



## An Analysis of Conceptual Metaphor in Non-Compositional Idioms in English TV Series

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تحليل الاستعارة المفاهيمية في التعابير غير التركيبية في المسلسل التلفزيوني  
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## **Abstract**

This study aims at investigating the conceptual metaphor in English non-compositional idioms. Theoretically, it traces the different aspects of conceptual metaphor and idioms. Practically, it presents the conceptual metaphor in the non-compositional idioms manifested in four different selected T.V series. The series are "*Anne with an E*", "*Breaking bad*", "*Friends*" and "*The big bang theory*". They are selected randomly to embody various genres to depict the uses of the non-compositional idioms and their entailed conceptual metaphor. The model followed in the analysis of the selected series is that developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The episodes of the series of the four works , video and scripts, were thoroughly studied for more reliable results. The findings reveal that the ontological metaphor is more commonly applied in non-compositional idioms. They also prove the pervasiveness of some particular types of conceptual metaphor more than the others.

**Keywords:** Conceptual metaphor, idioms, TV series

## 1. Introduction

People tend to use metaphors to add some kind of flavor to their texts. In other words, they deal with metaphor as grouping of words not thoughts. However, metaphor is applied in our everyday language. Our conceptual system which is responsible for generating our thoughts and actions is basically metaphorical in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:153). The study deals with the way we conceptualize metaphor. Hence, in cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor is defined as making sense of one conceptual domain in terms of another, i.e., A is B (Kövecses, 2002: 4). With the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's book, *Metaphors we live by* (1980), people and especially specialists show more interest in the cognitive approach to metaphor.

The study focuses on the use of conceptual metaphor in English idioms in TV series. The idioms are randomly selected from the episodes of four different series. The series are Anne with an E, Friends, The Big bang theory, and breaking bad. The methodology used involves adopting Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) model. It is believed that metaphors are most likely applied in words grouping like phrases and idioms rather than simple words, therefore, the study aims at investigating the manifestation of conceptual metaphor in non-compositional idioms for they are not easy to fathom.

## 2. Overview

In our everyday use, metaphor has an essential role in presenting our ideas and thoughts in a linguistic manner. Briefly and sharply, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 153) state that “ metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language”. Without a doubt, their statement did not pass unnoticed. Generally, their work *Metaphors we live by* is a

turning point in the field of cognitive linguistics. Conceptual metaphor is developed within the framework of a cognitive approach to language (Fabiszak, 2007: 15 ). Metaphor, from a cognitive perspective, is considered a clear evidence for the way humans think and understand the surrounding environment. It is even a solid proof of the way we perceive our own bodies (ibid:17).

## 2.1 The Conceptualization of Metaphor

As a main idea, Kövecses (2010: 4) points out that conceptual metaphors involve two conceptual domains which are defined as “coherent organizations of experience”. In other words, conceptual domain A ,which is more likely to be an abstract idea or object, is conceptual domain B which mostly entails concreteness. Significantly, it is important to make a distinction between conceptual metaphor and metaphorical linguistic expressions. The linguistic expressions are merely words that come from the concrete conceptual domain B. In this respect, Lakoff (1993: 202 ) maintains that , cognitively, the word metaphor is presented as a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system, while metaphorical expressions are known as words, phrases and sentences. Notably, conceptual metaphors are presented in small font capital letters to indicate that this set of wording is different from ordinary language.

In more details, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 4) believe that human’s conceptual system has typically a metaphorical nature. It is possible for a concept to be metaphorical, and the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR proves it. This structural metaphor is found in our daily conversation, and mostly unconsciously , for example:



1. Your claims are *indefensible*.
2. He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.
3. His criticisms were *right on target*.
4. I *demolished* his argument.

All these utterances and more are found and used by people and all have the concept of WAR in them. Interestingly, it is believed that one of the main tenets of conceptual metaphor is the fact that it is based on our bodily experience, therefore, it is involved in our methods of perceiving and thinking about the world. Accordingly, most metaphors will have the same connotations to the perceivers. Remarkably, Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005: 2) hold that the conceptual metaphor theory attempts to present the proper methods and tools to analyze all kinds of metaphorical expressions including idioms.

## 2.2 Typology of Conceptual Metaphor

In a detailed manner, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 196) propose two major types of metaphor, they are conventional and nonconventional metaphor. On the one hand, the conventional metaphor is meant to structure the conceptual system of our everyday language. On the other hand, there is the nonconventional metaphor which means to be creative and imaginative (ibid: 151). The current study will only focus on the first type. Conventional metaphor is subcategorized into the following types: structural, orientational and ontological.

### 2.2.1 Structural Metaphor

Kövecses (2010: 37) goes to claim that when dealing with structural metaphor, it is essential to keep in mind that it is all about having two domains (target A and source B ) and that A is understood in terms of B.

Kim (1996: 39) believes that the main idea of using structural metaphor is to metaphorically construct a concept by the use of a different concept, taking into account both concepts have something in common. For instance:

#### 5 LIFE IS WAR

is a structural metaphor in which the concept of war is used to metaphorically construct the concept of life. Kövecses (2010: 37) presents :

#### 6. TIME IS MOTION

as a structural metaphor. Certain mappings can be drawn from these basic elements and the background condition, as follows:

- a. The passing of time is motion.
7. Times are things. b. Future times are in front of the observer; past times are behind the observer.
- c. One thing is moving, the other is stationary; the stationary thing is the deictic center.

The structural metaphors are embodied in such concepts as *time, war, life, love, journeys*, etc., evoke a deeper structuring and understanding of the target concepts (ibid:38).

The metaphor in example (6) accounts for a large number of linguistic metaphors in English. The mappings not only explain why the particular expressions mean what they do but also provide a basic overall structure. Additionally, it also promote understanding our notion of time. Without metaphor, it would be difficult to imagine what our concept of time would be. Most structural metaphors provide this kind of structuring and understanding for their target concepts.

### 2.2.2 Orientational Metaphor.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 26 ), orientational metaphors have some sort of spatial orientation. To agree with, Basson (2006: 55 ) states that these metaphors are mostly related to spatial orientations such as *up-down*, *front-back*, *center- periphery*, *in-out*, and *on-off*. In our conceptual system, orientational metaphors allow coherency among target concepts. In this respect, Kövecses (2010: 40) believes that specific target concepts are mostly conceptualized in a fixed way and this is what is meant by coherency. For instance, the below listed concepts are characterized by an “*upward*” orientation, while their “opposites” have a “*downward*” orientation.

8. More is up; less is down: Speak *up*, please. Keep your voice *down*, please.
9. Healthy is up; sick is down: Lazarus *rose* from the dead. He *fell* ill.

Notably, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:26) claim that “these spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment.”

### 2.2.3 Ontological Metaphor

Simply put, ontological metaphor is all about mapping concreteness onto abstractness. In other words, substances and objects are projected onto something abstract (Richardt, 2003: 273). Significantly, presenting our knowledge of the world as objects and substances is the right way that allow us to choose part of this knowledge and treat them as “ discrete entities or substances” of a fixed kind (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 26).

To agree with, Valli and Lucas (2000: 156) confirm that ontological metaphors handles abstract entities, states, and events as objects. For example, It is possible to hear someone say:

10. I am falling into or climbing out of depression.

which is considered an emotional status as concrete place. Moreover, there are three types of ontological metaphor. The first is *entity* or *substance* metaphor. The metaphor,

11. Inflation is an entity.

is found in expressions like 'inflation is hurting people'. The second type is container metaphor in which states are considered *containers*. Sentences like:

12. He is in love.

13. She is out of trouble.

have the ontological metaphor 'love and trouble are an object container'. The last type is *personification* in which it means that metaphors are *persons*. For example, the sentence:

14. This fact argues against the standards.

has the metaphor 'fact is a person' (Haser, 2005: 144 ).

### 3. Idioms in English

Idioms exist in all languages. The use of idioms sometimes needs rather high linguistic capabilities for both the addresser and addressee. Usually, idioms are defined as linguistic constructions with meanings that do not depend on the meaning of their linguistic elements. Glucksberg (2001: 68) stresses that idioms are groups of fixed expressions with an estimated number of 80,000. As for the types of idioms, it is a very debatable issue because there are many classifications of different linguists. However, Nunberg ( 1978 cited in, *ibid*: 73) presents a certain classification of idioms



in which it is based on the dimension of compositionality. The first type is non-compositional idioms includes those idioms where there is no relation between the idiom's wording and its idiomatic meaning. For example, the idiom *cheesecake* refers to pinup art. The second type is partially compositional idioms. This type includes those idioms where there is some sort of relation between an idiom's constituents and its intended meaning. The last type is fully compositional idioms which has a clearer meaning. Hence, The current study focuses on the non-compositional type only.

### 3.1 Non-Compositional Idioms

The thing that differentiates idioms from other linguistic forms is their "illogical" nature. This illogicality descends from the absence of any sort of relations between their literal meaning and their idiomatic meaning (Glucksberg, 2001: 68). Anastasion (2010:76) maintains that the meaning of the non-compositional idiom is implied in the figurative meaning of its words not in their literal meaning. Significantly, non-compositional idioms cannot be attributed, tropicalized or substituted. According to the traditional linguistic theory, the meaning of an idiom is arbitrary because it is not predictable from the linguistic elements that make it up ( Lakoff, 1987: 448 ). To understand idioms, it is preferable to use a lexicon to arrive at the intended meaning. Moreover, because of the non-compositional nature of idioms, it is not easy to substitute words in an idiom with other words. They will not give the same meaning. This goes back to the rigidity of the idiom; therefore the words in an idiom cannot be rearranged (Baron, 2007:12).

#### 4. Methodology

The methodology followed in the current study involves introducing the data of analysis which was selected from four different TV series. Then, using the adopted model to analyze the idioms found in the series.

##### 4.1 The Selected TV Series

The first is a Canadian T.V series based on Lucy Montgomery's 1908 novel *Anne of Green Gables*. It is entitled *Anne with an E*. Its genre is drama. The second is the American TV series entitled *Breaking bad*. It is a crime and thriller drama. As for the third, it is the American Comedy, *The big bang theory*. Lastly, it is the American famous comedy, *Friends*. As the four works suggest, the diversity serves as reliable evidence for the randomization of the linguistic phenomenon investigated, the conceptual metaphor in non-compositional idioms. The diversity again comes to prove that idioms, compositional or non-compositional, can be traced in various types of register and/or genres.

##### 4.2 Data Collection

The data for analysis was selected in a way that provides a sense of originality to the current study. The works are chosen from different genres to have a broader viewpoint. The idioms selected are analyzed according to the adopted model of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) sketched below.

### 4.3 The Model

The model used in the current study for analyzing data is adopted from Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as presented in the sketch below:

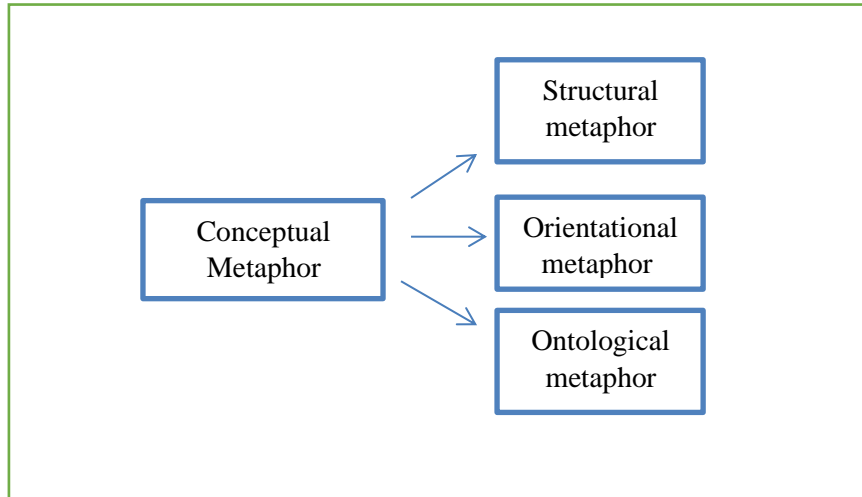


Figure (1) Lakoff and Johnson (1980) Model

### 4.4 Data Analysis

Applying the above model, the study carefully presents the conceptual metaphor that is believed to be entailed in the non-compositional idioms. Considering their figurative meaning, it is probable that non-compositional idioms are common in TV series. This is why the current study tends to select and analyze TV series other than works like movies, dramas, novels, journalistic register, etc. The process of analysis of the data is supposedly two-fold, visual and oral. The data of the four works has been investigated once visually by watching videos and then orally by reading the scripts. The results were recorded. To assure validity and reliability, the researchers worked separately and then compared their results to reach crucial judgments regarding idioms and their types and meaning. The controversial cases between the two researchers were carefully double-checked and twice-inspected for peremptory and decisive agreement. After agreeing upon the number of metaphors and the meaning of idioms, then, the analysis is illustrated in five tables. Each table presents the selected idioms and their

meanings. Noticeably, Cambridge international dictionary of idioms (1998) and Oxford dictionary of current English (1993) were consulted for the meaning of the idioms. Moreover, each table lists the number of the season and episode of each series. The three types of conceptual metaphor applied in the idioms are included. The percentage of each metaphor is calculated as well. Lastly, table (5) shows the comparison between the percentage of use of each type of metaphor in the four TV series. Besides, table (5) may serve as a recapitulation for the four tables. The tables are illustrated below:

No	Non-compositional idioms	Meaning of the idiom	Season	Episode	Structural metaphor	Orientalional Metaphor	Ontological metaphor
1	A fine kettle of fish	To be in a difficult situation	1	1	-	-	1
2	Bet on the wrong horse	To guess wrongly	1	5	1	-	-
3	Trial by fire	To perform well under pressure	1	5	1	-	1
4	Water under the bridge	Forget about an unpleasant event	1	7	-	-	1
5	A sight for sore eyes	Feel happy to see someone/thing	1	7	1	-	-
Percentage					%50	%0	%50

Table (1) conceptual metaphors in non-compositional idioms in *Anne with an E*



No	Non-compositional idioms	Meaning of the idiom	Season	Episode	Structural metaphor	Oriental Metaphor	Ontological metaphor
1	Back to square one	Back to the start point	1	1	-	1	1
2	Under the weather	In low spirit	1	3	-	1	
3	Drop the ball	Make a mistake	2	12	1	1	1
4	Spill the beans	Reveal secret information	3	7	-	1	1
5	Skin of my teeth	By a very narrow margin	2	12	-	-	1
Percentage					%11.11	%44.44	%44.44

Table (2) conceptual metaphor in Non-compositional idioms in *Breaking bad*.

No	Non-compositional idioms	Meaning of the idiom	Season	Episode	Structural metaphor	Oriental Metaphor	Ontological metaphor
1	Blow off some steam	Get rid of pent up emotions	6	19	-	-	1
2	State of the art	The most recent stage in developing something	6	21	-	-	1
3	Throw caution to the wind	Acting in a completely reckless manner	7	2	-	1	
4	Roll with the punches (of boxers)	Move the body away from the punch to lessen the impact	1	2		-	1
5	Out of sorts	Slightly unwell, in low spirit	1	12	-	1	1
Percentage					%0	%33.33	%66.66

Table (3) Conceptual metaphor in non-compositional idioms in *Friends*

No	Non-compositional idioms	Meaning of the idiom	Season	Episode	Structural metaphor	Oriental Metaphor	Ontological metaphor
1	Mum's the word	Don't reveal a secret	1	4	-	1	-
2	Pull out all the steps	Go to elaborate lengths/effort	7	6	-	-	1
3	A penny for your thoughts	To ask someone what they think	1	3	1	-	1
4	Break a leg	Wish someone a good luck	1	10	-	-	1
5	Be on the back burner	No one dealing with something but not yet forgotten	1	4	-	1	1
Percentage					%14.28	%28.57	%57.14

Table (4) Conceptual metaphor in non-compositional idioms in *The big bang theory*

Title of the series	Structural metaphor	Total NO.	Oriental metaphor	Total NO.	Ontological metaphor	Total NO.
1 Anne with an E	3	5	0	8	3	15
2 Breaking Bad	1		4		4	
3 Friends	0		2		4	
4 The big bang theory	1		2		4	
Total Percentage	%17.85		%28.57		%53.57	

Table (5) Conceptual metaphor in the four TV series

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Lakoff and Johnson's model (1980) is followed to analyze the entailed conceptual metaphor in the selected non-compositional idioms. The TV series are selected from different genres which adds to the diversity of the selected idioms and therefore, adds some reliability to the resulted conceptual metaphor.

The above tables show the outcome of the analysis. The last horizontal cell in each table shows the percentages of the entailed conceptual metaphor. Table (1) shows the analysis of the selected idioms in *Anne with an E*. The items of the model are applicable and the results show that the structural and ontological metaphor form %50, while the orientational metaphor forms %0. The dramatic and real life aspect of the series helps the use of more structural and container metaphor than spatial ones. Relatedly, Wilcox(2000: 26-27) states that Structural metaphor permits the use of more complicated concepts. In the same respect, Haser (2005:144) argues that the mapping between the source and target in the structural metaphor is complicated, although it helps represent a certain concept in terms of another.

The second TV series is *Breaking Bad* . Table (2) shows the percentage of each type of conceptual metaphor. The five selected idioms have only %11.11 of structural metaphor, while %44.44 percent in both orientational and ontological metaphor. This shows the dominance of some types more than the other when it comes to non-compositional idioms. On this point, Kövecses (2020: 95) states that our metaphorical conceptualization varies extremely in different types of discourse. The variation is a result of the different contexts in which metaphor is used. Each communicative situation has its effect on the process.

The TV series *Friends* is analyzed in table (3). The selected non-compositional idioms entail %0 percent of structural metaphor, and %33.33 of orientational and %66.66 of ontological metaphor respectively. The obvious difference in the percentage among the types proves the idea of the pervasiveness of a type among the others. In this regard, Basson (2006:53-55) argues that in our conceptual system, the orientational metaphor has a cognitive function of promoting a better coherence among the target concepts. Respectively, he (ibid) states that the human's activities, events, ideas and emotions can be viewed differently through the use of ontological metaphor. It helps reform their reference, categorization, and even their groupings which change the conception of our experience in terms of objects, substances and generally containers.

The fourth TV series is *The big bang theory*. Table (4) reveals %14.28 in the structural metaphor, %28.57 for the orientational metaphor and %57.14 for the ontological metaphor. Again, there is an obvious diversity in the percentage. Relatedly, concerning container metaphor which is a subtype of the ontological metaphor, Wilcox (2000: 26) states that they are unconsciously used as an essential process of the mind. Moreover, he adds that it is so "pervasive and natural" among people. In this regard, Spitzer (2004:56) asserts that orientational metaphor is like schemata in nature, therefore, they are more essential than structural metaphor. Moreover, he (ibid) argues that since the orientational metaphor arise from the fact that we have certain physical orientation, so they function accordingly.

Lastly, table (5) shows the conceptual metaphor applied in all of the selected non-compositional idioms in the four TV series. The findings show that a percentage of %17.85 represents the structural metaphor in the four



TV series. The same procedure is followed in calculating the percentage of the orientational and ontological metaphor. The last two have %28.57 and %53.57 respectively. As a result, the ontological has the highest percentage among the other types. The container, entity, and person ontological metaphor are the most entailed in the five selected non-compositional idioms. The mapping between abstractness and concreteness is obviously the reason of this pervasiveness. The orientational comes in the second place in the selected non-compositional metaphor, while the structural comes the third in the total percentage.

## 6. Conclusions

Metaphor is used by most people on different occasions. The cognitive mechanisms behind most linguistic engagements are metaphorical. Moreover, metaphor is not only a matter of language , but it is related to thoughts and actions. Hence, it is easily proved that metaphor can be conceptualized and studied within the framework of cognitive linguistics. The three types of metaphor can be found in all language forms, including idioms and, particularly, non-compositional idioms. Interestingly, idioms are different from other linguistic forms. when analyzing, it is important to consider idiomatic meaning not the literal meaning. Lakof and Johnson's (1980) model can be applied to analyze the types of conceptual metaphor entailed in the non-compositional idioms. The study reveals that the ontological metaphor is common in the non-compositional idioms, which is followed by the orientational and the structural. The diversity of the subtypes of the ontological metaphor affects its pervasiveness. The study mainly proves the fact that conceptual metaphor can be found in even the most figurative uses of language such as the non-compositional idioms.

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