

# Conceptual Metaphors in Beowulf

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## **Conceptual Metaphors in Beowulf**

Master's Thesis

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Zagreb, 2020.

Sveučilište u Zagrebu

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## **Abstract**

The thesis deals with conceptual metaphors found in *Beowulf* in order to explore the cultural elements reflected in Old English. The thesis aims to show which cultural values are deeply entrenched and consistent with the metaphorical system of Old English. In order to do that, metaphors were identified using the Metaphorical Identification Procedure in the first 100 lines of *Beowulf*. The results show that metaphorical items linked with culture may be divided into four thematic categories: God, Death, Ships and the Sea and Other. The category *other* includes metaphorical items referring to states and movements, not necessarily tied to culture or not specific to Old English. The categories of God and Death are not surprising as most cultures have some form of religion and death is merely an inevitable aspect of the human condition. The category of Ships and the Sea is the most specific to Old English. Most of the conceptual metaphors found function similarly in Modern English with just a couple of examples that are no longer used.

Key words: conceptual metaphors, *Beowulf*, cognitive linguistics, kennings, metaphor identification procedure, culture

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## **1. Introduction**

The thesis deals with conceptual metaphors that can be found in *Beowulf* in order to explore the cultural elements reflected in Old English. It aims to explore which cultural values are deeply entrenched and consistent with the metaphorical system of Old English so much so that they are reflected in language and general cognition of its speakers. As there are no more native speakers of Old English, the thesis will analyse the language used in *Beowulf*, an Old English poem originating from the oral culture of the Anglo-Saxons. It is a heroic poem, set in the Anglo-Saxon society of warriors, predating Christianity. It was, however; written by a Christian poet. In order to examine the language and identify metaphorical items, the Metaphor Identification Procedure, developed by the Praggleaz group will be used.

Ever after its introduction in the 1980s, cognitive linguistics has changed the way we understand metaphor. It is no longer seen as a dead ornament of language, but as an everyday part of our cognition and perception of the world. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that the metaphorical concept is systematic as is, therefore, the language we use to talk about that metaphorical concept. Because they are systematically tied, metaphorical linguistic expressions can be used to study the nature of metaphorical concepts. One concept is understood in terms of another one, which means that the use of a concrete concept facilitates the use of another, more abstract one. The thesis aims to identify the concepts being understood in terms of other concepts and analyse them within the cultural and historical context in which they were originally used.

The thesis starts with a historic and linguistic overview of the context regarding *Beowulf*. The poem's origin, its general characteristics and aspects of language will be explored. Section 3 discusses the conceptual metaphor theory. It focuses on conceptual metaphors and how to identify them. Section 4 discusses the aims and research questions of the thesis. Section 5 examines the exact methodology used to identify and discuss the metaphoric language in the poem. Section 6 contains the results and discusses metaphorical items identified and section 7 concludes the research.

## 2. Beowulf and its historical and linguistic context

This section provides an overview of *Beowulf*, the historical context in which it was written, as well as some of the linguistic characteristics of Old English.

### 2.1. Beowulf

*Beowulf* is an Old English poem written in prose. According to Magennis (2011), *Beowulf* originates from the oral culture of the Anglo-Saxons. It is a work highly traditional “in its metrical and syntactic structures, its word-chose of poetic vocabulary and its formulaic patterns of phrasing.” (2011: 27) It is also traditional in the themes it deals with and in its value-system. It is a heroic poem, set in the Anglo-Saxon society of warriors, predating Christianity. It was, however; written by a Christian poet. Magennis asserts that according to *Beowulf*'s tone, it can be regarded as an elegiac meditation just as much as it can be regarded as a narrative poem. The subject matter seems to deal with contrasting experience, as the poem can be described as a poem of oppositions or contradictions. Aspects that contrast each other are “the outlook of the poem itself and the heroic values of the tradition in which it participates, and between [...] tradition and the individual talent.” (Magennis 2011: 29) *Beowulf* stems from an oral culture, a culture in which knowledge is passed down through the spoken word and preserved in memory. The *Beowulf* poet takes the position of the oral *scop*, using the first-person plural. By doing so, he gives the impression of really being the *scop* and “using the traditional medium of heroic poetry to pass on things he has heard about.” (Magennis 2011: 31) In reality, *Beowulf* is a literary work, “which offers a meditation on its heroic world rather than itself coming directly from such a world.” (Magennis 2011: 31)

Its only preserved text can be found in the Nowell Codex, a manuscript from the early eleventh century. According to Orchard, “two scribes, one taking over from the other about two thirds through, copied the poem around the year 1000.” (2012: 64) The exact date of the poem's origin is difficult to determine, but it is believed to have most likely been written between 925 and 1025, which includes the entire span of Anglo-Saxon literature. The *Beowulf* manuscript, as it is also referred to, was damaged in a fire in 1731. It also contains four other texts, three in prose and one in verse, *The Passion of St Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and *Judith*. Orchard suggests that the Nowell manuscript actually serves as a collection of texts about monsters. The same division of monsters into human-shaped, bestial and serpentine can be found in the Anglo-Saxon *Liber monstrorum*, or the *Book of Monsters*. Orchard suggests that the reason that monsters are so important in *Beowulf* is because of the focus the poet encourages us to have on their

perspective. The poet uses the word *aglæca* to refer to Grendel. The word is used to refer to “A miserable being, wretch, miscreant, monster, fierce combatant” (Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary, 2019). The poet actually uses the same noun to refer to Beowulf, which leads to the question: can Beowulf also be regarded as a monster?

Orchard mentions that the tale of Beowulf has certain similarities with a type of tale which can be described as “the bear’s son’s tale”. The tale talks about a bear-descended hero, who, after a troubling childhood, goes on to defeat a monster and is rewarded with fame. Similar fights with a monster followed by retaliation from its mother can often be found in Old Norse-Icelandic narratives. According to Orchard, the monsters in *Beowulf* represent certain archetypal characters: “Grendel is an enraged exile, his mother an aggrieved kinswoman, and the dragon an affronted ruler devastated in his own domain.” (2013: 143) Such parallel similarities are no longer surprising. He also describes the plot of *Beowulf* as “simple to the point of bewilderment.” (2012: 65) It describes a hero fighting three battles, two in his youth and the final one as an old king.

## **2.2. Historical Context of Anglo-Saxon England**

Nicholas Brooks describes the Anglo-Saxon settlement in Britain as a “radical cultural and political transformation of the late Roman world traditionally known as the *Age of Migrations* or the *Barbarian Invasions*.” (2013: 1) He argues that in comparison to the rest of the Western Roman Empire, the most radical linguistic and cultural change occurred in Britain. The Anglo-Saxons saw themselves as separate from the rest of the world because, as Anlezark suggests, they were a nation of migrants who lived on an island at what they knew as the edge of the world.

During the fifth and the sixth century, the Romano-British culture was overpowered by Germanic pagans, whose language would evolve into Old English. Latin would go into decline. Brooks argues that the Romano-British elite adopted Christianity and began to abandon their former pagan tradition during the course of the fourth century. He exemplifies his claims with the description of the archaeological record of newly established Anglo-Saxon burial grounds of the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries. According to Brooks, the Anglo-Saxon pagan culture was profoundly altered in the course of the seventh century after two Christian missions: “the Roman monks sent by Pope Gregory I to Kent, [...] and the Irish-speaking monks from Iona [...] in 635.” (2013; 3) Brooks asserts that by the end of the sixth century “a dozen or more pagan Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had been established in eastern and

southern Britain.” (2013: 4) However, Anlezark suggests that for some Anglo-Saxons “pantheistic assumptions about the earth and its cosmic forces sat comfortably beside Christian belief.” (2013: 67) Brooks believes that the Anglo-Saxon Church sought to maintain its close links with the papacy, which served to strengthen the concept of “a shared English Christian identity within Britain.” (2013: 5) The strong Christian influence on the Anglo-Saxons meant that the English monks and priests had to be trained to manage reading and understanding of the Scriptures as well as holding Christian rituals in Latin.

In the seventh and eighth century, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were exposed to frequent warfare, which shaped their culture and geographic position. By the early ninth century, only four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms remained: Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia and Wessex. However, the ninth century also saw Viking conquests which destroyed three of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria. Brooks asserts that the “pagan Scandinavian warriors became the lordly class” (2013: 9) and that the Scandinavian legal customs and terminology influenced the Anglo-Saxons greatly. The region of East Anglia, East Midlands and Lindsey came to be known as the Danelaw.

According to Brooks, “The ninety years from 975 to 1066 were characterized by military and political failures and the foreign conquests of 1016 and 1066.” (2013: 13) This led to the replacement of the English aristocracy with a new ruling class of French barons whose cultural influence would affect England for the next three centuries.

### **2.3. Old English**

Old English is the earliest form of the English language. It is also referred to as the Anglo-Saxon language after the peoples who spoke it. The timeframe in which it was spoken roughly entails the time period between the invasion of the Angles and Saxons in the fifth century, and the Norman Conquest of 1066 when the language began to change more drastically due to outside influence. Old English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. According to Smith, “all Indo-European languages descend from a common ancestor, *Proto-Indo-European*.” (Smith 2009: 3) Proto-Indo-European's origin is unknown; however, some scholars contend that it “was spoken in what are now the steppes of southern Russia and the Ukraine.” (Smith 2009: 3) Proto-Indo-European did not survive, but its “phonology and morphology have been tentatively reconstructed.” (Gneuss 2013: 20) Languages such as Indic, Iranian, Armenian, Greek, Italic, Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, Slavic and Albanian go back to the Proto-Indo-European. According to Smith, “one group of Indo-European languages,

The Germanic languages, emerged in the first millennium BC in northern Europe.” (Smith 2009: 3) Old English originated from a Common Germanic spoken in southern Scandinavia and northern parts of Germany.

Old English is mostly preserved in manuscripts written by scribes, but some of it can also be found “in inscriptions carved on stone, metal and bone.” (Smith 2009: 6) The records only provide a fraction of the language once spoken for over six centuries. We have more than 1200 manuscript books or fragments written in Old English. However, most of the Old English poetry “survives in just four major manuscripts dating from the end of the tenth century: *The Exeter Book*, *The Vercelli Book*, *The Junius Manuscript* and *The Beowulf Manuscript*.” (Smith 2009: 7)

Upon coming to Britain, the Anglo-Saxons used the runic alphabet. It is not entirely certain where the runic alphabet originates from; however; it is believed to have been derived from a Roman alphabet and to have been spread to the Germanic tribes. According to Gneuss (2013), it is likely that the Anglo-Saxons must have learned to write in religious institutions during the course of the seventh century. (Gneuss 2013: 23)

The evolution of English can be described as a gradual change from a synthetic to an analytic language. Synthetic languages contain information about grammatical categories and syntactic functions in inflexional endings. Analytic languages use other means to mark the categories and functions, such as: fixed word order, prepositions, adverbs, auxiliary verbs and personal pronouns. The evolution started in Common Germanic when the accent was shifted to the first syllable. This, in turn, meant that the final syllable which carried the inflexional endings became weakened and reduced. According to Gneuss (2013), Old English was not a completely synthetic language. Noun endings did not differentiate cases clearly. Case, gender and number could often be ascertained from an accompanying pronoun or adjective. Personal nouns are usually masculine or feminine, corresponding with their meaning; however, there are a few exceptions. Old English verbs only have two tenses, present and past. There are two inflectional types of verbs, strong and weak. Strong verbs form the past tense by changing the vowel in the verbal root, and weak verbs add a suffix -d or -t.

The sentence structure in Old English differs from sentence structure in Modern English in the sense that it is less fixed. As Old English is not fully inflected, most of its nouns have the same form for the nominative and accusative case. This implies that the most common word order in Old English is S-V-O, which is a similarity it shares with Modern English. According

to Gneuss (2013), the sentence structure S-O-V is common in subordinate clauses, and the structure V-S-O is used in interrogative sentences. In Old English, nouns, adjectives and pronouns have to agree in number, case and gender, and subjects and verbs have to agree in number and person to indicate syntactic relationships.

Many words from OE have reflexes in Present-day English. The only differing aspects between the words in Old English and their reflexes in Present day English are spelling and pronunciation. Old English takes after Common Germanic in the sense that new words could be formed from existing words using the processes: compounding, prefixation and suffixation. Compounding refers to the combination of two or more independent words into a new word. The words most commonly used for the combination are nouns and adjectives. According to Gneuss, “the meaning of the second element is usually determined or modified by the first.” (2013: 33) For example, in the word *teapot* in Modern English, the element *pot* is determined by the first as it refers to a pot for tea. Prefixation could, as Gneuss suggests, be considered as a special type of compounding. A prefix, an element that cannot occur independently is combined with an independent word, likely a noun, adjective or verb. Suffixation or derivation refers to a process in which a suffix, an element that does not occur alone, is added to an independent word. The process results in new nouns, adjectives and verbs.

According to Smith (2009), borrowing was not particularly common in Old English. However, Gneuss suggests that once a large number of Old English words died out, it was replaced by loanwords of French or Scandinavian origin. Gneuss lists languages Anglo-Saxons might have been familiar with. He mentions Celtic British and Irish, Latin, Greek, Old Norse, Old Saxon and French. The influence other languages had on Old English pales in comparison to Latin. Christianity influenced the language with a creation of vocabulary tied to Christian practices and beliefs. Gneuss suggests that Greek loanwords found their way into Old English via Latin. Latin loanwords largely cover technical terms and religious concepts, Scandinavian loanwords, on the other hand, mostly refer to words used in everyday life. Gneuss suggests that Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians certainly had close contact, however; very little is known about the process of borrowing between the two peoples. Before the Norman Conquest there have only been a very few loanwords from French.

Of all the languages in medieval Europe, Old English was the only one that had developed a written standard. According to Gneuss, Anglo-Saxon poetry is characterized by the use of poetic words that do not normally appear in prose, combined with words of everyday life.

Alliteration is commonly used in Old English verse. The same way rhyme is used in later poetry, alliteration in Old English poetry has a structural purpose. The metrical unit of most Old English poems was the *half-line*; “half-lines were linked together in pairs by alliterating syllables.” (Smith 2009: 35). Gneuss suggests that the sentences in verse are more loosely structured than the ones in prose and that the punctuation in the modern editions is basically that of modern editors who “may want to impose on their text a grammatical precision that the poet may not have intended. (2013: 45) The loose structure of Old English texts in verse makes them more difficult to read and understand than the ones in prose.

### 2.3.1 Kennings

There has been a lot of contention about the definition of the opaque figure of speech known as the kenning. In his article *Kennings as blends and prisms*, Vlatko Broz (2011) offers an overview of several approaches scholars have taken to attempt to define the kenning. It is broadly considered to be the most striking feature of Old English poetry or “Germanic poetical diction” (Gardner 1969: 109) in general. Compounds are a tool commonly used in Old English poetic style. Broz lists Mitchell and Robinson’s examples of compounds found in *Beowulf*:

*breóstwylm* “a breast” “emotion of the breast” “grief” (Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary, 2019)

*hringedstefna* “A ship having its stern adorned with spiral or ring-shaped ornaments” (Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary, 2019)

*sceadugenga* “One who walks in darkness” (Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary, 2019)

He mentions another type of construction similar to the compound, “the noun modified by a genitive” (Broz 2011: 166). He explains that the two-word constructions can be regarded as kennings. Broz (2011) argues that some scholars disagree with the definition because they regard the terms “two-membered” and “poetic” as too general to strictly separate the kenning from a vast range of compounds.

Thomas Gardner offers a loose definition of the kenning “as the poetic interpretation or description of a thing or thought by means of a condensed simile.” (Gardner 1969: 109) He also suggests that in Old English “such a condensed simile normally takes the form of a compound.” (Gardner 1969: 109) Broz offers a translation of Heusler’s more precise definition as “a metaphor with an associating link”. (Broz 2011: 167) He goes on to explain

that for Heusler, kennings strictly refer to “two-membered expressions which consist of a metaphorical base or determinantum and a limiting word or determinant which links the base to its referent.” (Broz 2011: 167) Gardner (1969) suggests that the unique aspect of a kenning is its context. He argues that the kenning is a two-part figure that consists of a metaphorical base and a determinant, whose base expresses the thing with which the referent is being compared, and the determinant functions as a link between the base and the referent. Broz, on the other hand, lists certain compounds that according to Mitchell and Robinson should absolutely not be confused with kennings:

*beáhgifa* “A ring-giver, a giver of ring or bracelet money” (Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary, 2019), which has the meaning of the word *king*.

*lyftfloga* “A flier in the air” (Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Online Dictionary, 2019), which has the meaning of the word *dragon*.

These cannot be considered kennings because even though the expressions do evoke certain mental images, they do not compare the referent with something it is not. Broz groups these compounds as *kend heitis*, a term “adopted from medieval Icelandic treatises on poetics”. (2011: 168) He also argues that it is often impossible to distinguish *kennings* and *kend heitis* which other scholars agree with. Depending on the definition they subscribe to, scholars have offered different numbers of kennings in Beowulf. According to Gardner, “pure kennings are relatively rare in OE poetry.” (1969: 111) Apparently, they only make up around two percent of all the compounds in Beowulf. Gardner’s list of pure kennings mostly includes kennings related to the concepts of the *body*, *breast*, *ship* and *the sun*. He concludes his article that according to the definitions, kennings cannot be considered typical Germanic figures. He only argues that kennings can be characteristic of Old Germanic poetical diction if frequency is a criterion.

### 3. Conceptual metaphor theory

This section focuses on conceptual metaphors. Metaphor has long been strictly tied to literature, more importantly, poetry. The traditional view of metaphor regards metaphor as a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, saying that one is the other. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor has been ignored and reduced to a “problem in the philosophy of language.” (1980: 153) According to Kövecses (2002), that is the most commonly shared view of metaphor, both in scholarly circles and in general. He lists five characteristics of the traditional understanding of metaphor. Metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, it is used for artistic and rhetorical purposes, it is based on the similarity of the two entities that are being compared and identified, and it is commonly believed that metaphor is a figure of speech that we do not absolutely need. It is regarded as a figure of speech used for special effects and “not an inevitable part of everyday human communication.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: viii)

A new view that challenged the traditional understanding of metaphor was first developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980. It was first presented in their study *Metaphors We Live By* and later explored in a more coherent and systematic way in other work, such as, for example, Kövecses’ *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. According to Lakoff and Johnson, the concept of conceptual metaphors refers to the notion that much of our conceptual system and language are structured and decoded mostly in metaphorical terms. Conventional metaphors are common in our everyday reality of speaking, thinking and acting. Lakoff and Johnson focused their research on “the nature and role of metaphor in our conceptual system.” (1980: 453) They suggest that our conceptual system is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” (1980: 454) Our ordinary conceptual system refers to how and what we perceive, how we relate to other people, how we think and act, so it is safe to say that our conceptual system unconsciously defines and dictates our everyday reality. Lakoff and Johnson argue that the metaphorical concept is systematic as is, therefore, the language we use to talk about that metaphorical concept. Because they are systematically tied, metaphorical linguistic expressions can be used to study the nature of metaphorical concepts.

According to scholars who subscribe to the cognitive linguistic view, “metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain.” (Kövecses 2002: 4) One concept is understood in terms of another one, which means that the use of a concept facilitates the use of another, more abstract one. Kövecses defines the conceptual domain as “any coherent organization of experience.” (2002: 4) Conceptual metaphor is often

represented: CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B. An example of this is the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. The small capital letters are meant to demonstrate that the exact wording need not appear in language as such, but it dictates all metaphorical expressions created based on the model. Metaphorical linguistic expressions are “words or other linguistic expressions that come from the language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain.” (Kövecses 2002: 4) They are manifestations of the conceptual metaphors as they make explicit their ways of thinking. The two conceptual domains are referred to as the source and target domain. The source domain refers to the “conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain” (Kövecses 2002: 4), referred to as the target domain. The mechanism of conceptual domains relies on using a more concrete concept to better understand a more abstract one as “our experiences with the physical world serve as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domains.” (Kövecses 2002: 6) We rely on our knowledge of the physical, tangible world to draw parallels between the concepts and better understand abstruse and abstract notions. Kövecses (2002) explains that the possibility to draw a parallel between the concepts and understand one in terms of the other is facilitated by a set of mappings between the domains. The set of mappings refers to a systematic set of correspondences between the source and the target domain. According to Kövecses, the set of correspondences refers to the correlation of constituent conceptual elements of the domains. If we take our example, ARGUMENT IS WAR, the set of mappings could be laid out as:

| <i>Source: WAR</i>            |   | <i>Target: ARGUMENT</i> |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| soldiers                      | ⇒ | speakers                |
| physical combat               | ⇒ | verbal debate           |
| strategically taken territory | ⇒ | points dismantled       |
| shooting                      | ⇒ | speaking                |
| bullets                       | ⇒ | words                   |
| sword                         | ⇒ | pen                     |

Table 1 - A set of mappings for the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR

The metaphorical system of a people is deeply rooted in their culture and values. According to Lakoff and Johnson “our values are not independent but must form a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts we live by.” (Lakof and Johnson, 1980: 22) Our metaphorical system and culture go hand in hand and influence one another. Language and culture are intertwined

and cannot be studied in isolation as one dictates the other. Different cultures have different values which may, in turn, result with completely opposite conceptual metaphors. However, according to Kövecses, certain metaphors are universal and are created as a result of the universality of the human body. (Kövecses, 2002: 165) He examined the way the speakers of several different languages, belonging to different cultures, respond to certain situations regarding anger. As it seems to be universal to the human condition, when experiencing anger, all cultures “share certain physiological processes including body heat, internal pressure, and redness in the neck and face area.” (Kövecses, 2002: 171) This phenomenon has led the speakers within the cultures to regard their bodies as containers and understand the concept of anger within the terms of the concept of their bodies as pressurized containers. Similar findings are a goal of this study.

#### **4. Aims and research questions**

Taking into consideration what has been described in the previous sections, it is safe to presume that conceptual metaphors do appear in historical texts. This has already been proven in texts Geeraerts and Gevaert (2008) where *Beowulf* has been given limited attention. Geeraerts and Gevaert (2008) explore *heart* expressions in Old English in order to understand the “importance of embodied imagery of the mind and the soul.” (Geeraerts and Gevaert: 2008: 319) They have analyzed *heart* and *mood* compounds in Old English in an attempt to show that even though thoughts and feelings are often conceptualized as being metaphorically localized in the *heart*, they are more often perceived involving *mood*. (Geeraerts and Gevaert: 2008:321) Trim (2011) also discusses the conceptualization of emotions and mentions that the conceptual metaphor ANGRY PERSON IS A PRESSURIZED CONTAINER can be found in *Beowulf* when talking about the dragon in the story. He also discusses the conceptual metaphor PROTECTION IS SHIELD in relation to the conceptualization of the notion of a shield with all its broad symbolic and metaphorical implications. With all of this in mind, the aim of this thesis is to explore which conceptual metaphors referring to culture can be found in *Beowulf*. More specifically, the following research questions will be explored: Which cultural values are deeply entrenched in Old English? Which cultural values are consistent with the metaphorical system of Old English? Can the use of listed conceptual metaphors be found in Modern English?

## 5. Methodology

In order to identify metaphoric language, the *Metaphor Identification Procedure* (MIP) will be used. The procedure was designed by The Pragglejazz group in 2007. Their aim was to create a tool that could “establish, for each lexical unit in a stretch of discourse, whether its use in the particular context can be described as metaphorical.” (2007: 2) “The analysis is performed on the level of language: language expressions that have potential metaphoric meaning are looked for.” (Stanojević 2013: 135) The procedure contains four steps: reading the whole text, dividing the text into lexical units, establishing meaning in context for every lexical unit and determining if each lexical unit has a more basic meaning in other contexts. If the unit indeed has a more basic meaning in other contexts, we should decide if the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning. The fourth step is to mark the lexical unit as metaphorical if the unit does indeed have a more basic meaning in other contexts. (2007: 3) This thesis will focus on using the procedure “to identify the source and target domains underlying metaphorical words in context.” (2007: 34)

The MIP procedure relies on using a dictionary, and the dictionary used in this thesis was Bosworth Toller’s Anglo-Saxon online dictionary.

For this thesis, each word in the first one hundred lines of *Beowulf* was examined following the steps of the procedure, and listed using the MIP procedure as exemplified by the following words:

### **hweorfan**

- a) *contextual meaning*: The item refers to the concept of *passing away*.
- b) *basic meaning*: To turn, change, go, return, depart, go about, wander, roam, hover about
- c) *contextual meaning versus basic meaning*: The item's meanings differ because its basic meaning refers to physical act of leaving, whereas the contextual meaning refers to the state of death, the concept of passing away.  
Metaphorically used? Yes.

### **hran-rád**

- a) *contextual meaning*: The sea.
- b) *basic meaning*: The whale-road
- c) *contextual meaning versus basic meaning*: The meanings differ because the item’s basic meaning functions as the literal explanation for the meaning in context.  
Metaphorically used? Yes.

### **gén**

- a) *contextual meaning*: The item functions as an adverb meaning *still*.
- b) *basic meaning*: Again, moreover, besides, at length, yet
- c) *contextual meaning versus basic meaning*: They are the same.  
Metaphorically used? No.

## 6. Results and discussion

Overall, in the first 100 lines analyzed, 25 metaphorical items were identified. Qualitative analysis showed that there were four thematic categories: God, Death, Ships and the Sea and other conceptual metaphors.

### 6.1 Death

The notion of death is conceptualized as a kind of journey or departure and is within the first one hundred lines mentioned three times, solely referring to Beowulf's father, Shield Sheafson. In lines 26 and 27, Shield Sheafson's state is described with the verb *gewitan*, meaning to depart and the verb *feran* meaning to fare, to go:

“Him ða Scyld gewat to gescæphwile  
felahror feran on Frean wære.” (Jacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“Shield was still thriving when his time came  
And he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.” (Heaney, 2001: 5)

Death is also conceptualized as wandering and mentioned in line 55, again, when talking about Shield Sheafson:

“Fæder ellor hwearf,  
aldor of earde.” (Jacob, Kiernan, 2015)  
“...his father took leave  
of his life on earth.” (Heaney, 2001: 7)

In order to convey the concept of death, the verb *hweorfan* is used. It refers to going or moving about. It is important to note that Heaney's translation is not always as close to the original as possible as the translation's purpose was not the study of language and focus was put on the poem's literary value.

Metaphorical expressions referring to the same conceptual metaphor can be found in Modern English. In his book *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Kövecses dedicates a section to the concepts of life and death. He describes them as “metaphorical in nature” (Kövecses, 2002: 23) and explains that death is often conceptualized as departure. Metaphorical expressions used in modern English that support this claim include someone being *gone*, or *passing away*. The only difference between Modern and Old English is that apart from departure, the concept of death in Old English may also be viewed as a journey, a conceptualization that is in Modern English more commonly used to understand the concept of life.

The notion of death is tied to culture, however; it is obviously not specific to Old English or the Anglo-Saxons. As death may be regarded as a basic element of the human experience, all cultures have a relationship with death as well as ways to conceptualize it.

## 6.2 God

As *Beowulf* was written by a Christian poet, it contains elements of Christianity, mainly included in its understanding of God. The Christian God is described as the Lord of Life (in line 16), the Wielder of wonders (in line 17), a protector (in line 27) and a conqueror (in line 94), with a total of 5 examples in the first one hundred lines. The concept of the Christian God is described as an omnipotent entity mentioned controlling fate, life, death and the rule of the world. For instance, here are lines 16-17:

“Him þæs Liffrea,  
wuldres wealdend, woroldare forgeaf.” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“...so the Lord of Life,  
The glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.” (Heaney, 2001: 3)

In line 16, God is described as the Lord of life. The instance is metaphorical because God is understood in terms of the concept of a lord, a title which refers to a position of authority of some kind, here specifically mentioned controlling the very notion of life. In line 17, the literal translation of the concept that God is understood as is a Wielder of Wonders. The verb used is *wealdan* which refers to wielding or ruling, and the noun used is *wuldor* which means glory. In this case, the noun glory refers to earth in its entirety. In this sense, God is described as the wielder or ruler of all of earth.

In line 27, God is described as a protector:

“...felahror feran on Frean wære.” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“...and he crossed over into the Lord’s keeping.” (Heaney, 2001: 5)

The items used to refer to God are *Frean* meaning Lord and *wære* meaning safe-keeping or protection. In this instance, God is equated with a protector.

In line 49, God is equated with the sea. The word *garsecg* was used to refer to the ocean. The word functions as a compound meaning spear-man. According to Cassidy, the item has only survived referring to the ocean. He believes the item implies personification and refers to the deity Woden, also known as Odin. (Cassidy, 1972: 97) In this sense the ocean is the spear-man, or rather, Odin. The worship of pagan deities can only be detected by reading between

the lines as the pagan elements were purposefully left out or changed with the arrival of Christianity.

In line 94, God is described with the word *sigehreþig* meaning triumphant. God is therefore understood in terms of a conqueror.

According to Kövecses, in Modern English God is conceptualized as a person, mostly referred to as Father, Shepherd or King, etc. (Kövecses, 2002: 24) We can, therefore conclude that the conceptualization of God functions the same in both Old and Modern English as God is conceptualized as a person in Old English as well.

The notion of a God is indeed a cultural aspect, it is, however; not strictly specific to Old English. According to Kövecses (2002), religion is one of the most common target domains used to understand concepts such as eternity and life after or before death. It is safe to conclude that most cultures have a kind of religion.

### **6.3. Ships and the Sea**

Conceptual metaphors regarding the domain of ships and the sea may perhaps be the most telling of the Anglo-Saxon culture. Metaphorical items belonging to the domain of Ships and the sea can be found three times within the first one hundred lines, in lines 10, 35 and 42. SEA IS A WHALE ROAD (line 10) functions as both metonymy and metaphor:

“oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra  
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“In the end each clan on the outlying coast  
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him.” (Heaney, 2001: 2)

In this instance, the concept of a whale-road both stands for the sea, and provides a more direct access to the concept of the ocean. According to Kövecses (2002), the main difference between metaphor and metonymy is that metaphor connects two concepts belonging to two separate, different domains. Like previously mentioned, one is typically more concrete and the other more abstract. The more concrete concept facilitates the understanding of the more abstract one. Whereas in metonymy, two elements are involved, however; they “are closely related to each other in conceptual space.” (Kövecses, 2002: 147) Metaphor is used to understand a concept in terms of another, and metonymy is used to provide a more direct access to a concept that is not as easily available. In this case, the concept of a whale-road is both used to understand the concept of the sea, as well as provide a more direct access in order to better understand it. This conceptual metaphor is specific to Old English and is not used in Modern English.

The conceptual metaphor DECK AS A BOSOM (line 35) functions as embodiment:

“...beaga bryttan on bearm scipes” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“...laid out by the mast, amidships” (Heaney, 2001: 5)

The word *bearm* can literally be translated as *bosom* or *lap*. In this particular context it functions as *deck*. A foreign concept, the deck of a ship, is understood within an aspect of the human body, a bosom. The process of conceptualization functions as embodiment, a process which entails deriving metaphorical meaning “from our experience of our own body.” (Kövecses, 2002: 16)

The conceptual metaphor of the SEA AS OWNER (line 42) may be understood as a remnant of the pagan aspect of *Beowulf* in the sense that the sea takes on the role of an omnipotent being:

“...þa him mid scoldon  
on flodes æht feor gewitan.” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“...it would travel far  
out into the ocean’s sway.” (Heaney, 2001: 5)

The item *æht* meaning ownership is used relating to the sea. The sea having ownership cannot be taken literally, therefore we may conclude its meaning is metaphorical. The item’s meaning goes hand in hand with the previous section’s example of God being equated with the sea.

The conceptual metaphor SEA IS A WHALE ROAD is specific to Old English and the Anglo-Saxon culture and is not normally used in Modern English. According to Kövecses, “the human body plays a key role in the emergence of metaphorical meaning.” (Kövecses, 2002: 16) The process of embodying is very common in both Modern and Old English as the human body serves as an ideal source domain and is “perhaps the central idea of the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor...and meaning.” (Kövecses, 2002: 16)

#### **6.4. Other**

The last category includes general conceptual metaphors of mostly states and movement that do not necessarily refer to any cultural element specific to Old English. All of the conceptual metaphors are listed in the table below. They are listed next to the line in which they appear in the poem, the exact metaphorical item they are based on and the item’s translation. For example, in the first line, time is understood in terms of space:

“Hwæt we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by.” (Heaney, 2001: 3)

In this instance, the adverb denoting the information of position or location is used to mark temporal quality. The example is not specific to Old English. According to Kövecses, time is often conceptualized as “an object that moves.” (Kövecses, 2002: 23) In this case, it is conceptualized as an object localized in space.

In line 83, the intensity of war is understood in terms of the concept of fire:

“Heaðowylma bad,  
laðan liges.” (Iacob, Kiernan, 2015)

“...and awaiting  
A barbarous burning.” (Heaney, 2001:7)

In this case, the notion of fire or a burning may be understood literally, as they go hand in hand with the notion of war, however; they may also be understood metaphorically referring to the intensity of war. According to Kövecses, the source domain of fire “is especially common in the metaphorical conceptualization of passions and desires, such as rage, love, hate, and some others.” (Kövecses, 2002: 19) This conceptual metaphor is not limited to Old English and is a common source domain because it refers to extremely basic human experiences, such as heat and cold.

| Line   | Conceptual Metaphor    | Metaphorical item          | Translation                                 |
|--------|------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1      | SPACE IS TIME          | <i>gear-dagum</i>          | <b>in</b> days gone by                      |
| 2      | GLORY IS SOUND         | <i>þrymm</i>               | <b>heard</b> greatness                      |
| 8      | GROWING<br>INCREASING  | IS <i>weaxan</i>           | his <b>power</b> increased                  |
| 10, 66 | HEARING<br>OBEYING     | IS <i>hyran</i>            | to <b>yield</b> to him                      |
| 18     | JUMPING<br>SPREADING   | IS <i>springan</i>         | success <b>sprang</b> forth                 |
| 21     | BOSOM IS SAFETY        | <i>bearm</i>               | his father's <b>bosom</b>                   |
| 31, 57 | HAVING IS RULING       | <i>ahte, healdan</i>       | the leader <b>held sway</b>                 |
| 56, 60 | BEING BORN<br>AWAKING  | IS <i>onwæcnan, wæcnan</i> | his heir <b>arose</b>                       |
| 71     | SEPARATING<br>GIVING   | IS <i>gedælan</i>          | he <b>gave</b> to the young and the old     |
| 83     | INTENSITY IS FIRE      | <i>lig</i>                 | the hall awaited a <b>barbarous</b> burning |
| 91     | NARRATING<br>EXTENDING | IS <i>reccan</i>           | <b>unfolding</b> the story                  |

Table 2 - List of other metaphors in the corpus

## **7. Conclusion**

The thesis explored conceptual metaphors found in Beowulf with the goal of examining the cultural aspects reflected in Old English. Metaphorical items were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure. The conceptual metaphors identified in Beowulf have been divided into four cultural thematic categories: death, God, ships and the sea and other. The results show that the way the notion of death is conceptualized within Old English is not particularly different from how it is perceived in Modern English. The category of death is not specific to Old English as it is a basic aspect of the human experience. The category of God mostly conceptualizes the notion of God as a person, a process also common in Modern English. The most notable example of the perception of God is that in which the concept is equated with the sea, a possible remnant of the influence Anglo-Saxon pagan deities. The category of ships and the sea contains conceptual metaphors the most telling of Old English as it contains a conceptual metaphor no longer used in Modern English. The category of other mostly includes metaphorical items tied to states, movement and action that are not specifically relevant to Old English. In conclusion, most of the metaphorical items analyzed may be found in Modern English with a few notable exceptions. The most telling aspect of the Anglo-Saxon culture entrenched in Old English is the relationship between the sea and religion, however; the themes of the conceptual metaphors identified are mostly not surprising as most of them relate to all cultures and the very basis of the human experience.

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