SOME PHYSIOGNOMIES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN ASSAMESE

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ABSTRACT

Metaphors have been regarded as figures of speech, i.e. as more or less ornamental devices used in rhetorical style. However, expressions like the foot of the mountain indicate that the two phenomena also play an important part in everyday language. Moreover, philosophers and cognitive linguists have shown that metaphors are powerful cognitive tools for our conceptualization of the world. Conceptual metaphors are the mother metaphors which contain many other metaphorical expressions. In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are the conceptual structures that are based on our basic bodily experiences. In the present work I discuss conceptual metaphors in Assamese. Conceptual metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Behind every metaphorical expression, there is a conceptualization. Conceptual metaphor enables us to organize metaphorical expressions in a systematic way.

KEY WORDS: *CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR, METAPHORICAL EXPRESSION, CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN, ASSAMESE.*

1.0 Introduction

Natural language is essentially metaphorical, i.e., both words and grammar are based on human perception. If this is true, language is not an objective model of the world. But if a language is inherently metaphorical then what the poet bases on for his metaphoric expressions are, in essence, the same bodily interaction that underlies ordinary speech.

Metaphor offers a means to talk about the abstract in terms of the concrete. The concrete here is the experience to which our body has direct access. Under traditional view metaphors are ornamental figures of speech, but in cognitive linguistics, metaphors are thus conceptual structures based on our basic bodily experience with which we conceive the abstract. So, the present paper is an attempt to describe a few of the conceptual metaphors in Assamese and the underlying perceptions behind them. The paper illustrates the metaphorical expressions which together constitute a conceptual metaphor.

1.1 Idea of Conceptual Metaphor

Our experiences are basically physical and sensuous, some of them are not immediately clear to us. To express more complex and abstract ideas we use metaphorical expressions. For example, behind an expression like *Children must be given a good start* or *And miles to go before I sleep*, there is a conceptualization, i.e. "life is a journey." Life is perceived as journey.

In conceptual metaphors one domain of experience is used to understand another domain of experience. The domain we try to understand is called the *target domain*; the domain with the help of which we try to understand the target domain is called the *source domain*. Thus in 'Oil prices have gone up,' the target domain is rise in the price; the source domain is the domain of our spatial experience.

On the other hand, most common target domains are: different kinds of emotion – 'she is deeply moved'; desire, -'I see your point'; thought etc. Behind every metaphorical expression, there is a conceptualization. For instance, an expression like 'Price of petrol has gone up' or 'My fever has gone down' has behind them the concrete spatial experience of getting up and down. Thus, the conceptual metaphor that is behind these metaphorical expressions is MORE IS UP/LESS IS DOWN. Conceptual metaphor enables us to organize metaphorical expressions in a systematic way.

2.0 Needs of Conceptual Metaphor

Metaphorical expressions in everyday language give insight into the metaphorical nature of concepts that structure our actions. Some of those metaphors are universal in the sense that these metaphors have similar expressions in many languages. Hence, metaphor is considered as figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or an action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable E.g. - jibɔn nɔdi 'life is a river', kɔrmɔi dʰɔrmɔ 'work is religion'. Like these metaphorical expressions exist in our practical life and even structure of our daily activities.

However, metaphorical expressions help us to understand the abstract in terms of concrete but hide the concept behind the expression. To established the connection with idea to another to better understand something the conceptual metaphor is used.

Next, some broad terms usually find in everyday languages are not possible explain in a single metaphoric word or phrase, and at that time we take help from other concept to explain the term. Indeed, we switched over from metaphorical expression to conceptual metaphorical expression. In many cases, conceptual metaphors used in languages will let us into the strange world of the people speaking it and help us understand the meeting points that connect them with the rest of the cultures around the world. For this purpose, we have focused our attention on some conceptual metaphor in Assamese that have the potential to reflect on the basics of the cultural experience of this language and people.

3.0 Conceptual Metaphor in Assamese

Metaphors are a part of day to day language use. In Assamese we have a large number of metaphorical expressions used quite frequently. As for example, we can take the notion of movement:

> (1) gari sɔlɛ
> Lit: "vehicle moves"
> (2) ghɔr sɔlɛ
> Lit: "house moves"

In (1) the movement is clear, but in (2) the movement is not visible. To express more complex and abstract ideas, we use more basic and clear experiences – to run a household or an institution otherwise is different from running a machine.

But metaphor in language use is an extremely complicated and multi-faceted phenomenon, specially identifying the concept of thought behind the expressions in to more specific structure. As the majority of the metaphorical expression found in Assamese together constitute a conceptual metaphor. As in example (3)

> (3) xi   tair   prɛmɔt   pɔril
>   he   her   love.LOC   fall.PST
>   'He fell in love with her.'
> (4) tai   dukʰɔt   bhagi   pɔril.
>   she   sad-LOC break-NF   fall.PST
>   'She breaks down.'

In (3) and (4) above *love* and *sorrow* are abstract concepts metaphorically viewed as concrete concept bearing boundaries. As I mentioned above, behind every metaphorical expression, there is a Conceptualization. Thus, the conceptual metaphor that is behind these metaphorical expressions are LOVE IS LOSE/SAD IS BROKEN.

After exploring everyday use of the language, it is found that some terms are not easy to explain. It mainly has to do with several areas. In this case in Assamese we can surely take the well-known concept jibɔn jatra 'life is a journey'. 'Jatra' means a conflict. It therefore means, fight, rivals and loss or win. There is such a variety of expressions related to this concept, where these could serve as the only source for this concept. They are as follows

(5)   *xi   jibɔn   judʰɔt   juji   asɛ*
       he   life   battle.LOC   fight.NF   stay.Pres.1
       'He is fighting with his life'.

  5. *xi jibɔn jujɔt   haril*
       he life   fight.LOC   loss. PST.3
       'He lost the battle of life'.

  6. *tai   jibɔnɔt   gɔti   karilɛ.*
       she   life.LOC   move.NF   do.PST.3
       'She moved on with her life'.

  7. *xi   tair   jibɔnɔr lɔgɔt   kʰɛlilɛ.*
       he   she.GEN   life.Poss   with   play.PST.3
       'He played with her life'.

From these, we notice that the term like jibɔn 'life' is not easy to explain, because it involves many things. It might be human being, relation between two or more, and all. And so, we have put across these with the help of words and phrases. But here, the problem is that there is no specific metaphorical vocabulary for the term jibɔn 'life'. Therefore, these words and phrases presented above can also be used for other concepts or expressed with the help of conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphors are seen in language in our everyday lives. Conceptual metaphors shape not just our communication, but also shape the way we think and act.

4.0 Conclusion

To conclude in this paper, we have shown how several metaphors are able to account for the basic meaning and interpretation various uses in the Assamese language. And understood that Metaphorical concepts are necessary for understanding most of the things we encounter in our day to day life. Human thought is imaginative. To imagine is to construct a world which does not exist. For, instance *John is John* is real, but *John is a fox* is imaginative. Thus, metaphorical thinking means imagination or reconstruction. Metaphor violates the basic principle of formal logic.

"John is John"   A=A   [A=A:Aristotle's formal logic]

"John is a fox"   A≠A   (violation of A=A)

Change is constant; things are changing every moment in the world. A=A is only partially true, it does not tell about changes.

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