



Exploring Conceptual Metaphors in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart': A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis

Awaisuddin¹, Amjad Saleem², Honggang Wang³

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CMT,
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Source Domain,
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Abstract

Conceptual metaphors shape our perception and understanding of looking at the world. The cognitive linguistic approach to a narrative study provides necessary tools to explain the thinking pattern and the worldview of fictional characters. This study explores and analyzes the conceptual metaphors used by the main character in Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Tell-Tale Heart'. Using the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), this study explores what precisely was going on in the narrator's mind and how all that resulted in the killing of the old man.

In addition, those conceptual metaphors are then analyzed through cognitive linguistic lens.

¹Mphil/master's in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics from Yangzhou University, China.

afridiawais52@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

amjad.saleem@uop.edu.com

³Professor, College of International Studies, Yangzhou University, China.

whg793@126.com

INTRODUCTION

The current study takes a cognitive linguistic approach to the study of conceptual metaphors used by the main character in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* through the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics is a branch of linguistics that looks at language in terms of concepts. It sees language as a mental phenomenon and argues that language is embodied as well as situated in a particular environment. According to Dabrowska and Divjak (2015), "Cognitive Linguistics is an approach to language study based on the assumptions that our linguistic abilities are firmly rooted in our general cognitive abilities, that meaning is essentially conceptualization, and that grammar is shaped by usage" (p. 1). Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2010) believe that "Cognitive Linguistics is not a single theory of language but rather a cluster of broadly compatible approaches" (p. 3). For cognitive linguists, meaning comes first which depends on the context and social interaction and which can be acquired and explained in terms of general cognition. Construction grammar, cognitive grammar, conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending, image schemas and force dynamics, conceptual organization, categorization, metonymy, frame semantics, and iconicity are areas that are studied and explored by cognitive linguistics. The present study investigates Poe's story from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. Before CMT, a metaphor was considered only a matter of language or words or an artistic use of language. However, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980):

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action (p. 4).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) believe that we think as well as act metaphorically. Our mind is metaphorical in nature which means that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and that human thinking pattern is largely metaphorical. Conceptual metaphors are pervasive in our day-to-day lives. Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides us a framework for understanding an abstract concept in terms of a concrete one. It makes a distinction between a source domain which is concrete and a target domain which is abstract. This research examines the unnamed protagonist, who is the narrator of the story too, in order to understand and explain the character's worldview and unravel their thought process. The narrator of the story insists on their sanity after murdering an old man. The murderer kills the old

man because they cannot stand his vulture-like eye which gives them a strange and cold feeling. The murder is a calculated act and the murderer hides the old man's dead body under the floorboards after chopping it up into pieces. In the end, the protagonist's guilt manifests itself because the phantom beating of the old man's heart causes them to go mad and reveals their crime to the police.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) argued that it is the metaphor that enables us to talk about complex and abstract ideas. Metaphors enable people to sort out social issues and to collect information in order to arrive at decisions. According to them, “we find that the influence of the metaphorical framing effect is covert: people do not recognize metaphors as influential in their decisions” (p. 1). They believe that metaphors profoundly influence the way we conceptualize societal issues and that even a single metaphor can stimulate substantial differences in opinion about how to solve social problems. Risdianto (2014) analyzed Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’ from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory and found twelve conceptual metaphors used in twenty-one different sentences in the short story. According to Risdianto, Poe used a variety of conceptual metaphors or metaphorical expressions effectively and creatively in order to depict the psychological abnormality of the main character. He concluded that the conceptual metaphors used in the story explained the paranoia and split personality of the narrator as the main character of the story. Vengadasamy’s (2011) study on the two Malaysian short stories illustrates how writers use metaphors as ideological constructs. He concluded: “Metaphor analysis provides us with a window into a writer’s thoughts and ideas” (p. 106).

Ali et al (2021) examined the mind style of the suffering protagonist in Katherine Mansfield’s short story, ‘Miss Brill’ from the perspective of cognitive stylistics. They argue that metaphor is one of the most influential tools of human cognition for the construction of mind style. Anh (2017) investigated the conceptual metaphors that denote life in nineteen American and nineteen Vietnamese short stories from 1975 to 1991 through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory. Examining the similarities and differences between the two languages, she concluded that the abstract notion of life is commonly perceived in terms of concrete concepts in both languages. Nadeem, et al (2020) analyzed conceptual metaphors in Elif Shafak’s novel, *The Forty Rules of Love* where they investigated the use of two words i.e. “love” and “journey” as conceptual metaphors. Khaliq and Rahman (2020) analyzed the main character, Mr. Ramsay, in Virginia Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse* through the lens of conceptual metaphor and blending theory. They concluded that “metaphors are not mere linguistic variety but are programmed on a deeper level of cognition” (p. 133).

Yicai and Xueai (2021) collected conceptual metaphors from the film *Zootopia* and analyzed the characteristics and applications of conceptual metaphors found in the film. They explored the film from

the perspective of the three types of conceptual metaphors i.e., structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors. The study is helpful in improving people's metaphorical awareness and in giving them better understanding and knowledge of the culture and in turn improving the language and communication skills of the people. Sardaraz and Nusrat (2019) explored Ghani Khan's poetry from cognitive linguistic perspective to find out the conceptual schemas used in the description of life and death in his poetry. They found that most of the conceptual metaphors in his poetry are similar to those in the English language. They argued that "These similarities support the view that conceptual metaphor has cross cultural implications, and that languages across cultures are equally generated by conceptual metaphor" (p. 28).

Li and Chi (2021) explored love 'metaphors' from the cross-cultural perspective based on the figurative expressions in Chinese and English poems. According to them, "emotion is viewed as a kind of abstract and private personal experience" (Li & Chi, 2021, p. 3359). They concluded that flower metaphors used for love in Chinese and English poems were similar. This suggests that English and Chinese people talk and conceptualize love in nearly same ways based on universal experiences and perceptions. However, they also added that:

There are some variations if we analyze the metaphors at a specific level because of cognitive preferences. For example, rose is a common flower to express love and describe beautiful beloved ones in English poems, but Chinese poets prefer to use lotus and peach flower to conceptualize love and refer to their beloved girls. (p. 3366)

The review of relevant literature suggests that Poe's every short story offers a rich area of investigation from the perspective of cognitive stylistics. Taking this into account, the current study examines one of Poe's well-known stories, 'The Tell-Tale Heart' for the conceptual metaphors employed by the main character with a focus on their thought process in relation to the causes of the killing of the old man in the story.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology

With the help of Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), this study analyzes the main character's perceptions about world and their outlook on life. Thirteen conceptual metaphors identified in the story are analyzed to reveal the narrator's worldview.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5). In other words, conceptual metaphor offers a window of understanding one domain of experience (typically abstract) in terms of another (typically concrete). Conceptual metaphor theory makes a distinction between two domains i.e., a source domain and a target domain. A source domain is a concrete domain: it is something we can experience bodily. A target domain, on the other hand, is an abstract one: it is something we cannot bodily experience. According to Kövecses (2002), "Conceptual metaphors employ a more abstract concept as a target and a more concrete or physical concept as their source" (p. 6). This is because of the fact that concrete concepts give us clearer explanation about abstract concepts and therefore, result in better understanding. For example, in the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY, the domain of money is concrete and the domain of time is abstract. Money is thus a source domain and time is a target domain because we understand time in terms of money such as, 'You are wasting your time', 'You are running out of time', 'I do not have the time to give you', 'How do you spend your time these days?', 'I have invested a lot of time in her', and so on. These are some of the expressions that we use in our everyday lives which show that we understand time in terms of money. Conceptual metaphors are part of our everyday language. For example, the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR is reflected in our everyday language such as, 'He attacked every weak point in my argument', 'You have to defend your argument', 'You are losing your argument', and so on. In this scenario, we think of an argument as a war. Now, for example, what will happen if we, according to Lakoff (1980), try to think of a culture where the argument is viewed as a dance, not as a war? In this particular scenario, there would be no winning or losing, no attacking or defending. There would be a balanced performance in which the participants would be seen as performers. Understanding an argument in terms of a war creates a reality that is totally different from understanding an argument in terms of a dance. People in such a culture would look at arguments

differently and would talk about them differently as opposed to the people who view an argument as a war. Conceptual metaphors shape the way we think, communicate and act. We perceive and act in accordance with conceptual metaphors. Metaphors make our thoughts more vivid and interesting. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action as well. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p. 4).

Evans and Green (2006) believe that “We not only speak in metaphorical terms, but also think in metaphorical terms” (p. 295). According to Semino (2002), “Metaphor is seen not just as a linguistic phenomenon, but as an important tool for thought, reasoning and action” (p. 108). According to Kövecses (2020), “Metaphor resides not only in language but also in thought. We use metaphors not only to speak about certain aspects of the world but also to think about them” (p. 6). So, we can say that metaphor is not only a matter of language or words but also, a matter of thought.

Metaphors construct realities. When we think of something one way, one kind of reality is created as opposed to thinking of the same thing in a different way which creates a different reality. Kövecses (2020) believes that:

A major consequence of the idea that metaphors are conceptual in nature, i.e., that we conceive of certain things in metaphorical ways, is that, since our conceptual system governs how we act in the world, we often act metaphorically. When we conceptualize an intangible or less tangible domain metaphorically as, and from the perspective of, a more tangible domain, we create a certain metaphorical reality. We imagine life one way when we think of it as a journey, and in another way when we think of it as a theatre play, as reflected in Shakespeare’s famous lines “All the world is a stage / and all men and women are merely players”. The two source domains result in very different views on life, and in this sense they create very different realities. (pp. 6-7)

According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1993), when we come across any abstract or unfamiliar or complex concept, first we make subjective judgments based on our experiences then we conceptualize and visualize them with help of sensorimotor domains through cognitive mechanism of conceptual metaphors. The conceptual metaphors help us to use the physical logic of grasping to reason about understanding.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

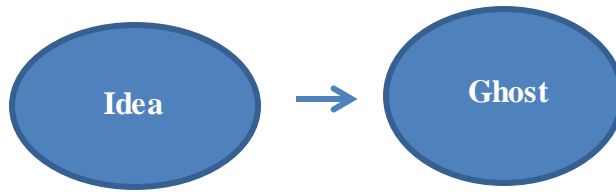
Based on reading of the story, the following thirteen conceptual metaphors have been identified. In each metaphor the abstract idea is understood in terms of a concrete one. In other words, a target domain is understood in terms of a source domain.

Table 4.1

No.	Conceptual Metaphors
1.	IDEA IS A GHOST
2.	INSULT IS AN OBJECT
3.	EMOTION IS TEMPERATURE
4.	MIND IS AN OBJECT
5.	LIFE IS AN OBJECT
6.	TIME IS AN OBJECT
7.	UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING
8.	TERROR IS A PERSON
9.	SOUL IS A PERSON
10	FEARS ARE HAIR
11.	DEATH IS AN EVIL PERSON
12.	ANXIETY IS A PERSON
13.	TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT

1. *It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night.*

In the above lines, the narrator says, “it (idea) haunted me”, so here the notion of “idea” acts as a target domain while the word “haunt” is used for ghosts that haunts people which acts as a source domain in order to understand the target domain easily. The concept of “idea” is understood in terms of ghost haunting the narrator.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: IDEA IS A GHOST

Subjective Judgment:	Idea
Sensorimotor Domain:	Haunting
Primary Experience:	Idea being a ghost that haunts the narrator.

1. *He had never given me insult.*

In the above line, the concept of “insult” acts as a target domain while the verb “give” is used for the things that we can take from and give to people, especially by hand. So, here, the verb “given” suggests that the narrator thinks of the idea of “insult” as an object. The notion of “insult” which is an abstract concept is understood in terms of an object which is typically concrete.



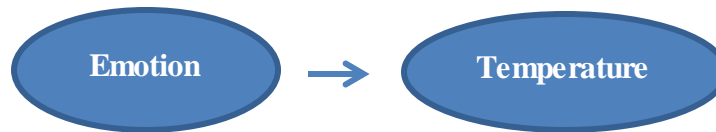
CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: INSULT IS AN OBJECT

Subjective Judgment:	Insult
Sensorimotor Domain:	Giving or taking an object
Primary Experience:	Imagining insult as a physical object that can be given just like concrete object.

2. *He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees.*

Emotions in English are understood as temperature. Emotions and temperature are closely related through embodied processes which means emotions are associated with the concepts of temperature. They are used in everyday language such as, warm and cold feelings, warm love, warm hug, chilled with fear etc. In the line “my blood ran cold” refers to the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS TEMPERATURE in which temperature acts as a source domain to express the emotion of fear easily. In English, when something/someone makes your blood cold, it means that you are frightened. In addition, when something/someone makes your blood boil, it means they make you angry. We can also

use the verb “run” such as, “my blood ran cold” as used by the narrator in the story which means they are frightened by old man’s vulture-like eye. In addition, the narrator uses the phrase “and so by degrees” which means that they actually look at emotions in terms of temperature because emotions cannot be measured i.e., there is no such scale or device with which we measure our emotions but we can measure the temperature. Therefore, this suggests that the narrator understands emotions as temperature.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: EMOTION IS TEMPERATURE

Subjective Judgment:	Emotion
Sensorimotor Domain:	Coldness
Primary Experience:	Emotions being measured in degrees just like temperature.

3. *I made up my mind to take the life of the old man.*

In the given line, the notion of “mind” acts as a target domain in order to be understood in terms of an object. The expression “to make one’s mind” is used generally by the native speakers of English when a person arrives at a decision about something. We know that mind is an abstract concept which cannot be physically experienced. How do we then make up our mind? We use the expression “to make up” to refer to something concrete in relation to its composition or constitution. This is why the concept of “mind” in the conceptual metaphor MIND IS AN OBJECT is understood in terms of an object.

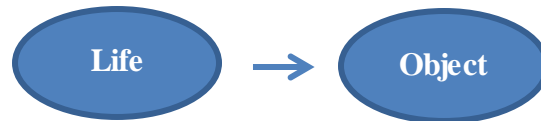


CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: MIND IS AN OBJECT

Subjective Judgment:	Mind
Sensorimotor Domain:	Making
Primary Experience:	Imagining mind as a physical object that can be made for deciding something.

4. *I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.*

Life is an abstract concept and conceptual metaphor such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY is used to understand life in concrete terms. Here the notion of “life” acts as a target domain because it is an abstract idea while the concept of “journey” acts as a source domain because it is a concrete idea. In the above line, the old man’s life is understood as an object. Normally, we give an object to and take it from people. Here, too, the narrator thinks of the old man’s life as an object. The narrator says, “I made up my mind to take the life of the old man” which suggests that the narrator considers his life an object which they are able to take. In this conceptual metaphor, the notion of life acts as a target domain and the use of verb “take” makes it as an object.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: LIFE IS AN OBJECT

Subjective Judgment:	Life
Sensorimotor Domain:	Taking or giving an object
Primary Experience:	Experiencing life as a tangible object, which we can take and give.

5. *And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night.*

Time is an abstract concept that acts as a target domain here. There are different conceptual metaphors used in English to understand time better such as, TIME IS MONEY. In this particular conceptual metaphor, the notion of “time” is understood in terms of “money”. Similarly, the native speakers of English use the expression “the day breaks” to refer to time when the night is over and the day starts off. They think of time as an object because the verb “break” is used for concrete objects that can be broken. The narrator also uses the expression, “when the day broke” suggesting that the narrator thinks of time as an object.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: TIME IS AN OBJECT

Subjective Judgment:	Time
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Sensorimotor Domain:	Breaking
Primary Experience:	Imagining time as a physical object that can be broken, leading to a sense of disruption or discontinuity in the flow of time.

6. *So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.*

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) discuss the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING and elaborate it in the following manner:

I see what you're saying. It looks different from my point of view. What is your outlook on that? I view it differently. Now I've got the whole picture. Let me point something out to you. That's an insightful idea. That was a brilliant remark. The argument is clear. It was a murky discussion. Could you elucidate your remarks? It's a transparent argument. The discussion was opaque. (p. 38)

In the lines taken from the story, the narrator expects the readers to think of 'understanding' in terms of seeing. This means that when a person sees something, they can comprehend it very well. We understand things better when we see them or experience them with our own naked eyes which is why in this conceptual metaphor, the narrator associates knowledge or understanding with vision or seeing because when we gain knowledge about something, we understand it better. This suggests that knowledge is light and having no knowledge is darkness or ignorance is darkness.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING

Subjective Judgment:	Understanding
Sensorimotor Domain:	Vision
Primary Experience:	Getting information through seeing.

7. *I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror.*

The narrator thinks of the notion of "terror" as a person in the above line. Groaning is something a human

or an animal produces. It is a deep and loud sound produced when a person expresses unhappiness or pain. But here the narrator understands the idea of “terror” in terms of a person who groans when they are in pain. Similarly, to the narrator, it seems as if the “terror” is in pain which is why it groans and the narrator hears it. Moreover, it is not only “terror” but “mortal terror” which suggests that the narrator looks at it as a person because humans are mortal. So, in this conceptual metaphor, the “terror” acts a target domain while the “person” acts as a source domain in order to understand the concept of “terror” easily.

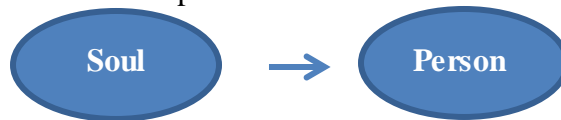


CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: TERROR IS A PERSON

Subjective Judgment:	Terror
Sensorimotor Domain:	Groaning
Primary Experience:	Imagining terror as a person who groans in state of unhappiness.

8. *It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe.*

Soul is an abstract entity. In the given lines, the narrator treats “soul” as a human being. We know that humans produce sounds and groan too, but soul cannot do so. In this conceptual metaphor, the notion of “soul” acts as a target domain while the phrase “the low stifled sound that arises from the soul” refers to the fact that it is the person who can produce such a sound.



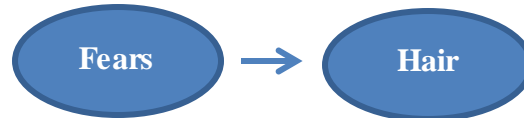
CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: SOUL IS A PERSON

Subjective Judgment:	Soul
Sensorimotor Domain:	Groaning
Primary Experience:	Imagining soul as a person that can groan when

	overcharged with awe.
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9. *His fears had been ever since growing upon him.*

Fear is one of the basic human emotions. It is an abstract concept which means we need to understand it in terms of a concrete object. Here, the narrator thinks of the concept of fear as hair that grows on our bodies. In this conceptual metaphor, the idea of “fears” acts as a target domain while the verb “growing” refers to it in terms of hair that acts as a source domain in order to understand it better.

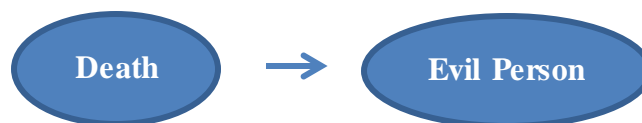


CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: FEARS ARE HAIR

Subjective Judgment:	Fears
Sensorimotor Domain:	Growing
Primary Experience:	Imagining fears as hair that grows on our body.

10. *Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.*

Death is an abstract concept that is difficult to grasp. The narrator, in the above lines, considers it as an evil person who can approach, and stalk people. Here, the target domain is “death” while the human features such as, approaching, stalking and having a shadow make the narrator think of it as a person that acts as a source domain.

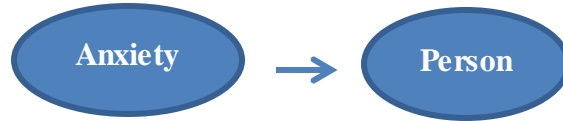


CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: DEATH IS AN EVIL PERSON

Subjective Judgment:	Death
Sensorimotor Domain:	Chasing
Primary Experience:	Imagining death as an evil person who can stalk and chase a person.

11. *And now a new anxiety seized me.*

Anxiety is an abstract concept. In the given line, the narrator thinks of it as a living entity because seizing is the quality of a person or animal. This suggests that the narrator understands it in terms of a person. In this conceptual metaphor, the concept of “anxiety” acts as a target domain and the verb “seize” makes the narrator understand it as a person that acts a source domain in order to comprehend the complex idea of anxiety.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: ANXIETY IS A PERSON

Subjective Judgment:	Anxiety
Sensorimotor Domain:	Being held by force
Primary Experience:	Experiencing anxiety as if it is a person who can take hold of another person.

12. *The old man's hour had come!*

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980):

Time in English is structured in terms of the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor, with the future moving toward us.

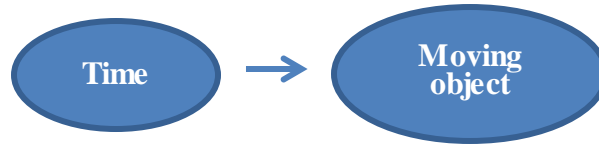
The proverb "Time flies" is an instance of the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor. Since we are facing toward the future, we get:

Coming up in the weeks ahead . . .

I look forward to the arrival of Christmas.

Before us is a great opportunity, and we don't want it to pass us by. (p. 35)

In the given line, the narrator also thinks of the notion of “time” as a “moving object”. In this scenario, the idea of “time” acts as a target domain in order to be understood easily in terms of an object that is moving. The narrator comprehends the concept of “time” as a “moving object” because they say, “The old man’s hour had come!” which does not mean that the hour had literally come but it is, actually, understood as a moving object that had come towards the old man.



CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR: TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT

Subjective Judgment:	The passage of time
Sensorimotor Domain:	Motion
Primary Experience:	Experiencing the passage of time as an object that moves or observes the motion.

The analysis of the data suggests that the narrator uses a variety of conceptual metaphors on different occasions in the story. These conceptual metaphors tell us about the main character's mind style, especially how they comprehend the abstract or intangible concepts in terms of concrete or tangible concepts.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that the story makes use of a variety of conceptual metaphors used by the main character. These conceptual metaphors allow the author to reveal the inner world or mind style of the narrator more vividly. Furthermore, conceptual metaphors allow the readers to get into the thoughts of a literary character and to understand their worldview about something or someone. In this case, the thirteen conceptual metaphors allow us to understand the worldview of the narrator. The analysis reveals that, from the very beginning of the story, the narrator had been thinking of killing the old man. The idea of killing sticks to him throughout and finds its final execution in killing the main. They show a violent behaviour towards the body even after killing him just because the idea was haunting them like a ghost. This may also be due to the fact that the narrator objectifies the old man's life: they think of his life as an object devoid of any worth.

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