

STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL FEATURES OF METAPHORICAL MAPPING IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

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Abstract. This paper examines the structural and functional features of metaphorical mapping in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The study explores how conceptual metaphors contribute to narrative organization and thematic development in the novel. Drawing upon the theories of Lakoff and Johnson, Kövecses, and Gibbs, the research identifies structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors that shape characters' perception of reality, time, memory, and identity. The analysis demonstrates that metaphorical mappings are not merely stylistic devices but cognitive mechanisms through which Woolf constructs psychological depth and thematic coherence. The findings reveal that recurrent metaphorical domains, including the lighthouse, the sea, memory, art, and time, function as conceptual structures that guide readers' interpretation of the narrative.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, metaphorical mapping, human cognition, emotions, Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay, cognitive linguistics, Lily Brisco, narrative structure.

Introduction. Over the last several decades, conceptual metaphor has gained considerable attention in cognitive linguistic research, where it is regarded as a fundamental cognitive mechanism rather than a purely rhetorical phenomenon. This perspective suggests that metaphor enables people to comprehend abstract concepts by relating them to concrete experiences. In literary discourse, conceptual metaphors play a significant role in shaping characters' mental representations, organizing narrative patterns, and expressing underlying thematic and ideological perspectives. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, a landmark work of literary modernism, provides a rich corpus for examining the interaction between metaphorical mapping and narrative construction due to its complex symbolic imagery and stream-of-consciousness technique. Despite extensive research on Woolf's narrative style, comparatively little attention has been paid to the structural classification and functional role of conceptual metaphors in shaping the novel's thematic architecture from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Therefore, investigating metaphorical mappings in *To the Lighthouse* is both theoretically and practically significant, as it contributes to a deeper understanding

of the relationship between language, cognition, and literary meaning while expanding the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in modernist literary studies (Kövecses Z).

Main body. Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) views metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition rather than a decorative element of language. According to this theory, people understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiential domains by establishing systematic correspondences between source and target domains (Lakoff G., Johnson M.). Such mappings are especially significant in literary discourse, where metaphor becomes a means of organizing both narrative structure and thematic meaning. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* represents one of the finest examples of modernist fiction in which conceptual metaphors shape characters' consciousness and readers' interpretation of reality. The novel employs symbolic images not only for aesthetic purposes but also as cognitive models reflecting philosophical ideas concerning memory, identity, time, and artistic creativity. One of the dominant conceptual metaphors in the novel is **THE LIGHTHOUSE IS SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION**. Throughout the narrative, the lighthouse functions as more than a physical object. For James Ramsay it symbolizes an unattainable childhood aspiration; for Mr. Ramsay it reflects intellectual achievement and personal ambition; while for Lily Briscoe it represents artistic completion and inner harmony. Consequently, one symbolic object generates different conceptual interpretations depending on each character's psychological perspective (Woolf V.). Another important metaphorical domain is **TIME IS AN EROSION FORCE**. Particularly in the chapter *Time Passes*, Woolf presents time as an invisible force capable of transforming places, relationships, and human existence. The gradual deterioration of the Ramsays' summer house symbolizes the inevitable influence of time on both material objects and human memory. Here metaphor performs a cognitive function by enabling readers to conceptualize temporal change through physical transformation.

The novel also demonstrates the ontological metaphor **MEMORY IS A CONTAINER**. Characters preserve emotions, experiences, and personal relationships within memory, allowing the past to remain psychologically accessible. Lily Briscoe's recollections of Mrs. Ramsay illustrate how memories function as conceptual spaces that influence present perception and artistic creation. This metaphor emphasizes the continuity between past and present, which is one of Woolf's central thematic concerns. Equally significant is the metaphor **ART IS VISION**. Through Lily Briscoe's artistic

development, Woolf conceptualizes painting as a means of understanding reality rather than merely representing it. Artistic perception becomes a cognitive process through which fragmented experience acquires unity and meaning. Therefore, metaphorical mapping contributes directly to the novel's thematic organization by connecting creativity with self-discovery.

The analysis indicates that conceptual metaphors establish coherence across different narrative levels. They organize symbolic imagery, characterize psychological states, and guide readers toward interpreting abstract philosophical ideas. Thus, metaphorical mapping functions simultaneously as a cognitive mechanism, a stylistic strategy, and a structural principle within the novel.

Conclusion. The study demonstrates that conceptual metaphorical mapping constitutes an essential component of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors interact to construct thematic unity and psychological depth. The lighthouse, time, memory, and artistic vision function as conceptual domains through which abstract human experience becomes cognitively accessible. Consequently, metaphor should be regarded not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a fundamental mechanism organizing literary meaning and narrative interpretation.

References:

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