

**GRAMMAR IN METAPHOR:  
A CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR ACCOUNT OF METAPHORIC LANGUAGE**

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**Abstract**

The conceptual metaphor revolution inspired by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) continues to give us a clearer picture of the conceptual structure of metaphor with every passing year. But even as we uncover the intricacies of conceptual metaphor, metaphoric language becomes more and more of a mystery. How can a speaker, using language, communicate the conceptual complexities of a metaphor to a hearer? This dissertation tackles the issue of metaphoric language by identifying how specific linguistic resources – from grammatical constructions to poetic devices – are employed to convey the conceptual structure of metaphor.

The dissertation focuses on the role of grammatical constructions in metaphoric language. In metaphoric phrases that can be understood out of context, such as *bright idea*, the dissertation argues that words in particular constructional slots indicate the source domain of a conceptual metaphor (i.e. are “metaphoric”), and words in other slots represent the metaphor’s target domain (typically with a “non-metaphoric” meaning). For example, *bright idea* is interpretable partly because the source-domain predicating adjective *bright* (metaphorically meaning “intelligent”) modifies the target-domain “non-metaphoric” noun *idea*. A similar phrase with a target-domain adjective and a source-domain noun, such as *intelligent light*, lacks the meaning “intelligent idea”.

The patterns underlying metaphoric uses of constructions can be explained in terms of *conceptual autonomy* and *conceptual dependence* (cf. Langacker 1987, Croft 2003), which the dissertation models using semantic frames (cf. Fillmore 1982). In non-metaphoric uses of constructions, conceptually autonomous elements “fill in,” or *elaborate*, the meaning of conceptually dependent elements. In metaphoric language, the autonomous elements’ elaboration process includes the designation of a target domain, which forces the dependent elements to be interpreted “metaphorically”.

The dissertation extends this analysis to numerous constructions, including domain constructions, as in *mental exercise*; preposition phrase constructions, as in *the foundation of an argument*; predicate-argument constructions; equations; idioms; constructional combinations; and techniques of metaphor evocation that are usually limited to literary genres, such as parallelism and “negation of the literal”. One chapter addresses the problem of metaphor look-alikes, by introducing a series of tests to distinguish genuine metaphor from the results of non-metaphoric semantic changes. The dissertation also includes a chapter on Finnish constructions, demonstrating that the analysis employed here can be applied to languages other than English.

The constructional systematicity of metaphoric language has implications for several fields: cognitive linguistics, which relies on metaphoric language as an important source of data on conceptual metaphor; natural language technologies (such as AI, search engines, and translation software) which can improve computer recognition and comprehension of metaphoric language; Construction Grammar, which can refine its understanding of constructional meaning; and cognitive stylistics, in which the intent and comprehension of literary metaphor can be more precisely interpreted.