

A Metaphorical Analysis of the Main Characters in Beloved from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

Yitong Zhu*, Hongqiang Liu

School of Foreign Languages, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, China

**Corresponding author*

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Abstract: Cognitive linguistics views conceptual metaphor as a crucial link between language and thought, recognizing its significance not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a fundamental aspect of cognition and thinking. By delving into the cognitive mechanisms underlying human language, cognitive linguistics offers a fresh perspective for analyzing literary works. This paper, guided by the conceptual metaphor theory, aims to explore the presence of conceptual metaphor in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. It seeks to unravel the reasons behind the author's extensive use of metaphor and to uncover the metaphorical meanings embedded within the main characters of the novel. Through this analysis, a deeper understanding of the novel's theme can be achieved. By examining the intricate web of metaphors woven throughout the text, we can gain insight into the characters' experiences, emotions, and relationships, ultimately shedding light on the profound messages conveyed by Morrison's masterful storytelling. The exploration of conceptual metaphor in *Beloved* not only enriches our understanding of the novel but also highlights the power of language and metaphor in shaping our thoughts and perceptions. This interdisciplinary approach, combining cognitive linguistics and literary analysis, opens up new avenues for studying and appreciating literature, allowing us to uncover hidden layers of meaning and appreciate the intricate interplay between language, thought, and creativity.

1. Introduction

Toni Morrison is a prominent contemporary African American female writer and literary critic. She is the first and only African American woman to date to win the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature. *Beloved*, the first in her historical trilogy, represents slavery and the oppression of black people. The novel is set during the Reconstruction period after slavery and the Civil War and is based on the true events of a runaway slave woman in Kentucky who chose to kill her child to prevent her from becoming slaves.

In literary works, conceptual metaphors constitute most of the languages. These symbols and metaphors become the language props throughout the novel, and become the main clues and veins of the plot, structure and even the development of the story form. Metaphor is a very important writing technique in Morrison's novel *Beloved*. In this novel, metaphor is not only a rhetorical device and language style, but also a widely used principle with multiple levels of meaning, which plays a crucial role in the transmission of the novel's ideological content and the formation of the overall style. It

can even be said that the novel cannot be fully understood without fully understanding the use of metaphor in the novel. On the basis of previous studies, this paper tries to analyze the symbolic and metaphorical connotations of the characters in the novel in order to penetrate into the spiritual space and deep theme behind the novel world.

2. Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics

Lakoff and Johnson put forward the conceptual metaphor theory in their book. The traditional view is that metaphor is a figure of speech, while the conceptual metaphor theory holds that metaphor is not only a common language, but a means of poetic imagination and rhetoric, and a cognitive tool. Metaphor exists in any time period and any place, occupies a core position in daily language, exerts a profound impact on people's way of thinking, and directly participates in human cognition^[1]. Metaphor is one of the most basic forms of human existence, and cognitive activities are carried out in relation to the individual's life experience and personal experience. It plays an important and extensive role in people's conceptualization of experience, language expression and way of life^[2]. In essence, metaphor belongs to the category of cognitive phenomena in which human beings interpret another experience with the help of their accumulated experience. The comprehension and reception of metaphor is a process in which the listener associates, activates, selects and deduces the new hypothesis established by the received discourse through the cognitive context, and finally obtains the conversational meaning of metaphor^[3].

In the category of cognitive language, metaphorical thinking is a necessary way for people to understand and recognize things, and then build a perfect conceptual system, which is an important hub between language and cognition, and can help people deepen their understanding of the world, and is an effective path for language learning^[4]. Some scholars have pointed out that metaphor is the expression of one cognitive domain projected onto another cognitive domain, and it can be formed because of the existence of two basic elements, namely, the origin and the target. To analyze the implementation path of metaphor, it is the projection of the source in the target. After being projected by the source, the target can have some influence on it, but the prerequisite is that there is a similarity between these two elements in one or more aspects^[5]. On this basis, select one or more targets as the source or target domain, through the mapping mechanism, rebuild its original concept, filter out useless targets. This interaction between the source domain and the target domain plays an important role in conceptual integration.

3. Reasons for Using Conceptual Metaphor in *Beloved*

Conceptual metaphor is a common technique used by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*. Understanding the implied meaning conveyed by conceptual metaphors can lead to a deeper understanding of the characterization and theme of the whole novel^[6]. In order to understand the conceptual metaphor in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, one must first demonstrate the reasons why conceptual metaphor is ubiquitous in *Beloved*. From the general analysis of the language of *Beloved* and the detailed evaluation of metaphor in cognitive linguistics, there are many reasons for the prevalence of conceptual metaphor in it.

First of all, conceptual metaphor can arouse readers' curiosity, keep their attention, and make the plot of the novel more intriguing and attractive. Toni Morrison's ultimate goal is to convey to readers the real experience of black people in history. By using conceptual metaphors in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison not only manages to delineate the "unspeakable," but also to make readers feel for themselves the deep scars that slavery has left on the black psyche. In addition, conceptual metaphors can enhance the thematic ideas expressed by Toni Morrison in her novels. Through the analysis of metaphors, readers can understand not only the African American tradition, but also

the deep scars that slavery left on the black psyche. Metaphor also explores the possible means by which blacks can escape from such influence^[7]. Finally, by using metaphor in *Beloved*, the author can avoid taking responsibility for some of the meanings generated by the novel itself. The most important reason why writers evade responsibility is related to the social status of blacks in reality and the attitude of whites towards blacks. Race is still a difficult topic to talk about in the United States, so much so that Morrison tends to use conceptual metaphors to reveal the mental and physical trauma of former slaves after the abolition of slavery in the United States. Moreover, blacks are a marginalized group in the United States, and their forthright expression is limited by cultural and psychological factors. Therefore, Toni Morrison uses conceptual metaphors to express the inhumane status of black slaves and their desire for freedom.

In *Beloved*, it is difficult to find a simple description of reality in the traditional sense, and almost all descriptions of reality are metaphorized. For the most part, Morrison's emphasis on the oral literary tradition and her use of African American language give her novels a distinctly personal touch. Through the application and rewriting of the original white biblical text, the author reflects the intention to destroy a language that has risen to a privileged position through a relationship of political domination. In other words, she tries to use the language of the novel as a vehicle to establish a center of the other by means of metaphor that competes with traditional Standard English literature.

4. Metaphorical Concept of the Main Characters

Metaphor is when one concept uses another concept as a metaphorical structure. The essential meaning conveyed by this metaphor is to use one thing to experience and explain another thing. Therefore, when adopting this type of conceptual metaphor in Morrison's *Beloved*, the author always uses another concept to analyze the meaning associated with the protagonist.

Metaphor is the use of one concept as a metaphorical structure for another. The essential meaning conveyed by this type of metaphor is to experience and explain one thing in terms of another. Therefore, when employing this type of conceptual metaphor in Morrison's *Beloved*, the author will always analyze the meaning associated with the protagonist in terms of another concept.

4.1 Sethe

As the most important character in the whole novel, Sethe's metaphorical meaning deserves careful observation and study. Sethe's name alludes to the biblical Genesis of Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, who killed his brother Abel. God gave them a third son, Sethe, as a "substitute" to replace the murdered son and the murderer. Morrison used the name Sethe on the protagonist to suggest that Sethe was the epitome of black people murdered under slavery^[8]. Although Sethe is a woman, in the whole novel, she is not like an ordinary woman, but like a man, or like a soldier, does not compromise with slavery, she tries all means to escape from the slave owner's manor, hoping to get freedom. In her mind, freedom is more important than anything else. So she would rather have her child killed by herself than grow up to be a slave without her freedom. Therefore, no one is more eager for freedom than Sethe. Power and freedom are Sethe's life pursuit and belief in *Beloved*, which is the relevant meaning or metaphorical meaning obtained from a deep reading of the text.

At the same time, the analysis of Sethe is needed to take into account her identity as a mother and daughter. If *Beloved*'s fear, anger, and sense of betrayal at Sethe killing her were feelings of abandonment, it was also a shadow memory of abandonment projected by Sethe as a daughter. So there is an actual cross-domain mapping between the meanings conveyed by Sethe and *Beloved*^[9]. Sethe's mother made a one-armed woman her foster mother and Sethe suffered from a constant sense of deprivation. This is not only because she has completely lost her mother's care and love, but also because she intuitively knows that her mother has deliberately chosen to abandon her. The appearance of *Beloved* resurfaced repressed memories of Sethe's mother. The sight of *Beloved* reminded Sethe

of a childhood memory that she particularly associated with her mother^[10]. Beloved is not only connected to Sethe's murdered daughter, but also to her lost mother. In this way, the meaning reflected in Beloved is projected onto Sethe through cross-domain mapping. The metaphorical meaning of Sethe is not only a yearning for freedom and resistance to slavery, but also a recognition of identity given by the black community, which is the real communicative intention expressed by the author and the best relevant meaning found by readers through relevance theory.

4.2 Beloved

Morrison's greatest achievement is her voice for the victims of murder throughout history. With slavery at its center, Morrison tries to convey some point to the reader through the image of Beloved and the testimony of the victims, to make the reader recognize the unbearable bitterness of the past, the loss suffered not only by the survivors, but also by those who died. In the novel, the unfortunate child's spirit is reincarnated to collect the debt, still known as "Beloved". In a narrow sense, Beloved was reincarnated to win back her mother's love for her. In a broad sense, on the one hand, she wants people not to forget the past, on the other hand, she helps people heal the pain of the past, start a new life, and strive to become a real "beloved". The novel's central questions are Beloved's origins and identity, and the nature of her relationships with Sethe, Paul, and Denver. Beloved is the metaphorical spirit of Sethe's dead daughter^[11]. The first time Sethe saw her, she was soaking wet, like a newborn baby. Sethe felt her water break when she saw her. Besides, Beloved knew about a pair of earrings Sethe had owned long ago. She was humming a song Sethe had made up for the children. There are also metaphorical interpretations that see Beloved as a representation of Sethe's dead mother.

In addition, Beloved had recounted Sethe's memories of her journey from Africa to America, which were consistent with what Sethe's mother might have had. Beloved and Sethe switched places, with Beloved playing the mother and Sethe the child. In the reconstructed context, the reader restores the character image of the beloved, completes the confirmation of the beloved's identity, explores the deep intention of the novel author from a deeper level, and thus further discusses the meaning and direction of the beloved's identity confirmation, and completes the cognition of the narrative and metaphor of the novel while unraveling the mystery. The process of Beloved's removal is a metaphor for black people's path to freedom as they unite to receive spiritual baptism. Morrison endows characters with metaphors, and through re-searching the correlation between characters and metaphors, she endows her works with more profound meaning. Through the soul freely shuttling and wandering between Yin and Yang without the limitation of time and space, Morrison shows us the cruelty and absurdity of reality. In short, through the character Beloved, Morrison expresses the collective unconscious of all those oppressed by the history and legacy of slavery^[12].

4.3 Denver

Morrison uses structural metaphor in the novel to imply that Denver is a kind of hope. Denver was very lonely, no one told her how horrible slavery was, and she grew up with memories of the past that she knew nothing about. When Denver sees how Beloved, the embodiment of slavery memories, devoured her mother and pushed Sethe to the brink of death, Denver realizes that her original choices were wrong and need to be corrected. Her job, which had started as protecting Beloved from Sethe, had now become protecting her mother from Beloved. Only then did Denver become Beloved's rival. Beloved and Sethe got tangled up, and Denver helped Sethe out of it; When Beloved was destroying Sethe, it was Denver who went out to seek help to protect Sethe from being destroyed.

Denver and Beloved are sisters. Beloved symbolized the past, and Denver symbolized the black future. Denver was named after a white man. With her help, Sethe managed to land Denver.

Denver's birth was a miracle, as much a symbol of fraternity as her own name, so Denver was a symbol of fraternity with white people. Denver's growth process from birth to maturity is a metaphor for the future road of black people, which is a development process of developing their own national personality and making common progress with other ethnic cultures in the world. As Sethe's other daughter, Denver stands in stark contrast to Beloved. Instead of bringing back memories of the past and destroying the present life of black people, like Beloved, Denver looks to the future and helps black people rid themselves of painful memories.

5. Conclusion

The study of metaphor has been going on for a long time since Aristotle. In addition, Lakoff only proposes that metaphor is not only used in human language, but also hidden in human concepts and thoughts. This paper uses the concepts and theories of cognitive linguistics to understand the conceptual metaphor in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. This paper analyzes the reasons for Toni Morrison's extensive use of metaphor in *Beloved*, and briefly analyzes the metaphorical meanings of the main characters in *Beloved*. By analyzing the linguistic research results and the cognitive metaphor theory in Morrison's *Beloved*, we believe that the metaphors in Morrison's *Beloved* can only be fully explained under the framework of the cognitive metaphor theory. Through the analysis of the metaphor of the characters in the novel, the identity of the characters can be interpreted in a variety of ways, which deeply resonates in the hearts of readers from different races, and thus rises to ponder on the future and fate of the whole human race, which is one of the reasons for the great success of the novel.

Metaphor plays a very important role in providing readers with a medium to process and analyze the content of *Beloved* through the cross-domain mapping of conceptual metaphor. In addition, the analysis of metaphors in the novel is also helpful for readers to understand the historical background of *Beloved* and further understand the theme of the novel. Beloved's tragedy shows the shadow of slavery on the soul of black Americans and the suffocating and devouring of the essence of black people by white cultural values. The author not only truly records that bitter history but also extends his feelings to the whole black history, black people and black culture.

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