



## THE NATURE, CLASSIFICATION, AND COGNITIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF METAPHORS IN LINGUISTICS

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**Abstract** *This paper explores the nature, classification, and significance of metaphors in language. Metaphor is widely defined as a semantic transformation where words typically referring to one domain are applied to another based on perceived similarities. This dual interaction between distinct concepts forms the foundation of metaphorical meaning. Linguistic metaphors play a crucial role in language development, influencing the creation of synonyms, new meanings, polysemy, and expressive vocabulary, while also serving as a tool for articulating complex inner experiences. Various classifications of metaphors are examined, including N.D. Arutyunova's nominative, figurative, cognitive, and generalizing types, as well as M.V. Nikitin's ontological (direct and structural), synesthetic, and emotive-evaluative metaphors.*

**Keywords:** *Metaphor, linguistic metaphor, cognitive metaphor, ontological metaphor, grammatical metaphor, semantic transformation, polysemy, conceptual metaphor*

The most widely accepted definition of metaphor in linguistics is as follows: "A metaphor (or metaphorical model) is a comparison between two phenomena, based on the semantic transformation of a phenomenon, quality, action, or attribute. This transformation allows words (phrases or sentences) that typically refer to one set of objects or situations to be used in reference to another, based on a perceived similarity in certain key characteristics." [Glazunova, 2000, pp. 177–178].

When a metaphor is used, two separate concepts—each related to different objects—interact within a single word or expression. The resulting meaning arises from this conceptual interaction.

The creation and analysis of a metaphor typically involve four key components:

- Two distinct categories of objects
- The properties associated with each category

A metaphor functions by selecting features from one category of objects and transferring them to another category or individual instance—these are the core metaphorical representations. This interaction between two different domains highlights the central feature of metaphor: its duality.

A living metaphor, at the moment it is created and understood, involves the interaction of two referents: the subject being compared and the object it is compared to. The name of the latter is transferred to the former, thereby acquiring a metaphorical meaning.

Linguistic metaphors play a crucial role in language development. They serve as the foundation for various linguistic phenomena, including the formation of synonyms, the emergence of new meanings and subtle nuances, the creation of polysemy (multiple meanings for a word), and the expansion of emotionally expressive vocabulary. Metaphors are particularly valuable for expressing thoughts about a person's inner world.

As R. Hoffman noted, *“A metaphor can be used as a tool for description and explanation in any domain—whether in psychotherapeutic dialogue or communication between airline pilots, in ritual dance or programming languages, in art education or quantum mechanics. Wherever it appears, a metaphor always enhances our understanding of human behavior, knowledge, and language.”* [Hoffman, 1987, p. 152].

The British scholar E. Ortony identified three primary reasons for using metaphors in everyday communication:

- They allow us to express ourselves more concisely.
- They make our language more vivid and engaging.

- They enable us to articulate thoughts and experiences that are otherwise difficult to express. [Ortony, 1990, p. 215].

We rely on metaphors because they are quick, clear, efficient, and widely comprehensible.

### Classification of Metaphors

According to N.D. Arutyunova, linguistic metaphors can be categorized into the following types:

**1. Nominative metaphor** – involves the transfer of a name, where one meaning is substituted with another.

**2. Figurative metaphor** – emerges when an identifying meaning transitions into a predicate, contributing to the development of figurative expressions and synonymous forms in language.

**3. Cognitive metaphor** – arises from a shift in the compatibility of predicative words, leading to the creation of polysemy (multiple meanings).

**4. Generalizing metaphor** – blurs the boundaries between different logical categories within a word's lexical meaning, thus encouraging the formation of logical polysemy.[Arutyunova, 1998, p. 366].

M.V. Nikitin's typology of metaphors is based on the idea that the similarity between referents (denotates)—which underpins metaphorical transfer and the reinterpretation of literal meaning—can have various origins.

- When the similarity lies inherently in the compared objects themselves, the metaphor is considered ontological and can be either:

- Direct, where the shared features are of the same physical nature (e.g., “*bear*”: 1. an animal; 2. a clumsy person), or
- Structural, where the similarity is based on the structural role played by the features in both referents (e.g., *eating*, *receiving guests*, *receiving information* all share a structural pattern of intake).

In both types, the similarity pre-exists the comparison and is revealed through it.

- In contrast, when the features of similarity are not inherent or ontologically aligned—neither in physical substance nor in structural function—and emerge only during the act of perception, we are dealing with synesthetic or emotive-evaluative metaphors. Here, the perceived similarity is not based on the objective nature of the entities, but on cognitive mechanisms involved in processing information.

The commonality between ontological metaphors (both direct and structural) and synesthetic metaphors lies in their shared goal: to describe and characterize a subject through perceived similarities based on the subject's own features—though each type does so in a distinct manner. In contrast, the emotive-evaluative metaphor operates differently by shifting from a cognitive to a pragmatic mode of understanding, focusing more on emotional or subjective interpretation than objective similarity[Nikitin, 2001, pp. 37–38].

According to J. Lakoff and M. Johnson, metaphors can be categorized into two main types:

- **Ontological metaphors:** These allow us to conceptualize abstract elements such as events, actions, emotions, or ideas as tangible entities (e.g., *the mind is an entity, the mind is fragile*).

- **Orientational metaphors:** Rather than mapping one concept onto another, these metaphors structure a system of concepts through spatial orientation (e.g., *happy is up, sad is down; conscious is up, unconscious is down*).

In addition to lexical metaphors, grammar can also convey metaphorical meaning. In linguistics, a grammatical metaphor refers to the deliberate transfer of the properties of one grammatical category into the domain of another, producing a new, additional meaning that may not be strictly grammatical [Maslennikova, 2006, p. 23].

There are three primary forms of grammatical metaphorization:

1. A mismatch between the grammatical form and the context in which it appears;

2. A contrast between the grammatical form and its lexical content;
3. A discrepancy between the literal dictionary meaning and the real-world (extra-linguistic) situation.

When comparing lexical and grammatical metaphors, several key differences emerge: grammatical metaphor is limited by the relatively closed and systematic nature of grammar, which restricts metaphorization to a smaller number of oppositional structures. Furthermore, grammatical metaphor typically functions in a unidirectional manner, although exceptions to this principle are occasionally observed.

To sum up, metaphor is a fundamental and multifaceted linguistic phenomenon that plays a vital role in language and cognition. It enables the transfer of meaning between distinct domains by highlighting perceived similarities, thus enriching communication and thought. Metaphors are not only instrumental in expanding vocabulary and expressing complex or abstract ideas but also serve as key cognitive tools for organizing knowledge and experience. The diverse classifications - ranging from nominative and figurative to cognitive and grammatical metaphors - reflect the complexity of metaphorical processes and their various origins, whether inherent or perceptual. Understanding metaphor from both linguistic and cognitive perspectives deepens our insight into how language shapes human understanding and interaction. Ultimately, metaphor remains an indispensable device for enhancing clarity, vividness, and expressiveness across all spheres of communication.

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