

SOME IDEAS CONCERNING CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

ZOLTÁN TÖLTÉSSY

Zoltán Töltéssy took his BA in Teaching Hungarian and English in Eger in 1976, and MA in Applied Linguistics in Debrecen in 1988. His publications include book reviews, essays on metaphor and local history, and a book-length commentary on textual variations of Halotti Beszéd (*Funeral Oration*, the first written record of the Hungarian language from the 12th century). He gave two talks in the Forum: one on homophones in British English on 21 March 2005 and another on conceptual metaphors on 4 April 2007.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to investigate the nature of metaphor. Although many examples are taken from literature, I do not intend to deal with literary metaphors; instead, I would like to analyze metaphors from a linguistic point of view. The linguistic point of view is consistently applied. Linguistic principles are observed, and aesthetic and literary viewpoints are ignored in this analysis. In the first part, I look back to find the cultural background of the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. In the second part, I examine how time can be interpreted in terms of space. A parallel is drawn between examples taken from everyday speech and a literary work. I hypothesize that understanding literature and metaphorical expressions is based on understanding everyday metaphorical linguistic expressions.

A LITERARY EXAMPLE

JOHN ANDERSON, MY JO

John Anderson my jo,* John,	joy
When we were first acquent,	
Your locks were like the raven,	
Your bonie* brow was brent;*	pleasing; smooth
But now your brow is beld,* John,	bald
Your locks are like the snow;	
But blessings on your frosty pow,*	head
John Anderson my jo, John.	
John Anderson my jo, John,	
We clamb* the hill thegither;**	*climbed, **together
And mony* a canty** day, John,	*many, **merry
We've had wi' ane anither:	
Now we maun* totter down, John,	must
And hand in hand we'll go,	
And sleep thegither at the foot,	
John Anderson, my jo.	

In Burns's poem there are similes ("Your locks were like the raven," "Your locks are like the snow"), metaphors ("sleep" stands for death or rest in a grave and "jo" is identified with John's person), and there is some intimacy in how a woman speaks about her love. But there is something more in this poem. A whole life is related in sixteen lines. How is it possible to squeeze love, marriage, life and death (even afterlife, i.e., "sleep") into a short poem?

HUMAN LIFE IS A JOURNEY

When Robert Burns wrote his poem, there were many fictitious travelogues in which writers presented the protagonist's life:

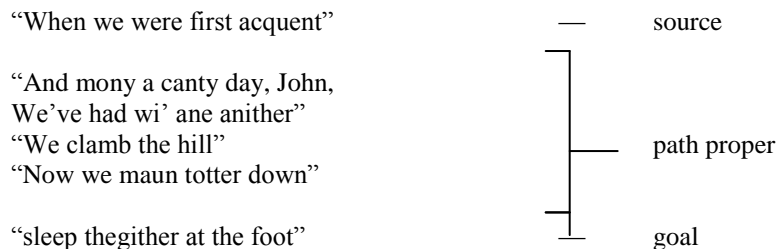
(1) The myth of a hero's journey reveals significant aspects of our fundamental ability to conceptualize our lives via metaphor. A journey is a movement from here to there, from Point A to Point B, and as a metaphor for life of the two points are obviously life and death. Metaphorical journeys have the day's journey at their core, the amount of space we can cover under the cycle of the sun. (Gibbs 1994:188)

In the classic travel books of the 18th century, it is obvious that the hero's life can be identified with his adventures. Each day, each week is the definite time, and each house or settlement is the specific place of an incident connected to the hero's life.

An historical aspect of the metaphor "human life is a journey" is explored and explained by Raymond W. Gibbs:

(2) People have always experienced a significant part of their everyday lives from early childhood in term of source—path—goal image schemas. These recurring bodily experiences are abstracted to form part of the foundation for higher-order reasoning. This abstraction is one reason why journey metaphors are seen so frequently in the way people think about their mundane lives [...]. (Gibbs 1994:191-2)

Now let us see the cognitive aspect of the metaphor "human life is a journey." In Burns's poem, the only specific place is "the hill." It is specific in the sense that this is the only place that can be identified in the physical world. This is the metaphorical linguistic expression that is based on the image schema path consisting of the constituent parts *source/starting point—path—goal/endpoint*.



George Lakoff and Mark Johnson first proposed the existence of an “abstract” metaphor which can account for the interpretation of travelogues, lyric poems, and expressions used in everyday life. They claim that metaphor is a property of concepts rather than of language. Its function is to understand concepts rather than linguistic expressions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

The metaphorical process consists in that there is some relationship between concept A and concept B. It means that there is a set of systematic links between them, i.e., the constituent conceptual elements of concept B—the vehicle named traditionally in stylistics—are mapped onto the constituent conceptual elements of concept A—the tenor named traditionally in stylistics (Kövecses 2002:6). A parallel can be drawn between the stages of a journey and the stages of life. The stages in the two sets can be linked systematically. In other words, “[t]his suggests that conceptual metaphors are not simply the mapping of one complex propositional structure onto another (e.g., arguments are war). Instead, the propositional structures themselves are metaphorical” (Gibbs 1994:151). Gerard Steen sums up that “metaphor has become the thing to be expected in cognition instead of the thing to be avoided in language” (1994:4).

So henceforth it is necessary to distinguish conceptual metaphors graphically from metaphors meant by stylists: LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

THE INVARIANCE PRINCIPLE

As Gibbs points out, the propositional structures themselves are metaphorical. An example can be mentioned, and it is consistent with the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

The logical structure of the image–schema path is as follows: if you are going from A to C, and now you are at point B which is intermediate, then you have been at all points between A and B, and not at any points between B and C.

Let us take an everyday example: if X is travelling by train from London to Marseilles, and the train is just pulling up at Paris, then X has already run through the Channel Tunnel but has not been to Avignon. See the pictorial representation in Figure 1.

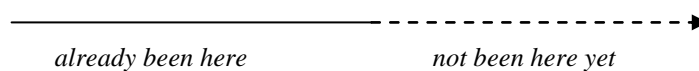


Figure 1 (from Lakoff 1993:214)

The form of the inference is the same in both cases. The path infers a consequence of the cognitive topology of paths. This holds true for any path image-schemata. Thus there is a linguistic-and-inferential generalization to be stated. It can be stated by the metaphor that linear scales are paths, on condition that metaphors preserve the cognitive topology, the image-schematic structure, of the source domain (Lakoff 1993:214).

It is true of the other side of the coin. Lakoff hypothesizes the following as the Invariance Principle:

(3) Metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain. (Lakoff 1993:215)

The Invariance Principle guarantees that, as for path image-schemata, sources will be mapped on sources, paths proper on paths proper, and endpoints on endpoints. The conclusion can be drawn that the image-schematic structure of the target domain cannot be violated. Cases in which the starting point of a path in the source domain is mapped on the endpoint of the path in the target domain cannot be found. This simply does not happen.

TIME IS INTERPRETED IN TERMS OF SPACE

Time is conceptualized in terms of space in English: TIME AS SPACE (Radden 2003). The details are worked out by Lakoff (1993:216-17).

From an ontological point of view, time is understood in terms of entities, locations, and motion. Mapping can be noticed as follows:

- (4)(a) Occasions are things.
- (4)(b) The passing of time is motion.
- (4)(c) Future points are in front of the observer. (*I can't face the future. Troubles lie ahead. I look forward to seeing you* (Radden 2003).)
- (4)(d) Past events are behind the observer. (*That's all behind us now. That was way back in 1900. Look back in anger* (Radden 2003).)
- (4)(e) One thing is moving, the other is stationary; the stationary entity is the deictic center.

Two cases can be differentiated:

Case 1: TIME PASSING IS MOTION OF AN OBJECT.

- (5)(a) The observer is fixed. Points of time are entities moving with respect to the observer.
- (5)(b) Times are oriented with their fronts in their direction of motion.
- (5)(c) The entailment is that the time passing the observer is the present time. Time has a speed relative to the observer.

Examples taken from everyday speech:

- (6)(a) *The time will come when...*
- (6)(b) *The time for action has arrived.*
- (6)(c) *In the weeks following next Tuesday...*

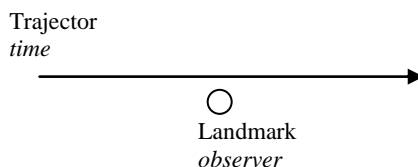


Figure 2 TIME PASSING IS MOTION OF AN OBJECT

The common feature is in that words like *come*, *arrive*, *follow* are used in a temporal sense. If we look at Burns's poem, we can find an example that can be added to the list above:

"And mony a canty day, John, / We've had."

Case 2: TIME PASSING IS MOTION OVER A LANDSCAPE.

(7)(a) Times are fixed locations. The observer is moving with respect to time.

(7)(b) Entailment: Time has extension and can be measured. An extended time, like a spatial area, may be conceived of as a bounded region.

Examples of everyday style:

(8)(a) *His stay in Russia extended over many years.*

(8)(b) *He passed the time happily.*

(8)(c) *We are getting close to Christmas.*

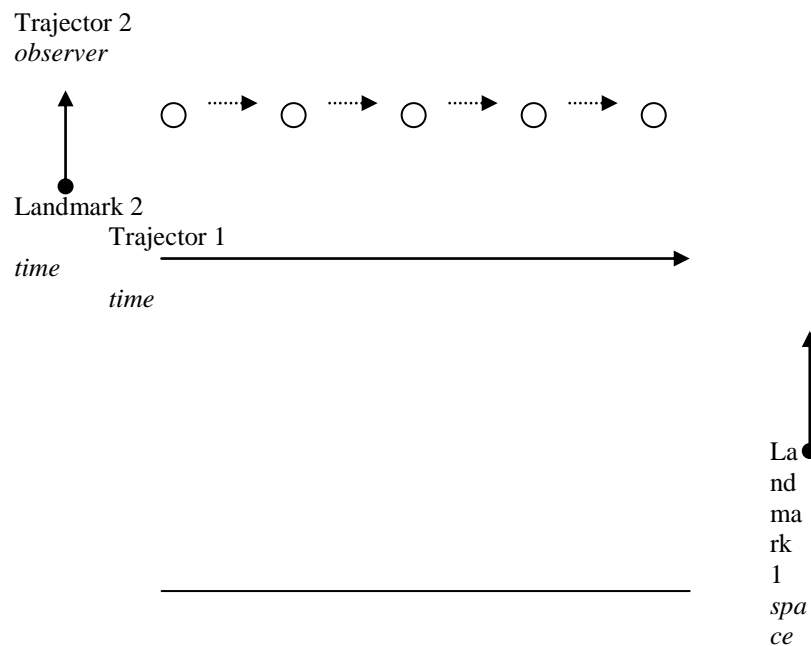


Figure 3 TIME PASSING IS MOTION OVER A LANDSCAPE

The words that are especially used in such contexts are *over*, *pass*, *close to*, *down the road*. Examples can be found in Burns' verse: "We clamb the hill," "Now we maun totter down."

A NET OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

What other conceptual metaphors underlie Burns's poem? Conceptual metaphors that may expound the theory of the cognitive aspect of metaphor are compiled in the books referred to.

- (9) BEING HAPPY IS LIKE BEING HIGH UP (Kövecses 2002:28) (Kövecses 2003:24) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:15)
- (9)(a) *I'm feeling up.*
- (9)(b) *That boosted my spirits.*
- (9)(c) *My spirits rose.*
- (9)(d) "We clamb the hill"
- (10) HUMAN LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Kövecses 2002:9) (Kövecses 2003:103-4)
- (11) SADNESS IS LIKE BEING DOWN (Kövecses 2003:25) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:15)
- (11)(a) *I'm feeling down.*
- (11)(b) *I fell into a depression.*
- (11)(c) *My spirits sank.*
- (11)(d) "Now we maun totter down"
- (12) HEALTHY IS UP (Kövecses 2002:36) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:15)
- (12)(a) He is at the *peak* of health.
- (12)(b) He is in *top* shape.
- (12)(c) As to his health, he's way *up* there.
- (12)(d) "We clamb the hill"
- (13) SICK IS DOWN (Kövecses 2002:36) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:15)
- (13)(a) *He dropped dead.*
- (13)(b) *He came down with the flu.*
- (13)(c) *His health is declining.*
- (13)(d) "Now we maun totter down"
- (14) THE LIFE OF HUMAN BEINGS IS A DAY (Kövecses 2002:9)
- (15) LOVE IS A UNITY (Kövecses 2002:46)
- (16) LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:44)
- (17) LIFE IS A VOYAGE IN SPACE (Kövecses 2002:49)

Some other conceptual metaphors can be added to the above list:

- (18) EXPERIENCES ARE LIKE DIFFERENT PARTS OF A JOURNEY
- (19) HELPING PEOPLE IS LIKE SUPPORTING THEM PHYSICALLY
- (20) BEING HEALTHY IS FULL COLOUR
- (20)(a) "Your locks were like the raven"
- (21) BEING SICK IS PALE/LIGHT COLOUR
- (21)(a) "frosty pow"
- (22) THE LIFE OF HUMAN BEINGS IS A YEAR

So while the basic conceptual metaphors are HUMAN LIFE IS A JOURNEY, LOVE IS A JOURNEY, there are some others that make up a whole net of concepts. The concepts are not mutually exclusive; therefore, they

are sometimes organized in hierarchical structures where ‘lower’ mappings in the hierarchy inherit the structure of the ‘higher’ mappings (G. Lakoff 1993). Consider one example of a hierarchy with three levels (ibid.):

Level 1: The event structure metaphor

Level 2: PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS JOURNEY

Level 3: LOVE IS A JOURNEY [...]

(Gibbs 1994:152)

Conceptual metaphors can be classified not only within a hierarchy but can also make up a list, e.g., LIFE IS JOURNEY can be connected to LIFE IS A DAY; LOVE IS A JOURNEY can be juxtaposed to LOVE IS A UNITY. Different metaphors can be used in parallel. In Burns’s poem, their poetic effect accumulates.

CONCLUSIONS

Although this essay focused on one of Burns’s poems, I consistently analyzed his text and everyday linguistic examples in parallel. Comparing and contrasting examples, I can draw two conclusions. First, linguistic principles hold true for literature as well. As an entailment of the first, secondly, literary metaphors are deeply embedded in language and cognition. So, literary metaphors are metaphorical linguistic expressions which can be subsumed under conceptual metaphors, and this way they can be made clear.

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