Journal Of the Iraqia University (77-2) 31 October (2026)

ISSN(Print): 1813-4521 OnIine ISSN:2663-7502
Journal Of the Iraqia University
available online at
https://iasj.rdd.edu.iq/journals/journal/view/247

COGNITIVE ANALYSIS OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SCOTT BERGSTROM'S THE CRUELTY

Inst. Moayad Mohammad Hassan
moayad.hassan55@gmail.com
The Sunni Endowment
Divan Religious Teaching and Islamic Studies DirectoratE

تحليل معرفي للاستعارات المفهومية الخاصة بالاتجار بالبشر في رواية القسوة لسكوت بيرغستروم

م. مؤيد محمد حسن
دائرة التعليم الديني والدراسات الاسلامية ديوان الوقف السني

Abstract

This study examines the conceptualization of human trafficking in Scott Bergstrom's The Cruelty in light of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT). The research uses a mixed methodology, which involves qualitative metaphor analysis together with a modest quantitative component. For data collection, the author chose four selected excerpts from the book, relevant to such processes as transportation, containment, commodification, violence and death. In turn, data collection entailed the identification and extraction of metaphorically meaningful expressions followed by coding and categorization. The qualitative analysis relies on CMT and ECMT and entails mapping the correspondence of source and target domains as well as image schemas and frames of mind at various cognitive levels. Parallel to it, the basic quantitative approach was used in calculating the frequency of metaphor categories identified. Results indicate that there is a stable metaphorical system where crime is organized as economy, trafficking as global logistics, humans as containerized cargo in transport systems, and death as a process of death within institutional frameworks. Mappings in this way reduce agency by subsuming violence into organizational structures. Under the framework of ECMT, metaphor works at embodied, socio-economic, and discursive levels, and normalizes exploitation as circulation rather than moral violation.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory; ECMT; Human Trafficking; Cognitive Linguistics

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة التصور المفهومي للاتجار بالبشر في رواية *القسوة* لسكوت بيرغستروم في ضوء نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية والنظرية الموسعة للاستعارة المفهومية. وتعتمد الدراسة منهجية مختلطة تجمع بين التحليل الكيفي للاستعارات ومكوّن كمي محدود. ولجمع البيانات، اختار الباحث أربعة مقاطع منتقاة من الرواية تتناول موضوعات النقل، والاحتواء، والتسليع، والعنف، والموت. وشملت عملية جمع البيانات تحديد التعبيرات ذات الدلالة الاستعارية واستخراجها، ثم ترميزها وتصنيفها.ويستند التحليل الكيفي إلى نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية والنظرية الموسعة للاستعارة المفهومية، من خلال بيان علاقات المطابقة بين المجالات المصدرية والمجالات الهدف، وتحليل المخططات الصورية والأطر المعرفية عبر مستويات معرفية متعددة. وبالتوازي مع ذلك، استُخدم تحليل كمي أساسي لحساب تكرارات فئات الاستعارات التي تم تحديدها.وتشير النتائج إلى وجود نظام استعاري متماسك، تُنظَّم فيه الجريمة بوصفها نشاطًا اقتصاديًا، ويُصوَّر الاتجار بالبشر بوصفه منظومة لوجستية عالمية، ويُنظر إلى البشر بوصفهم شحنات منقولة داخل أنظمة النقل، بينما يُمثَّل الموت بوصفه عملية مؤسسية. وتسهم هذه المطابقات المفهومية في تقليص فاعلية الضحايا من خلال إدماج العنف داخل البنى التنظيمية. ووفقًا للنظرية الموسعة للاستعارة المفهومية، تعمل الاستعارة على مستويات معرفية متجسدة، واجتماعية واقتصادية، وخطابية، بما يؤدي إلى تطبيع الاستغلال وتصويره بوصفه عملية تداول وحركة، بدلًا من اعتباره انتهاكًا أخلاقيًا.

الكلمات المفتاحية :نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية، النظرية الموسعة للاستعارة المفهومية، الاتجار بالبشر، اللسانيات المعرفية.

1. Introduction

The notion of metaphor has long been a focus of linguistic and philosophical research starting from the times of Aristotle. From this perspective, it was traditionally viewed as a figure of speech and a linguistic phenomenon related to rhetorical and stylistic purposes. The approach has been fundamentally restructured by the introduction of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in Metaphors We Live By by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In CMT, metaphor is seen as a means of cognition through which abstract conceptual domains are regularly mapped onto experiential and concrete ones.Conceptual metaphors, from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, represent underlying ways of organizing human experience and thinking that go beyond language, which means that linguistic metaphors are the surface form of mapping from one domain to another. Accordingly, the concept of metaphor has acquired new meaning within cognitive semantics and stylistics.Though many works have been done with regards to the analysis of conceptual metaphors in various kinds of discourses, there is little research done on the conceptual metaphors of human trafficking, violence, and psychological trauma that is present in contemporary literature. Specifically, in The Cruelty, there are numerous representations of fear, captivity, survival, and identity formation that can be based on systematic metaphors that organize human experience in such cases.That is why this paper aims at analyzing the conceptual metaphors that underlie the notions of trauma, danger, and survival in The Cruelty by applying the conceptual metaphor theory. This way, the paper is aimed at studying how human experience is shaped and organized through metaphor in a narrative discourse, which will contribute to cognitive stylistic studies of contemporary fiction as well as to the application of CMT to young adult literature focused on psychological trauma.

Accordingly, this paper is based on the following research questions:

1. What are the main conceptual metaphors in The Cruelty with regards to human trafficking, violence, and survival?
2. How are these metaphors structured through source-target mappings and are they extended through image schemas, frames, and mental spaces?
3. How do these metaphors construct the experience of trafficking and what does the distribution pattern of the latter show?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Cognition and Cognitive

Cognition is defined as the mental activity of gaining, arranging and processing knowledge. Perception, memory, thinking, concept formation and language processing belong to cognitive processes. In Cognitive Linguistics, the notion of cognition implies the embodiment and experientiality of cognition based on human interaction with the real world. According to Lakoff (1988, pp. 119-121), there are two major positions about cognition – objectivist and experientialist cognition. Objectivist cognition supposes that meaning arises from abstract symbols of an external reality, but experientialist cognition claims that conceptual structures arise from the bodily, sensory, affective and social experiences. The latter idea forms a basis of the experiential approach which is the main principle of Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory.In the same way, Allwood and Gärdenfors (1999, pp. 39-40) distinguish between narrow and broad approaches to cognition. Cognition in the former understanding presupposes mental representations and problem-solving processes, while the latter conception implies those cognitive mechanisms which play an intermediary role between the external reality and human response. In other words, cognition covers mental operations of information processing and meaning creation (Allwood & Gärdenfors, 1999, pp. 39-40).Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 9) define cognition as a process which comprises not only unconscious mental operations such as perception, memory and mental imaging but also as conceptual structures structuring human thoughts. Thus, the nature of meaning does not only reflect the objective reality but is also constructed through cognitive activity and human embodied experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 9).

2.2 Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive Linguistics can be described as an interdisciplinary paradigm that was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by researchers like Fauconnier, Fillmore, Lakoff, Langacker, and Talmy. Cognitive Linguistics is not a formal theory, but it is a framework, which concerns itself with relations between language, meaning, concept formation, and embodiment (Evans, 2007, p. 22). The main idea of the paradigm is that linguistic structure mirrors general cognitive processes instead of being a grammatical one.In the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, language is perceived as a system, in which organization, processing and communication of concept-based knowledge is embedded into human experience. Thus, Cognitive Linguistics is highly related to cognitive science and psychology because the linguistic knowledge is seen as a part of general cognition, which is mediated by mental representations used in human interaction with environment (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007, pp. 4-5). Meanings are not considered independently but are derived from conceptual systems, which are

embodied and culturally situated.Cognitive Linguistics, according to Lakoff (1990, p. 39), is committed to explaining all generalizations about linguistic phenomena in accordance with empirical data concerning the mind and brain. One of the fundamental assumptions is the inseparability of form and meaning in the language as well as the reflection of general cognitive capabilities in language and not its existence as an independent module. As a result, Cognitive Linguistics has two important domains of research: cognitive grammar and cognitive semantics. Two major principles of Cognitive Linguistics are also recognized. They include the principle of generalization commitment, which presupposes explanation of all the levels of linguistic phenomena including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, and the principle of cognitive commitment, which ties linguistic phenomena to research in the relevant fields of cognitive science such as psychology, anthropology and neuroscience (Lakoff, 1990, pp. 40-41).The Cognitive Semantics subfield deals precisely with the interrelation between language meaning, embodiment, and concepts (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 50). For Talmy (2000, pp. 4-18), semantics is cognitively based because it is connected with the conceptualization of language. Thus, according to such an approach, meaning is not something external but a manifestation of mind and embodiment.In addition to such categorization of semantics, there is also a distinction between the cognitive and realist approaches to semantics. Cognitive semantics considers meaning as a mental construct; at the same time, realist semantics regards meaning as something existing outside of a person (Gärdenfors, 1999, p. 19). This approach opposes to those approaches that do not connect language with other mental operations (Allwood & Gärdenfors, 1999, p. vii).

2.3 Cognitive Poetics

Cognitive Poetics is an academic research field connected with the investigation of how literary texts influence the perceptual and cognitive responses of their readers with the help of linguistic and psychological knowledge gained from cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology (Littlemore & Taylor, 2014, p. 218). Cognitive Poetics was introduced by Reuven Tsur in the 1970s. This term could also be called cognitive stylistics or cognitive rhetoric since the field under discussion implies linguistic investigations of literary discourse (Stockwell, 2002, p. 60). Cognitive Poetics analyzes the processes of cognition that occur during the interpretation of literary texts and their influence on the formation of meaning. The concepts of foregrounding and deviation play crucial roles in Cognitive Poetics. Foregrounding means stylistic salience attained through the use of linguistic patterns that attract the attention of the readers and disrupt their automatized perception (Leech, 1968, p. 57). Foregrounding is the mechanism of defamiliarization which contributes to aesthetic perception and increases the interpretive involvement of the readers.Deviation means the use of forms of language that differ from usual grammatical, lexical, and semantic norms in order to create stylistic effects (Bradford, 1997, p. 54). Semantic deviation plays an especially important role in poetic discourse because this phenomenon implies disruptions of conventional meaning resulting in ambiguities, absurdities, and figurative interpretations. Semantic deviation does not prevent the reader from comprehension, but promotes figurative interpretation and cognitive processing (Leech, 1968, p. 45). Deviations are not accidental; rather, they are aesthetically motivated. Semantic deviation makes possible the development of meaning and facilitates the process of interpretation.Poetic language is characterized by the process of deliberate defamiliarization when the conventional structures of language are transformed into something new that contributes to the achievement of aesthetic and cognitive effects. According to Leech (1969, p. 49), poetic meanings are created through symbolic structures and figurative transfer and consist of literal incongruity that results in metaphorical meanings.

2.4 Metaphor

From a traditional linguistic point of view, the definition of metaphor is "a case where language refers to something that it did not originally refer to, or what it does not mean 'literally,' in such a way as to indicate some likeness or establish a relationship between the two" (Moon & Knowles, 2006, p. 2). Under the traditional definition, metaphor appears as a linguistic and stylistic instrument, which exploits the resemblance between two items. According to Kövecses (2002, pp. vii-viii), the definition of metaphor can be stated as follows: a type of figure of speech in which one idea is expressed by referring it to another. Thus, in the traditional conception metaphor is usually perceived as a characteristic of language and not of thought since it implies resemblance between two concepts. In addition, the concept of metaphor can be considered as stylistic or rhetorical tool since it implies a deliberate application of language. Furthermore, this concept is usually connected with literary and/or persuasive situations, and not with everyday communication. In other words, the traditional conception of metaphor implies that it is a stylistic option but not a constituent element of the conceptual structure.

2.5 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) foundations were laid by Lakoff and Johnson in Metaphors We Live By (1980), with subsequent development of their theories being done in other books by Lakoff (1987a, 1990, 1993) and Johnson (1987). Lakoff and Johnson (2004, p. 4) maintain that "metaphor is ubiquitous in our daily lives, not only in our language but also in our thoughts and actions". The authors continue to underline 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". Accordingly, the theory assumes that the metaphor is not a linguistic construct but the conceptual one that shapes human thinking and behavior. Thus, Lakoff (1993, p. 203) asserts that the metaphor lies not in language but in conceptualization itself, with linguistic metaphors being surface expressions of concepts. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p. 6) put it, metaphors in language are possible "because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system", with the language expressing cognitive structures.In this context, Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p. 247) define conceptual metaphor as "the application of inference patterns from one conceptual domain in reasoning about another conceptual domain", whereas "correspondences across such domains are called metaphorical mappings". Also, Honeck (1997, p. 145) claims that many aspects of human cognition are shaped through the mappings, allowing one domain (target domain) to be understood in the terms of another domain (source domain). Deignan (2005, p. 4) adds that CMT is the most influential theoretical model of the metaphor as thought, underlining its key importance in both language and cognition. Moreover, Casasanto (2009, p. 127) states that abstract domains are usually structured through more concrete or experiential domains.

2.5.1 Metaphor as Mapping between Target Domain (TD) and Source Domain (SD)

The concept of mapping is an important one in CMT and comes from mathematics (Grady, 2007, p. 190). Mappings are described by Kövecses (2002) as relations where specific characteristics of the source domain are mapped to the target domain. According to Lakoff (1993, p. 245), the relation must be a systematic one and not an arbitrary one whereby specific characteristics of the source domain are selectively mapped to the target domain. For instance, in the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, some aspects of the journey domain are mapped to the love domain. Mapping usually occurs at a superordinate level whereby several basic level instantiations can occur for one conceptual metaphor such as using boats, trains, or planes.

2.5.2 Essential Principles of CMT

The key principles of CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) can be summarized as follows:

1. Concrete–abstract structure of domains

Abstract target domains (e.g., emotions, relationships) are conceptualized through more concrete source domains (e.g., objects, containers, movement).

2. Experiential grounding

Source–target pairings are motivated by embodied experience and correlations in lived reality rather than arbitrary association.

3. Cognitive nature of metaphor

Conceptual metaphors operate at the level of thought and language, contributing to the construction of metaphorical reality (Kövecses, 2016, p. 17).

4. Pervasiveness

Conceptual metaphors are not restricted to literary language but are fundamental to everyday cognition and communication, with realizations also observable in art, film, and other semiotic systems (Kövecses, 2010, p. 63).

2.6 Classification of Metaphor

Kövecses (2010, p. 46) proposes multiple classifications of metaphor based on conventionality, function, level of generality, and universality, reflecting key concerns in Cognitive Linguistics.

2.6.1 Conventionality of Metaphor

The metaphors could be differentiated depending on their level of conventionality which is related to the frequency with which they are used in everyday speech. Highly frequent metaphors might turn into what could be described as "dead" metaphors which do not appear to be figurative anymore, whereas other metaphors still have certain level of transparency even in the process of their conventionalization (e.g. fall in love); Kövecses, 2002, p. ix). At the same time, live metaphors are always figurative and You are the sun of my life is an example of one (Fraser, 1993, p. 330). However, according to the theory of Cognitive Linguistics, even conventionalized metaphors cannot be called "dead" as long as they are still active conceptually; (Kövecses, 2010, p. 34).

2.6.2 Cognitive Function of Metaphor

Metaphor plays an important role in cognition through concretization of experience that is abstract in nature. Conceptual metaphors can be categorized into structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors that work in tandem.

2.6.2.1 Structural Metaphor

The principle of structural metaphors refers to structuring one notion in terms of another systematically (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 14). An example of a structural metaphor would be TIME IS MONEY; it is illustrated by such phrases as "I'm wasting my time" and "I've invested a lot of time." In this case, the abstract notion of time is being structured via economic and spatial-movement notions; thus, it is possible to think coherently about the experience of time.

2.6.2.2 Ontological Metaphor

The ontological metaphor conceives of abstract things as things, substances, or containers such that they can be talked about and counted (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 27). They offer a simpler structure compared to structural metaphors, and through them, abstract experiences are able to be treated as objects. An example of the use of ontological metaphors is the MIND IS A MACHINE "My mind is not working well today." Ontological metaphors, according to Kövecses (2010, pp. 38-39), serve mainly to give ontological form to abstract experiences. They are used in cognition to help people think about abstract things as objects or substances.

2.6.2.3 Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors involve the organization of conceptual systems in space through a series of oppositional relations, such as up vs down and in vs out (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 14). Such metaphors depend on bodily and cultural experience, for example in "HAPPY IS UP" and "SAD IS DOWN." Some examples include "I've got things under control" (CONTROL IS UP) and "His spirit sank into oblivion" (UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN). The cognitive role of these metaphors is not structuring of concepts in detail but organizing them in a coherent system in space (Kövecses, 2010, p. 40).

2.6.3 Nature of Metaphor

Metaphors can also be classified as knowledge-based or image-schematic.

2.6.3.1 Knowledge-Based Metaphor

Metaphors based on knowledge depend on conceptual knowledge that is structured through experience. Knowledge metaphors depend on background knowledge that is organized within frames and domains in order to allow mapping between the source domain and target domain (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, pp. 102-103; Evans, 2007, p 104.

2.6.3.2 Image-Schematic Metaphor

Image schemas are based on bodily patterns that happen repeatedly like CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE, and CONTACT. The image schemas develop from physical experience and serve as structures for abstract thought (Johnson, 1987, p. xix; Ibáñez & Velasco, 2003, p. 507). They are highly schematic and thus offer basic mappings, like "I'm out of money" (OUT–IN image schema) and "He's feeling low" (UP–DOWN image schema).

2.6.4 Levels of Generality: Generic and Specific

Moreover, metaphors may be classified according to their degree of generalization. The former type of metaphors is based on generic schemas, such as MOTION schema, that may take different shapes (such as journey, walk, run) (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 38–39). The latter metaphors have more specific source domains, for instance, the domain of JOURNEY in the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

2.6.5 Universality of Metaphor

Although metaphor is a general cognitive process, the realization of metaphor is also partially based on culture. For instance, the conceptual metaphor "TIME IS MONEY" is common to English language, and thus metaphors like "saving time" or "wasting time" emerge. However, the structuring process is not universal because conceptualization is always affected by particular cultural experience and values (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 8–9).

2.7 Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT)

Since the introduction of the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), there have been many developments in Conceptual Metaphor Theory. These developments have resulted in the creation of several other terminologies and theories which, although dealing with the same phenomenon, use different approaches to analyzing it. Such developments have also caused ambiguity with regard to conceptual metaphor. This problem is solved by ECMT introduced by Kövecses (2017, 2020, 2021).

2.7.1 Multi-Level View of Conceptual Metaphor

According to Kövecses (2017, p. 321), a multi-level conceptual metaphor approach can be introduced with the purpose of eliminating the terminological problems related to conceptual metaphor by recognizing the various levels of ontology of metaphor. The three main levels that he highlights are:(a)The sub-individual level refers to the lowest level of embodied meaning which reflects universal bodily experience that ensures "naturalness and bodily motivation for metaphorical conceptualization" (Kövecses, 2021a, p. 135).(b)The supra-individual level refers to the shared cultural and linguistic level of metaphorical patterns that come out of the interaction between language and culture.(c)The individual level refers to the level of contextualized usage of metaphors by individual speakers.The organization of these levels happens on the basis of the principle of schematicity which refers to the concept-specificity within a hierarchical continuum. It should be noted that according to Kövecses (2017), the levels mentioned above do not exist as distinct phenomena but gradually transition into each other from being more schematic to less schematic. Four main levels of schematicity are: image schema, domain, frame, and mental space.

1. Image Schema

Image schemas refer to preconceptual and embodied cognitive schemas which provide a basis for the understanding of the meaning of something in cognitive linguistics. Image schemas entail the pattern of perceptual and motor experience, whereby they work as schematic gestalts whose internal structure is based on minimal internal structures arising from sensorimotor experience (Johnson, 1987, p. ix; Hampe, 2005, pp. 1–2; Kövecses, 2020, p. 53). In that case, the image schemas work as fundamental cognitive frameworks to make abstraction possible by using the bodily experience in the creation of meaning (Johnson, 2005, pp. 15–16). For example, in the conceptual metaphor, THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, the image schemas include CONTAINER, PART–WHOLE, and VERTICALITY.

2. Domain

A domain is a systematized conceptual body of knowledge that forms the background of meaning making in cognitive linguistics. It is a coherent body of conceptual knowledge relative to which semantic units are defined (Langacker, 1987, p. 488), and an internally organized body of knowledge of different complexity (Evans, 2007, p. 61). Domains are not the same as image schemas; they are more complex, content-oriented, and propositional rather than embodiment-based. In cognitive semantics, meaning is analyzed relative to domains of knowledge and experience. Examples of domains include TEMPERATURE with hot and cold as part of it, and BUILDINGS with their spatial and functional knowledge. In conceptual metaphor, domains form the source and target of structure transfer, as in LOVE IS A JOURNEY where structure from JOURNEY domain is transferred to LOVE (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

3. Frame

Frame refers to the set of organized background knowledge. The organization of this knowledge gives context to the interpretation of the linguistic meaning (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 230). Frames are triggered in discourse and help organize situation-specific knowledge. This means that understanding linguistic meaning is influenced by the structures in which these words appear (Fillmore, 1982, p. 111; Evans & Green, 2006, p. 230). Frames are narrower than domains since frames describe role-relations in specific situations. For instance, the COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION frame consists of the buyer, seller, goods, and money (Baker & Fillmore, 2010, p. 318).

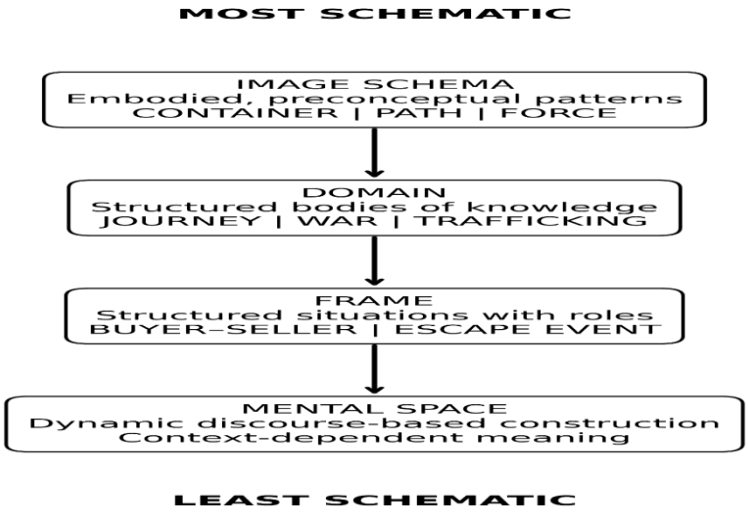
4. Mental Spaces

Mental spaces represent the level of conceptual structuring that is most context-dependent in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. These spaces are dynamic and temporary structures constructed in the process of communication that involve the use of long-term knowledge, experience, and context. Contrary to domains and frames, mental spaces are used as select structures for interpreting and reasoning. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002, pp. 102–103), these are conceptual chunks that are framed and constructed in thought and speech processes. In addition, Fauconnier (2007, p. 351) points out their partial and context-dependent character. They are constructed in working memory while maintaining connections with permanent cognitive structures. Thus, in "John built himself a strong house," there is a creation of an event space where participants and properties can be specified in context, rather than in domains or frames.

2.7.2 Role of Context in Conceptual Metaphor

While Conceptual Metaphor Theory started off focusing on the idea of embodied cognition, subsequent research indicates that metaphors rely heavily on contextual influences. According to Kövecses (2020; 2010a; 2015), there cannot be an explanation of metaphor selection and variation based solely on cognitive structures, as context plays an important role. Contextual factors include situational, discoursal, corporeal, and conceptual-cognitive context. Metaphors thus constitute context-sensitive phenomena, as domain choices depend on

contextual conditions.In ECMT, the contextual factor has its highest manifestation at the level of mental spaces, where meaning is created dynamically and constantly reshaped in working memory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Kövecses, 2020). In general, metaphor is applied on the continuum of schematicity ranging from image schema to domains and frames, with mental spaces being the most context-sensitive type of conceptualization.
Figure 1. Hierarchical Organization of Conceptual Structure in ECMT (Image Schema–Domain–Frame–Mental Space Continuum)



3. Methodology

In this section, the methodology used in the current study is presented. The data, design, and methods of analysis are introduced that were used to conceptualize human trafficking in the book The Cruelty written by Scott Bergstrom. In order to achieve this aim, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) was used.

3.1 Research Design

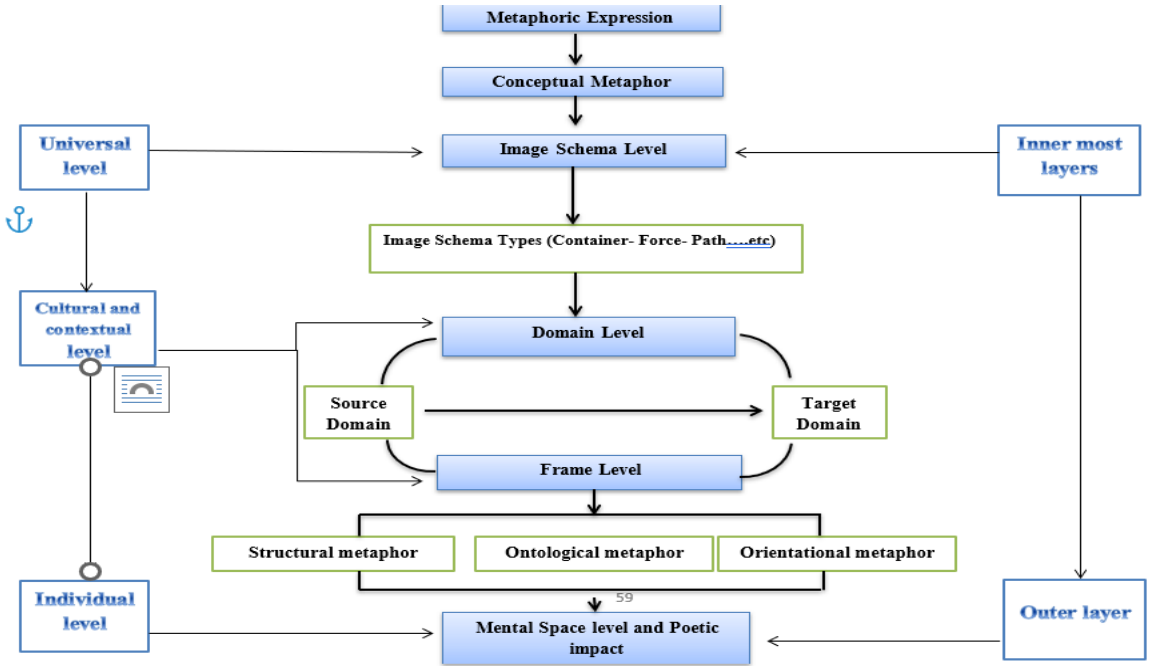
The methodology used in this research combines qualitative and quantitative analyses and employs the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics. Specifically, the qualitative part is based on the premises of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory and strives to reveal and analyze the metaphorical constructions used to represent human trafficking in the book, The Cruelty. Special attention will be paid to source-target domain mappings and their involvement in the representation of coercion, exploitation, violence and control.Additionally, the quantitative analysis will be carried out, and metaphorical concepts will be classified in conceptual categories and counted to establish their distribution and salience.

3.2 Data Collection and Selection

The corpus contains purposely chosen four extracts from Scott Bergstrom's The Cruelty. This particular book has been chosen because of its direct association with human trafficking and its various types of violence. Extracts have been chosen on the basis of their relation to experiences pertaining to human trafficking and the use of metaphorical language. The emphasis is on extracts that associate human trafficking with concepts like ownership, captivity, dehumanization, commodification, and control.

3.3 Proposed Model

The present research work follows the eclectic approach that combines the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (2003) and the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT) by Kövecses (2020). CMT offers the theoretical framework that allows detecting conceptual metaphors on the basis of the mapping of source and target domains, whereas ECMT expands the analysis by including cognitive, cultural and contextual components of the metaphor phenomenon. In order to reveal in more details, the ways in which human trafficking is conceptualized in The Cruelty, the analysis takes into consideration the four levels of schematicity developed by Kövecses: image schema, domain, frame and mental space. The image schema reflects basic experience-based schemata (for instance, CONTAINER, FORCE); domain is a more abstract structure, frame denotes context-dependent knowledge within a particular domain, whereas mental space implies dynamic processes of meaning-making.



4. Analysis of Data

The current section focuses on an examination of selected excerpts from Scott Bergstrom's novel The Cruelty within the context of the understanding of human trafficking and other forms of crimes. In the first place, the data will be examined in terms of the metaphorical organization that consistently shapes experiences of violence and exploitation in the form of coherent cognition patterns. The theoretical approach to this analysis involves the use of Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff & Johnson (2003); Kövecses (2020). The four-level model of image schema, conceptual domain, frame, and mental space will be employed.

4.1 Qualitative Analysis of Extracts

Extract 1:

"Murder, drugs, all that. But Viktor's main things were arms dealing and human trafficking."

1- Metaphoric Expression

This excerpt has grouped various forms of criminal activities like "murder, drugs, arms trading, and human trafficking" into "Viktor's main things." Here, different forms of violence have been simplified into mere possessions.

2- Conceptual Metaphor

Crime is a set of manageable commodities and business items.

3- Image Schema Level

In this regard, the CONTAINER schema organizes the representation process in that it views crimes as being "confiscated" within Viktor's sphere of ownership, whereas the COLLECTION/BUNDLE schema organizes multiple crimes into one group of crimes. This leads to cognitive compression of different violent actions into one object.

4- Domain Level

In the domain level, possession and collection organization constitute the source domain which is transferred to the criminal identity and criminal activity organization. "Things" refer to controllable possessions, from which categorization, prioritizing, and hierarchization can be inferred. These characteristics are then applied to criminal behavior, when criminal acts are part of the set of activities performed by Viktor. The expression "main things" is the basis for the construction of the hierarchy, based on the business jargon.

5- Frame Level

The framework for CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE/BUSINESS considers all illegal practices as elements that fit into the system. The moral distinction between the illegal acts disappears while categorizing them functionally into the portfolio of crimes.

6- Mental Space Level

At the mental space level, there is an integration of two input spaces. There is a crime input space and a business/asset management input space. At the crime input space level, there are different criminal acts that form different types depending on their legal and moral standings. At the business input space level, there are different objects that form a collection of property or portfolio of objects arranged in order of relevance or importance. There is a mixture of organizational and possessive properties of the crime into a single space.

Extract 2

"Mainly they were sent to Europe, but also to Abu Dhabi, Shanghai. Los Angeles, too."

1- Metaphoric Expression

The extract is an example of the representation of human transportation using the verb “sent” and a list of international destinations such as “Europe,” “Abu Dhabi,” “Shanghai,” “Los Angeles.”

2- Conceptual Metaphor

Human movement is commercial distribution and shipping.

3- Image Schema Level

The PATH script organizes the construction of the representation such that it guides the movement toward many places. The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL script is evoked, wherein the silent source, the controlled transfer ("sent"), and many geographic goals constitute a distributive network.

4- Domain Level

Regarding the level of the domain, the source domain for the global movement system is associated with the target domain of human trafficking. The source domain involves the movement of goods via a network of delivery systems. On the other hand, the target domain involves the application of similar patterns in the movement of people through various routes and destinations.

5- Frame Level

The movement is structured in terms of the GLOBAL SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT NETWORK frame through systematic routing at the international level. The structure of the frame is bolstered by the WORLD TRADE DISTRIBUTION frame and, in its implicit context, the CRIMINAL TRANSPORT frame.

6- Mental Space Level

With regard to the mental space, the analysis develops a blend that involves the combination of two separate conceptual domains: the domain of global logistics and the domain of human trafficking. In the domain of logistics input space, there is organized movement in the form of structured routes of objects to various international destinations. On the other hand, in the domain of the trafficking input space, there is human movement against their will and under circumstances of coercion. The combination of both these concepts creates an integration of the structures whereby the concept of commercial distribution is mapped onto the movement of people to come up with the idea that people are transferable objects moved through a global network.

Extract 3

"Cargo containers on ships. That's how he sent them to LA. Put in a metal box with a little food and water and a bucket for a toilet."

1- Metaphoric Expression

The excerpt creates the idea of humans being transported by means of “cargo containers on ships,” “sent them to LA,” and “metal box with a little food and water and a bucket for a toilet,” thus depicting people as cargo being transported and their basic needs reduced to bare necessities.

2- Conceptual Metaphor

Humans are cargo and commodities in transport.

3- Image Schema Level

The CONTAINER metaphor scheme regulates through "cargo containers" and "metal box," signifying concepts of inclusion, limitation, and lack of control. The PATH metaphor scheme uses the phrase "sent them to LA," but is made subordinate to CONTAINER, resulting in a regulation scheme of transportation not of motion itself.

4- Domain Level

Maritime transport of cargo is the source domain that is metaphorically mapped to human trafficking and forced transport as the target domain. The properties of containers in the source domain include the fact that they serve as closed entities for carrying cargo around the globe with only basic maintenance requirements. The same attributes are mapped to human movement where individuals become packaged beings who are transported via logistics with mere provision of basic things like food and water.

5- Frame Level

The extract triggers an OCEANIC SHIPPING frame combined with a CONTAINMENT AND STORAGE frame, where entities are transported, enclosed, and marginally sustained. This is coated by a CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION frame that recontextualizes shipping infrastructure as an instrument for coercive human transport, with "LA" functioning as a destination node within a global routing system.

6- Mental Space Level

At the mental space level, the analysis mixes a shipping input space and a human imprisonment input space. In the shipping space, cargo is transported in standardized containers through naval routes toward global destinations. In the imprisonment space, human beings are forcibly enclosed in restricted conditions with minimal survival resources. The blended space projects the structural logic of cargo transport onto human bodies, resulting in a representation where movement ("sent to LA") coexists with compulsory motionlessness inside sealed containers, producing a cognitively compressed model of transit as controlled confinement.

Extract 4

"They were dead when Customs found them."

1- Metaphoric Expression

In the above phrase "They were dead when Customs found them," the use of passive voice and institutional perspective serves to reverse causality and agency. In this case, death is presented as a revelation in the ritual process while "Customs found them" is an institutional discovery and not a human one.

2- Conceptual Metaphor

Death is a detectable condition in a logistical system.

3- Image Schema Level

The CONTAINER schema is indirectly preserved through former framing of humans as transported entities, while a remaining PATH schema appears in "Customs found them," signifying a terminal checkpoint. The nonappearance of force dynamics and causality eliminates interactional structure, creating a static endpoint interpreted through institutional detection.

4- Domain Level

The source domain of customs examination in international trade systems is mapped onto the target domain of trafficked human beings endangered to fatal conditions during transport. In the source domain, Customs functions as a governing checkpoint for checking goods entering or crossing borders. In the target domain, these procedures are applied to human bodies, where death is treated as a condition exposed through institutional discovery rather than an act with recognizable causes. This mapping reframes mortality as an organizational finding within a controlled system of movement.

5- Frame Level

The BORDER CONTROL AND INSPECTION frame structures the clause, positioning Customs as a supervisory authority responsible for monitoring cross-border movement. This is overlapped by a CRIMINAL TRAFFICKING frame, which recontextualizes the inspected entities as human victims. The interaction of administrative objectivity with fatal outcome produces a frame tension in which procedural language disguises extreme human harm.

6- Mental Space Level

At the mental space level, the investigation integrates a customs check input space and a human death input space. In the inspection space, entities are exposed, evaluated, and recorded within an organizational system. In the mortality space, death signifies a final and irrevocable biological event. The blended space merges these structures so that demise is construed as a condition identified during inspection rather than as the result of explicit actions or agents. This blending shifts emphasis from causation to detection, creating a cognitively neutralized representation of extreme violence in which institutional discovery replaces narrative accountability.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors

In order to support the qualitative analysis of the findings, the conceptual metaphors that were identified were quantified based on their occurrence. The numbers show the prevalence of the metaphors that are used to represent human trafficking in The Cruelty.

Figure 2. Frequency Distribution of Conceptual Metaphors Related to Human Trafficking

Humans are commodities/cargo	**12 (33.3%)**
Trafficking is transport/shipping	**9 (25.0%)**
Humans are commodities/cargo	**12 (33.3%)**
Crime is business/commerce	**7 (19.4%)**
Trafficking is containment/captivity	**5 (13.9%)**
Death is logistical condition	**3 (8.4%)**

The quantitative distribution reveals a clear hierarchy in metaphorical structuring of human trafficking in The Cruelty. The most dominant category, Humans are commodities/cargo (33.3%), indicates a strong cognitive tendency toward ontological reduction of human beings into transferable objects within economic and logistical systems. This dominance, together with Trafficking is transport/shipping (25.0%), which accounts for a further

quarter of occurrences, shows that trafficking is primarily conceptualized through global mobility and trade infrastructures. Together, these two metaphors constitute 58.3% of all instances, suggesting that the conceptualization of trafficking is overwhelmingly organized through commercial distribution and movement-based schemas, particularly the CONTAINER and SOURCE–PATH–GOAL structures.In contrast, Crime is business/commerce (19.4%) and Trafficking is containment/captivity (13.9%) occupy a secondary position, indicating that while organizational and spatial restriction frames are present, they are subordinated to mobility-oriented metaphors. The relatively low frequency of Death is a logistical condition (8.4%) suggests that institutional reframing of mortality is marginal compared to commodification and transport schemas, despite its high semantic intensity. Overall, the distribution reflects a systematic cognitive bias toward economic and logistical structuring, which normalizes trafficking by embedding it within familiar domains of commerce and global circulation.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Crime as Economic Organization

Crime is framed as structured economic activity, where diverse illegal acts are gathered as manageable units ("main things"), triggering a crime is commodity and business resource metaphor. Embodied schemas (CONTAINER, COLLECTION) support this organization but are recontextualized through business logic. Crime is thus normalized as portfolio-like management, reducing moral differentiation.

5.2 Trafficking as Global Logistics

Distribution of human beings can be represented through PATH and SOURCE-PATH-GOAL distributions on global nodes, referred to as “sent” and destinations. However, this can be represented using the framework of shipping. It has been successfully captured as a logistics process in which people become transferrable goods.

5.3 Humans as Contained Cargo

The concept of containment, such as “metal boxes,” invokes the CONTAINER frame and places human beings in the realm of shipping. Thus, human beings are treated as containerized cargo.

5.4 Institutional Framing of Death

Death is framed as an institutional process – “Customs found them” – focusing on observation and not causation in the border controls context. Death is thereby reinterpreted as an act of institutional observation which conceals any involvement and accountability.

5.5 ECMT as System of Institutional Normalization of Exploitation

Metaphorical framing works through cognition (schemas), culture (business/logistic frames) and context (global mobility discourse). All three work together to construct exploitation as normalizing institution by integrating it into well-known systems of organization and control.

6. References

Allwood, J., & Gärdenfors, P. (1999). *Cognitive semantics: Meaning and cognition*. In J. Allwood & P. Gärdenfors (Eds.), *Cognitive semantics: Meaning and cognition* (pp. vii–xii). John Benjamins.

Baker, M., & Fillmore, C. (2010). Frame semantics. In B. Heine & H. Narrog (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of linguistic analysis* (pp. 313–339). Oxford University Press.

Bergstrom, S. (2018). *The cruelty*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Casasanto, D. (2009). Embodiment of abstract concepts. In M. De Vega, A. Glenberg, & A. C. Graesser (Eds.), *Symbols and embodiment: Debates on meaning and cognition* (pp. 127–141). Oxford University Press.

Deignan, A. (2005). *Metaphor and corpus linguistics*. John Benjamins.

Evans, V. (2007). *A glossary of cognitive linguistics*. Edinburgh University Press.

Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Fauconnier, G. (2007). Mental spaces. In D. Geeraerts & H. Cuyckens (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics* (pp. 351–376). Oxford University Press.

Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind’s hidden complexities*. Basic Books.

Fillmore, C. J. (1982). Frame semantics. In L. J. H. (Ed.), *Linguistics in the morning calm* (pp. 111–137). Hanshin.

Geeraerts, D., & Cuyckens, H. (Eds.). (2007). *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Grady, J. (2007). Metaphor. In D. Geeraerts & H. Cuyckens (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics* (pp. 188–213). Oxford University Press.

Hampe, B. (Ed.). (2005). *From perception to meaning: Image schemas in cognitive linguistics*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Honeck, R. (1997). *A proverb in mind: The cognitive science of proverbial wit and wisdom*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Ibáñez, M., & Velasco, M. (2003). Image schemas and metaphor. *Journal of Pragmatics, 35*(4), 503–521.
Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of Chicago Press.
Johnson, M. (2005). *The philosophical significance of image schemas*. In B. Hampe (Ed.), *From perception to meaning* (pp. 15–33). Mouton de Gruyter.
Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford University Press.
Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
Kövecses, Z. (2017). Conceptual metaphor theory. In E. Semino & Z. Demjén (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of metaphor and language* (pp. 13–27). Routledge.
Kövecses, Z. (2020). *Extended conceptual metaphor theory*. Cambridge University Press.
Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. University of Chicago Press.
Lakoff, G. (1990). The invariance hypothesis. *Cognitive Linguistics, 1*(1), 39–74.
Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed., pp. 202–251). Cambridge University Press.
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. Basic Books.
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2004). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
Langacker, R. W. (1987). *Foundations of cognitive grammar: Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford University Press.
Leech, G. N. (1968). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. Longman.
Leech, G. N. (1969). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. Longman.
Littlemore, J., & Taylor, J. R. (2014). *The Bloomsbury companion to cognitive linguistics*. Bloomsbury.
Moon, R., & Knowles, M. (2006). *Introducing metaphor*. Routledge.
Saeed, J. I. (1997). *Semantics* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive poetics: An introduction*. Routledge.
Talmy, L. (2000). *Toward a cognitive semantics* (Vol. 1–2). MIT Press.