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The conceptual metaphor of ‘Life is a journey’ in Kazakh cognition

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Abstract

The subject of research is the investigation of conceptual metaphors of LIFE in poetry. The study applies the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMP), specifically the distinction between the source domain and the target domain. As a result, the knowledge of Kazakhs about the source domain is explicit and detailed as compared to life. In conclusion, the principles of CMP were found to be useful in organizing and explaining the consistent use of the ‘Life is a journey’ metaphor in Kazakh literature.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor, Domains.

La metáfora conceptual de "La vida es un viaje" en la cognición kazaja

Resumen

El tema de investigación se centra en las metáforas conceptuales de LIFE en poesía. El estudio aplica los principios de la teoría de la metáfora conceptual (CMP), específicamente la distinción entre el dominio de origen y el dominio de destino. Como resultado, el conocimiento de los kazajos sobre el dominio de origen es explícito y detallado en comparación con la vida. En conclusión, los principios de CMP resultaron útiles para organizar y explicar el uso constante de la metáfora "La vida es un viaje" en la literatura kazaja.

Palabras clave: Lingüística cognitiva, Metáfora conceptual, Dominios.

1. INTRODUCTION

LAKOFF & JOHNSON's (1980) widely used book, the metaphor we live by, introduced a radical change in thinking about metaphors. The metaphors that they offered were not just poetic parts of speech or complicated idiomatic expressions, but comparatively larger parts of our cognitive interpretation. Conceptual Metaphor Theory differs from the traditional metaphor study. It is revolutionary in many aspects and such directions are also supported by Kövecses. Based on CMT, poetic texts are studied in the framework of cognitive linguistics. It is asserted that basic conceptual metaphors, based on everyday expressions, also take their origin from poetic metaphors. In other words, poetic metaphor is a non-conventional use of conventional metaphors.

The study of the conceptual metaphor, Life is a journey in English or other languages that belong to Western culture has received much

attention from different angles of study. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has yet researched this metaphor in the Kazakh language, which belongs to the Turkic language group of the Ural-Altai family. It is the official language of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is situated in Central Asia. We believe that the current theory of conceptual metaphor, applied to the analysis of poetic texts may cast light on subsequent research in this group of languages. Kazakh poetic texts were analyzed and used as sources for identifying Kazakh linguistic metaphorical expressions. On the one hand, it is expected that poetic texts are testimony to the lexicon of a literary Kazakh language that is a rich source of expressions. On the other hand, they implement the approach to the collection of commonly existing linguistic expressions.

Our research materials have been selected from the following books: *Life is a Flowing River. Collection of Poetry* (MAKATAEV, 1979), *To Protect Love. Poems, Ballades, Verses and Songs*, (SHAHANOV, 1982), *Words of Ancestors Poetry. Cultural Folklore*. The scope of this paper includes 120 poems. In our investigation, about 60 examples were selected to identify and interpret metaphors.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Traditionally, metaphor, along with other parts of figurative speech like similes or hyperbole, is considered as basically linguistic. In recent years, a theory of metaphors has developed that supports the idea that all mankind comprehends metaphor from everyday life and,

in fact, the ways we think about the world and talk about it are mostly metaphorical. Metaphor is deeply rooted in our conceptual system, understanding one kind of thing in terms of another. LAKOFF & JOHNSON (1980) found that many of the English expressions came from the basic metaphors which he called conceptual metaphors. These conceptual metaphors can generate various daily expressions and these expressions are systematical, so they can be called metaphorical concept systems as well. This is their Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

CMT has since been developed and elaborated. For further discussion of the theory and recent developments within the field of cognitive linguistics is GIBBS (1994). This study attempts to identify and distinguish the conceptual metaphor of Life is a journey in the Kazakh language and culture. In addition to understanding how Kazakh specifically conceptualizes Life and the cultural and linguistic associations it has, we have looked at the different forms which this conceptual metaphor takes linguistically. Since we are working under the assumption that, the most fundamental value in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture, we hope that this study will illuminate the selected metaphor both linguistically and anthropologically in terms of Kazakh poetry and culture.

BEKTEMIRKYZY (2012) considers a concept as a reference to the main cultural cluster or the acquisition of those cultural clusters, arising from the life experience of the person in his worldview.

BEKTEMIRKYZY (2012) also says that the meaning of a concept is complex. It includes all the structural meanings and structural concepts that define the origin of the culture (etymology), its history and its relationship with the modern culture. This means that the aggregation of a certain collection of linguistic units into one unit from life experience will eventually appear as a concept and we can use that concept as a label for that experience. The cognitive linguist, ILIASKYZY (2011) asserts that there is a limited number of lexical units which can be considered a concept. To be a cultural concept, there must be real-world phenomena for which the word can be a label, and these must be represented by valuable, extensive language units, contained in proverbs, sayings, and poetic texts.

When we translate the word journey from English to Kazakh, it is important to understand the word properly. As there are many words in English with similar meanings to the journey, so there are several similar words for the journey in the Kazakh dictionary; they can be translated back into English as Caravan, Route, Tour, Trip, Travel, Voyage, and Way. The standard translation of the word journey according to everyday usage in Kazakh is *Сауат*. The fundamental tenet of CMT is that metaphor operates at the level of thinking. CMT introduces cross-domain mapping control into our conceptual system. The mapping occurs at the conceptual level in such a way that one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another. A conceptual domain symbolizes organized knowledge about an experience. CMT focuses on two conceptual domains; the target domain and the source domain. The target domain interprets a relatively unorganized

conceptual domain through metaphorical expressions. The source domain is a more characterized conceptual domain used for understanding the target domain (KOVECSES, 2002). In the conceptual metaphor, Life is a journey, the target domain is Life and the source domain is Journey.

3. METHODOLOGY

The metaphor may seem to consist of words and other linguistic expressions that come from the terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain, but conceptual metaphor underlies a system of related metaphorical expressions that appear on the linguistic surface. Similarly, there is a close relationship between poems and metaphors; poems cannot exist without metaphor. Many scholars accept that metaphor is an important principle of poetry and key to the honor of the poet. In the domain of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is not just surface ornamentation of language, but part of the human thought process. Cognitive linguists have changed the focus of attention from metaphor in language to metaphor in the mind, as a conceptual metaphor. For that reason, when addressing metaphor used in poetry, we study it more from the cognitive aspect; not only the use of language but also the conceptualization of language. Poets can speak to their audience by using ways of thought that everyone possesses. Utilizing the capacity, we share, poets can highlight our experience,

analyze the consequences of our beliefs, feel the way we think and interpret our ideologies.

The method of CMT was utilized in this study, as LAKOFF & JOHNSON (1989) described systems in which poets aimed at poetic effects through conventional cognitive metaphor. In such a way, it is possible to elaborate on the image-schemas technique which makes poetic metaphor memorable and remarkable. This study attempts to demonstrate how poems can be analyzed in terms of conceptual metaphor. Furthermore, the study of conceptual metaphor utilizes a mapping method for the source domain and target domain to form a conceptual metaphor.

4. RESULTS

To understand the full extent of *Life is a journey* in Kazakh, it is necessary to plan the varied ways in which the concept of *Journey* lends itself to the conceptualization of *Life*. Systematic conceptual correspondences appear between the source and target in the sense that constituent conceptual elements of B correspond to constituent elements of A... often referred to as mapping (KOVECSES, 2005). There is a similar list of standard correspondences in a form that moves from the source domain to the target domain clearer. In a way that is familiar because it is present in most languages, *Life is a journey* in Kazakh can be mapped out in the following way: Examples

of words used to express the concept of metaphors for Life in Kazakh, as identified and distinguished by the research, are as follows:

- (1) Words of Ancestors Poetry, Kunanbaev;
- (2) Words of Ancestors Poetry, proverb, the life of a person is like a carriage with a wheel, you do not know in what turns the passing carriage will take you away;
- (3) Words of Ancestors Poetry, Ismailov. Abai's struggle to fight is an ambitious, libertarian, clear path of people's struggle. Abay's Way – The People's Way;
- (4) My journey will never end
- (5) Words of Ancestors Poetry, Toraygirov, life seems short, I devoted my life to the way of poetry;
- (6) Words of Ancestors Poetry, proverb.

Is there a dream, if one dies keeping the straightway?

- Journey corresponds to Life
- A carriage with a wheel for a journey corresponds to Life

- As Journey has a beginning point so Life has birth as a beginning point

From the lines above, it can be noticed that life is compared to traveling on the road; for instance, Abay's way – People's way. Moreover, from this example, we also perceive that, on this road, everyone travels from birth to death. Going from birth to death is the same as traveling from one place to another. If life is metaphorically viewed as a journey, then we can make use of our further knowledge of life and of journeys; namely, that the journey can be traveled by the traveler through life. The traveler is the main character of a journey as a human is the leader of life. As a journey demands a traveler, life is led by a human. Co-travelers share the journey, so people can share a common destination. The following quotes are evidence:

- (1) Words of Ancestors Poetry, quote, we all are travelers in this life;
- (2) Words of Ancestors Poetry, quote, we are travelers in this carriage of life;
- (3) Words of Ancestors Poetry, Akim Ysqaq, a human is a traveler from birth to death;
- (4) Words of Ancestors Poetry, quote, a human is a carriage; life is a road;

(5) Words of Ancestors Poetry, Al Farabi, the Creator created his creatures as travelers in life;

(6) Words of Ancestors Poetry, quote, all people are travelers looking for happiness.

(7) Words of Ancestors Poetry, Uzaqbai jyrau, if departure is fated, you will leave as you are a carriage on the road. In the poem of MAKATAEV (1979) we can see that friends are the co-travelers of his journey.

(8) I cannot say I am friendless when I satisfy my thirst with my folk. Whether there is the difficulty, I will be with my folk.

- The traveler corresponds to the person leading a life
- The carriage on the road corresponds to the person leading a life
- The Creator of life corresponds to the guide of the journey
- All travelers correspond to all the people of the world
- The co-travelers who accompany the journey correspond to friends, parents, a wife and a husband who spend life together.

The journey from its starting place to its destination is the path. Our understanding of life as a journey uses our knowledge about the journey. As we can notice from the examples above, the image of a traveler is mapped onto the image of a human: We are all travelers on the road, as all journeys involve travelers. Furthermore, the idea of Life's road evokes the domain of life and the domain of travel. We imagine a human one way when we think of the human as a traveler, in another way when we think of the human as a carriage, as reflected in the line A human is a carriage. Moreover, it evokes the idea that a journey needs transport.

In Kazakh, *Өмір*, Life, is often represented in terms of coming to life, destinations and directions of life, choices of directions, turns and obstacles and, ultimately, a departure from life. In our culture, life is assumed to be purposeful; we are expected to have goals in life. A purposeful life is the long term. It is a purposeful activity. And goals in life are destinations on the journey. In Kazakh tradition, life's destinations can be divided into several stages that correspond with achieving our goals. Achieving a goal is equal to the idea of reaching a destination on a journey. We offer the poem of SHAHANOV (1982) with figurative expressions of stages of goals in our life:

(1) In the mountainous region where you grew up, so did I.
Your dreams are the same as mine, my dear friend.

(2) We took both of you for the first time in school.

(3) I am a student, feeling joy from every dawn.

(4) Days followed day by day, we entered the university.

(5) My dears, it is the sign of being an adult.

(6) We started our experience of work in a native town.

➤ As a journey demands to get to a destination, so life requires having aims, purposes, and objectives

➤ As a journey demands definite effort to get to a certain destination, so life's destination or goal can be reached by doing certain activities.

➤ To grow up, to get education from the university, to get a job, to get married correspond to the destinations of life

The consecutive stages of life are to grow up, go to school, be an adult, go to the university, to get a job, to marry, be a husband and a wife, etc. and there is vast importance in reaching the goals of life in the Kazakh understanding. These stages could be taken non-metaphorically, but they are more likely metaphorical interpretation via the concept of Career-as-journey. Here we have a question: Why is a particular source domain paired with a particular target domain? The most traditional answer to this question is to say there is a resemblance or a similarity between two things. In this case, the resemblances between destinations of a journey

and the goals of life are that the actions that a human takes in every stage of life can be considered self-propulsion towards the destination; human life is built upon predetermined goals to give a sense of direction. Someone without goals is considered as purposeless and possibly leading a meaningless existence.

Another aspect of the journey domain when accompanying life is the weather. As weather is changeable, the way of one's life too can be changeable. Along the journey, the weather keeps the obstacles in front of us.

(1) I grew up to fall in a rush of wind, what a fate without meaning
as a waterless lake, I fell out of all the devil's harm

(2) Whenever you are traveling on a hilly mountain slopes, what
will you do, if you come across a tiger? The main thing is to keep
calm, not to give up.

(3) When reaching out for happiness, but fate cut your way.

➤ As a traveler can meet obstacles during his journey, so a person
can meet difficulties in life.

➤ Falling from a carriage on a turn corresponds to the difficulties
you will meet in life

➤ Nasty weather corresponds to the difficulties of life

- Difficulties correspond to the tests of life

- Tests establish the quality of the traveler's aim

- Nasty weather brings difficulties to the journey as the hardship of life can make achieving goals difficult.

From the example, if you came across a tiger on a mountainous slope, it is evident that the tiger is reflected in terms of the difficulty of the journey. In the next line, but he was blocked by inactivity, impatience misled his journey great obstacles are presented, as if by the weather during the journey. From the words, when reaching out for happiness, but fate cut your way we can understand happiness as a goal of life and fate as nasty weather or the entire system of nature. Here, we come across the metaphor of difficulties-as-test that describes the difficulties of life. It is conceived that life is not perfect; like a road, it has many bends, ups, and downs to dwell on the reality that most difficult daily challenges we face result from dealing with tests. As in the saying, after every night comes a beautiful sunrise, so, as the difficulties pass there will be great achievements when we see the faintest ray of light.

5. DISCUSSIONS

All the examples above undoubtedly demonstrate that there is no big cultural difference from the universal metaphor, Life is a journey, as discussed in western literature, but that this conceptual

metaphor is also to be found in the Kazakh language. The analysis above showed that the mapping of the metaphor Life is a journey is quite well structured and easily understandable because the abstract concept of Life is clearly understood through the source domain of Journey. As Kövecses says, each source domain has a particular meaning focus which can be mapped onto a target. The major theme reflected how a concrete source domain's been used to understand an abstract target domain.

It is obvious that a journey has its beginning and its ending and that the life of a person starts with birth and ends with death. Everyone is equal under natural law, so every journey involves the traveler, as life is led by a person; in the journey, we are certain to be faced with nasty weather as we meet different types of difficulties and we have to overcome them; otherwise, we are not being able to finish our journey. Before we begin a journey, we have to make a plan in detail, so that we can reach our destinations easily; during the journey, there are two roads, but we cannot travel both at the same time. If we choose one, we cannot take the other at the same time and it becomes harder to return to the other road as we go further down the road we have chosen. To live a meaningful and effective life, we have to plan it carefully and persist in our opinion to achieve the goal of our lives. The last destination of our journey is death.

As we mentioned before, the metaphor makes a poem as vivid as a reflection of natural life, and poems can be analyzed in terms of their conceptual metaphor. There were a great number of words which

were repeatedly used in every writer's work, such as way, journey, travel, traveler, the carriage with a wheel, passing carriage, the path, caravan on the road, straightway and winding way, the stages, and obstacles of the journey, destinations, departure, etc. They were utilized metaphorically, based on the similarities between Life and Journey. For this reason, we can conclude that Kazakh poetry consistently, using words from the core metaphor of poetry, Life is a journey.

Based on the present argument that we have outlined above, we can understand abstract things as a target domain (life) and a concrete concept as their source domain (journey). The knowledge of Kazakhs about the source domain is explicit and detailed as compared to life, because this domain is concretely, repeatedly and physically experienced in Kazakh culture, building a structure in the mind through persistent recurrence.

6. CONCLUSION

The present paper has tackled the conventional conceptual metaphor Life is a journey in Kazakh poetry, within the theoretical framework put forward by LAKOFF (1993), known as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which explains how every correspondence between the two domains of Life and Journey can fit there. The idea of life understood in terms of a journey pervades Kazakh poetry, where

the use of such a metaphor gives the reader a clear understanding and defines the relationship between object and image.

Both domains, Life as a target domain and Journey as a source domain, are explicit. It is traditionally used to understand the concept of human life from birth to death. However, in the Islamic religion, the final destination is unknown and is never reached; death is only one of the stages of the journey. Our next research will look at the subject from the Islamic point of view. The fundamental distinction between the traditional and contemporary theories of metaphor is obvious. The traditional way studies metaphors as individual rhetorical devices or linguistic expressions that the author produces in a particular piece of discourse. They are primarily literary or poetic. In contemporary metaphor theory, on the other hand, metaphors are studied as systems of human conceptualization, operating deep in human thought and cognition.

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