o-Global Journal of Linguistics and Language Education
ISSN 3030-1394 /online/

Vol. 2 No. 5 (2025) Žiema

Conceptualization and Metonymy: Cognitive Mechanisms of Meaning Construction in Language

[1] **Dilber Orujova**

https://doi.org/10.69760/egjlle.2505003

Abstract; This paper examines how conceptualization and metonymy jointly underpin meaning construction in language within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. Conceptualization is treated as the dynamic, construal-based, and embodied process through which linguistic expressions prompt mental representations, while metonymy is argued to be a domain-internal access operation that provides cognitively economical routes to complex conceptual structures. Integrating insights from Cognitive Grammar, Frame Semantics, and Conceptual Integration Theory, the study shows how reference-point relations, frame activation, and local compressions in blended spaces account for familiar patterns such as AUTHOR→WORK ("She reads Shakespeare") and PLACE→INSTITUTION ("The White House issued a statement"). The analysis highlights the roles of salience, profiling, and cultural models in stabilizing metonymic preferences across languages and registers, and it outlines operational diagnostics for distinguishing metonymy from metaphor in corpus data. We argue that metonymy is not a peripheral stylistic device but a fundamental cognitive mechanism embedded in embodied experience and socio-cultural practice. The paper concludes with implications for linguistic theory, cross-linguistic variation, corpus methodology, and applied domains including translation, lexicography, and natural language understanding.

Keywords: *conceptualization; metonymy; cognitive linguistics; embodied cognition*

1. Introduction

The study of meaning has long oscillated between two broad conceptions. In traditional structuralist and formalist accounts, meaning is treated as a relatively **static relation** between a sign and an extralinguistic referent, compositional and truth-conditional in spirit. On this view, linguistic expressions map onto the world in a largely code-like fashion, and figurative uses (including metonymy) are often relegated to stylistics or pragmatics. By contrast, **Cognitive**

[1] Orujova, D. Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan. Email: dilber_orucova@ndu.edu.az. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0459-9692.

Linguistics (CL) reconceives meaning as conceptualization—a dynamic process in which language prompts comprehenders to construct rich mental representations constrained by attention, perspective, and embodied experience (Langacker, 1987, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). In CL, grammar itself is symbolic and usage-based; semantic structure is inseparable from encyclopedic knowledge, and discourse is saturated with culturally learned frames and scenarios (Fillmore, 1982). Within this framework, figurative phenomena are not peripheral ornaments but basic cognitive operations that reveal how speakers access, organize, and navigate conceptual structure.

While metaphor has attracted sustained attention as cross-domain mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metonymy—a within-domain access relation grounded in contiguity and salience—has emerged as equally fundamental to meaning construction (Radden & Kövecses, 1999; Kövecses, 2002). Metonymy enables speakers to reach a complex target concept by profiling a cognitively prominent reference point—as when *Shakespeare* denotes the writer's works, or *the White House* profiles the U.S. executive. Far from being a mere stylistic shortcut, metonymy is pervasive in everyday reference, description, stance-taking, and institutional discourse; it underwrites headline economy, legal personification ("the bench ruled"), and the conceptual compression characteristic of expert genres. From a CL perspective, then, conceptualization provides the architecture, and metonymy provides efficient access within that architecture.

Despite broad consensus on this division of labor, several issues remain undertheorized or methodologically diffuse. First, we lack a precise account of how metonymy functions mechanistically as an access operation inside ongoing conceptualization—how salience, profiling, and attentional selection interact in time. Second, although influential frameworks—Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1982), Reference-Point Constructions (Langacker, 1993), and Conceptual Integration (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002)—offer complementary tools, their constraints on metonymic mappings have not been systematically aligned. Third, cross-linguistic research shows that metonymic preferences vary with cultural models and discourse traditions (Kövecses, 2005), yet we lack comparable diagnostics that travel across languages and registers. Finally, annotation and corpus practice still struggle to differentiate metonymy from metaphor in ambiguous cases ("metaphtonymy"), and to do so in a way that supports reproducible analysis.

Against this background, the present paper advances a unified, operational view of metonymy as a cognitive access mechanism embedded in conceptualization. We pursue four guiding research questions:

- **RQ1 (Access):** *In what precise ways does metonymy function as a cognitive access operation within conceptualization?* We model metonymy as reference-point–guided profiling inside a single frame/domain, yielding conceptual economy and discourse coherence (Langacker, 1993; Radden & Kövecses, 1999).

- **RQ2 (Constraints):** *How do frames, reference points, and embodiment constrain metonymic mappings?* We articulate constraint sets from Frame Semantics (slot/role structure), Reference-Point dynamics (salience, proximity, conventionality), and embodied routines that stabilize recurrent contiguities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Fillmore, 1982).
- **RQ3 (Variation):** *What cross-linguistic/cultural factors modulate metonymic preferences?* We examine how cultural cognition and discourse conventions select different reference points (e.g., PLACE→INSTITUTION vs. LEADER→STATE), and how genre/register (legal, journalistic, literary) redistributes metonymic load (Kövecses, 2005; Radden, 2005).
- **RQ4 (Diagnostics):** *How can we operationalize diagnostics for identifying metonymy vs. metaphor in real data?* We propose a compact test battery—paraphrase expansion, frame-fit checks, anaphora and agreement behavior, collocational profiles, and syntactic alternations—to support annotation and corpus studies, and to distinguish within-domain access from cross-domain mapping.

Outline. Section 2 reviews the theoretical background: conceptualization as dynamic, construal-based, and embodied (Langacker, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999); metonymy as within-domain access (Radden & Kövecses, 1999); and three anchors—Frame Semantics, Reference-Point Constructions, and Conceptual Integration. Section 3 proposes a working typology of metonymy (e.g., PART→WHOLE, PLACE→INSTITUTION, PRODUCER→PRODUCT, OBJECT→CONTENT, BODY-PART→STATE/AGENT) with minimal diagnostics and cross-linguistic illustrations. Section 4 develops our account of metonymy as access inside conceptualization, detailing salience, profiling, and economy, and formalizing reference-point dynamics. Section 5 aligns constraints from frames, reference points, and blending, clarifying when metonymic compressions participate in integration networks. Section 6 surveys cross-linguistic and cultural variation, relating metonymic preferences to cultural models and register. Section 7 sets out a methodological program: corpus diagnostics, optional experimental probes, and an annotation scheme. Section 8 offers case studies from legal, media/literary, and conversational discourse. Section 9 discusses theoretical payoffs and borderline phenomena (metaphtonymy); Section 10 sketches implications for lexicography, NLP, translation, and pedagogy; Section 11 notes limitations and avenues for future work; and Section 12 concludes that conceptualization (architecture) and metonymy (navigation) jointly ground the flexibility, efficiency, and cultural patterning of linguistic meaning.

Throughout, we treat metonymy not as a decorative trope but as a core cognitive resource—one that reveals, with particular clarity, how language users build, access, and manage conceptual structure in real time.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Conceptualization in Cognitive Linguistics

Within Cognitive Linguistics (CL), meaning is not housed in words per se but constructed by language users as they recruit rich conceptual knowledge to interpret an expression in context (Evans & Green, 2006; Croft & Cruse, 2004). In Langacker's terms, a linguistic form prompts a conceptualization rather than encoding a ready-made proposition (Langacker, 1987, 1993). Four interlocking notions are central:

- Construal. A situation can be conceptualized in multiple, systematically related ways. Lexico-grammatical choices modulate scope, granularity, and vantage point (e.g., *a flock of birds* vs. *thirty starlings*), yielding distinct but compatible portrayals (Langacker, 1987; Evans & Green, 2006).
- Perspective. Linguistic expressions impose a viewing arrangement: the conceptualizer's position (e.g., deictic center, temporal vantage), attentional window, and trajector–landmark relations (Langacker, 1987). Passive/active alternations or motion verbs with path vs. manner salience instantiate perspectival shifts.
- Profiling and figure/ground. A lexical item profiles a substructure within a base (encyclopedic frame). In *elbow*, the joint is profiled against the arm schema; in an event description, a figure (trajector) is set against a ground (landmark), shaping attentional salience (Langacker, 1987, 1993).
- Embodiment. Conceptualization is constrained by bodily and sensorimotor experience. Image schemas (e.g., CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE) arise from recurrent bodily interactions and structure both literal and nonliteral understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Johnson, 1987).

Beyond embodiment, conceptualization is culturally patterned. Languages package recurring experiences into community-specific cultural models that attune speakers to preferred construals and figurative routines (Kövecses, 2005). Thus, CL treats semantic structure as encyclopedic, usage-based, and variationally sensitive across communities and registers (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Evans & Green, 2006).

2.2. What Metonymy Is (and Isn't)

In the cognitive paradigm, metonymy is a domain-internal mapping in which one concept affords mental access to another conceptually contiguous entity within the same frame/domain (Radden & Kövecses, 1999). It exploits entrenched associations (producer–product, part–whole, place–institution) to navigate conceptual structure efficiently:

- Access via contiguity/association. In *She reads Shakespeare*, the AUTHOR provides access to the WORKS; in *The White House issued a statement*, a PLACE profiles an INSTITUTION. Such relations are licensed by conventional contiguity inside knowledge frames (Radden & Kövecses, 1999; Kövecses, 2002).

- Contrast with metaphor. Metaphor maps across domains (e.g., ARGUMENT IS WAR), projecting structure from a source to a target (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metonymy, by contrast, stays within a single domain/frame and re-profiles an element already internal to that frame. Mixed cases ("metaphtonymy") arise when metonymic highlighting scaffolds a subsequent cross-domain projection (Kövecses, 2002).
- Processing intuition: economy, salience, entrenchment. Metonymy achieves cognitive economy by recruiting the most salient reference point available, leveraging entrenched associations to compress description, advance reference, and maintain discourse coherence (Radden & Kövecses, 1999; Langacker, 1993). In headlines and legal prose (*The bench ruled…*), metonymy supports conceptual compression while preserving recoverability.

A working typology (illustrative, not exhaustive) includes PART→WHOLE (*hands* for workers), WHOLE→PART (*the university* for an office), PLACE→INSTITUTION (*Hollywood*), PRODUCER→PRODUCT (*to own a Picasso*), OBJECT→CONTENT (*drink a glass*), BODY-PART→STATE/AGENT (*keep a cool head*). Each type can be diagnosed by paraphrase expansion and frame-fit tests (Section 7).

2.3. Three Anchors

CL offers complementary frameworks that specify how metonymy operates inside conceptualization. We foreground three "anchors" and the constraints they contribute.

(i) Frame Semantics (Fillmore, 1982).

Lexical meaning invokes frames—schematized situations with participants, roles, and relations (e.g., COMMERCIAL_TRANSACTION: buyer, seller, goods, money). Metonymy functions as frame-internal activation: highlighting one frame element to stand for (and provide access to) the frame or another element. Thus, *the bench* (ROLE: judicial body) can profile the institutional agent in the LEGAL frame. Constraints: (a) the source and target must belong to the same frame, (b) the relation must be conventional and inferentially licensed by the frame, and (c) the metonymic shift should preserve role compatibility to sustain coherence.

(ii) Reference-Point Constructions (Langacker, 1993).

Metonymy is modeled as reference-point–guided profiling: a salient, cognitively accessible entity (the reference point) affords mental access to a less accessible target within a network. Canonical patterns include AUTHOR→WORK, PLACE→INSTITUTION, and POSSESSOR→POSSESSED (*John's keys*). Constraints: (a) salience/proximity (the reference point must be highly entrenched and contiguous to the target in the knowledge network), (b) conventional pathways (community-stored links), and (c) asymmetric accessibility (the reference point is more accessible than the target at the moment of use). This account explains why

Shakespeare readily stands for the plays, but *a Renaissance playwright* does not as easily stand for a specific corpus without further specification.

(iii) Conceptual Integration (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

Meaning often arises in blended spaces where structure from multiple input spaces integrates under compression principles (time, cause–effect, role, identity). Metonymy participates as a local compression: an internally licensed shortcut that carries into the blend to support tighter emergent structure (e.g., slogan and headline stylization). Constraints: (a) metonymic access should be licensed in at least one input by frame-internal relations, (b) compression must increase topical coherence without losing recoverability, and (c) the blend should permit back-projection to inputs for interpretation. This clarifies why highly compressed institutional personifications work in headlines but require expansion in formal statutes.

Together, these anchors yield a layered constraint model: frames delimit the domain and role inventory; reference-point dynamics determine which element is cognitively optimal for access at a given discourse moment; and integration explains how local metonymic compressions scale up in complex, multi-input constructions (Fillmore, 1982; Langacker, 1993; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

3. A Working Typology of Metonymy

Below, each subtype is defined as a within-frame access relation (Radden & Kövecses, 1999), followed by a minimal diagnostic (quick tests you can run in corpus work) and 2–3 examples (English + one other language). Where helpful, I note role compatibility (Frame Semantics) and reference-point status (Langacker, 1993).

3.1 PART → WHOLE / WHOLE → PART

Definition. A salient part (or member) provides access to the whole entity (or set), or vice versa, within the same frame (e.g., BODY, ORGANIZATION).

Minimal diagnostic.

- Paraphrase expansion: “part” ↔ “the person/whole” without changing the frame: *three hands ≈ three workers*.
- Anaphora/Agreement: follow-up pronouns reveal intended number/type (*Three hands are needed; they start at 7 a.m.* → they = workers).
- Reversibility: WHOLE→PART often not reversible (*The company signed ≠ the managers signed* unless context licenses it).

Examples.

- EN: *We need all hands on deck* (PART→WHOLE: hands for workers/personnel).
- EN: *The university announced new grants* (WHOLE→PART: university for administration/decision-makers).
- ES: *Faltan manos en la cocina* "We're short of hands in the kitchen." (PART→WHOLE: manos for staff).
- FR: *L'Élysée a confirmé la visite* "The Élysée confirmed the visit" (WHOLE/PLACE→PART/INSTITUTION; see §3.2).

3.2 PLACE → INSTITUTION / BUILDING → PEOPLE

Definition. A location/building serves as reference point for the institution/people housed there (LEGAL, GOVERNMENT, MEDIA frames).

Minimal diagnostic.

- Role compatibility: Does the PLACE fill the Agent role plausibly? If yes, metonymy licenses institutional Agent.
- Frame-fit check: Replace PLACE with explicit institution/officials; acceptability preserved in news prose.
- Anaphora: *The White House said… it…* (institutional singular).

Examples.

- EN: *The White House issued a statement.* (BUILDING→PEOPLE/INSTITUTION)
- EN (legal): *The bench ruled against the motion.* (PLACE/SEAT→JUDGES)
- DE: *Das Kanzleramt dementierte den Bericht.* "The Chancellery denied the report." (BUILDING→INSTITUTION)

3.3 PRODUCER → PRODUCT

Definition. A producer/author/brand profiles the work/product (AUTHOR→WORK, MAKER→ARTEFACT).

Minimal diagnostic.

- Paraphrase: *read Shakespeare* ≈ *read Shakespeare's works*.
- Selectional fit: Verbs select for works, but the author name appears: *read*, *buy*, *listen to*.
- Anaphora: *She bought a Picasso. It hangs in the foyer* (object, not person).

Examples.

- EN: *She reads Shakespeare every summer.* (AUTHOR→WORK)
- EN: *They served a Burgundy with dinner.* (REGION/PRODUCER→PRODUCT wine)
- ES: *Voy a escuchar a Piazzolla esta noche.* "I'm going to listen to Piazzolla tonight." (AUTHOR→WORK/recordings)

3.4 INSTRUMENT → ACTION / OBJECT → CONTENT

Definition. An instrument provides access to the action regularly performed with it; a container profiles its contents (INGESTION, READING, COMMUNICATION frames).

Minimal diagnostic.

- Paraphrase: *She skyped me* ≈ *She called me via Skype* (INSTRUMENT→ACTION).
- Frame-fit: *drink a glass* ≈ *drink the contents of the glass*.
- Agreement: content-compatible anaphora: *He finished a bottle; it was a Rioja.*

Examples.

- EN: *He mic'd the speaker.* (INSTRUMENT→ACTION, productive verbing)
- EN: *She drank a glass and left.* (OBJECT→CONTENT)
- TR: *Bir fincan daha ister misin?* "Do you want another cup?" (OBJECT→CONTENT: coffee/tea understood)

3.5 BODY PART → STATE / AGENT

Definition. A body part profiles a person or mental/affective state saliently associated with it (BODY, AGENCY, EMOTION frames).

Minimal diagnostic.

- Paraphrase: *We need more heads* ≈ *We need more people/staff*.
- Entailments: idiomatic collocations preserve state readout (*keep a cool head* → self-control).
- Anaphora: Number/type switch to persons: *Two pairs of hands joined; they helped immediately.*

Examples.

- EN: *They're short two heads in accounting.* (PART→WHOLE person count)
- EN: *Keep a cool head and carry on.* (BODY PART→STATE)

- RU: *Нам не хватает рук.* “We don’t have enough hands.” (PART→WHOLE: workers/staff)

Table 1. Typology, Diagnostics, and Examples (schematic)

Type	Definition (within-frame)	Minimal Diagnostic	EN Example	Other-Language Example
PART→WHOLE	Part profiles the whole	Paraphrase; anaphora to people	*All **hands** on deck*	ES *faltan **manos***
WHOLE→PART	Whole profiles sub-part	Role-fit; reversibility weak	*The **university** announced…*	FR *L’**Élysée** a confirmé…*
PLACE→INSTITUTION	Building/place → institution/people	Agent role; frame-fit	*The **White House** said…*	DE *Das **Kanzleramt** dementierte…*
PRODUCER→PRODUCT	Producer/author → work/product	Verb selection; object anaphora	*Read **Shakespeare***	ES *escuchar a **Piazzolla***
INSTRUMENT→ACTION	Tool names action	Paraphrase to action	*He **mic’d** the speaker*	—
OBJECT→CONTENT	Container → contents	Paraphrase; content anaphora	*Drink a **glass***	TR *Bir **fincan** daha…*
BODY PART→STATE/AGENT	Body part → person/state	Collocation; anaphora to people	*count **heads**; cool **head***	RU *не хватает **рук***
EVENT→TIME	Event → period/era	Paraphrase; recoverability	*Since **9/11***	ES *Tras el **15-M***
TIME→EVENT	Time/date → event	Community indexicality	*On **Feb 24***	—

3.6 EVENT → TIME / TIME → EVENT

Definition. A historical event provides access to the period, or a date/time profiles the event (HISTORY, MEDIA frames).

Minimal diagnostic.

- Paraphrase: *After 9/11 ≈ After the September 11 attacks* (EVENT→TIME-PERIOD).
- Recoverability: Time/date uniquely retrieves the event in discourse community.
- Anaphora: time vs. event pronouns (*After 9/11, it changed everything* → it = the event).

Examples.

- EN: *Since 9/11, airport security has tightened.* (EVENT→ERA)
- EN: *On February 24, everything shifted.* (TIME→EVENT: 2022 invasion context)
- ES: *Tras el 15-M, surgieron nuevos partidos.* “After 15-M (May 15 movement), new parties emerged.” (EVENT label → period)

4. Metonymy as an Access Mechanism in Conceptualization

4.1 Salience, Profiling, and Economy

Metonymy delivers cognitive economy by letting speakers profile the most accessible substructure of a frame to stand for the target (Langacker, 1993). Three benefits follow:

1. Selectional efficiency: The metonymic reference point satisfies grammatical/semantic selection while compressing content (*The bench ruled…* efficiently encodes "the panel of judges issued a decision").
2. Discourse coherence: Recurrent reference points stabilize topic continuity (news cycles reuse the White House, Downing Street, Brussels).
3. Inferential guidance: Listeners reconstruct the full frame via entrenched associations, minimizing ambiguity where communities share the frame (Fillmore, 1982).

Result: fewer words, higher cohesion, and predictable inferences—hallmarks of efficient conceptual navigation.

4.2 Reference-Point Dynamics

In Langacker's model, a salient pivot (reference point) affords mental access to a target within a knowledge network. Two canonical cases:

- AUTHOR → WORK. *Shakespeare* (highly salient author node) → *the dramatic/poetic corpus* (target). Why it works: (i) stable producer–product association, (ii) community conventionalization, (iii) asymmetric accessibility (the name is more retrievable than a list of titles).
    - Discourse payoffs: thematic cohesion (*Early Shakespeare shows…*), evaluative stance (*late Shakespeare*).
- PLACE → TEAM/GOVERNMENT. *Downing Street*, *the Kremlin*, *Ankara* → institutional agents. Why it works: (i) seat-of-power schemas in the GOVERNANCE frame; (ii) spatial contiguity cues agency; (iii) journalistic convention licenses Agent role for PLACE.
    - Diagnostics: frame-fit (replace with *the government/PM*); agentive verb compatibility; singular institutional anaphora (*it*).

Operational cues for annotation.

- Salience/entrenchment: frequency and conventionality in domain corpora.
- Proximity: tight source–target linkage in the same frame (no cross-domain bridging).
- Asymmetry: source more retrievable than target at that discourse moment (topic, givenness).

4.3 Embodiment Constraints

Embodied routines shape stable contiguities that metonymy exploits (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 1987):

- Body-based aggregations: manual labor → hands; cognition/self-regulation → head; perception → eyes.
- Artefact–use couplings: cup → beverage, bottle → wine—ingestion schemas ground OBJECT→CONTENT.
- Place–agency schemas: occupants recurrently occupy buildings associated with authority (courtrooms, palaces), yielding PLACE→INSTITUTION mappings.

These bodily and situated regularities provide experiential evidence that stabilizes metonymic preferences across communities; culture then amplifies or redirects them (Kövecses, 2005).

5. Interfacing Frameworks

5.1 Frame Semantics

Frame Semantics treats lexical meanings as pointers to frames—structured scenes with slots (roles) and prototypical fillers (Fillmore, 1982). On this view, metonymy is frame-internal activation: a speaker highlights one element to grant mental access to the larger frame or to another element within the same frame. Thus, in the LEGAL frame, *the bench* fills a ROLE (judicial body) yet functions referentially as an Agent, activating the full adjudicative scene. Operationally, this predicts: (i) role compatibility—the metonymic SOURCE must plausibly stand in for a role licensed by the frame; (ii) recoverability—listeners can reconstruct the frame and the intended TARGET; and (iii) conventionalization—community practices entrain which slot–filler shortcuts are stable (e.g., *Downing Street*, *the Kremlin*, *Wall Street*). Frame diagnostics therefore double as metonymy diagnostics: frame-fit checks and role substitution tests (Section 7.1).

5.2 Cognitive Grammar

In Cognitive Grammar, expressions profile a substructure against an encyclopedic base; meaning differences reflect differences in construal (Langacker, 1987, 1993). Metonymy appears as conceptual prominence: the speaker re-profiles a readily accessible substructure (the reference point) to stand for a less accessible target within the same knowledge network (AUTHOR→WORK; PLACE→INSTITUTION). Three consequences follow. First, asymmetric accessibility: reference points tend to be more salient (names, seats of power, iconic parts). Second, economy: re-profiling compresses description while preserving interpretability. Third, discourse coherence: once a reference point is introduced, it supports topic continuity via anaphora and collocational routines (e.g., *the White House… it… its…*). Cognitive Grammar thus explains how metonymy works (via profiling and reference-point access) and why it is efficient (salience-driven selection in real time).

5.3 Conceptual Integration

Conceptual Integration Theory models meaning construction as online blending of multiple inputs under compression principles (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Metonymy contributes as a local compression imported from an input where the frame-internal shortcut is licensed (e.g., PLACE→INSTITUTION in political reporting) and projected into the blend (e.g., a headline, slogan, or chant). This predicts distributional facts: metonymies are especially prevalent in registers that reward brevity, rhythmic patterning, and iconicity (headlines, tickers, slogans). Blending additionally clarifies mixed cases ("metaphtonymy"): a metonymic highlight (e.g., *Washington*) scaffolds a subsequent cross-domain metaphor (e.g., *Washington turned up the heat*), with metonymy handling reference and metaphor handling structure.

6. Cross-Linguistic and Cultural Variation

Cultural models guide preferred metonymies. In political discourse, some languages/media traditions favor COUNTRY→GOVERNMENT (*Berlin announced…*), others LEADER→STATE (*Ankara decided…*; LEADER as the reference point), reflecting local ideologies of agency and leadership (Kövecses, 2005). Such preferences are reinforced by journalistic stylebooks, audience expectations, and institutional naming practices.

Body-part metonymies reveal cultural salience. As Radden (2005) shows, European languages differ in which body parts profile people or states: EN *hands* (labor), RU *руки* (labor), EN *heads* (headcount/authority), DE *Kopf* in idioms (judgment), with distinct collocational ecosystems (e.g., *cool head*, *clear head* vs. *steady hand*). These distributions map culturally entrenched embodied routines (Section 4.3).

Register matters.

- Journalistic prose maximizes PLACE→INSTITUTION and COUNTRY→GOVERNMENT for speed and cohesion.
- Legal genres prefer BUILDING/ROLE→INSTITUTION/PEOPLE (*the bench, the court, the prosecution*), aligning with role precision and institutional personification.
- Literary text amplifies PRODUCER→PRODUCT and BODY PART→STATE for stylistic texture and focalization.

Table 2. Cross-linguistic snapshot

Language	PLACE→INSTITUTION	COUNTRY→GOVT	LEADER→STATE	PRODUCER→PRODUCT	BODY PART→STATE/AGENT
English	**The White House** said…	**Washington** will…	*Biden* vowed… (rarer as STATE)	*read **Shakespeare***	*count **heads**; cool **head***
German	**Das Kanzleramt** dementierte…	**Berlin** beschloss…	**Scholz** entschied… (commentary)	*ein **Kafka** lesen*	*klare **Kopf*** (idioms)
Spanish	**La Moncloa** anunció…	**Madrid** aprobó…	**Sánchez** anunció… (frequent)	*escuchar a **Piazzolla***	*faltan **manos***
Russian	**Кремль** заявил…	**Москва** решила…	**Путин** заявил… (salient)	*читать **Пушкина***	*не хватает **рук***
Turkish	**Beştepe** duyurdu…	**Ankara** açıkladı…	**Erdoğan** söyledi… (common)	*Orhan Pamuk'u okumak*	*iki **el** daha lazım*

Note. Cells reflect common press/literary patterns; actual distributions vary by outlet and subregister.

7. Methodological Program

7.1 Corpus Diagnostics

To distinguish metonymy (within-frame access) from metaphor (cross-domain mapping) in authentic data, we propose a compact battery:

1. Paraphrase expansion (recoverability). Replace the suspected SOURCE with the explicit TARGET (*the bench → the panel of judges*). If meaning and entailments hold, metonymy is supported.
2. Frame-fit check (role licensing). Verify that both SOURCE and TARGET are members of the same frame and that the SOURCE can plausibly fill the discourse role (Agent, Experiencer).
3. Anaphora resolution. Track follow-up pronouns and definites (*it/they, this decision, the institution*). Institutional singulars (*it*) often mark PLACE→INSTITUTION.
4. Collocational profiles. Examine verb–noun and adjective–noun patterns. Institutional agents pair with speech and decision verbs (*announced, ruled, confirmed*).
5. Syntactic alternations. Passive/active alternations or light-verb constructions can reveal the underlying role structure (*The bill was passed by Westminster* vs. *Parliament passed the bill*).
6. Community indexicality. Event/time labels and place names rely on shared indexical frames (e.g., *9/11*, *15-M*). If indexical recoverability is high, metonymy is likely.

Corpora to sample.

- Newswire: Gigaword, NOW (News on the Web).

- Parliamentary debates: Hansard, Bundestag stenographic reports.
- Legal decisions: Supreme Court opinions, EU Court of Justice.
- Literature subcorpora: Project Gutenberg subsets; national literary corpora.
- Comparable multilingual news corpora for cross-linguistic contrasts.

7.2 Experimental Probes (optional)

To validate corpus diagnostics with processing evidence:

- Reference-point priming. Prime participants with the SOURCE (*White House*) and measure reaction times to TARGET-consistent continuations vs. mismatches (expect facilitation for frame-consistent targets).
- Eye-tracking for headlines. Headlines with PLACE→INSTITUTION should yield shorter regressions when followed by institutional continuations than by literal place continuations.
- Acceptability judgments. Compare metonymic sentences with literal paraphrases across registers; metonymy should show higher naturalness in headline/legal styles.
- Memory probes. Test whether readers recall institutional agents after PLACE primes more accurately than literal place content.

7.3 Annotation Scheme

A lightweight schema to support reproducible analysis and inter-annotator agreement:

- SOURCE (string; e.g., *the White House*).
- TARGET (normalized label; e.g., *U.S. executive/officials*).
- FRAME (e.g., GOVERNANCE, LEGAL, LITERARY PRODUCTION).
- TYPE (e.g., PLACE→INSTITUTION; PRODUCER→PRODUCT; BODY PART→STATE).
- EVIDENCE (diagnostics used: paraphrase, frame-fit, anaphora, collocation, syntax).
- REGISTER (news, legal, literary, conversational).
- CONFIDENCE (Likert 1–5).
- NOTES (free text for edge cases; mark metaphtonymy if metaphor interacts).

Inter-annotator agreement protocol.

- Train annotators on a seed set with gold analyses; discuss borderline cases (e.g., *Washington turned up the heat*).
- Compute Cohen's κ or Krippendorff's α on SOURCE/TYPE labels and FRAME assignment; target ≥ .75.
- Adjudicate disagreements with diagnostic audit trails (store the paraphrases and frame-fit steps).
- Release an annotator's manual with decision trees (e.g., "If role licensing fails, consider metaphor or literal reading").

8. Discussion

This paper has argued that conceptualization supplies the *architecture* of meaning—an encyclopedic, frame-saturated, and embodied knowledge space in which linguistic forms prompt specific construals—while metonymy provides the *navigation tools* within that architecture, affording cognitively economical access to targets via salient reference points. The division of labour is therefore complementary: conceptualization furnishes the scene, role inventory, and attentional parameters; metonymy selects and profiles the most accessible node to keep discourse fluent, cohesive, and recoverable. Put differently, conceptualization answers *what structure is potentially in play*; metonymy answers *which doorway we use to enter it*.

This synthesis clarifies why metonymy is ubiquitous in high-pressure communicative environments (headlines, tickers, legal rulings, play-by-play commentary), where compression is rewarded and community knowledge can be presupposed. It also explains the stability of "institutional personifications" (e.g., *the bench ruled*; *the White House announced*): once entrenched, these shortcuts become default entry points to complex frames. In narrative discourse, producer→product and body-part→agent/state mappings serve analogous functions—offering quick access to evaluative stance (*early Shakespeare*), participation structure (*count heads*), or affective regulation (*keep a cool head*) without re-describing the entire frame on each mention.

Metonymy, metaphor, and the edge cases

Difficult cases often involve layering, where metonymy and metaphor co-occur or interact—frequently labelled metaphtonymy. Three recurrent configurations help disambiguate:

1. Metonymy scaffolds metaphor. A metonymic reference point secures reference (*Washington* for the U.S. government), upon which a metaphor imposes structure (*turned up the heat* → INTENSITY-AS-TEMPERATURE). Here, diagnostics show *within-frame* licensing for *Washington* (PLACE→INSTITUTION), followed by a cross-domain mapping for the predicate.

2. Metaphor licenses metonymy. A metaphor establishes a domain shift (*MARKET IS A CREATURE*), after which metonymy exploits within-blend contiguities (*the market's nerves* → PART→WHOLE inside the creature-blend). Distinguishing marks: metaphor is global (reorganizes the event geometry); metonymy is local (access within the newly constituted frame).

3. Ambiguity resolved by role-fit and paraphrase. If a candidate source cannot plausibly fill a frame role for the same domain (*the corridor decided*), the reading is either metaphoric or infelicitous. Role-compatibility and paraphrase expansion remain the most reliable field diagnostics.

In practice, analysts should chart the order of operations (reference secured first vs. structure imposed first) and test recoverability via literal paraphrases. A methodologically conservative stance treats metonymy as the minimal hypothesis when *within-frame* access suffices, invoking metaphor only when cross-domain projection is required to satisfy selection or inference.

Processing and acquisition: predictions

A unified account yields testable predictions for processing and learning:

- Frequency and conventionality. Because metonymies piggyback on entrenched frame contiguities, higher token frequency and collocational stability should correlate with faster recognition and lower processing cost (shorter reading times, fewer regressions). Conversely, novel or community-specific metonymies should incur accommodation costs unless strongly cued by context.

- Reference-point priming. Prior exposure to a reference point (e.g., *the Kremlin*) should facilitate uptake of institutional predicates (announce, deny, sanction) and penalize literal continuations (architectural descriptions). This predicts classic priming asymmetries in RT and EEG (e.g., reduced N400 for frame-consistent continuations).

- Acquisition trajectory. Children and L2 learners should first master high-contiguity, high-visibility patterns (OBJECT→CONTENT, BODY-PART→AGENT) before more abstract institutional personifications (PLACE→INSTITUTION). Early overextensions (e.g., treating any building as an institutional agent) should regress as role-fit constraints are learned.

- Register sensitivity. With exposure, learners will map register-specific metonymies (journalistic PLACE→INSTITUTION; legal ROLE→INSTITUTION) and display style-conditional expectations—a headline bias towards compressed institutional agents versus a statutory bias toward explicit institutional names.

- Bilingual modulation. In multilinguals, metonymic defaults track the cultural models and stylebooks of the language of discourse; switching languages should shift reference-point availability and naturalness judgments, mirroring cross-linguistic corpus distributions.

Collectively, these predictions align with a view of metonymy as an experience-tuned access mechanism: frequency shapes entrenchment, conventionality shapes expectations, and both jointly reduce the computational burden of real-time interpretation.

9. Conclusion

We have argued that conceptualization and metonymy are interdependent pillars of meaning construction. Conceptualization structures experience by supplying frame-based, embodied, and culturally patterned architectures; metonymy provides cognitively economical access within those architectures, selecting salient reference points to navigate complex scenes with minimal linguistic overhead. This joint mechanism explains the pervasiveness and stability of patterns such as PLACE→INSTITUTION, PRODUCER→PRODUCT, and BODY-PART→STATE/AGENT across languages and registers, while also clarifying their sensitivity to cultural models and genre conventions.

Methodologically, treating metonymy as within-frame access yields practical diagnostics (paraphrase expansion, role-fit, anaphora, collocation, and syntactic alternations) and cleanly separates it from metaphor (cross-domain structure). The framework generates processing and acquisition predictions—chiefly that frequency and conventionality entrain faster uptake and that learners internalize high-contiguity mappings first. For applied domains—translation, lexicography, NLP, and pedagogy—the payoff is immediate: preserve or model reference-point dynamics to maintain coherence and interpretability.

In sum, meaning in natural language is flexible, embodied, and culturally patterned not despite metonymy but because of it. Conceptualization lays out the map; metonymy supplies the well-worn paths that let speakers and listeners move through it swiftly, accurately, and—when needed—creatively.

References

Barcelona, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Metaphor and metonymy at the crossroads: A cognitive perspective*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Croft, W., & Cruse, D. A. (2004). *Cognitive linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.

Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.

Fillmore, C. J. (1982). Frame semantics. In Linguistic Society of Korea (Ed.), *Linguistics in the morning calm* (pp. 111–137). Hanshin.

Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of Chicago Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. Basic Books.

Langacker, R. W. (1987). *Foundations of cognitive grammar, Volume 1: Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (1993). Reference-point constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics, 4*(1), 1–38.

Panther, K.-U., & Thornburg, L. L. (2003). *Metonymy and pragmatic inferencing*. John Benjamins.

Radden, G. (2005). The ubiquity of metonymy. *Cognitive Linguistics, 16*(2), 335–345.

Radden, G., & Kövecses, Z. (1999). Toward a theory of metonymy. In K.-U. Panther & G. R. Radden (Eds.), *Metonymy in language and thought* (pp. 17–59). John Benjamins.

Received: 09.15.2025
Revised: 09.18.2025
Accepted: 10.25.2025
Published: 11.03.2025