

# The Historical Stages In The Development Of Theories Of Metaphor

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**Abstract:** Human thinking is a highly complex and multifaceted process that operates through various cognitive mechanisms. It is a sophisticated cognitive activity directed toward perceiving the surrounding reality, comprehending and processing the phenomena and concepts within it. In this process, human cognition employs several cognitive mechanisms to process spiritual, emotional, and experiential information. One of these mechanisms is metaphor. Metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but one of the fundamental cognitive mechanisms that enable the human mind to process, categorize, organize, and comprehend knowledge about the world. A metaphor is an integral part of human thinking and language, serving as an important means of perceiving and expressing reality. This article explores the historical evolution of scientific views on metaphor, tracing its development from classical rhetorical traditions to modern cognitive theories. The study aims to analyze the main stages in the formation of metaphor concepts and definitions, showing the transition from understanding metaphor as an ornamental stylistic device to interpreting it as a fundamental cognitive mechanism of human thought. The article analyzes the main stages in the development of views on metaphor, offers a comparative review of various theoretical approaches, and highlights the significance of metaphor not only in language but also in cognition and world perception. Particular attention is paid to the cognitive theory of metaphor developed by J. Lakoff and M. Johnson, according to which metaphor is considered a fundamental mechanism of human thinking.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Metaphor, Linguistic Phenomenon, Human Thinking, Cognitive Mechanism, Theory of Metaphor.

**Introduction:** When analyzing the linguistic richness of a particular language, various ornamental stylistic devices are usually considered those that contribute to the imagery and expressiveness of speech. These devices largely reflect the worldview of a people, the characteristics of a society's social structure, as well as the religious beliefs inherent in a given culture. Metaphor, being one of the most important mechanisms for conveying figurative meaning in language, has attracted the attention of prominent thinkers and philosophers since ancient times, which is reflected in the large number of works devoted to its study. A metaphor is a trope or a linguistic mechanism derived from the Greek word "metaphorá" ("transfer of meaning"), which consists in expressing one object through the name of another on the basis of their shared properties.

The subject of our research is the evolution of scientific approaches to metaphor, from rhetorical traditions to cognitive theories. The aim of the study is to analyze the historical stages in the development of ideas and definitions of metaphor, as well as to trace the transition from understanding metaphor as an ornamental stylistic device to its interpretation as a universal cognitive mechanism of human thought.

Throughout the history of metaphor studies, we can observe two opposing yet interconnected perspectives. On the one hand, metaphor is regarded as a linguistic phenomenon that contributes to the development of human thought; on the other hand, it is viewed as a special form of expression based on the transfer of meaning – one of the most widespread and frequently used means in speech.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed historical and analytical approaches to examine the development of metaphor theory across different historical periods. The main sources included classical theories (Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero), Renaissance thought (G. Vico), and early modern philosophical works, as well as contemporary research in linguistics and cognitive science (A.A. Richards, E. McCormack, J. Ortega y Gasset, and G. Lakoff & M. Johnson), which were used as key references.

In analyzing the historical stages in the development of metaphor theory, the study applied methods of historical, comparative, and cognitive-linguistic analysis.

## RESULTS

One of the earliest researchers of metaphor, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, regarded metaphor as a manifestation of creative potential that endowed language with remarkable expressive power. He emphasized that metaphors are inherent in every language and constitute a significant part of its lexical system. Aristotle defined metaphor as follows: "Metaphor is the transfer of a word with a changed meaning from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy". [Aristotle, 1927, p.66] He paid particular attention to metaphors that arise specifically through analogy. According to Quintilian, "Metaphor is a gift granted by nature itself, so that even uneducated people often use it without being aware of it. At the same time, it is so delightful and beautiful that it shines with its own light even in the most brilliant speech." He called metaphor "an abbreviated simile". [Quintilian, 1936, pp.218-219]

Cicero emphasizes that metaphor initially arose out of necessity due to the poverty of a language's vocabulary, but later gained widespread use because of its expressiveness and aesthetic appeal. He defines metaphor as "a comparison reduced to a single word." [Cicero, 1936, p.216.]

After a long hiatus, metaphor once again attracted the attention of scholars in the 16th and 17th centuries. Proceeding from the assumption that thinking and the perception of the world take place in the human mind through images, the Italian philosopher G. Vico interpreted metaphor as a means of creating ideological myths through language. According to G. Vico, "All primordial tropes originate in logic, and the most striking, most important, and most widespread of these is metaphor. The most recognizable feature of metaphor is that it imbues even inanimate objects with emotion". [Vico, 1940, p.146] According to the scholar, each metaphor essentially manifests as a small myth. Metaphors provided a foundation for humans to

comprehend the world and abstract concepts. This, in turn, formed the basis for the conclusion that a person understands and assimilates any new concept in the world through their body, emotions, and experiences.

In traditional linguistics, metaphor was regarded as a poetic and figurative device, whereas in modern cognitive linguistics it is studied as a cognitive structure that serves to organize and shape knowledge in the human mind. A. A. Richards emphasized that classical rhetoric remained largely confined to the purely stylistic interpretation of metaphor, while in reality humans comprehend their understanding of the world largely through metaphor. He argued that metaphor has become a fundamental principle inherent in both language and thought.

According to, the notion of metaphor as an omnipresent principle of language is confirmed by simple observation: in ordinary coherent speech, it is rare to encounter even three consecutive sentences without a metaphor. Even in the precise language of the exact sciences, avoiding metaphor is possible only with considerable effort. [Richards, 1990, pp.45-47] According to the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, metaphor in science arises when a scientist is faced with the need to name a new, previously unknown phenomenon. Since the new concept is unfamiliar to speakers, they are compelled to draw on the existing vocabulary. The scientist selects a word whose previous meaning can shed light on the essence of the new concept. Thus, metaphor becomes a tool of scientific thinking: a new meaning is generated through an existing one, while the original meaning remains in the mind, serving as a mediator. According to Ortega y Gasset, "Metaphor is an essential instrument of thought, a form of scientific thinking". [José Ortega y Gasset, 1990, p.68]

## DISCUSSION

If, within the framework of traditional linguistics, metaphor was studied as one of the mechanisms of semantic transfer, then by the 20th century, representatives of various fields of knowledge began to systematically turn to this linguistic phenomenon – philosophers, logicians, sociologists, psychologists, linguists, literary scholars and representatives of the humanities in general. In modern global linguistics, the question of conceptual metaphor has stimulated research into human cognitive processes. This, in turn, has contributed to the development of the concept of metaphor as a verbal expression of a way of conceptualizing the surrounding world.

Metaphor became a linguistic phenomenon that attracted the widespread attention of linguists in the 20th century and laid the foundation for the

development of cognitive science. According to scholars engaged in cognitive research, studying and describing human thinking and cognitive processes within the framework of philosophy, psychology, logic, medicine, or any other single discipline is highly complex.

It was precisely the cognitive approach that completely freed metaphor from being viewed merely as a rhetorical device and defined it as a "fundamental mental operation, that is, a way of perceiving, categorizing, conceptualizing, evaluating, and interpreting the world". Within the cognitive approach, the main scientific premises for studying metaphor are its mental nature and its role in shaping human thought. Researchers such as G. Vico, M. Beardsley, J. Ortega y Gasset, E. MacCormac, P. Ricoeur, and E. Cassirer paid special attention to this particular aspect of metaphor.

The studies conducted by researchers such as A. Ortony [Ortony, 1993, p.673], I. A. Richards [Richards, 1936, p.138], and M. Black [Black, 1962, p. 278] redefined metaphor not merely as an ornament of language, but as a cognitive mechanism arising from the interactive and cognitive interplay between concepts. In his work, A. Ortony paid particular attention to the analogical properties of metaphor, particularly its role in assimilation processes. R. Harris, in turn, viewed metaphor comprehension as a two-stage process: the first stage is the perception of the word's direct lexical meaning, and the second is the use of this meaning to form a metaphorical interpretation. [Ortony, A., Reynolds, R.E. et al.,1978, pp. 919-943]

In particular, the fundamental work "Metaphors We Live By" by the American linguist George Lakoff and the renowned philosopher Mark Johnson marked a turning point in the development of cognitive linguistics and cognitive science as a whole. The cognitive theory of metaphor was presented in its most explicit and systematic form precisely in "Metaphors We Live By." These scholars laid the foundation for the theory of conceptual metaphor.

American scholars were the first to examine metaphor as a conceptual construct and to identify its unique role in the development of human thought. Contrary to the widespread view of metaphor as merely a poetic or rhetorical device, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson argue that metaphor underlies everyday thinking, language, and behavior. According to the American linguists: "Most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life – not just in language, but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and

act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.3)

Thus, metaphor is not merely an ornament of speech, but a cognitive tool that assists in the process of thinking. This, in turn, has made research on the interaction between linguistic and psychological phenomena – particularly the study of metaphor – one of the most relevant issues in modern linguistics. According to Russian scholars, metaphor as a linguistic phenomenon received a "second wind" thanks to the work of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. [Osokina, Karpuxina et al., 2021, p.423]

G. Lakoff and M. Johnson explained how metaphorical expressions in ordinary language can reveal the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure human everyday experience, illustrating this through the modern English conceptual metaphor "Time is money." The idea that time is money allows us to conceive of the abstract notion of time as a tangible, material entity – something that can be saved, spent, lost, given, or even stolen.

You're wasting my time.

This gadget will save you hours.

I don't have the time to give you.

How do you spend your time these days?

I've invested a lot of time in her.

In European culture, the notions that "time is a valuable commodity" and "time is a limited resource used to achieve goals" are reflected in the fact that, in modern Western culture, the concept of work is typically measured by the amount of time spent on it. According to scientists, time is a value in European culture. It's a limited resource we use to achieve our goals. Since in modern Western culture the concept of WORK is usually associated with time spent on it, and time can be precisely quantified, wages are typically calculated hourly, weekly, or yearly.

Words and expressions expressed metaphorically in this way can differ significantly across languages. From a linguistic perspective, these subcategorial relationships give rise to the following relations in metaphors: TIME IS MONEY, the metaphor TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE follows, from which the metaphor TIME IS A VALUE follows.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the course of analyzing the evolution of views on metaphor, it has been established that the understanding of its nature has undergone significant changes throughout history. Whereas in rhetoric and traditional linguistics metaphor was regarded as an ornamental stylistic device, modern cognitive theories

interpret it as a fundamental mechanism of conceptualization and knowledge organization.

Metaphor has ceased to be merely a poetic device and has come to be viewed as a universal instrument of thought, actively involved in shaping human experience and perception of reality. This indicates a shift from the formal analysis of language to the study of the mental processes underlying it.

Thus, contemporary linguistics increasingly considers metaphor within an interdisciplinary context at the intersection of linguistics, cognitive science, philosophy, and psychology which opens new prospects for further research in this field.

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