



GENESIS AND GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF “ROAD” CONCEPTOSPHERIC UNITS

Rakhimov Muzaffar Murodovich

PhD student at Bukhara State University

m.m.raximov@buxdu.uz

Abstract: *The study studies how cognitive linguists have upgraded their ideas about the usefulness of the road metaphor through time and around the globe. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and ideas from cultural linguistics, the research investigates how “road” represents various abstract ideas such as life, time and purpose. Analysis of language and literature demonstrates that the use of “road” imagery is constantly changing and very important in how we think and communicate.*

Keywords: *road metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory, journey, embodied cognition, conceptual blending, metaphor evolution*

Introduction. Metaphors are not just fancy expressions; they are essential for thinking and speech, letting us understand abstract ideas by relating them to what we can see, feel and touch. Using the “road” as an idea, we see it in stories, writings and histories from many different times. Both common language and literature use “road” as a way to imagine life, advancement, changes and destinies. The common use of metaphors proves that they are important to thinking, since they allow us to organize and view ideas that are not directly observable such as personal growth, important decisions in life or cultural trends. In this framework, life is seen as a journey, time is like a road and people’s actions are considered directed movement which suggests taking choice, pursuing goals and learning. It is suggested by various studies on websites such as academia.edu, clausiuspress.com and zitalucaesatho.medium.com that the “road” metaphor is one of the most reliable and flexible concepts in conceptual metaphor theory.

This research is focused on studying where and how the concept of the road developed in human speech, thought and society. This study depends on cognitive linguistics and cultural semantic models to find out the ways in which this metaphor has developed and become common in various situations. Even though “life is a journey” seems to be a common metaphor, its structure and expression are shaped by the culture, history and beliefs around it.

First, it is important to learn how the “road” metaphor began and evolved in many cultures and ages. Second which mental operations and image schemes make this metaphor understandable and stable? Next, how does the idea of a road appear in literature and regular language and what can its presence in both areas tell us about





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human understanding, self-image and principles? The authors of the study rely on research data from multi-cultural texts, metaphor theories and information from history, especially that presented by the University of Warsaw's Department of History (historia.uw.edu.pl). The main goal is to explain the "road" metaphor as both a word combination and an idea that transforms with our thoughts and culture.

Literature Review. In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the concept of the "road" as a metaphor takes central importance, since these researchers argued that general ways of thinking are often formed using metaphors. Life, time and function are said to be experienced through the body and then reflected in abstract thoughts. By thinking of life as a journey on a road, we are able to understand various life changes, moments and moves (as pointed out by Lakoff & Johnson in 1980 and Lakoff in 1993).

Embodied cognition which is important in CMT, states that metaphorical thinking is based on sensorimotor skills. The theory of conceptual blending by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) points out that movement and navigation are basically what help us understand abstract metaphors. Gibbs (2006) believes that the constant use of the road metaphor to describe what we do in life is due to our everyday experiences of walking and moving around in space. Therefore, the road exists as a language symbol and is also used by the body to understand difficult concepts.

Still, metaphors are considered fluid and change from one culture to another. Cultural linguists mention that the use of metaphor signals what a particular community believes in and what it has learned together. Puglisi and Baronchelli (2008) proved through their study that metaphorical systems are created through cultural transmission and affected by historical, geographical and social factors. That's why, in different social and cultural surroundings, the "road" metaphor means different things. Even though in Western texts it represents an individual journey and steady advancement, in Eastern literature it usually means that change repeats, we have responsibilities or people seek enlightenment together.

Across many academic backgrounds, people have studied the "road" metaphor. In Hemphill (2019), the verse describing the separation of the water and land is read using CMT which demonstrates that the metaphor of "road" gives direction for both the ology and morality. Many people draw from Wikipedia (2023a) to support the metaphor's constant role in topics, for instance, inventions, movies and mythology. Lucacs-Satho (2024) has recently added neuroscientific findings to explain that the concept of "the road ahead" activates both brain networks related to vision, movement and emotions at once.

All of these theories point out that the road is understood not only as a well-known literary device but also as a basic way of thinking. At the same time, a metaphor saves our brain effort, marks cultural traditions and acts as a vessel for emotions, showing its usefulness in facing human experiences over the years.





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Methodology. The research is conducted using qualitative methods to look at the development of the “road” metaphor in literature and culture. This work is mainly based on cognitive-linguistic models such as the one Gibbs (2006) presented which stress the analysis of metaphorical language found in real texts. Using a qualitative perspective, one can notice how road-related metaphors are created, modified and work through different genres and literary periods.

Works in this database cover many genres, for example, sacred texts, old classical writings and contemporary literature. Using various texts of different cultures over many years makes the results valid for different times and cultures, as Hemphill (2019) did in his analysis of Genesis 1 metaphors. The authors have included various traditions to show how flexible and stable “the road” metaphor is in different cultures and beyond Western traditions.

The framework relies on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as it was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and then continued by Lakoff (1993). With CMT, one can note that certain abstract concepts such as life, destiny and time can be explained using the domain of “road” or “path.” In addition, this study applies Conceptual Blending Theory which was devised by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Thanks to this approach, we can consider mixed ideas such as time, space and agency, that are integrated in metaphorical statements like “life is a road.”

Also, the study obtains descriptive data from digital encyclopedic repositories, like Wikipedia (2023c) which gives clear accounts of intricate theories like conceptual blending and fictive motion. With these references, the structure of the metaphor’s conceptual space is clear and it is possible to see all the cognitive layers involved in its creation and use.

The aim of this approach is to outline in detail how the “road” metaphor began, how it is used with different meanings and how it affects our perception of abstract matters.

Results. Various texts from different eras and cultures regularly use metaphors involving roads with some patterns and changes over time. The results are based on two basic ideas of metaphor, namely, “Life is like a journey” and “Time is a road you travel.” In Lakoff and Johnson’s view, metaphors using road image take on the main role and people match their life situations with the experience of traveling along a road. Lucacs-Satho (2024) explains that this metaphor fits with the brain activity needed for spatial mind which supports the view that using “road” as a metaphor may have a basis in the human nervous system.

The uses of this metaphor as travel across cultures prove that it is adaptable and flexible in many societies. In Western literature and philosophy, going on a journey usually stands for individual initiative, targets and unavoidable fate. This gives emphasis to the idea of an independent character exploring a story or an argument arranged one step after another (Gibbs, 2006). Meanwhile, as shown by both ancient writings and modern publications, Eastern philosophies consider the “road” to refer to a





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group effort, promoting unity, leaving behind desires for success and acting responsibly (Hemphill, 2019; Wikipedia, 2023a). Both groups relate to the main theme, but the way it is experienced in two societies is very different.

Ultimately, the history of the “road” metaphor proves that its meaning has grown wider over years. Early in the poems, those people treated this metaphor by thinking of roads and journeys as real and authentic. With the growth of the theory in literary and philosophical spheres, “road” began to represent how people travel through life, develop personally and face their fate. This form of change agrees with Puglisi and Baronchelli’s (2008) claim that excited phrases are used this way because of their cultural context and how they are often used. For this reason, the metaphor of a “road” demonstrates how experiences from our body can gradually become mental concepts and form detailed networks in the mind.

All of these studies prove that the idea of the “road” plays a major role in helping humans make sense of their place in time, feelings and existence.

Discussion. The research confirms that metaphorically using concepts such as the road allows people to better grasp abstract thoughts. Therefore, this corresponds to embodied cognition which states that human mind and body work together to influence thinking. If we use words such as “life is a journey” literally, we can think of life using the framework of traveling (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002; Gibbs, 2006).

It has major effects on language as well as on how we think. In Lakoff’s opinion (1993), metaphors are essential to both our reasoning and our way of understanding reality. “The road” is a metaphor that is stable and works well which is why it appears in various stories from many cultures. According to Lucasz-Satho in 2024, metaphor use engages regions of the brain that also handle spatial ways of thinking which strongly suggests that metaphor has a biological component.

The road image is influenced by the values of a given culture which shows how metaphoric thinking depends on culture. In the Western world, most uses of this metaphor put focus on reaching goals, straight paths and personal accomplishments through tales of progress, winning or fate. Unlike Western ideas, Eastern traditions usually put more importance on moving through the learning process, as they see it as constantly revolving, relevant to each person’s growth and the health of society (Hemphill, 2019). It comes from the fact that Western studies put more emphasis on results while Eastern views highlight the process and being there throughout the journey.

Moreover, Puglisi and Baronchelli (2008) explain that such metaphorical frameworks usually arise from cultural interactions which once more demonstrates the relationship among cognition, culture and language. That’s why the “road” metaphor is not fixed but evolves and is active in people’s bodies and minds.

Conclusion. The findings of the present study suggest that although the “road” metaphor comes from observing roads in the world, it has since become very involved





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and exists within our thinking, emotions and cultural practices. The idea of spatial navigation led to the development of this metaphor which has later been used to talk about life, time, destiny, transformation and purpose. Since Conceptual Metaphor Theory points out that ‘journey’ is linked to things such as walking and encountering problems, it makes sense that ‘journey’ appears frequently in both history and culture.

Research proves that the common expressions “life is a journey” and “time is a road” truly guide how people think, behave and relate to reality. Flexibility in the metaphor helps it emerge in faith, philosophy and casual talk which proves it is always suitable in different genres. What’s more, the metaphor accepts different ways of thinking about development, showing how it fits in various parts of the world.

The study clearly points out that metaphors play a key role in the formation of meaning in cognitive linguistics. It compliments the research of Lakoff, Johnson, Gibbs and Fauconnier by proving how a metaphor can develop in new directions and still work across several cultures. Moreover, the research confirms that metaphors always change with their use in certain socio-cognitive environments.

Hence, two main pathways are proposed for carrying out future research. Looking at how “road” is described in languages that have not been studied much, might reveal its different structural and emotional meanings. Since technological and digital changes influence people’s movements across actual and symbolic space, we also need to look into how they impact familiar metaphoric patterns. Such research would not only help us learn more about metaphors but also join discussions on the ties between language, technology and the way our minds have evolved.

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