

## CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN FAIRY TALES

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### Анотация

Визира се ролята на първичната когнитивна метафора във вълшебните приказки: ключ за интерпретацията на техния смисъл и механизъм, структуриращ сюжета. Подчертани са някои паралели между когнитивната метафора в сънищата и приказките. Анализирани са ограничен корпус от текстове.

Ключови думи: първична когнитивна метафора, вълшебни приказки, сюжет, интерпретация на смисъла

### I. Introduction

Recent development in cognitive science has radically changed the long-held traditional view of metaphor as a mere figure of speech. Metaphor is not just a matter of language, it is *a matter of thought* reflected in language (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 6). According to three of the main tenets of cognitive science, most thought is *unconscious*, most thought is *metaphorical* in nature and *conceptual metaphor* is “*the language of the unconscious*” (Lakoff 2001, abstr.). Therefore, **conceptual metaphor analysis** in any form of written or spoken language is important for *the interpretation of meaning*. In fact, the latest linguistic approach to literature is that of *cognitive metaphor*.

Conceptual metaphor structures not only ordinary thought, but also *dreams*, and connects the hidden meanings of dreams to their overt meanings and images in a systematic way (Lakoff 2001, abstr.). Freud’s notion of *symbolization* in dreams is the same mechanism that cognitive scientists refer to as *conceptual metaphor* (Lakoff 2001, para. 6). In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud points out that this *symbolism* is not typical of dreams only but of *unconscious ideation* and is also to be found in *folklore, popular myths and legends* to a more complete extent than in *dreams* (Freud 1965, section VI.E, p. 386). Because of the similarity between *the symbolic character of dreams* and *fairy tales* Freud used *fairy tales* to illustrate his theories of the mind and applied the psychoanalytic method he used in *dream analysis* to interpret *symbols in fairy tales* and unveil their *hidden content*. The parallels between *symbolization (conceptual metaphor)* in *dreams* and *symbolism (conceptual metaphor)* in *folk tales* (as a form of unconscious ideation) in particular imply that **conceptual metaphor analysis** in fairy tales is *essential for the interpretation of meaning* and that conceptual metaphor in fairy tales may function as a *plot structuring mechanism*<sup>1</sup> - in the same way as *symbols in a dream* are *crucial for its analysis* and constitute *the framework* of the dream. *Symbols* are a key to *the hidden meaning, the latent content* of a dream. The latent content represents *the message of the unconscious, the essence* of a dream, its true meaning. So *conceptual metaphor* may be *the key to the hidden meaning* of the unconscious creation, *the essence* of the folk tale. Provided conceptual metaphor is *the cornerstone for the interpretation of meaning* in fairy tales, *the plot* may actually be built up *on the groundwork of conceptual metaphors*, since the plot outline of fairy tales is always consistent and intertwined with the basic meaning of the tale.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I have adopted the view of conceptual metaphor in fairy tales as pivotal for the interpretation of meaning and a plot structuring mechanism (see Javier Herrero Ruiz, *Conceptual metaphors in fairy tales. The cases of: Acquiescence is Swallowing, Intelligence is Light, a Child is a Hope of Change and Renewal, Darkness is a Cover and Powerful is Witty*) but via somewhat different theoretical approach - with an emphasis on primary metaphors and parallels between fairy tales and dreams

Fairy tales share amazingly similar plot outlines and motifs even across distant cultures. On the one hand, this may be accounted for by their characterization as “the purest expression of the collective unconscious” (M. L. von Franz 1996, 1), according to Jung’s theory, where there is “much less cultural overlay” than in myths or legends (M. L. von Franz 1996, 1). On the other, from *a linguistic point of view*, since fairy tales are abundant in *symbols (conceptual metaphors)*, similarities may be explained by the manifestation of a specific kind of metaphor which is thought to be grounded in *universal primary experience*, namely, *primary metaphor*. According to Grady’s Theory of Primary Metaphor, part of the Integrated Theory of Primary Metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, pp. 45-59), *primary metaphors* are considered *potentially universal* because they are based on *universal bodily* (or “embodied”) experience. *Sensorimotor experiences (source domain)* are projected onto *subjective experiences (target domain)* e.g. emotions and achievement. So we conceptualize *subjective experience* in terms of our *sensorimotor experience*. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “We acquire a large system of primary metaphors automatically and unconsciously simply by functioning in the most ordinary ways in everyday world from our earliest years. We have no choice in this”, and, “we all naturally think using hundreds of primary metaphors.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 47). Thus, *primary conceptual metaphors* in fairy tales may reveal *common ground between cultures* and their analysis is important for the enhancement of *intercultural competence*.

## II. Study of the Metaphors

### 1. FEAR IS COLD (a special case of EMOTION IS TEMPERATURE *primary metaphor*)

Experiential basis.

When we feel *fear* our body reacts as it reacts to *cold* and we conceptualize the emotion of *fear* as our physiological experience of *cold* by means of association between the two domains: *concrete sensory domain (cold)* and *the abstract domain of emotion (fear)*.

Conceptual metaphors often interact with conceptual metonymies, which are contiguity relations within one domains. For example, the CAUSE FOR EFFECT mapping has been successfully applied to the study of emotions by means of establishing a general metonymic principle: THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR THE EMOTION (Strugielska and Alonso 2007, para. 5)

Examples from everyday language.

Bulgarian:

- (1) *Замръзнах на място от страх* (“I froze in fear”)
- (2) *Тръпки ме побиха от страх* (“It gave me the shivers”)
- (3) *Изтръгнах от страх* (“I shuddered with fear”)

German:

- (1) *zittern wie Espenlaub* (“to shiver like a leaf”)
- (2) *kalte Füße bekommen/kriegen* (“to get cold feet”)
- (3) *sich gruseln* (“to get the shivers out of fear”)

My analysis includes two fairy tales: a Bulgarian one: *The Boy Who Does Not Know What Fear Is*<sup>2</sup> (in Bulgarian, *Момчето, което не знае страх*) and a German one: *The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was*<sup>3</sup> (in German, *Von einem, der auszog, das Fürchten zu lernen*). Both share similar plot outlines. The protagonists leave their homes motivated by the desire to find out what *fear* is, they go through a series of adventures on their quest, in both versions represented by encounters with terrifying supernatural beings (dragons, evil woodland fairies and vampires in the Bulgarian version and ghosts in a haunted castle in the German version), and, finally, they both become kings in the realms they have freed from evil dark forces.

The FEAR IS COLD metaphor is explicit in the *The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was*. This is due to the recurrent linguistic expressions “*es gruselt mir*” (“*It gives me the shivers*”) and “*das Gruseln zu lernen*” (“*to learn about the shivers*” or, “*to learn how to get frightened*”) to denote fear in this tale (which motivated Ralph Manheim to translate the title of the tale *The Boy Who Left Home to Find Out About the Shivers*). But also because in the end the boy comes to know what shivers (i. e. *fear*) are after his wife empties a pail full of cold water and minnows on top of him, which finally “*gives him the shivers*”.

Though FEAR IS COLD metaphor is not explicitly present in the Bulgarian version, in both versions *fire* is a recurrent image as an antipode of *fear* (perceived as FEAR IS COLD metaphor). The image of *fire* appears immediately prior to most episodes where the protagonists encounter evil supernatural beings, therefore it is not an arbitrary image but shows coherence between the binary opposition *courage-fear* and FEAR IS COLD metaphor.

*Fire* is also a symbol of *the heart*. *The heart* has a central role in blood circulation and therefore in sustaining our body temperature. The Spanish word for *heart*, *corazón*, reflects the medieval conception of *the heart as the seat of courage*. *Сърцям* in Bulgarian means *courageous*, from the root *сърце* (“*heart*”). In German *sich ein Herz fassen* means *to take heart*.

*Fire* is also a symbol of *protection*. Primitive tribes used circles or walls of *fire* to secure themselves from the beasts. In the Bible God is often represented as *fire*, e. g. a *fire* wall of *protection*, *burning bush* or *fire* as light fighting darkness, demonic dark forces.

Both tales share yet another metaphor:

FEAR IS A SUPERNATURAL BEING, which, according to Kövecses, is a *specific* metaphor (Kövecses 2000, 23) where the **source** domain, *supernatural being*, is mapped on **only one target** emotion concept, *fear* (Kövecses 2000, 40).

Experiential basis.

On the one hand, the metaphor is based on the fact that we are all prone to blowing things out of proportion because of *fear*, to ascribing additional, illusory power to what (or whom) we are afraid of. On the other, we all have *fear* of the unknown and tend to impart a *mythical* form to it.

Examples from everyday language.

Bulgarian:

(1) *адски страх* (“*hellish fear*”)

(2) *обладан от страх* (“*possessed by fear*”)

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<sup>2</sup> The analysed Bulgarian fairy tales in this article are recorded in their oral form from authentic sources (see Парпулова Любомира и Доротея Добрева. *Българска народна поезия и проза*. Том 6. *Народни приказки*. София: Български писател. 1986).

<sup>3</sup> This tale is one of the two hundred and ten tales of the Brothers Grimm, translated by Ralph Manheim (a highly acclaimed, prize-winning translator) from the original German editions (see Grimm’s Tales for Young and Old, translated by Ralph Manheim. New York:Doubleday. 1983).

German:

(1) *eine höllische Angst haben* (“feel hellish fear”)

(2) *dämonische Angst* (“demonic fear”)

Since *specific-level* metaphors tend to be different cross-linguistically (Kövecses 2008, 55), the occurrence of the same *specific* metaphor across the two cultures implies particular similarity between the folklore systems and hence mentality. On the one hand, this is due to the primitive, mythological view of reality where *supernatural forces* occupied a central position (from ancient times through the Middle Ages). This in turn is justified by *the fear* of the unknown because of the limited knowledge of the natural world and the fact that every phenomenon for which there was no rational explanation, due to lack of systematic scientific knowledge, was interpreted by means of *mythological thinking*. But, on the other, this mode of thought is still present and is best exemplified in children’s *fears*. According to Jung’s theory of *the collective unconscious*: “In reality we are concerned with primitive or archaic thought forms, based on instinct, which naturally emerge more clearly in childhood than they do later. But they are not in themselves infantile, ... also the myth, which is likewise based on unconscious fantasy processes is, in meaning, substance and form far from being infantile ... even though it produces a world-picture which is scarcely consistent with our rational and objective view of things” (Jung 1956, 28).

2. EATING IS ACHIEVING A PURPOSE (a special case of ACHIEVING A PURPOSE IS ACQUIRING A DESIRED OBJECT *primary* metaphor)

Experiential basis.

*Eating* satisfies *hunger*, a major physical need in our lives. *Hunger drive* and *hunger satisfaction* are especially important during the infant (*oral*) phase. Satisfaction of our *physical needs* determines *major purposes* in our lives. *Food* is essential for living. Providing for *food* is *achieving a major purpose* in our lives. In most preliterate tribal societies the main part of all activities were concerned with production of *food*.

Related to another metaphor: RESOURCES ARE FOOD<sup>4</sup>. Most of our time is spent on activities destined to provide *resources* necessary for our daily needs. *Food* is a central *resource* to sustain our lives.

Examples from everyday language.

Bulgarian:

(1) *това е голям залък за твоята уста* (“Do not bite off more than you can chew”)

(2) *мога да усетя вкуса на победата* (“I can taste victory”)

(3) *плодовете на неговия труд* (“The fruit of his labour”)

English:

(1) *The league leaders fattened up on the last place team.*

(2) *He’s starved for a win.*

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<sup>4</sup> In *How Metaphor Structures Dreams: The Theory of Conceptual Metaphor Applied to Dream Analysis*, Lakoff analyses EATING IS ACHIEVING A PURPOSE and RESOURCES ARE FOOD metaphors as symbols in Pharaoh’s dream interpreted by Joseph (a story from the Old Testament). In the dream seven lean cows eat seven fat cows and seven withered ears of corn devour seven full ears of corn. Cows and corn stand for resources. The fat cows and full ears of corn stand for good years and the lean cows and withered ears are famine years. Fat is associated with success (“good years”), therefore eating is associated with achieving a purpose.

(3) *The sweet smell of success.*  
(Lakoff, 2001, para. 62)

My corpus includes *The Three Brothers and the Dragon* (a Bulgarian fairy tale, *Тримата братя и ламята*) and *Jack and the Beanstalk*<sup>5</sup> (an English fairy tale).

In the Bulgarian folk tale ACHIEVING A PURPOSE IS EATING metaphor is *explicit*. The direct relationship between *eating* and *the power of overcoming obstacles* (i. e. fighting the dragon in the story) is *the cornerstone* of the tale and is underlined repeatedly. The three brothers (“*three brave fellows*”), the eldest one first and the youngest one last, set on to kill the dragon (a she-dragon) that has swallowed many cattle and people. On his way the eldest one meets a vendor of buns and a shepherd before he gets to an orchard of pear and apple trees behind which the dragon lives. The vendor tells him that if he manages to eat all of the buns he will kill the dragon, but he could not eat all of the buns. Then he meets the shepherd and he tells him that if he manages to eat all of the butter and drink all of the milk he will kill the dragon, but he could not eat all of the butter and drink all of the milk. Then he gets to the pear and apple trees orchard and starts eating apples. The son of the dragon sees him and tells his mother about this. She asks him about the way the brave fellow is eating the apples, whether he is eating them “*with the leaves*” or is choosing “*only the soft ones*”. The little dragon answers that he is choosing only the soft apples. The dragon says that this is “*a good sign*”. Then she manages to outwit and swallow the eldest brother. When the younger brother sets on to kill the dragon, the story repeats itself. But the youngest one manages to eat all of the buns and even “*asks for more*”, he manages to eat all of the butter and drink all of the milk and “*asks for more*” again. In the dragon’s orchard he is eating the apples “*with the leaves*” and when the dragon learns about this she says that this is “*a bad sign*”. The dragon could not outwit and swallow the brave fellow but he hits her with his mace and kills her.

In *Jack and the Beanstalk* the metaphor is *implicit* but eating is still indicative of *achieving a purpose*. The protagonist climbs the ladder of the magic beanstalk and reaches the sky where an ogre lives with his wife in a great big house. Jack does this three times. The first and second time Jack asks the ogre’s wife very insistently to give him *something to eat* because he is *very hungry* and she does. When the ogre comes home she hides Jack in the oven. The ogre falls asleep and Jack takes two bags of gold and a hen that lays gold eggs. The third time Jack climbs up the beanstalk he steals a magic singing gold harp. He is then chased by the ogre and on his way down the beanstalk Jack cuts the beanstalk in two and the ogre falls down and dies.

It seems a little out of place that Jack is so concerned about being *hungry* at the ogre’s home. He is very insistent on asking the ogre’s wife for *food* even after she warns him that he is very likely to be the breakfast of her husband. It is also as unusual that the ogre’s wife (“*who wasn’t such a bad sort*”) treats him to breakfast. This moment of the story could easily be overlooked or ascribed to the (apparently) bizarre logic of fairy tales. But, if considered related to the metaphor EATING IS ACHIEVING A PURPOSE, the implication of this particular scene is clear, as well as its function as *a key* to the subsequent *development of events*.

In both tales there are two more prominent metaphors related to ACHIEVING A PURPOSE IS EATING: FOOD IS POWER and, therefore, EATING IS GAINING POWER. In the English tale Jack is treated to breakfast by the ogre’s wife because he is “*very hungry*”. His *eating* at the ogre’s home is symbolic of *drawing power* from the ogre’s *power* and his *hunger* is symbolic of *need for more power*.

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<sup>5</sup> The analysed English tales are from a collection of English folk tales recorded from authentic sources (see Neil, Philip (ed.). *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*. Penguin. 1992).

3. LOVE IS THIRST and DESIRE IS HUNGER (a special case of DESIRE IS HUNGER *primary* metaphor)

This is an association between *physical needs* (**source** domain *hunger* or *thirst*) and *emotional needs* (**target** domain *love*). According to Lakoff and Johnson “we typically conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical—that is, we conceptualize the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 59) and, “there are systematic correlates between our emotions and our sensory-motor experiences” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 58). LOVE IS HUNGER metaphor is related to LOVE IS A NUTRIENT conventional metaphor.

As Ariadna Strugielska and Maria Rosa Alonso Alonso (2007, para.1) point out, since *emotions* are the most *central* and *pervasive* aspect of human experience (associated with physiological reactions, expressed through our behaviour, reflected in language) an appropriate study of emotions requires an *interdisciplinary* research. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (Department of Psychology, University of California) et al. conducted a research on the relationship between body experiences of *hunger* and *desire* (R. W. Gibbs Jr. et al. 2004, pp. 1189-1210). According to the study, LOVE IS HUNGER metaphor is a special case of DESIRE IS HUNGER *primary* metaphor. *Desire* is associated with *hunger/thirst* because when we are *hungry/thirsty*, we experience *desire* for *food/water*. There are said to be systematic correspondences between feeling *hunger* and different aspects of *desire*, and this refers to people of all cultures. *Hunger* and *thirst* are frequently used to describe different *desire* experiences. For example, in English: *He hungers/thirsts for recognition. He hungers/thirsts for adventure. He hungers/thirsts for revenge.* In Portuguese: *I hunger/thirst for knowledge. I hunger/thirst for love. I hunger/thirst for revenge* (Gibbs et al. 2004, 1200). These *hunger/thirst* expressions have corresponding *thirst* translations in Bulgarian: *Той жадува за признание/ приключения/ отмъщение/ знания/любов.*

The study was conducted among American and Brazilian students and included two sets of *symptoms* (local and general bodily, and behavioral): *related* and *not related* to the experience of *hunger*. Results showed that items previously rated as highly relevant to *hunger* were seen as most acceptable to define *love*, *lust* and *desire*. The findings were generally *consistent* across American and Brazilian students (Gibbs et al. 2004, 1206).

Examples from everyday language.

Bulgarian:

- (1) жадувам за теб (“I long for you”)
- (2) изпивам с очи (“to devour with eyes”)
- (3) той е лапнал по нея (“He has a crush on her”)
- (4) неутолимо/ненаситно желание (“unquenchable/insatiable desire”)

English:

- (1) *She's thirsty for love and affection.*
- (2) *He's love-starved.*
- (3) *He hungered for love.*

These metaphors occur in *The Maiden that Came Out of a Watermelon* (in Bulgarian: *Мома от карпуз*) or *The Maiden that Came Out of a Golden Apple* (in Bulgarian: *Неподена мома*) Bulgarian fairy tales (two versions that share very similar plots and motifs) and *Sorrow and Love*, an English folk tale.

In *Sorrow and Love* the protagonist, the youngest daughter of a farmer, asks her father to bring her 1 d. of “*sorrow and love*”. He could not find what she asked for anywhere. Then a mysterious handsome gentleman promises he will give his daughter some *sorrow* and *love* if he meets her. She falls in *love* with him at first sight. He designates a definite time they

should meet again next morning but she is one second late. Then he *bites off* the tip of her little finger and makes three blood stains on the front of his white shirt, tells her his name (Squire King Kaley) and says that if she ever finds him again, she will be his wife. The *bit off* end of her little finger is one of *the signs* by which he recognizes her as his *true bride-to-be* in the end of the tale. So *the biting off* of the tip of the finger is a *symbolic act* that *bonds* the characters together.

In the Bulgarian folk tales the protagonist is given three magical watermelons/golden apples. He is told that if he cuts a fruit a beautiful maiden will appear and he has to be ready to give her *water/bread and salt*. In doing so “*she will be his and he will be hers*”. The first two times he cuts the fruit, a beautiful maiden comes out of it and she asks him for *water/bread and salt*, but since he does not have them, they “*die*”/“*disappear like a shadow*”. The third time the protagonist gives the maiden what she asks for and promises to marry her. In both versions *water/salt and bread* represent *love* that bonds the characters together. On the other hand, since the maiden dies if she is not given *water/salt and bread*, which stand for *love*, there is yet another metaphor: LOVE IS LIFE. LOVES IS LIFE metaphor is intertwined with DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor in the folk tales of Snow-White and Sleeping Beauty.

Both Bulgarian versions and the English folk tale share some *plot similarities*. There is a period of *separation* between the characters and the tales end with *a reunion*. A *gypsy woman* takes the place of the “true bride” by *treachery and deceit* in the Bulgarian versions. *The rival* in the English folk tale is *a lady* in the house of the Squire King (she is in charge of all the servants and household arrangements) and she uses *treachery and deceit* too to prevent the young girl from getting married to the squire. The rivals cause a series of *ordeals* upon the brides-to-be till *the truth comes out* and they *reunite* with their beloved.

In both Bulgarian versions and in the English tale LOVE IS HUNGER/THIRST metaphor underlies *the essence* of the tale and functions as *a plot structuring mechanism* because *love* (represented as *hunger/thirst*) destines the characters to be *united* despite obstacles and (temporary) separations. The notion of *unity* reveals the LOVE IS A UNITY metaphor. According to Kövecses, the central idea and hence metaphor, in the *love system* is the notion of UNITY, due to the prevalence of *source* domains as UNITY OF TWO COMPLEMENTARY PARTS, BOND and CLOSENESS, projected onto the emotion of LOVE (Kövecses 2000, 27).

Conceptual metaphors may project not only schematized bodily, but also enculturated experience onto abstract target domains and therefore, while some metaphors may be universal, others vary from culture to culture. But though “emotions are commonly said to be private and heavily culturally dependant experiences” and “for this reason, the language and underlying conceptualization of emotional experiences are expected to be highly culture-specific” (Kövecses 2005, 35), “this claim or expectation should be taken with a grain of salt” (Kövecses 2005, 36). The most pervasive type of metaphor, *the primary* metaphor, is grounded in embodied experience and this kind of experience includes the expression of emotions. In the two folk tales I have analysed the mappings between source and target domains in the two cultures overlap (i.e. source domain *hunger/thirst*, physical need, projected onto target domain *love*, emotional need).

### III. Conclusion

In this article I have shown how *conceptual metaphors*, especially *primary metaphors*, may account for *the basic meaning* of several folk tales and function as *a plot structuring mechanism*. The analysed folk tales evidence that the same *underlying conceptual metaphors* (some *explicit*, others *implicit*) in folk tales *across cultures* lead to *parallels* between *the basic meaning* and *plot outlines*.

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