STRONG AND WEAK INTERPRETATIONS OF METAPHORIC REPRESENTATION: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF MURPHY'S ALTERNATIVE AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDIES

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Abstract This text critically examines the claim within Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) that abstract concepts are structured metaphorically, focusing on Murphy's distinction between strong and weak interpretations of metaphoric representation. The strong interpretation proposes that target domains lack independent conceptual structure and are understood solely through source-domain mappings, whereas the weak interpretation maintains that target concepts possess autonomous representations that are subsequently influenced by metaphorical associations.

Keywords. metaphoric representation; strong vs. weak interpretation; Murphy; structural similarity; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; structure-mapping theory; cross-linguistic cognition; Boroditsky; time metaphors; embodied cognition; conceptual structure.

Аннотация В данной работе критически рассматривается центральное положение Теории концептуальной метафоры (Conceptual Metaphor Theory, CMT), согласно которому абстрактные понятия структурируются метафорически. Особое внимание уделяется различию между сильной и слабой интерпретациями метафорической репрезентации, предложенными Мёрфи. Сильная интерпретация предполагает, что целевые домены не обладают самостоятельной концептуальной структурой и понимаются исключительно через отображения из доменов-источников. В противоположность этому, слабая интерпретация утверждает, что целевые концепты имеют автономные репрезентации, которые впоследствии модифицируются или дополняются метафорическими ассоциациями. Мёрфи критикует обе позиции, предлагая модель структурного сходства, согласно которой метафоры возникают на основе уже существующих реляционных параллелей между концептуальными доменами, а не в результате метафорического структурирования мышления.

Ключевые слова. метафорическая репрезентация; сильная и слабая интерпретации;

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada Konseptual metafora nazariyasining (Conceptual Metaphor Theory, CMT) asosiy da'vosi — mavhum tushunchalar metaforik tarzda tuziladi degan fikr — tanqidiy jihatdan tahlil qilinadi. Tahlilda Мёрфи tomonidan ilgari surilgan metaforik reprezentatsiyaning kuchli va zaif talqinlari o'rtasidagi

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farqqa alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Kuchli talqinga ko'ra, nishon sohalar mustaqil konseptual tuzilishga ega emas va ular faqat manba sohalardan ko'chirish (mapping) orqali anglanadi.

Kalit so'zlar. metaforik reprezentatsiya; kuchli va zaif talqinlar; Мёрфи; strukturaviy o'xshashlik; konseptual metafora nazariyasi; strukturani moslashtirish nazariyasi; tillararo kognitsiya; Boroditskiy; vaqt metaforalari; mujassamlashgan kognitsiya; konseptual tuzilma

Introduction

Murphy postulates two main interpretations of the claim for metaphoric representation, a strong interpretation and a weak interpretation. In the strong interpretation, some target domains, for example emotions, do not have their own conceptual representations but are understood through metaphoric reference to a source domain, for example temperatures. In the weak interpretation people do have a separate representation of abstract and complex domains such as emotions, but the content of the representations is influenced by metaphors relating emotions to temperatures in such a way that the emotion concept takes on the same structure as the temperature concept. The critical difference between the strong and weak versions is independence of representation. In the strong version, people do not have a well-developed concept of argument independently of the concept of war – they can understand arguments only in terms of wars. In the weak version, people do have a complete, independent concept of argument which they can use to understand arguments, but the content and structure of this concept have been influenced by the content and structure of the concept of war. Murphy points out that in the strong view, for a metaphor such as ARGUMENT IS WAR our representation of the target domain arguments is a set of connections to the source domain war, relating the arguers to combatants, the arguments to weapons, arguments in favour to defences, and so on. This entails that people employ their knowledge of war to think about an understand arguments. On the strong interpretation, concepts such as argument have little conceptual structure of their own but rather receive their structure via the source domain through which they are understood, such as war. This entails that people do not have independent knowledge about the components of an argument but only a set of pointers to the concept of war, and we use the components of war to understand the components of arguments. If concepts such as arguments have a metaphorical representation then they cannot be independently defined and represented. Murphy stresses that this entails that 'one does not really understand an argument – one only understands war, and the understanding of arguments is parasitic on this concept'. Yet people know and believe a lot of things about arguments that they do not know or believe about wars, which would be impossible given the strong view. Murphy points out

ISSN 3030-3907

that the strong view entails that concept such as argument are represented and understood through a link to war and that this link would routinely attribute incorrect attributes of wars to arguments, which does not happen in practice. Moreover, the presence of multiple metaphors for the same target domain, such as

LOVE IS A JOURNEY, LOVE IS MADNESS and LOVE IS A BUSINESS TRANSACTION (Kövecses 1986), poses a serious problem to the claim that concepts are structured metaphorically, and reference to the "inherent structure" of target domains cannot resolve this issue as this would require that this inherent structure is non-metaphorically represented. In relation to this point McGlone has pointed out that people need 'at least a minimal independent representation of theories'; otherwise people would 'assume that theory terms are synonymous with building terms and would be conceptually incapable of distinguishing between them'. In this view the concepts ARGUMENT and WAR both have their own mental representations and ARGUMENT has its own structure independent from the structure of WAR and defined in its own terms rather than in terms of the metaphor. However, because the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR is so frequent in our language, the structure of the ARGUMENT concept has become similar to the structure of the WAR concept. Though Murphy acknowledges that a weak interpretation of the metaphoric representation claim is not impossible, he proposes an alternative hypothesis that does not require any metaphoric representation of concepts. In his structural similarity view all concepts are represented directly and the prevalence of metaphor in language does not generally reflect the influence of these metaphors on the mental representations. Instead, metaphors are the result of the similarity of preexisting conceptual structures.

Metaphors such as ARGUMENT IS WAR are the result of a structural similarity between the concept of ARGUMENT and the concept of WAR. Murphy therefore argues that the relations of the components of ARGUMENT can be projected onto the relations of WAR in a coherent way, as is also argued by Gentner and Clement. In his view it is this similarity in relational structure that enables people to construct understandable verbal metaphors, and those that are effective and pleasing become conventional ways of talking about a specific domain. In Murphy's structural similarity view concepts such as LOVE and JOURNEY have independent representations of their own. The existence of metaphorical expressions that relate love to journeys are the result of a structural similarity between these two domains. In this view, salient properties of LOVE correspond to salient properties of JOURNEY. Murphy argues that such correspondences could be explained by the structure-mapping theory of Gentner and colleagues. On the structural similarity view, the domain of LOVE and the domain of JOURNEY are each represented independently, and the domain of JOURNEY does not

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influence the content and structure of the domain of LOVE. Since this view does not propose any metaphoric links between source and target domains the problem of incorrect inferences does not occur. Multiple metaphors to describe one and the same target domain are also not problematic for the structural similarity view as different metaphors will map different structural similarities between domains. This 'multiplicity of similarities' between domains corresponds to findings by Medin et al. (1993) and Markman and Gentner that showed that a single stimulus could be viewed as similar to two different and incompatible stimuli. This showed that similarity comparisons can cause an item to be interpreted differently depending on the item it is being compared to. McGlone points out that the weak version of the metaphoric representation claim can be empirically tested, though this has rarely been done by CMT proponents. In most cases, the evidence for the presence of conceptual metaphors has been circular: the evidence that people think about arguments in terms of buildings is that they talk about arguments in terms of buildings, and the reason that they talk about arguments in terms of buildings is because they think about arguments in terms of buildings. To empirically test the presence of conceptual metaphors, an abstract concept needs to be found for which a set of metaphorical expressions can be determined that suggest a conceptual metaphor in a given culture, such as THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS in Western culture. The metaphorical expressions should then be compared to the way this concept is talked about in a different culture, to determine whether this culture uses the same or a different conceptual metaphor. After having determined whether the different cultures use different linguistic expressions to talk about the same abstract concept, it should then be demonstrated that these different cultures not only talk differently about this concept but also think differently about it, as evidenced by non-linguistic reasoning. This final step is crucial since it is the only non-linguistic evidence for the presence of conceptual metaphors. A number of experiments by Boroditsky specifically address this issue. Boroditsky examined whether speakers of English and Mandarin Chinese think differently about the abstract concept TIME. While both Mandarin and English speakers use horizontal front/back terms to talk about time (i.e. 'the good times ahead of us' or 'the hardships behind us'), Mandarin speakers also commonly use up/down vertical terms. The question is whether this difference between English and Mandarin in the way speakers talk about time also leads to a difference in the way speakers think about time Boroditsky specifically investigated whether using spatial language to talk about time has both immediate, short-term implications for on-line processing as well as long-term implications. Using reaction times as an implicit measure, the experiments showed that language affected thought even in non-linguistic tasks. The first experiment showed that 'habits in language encourage habits in thought':

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Mandarin speakers showed a vertical bias even when they were “thinking for English”, indicating that ‘language-encouraged habits in thought can operate regardless of the language that one is currently thinking for’. A second experiment revealed that the bias of Mandarin speakers to think about time in vertical terms was greater for speakers who started learning English later in life, though the vertical bias appeared to be independent of the length of exposure to English. That is, ‘[the] propensity to think about time vertically was related to the length of pure Mandarin experience (before any English was learned), but not to the length of English experience’. In a third experiment, native speakers of English learned to use vertical spatial terms (i.e. above, below, etc.) to talk about time, similar to the way these terms are used in Mandarin Chinese. The experiment revealed that native speakers of English who had been trained briefly in using vertical terms to talk about time produced similar results to the Mandarin speakers, confirming that the earlier differences between English and Mandarin speakers were driven by differences in language rather than culture. The results indicate that ‘learning a new way to talk about a familiar domain can change the way one thinks about that domain’.This section addressed the claim in Conceptual Metaphor Theory that many abstract concepts are structured metaphorically. It discussed both a strong and weak interpretation of this claim for the metaphoric representation of concepts. Though the strong interpretation seems to be untenable, the experiments by Boroditsky provide evidence that supports the weak interpretation. Boroditsky’s findings and Murphy’s (1996) interpretation of the weak version of metaphoric representation were argued to be in line with Gentner’s (1999) structure-mapping theory. The next section will address this theory in more detail with regard to the issues raised against CMT in terms of its evidence for metaphor processing.

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