

## Conceptual Metaphor of Life in Emily Dickinson's "My Life Had Stood- A Loaded Gun"

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### ABSTRACT:

Conceptual metaphor is the structures that linguistically work to denote metaphors. To the researcher's best knowledge, conceptual metaphor has been tackled from different perspectives; Still few studies have dealt with conceptual metaphor in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The study deals with the types of conceptual metaphor of life in Emily Dickinson's My life had stood- a loaded gun. Therefore, this study aims at analyzing the types of conceptual metaphors of life in the target poem. To this end, the poem was purposefully and analyzed based on Lackoff and Johnson's (2003) model of conceptual metaphor theory. The findings revealed that there were 2 structural metaphors and 4 ontological metaphors.

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## 1. Introduction:

Cognitive semantics is treated as one of the essential approaches in cognitive linguistics. According to Allwood and Gardenfors (1998), cognitive semantics "identifies meanings of expressions with mental entities" (p:29). The subject of CM (henceforward CM) as a part of cognitive semantics has long been of a considerable importance in cognitive linguistics. Lakoff and Turner (1989) argued that "metaphor is a matter of thought- all kinds of thought: thought about emotion, about society, about human character, about language, and about the nature of life and death" (xi). Lakoff and Turner (2003) claimed that metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another.

In addition, Kövecses (2010) stated that, from a cognitive linguistic point of view, metaphor is characterized as capturing one conceptual domain in terms of another. Metaphor works when two concepts are to interact in the human mind to create knowledge held in the individual concepts (Baake, 2003). On this account, it has a fundamental role in the process of person knowledge. As maintained by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) metaphors do not only provide vivid thoughts but also they pattern the way of perceptions in mind. They have drawn a great attention to the exclusive meaning of metaphor by saying that " metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language"(p. 68)

Yousif (2018) showed that we have two kinds of languages: ordinary language and literary language. As a matter of comparison, literary language seems to be used to convey deep feelings, messages and images to the audience. Thus, CM is a very essential part in poetry. Lakoff and Turner (1989) in their book *more than cool reason* indicate that metaphorical expressions are widely used in a way that is different from everyday language.

Metaphor as one of the marvelous types of figurative language is widely used in poetic texts to give a special aesthetic value (Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014). This can give the impression that in literary work, the aesthetic sense can be achieved by the use of figurative language. The idea of aesthetic turns to be the highlight in structuring literary works and this makes literary works different from other non-literary ones. One of the well-known representatives in poetry, who uses metaphorical expressions, is Emily Dickinson. She succeeded in decorating her poetry by using CM. By the use of CM, she was able to convey her deep feelings, her situation, and her thoughts. Accordingly, CM was a good tool which enabled Dickinson to be successful in handling many concepts, themes, and images in her poems.

Literature is a term used to describe written works that have an artistic form and intellectual worth in order to express language in ways that are different from how it is used in everyday life (Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014). According to Cuddon (2013) "Literature is a broad term that usually denotes works belonging to the major genres: epic, drama, lyric, novel, short story, and ode," (p:404). Poetry is a type of literature. For its aesthetic use of language; it occupies a major position in literary genres. Poets turn to use figurative language in their work for the purpose of conveying their feelings, attitudes, and thoughts to the audience. Metaphor is one of the noticeable figurative tools. It adds some extra aesthetic sense to literary works, particularly poems. Dickinson is considered an important representative whose poetry seems to be decorated with metaphors.

Previous studies such as (Cenita (2020), Inpok et al (2019), Syarwani (2017), Chen (1982) have made an attempt to study metaphor in Dickinson's poems from different perspectives. It was noticed that these works on metaphor rely on rule-based, statistical model or investigate metaphor in literary contexts. None of them have dealt with metaphor in the poetry of Dickinson from a cognitive semantic point of view. However, the cognitive aspect of metaphor has not been dealt with yet. It was argued that CM is a powerful tool used by Emily Dickinson to convey her feelings, thoughts and attitudes to the readers. Emily Dickinson excessively used the metaphorical language in her poetry. Accordingly, the researcher attempts to answer the following question:

What are the types of CM used in Emily Dickinson's poem of life *My life had stood- a loaded gun?*

## 2. Conceptual Metaphor: An overview

It's a matter of degree when it comes to the distinction between literal and metaphorical language. To establish a line between literal and metaphorical language, it is vital to comprehend the communication process. Consequently, when speakers wish to impart information regarding reality or experience in the outside world, they begin with a mental

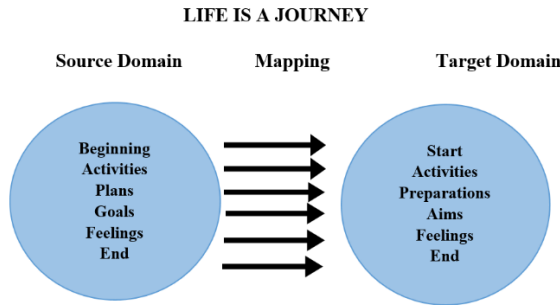
cognitive process. The speaker then proceeds to form the statement in the briefest and relevant manner feasible in order to explain the concept. The idea or notion regarding anything conveyed is referred to as a proposition. They represent this claim utilizing linguistic coding, which are frequently employed to link the meaning of an idea with concrete forms in order to communicate it in a text or utterance. Listeners perceive the text or utterance, decode it, then interpret it by estimating speakers' thoughts which are most likely to be conveyed (Goatly, 1997)

In most cases, the proposition organized by speakers, to a greater or lesser extent, approaches the notion being conveyed. The greater the disparity between the stated proposition and the intended interpretation, the greater the metaphorical value. The gap might appear when the world's reality or experience does not precisely fit the proportional form (1997). However, when literal language fails to describe reality, metaphor is the best option. Metaphor produces meaning by expressing a feature of one object in terms of another, which is at best ornamental and at worst misleading. The text or speech is seen, decoded, and then understood by listeners by determining what the speaker's intended meaning is. as stated by (Goatly, 1997)

The proposition put out by speakers will typically, to some extent, approximate the idea being communicated. The metaphorical value increases as the discrepancy between the stated statement and the expected perception grows. The problem might appear when the world's reality or experience does not precisely fit into proportional form (1997). However, when literal language fails to describe reality, metaphor is the best option. By comparing a property of one item to another, metaphor creates meaning that is, at best, decorative and, at worst, deceptive.

### ***2.1 The dominating CM in Emily Dickinson's selected poem "My life had stood- a loaded gun".***

It seems that Emily Dickinson mostly dealt with the concept of life as a journey as the dominating CM. This was due to her bad experience and attitude toward life. Thus, the CM of LIFE IS A JOURNEY appeared to be dominating in all of her selected poems. Thus, it is possible to say that conventional knowledge leads to the ability to comprehend metaphors as stated by (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). As to understand one domain in terms of another, there must be appropriate knowledge about these domains. If the CM of LIFE IS A JOURNEY is taken as an example of this claim, our understanding of the concept of life as a journey requires our knowledge about the journey itself. This means that the shared properties between the source domain LIFE and the target domain A JOURNEY are to some extent the same. There must be a correspondence between all of the shared properties between the two targets. This enabled the researcher to state that the CM of LIFE IS A JOURNEY is structured according to the components or the properties found in the concepts of both life and journey.



**Figure 2.5.1 The CM of LIFE IS A JOURNEY**

This figure was used to show the conceptualization of the general theme found in Emily Dickinson's selected poem. This was to explain how one concept is characterized in the sense of another. The CM of LIFE IS A JOURNEY is structured according to the components found in the concepts of both life and journey. Both life and journey have a starting period. The start of life is achieved by the birth of someone. On the other hand, the starting point of a journey begins by its movement from its original place. During the life of someone, there would be certain activities to be done. This is faced by the activities done throughout the journey. As for the plans, almost all people have plans in their life to achieve their goals. This is, of course, as the same as the preparations done by someone who is in a journey to reach the aims of his journey. Consequently, the goals and the aims in both life and journey seem to have the same idea, but in different situations. The feelings of whether achieving the goals or the aims in both life and journey are similar. Finally, both life and journey have an end. The end of life is achieved by the death of someone while the end of a journey is achieved by reaching the target place and doing the aims.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 The Model Adopted

The corpus of this study was selected from *THE COMPLETE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON* edited by Thomas H. Johnson. The poems were read several times to grasp detailed comprehension of their themes and the metaphor used by the poet. Then, every stanza was selected and examined depending on the following criteria:

1. Finding out and selecting the poems abundant with conceptual metaphors.
2. Selecting six representative poems of both CMs of life and death, three poems for each.

Metaphor is claimed to be essential to language and thinking in this perspective. As a result, there is a theory called as CM Theory that may be considered as an extension of this viewpoint (Saeed, 2016). In their groundbreaking paper *Metaphors, We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson introduced this new perspective on metaphor for the first time in 1980.

Metaphor is defined by Lakoff and Johnson as knowing and experiencing one sort of object in terms of another. In the cognitive linguistic approach, metaphor is defined as comprehending one conceptual domain in relation to another conceptual domain, according to Kövecses (2010). There are three types of conceptual metaphor suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (2003). First, structural metaphor is a metaphor that expresses one concept in terms of another structure or concept. These entail the organization of one type of experience or activity in relation to another type of experience or activity. Second, when compared to structural metaphors, ontological metaphors give far less cognitive structuring for target concepts. Ontology is a philosophical which is field concerned with the nature of existence as stated by (Koveses, 2010). Third, according to Perrine (1977), most metaphors that serve this purpose have to do with basic human spatial orientations, such as up-down, center-periphery, and so on, hence the name orientational metaphor. It indicates that orientational metaphors use spatial orientations to arrange an entire system of concepts.

Any systematic building of experience is referred to as the conceptual domain here. The source domain (where it is normally physical) and the target domain (where it is usually abstract) are the two conceptual domains that make up a conceptual metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), human concepts govern what is sensed, how we approach this environment, and how we interact with others. Lakoff and Johnson came to the conclusion that the human cognitive process is heavily metaphorical.

Furthermore, Kövecses (2010) depicted the mappings as a series of well-organized correspondences between the source and target, with the conceptual component of B corresponding to the component of A. The poem numbered 764 in the complete collection of Emily Dickinson's poems was purposefully selected depending since it contains different types of CM.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, the researcher analysed the concepts of life found in Emily Dickinson's poem *My Life Had Stood- a Loaded Gun* based on Lackoff and Johnson (2003) model of CM Theory.

##### (764) (*My life had stood- a loaded Gun*)

S1

*My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun*

*In Corners - till a Day*

*The Owner passed – identified*

*And carried Me away-*

S2

*And now We roam in Sovereign Woods*

*And now We hunt the Doe-*

*And every time I speak for Him-*

*The Mountains straight reply*

**S3**

*And do I smile, such cordial light*

*Upon the Valley glow-*

*It is as a Vesuvian face*

*Had let its pleasure through-*

**S4**

*And when at Night-Our good Day done*

*I guard My Master's Head-*

*'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's*

*Deep Pillow - to have shared-*

**S5**

*To foe of His - I'm deadly foe*

*None stir the second time-*

*On whom I lay a Yellow Eye*

*Or an emphatic Thumb-*

**S6**

*Though I than He - may longer live*

*He longer must - than I-*

*For I have but the power to kill,*

*Without - the power to die-*

Emily Dickinson's poem My Life Had Stood a Loaded Gun was written in the nineteenth century. The poems are typically described by their opening lines. The poem, written about 1863, is vague and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Many academics, however, agreed on a reading of the poem in which the Loaded Gun serves as an extended metaphor. The speaker expressed the concept of her lifetime as a "Loaded Gun," outlining a pointless, powerless life prior to the entrance of the Owner which might be seen as a metaphor of the speaker's fury in this interpretation of the poem. Because people are frequently described as

being "taken away" by extreme emotions, the expression "carried away" shows how much influence anger has over the speaker.

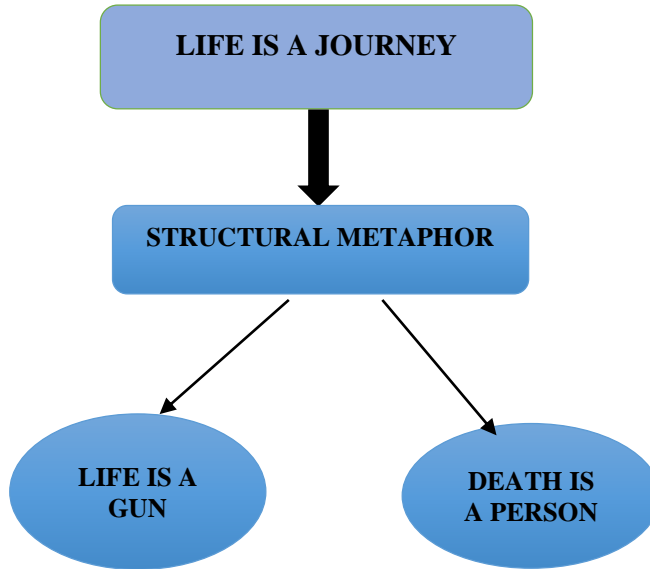
In S1, the poet used the structural metaphor to conceptualize the abstract concept of life as a physical material "a loaded Gun". In this conceptual metaphor, she conceptualized the notion of her tiring life which was full of struggles and limitations as the ready loaded gone that may be exploded at any point of time when its operated by someone. In the second line, she utilized another type of CM which was the personification. In this metaphor, she personified life as someone standing in corners waiting someone to take her away. The third line, contained another personification in the sense that she conceptualized the concept of death as the owner who controlled her life. Thus, this stanza had the CM LIFE IS A GUN.

S2 contained another personification. In this conceptual metaphor, the poet conceptualized the notion of "mountains" as a person who simultaneously responded to her voice. Such conceptualization helped the poet to conceptualize the image of her screams resulting from the pains and the struggles of her life. This CM was linked to the third stanza in which there was a correspondence relationship between the elements of nature. This was shown by the use of the term "valley".

As for S3, she again used an ontological metaphor. In this conceptual metaphor, she structured the concept of the concrete object "mountain" as a normal person with his face. This conceptualization was enriched by the use of the term "vesuvian". This is the name of a famous mountain in Italy. Combining the word "face" with this mountain was a genius technique by the poet to conceptualize the idea that her harshness, the limitations, and the struggles she lived with will be faded away just like the mountains when they through their lava down the mountain.

Regarding S4, there was a structural metaphor in which the abstract notion of death was structured in terms of a concrete object "master's head". This CM supported the idea of the desired death by the poet to get rid of her life. She emphasized this concept by the use of the following lines when she described this notion as being something smoother than the "Eilder Duck's". The use of "deep pillow" enriched this conceptual metaphor. As a result, this stanza involved the CM DEATH IS PERSON. In this regard, the CM LIFE IS A JOURNEY can be explained in the following figure:





**Figure 4.1** The Structural Metaphors in Emily Dickinson's Poem of Life "*My life had stood- a loaded gun*"

The CM of LIFE IS A JOURNEY was structured in this poem by the two structural metaphors LIFE IS A GUN and DEATH IS A PERSON. The CM of LIFE IS A GUN was structured according to the poet's view of life. Her life was loaded of difficulties, sadness and struggles like a gun loaded with its magazine. So the poet depended on the subcategory of suffering, sadness, and difficulties included in her life and structured them in terms of a loaded gun ready for shooting. Thus, she succeeded in revealing the idea that she could not endure anymore.

The CM of DEATH IS A PERSON was embodied in this poem in an intelligent way. The poet structured the abstract concept of death as a concrete concept. The poet took into consideration the shared subcategory between death and a person. The shared subcategory was the ability of taking someone from one place to another. According to the poet, death have the ability to stand as a turning point between the life of someone and his/her immortality. In other words, in the eyes of the poet, it had the ability of changing someone's status from being a live (sad) into a dead one (immortal). Human, on the other hand, human have the ability to rash someone from one place to another or change someone's status.

## 5. Conclusion

Answering the research question, "What are the types of CM used in Emily Dickinson's poem "*My life had stood- a loaded gun*"? the researcher has concluded the following: In S1, there were one structural metaphor "LIFE IS A GUN" in which she conceptualized the notion of life and as a loaded gun and two types of ontological metaphor which were personifications. In S2, the researcher found that there was only one type of CM (ontological metaphor). As for S3, the researcher found only one ontological metaphor. In S4, it was found that there was a structural metaphor DEATH IS A PERSON.

## الاستعارة المفاهيمية للحياة في قصيدة املي دكنسون "حياتي كانت سلاح محشوا"

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### ملخص البحث:

تعتبر الاستعارة المفاهيمية بمثابة تراكيب تحدد الاستعارات لغوياً. الى حد علم الباحث، تم تناول الاستعارة المفاهيمية من وجهات نظر مختلفة الا انه؛ لا يزال هناك عدد قليل من الدراسات التي تناولت الاستعارة المفاهيمية في شعر إملي دكنسون. تتعامل الدراسة مع أنواع الاستعارة المفاهيمية للحياة في قصيدة إملي دكنسون، "حياتي كانت سلاح محشوا". لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أنواع الاستعارات المفاهيمية للحياة في القصيدة المستهدفة. ولهذا الغاية، تم تحليل القصيدة بشكل هادف بناءً على نموذج لأكوف وجونسون (2003) لنظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية. كشفت النتائج أن هناك استعارتين هيكليتين و4 استعارات وجودية.