

Analysis on metaphor of sky based on corpus

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Abstract

This study explores the different metaphorical usage of sky using the BNC corpus, one of the largest English corpus in the world. It aims to uncover the diverse conceptualizations and linguistic expressions associated with this universal and culturally significant element. By employing corpus linguistics methods, the study views a broad range of written and spoken texts to identify and analyze metaphors of sky in various contexts and genres. The research seeks to elucidate how the metaphor of sky is employed to convey abstract concepts, such as emotions, aspirations, spirituality, and how it is intertwined with cultural, environmental, and imaginative dimensions. Through the systematic analysis of linguistic data extracted from the BNC corpus, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the metaphorical diversity of the sky. The findings provide insights into the cognitive and communicative significance of sky-based metaphors, offering valuable implications for fields such as linguistics, cognitive science, cultural studies, and literary analysis.

Keywords

Sky, metaphor, BNC, cognitive thinking.

1. Introduction

Metaphor is firstly introduced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle [1]. It is used to make comparison between two things that are unrelated but share some similar characteristics. It uses imagery and descriptive language to create a vivid and imaginative connection between the two things. Metaphors are powerful rhetorical devices that can facilitate communication, convey complex ideas, and stimulate the imagination and play a crucial role in language, literature, poetry, art, and our everyday conversations, enriching our understanding of the world and enhancing our ability to express thoughts and emotions.

Metaphors often emerge from our experiences and observations of the world. They can be inspired by nature, human behavior, cultural symbols, or other sources of inspiration. As people try to express complex or abstract ideas, metaphors provide a way to relate them to familiar and concrete concepts. Metaphor is not only a linguistic tool but also becomes a cognitive process [2]. Metaphorical thinking allows us to conceptualize and understand abstract or complex ideas by using familiar and concrete concepts. Metaphors shape the way we think and perceive the world by influencing our thought patterns, reasoning, and understanding. According to Lakoff and Johnson [3], one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another conceptual domain in metaphor. They argue that metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but pervasive cognitive structures that shape our thoughts, perceptions, and actions.

A conceptual metaphor involves the understanding and experiencing of one concept by relating it to another concept. It follows the formula "CONCEPT A is CONCEPT B" where CONCEPT A represents the main concept being explored (target domain), and CONCEPT B represents the concept used to understand it (source domain). The connection between the two domains is formed through a mapping mechanism that consists of systematic correspondences between the target and source domains. In a conceptual metaphor, we comprehend and make sense of the target domain A by drawing on the source domain B. This understanding is based on a set

of mappings that exist between elements of A and B. Having knowledge of a conceptual metaphor entails understanding this specific set of mappings. To know a conceptual metaphor is to know this set of mappings [4].

Sky generally refers to the expanse or celestial dome that appears to encircle the Earth, encompassing the atmosphere and extending to outer space. It is the region above the Earth where clouds, the sun, the moon, stars, planets, and other celestial bodies are visible. In a broader sense, the sky represents the entirety of the upper atmosphere and outer space, including the cosmic void beyond the Earth's atmosphere. This concept is fundamental to human perception, culture, and language, often evoking feelings of wonder, awe, and contemplation. In scientific terms, the sky is the upper, vast, and apparent dome-like area that surrounds the Earth, comprising the troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere, and exosphere, as well as extending into outer space.

Sky plays a significant role in our daily lives and the natural environment [5]. It consists of the Earth's atmosphere, which is a layer of gases surrounding our planet. The atmosphere protects us from harmful radiation, regulates temperature, and provides the air we breathe. And the sky is closely linked to weather and climate systems. Clouds, precipitation, wind patterns, and atmospheric conditions all occur in the sky. By studying the sky, scientists can gather important data to understand and predict weather patterns and long-term climate changes.

People have always lived under the blue sky for innumerable years and have accumulated their understanding and knowledge of the sky. Their cognitive understanding of sky made it possible for them to use it for many kinds of interesting metaphors, mapping sky onto all sorts of target domains. Nowadays, there are multitudes of studies on metaphor of natural phenomena such as cloud, wind, rain, moon and so on. However, few research was based the metaphor of sky, the most common natural gift that we live by everyday. Thus, this paper studies the metaphor of sky to help people understand clearer this natural phenomenon.

2. Analysis

The sky metaphor in this paper is mainly discussed in four major parts. They are: Sky used for positive conditions, sky used for negative conditions, sky used for neutral conditions, and the emotional metaphor of sky.

2.1. Sky used for positive metaphors

The following are several sentences chosen from the BNC corpus containing positive use of sky metaphors.

- (1) REACH for the sky with yet another Limit fly-away competition.
- (2) He said: 'When you're champions and in Europe, the sky's the limit.'
- (3) We all share the same sky and the same passion, which is to see our joint projects take to the air.
- (4) At one o'clock, without warning, the wind dropped, dust settled, and I was under a pleasant sky.
- (5) And he rode with a jewelled twinkle, His pistol butts a-twinkle, His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

The use of the phrase "reach for the sky" in Example (1) serves to convey the concept of aiming high or striving for ambitious goals. The metaphor functions by comparing the act of pursuing high score or record to the physical action of reaching upward toward the sky, which symbolizes lofty aspirations and unlimited potential. This metaphor is employed to encourage participants to set their sights high and to pursue their goals with determination and enthusiasm.

The expression “sky’s the limit” in Example (2) is used to convey the idea that there are no restrictions or boundaries to what we can achieve. It suggests that reaching the status of champions and being in Europe opens up vast opportunities and potential for success. This phrase compares the limitless possibilities to the expanse of the sky, emphasizing the idea of endless potential. The sky is commonly far far higher above us and associated with vastness and endlessness, so using this metaphor effectively communicates the idea of unrestricted potential and success.

The expression “We all share the same sky” in Example (3) conveys the idea of shared human experience among individuals. By evoking the image of the sky, the metaphor emphasizes the collective nature of their hopes and dreams. The metaphors used in this sentence effectively depict the unity of purpose and the collective desire for their projects to succeed.

The phrase “under a pleasant sky” in Example (4) compares the experience of being in a pleasant atmosphere to being under a literal sky. This suggests that the speaker’s surroundings became pleasant or favorable, maybe in terms of weather or overall ambiance. It is used to describe a sudden change in the speaker’s environment and mood. The metaphor emphasizes the abruptness of the shift from a windy and dusty environment to a peaceful and enjoyable one.

The phrase “jewelled sky” in Example (5) compares the sky to a jewel, emphasizing its beautiful and shining traits and creating a vivid and evocative image of the rider and his surroundings. This also creates a favorable atmosphere for the whole context.

2.2. Sky used for negative metaphors

The following are several sentences chosen from the BNC corpus containing negative use of sky metaphors.

(6) Nationalization was a pie in the sky, and the pie fell to the ground very soon.

(7) Jack and Richard Hannon keep on banging in the winners while others are rushing about like headless chickens in the belief that the sky is falling down.

(8) You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown, as the sky split open into a thunderstorm.

The metaphorical use of “pie in the sky” in Example (6) is employed to convey the idea that nationalization was an unrealistic or unattainable concept. The metaphor functions by comparing the concept of nationalization to a “pie in the sky” which suggests that it is an impractical or unachievable goal, much like trying to grab a pie that is just out of reach in the sky.

In Example (7), Sky is compared with something like house roof or ceiling, which has tangible parts to perform the act of falling down. Based on our knowledge, sky will never fall down. The belief that the sky is falling down is a metaphorical expression that suggests a sense of extreme fear or a belief that there is an impending disaster. The metaphor is used to contrast the calm and successful performance of Jack and Richard Hannon with the chaotic and anxious behavior of others. It creates a vivid image and helps to emphasize the difference in their attitudes and outcomes.

This metaphor of “split up” in Example (8) conveys the sudden and intense nature of the thunderstorm. It creates an image of the sky bursting apart, as if unable to contain the force of the storm. The metaphor amplifies the significance and impact of the rain, which is large and heavy. And it can be used to emphasize the emotional state of the character and enhance the sensory experience of people.

2.3. Sky used for neutral metaphors

The following are several sentences chosen from the BNC corpus containing neutral use of sky metaphors.

(9)Kwik Save sort of dropped out of the sky.

(10)The cultivation of the mind entails giving it freedom to soar like a bird into the mind's sky.

(11)Above the kitchen chimney stack, the sky quavers on a high inaudible note.

The phrase "drop out of the sky" in (9) is used to suggest that the appearance or arrival of Kwik Save was sudden and unexpected. It compares the unexpected arrival of Kwik Save to something dropping from the sky without warning, which conveys the idea that Kwik Save's emergence seemed to happen out of nowhere. The metaphor adds emphasis to the unexpected nature of the event and creates a vivid image in the reader's mind. Overall, the metaphor is used to effectively describe a surprising and sudden event or occurrence.

The phrase "the mind's sky" in (10) presents the mind as a boundless, expansive space similar to the open expanse of the sky. Our mind is endless as the sky, and things we can store and think of in our mind are also infinite. So this metaphor describes the vastness of our mind using the concept of sky.

The metaphor in (11) compares the sky's movement or vibration to the trembling of a musical note. The term "quaver" suggests a rapid, slight, and trembling motion. This metaphor serves to convey a sense of delicate and ethereal movement in the sky. It implies that the sky is alive and dynamic, adding a sense of movement and vibrancy to the description.

2.4. The emotional metaphor of sky

The sky has cultural and symbolic significance in various societies and religions. In many cultures and religions, sky is something associated with concepts such as divinity, spirituality, soul, heaven, the afterlife and so on. Therefore, it is often considered as an item full of emotions and is used in metaphor as something emotional. Many cultural traditions, rituals, and ceremonies are linked to celestial events and the interpretation of the sky. The following are some examples of this kind chosen from the BNC corpus.

(12)The sky is torn in lonely streaks. The stars are wrecked islands. Would I have known how to connect.

(13)The sky is immortal. The stars can not die.

(14)A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot, fractious under the heavy, sexy sky.

(15)All day, the eye of the sky bulges, lidless and forgiving until darkness comes to roost, undisturbed in its lashes.

(16)and the sky itself is an iconoclast perpetually sweeping the canvas clean.

(17)Those drops of rain are the tears of the sky, tears of the Lord falling upon the windows.

The metaphor of the sky being "torn" in Example (12) conveys a sense of fragmentation and separation. It suggests that the sky is not whole or continuous but rather divided into distinct and isolated streaks. This description creates a striking image that portrays a sky filled with long and narrow streaks or bands of varying colors and textures. By using this metaphor, the emotional impact of the description is enhanced. The word "lonely" further emphasizes the sense of isolation and desolation, allowing the reader to imagine a sky that is not only physically torn but also emotionally torn. The metaphor serves to evoke a particular mood or atmosphere, one characterized by a sense of melancholy or solitude. It may suggest a feeling of alienation, as if the sky itself reflects a sense of loneliness.

The metaphorical comparison of the sky in Example (13) to something immortal suggests that the sky possesses life and is enduring and permanent. By comparing the sky to the concept of immortality, the sky is given with a sense of eternity. This metaphor serves to elevate the sky from a physical entity to a symbol of enduring existence and spiritual significance. The use of the metaphor serves to create a sense of awe and respect toward the sky, encouraging the reader to think of the vastness and enduring nature of the sky.

In Example (14), the metaphor of the sky being heavy suggests a sense of burden or weight, adding to the feeling of unease or discomfort experienced by the person. The use of the word “sexy” in this context conveys a sense of sensuality, allure, or seductive power. This metaphor plays with the contrast between the heaviness of the sky and the potential allure it might possess, further heightening the emotional tension in the sentence. Through the description of the sky as heavy and sexy, a vivid and evocative image of the person’s untidy, hot, and fractious state under the influence of the alarm is created. The goal is to convey a sense of emotional turmoil and discomfort.

In Example (15), the metaphorical comparison of the sky to an eye evokes a powerful visual image and attributes human characteristics to the natural element. By describing the sky as the “eye of the sky”, it suggests that the sky serves as a watchful entity like human. This metaphor highlights the sky’s ability to observe and witness everything that happens throughout the day. The phrase “bulges, lidless” further emphasizes the eye-like nature of the sky. It suggests that the sky extends its gaze uninterrupted, without any eyelids to close or obstruct its view. This metaphor conveys a sense of constant vigilance and offers a personification of the sky as a sentient being. Overall, the use of this metaphor contributes to the poetic and imaginative nature of the sentence, allowing the reader to experience the sky in a unique and evocative way. The metaphor enhances the sense of awe associated with observing the natural world.

In Example (16), the metaphorical comparison of the sky to an “iconoclast” serves to depict the sky as a rebel or a destroyer of conventions and traditions. An iconoclast is someone who challenges or overturns established beliefs, customs, or institutions, and by comparing the sky to an iconoclast, the author implies that the sky disrupts and challenges the conditions. The phrase “perpetually sweeping the canvas clean” presents that the sky is an agent of change and renewal. This suggests that the sky continuously wipes away the existing “canvas” of the atmosphere, marking a constant process of transformation. The use of the word “canvas” in this context creates an association with the idea of a painter’s canvas, emphasizing the creative and artistic nature of the sky’s disruptive actions.

The metaphorical comparison in Example (17) of “drops of rain” to “tears of the sky, tears of the Lord” serves to evoke a powerful image of the rain as a manifestation of deep emotion and divine presence. By likening the rain to tears, the author entitles the natural phenomenon with human-like emotions. Additionally, by associating the tears with the Lord, the metaphor introduces a religious or spiritual dimension, suggesting a sense of divine sorrow or empathy being expressed through the rain. The metaphor is used in this context to convey a sense of reverence and awe for the natural world, as well as to suggest a deeper, spiritual meaning behind the phenomenon of rain. By portraying the rain as a sacred and emotional manifestation, the rain is perceived as more than just a physical occurrence, but as a reflection of experiences. The use of this metaphor serves to elevate the description of the rain, transforming it from a mundane meteorological event into a symbol of profound emotion and spirituality. This encourages the reader to engage with the rain in a more reflective and contemplative manner.

3. Conclusion

This paper has presented some usages and interpretations of sky metaphor in BNC corpus. In BNC corpus, sky metaphor is often used to describe ambitious goals of people, the boundaries to people’s success, unrealistic goals and so on. It is also used in situations that need vivid description to make the sky emotional. The use of these metaphors can have such roles as enhancing the sensory experience and emotional impact of the sentence, deepening the poetic and imaginative nature of the sentence, making the description of the sky deeper and more complex, creating a sense of empathy and connection between the reader and the natural world, and fostering a sense of wonder and respect for the natural world and its connections to

broader existential and spiritual themes. In general, the use of sky metaphor is very significant in our quotidian life to describe our experience, communicate with others and some linguistic studies.

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