GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC OF METAPHOR IN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS: PROBLEMS, THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

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Abstract: *This paper provides a comprehensive linguistic analysis of metaphor as a fundamental mechanism in the English language. It examines the evolution of metaphor studies from traditional rhetoric to modern cognitive linguistics, highlighting key theoretical frameworks such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The study identifies major problems in metaphor research within English linguistics, including identification and demarcation of metaphors, cultural specificity, diachronic changes, ambiguity in discourse, and challenges in computational processing. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of examples from literary texts, everyday discourse, political rhetoric, and scientific English, the paper demonstrates how metaphors shape thought and communication in English. Special attention is given to unresolved issues such as the boundary between metaphor and metonymy, cross-cultural translation difficulties, and the role of metaphors in word formation and semantic change. The research concludes that despite significant advances, several methodological and theoretical problems persist, necessitating interdisciplinary approaches involving cognitive science, corpus linguistics, and artificial intelligence. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of metaphor's role in English as*

a global lingua franca and offer practical implications for language teaching, translation studies, and natural language processing.

Keywords: *metaphor, English linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, cognitive linguistics, linguistic problems, semantic shift, discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication*

Introduction

Metaphor has long been recognized as one of the most powerful and pervasive features of human language. In English linguistics, the study of metaphor extends far beyond poetic ornamentation to encompass fundamental cognitive and communicative processes. As a segment of linguistics, the analysis of metaphor reveals how speakers of English conceptualize abstract ideas through concrete domains, creating systematic correspondences that influence thought, culture, and social interaction.

The term "metaphor" originates from the Greek metaphora ("transfer"), reflecting the process of understanding one thing in terms of another. In traditional rhetoric, metaphors were viewed as stylistic devices, but the cognitive turn in the late 20th century revolutionized the field. Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work Metaphors We Live By (1980) demonstrated that metaphors are not merely linguistic but conceptual, structuring everyday reasoning. This paradigm shift has generated extensive research yet has also exposed numerous unresolved problems in English linguistics.

This paper aims to provide a systematic overview of metaphor in English, from its theoretical foundations to contemporary issues. It addresses the following research questions:

What are the primary theoretical approaches to metaphor in English linguistics?

What methodological problems arise in identifying and classifying metaphors?

How do cultural and diachronic factors complicate metaphor analysis in English?

What practical implications do these issues have for applied linguistics?

The study draws on a combination of qualitative textual analysis and quantitative corpus data from sources such as the British National Corpus (BNC), Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and literary works by Shakespeare, Dickens, and modern authors. Examples are drawn from diverse registers: literature, journalism, politics, science, and everyday conversation.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Metaphor Studies

1.1. Traditional Approaches

In classical rhetoric (Aristotle, Quintilian), metaphor was defined as a trope based on similarity. English scholars such as I.A. Richards (1936) introduced the interaction theory, viewing metaphor as a tension between tenor and vehicle. Max Black (1954) further developed this with the concept of "resonance" and "filter." These models treated metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon confined to specific contexts.

1.2. Cognitive Linguistics Paradigm

The publication of Metaphors We Live By marked a turning point. Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphors are grounded in embodied experience and form conceptual systems. They distinguished three main types:

Structural metaphors (e.g., ARGUMENT IS WAR: "He attacked my position," "I demolished his argument").

Orientational metaphors (e.g., HAPPY IS UP: "I'm feeling up today," "My spirits rose").

Ontological metaphors (e.g., THE MIND IS A MACHINE: "I'm a little rusty today," "My wheels are turning").

Subsequent developments include Grady's primary metaphors (1997), blending theory by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), and the career of metaphor

by Gentner and Bowdle (2001). These frameworks have been extensively applied to English data but have also revealed limitations when applied cross-linguistically.

2. Problems of Metaphor Identification and Classification

One of the most persistent issues in English linguistics is the reliable identification of metaphors. Unlike literal language, metaphors lack clear formal markers. Steen's (2008) MIP (Metaphor Identification Procedure) and later MIPVU have attempted to standardize analysis, yet inter-annotator agreement remains low (often below 70 % in corpus studies).

Ambiguity arises in cases such as:

Dead metaphors (e.g., "the foot of the mountain" – fully conventionalized).

Novel metaphors (e.g., "time is a thief" in creative writing).

Mixed metaphors (e.g., "We're going to have to bite the bullet and swallow our pride").

Distinguishing metaphor from metonymy, simile, and analogy remains problematic. For instance, "The White House issued a statement" is metonymic (institution for people), yet many English speakers perceive it metaphorically. Corpus-driven studies (e.g., using COCA) show that up to 20 % of expressions in political discourse are metaphoric, but automated detection tools achieve only 60-75 % accuracy due to context dependency.

3. Cultural and Diachronic Dimensions

English, as a global language, absorbs metaphors from diverse sources (Latin, French, Germanic roots, and modern borrowings). Cultural specificity creates translation problems. The English orientational metaphor TIME IS MONEY ("spend time," "waste time") is less salient in languages without strong capitalist connotations.

Diachronic change poses another challenge. Shakespearean metaphors (e.g., "All the world's a stage") have become conventionalized, while new

metaphors emerge rapidly in digital discourse (e.g., “scrolling through life,” “ghosting someone”). Historical corpora such as the Helsinki Corpus reveal that metaphor density has increased in scientific English since the Enlightenment, reflecting the shift toward abstract conceptualization.

4. Metaphor in Discourse and Specialized Registers

4.1. Literary English

Metaphors in literature serve aesthetic and thematic functions. In 1984 by Orwell, “Big Brother is watching” functions as both metaphor and metonymy, illustrating power structures.

4.2. Political and Media Discourse

Political metaphors are particularly manipulative. Charteris-Black (2011) identifies “journey metaphors” in election campaigns (“road to recovery,” “path to victory”). The 2020s have seen new metaphors related to technology and crisis (e.g., “infodemic,” “viral misinformation”).

4.3. Scientific and Technical English

Scientific writing relies heavily on ontological metaphors (e.g., “data mining,” “genetic code”). These facilitate understanding but can obscure precision, leading to debates about “metaphorical imperialism” in science.

5. Methodological Issues in Empirical Research

Quantitative analysis using corpus tools (Sketch Engine, AntConc) reveals high metaphor frequency: approximately 1 metaphor every 10-20 words in spoken English. However, results vary depending on the definition of “metaphor.” Qualitative discourse analysis (Critical Metaphor Analysis by Charteris-Black) highlights ideological implications but is criticized for subjectivity.

Experimental psycholinguistic studies using eye-tracking and fMRI show that metaphor processing activates sensory-motor regions, supporting embodied cognition. Yet replication crises in cognitive linguistics question the universality of these findings for English speakers.



6. Applied Linguistics Perspectives and Practical Challenges

In language teaching, metaphors pose difficulties for non-native speakers. EFL learners often struggle with idiomatic expressions rooted in conceptual metaphors (e.g., UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING: “I see your point”). Textbooks rarely address systematicity.

In translation studies, metaphor transfer between English and other languages frequently leads to loss of meaning. Machine translation systems (Google Translate, DeepL) still fail to handle novel metaphors accurately.

Natural Language Processing faces significant hurdles: BERT and GPT models detect surface metaphors but struggle with implicit or creative ones. Current research in computational metaphor processing (e.g., using neural networks trained on annotated corpora) reports F1-scores around 0.68-0.75.

7. Comparison with Uzbek Metaphor System (for Contrastive Analysis)

Although the primary focus is English, a brief contrastive glance reveals differences. Uzbek metaphors often draw from nomadic and Islamic cultural domains (e.g., time as a flowing river or destiny as a written path), while English favors mechanical and spatial imagery. This highlights the culture-specific nature of metaphor, complicating contrastive linguistics and bilingual lexicography.

Conclusions

Metaphor remains one of the most dynamic and problematic areas in English linguistics. While cognitive approaches have illuminated its conceptual foundations, persistent issues—identification, cultural variability, diachronic instability, and computational modeling—demand continued interdisciplinary research. Future studies should integrate big data corpora, experimental methods, and cross-linguistic comparisons to resolve these challenges.

The practical significance of this research extends to language education, translation, political discourse analysis, and AI development. Understanding

metaphor is not merely academic; it is essential for effective communication in a globalized English-speaking world.

Further research is recommended on multimodal metaphors (visual + verbal) in digital media and the impact of artificial intelligence on metaphor creation and interpretation.

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