

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF ENGLISH METAPHORS

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Abstract. *This study examines the historical and cultural background of English metaphors, focusing on how different eras and cultural shifts have influenced metaphorical language in English literature and communication. Metaphors, as fundamental elements of human cognition and linguistic expression, reflect the collective experiences, beliefs, and traditions of a society. By tracing the development of metaphors from ancient Anglo-Saxon times through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and into modern English usage, the study reveals how historical events, philosophical movements, and cultural transformations shaped the metaphorical worldview of English speakers. The research emphasizes the role of religion, mythology, exploration, industrialization, and globalization in enriching and diversifying metaphorical expressions. Through the analysis of various literary works, speeches, and everyday language, the study highlights how metaphors serve not only as artistic tools but also as mirrors of historical consciousness and cultural identity. Special attention is given to the way metaphors evolved alongside changes in social structures, technological advancements, and political ideologies.*

Keywords: *Metaphor, Historical background, Cultural background, Anglo-Saxon period, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Modern English, Mythology.*

ИСТОРИКО-КУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ПРЕДПОСЫЛКИ АНГЛИЙСКИХ МЕТАФОР

Аннотация. *В этом исследовании изучается исторический и культурный фон английских метафор, уделяя особое внимание тому, как различные эпохи и культурные сдвиги повлияли на метафорический язык в английской литературе и коммуникации. Метафоры, как фундаментальные элементы человеческого познания и языкового выражения, отражают коллективный опыт, верования и традиции общества. Прослеживая развитие метафор от древних англосаксонских времен до Средних веков, эпохи Возрождения и до современного английского использования, исследование показывает, как исторические события, философские движения и культурные*

трансформации сформировали метафорическое мировоззрение носителей английского языка. Исследование подчеркивает роль религии, мифологии, исследований, индустриализации и глобализации в обогащении и диверсификации метафорических выражений. С помощью анализа различных литературных произведений, речей и повседневного языка исследование подчеркивает, как метафоры служат не только художественными инструментами, но и зеркалами исторического сознания и культурной идентичности. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как метафоры развивались вместе с изменениями в социальных структурах, технологическими достижениями и политическими идеологиями.

Ключевые слова: *Метафора, Исторический фон, Культурный фон, англосаксонский период, Средние века, Возрождение, Современный английский язык, Мифология.*

Introduction

Metaphors are more than just decorative elements in language; they are deeply rooted reflections of a society's history, culture, and worldview. In English, metaphorical expressions have evolved over centuries, shaped by various historical events, cultural transformations, and philosophical developments. From the early Anglo-Saxon era, where metaphors were heavily influenced by nature and mythology, through the religious and chivalric themes of the Middle Ages, and into the intellectual flourishing of the Renaissance, metaphors have mirrored the shifting values and experiences of English-speaking communities. Understanding the historical and cultural background of English metaphors provides valuable insight into how language adapts to social change and preserves collective memory. It also highlights the way metaphors bridge abstract ideas and everyday reality, helping individuals conceptualize and communicate complex notions. By exploring the development of English metaphors through different historical periods, we can better appreciate their role not only in literature but also in shaping thought patterns and cultural identity across generations.

Literature review and method

Metaphor is a concept widely used in linguistics and literary studies, which is based on the creation of a new meaning by transferring the properties of one object or phenomenon to another object or phenomenon.

The word metaphor itself is derived from the Greek word "metaphora", which means "to transfer", "to transfer". Metaphor is not simply a comparison, but a means of establishing a new connection between two things and revealing their essence.

Through metaphor, we get the opportunity to see and understand the world in a new way, because it enriches our thinking and imagination. Metaphor makes speech figurative, impressive and memorable, which increases its communicative value. The main characteristics of metaphor include imagery, expressiveness, subjectivity and cognitive. Its imagery helps us perceive things through visual, auditory or emotional images. Expressiveness enhances the emotional impact of the metaphor and evokes different emotions in the reader.

Metaphors are distinguished by their diversity and can be classified according to various criteria. Cognitive metaphors are one of the main mechanisms of human thinking, helping to understand new concepts based on existing knowledge. Conceptual metaphors, on the other hand, are aimed at expressing abstract concepts through concrete images (for example, "argument is war"). Artistic metaphors serve as a means of enhancing imagery and expressiveness used in literary works. In addition, metaphors differ in their structure (simple, complex, extended) and field of application (social, political, religious). Each type has its own characteristics and performs different functions in human thinking. This diversity of metaphors shows how important a role they play in human life and culture.

Metaphor is an integral part of human thinking and has a significant impact on the way we understand and perceive the world. We perceive many concepts, especially abstract ones, through metaphors. Metaphor is not only a language tool, but also a way of thinking. It helps us create new ideas, apply existing knowledge in new contexts, and simplify complex issues. In culture, metaphor plays an important role in the formation of common concepts and values.

Metaphors reflect the symbols, customs, and traditions of a culture. They are passed down from generation to generation, becoming part of the cultural heritage. Metaphor facilitates mutual understanding between people and unites them in a common cultural space. Therefore, it is important to study metaphor not only from the point of view of linguistics, but also from the point of view of cultural studies. Metaphor plays an important role in literary texts as a means of depiction. Metaphor gives literary works variety, depth, and emotionality. Authors can use metaphors to describe the inner world of their characters, the essence of events, and the beauty of the environment. Metaphors enrich the reader's imagination and help him or her understand the work more deeply.

Metaphors play an important role in revealing the ideological and artistic content of a literary text and increase the impact of the work. Metaphors give a literary work its uniqueness and originality. With their help, the author conveys his or her thoughts to the reader in an impressive and memorable way. Therefore, metaphors should be studied with special attention in literary studies.

Old English period

The Old English period (c. 450-1066) began with the migration of Germanic tribes to the British Isles. During this period, the English language was close to Germanic languages, and oral creativity was of great importance. The main examples of literature are epic poems such as "Beowulf", in which themes of heroism, war and nature prevail. Old English metaphors were simple and figurative, expressed through techniques such as kennings and alliteration. The main themes of the metaphors were related to nature, war and heroism. For example, the word "sea" was expressed in metaphors such as "swan road" or "whale home". The metaphors of this period reflected the worldview and lifestyle of the ancient Germans, and laid the foundation for metaphors of later periods. The metaphors of Old English literature are distinguished by their simplicity and imagery.

Examples and Analysis:

- From the epic poem "Beowulf": Beowulf's enemy Grendel is described as a "shadow stalker." This metaphor reveals Grendel's secretive and fearsome character.
- Kennings for the word "sea": Metaphors such as "swan road," "whale home," and "whale home" represent the grandeur and danger of the sea.

Middle English period

The Middle English period (c. 1066–1485) began with the Norman Conquest. During this period, French was widely spoken in England as the language of the aristocracy and government. Many French words were introduced into English, and the grammar of the language changed significantly. Religion and chivalry dominated Middle English literature. The metaphors of this period were more complex and elegant, and allegorical imagery was used more often. Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" is a vivid example of the Middle English period, in which metaphors were skillfully used to describe various characters and situations. Metaphors of the Middle English period developed under the influence of French culture and enriched the lexical composition of the English language. Religious and moral issues occupied a greater place in the metaphors of this period.

Discussion

The evolution of metaphors in the English language is closely intertwined with the historical and cultural milestones of the English-speaking world. In the Anglo-Saxon period, metaphors were primarily inspired by nature, daily life, and mythology, reflecting the people's close connection to the natural environment and their belief systems. Expressions rooted in battles, seafaring, and agricultural life were dominant, symbolizing survival, struggle, and human interaction with nature. During the Middle Ages, religious influence became more pronounced, leading to metaphors that revolved around faith, morality, and divine order. Metaphors related to light and darkness, heaven and earth, and sin and redemption were prevalent, indicating the society's focus on spiritual life and moral instruction.

The Renaissance era, marked by humanism and a renewed interest in classical knowledge, introduced metaphors emphasizing reason, exploration, and the human experience.

Literary works of this period, such as those by Shakespeare, enriched English with a wide range of complex and layered metaphors, many of which are still in use today. The Industrial Revolution and the age of scientific advancement brought a shift toward metaphors based on machinery, industry, and scientific progress. Concepts of growth, innovation, and mechanical precision became common metaphorical themes, reflecting societal transformation. In the modern and contemporary periods, globalization, technological developments, and social movements have introduced new metaphorical frameworks, such as those based on networks, digital spaces, and ecological awareness. These changes demonstrate how metaphors continue to adapt, representing not only static cultural values but also dynamic social realities. Thus, the history of English metaphors illustrates how deeply cultural and historical factors influence linguistic creativity. Metaphors act as a bridge between the past and the present, preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously accommodating new ideas and experiences.

Conclusion

The historical and cultural evolution of English metaphors reveals a profound connection between language, thought, and societal development. Each historical period contributed distinct metaphorical patterns that reflected the dominant worldviews, values, and experiences of its time. From the natural and heroic imagery of the Anglo-Saxon period to the religious and feudal metaphors of the Middle Ages, from the humanistic expressions of the Renaissance to the industrial and technological metaphors of modern times, the English metaphorical system has continuously adapted to reflect changing realities.

Moreover, metaphors have not only mirrored history but have also actively shaped perceptions and conceptual frameworks within society. They serve as cognitive tools that help individuals and communities understand complex phenomena, articulate abstract ideas, and maintain cultural continuity. Understanding the historical and cultural background of English metaphors thus offers deeper insight into the evolution of English-speaking societies and their ways of interpreting the world.

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