

# Conceptual Metaphor Analysis in Advertising Slogans about Coffee Brands

Lingxiao Li\*

School of Foreign Languages, Xiangtan Institute of Technology, Xiangtan 411100, Hunan Province, China

\*Corresponding author: Lingxiao Li, [lilingxiao0310@163.com](mailto:lilingxiao0310@163.com)

**Copyright:** © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** This paper delves into the strategic use of conceptual metaphors in advertising slogans for coffee brands, exploring how these linguistic devices influence consumer perception and brand appeal. By employing cognitive linguistic theories, this study categorizes eight global coffee brand slogans into five distinct metaphorical patterns, revealing the underlying conceptual mappings that enhance brand messaging. The analysis underscores the importance of metaphorical language in simplifying complex ideas, evoking emotional responses, and establishing a connection between the product and the consumer's everyday experiences. This paper concludes that the judicious application of conceptual metaphors in advertising is a powerful tool for creating memorable and impactful slogans that resonate with the target audience.

**Keywords:** Conceptual metaphor analysis; Coffee brand marketing; Conceptual mapping

**Online publication:** September 30, 2024

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development and commercialization of society, companies have utilized advertising to promote their products to gain more prestige and popularity <sup>[1]</sup>. The increasing influence of advertising has made it a fundamental tool when it comes to marketing and it plays an essentially significant role in our daily life. What arouses scholars' attention is that the application of metaphors in advertising would change consumers' attitudes or beliefs towards a particular product <sup>[2]</sup>. However, most of them only focus on analyzing advertisements from the perspective of verbal and pictorial metaphors, implying that there are few studies about conceptual metaphors, particularly how they work to impress potential customers <sup>[3]</sup>.

Conceptual metaphor theory is applied in diverse contexts such as poetry and literature <sup>[4]</sup>. Nevertheless, Gibbs <sup>[5]</sup> illustrated that a good many metaphorical mappings could be used in a certain poem and distinct interpretations may occur for optimal understanding due to the complexity of the metaphor. Metaphors can be visualized in literature as well according to the research by Gibbs. However, most of the metaphors in literary works are mapping of images (also called image metaphors) instead of mapping between the target domain and source domain mentioned above. Although there is a lot of analysis related to conceptual metaphor theory in poetic and literary texts, it is relatively hard for readers to review any research that focuses on metaphors in

advertising slogans, especially those slogans about coffee brands around the world. Therefore, this study analyzes the metaphors in eight advertising slogans about coffee brands.

The basic structure of this paper starts with a brief introduction, followed by the major theoretical framework. Analysis and discussion related to the topic are put forward in the third section while functions of conceptual metaphor are listed subsequently. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn based on our observation.

## 2. Theoretical framework

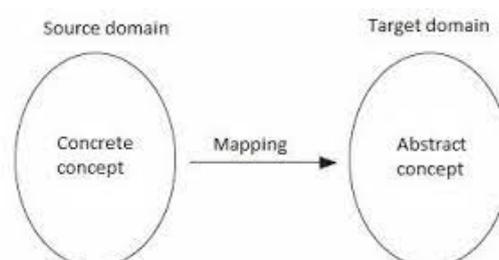
To analyze the advertising slogans more academically, a theoretical framework is set up for better understanding.

### 2.1. Conceptual metaphor

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is perceived as comprehending one conceptual domain in the light of another conceptual domain <sup>[6]</sup>. According to Lakoff and Johnson <sup>[7]</sup>, the conceptual metaphor could be a metaphorical comparison in which one viewpoint is understood in terms of another. With conceptual metaphor theory, Lakoff and Johnson proposed that metaphor is not only used to beautify language, but it could be so widespread that people usually apply it in their daily conversation and behaviors. To better illustrate the theory, Lakoff and Johnson generalized conceptual metaphor with a pattern as “conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B,” which means that there are two conceptual domains in one conceptual metaphor and one domain is understood by consulting the other. Moreover, each domain has a special name to serve different purposes in a single conceptual metaphor.

### 2.2. Conceptual domains in conceptual metaphor

As mentioned previously, two separate domains (conceptual domain A and conceptual domain B) are introduced in the structure of conceptual metaphor based on Lakoff and Johnson. Conceptual domain A is the target domain, which symbolizes the abstract and general concept, and conceptual domain B is the source domain, which indicates the concrete and specific idea <sup>[7]</sup>. The features of the concrete source are mapped onto the abstract target so that readers can have a better understanding of the elusive concept <sup>[8]</sup>. To fully master this formula, a classic example is listed as follows: Time is Money. In this case, Time works as conceptual domain A while Money works as B, and we could assume that the abstract concept of time could be interpreted by a more concrete object—“money”—to facilitate understanding. More importantly, according to Lakoff and Johnson <sup>[7]</sup>, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” As a part of society, we tend to compare one thing to another unconsciously so that we would be able to understand some non-objective ideas in our daily lives. It is because metaphorical expressions in our language are interwoven with metaphorical concepts systematically, that metaphorical expressions can be applied to acquire the essence of metaphorical concepts, and the nature of our everyday activities could be obtained in this way <sup>[7]</sup>. People are inclined to associate abstract concepts or ideas with their daily experience, hence the mapping between the target domain as well as source domain is based on our embodied experience. **Figure 1** explains the conceptual domains in conceptual metaphor visually.



**Figure 1.** The basic construct of conceptual metaphor <sup>[7]</sup>

### 2.3. Metaphorical linguistic expressions

Lakoff and Johnson <sup>[7]</sup> came up with the idea of systematicity when they elaborated on the metaphorical concept, and they declared that the utterances that people utilize to express the metaphorical concept should be systematic. Therefore, they suggested that metaphorical linguistic expressions could be applied to perceive the essence of conceptual metaphor as well as our daily events. Besides, conceptual metaphor operates through a systematic construct of metaphorical expressions. In this case, the example of “Time is Money” would be further discussed to reach better comprehension.

Based on Lakoff and Johnson, metaphorical expressions of the conceptual metaphor “Time is Money” are as follows <sup>[7]</sup>:

You’re *wasting* my time.

This gadget will *save* you hours.

I don’t *have* the time to *give* YOU.

How do you *spend* your time these days?

That flat tire *cost* me an hour.

I’ve *invested* a lot of time in her.

I don’t *have enough* time to *spare* for that.

You’re *running out* of time.

From these expressions, we can conclude that people understand a more abstract concept of time in terms of more concrete objects of money in everyday life. Since time is normally considered a precious resource in line with our personal experience and it has become common sense in the culture in which we exist, it is acceptable for people to pay a certain amount of money to receive a specific length of time. In other words, time is so limited and rare that it could be regarded as a tangible thing that serves the purpose of consumption or waste in daily communication. In the meanwhile, all of these expressions are metaphorical because they reveal the fact that we keep using the concrete substance of money to conceptualize the abstract notion of time on the grounds of our practical experience.

### 2.4. Metaphorical entailment

As mentioned before, there is a complete set of mappings between a source and target in the conceptual metaphor. Certain aspects of the source have conformity with that of a target, so in such a way, the components of the source have to correspond to the components of the target. In addition, we have abundant information and specific knowledge about the source that cannot be ignored, because it is made use of yielding metaphorical entailment. In daily life, plenty of metaphors do map additional knowledge from sources into the target. Metaphorical entailments are a common property of conceptual metaphors <sup>[6]</sup>. Some vivid examples can be used to illustrate this concept.

First, let us take “An argument is a journey” as an example <sup>[6]</sup>. The constituent factors of a journey that occur along the path are mapped onto the process of an argument. Yet we also have other additional information and knowledge about a journey, in other words, sometimes we can deviate from the main path. This is the non-constituent factor of the source concept of journey. However, this metaphor entailment, “digress from,” is also utilized to describe an argument. In this typical example, the additional knowledge of the journey can be used to help us make sense of the features of an argument. In addition, metaphorical entailments can also be involved in daily conversation. Below is a simple but clear conversation between a fitness instructor and a trainee <sup>[6]</sup>:

Instructor: You look like a healthy apple.

Trainee: I hope it’s not rotten inside.

Instructor: I hope, too, that it will last a long time.

There is an interesting conceptual metaphor in the conversation, and that is a person mapped onto a kind of fruit. Both participants in the conversation use the property of the fruit, which is rotten inside but maybe looks healthy outside, to convey the meaning. In this case, participants continue the conversation by utilizing additional knowledge related to the source domain of this metaphor. Therefore, making good use of metaphorical entailments of a conceptual metaphor can make daily conversations lively and vivid.

The above-mentioned are simple metaphor entailments in daily life, we will demonstrate next the full exploitation of metaphorical entailments. Below is a famous metaphor about anger: Anger is a hot fluid in the container<sup>[6]</sup>.

the physical vessel → the furious people's body

the cap of the vessel → the rational of furious people

hot liquid in the vessel → the anger of people

the degree of liquid heat → the strength of anger

the reason for enhancing liquid temperature → the reason for anger

We can use our physical knowledge associated with the source domain to interpret this metaphorical entailment. We know that the liquid in a container rises as the temperature rises and fluid heat produces steam. At the same time, the water vapor and liquid exert pressure on the vessel. When this pressure exceeds a certain range, the lid of the container will be flushed open, which is dangerous to others nearby. All of this coherent information about heat liquid will be used to make sense of the features of a furious individual. As a result, if we can discover some conventionalized utterances that can illustrate metaphorical entailments about anger in discourse, other people also can understand the meaning of discourse in terms of entailment potential. However, some additional knowledge from the source cannot be mapped onto the target. The prerequisite is that such knowledge must be associated with the target, and must comply with the invariance principle. Otherwise, the source of knowledge is avoided from being mapped into the target.

### 3. Analysis and discussion

After collecting a sizable quantity of data, we eventually selected eight advertising slogans of different coffee brands around the globe and specifically categorized them into five conceptual metaphor patterns of "A is B" to further develop the analysis.

#### 3.1. "Coffee is Companionship."

By sifting all the applicable data, two pieces of slogans can be classified as the metaphor "Coffee is Companionship." In this metaphor, coffee is the target domain while companionship is the source domain. Companionship is a close relationship between two or more individuals and these individuals would be able to feel satisfied or relaxed when they are in this relationship. It is apparent that the feature of a friend or partner is mapped onto the quality of a certain type of coffee so that the coffee drinkers can better conceptualize the product. The following are the related slogans:

"It's not just coffee. It's Starbucks." (By Starbucks)

"Good Coffee is Like Friendship: Rich, Warm, and Strong." (By Pan American Coffee Bureau)

From the slogan created by the Starbucks company, we can sense that it provides not only excellent coffee for coffee drinkers but also hopes that Starbucks could act as the best friend of the customers. The second slogan is more direct in metaphor because it directly regards the coffee as friendship, indicating that the Pan American Coffee Bureau essentially builds a close relationship between the brand and the drink consumers. By

offering a sense of rich, warm, and strong feeling, drinkers can expect the same feeling an intimate one could give them. Both cases stress the importance of companionship between the promoted products and the potential buyers, hence “Coffee is Companionship.” could be perceived through these metaphorical expressions.

### **3.2. “Coffee is Heaven.”**

Through selection, we notice that two pieces of slogans share a similar pattern of conceptual metaphor, which is “Coffee is Heaven.” In this metaphor, coffee is the target domain and heaven is the source domain. Heaven refers to a special place where gods stay and where kind people will reside after they are claimed to be dead in some religions according to the explanation from Cambridge Dictionary. These coffee manufacturers try to boost sales by helping buyers conceptualize the product in terms of heaven so that better understanding can be achieved. Here are the relevant examples:

“The Heavenly Coffee” (by Chock full o’Nuts)

“Heaven in a Cup” (by Lavazza Coffee)

The first slogan by Chock full o’Nuts underlines the main feature of its coffee by using the adjective “heavenly” to describe the fantastic texture. It enables customers to imagine the great happiness and gratification that might generate after consuming the product and this feeling may only be found when drinking the coffee. Lavazza company also highlights the extremely high quality of its commodity with the same metaphorical expression, managing to create a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere for those who are eager for the most favorable coffee in the market. In short, from these interpretations, the metaphor “Coffee is Heaven.” could be well understood accurately.

### **3.3. “Coffee is gold.”**

The Starbucks coffee slogan, You’re a sip away from GOLD, catches our attention, because it is a typical conceptual metaphor. In this metaphor, coffee is the target domain while gold is the source domain. Gold, as we know, is a kind of a widely popular precious metal that was created by planetary impacts about 4 billion years ago. This rare metal is also famous for its stability, representing dignity, as well as an attractive quality. Although coffee is just an ordinary beverage in our daily life, and drinking coffee is also a simple habit of life, Starbucks coffee can give coffee drinkers a high-quality taste experience. As the slogan says, when one drinks Starbucks coffee, it is an experience like having gold. In other words, there is a sip of Starbucks coffee between one and gold. The advertisers have made correspondence between the two of them, which seemingly have nothing to do with each other. From this slogan, we can make sense that these characters of gold are mapped onto Starbucks’ coffee and advertisers can also apply this slogan to emphasize brand value—high quality.

### **3.4. “Coffee is the feature.”**

From the quantitative analysis of the advertising data, we also filter out two coffee advertising slogans that share the same source of the domain. They all conceptualize coffee into some kind of feature. In this metaphor, the feature is the source domain while coffee is the target domain. We know that everyone has their features or characteristics, such as being extroverted or introverted. At the same time, advertisers use people’s diverse personalities to associate different types of coffee with distinct character traits. By corresponding between feature and coffee, we can illustrate coffee as a feature. The following are the related slogans:

Blend 37 Coffee: Richer, Darker, Distinctly Continental. (By Nescafe)

Nescafe Espresso: Short, Dark, and Intense. (By Nescafe)

Both advertisements’ slogans above are from the prestigious Nescafe company. From the first slogan, we can make sense that this kind of coffee has stronger taste and more distinctive layers, allowing consumers to

have a richer tasting experience. This blend has been created from carefully selected 100% Arabica coffee beans that are professionally roasted to release the intensity of flavor. “Short” in the latter slogan shows that customers can easily prepare and enjoy a delicious instant coffee. Consumers take a moment out of their day to experience a distinctively difference coffee break and find rich, intensive flavors in every sip. These advertising slogans make strategic use of linguistic expressions to emphasize the quality of the coffee, thus encouraging consumers to buy them.

### **3.5. “Coffee is up.”**

By selecting all the applicable data, a type of slogan can be characterized as the metaphor “Coffee is up.” This is another kind of conceptual metaphor that cannot be structured as one concept in terms of the other, but instead constructs a whole system of concepts concerning one other <sup>[6]</sup>. This is called orientation metaphor, and most of them have a relationship with spatial orientation. We all know that coffee contains caffeine, which can make people feel happy and keep their energy levels up. In the additional perception, upward orientation represents positive evaluation and satisfied emotions but downward position means negative emotions. Advertisers use the properties of this substance in coffee to emphasize that drinking coffee can make people feel a sense of positive attitude and have the power to move upward. There is a slogan associated with the concept mentioned above:

The best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup! (Folgers Coffee)

When you wake up sleepy in the morning, a cup of coffee can refresh and rejuvenate your mind. Therefore, advertisers utilize this correspondence between the feature of coffee and the upward position to emphasize the feature of coffee. When customers drink this kind of coffee, they can feel more energetic and satisfied. Thus, to some extent, the orientation metaphor is a kind of “coherence metaphor.”

## **4. The function of conceptual metaphor**

From the above analysis, we know that the main purpose of metaphor is to communicate eloquently about a topic by comparing one topic to other topics. In cases where brevity and vividness are needed, the speaker or writer may use such an implicit comparison. Conceptual metaphors are useful when complex things must become simple and familiar. In other words, these abstract concepts are mapped into certain familiar experiences and objects in life, thus helping people to better understand these theoretical points. For example, when advertisers want to deliver an abstract taste experience and a brand ideology to consumers, a vivid and concrete conceptual metaphor can be effective. Therefore, in coffee advertising, some short but memorable slogans with conceptual metaphors can make consumers better understand the drinking experience and various tastes and promote consumption, which is the power of language. Additionally, conceptual metaphors can also serve to engage the reader’s interests. A richness of experience can be yielded by a metaphor and people can be aware of meaningful correspondences and differences between things at the same time. When linguistic expressions of a metaphor contain unrelated things, they immediately draw attention from the reader. This is why in many advertising slogans, two unrelated things are linked by a conceptual metaphor. As mentioned above, the Starbucks advertising slogan makes use of the experience of drinking coffee as if it were gold, thus creating a strong comparison and gaining the attention of more consumers <sup>[9]</sup>.

## **5. Conclusion**

In summary, this paper focuses on the specific concepts of conceptual metaphor and its practical application in advertising slogans. From a linguistic point of view, a conceptual metaphor is a rhetorical device that illustrates

one of two objects by comparing the similarities between them. However, metaphors not just exist in languages but our thinking and behaviors. In a sense, the conceptual system that governs our thinking and acting is also a fundamental metaphor in nature. Language of all genres contains metaphors, more than we realize and they are pervasive in our daily life. Examples of this include when we talk and think about life in terms of travel, time in terms of money, anger in terms of heat fluid, an argument in terms of a journey, coffee in terms of gold, COVID-19 in terms of wars, and so on. Therefore, when we have a deeper understanding of the linguistic and cognitive meaning of the conceptual metaphor, we will be able to better understand the metaphor we live by.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Kovecses Z, 2002, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- [2] Phillips BJ, McQuarrie EF, 2009, Impact of Advertising Metaphor on Consumer Belief: Delineating the Contribution of Comparison Versus Deviation Factors. *Journal of Advertising*, 38(1): 49–62.
- [3] Hermeren L, 1999, *English for Sale: A Study of the Language of Advertising (Vol. 99)*, Lund University Press, Sweden.
- [4] Gibbs Jr RW, Gibbs RW, Gibbs J, 1994, *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- [5] Gibbs RW, 1999, Researching Metaphor, in Cameron L, Low G, (eds.), *Researching and Applying Metaphor*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 29–47.
- [6] Kovecses Z, 2010, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- [7] Lakoff G, Johnson M, 1980, *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- [8] Coegnarts M, Kravanja P, 2012, From Thought to Modality: A Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Structural-Conceptual Metaphors and Image Metaphors. *Image and Narrative*, 13(1): 96–113.
- [9] Crider C, Cirillo L, 1991, Systems of Interpretation and the Function of Metaphor. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 21(2): 171–195.

### Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.