What is Conscience?
Some Ontological Metaphors
in the English-Language Aphorisms

ELDAR VEREMCHUK

Zaporizhzhia National University, Faculty for Foreign Languages,
Zhukovskogo Street, 68a, UA Zaporizhzhia,
eldar.veremchuk@znu.edu.ua

Članek obravnava ontološke metafore s ciljno domeno ZAVEST. Temelji na načelih in metodologiji teorije konceptualne metafore. Analizirano gradivo predstavlja korpus aforizmov o zavesti, pridobljen z metodo kontinuiranega vzorčenja na podlagi podatkov iz spletnih zbornikov aforizmov. Predpostavljamo, da je abstraktna etična entiteta oblikovana glede na spoznanje konkretnih danosti iz življenjske izkušnje. Glavni konceptualni metafori analiziranega etičnega koncepta sta »vest je človek ali bog« in »vest je stvar«, ki imata v različnih kontekstih različne variante, v katerih se uresničujeta.

The paper discusses ontological metaphors with the target domain CONSCIENCE. Its research is based on the tenets and methodology of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The analyzed material is represented by a corpus of aphorisms about conscience, obtained by the method of continuous sampling based on data from online compendiums of aphorisms. It is argued that an abstract ethical entity is conceptualized in relation to knowledge about basic concrete things from central life experience. The main conceptual metaphors for the conceptualization of the analyzed ethical concept are "Conscience is a human or God" and "Conscience is a thing", which have elaborations and extensions in various contexts.

Ključne besede: konceptualna metafora, meddomenska preslikava, domena, elaboracija, razširitev

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, cross-domain mapping, domain, elaboration, extension

1 Introduction

Conscience has become the object of research in various fields of study, some of the latest works including the philosophy sphere (Mantzanas 2020), the deontology sphere (Glackin 2021), the ethics sphere (Greene 2019), etc. Linguistics is

no exception, since according to Cognitive Commitment, language semantics and linguistic organization reflect general cognitive principles (Evans & Green 2006), namely that language depicts the way we conceptualize reality. It is very likely that conscience is an important element in the perception of the world and one of the essential concepts in moral philosophy, psychology and ethics, since it is a part of the human soul that determines and regulates interpersonal relations, attitudes and deeds. Being studied from different viewpoints, conscience makes up a valid research topic also for cognitive linguistics studies, since the investigation within the cognitive paradigm enables us to shed light upon the way the ethical concept CONSCIENCE is represented in the construal of the world. One of the aspects of such research is the analysis of ontological metaphors, in which CONSCIENCE acts as a target domain.

It is worth mentioning that metaphor studies are quite abundant in modern linguistics and are constantly increasing in number. This is illustrated by Booth's (1979: 49) claim, partly ironical, that there will be more students of metaphor than humans by the year 2039. The impressive number of metaphor studies can be explained by their high applicability to various spheres of human life, since metaphor is in contemporary science not viewed merely as a literary means of expression, serving stylistic and rhetorical purposes, but as a cognitive mechanism for structuring experience and knowledge about the world. This view is based on the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2017). Recent metaphor studies encompass a wide specter of topics, ranging from general semantic and cognitive features of metaphorical expressions (Keglević Blažević 2022) to investigations of their role in the film industry (Fabčič 2022) and even in the conceptual framing of the global crisis (Miletić 2023).

Recent studies on conceptual metaphors for ethical concepts include studies of HONOUR (Sharma 2015), PRIDE (Brocic 2019), EMPATHY (Tatsenko 2020), MODESTY (Shevchenko & Shastalo 2021), LOVE (Čeh 2022), etc. Indeed, the abundance of metaphor studies is justified by the impact of the obtained results, which sheds light upon the way humans perceive different phenomena and aspects of the world.

The aim of the present paper is to determine the way conscience is conceptualized in the English construal of the world through the analysis of ontological mappings, in which it acts as a target domain. We hypothesize that CONSCIENCE is conceptualized on the basis of knowledge about concrete things, which is inferred from the provisions of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

The paper includes the following highlights: determination of the primary metaphorical mappings for the target domain CONSCIENCE; elucidation and interpretation of the metaphorical elaborations for each of the mappings; characteristics of the metaphorical extensions.

2 Material and methods

Aphorisms are as short, witty and memorable expressions concerning certain aspects of life found in anthologies of quotations, such as Auden and Kronenberger (1981), Gross (1983), and Auriel and Strumpf (1989). Currently, there are also online compendiums, like (Proverbicals) and (BrainyQuote), which provide an ample and regularly updated supply of quotes relating to different concepts and notions.

The research material in the present study is a corpus of aphorisms and proverbs about the human conscience compiled from online resources (BrainyQuote; Proverbicals) using the method of continuous sampling. We believe that aphorism and proverb compendiums make up a plausible source of material allowing researchers to attain more convincing results than the ordinary language corpora. This is because an aphorism or a proverb, by definition, is a witty saying that gains multiple recurrences in discourse because of its wise and catchy nature, which is particularly due to the use of metaphorical language. Language corpora as an alternative source, on the other hand, contain passages of spontaneous speech and are thus characterized by a lower frequency of metaphorical expressions.

The retrieved sample for analysis with the target lexeme *conscience* includes 560 contexts. In the next step the aphorisms, with metaphor as a stylistic device, were analyzed within the framework of CMT. Firstly, they were examined in terms of how language metaphorical expressions objectify CONSCIENCE as a mental construct, which was done through lexical and semantic analysis of the phrases with the target lexeme *conscience*. After this, the sample was shortlisted to 122 contexts, revealing how CONSCIENCE is conceptualized through ontological metaphors which are lexicalized by metaphorical expressions at the language level. The method of conceptual analysis allowed us to determine the primary conceptual projections, in which CONSCIENCE acts as a target domain, and to delineate their central mappings. Each mapping was further researched for metaphorical elaborations, which presupposed the determination of the cross-mapping zone, i.e. the range of cognitive features, mapped from the source to the target domain. Finally, we outlined and characterized the metaphorical extensions of the mappings by means of establishing the hyponyms of the source domains and interpreted the projection of their features onto the target domain CONSCIENCE from the cognitive perspective.

3 Theoretical remarks

From the etymological perspective/Etymologically, the Greek word *aphorismos* means 'to distinguish' or 'to define'. An aphorism is a term which shares common features with other terms like *the short dictum*, *the adage*, *the cliché*, *the epigram*, and *the proverb*. The aphorism is defined as "*a concise statement of*

a principle, a short-pointed sentence expressing a wise or a clever observation or a general truth" (Auriel and Strumpf 1989). In common language, an aphorism is an original thought spoken or written by an author in a concise and memorable form. J. Geary (2005: 8-20) identifies five features of the aphorism: 1) briefness; 2) definitiveness; 3) personal nature; 4) twisted character; 5) philosophic sense.

We believe that at least three essential features of aphorisms – the definitive character, the twist and the philosophic nature – make them a legitimate object of linguistic and cognitive research. The twisted definitive character of the aphorism is achieved by the extensive use of metaphorical language, which unravels the underlying conceptual metaphors employed to cognize and interpret complex philosophic ideas about phenomena encoded in this type of quotes. Since the aphoristic status of an individual quote proves its 'popularity' and 'acceptability' in the language community through multiple recurrences in discourse, expressions containing metaphoric language appear to be representative material for the analysis and interpretation of the way the human mind conceptualizes abstract ethical entities, like human CONSCIENCE. This can be done employing the tenets of CMT.

CMT (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2017) explains the way the human mind categorizes and conceptualizes the world. This theory distinguishes three types of metaphorical projections: ontological, structural and oriental. This paper is focused on the ontological type of metaphor. This type involves understanding something abstract via knowledge of something concrete from central life experience (Evans & Green 2006).

In other words, the ontological metaphorical transference involves understanding one domain of experience (CONSCIENCE) in terms of an entirely different domain of experience (PERSON or THING, for instance), which constitutes cross-domain mapping. The mapping is tightly structured. It consists of a central mapping zone and metaphorical elaborations, which make up the zone of conceptual transference. This zone can further be expanded by metaphorical extensions. Central mapping is represented by the coupling of the most essential source domain (SD) feature with the most essential target domain (TD) feature. This presupposes that both source and target domains share a certain feature that, being the same in its essence, might have a variation component for SD and TD. Elaboration of the central mapping yields further projection of SD features upon the TD. The extension of metaphor involves hyponyms of the superordinate SD as alternative source domains for the target concept. Therefore, the following section highlights the identification and analysis of the cross-domain metaphorical mappings for the TD CONSCIENCE.

4. Results

The contextual, semantic and cognitive analysis of the retrieved aphorisms and proverbs enabled us to identify four primary mappings, which we will treat separately. One of the instances of ontological metaphor is personification, in which human qualities are bestowed upon nonhuman entities. This type of metaphor is not only a very common literary device and stylistic expressive means, but also a representative cognitive mechanism of conceptualization of the world. As Kövecses (2017) claims: "Personification makes use of one of the best source domains we have – ourselves. In personifying nonhumans as humans, we can begin to understand them a little better".

4.1 Mapping 1 'PERSONIFICATION OF CONSCIENCE'

At this point it is worth noting that from here on the provided aphorisms are retrieved from online compendiums (BrainyQuote; Proverbicals).
    Since the prototypical function of conscience is making moral judgments, conscience is conceptualized as a JUDGE and the central mapping is represented by the feature 'judging', which is shared by both SD and TD.

> Every **judgement of conscience**, be it right or wrong, be it about things evil in themselves or morally indifferent, is obligatory, in such wise that he who acts against his conscience always sins. ~ Thomas Aquinas

The elaboration of central mapping involves conceptual development within the COURT frame, yielding the transference of the following features:

– 'affiliation to court': *There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the **court of conscience**. It supersedes all other courts.* ~ Mahatma Gandhi

– 'witnessing' and 'accusing': *There is no **witness** so terrible and no **accuser** so powerful as conscience which dwells within us.* ~ Sophocles

– 'innocence': *A clear **and innocent conscience** fears nothing.* ~ Elizabeth I

– 'guilt': *A **guilty conscience** needs no accuser.* ~ English Proverb

The personification of CONSCIENCE proves the fact that being a part of the human mind and nature, conscience is subconsciously viewed as a person who can carry out typical actions, primarily judging. The central mapping undergoes elaboration and is realized within the frame COURT. Analysis of this ontological mapping enables us to state that conscience is viewed as an entity, which blames (ACCUSER), testifies (WITNESS), and brings out a verdict (JUDGE). The latter role can also be done in relation to oneself, i.e. by means of self-judgement (DEFENDANT). Evidently, central mapping involves enantiosemic domains, which indicates that conscience is conceptualized as an entity possessing opposite or even mutually exclusive features. This proves

that CONSCIENCE as an ethical concept is represented in the construal of the world as an all-round reference frame for making moral judgements. Therefore, conscience as a constituent of the human mind performs axiological and deontological functions. The conceptual zone of this mapping is formed by the elaboration and extension of the central mapping. The elaboration has two directions: mapping mental and physical properties of a person.

The mapping of human mental features involves the transference of the following traits:

- 'approving: *Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but they whose heart is firm, and whose* **conscience approve**s *their conduct, will pursue their principles unto death.* ~ Leonardo da Vinci

- 'assuming': *The* **conscience** *of the world is so guilty that it always* **assumes** *that people who investigate heresies must be heretics.* ~ Aleister Crowley

- 'abiding': *The one thing that doesn't* **abide by** *majority rule is a person's* **conscience**. ~ Harper Lee

- 'worrying' and 'soothing': *I* **soothe my conscience** *now with the thought that it is better for hard words to be on paper than that Mummy should carry them in her heart.* ~ Anne Frank; *Repentance is a sweet* **solace** *to* **conscience**. ~ Deborah Sampson

- 'fearing': *Clear* **conscience** *never* **fears** *midnight knocking.* ~ Chinese proverb

- 'being erroneous': A man's conscience and his judgment is the same thing; and as the judgment, so also the **conscience, may be erroneous**. ~ Thomas Hobbes

- 'conflicting': *Amidst the confusion of the times, the* **conflicts of conscience**, *and the turmoil of daily living, an abiding faith becomes an anchor to our lives.* ~ Thomas S. Monson

- 'having spiritual virtues and vices': *Conscience is a coward, and those* **faults** *it* **has** *not* **strength** *enough to prevent it seldom* **has justice** *enough to accuse.* ~ Oliver Goldsmith

- 'having freedom': *War is wrong. Conscription for war is inconsistent with* **freedom of conscience**, *which is not merely the right to believe but to act on the degree of truth that one receives, to follow a vocation which is God-inspired and God-directed.* ~ Bayard Rustin

To summarize, Elaboration 1 'mental abilities of a person' embraces a range of SD features, which can be subdivided into three categories. The first category – 'abstract thinking' includes abilities to make mental judgements, like the abilities to approve, assume, abide, and be erroneous, and has the tightest bonds with the central mapping – 'ability to judge'. The second category is represented by the emotional and spiritual plane of a person and includes features like 'worrying', 'fearing', 'soothing', and 'conflicting' along with the ability to possess moral virtues and vices, like 'having fault', 'strength' and 'a sense for justice'. This category is more distant from the central mapping and it represents the second part of the human soul – the emotional one. The third part is human willpower indicated by the projection of the feature 'having freedom'. In short, this vector of elaboration involves the transference of human features

belonging to all three parts of the human soul: namely the mind, feelings and willpower upon TD.

Mapping of human physical abilities and features involves one of the specifications of the SD PERSON – SPEAKER, which maps its following traits:

– speaking': *The **voice of conscience** is so delicate that it is easy to stifle it; but it is also so clear that it is impossible to mistake it.* ~ Madame de Stael

– 'telling' (what to do): *Conscience is what tells you not to do what you have just done.* ~ Spanish Proverbs

– 'asking questions': *Cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But **conscience asks the question, is it right**? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.* ~ Martin Luther King

– 'whispering': *One should be more concerned about what his **conscience whispers** than about what other people shout.* ~ Author Unknown

– 'having tongue' (the property, which follows from the aforementioned): *My **conscience hath a thousand several tongues**, and every tongue brings in a several tale, and every tale condemns me for a villain.* ~ William Shakespeare

Further projection involves the transference of the following features:

– living': *For a lot of people their **conscience lives** in the middle of the street.* ~ German Proverb; *There is no witness so terrible and no accuser so powerful as **conscience** which **dwells** within us.* ~ Sophocles

– 'being bound': *An oath! Why, it is the traffic of the soul, it is law within a man; the seal of faith, the **bond of every conscience**; unto whom we set our thoughts like hands.* ~ Thomas Dekker

– 'being stung': *Oh **conscience**, upright and stainless, how **bitter a sting to thee** is a little fault!* ~ Dante Alighieri

– 'being pricked': *A pain that pricks the conscience is more effective than a lot of whip-lashes.* ~ Hebrew Proverb

We can conclude that Elaboration 2 'physical abilities' is even more conceptually remote from central mapping as it projects the bodily properties of a human upon the target abstract entity (like having a tongue). This fact states that conscience is viewed in the world construal as an independent human being in the biological sense, henceforward it can carry out and undergo actions characteristic of people (like being stung, pricked, etc). This elaboration forms the foundation for further elaboration within the domain SPEAKER. It can be explained by the assumption that conscience is seen as an entity, which makes judgments and prescribes carrying out morally correct actions. Therefore, the TD feature 'commanding' is aligned with the semantically more schematic SD feature 'speaking', sanctioning metaphoric(al) expressions such as the *voice of conscience, conscience tells or says etc.*

Alongside elaborations, we identified the extensions of the mapping, which presuppose transference of cognitive features from the SDs, hyponymic to the superordinate domain PERSON. They include:

– GUIDE: *People are getting smarter nowadays; they are **letting** lawyers, instead of their **conscience**, **be** their **guide***. ~ Will Rogers

– MASTER***: Conscience** is the root of all true courage; if a man would be brave let him **obey his conscience***. ~ James Freeman Clarke

– ENEMY: *A guilty **conscience** is a lively **enemy*** ~ Indian Proverb

– *It is easier to fight an army than to fight your conscience.* ~ Matshona Dhliwayo

– COWARD: ***Conscience** is a **coward**, and those faults it has not strength enough to prevent it seldom has justice enough to accuse.* ~ Oliver Goldsmith

– TAX PAYER: *Fear is **the tax that conscience pays** to guilt.* ~ George Sewell

– SENTINEL: ***Conscience** is the **sentinel** of virtue.* ~ Johann Kaspar Lavate

– INTERPRETER: ***Conscience** is the perfect **interpreter** of life.* ~ Karl Barth

Metaphoric personification is also represented by another mapping, namely 'CONSCIENCE IS GOD'. The central mapping is represented by the aligning SD feature 'living in human's soul' with the TD feature 'being part of human soul':

***Conscience is God** present in man.* ~ Victor Hugo

This transference sanctions the elaboration involving one of God's abilities:

– 'speaking': ***Conscience** is the **authentic voice of God** to you.* ~ Rutherford B. Hayes

The mapping CONSCIENCE IS GOD is sanctioned by the imperative and prescriptive character of conscience. If God is the one who guides people to moral uprightness, such a mapping becomes valid and develops a specified elaboration CONSCIENCE IS GOD'S VOICE, since voice is the main means of guiding people, i.e. giving commands, directions or imperatives.

4.2 Mapping 2 'CONSCIENCE IS A THING'

The next primary mapping is CONSCIENCE IS A THING, which is in line with the edifice of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory positing that abstract things are conceptualized in relation to physical entities. The central projection is represented by the feature 'ability to be possessed', mapped upon the abstract TD:

***Conscience** – is the only incorruptible **thing about us**.* ~ Henry Fielding

The elaboration includes the following features:

- 'purity' and 'cleanliness': *Doctors **purge** the body, ministers the **conscience**, lawyers the purse*. ~ German Proverb.

- 'being cut': *I cannot and will not **cut my conscience** to fit this year's fashion*. ~ Lillian Hellman

- 'being lost': *He that **loses his conscience** has nothing left that is worth keeping*. ~ Izaak Walton

We tend to believe that defilement of moral uprightness is conceptualized as damage or disappearance, which is characteristic of physical bodies. The projection of the feature 'purity' is rooted in central life experience, in which cleanliness is good and sound, while dirt is bad and corrupted. As conscience is a measure of moral rightness the projection of 'purity' is fairly justified.

Alongside these elaborations, the analyzed mapping also includes extensions by projections involving the following source domains:

- WATER BODY: *Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the **surface** of the average **conscience** a still, small voice says to us, something is out of tune*. ~ Carl Jung

- LOUDSPEAKER: *If you can't hear your conscience, turn up the volume*. ~ Frank Sonnenberg

- MEASURE: *Your **conscience is the measure** of the honesty of your selfishness. Listen to it carefully*. ~ Richard Bach

- FIRE: *Labor to keep alive in your breast that little **spark of celestial fire, called conscience***. ~ George Washington

- COMPASS: ***Conscience is** a man's **compass***. ~ Vincent Van Gogh; ***Conscience is** our magnetic **compass.*** ~ Joseph Cook

- SACRIFICE: *He who **sacrifices his conscience** to ambition burns a picture to obtain the ashes*. ~ Chinese proverb

- ROOT: ***Conscience is the root** of all true courage; if a man would be brave let him **obey his conscience***. ~ James Freeman Clarke

- BASEMENT: *Society **rests upon conscience** and not upon science*. ~ Henri-Frederic Amiel.

- FIELD: *Nothing has ever remained of any revolution but what **was ripe in the conscience** of the masses*. ~ Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin

- MIRROR: ***Conscience is the mirror** of our souls, which represents the errors of our lives in their full shape*. ~ George Bancroft

- ROAD MARKING: *A man's **conscience, like a warning line** on the highway, tells him what he shouldn't do - but it does not keep him from doing it*. ~ Frank A. Clark

- STEEL: *Hatred is **corrosive of** a person's wisdom and **conscience***. ~ Liu Xiaobo

- CONTAINER: *Put your hand **in your conscience** and see if it does not come out as black as pitch*. ~ Dutch proverb

Within this mapping it is possible to single out its variation: CONSCIENCE IS A FORCE. This mapping is secondary in relation to the two primary mappings: 'CONSCIENCE IS A PERSON' and 'CONSCIENCE IS A THING' since force is a more abstract phenomenon and it has no direct visual and tactile image, unlike PERSON or THING. Nonetheless, force can be experienced first-hand, since central life experience presupposes an awareness of physical dynamic influences and counter influences, which makes FORCE a productive source domain for the mappings:

> *Never do anything **against conscience** even if the state demands it.* ~Albert Einstein

> *"It is easier to fight the world than to **wrestle your conscience.*** ~ Matshona Dhliwayo

5 Conclusions

The results obtained in the paper prove that conscience as an abstract ethical concept is conceptualized through basic concrete things, which make up human central life experience. The primary mappings are CONSCIENCE IS A PERSON and CONSCIENCE IS A THING, which have elaborations and extensions. This conclusion is in line with CMT, which posits that abstract entities are viewed as concrete objects. The two secondary mappings are CONSCIENCE IS A FORCE and CONSCIENCE IS GOD, the source domains of which bear a higher level of abstraction. The impact of the findings of this paper is twofold: scholarly and practical. The scholarly impact is that the achieved results can be used in linguistic and cultural metaphor studies and in concept studies within the area of cognitive linguistics. Since the object of the research is an ethical/philosophic concept, the results obtained in the paper may also prove useful for philosophical reflections and generalizations in the sphere of ethics and deontology. The practical value is in the possibility to use the obtained results in developing eloquence and poetic language by appealing to conceptual metaphors through metaphorical expressions. The perspective of further studies could be the research of ontological metaphors for other moral concepts, like JUSTICE, DUTY, DIGNITY, etc., upgraded by comparing and contrasting the ways they are conceptualized in the construal of the world.

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KAJ JE ZAVEST? NEKAJ ONTOLOŠKIH METAFOR V AFORIZMIH V ANGLEŠKEM JEZIKU

Članek obravnava nekatere ontološke metafore s ciljno domeno ZAVEST v angleško govorečem pojmovanju sveta. Osnovni namen je raziskati meddomenske preslikave z analizo metaforičnih izrazov v aforizmih o človeški zavesti. Analizirano gradivo predstavlja korpus aforizmov o zavesti, pridobljen z metodo kontinuiranega vzorčenja na podlagi podatkov iz spletnih zbirk. Aforizmi kot duhoviti in udarni izreki pogosto vsebujejo metaforični jezik, zato predstavljajo reprezentativno gradivo za analizo pojmovnih metafor. Raziskava temelji na načelih in metodologiji teorije konceptualne metafore. Analiza metaforičnih izrazov s ciljnim leksemom *zavest* je omogočila določitev štirih konceptualnih preslikav. Dokazano je, da je vsako kartiranje tesno strukturirano, nadalje, da je sestavljeno iz osrednjega kartiranja in metaforičnih elaboracij, ki sestavljajo konceptualno območje. Prav tako je bilo dokazano, da sta dve od štirih kartiranj nagnjeni k ekstenziji, kar vodi k projekciji kognitivnih lastnosti nadrejenih nadpomenk izvorne domene na ciljni pojem. Dobljeni rezultati potrjujejo, da je zavest kot abstraktna entiteta konceptualizirana v povezavi z znanjem o osnovnih konkretnih stvareh iz osrednje življenjske izkušnje. Članek podaja razmišljanja o začrtanih metaforičnih prenosih in interpretira izpostavljene metaforične projekcije s kognitivnega vidika, zaradi česar je lahko koristen tako za teoretike, ki se ukvarjajo z metaforiko in jezikovnimi študijami, kot tudi za praktike, ki si prizadevajo za izvorno retoriko s sklicevanjem na pojmovne metafore prek jezikovnih metaforičnih izrazov.

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