

The moon in narrative, metaphor and reason: A multilinguistic perspective

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Introduction and Background

Despite the moon's familiar presence, its elusive physical nature has meant that people have used stories and scientific explanations to make sense of it. This paper presents the initial findings of a study that aims to understand how people from different language groups and cultures (Chinese, Arabic, Polish and English) use their narrative, explanatory and metaphorical resources when talking about the moon.

Aims of Study

The study has two broad aims:

1. How do family members from each language group construe the moon, and abstract concepts associated with the moon, through metaphor?
2. What does this tell us about the significance of the moon for the family members in each language/cultural group?

Research Design

Pre-focus group text analysis

- MIP/Pragglejaz (2007).
- High Arabic, Polish and Mandarin native speaker involvement.

Metaphor Map with the Historical Thesaurus (2019).

Two focus groups per language group (3-6 people/group; 6+ yrs; bilingual setting)

References

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Analytical Framework

This study's **analytical approach** acknowledges a full range of contextual dimensions (cognitive, linguistic, physical, affective, cultural, social) to the dynamic metaphor manifestation in discourse (Cameron 2010; Jensen 2017). It uses a **cognitive discursive framework** that draws on cognitive linguistic /stylistic principles: e.g. CMT (Lakoff and Johnson 1980); cognitive grammar (Langacker 1991), schema theory (Stockwell 2005) and Text World Theory (Gavins 2007; Werth 1999).

Findings

Pre-focus group text analysis:

Source domains

- Text analysis (mainly English): (~ 200 metaphors) DESTINATION; TIME KEEPER; OBJECT OF DESIRE; EXOTIC OBJECT; PUZZLE; MOVEMENT; POSSESSION; OBJECT TO CONQUER; MEASURE OF OUR DESIRES; ACTIVE AGENT; ANIMAL; PERSON.

Some common target domains

- LOVE, TIME, MIND, LONGING, (text analysis; mapping metaphor with the historical thesaurus 2019)

Focus groups:

When describing the moon's elusive physical appearance and explaining its significance, source and target domains vary and are strongly linked to participants' experiential and cultural knowledge:

'The moon is like a sickle' – Polish;

Not 'blood' moon – Arabic;

MINOR CRIMINAL ACTIVITY IS THE MOON'S PRESENCE – English.

Metaphors are often novel e.g empty: 'pusty' – Polish.

Participants draw on what they have read or films they have seen; there are strong intertextual links.

Initial cognitive grammatical analysis of, for example, the foregrounding and specificity of the metaphorical expressions provided further insight into the significance of the moon for the participants.

Take away message

This study shows how understanding cognitive architecture of metaphorical construals from a multilingual and multicultural perspective can provide insight into individual, linguistic and cultural variation found in our relationship with the natural world.