# A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE METAPHORI-CAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT «LIFE» IN LITE-RARY DISCOURSE (BASED ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LITERARY TEXTS OF 19-20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

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*Summary*: The major objective of this study is to provide insight into the key role of metaphorical expressions in the conceptualization and proper understanding of the LIFE concept, generated in literary discourse. With this aim in mind, examples related to the conceptual domain of LIFE from literary texts of famous American and English authors of the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries are reviewed. Many-correspondence metaphors that are constituent parts of a more general conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY are described.

#### 1. Introduction

*Life* as a many-sided phenomenon characterized by a number of properties is a perennial subject of discussion and *a priori* of great interest for a broad range of research fields. It has been widely discussed that numerous definitions of the term «life» embrace its biological, medical, cultural, literary, philosophical, psychological aspects etc.

In the frame of the modern interdisciplinary approach to the study of a language which may be characterized as the cross-disciplinary interaction between such disciplines as linguistics, cognitive semantics, psychology and culture studies, the phenomenon of «life» is viewed from a cognitive perspective and studied in terms of the *concept* which has a verbalization potential in a language and can provide valuable cultural information. The knowledge underlying any concept may be exchanged or shared in the discourse. In literary discourse the LIFE<sup>1</sup> concept may have many interpretations and therefore occur in a variety of different forms of verbal representation. This reflects individual nature of human cognition as people from different cultures may comprehend the surrounding world in dissimilar ways.

This paper deals with the analysis of the LIFE concept from a cognitive standpoint that explores the structural characteristics of the LIFE concept categorization in the form of conceptual metaphor in the literary discourse of the English language. We decided that it would be interesting to investigate the perception of the LIFE concept in the English language mapping of the world in literary discourse since literature is such an area which can be abundant in various types of metaphorical representations of concepts.

Firstly, a brief review of cognitive linguistics, concept, and conceptual metaphor as effective means of interpreting concepts will be given, and then the analysis of the concept LIFE will be presented.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Small capitals are used to indicate the name of the concept (here: LIFE) as well as conceptual metaphors.

## 2. Theoretical Background to the Research

Cognitive linguistics, one of the modern schools in linguistics today, explores the process of perception of the reality and concentrates on studying and understanding how the language reflects our experiences of the world. It «places central importance on the role of meaning, conceptual processes and embodied experience in the study of language and the mind and the way in which they intersect» [Evans 2007: 22]. In this sense, this branch of linguistics argues that the cognitive ability to use language is closely connected to some other abilities which include the abilities to perceive, conceptualize and categorize the information.

The cognitive ability of the humans to conceptualize helps to distinguish objects around and thus to orient in the world. This is due to the fact that in the process of perception of the world phenomena and creation of the images, as a result of all senses employed, some associations are drawn to form *concepts* which combine information about the world around in the human mental system. So this construction of meaning of the things around us takes place at the conceptual level. In this case, «meaning construction is equated with conceptualization, a dynamic process whereby linguistic units serve as prompts for an array of conceptual operations and the recruitment of background knowledge» [Evans & Green 2006: 162].

Thus, although concept as a purely logical category is only a property of our mental sphere and the essential part of our mental reality, it may be found externalized by means of language. «Concepts encoded in language take a modality-specific format known as a lexical concept» [Evans 2007: 38]. In the process of verbalisation of the concepts, the function of linguistic units such as words is to make contribution to the process of meaning construction through the great semantic potential encoded in them. This means that they conventionally provide access to a rich body of encyclopaedic knowledge stored in the minds of people in a set of concepts [Evans 2007: 38, 123-124].

In the book of the Russian cognitive linguist E.S.Kubryakova [Kubryakova 1996: 91], it is said that some bits of information about the conceptual subject, which reflect the worldview underlying each concept, may be expressed not only in the form of a language sign with its corresponding meaning, but also by means of «mental representation», i.e. images, schemes and pictures in the mentality of a person. This is due to the fact that metaphoricalness is in the nature of human thought processes. Lakoff and Johnson in their study named Metaphors We Live By assert that «the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined» and metaphor plays a part of a common and irreplaceable tool used rather «unconsciously and automatically» [Lakoff & Turner 1989: xi]. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson [Lakoff & Johnson 1980] claim that our daily life is effortlessly pervaded with various metaphorical expressions that reflect the way we perceive and conceptualize the world around. So, being pervasive both in language and thought, metaphors allow us to easily understand certain concepts in terms of the other. In fact, «we use [metaphors] systematically to conceive of our more abstract, subjective experiences (e.g. the workings of our minds), in terms of concrete, physical experiences (e.g. manipulating physical objects)» [Gibbs 2008: 235].

From a perspective of cognitive linguistics, «a conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another», presenting «any coherent organization of experience» [Kövecses 2010: 4]. These two domains are named *source* and *target* domains. The *source* domain is the one from which we draw metaphorical linguistic expressions to understand another conceptual domain, called *the target domain* (in our case the LIFE concept). To illustrate this point, consider some of the examples developed from the conceptual metaphor «LOVE IS A JOURNEY» from Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* [1980]: 'Look *how far we've come'*, 'We can't *turn back* now', and 'This relationship is a *dead-end street*'. Johnson [Johnson 1987: 98] states:

«Metaphors are sometimes creative in giving rise to structure within our experience. That is, they do not merely report pre-existing, independent experience, rather they contribute to the process by which our experience and our understanding <...> are structured in a coherent and meaningful fashion.»

Consequently, metaphoricalness of thinking, understanding, reasoning and expression serves as an effective way in the process of conceptualization, creation and description of the social and cultural reality in the mental activity and language of a person. From this very point the research into peculiarities of the connection among language, mind and culture demonstrated with an example of the LIFE concept is based on the theory of conceptual metaphor.

Within the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) created by Lakoff and Johnson [1980; 1999] and developed further by Lakoff and Turner [1989], in this paper we will analyze various metaphorical expressions underlying such an abstract concept as the LIFE concept. The application of CMT will demonstrate how conceptual metaphor is effective in analyzing and interpreting conceptual world mapping that is revolved around concepts, and in investigating social and cultural aspects of human cognition.

#### 3. Analysis of the LIFE concept

This section of the paper is devoted to the conceptual analysis of the LIFE concept expressed by means of conceptual metaphors. The analysis undergoes such stages as: 1) creation of the list of key lexical units related to the LIFE concept; 2) search for cognitively plausible metaphorical representations of LIFE by means of defined key words such as *life* and *to live* in the corpus of texts investigated; 3) detection of the source domains projected upon the target domain of «life»; 4) description of conceptual metaphors; 5) classification of the main imageries found within the domains of conceptual metaphors.

For the present study, we made use of the corpus analysis for collecting data from the literary works of prominent American and English authors of the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>2</sup>. The corpus of data for the analysis was excerpted and retrieved from online archives. The keywords for researching corpus data included *life* and *to live*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In order to narrow down the research, we have analyzed certain works of the following authors: Arnold M., Butler S., Dickens Ch., Dreiser Th., Galsworthy J., Joyce J., Lawrence D.H., London J., Maugham W.S., Mencken H.L.

We selected examples that showed the presence of metaphorical expressions of the LIFE concept and analyzed their patterns.

The analysis of data shows that such an abstract and elusive concept as LIFE is expressed by various types of conceptual metaphors, but is characterized mainly via metaphorical mappings of two conceptual domains – the source domain such as JOURNEY used to comprehend the target conceptual domain of LIFE. More specifically, the analysis of examples revealed that in the process of conceptualization of «life» through the prism of «journey» in the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, three dominant imageries such as «path» (moving forward), «process», and «moving object» or «stationary observer» can be distinguished with relation to: a) a two-dimensional space in conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A PATH WE [AS TRAVELLERS] MOVE THROUGH; b) a process in a «progressive» conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A PROCESS, which has certain discrete stages like starting and finishing points as well as separate phases and reached stages; c) an object in a «dynamic» conceptual metaphor with an active object in LIFE IS A MOVING OBJECT and a passive observer in LIFE IS A STATIONARY OBSERVER.

In the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, life of a person is associated with the travelling along the allotted lifetime. In the process of metaphorical representation, the LIFE concept is structured in the concrete domain of journey, using spatial and dynamic terms, peculiar to the JOURNEY scheme. This means that the structures mapped form the source domain of «journey» to the target domain of «life» should be that of the «path» scheme which is at the heart of the «journey» domain. The most typical mappings peculiar to the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY are given below with relevant linguistic examples.

#### a) LIFE IS A PATH WE [AS TRAVELLERS] MOVE THROUGH:

- (1) He did not know how wide a country, arid and precipitous, must be crossed before *the traveller through life* comes to an acceptance of reality (W.S.Maugham, Of Human Bondage).
- (2) He had been perturbed always by a feeling of unrest, had heard always the call of something from beyond, and *had wandered on through life* seeking it until he found books and art and love (J.London. Martin Eden).
- (3) Even before *they set out on life's journey* they seemed weary already of the way (J.Joyce. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man).

Example (1) makes it obvious that the path of life can be rather difficult to comprehend and reality around this path is not always accepted easily by «the travellers». As a result, as example (2) shows, people, just like the travellers speculating on which route to take when preparing an itinerary, often «wander» around in search of their «right route», defined as a rule by the things that should take priorities in their course of life, and, before they have actually found it and are ready to start «their real» journey, they might already feel tired during the process, which is confirmed by example (3). Some travellers through life though choose to go where there is no path and lay out their own trail:

(4) I *made my own way* and I shall expect my sons to do the same (S.Butler. The Way of All Flesh).

Further examples give more insight into the conceptualization of the LIFE concept via the PATH scheme.

- (5) ... I fervently trust and pray that this retreat may be *the turning point in the life* of that soul (J.Joyce. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man).
- (6) *Life* is a dead-end street (H.L.Mencken).

In English, life is often described as a path which has the beginning, certain points of destination, like «the turning point in the life» given in example (5), barriers along the way and, finally, its end. In example (6), the vivid imagery of an impasse is well employed for linking the LIFE concept to that of the DEATH, indicating that forward motion of the travellers along the course of life is headed towards its final destination, i.e. death.

In all these examples, life is comprehended as a still space with a bounded path leading to certain points of destination, through which people move forward, from past to the future. The main characteristic of this «journey» metaphor is a linear direction, succession and progressiveness. The conceptual metaphor above can be called «two-dimensional space» metaphor because each of the examples illustrates its connection to the PATH scheme.

The established metaphorical mappings of LIFE IS A JOURNEY may include more metaphorical expressions based on such specific source domain as *«life as a sea (river) journey»*, e.g.:

- (7) The fact that she was alone, away from home, *rushing into a great sea of life* and endeavour, began to tell ... Carrie scarcely heard, her head was *so full of the swirl of life* ... Carrie *drifted out of his life* (T.Dreiser. Sister Carrie).
- (8) If only Birkin would form a close and abiding connection with her, she would be safe during *this fretful voyage of life* (D.H.Lawrence. Women in Love).
- (9) He had never, till those last few weeks, had this curious feeling of being with one half of him eagerly borne along *in the stream of life*, and with the other half left *on the bank*, watching that helpless progress (J.Galsworthy. The Forsyte Saga).
- (10)...pity of his own nature rose and fell like *the rising, falling waves of life*... (J.Galsworthy. The Forsyte Saga).

The physical setting of the sea (river) is utilized in the above metaphorical expressions in (7-10) to draw a parallel between certain perceptual aspects characterizing such physical environment as «sea (river)» and an abstract concept of LIFE. The SEA (RIVER) JOURNEY source domain is used metaphorically to describe life due to some physical characteristics of the sea (river) (*«a great sea», «stream», «bank»*), and the «changeable», «fretful» physical events happening at it (*«the swirl»*). While the sea (river) might be unpredictable because of the unexpected

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changes in weather conditions which may occur, the «sea» of life also depends on numerous kinds of «challenging» circumstances, both favorable, often leading to peaceful state of mind, success, great achievements, and negative, causing stress, despair, and failure. Yet the latter can at the same time make people stronger psychologically.

The other metaphorical expressions related to the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY are its extension and mainly delineate the «motion» scheme as well. Consider the following example:

#### b) LIFE IS A PROCESS:

(11) And all *life was a rotary motion*, mechanized, cut off from reality (D.H.Lawrence. Women in Love).

The «motion» scheme (11) in conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A PROCESS is used to indicate an unceasing process of life in its «fictive rotary» motion. On the whole, the given view on life is rather of philosophical nature. However, most of examples, characterizing the process of life, clearly depict discrete points of the beginning and ending of life. This is clear in the following examples:

- (12) And William went to London *to start a new life*...The only times when he entered again into the life of his own people was when he worked, and was happy at work (D.H.Lawrence. Sons and Lovers).
- (13) It was an interesting world to her. *Her life had just begun...*He began to imagine it would not be so difficult to enter into her life again, high as she was. (T.Dreiser. Sister Carrie).
- (14) This was George's great start in life (S.Butler. The Way of All Flesh).
- (15) He was really *starting life*, and it made Philip more restless to think of it (W.S.Maugham. Of Human Bondage).

In the above given examples (12-15), it is evident that both the starting and finishing points in the journey of life arouse various feelings of positive as well as negative nature. The beginning of life is closely related to the various tones of feelings and emotional states that people may experience. Being well-prepared to start the process and actually interested in «the process of living», feeling happy, and having great expectations concerning new adventures of life are highly positive. On the contrary, being restless about the uncertainty of life path shows negative feelings of the person experiencing it.

As regards the final stage of life, when the whole picture of life is put together like a jigsaw puzzle with different events as its constituents, people may experience twofold, dubious feelings, for example «peace» and «disappointment», which can be seen in the following lines:

(16) This was the first time that an utter and absolute peace had entered his heart, now, in *this final transit out of life* (D.H.Lawrence. Women in Love).

(17) She *finished life off* so thoroughly, she made things so ugly and so final (D.H.Lawrence. Women in Love).

As it is seen in the above two examples (16 and 17), accomplishing the goals and missions in one's life, which is analogous to arriving at a certain destination in a journey, can lead to positive emotional state, when «a traveller» is generally satisfied and content with the achieved aims and the whole «journey», and conversely, to negative feelings, when a person feels displeased with it.

The data show that the LIFE concept can be comprehended with the help of metaphorical mappings of the «motion» imagery embedded in such conceptual metaphor as LIFE IS A MOVING OBJECT, i.e. «an object, moving forth, often past another stationary object» (18-19):

#### c) LIFE IS A MOVING OBJECT:

- (18) Sometimes she had periods of tight horror, when it seemed to her that her *life would pass away*, and *be gone*, without having been more than this (D.H.Lawrence. Women in Love).
- (19) At the last moment of consciousness *the whole earthly life passed before the vision of the soul* and, ere it had time to reflect, the body had died and the soul stood terrified before the judgment seat (J.Joyce. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man).

The given sentences exemplify metaphorical linguistic expressions in which life represents itself through sensorimotor actions that people experience, e.g. «life would pass away, and be gone», «life passed». Such metaphors are ubiquitous in everyday language.

Examples (20-24) reveal that integral features in the imagery of life as a moving entity such as «speed» and «manner» of «life» motion are foregrounded as significant characteristics of a more general «journey» metaphor.

- (20) *Life went smoothly* enough with them (W.S.Maugham. Of Human Bondage).
- (21) There had been so little communication between these two both because *life* at Stone Lodge *went monotonously round* like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference... (Ch.Dickens. Hard Times).
- (22) *The evil spirit of his life had flitted away again*, months ago... (Ch.Dickens. Hard Times).
- (23) You thought you had hold of *life*, but *it slipped away* behind you, *took you* by the scruff of the neck, *forced* you *here* and *forced* you *there*, and then, likely as not, *squeezed life* out of you! (J.Galsworthy. The Forsyte Saga).
- (24) If it had ever been here, its ashes alone would save me from the void in which *my whole life sinks* (Ch.Dickens. Hard Times).

Any human life leads to its final destination. While to some people its motion may seem to be rather imperceptible or slow enough, others may live rapid

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lives. So the examples in (20-24) focus not on the destination path, but rather on the manner of motion (20, 21 and 24) and its speed, mostly highlighting the nature of its fleetingness. In this regard, rapid locomotion of «life» expressed well in examples (22 and 23) is closely connected not only with the dynamics, such as «self-propelled» motion, but also with the subjective temporal awareness of the speaker.

The MOTION scheme in conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A MOVING OBEJCT can be mapped into a more specific source domain such as «life as a tidal wave». To illustrate this, the following examples should be considered:

- (25) A man becomes aware of his *life's flow* and hears its *winding murmur* (M.Arnold. The Buried Life).
- (26) He had tried to build a break-water order and elegance against *the sordid tide of life* without him and to dam up, by rules of conduct and active interest and new filial relations, *the powerful recurrence of the tides* within him (J.Joyce. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man).
- (27) *To merge his life in the common tide of other lives* was harder for him than any fasting or prayer and it was his constant failure to do this to his own satisfaction which caused in his soul at last a sensation of spiritual dryness together with a growth of doubts and scruples (J.Joyce. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man).

All examples in (25-27) are linguistic metaphors that reveal the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A (SEA/RIVER) JOURNEY. They manifest life as something unstoppable, uncontrollable, a substance that is of great depth and might guide a life journey or break over people changing their life paths completely. Suffice it to say that we sometimes rely on the nature of «tidal waves», in other words on circumstances beyond our control, which take us further in our lives.

In other examples (28-30), the correlation between journey and life is mapped by a specific source domain such as LIFE IS A STATIONARY OBSERVER, which presents life as «an object that is stationary with respect to another, moving one». Consider the examples provided below:

#### d) LIFE IS A STATIONARY OBSERVER:

- (28) He was seeking a new orientation, and until that was found *his life must stand still* (J.London. Martin Eden).
- (29) He was waiting for some impulse, from he knew not where, *to put his stopped life into motion* again (J.London. Martin Eden).
- (30) He sought Waterloo Station in a disturbed frame of mind, as though the skin of his moral being had been scraped; and all the way down in the train he thought of ... *the strange paralysis of life* that lay on them both (J.Galsworthy. The Forsyte Saga).

The metaphorical linguistic expressions as given above in examples (28-30) reveal both conventionalized and unconventional (novel) metaphorical expressions. While the first two sentences provide clichéd examples of talking about

life as «a motionless entity» in English: «life must stand still» and «stopped life», (30) strikes us because of the usage of a novel metaphorical linguistic expression, such as «the strange paralysis of life», where the word «paralysis» is used to indicate the lack of motion and thus to describe «a still life».

#### 4. Conclusion

The research has been set within the tenets of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory [Lakoff & Johnson 1980], which claims that metaphors are deeply rooted in our conceptual system, linking two conceptual domains, which are the «source» domain and the «target» domain. Within this theoretical framework, the present study has been aimed at exploring and demonstrating the variety of metaphorical representations that define the universal concept of LIFE (namely «human life» that covers a period from birth to death) in the literary discourse of the English language, particularly focusing on the literary works of various prominent English and American authors of the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A cognitive-semantic analysis of the corpus of obtained examples has revealed that the idea of life is extensively conceived in terms of a conventional conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which is evoked by the correspondence between two explicit domains: the target domain of «life» and the source domain of «journey». Further analysis has shown the dominant models within the aforementioned conceptual metaphor. Further in-depth analysis has shown that there are many-correspondence metaphors within the aforementioned conceptual metaphor.

The main metaphorical models, which have been distinguished on the basis of such dominant imageries as «path», «process» and «moving object/stationary observer», include: 1) LIFE IS A PATH WE [AS TRAVELLERS] MOVE THROUGH; 2) LIFE IS A PROCESS; 3) LIFE IS A MOVING OBJECT, and 4) LIFE IS A STATIONARY OBSERVER.

More generally, the concept of LIFE in English is viewed as a journey along location like a «path» or more specific *road, street, sea/river* etc., with people as *travellers* traversing it from the point of embarkation or birth, its salient intermediate stations (here: periods in life) and finally reaching the end (death). Life is conceptualised in terms of the domain of «physical motion», which has both starting and finishing points, and is characterized by the «speed» and «manner» of the MOTION scheme. Moreover, the concept of LIFE is systematically structured in terms of concrete physical experience, i.e. «life» appears to be understood as an entity moving forward at different speeds, or as a stationary observer.

Various patterns in metaphorical representations related to the LIFE concept have also provided evidence to more mappings, in which the phenomenon of life is conceived by means of «(life as) a sea or river» and «(life as) a tidal wave». The findings have revealed that literary language presents both conventional and novel metaphorical expressions related to the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor.

Our investigation and results have shown that the conceptual metaphor is a key instrument in the process of reconstructing concepts they represent and in building linkages among various conceptual domains, thus creating coherent components of the holistic conceptual system. In essence conceptual «metaphor is a primary tool for understanding our world and our selves» [Lakoff & Turner 1989: 11 of preface]. Metaphors can be an effective and valuable means in revealing and giving access to the particular features inhering in concepts, especially in the context of literary works which play a significant role in the processing and construction of meaning.

In this paper, we have explored the concept of LIFE by virtue of conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY; however, the research into the structure of this concept could be expanded further, especially with regard to other source domains and mappings.

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