Abstract

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The metaphorical conceptualization of the notion ‘morality’ in the Hungarian and German languages

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1. The object and aim of the research

In my thesis, I explore the conceptualization of the notion “morality” on the basis of the Hungarian and German languages employing a corpus-based systematic analysis. With this aim in mind, I analyse conceptual metaphors identified in linguistic corpus texts, thus, my primary target is the metaphorical conceptualization of the notion.

While planning the research, I proceeded from one of the principles of cognitive linguistics according to which our conceptual framework can be characterised employing linguistic analysis. A close correlation can be presumed between thinking and language: thinking is manifested in language, and language influences the process of thinking (Kövecses–Benczes 2010: 219). Furthermore, physical and social media have a significant role in the process of forming meaning. Taking into account this factor reveals deviations between cultures in conceptualizing notions.

The theoretical framework of my research is primarily based on available specialised literature on cognitive linguistics in English, Hungarian, and German languages. The analysis is based on the concept of morality elaborated by Lakoff (1996, 2002) and Lakoff–Johnson (1999) that describes the interpretation process of the American society, however, some of its parts can be considered almost universal, thus offering useful observations for the analysis of other languages.

The aim of researches done within the framework of cognitive linguistics can be of two kinds. On the one hand, cognitive linguists can study language as a research object, on the other hand, they can study the process of conceptualization on the basis of the language. In the former case, linguists analyse what language means the speakers use in expressing their message. These studies are rather language-centred, while in the latter case, they focus on the speaker’s conceptual system, the process of conceptualization, and cognitive operations. This research is aimed at revealing the process of conceptualizing the above-mentioned notion.

The notion of morality is deeply rooted in the nation’s consciousness, however its nature is still not clear for common people. Several disciplines deal with particular aspects of the notion. Philosophers, moral psychologists, theologians, and lawyers try to define it from their point of view, thus connecting it with their conceptual system. Morality is closely related to, inter alia, the accepted norms of social coexistence, hereby it determines some of our behavioural forms, it is in close relation with religion, written laws, and, consequently, law.

We rarely speak openly on morality, however, our moral concept is reflected in our language. Notions are of critical significance in making decisions in any sphere of life, both in our
linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. The empirical basis of our understanding of morality, the feeling of well-being can be regarded potentially universal, however, the potentially universal conceptualization can acquire specific forms due to sociocultural characteristics. This doctoral thesis aims at revealing the characteristic features of this process via the analysis conducted in the Hungarian and German cultural context. While moving from the general to the more concrete I identify ontological and structural metaphors organising them. The research results serve the ground for elaborating dominant and alternative folk theories on morality in two language communities. Comparing these I search for intercultural similarities, differences, as well as their causes.

There is no comprehensive, systematic research yet on the notion of morality within the framework of cognitive linguistics on the material of Hungarian and German languages. However, the universal principles of cognitive linguistics can definitely be used to reveal the interpretation process of this notion. This doctoral thesis is aimed at filling the gap.

2. Research questions

The main aim of the dissertation is to elaborate the dominant folk theory of the notion “morality” or its alternative model in Hungarian and German. In my research, I use the following interpretation of folk theory:

Our knowledge of the world can be based on routine, folk theory observations, knowledge, or expertise. Our everyday knowledge is characterised by folk theories that help us find our way about in the world. […] Folk theories are often confronted with scientific theories.” (Kövecses–Benczes 2010: 228).

On the basis of collected linguistic data, I aim to answer the following questions:

A. Is the conceptual basis identical or different while interpreting the notion of morality in case of communities having various experimental focus, living in different economic and social conditions? In other words, is there a language universal or the specific character of a language is more significant?

B. What source domains and mediator entities help understand the notion of morality in various languages and contexts? In other words, what conceptual metaphors motivate the interpretation of morality in Hungarian and German?

C. What is morality’s dominant folk theory in the languages under analysis? Are similarities or differences significant?
D. What causes the possible differences in conceptualization between the two languages?
E. Can the system of values elaborated by Lakoff (1996) to interpret morality be manifested in the language of Hungarian and German communities?

3. Research hypotheses based on the formulated questions

A. Is the conceptual basis identical or different while interpreting the notion of morality in case of communities having various experimental focus, living in different economic and social conditions. In other words, is there a language universal or the specific character of a language is more significant?

The influence of contextual factors (physical, sociological, cultural, context, and so forth) on variation was substantiated in numerous researches (Emanatian 1995, Wierzbicka 1999, Yu 2003, Kövecses 2010b, Kövecses et al. 2015, Sharifian 2006, 2011, 2017, Oster 2012). Studies in this sphere support the fact that although physical experiences motivate predominantly universal conceptual metaphors, this does not exclude the possibility for certain individuals, groups, cultures to use a different aspect of the physical experience, or if they use the same, then they do so to a different extent in the process of conceptualization. This gives me the ground to assume – that the research results can serve as an example of differential experiential focus (Kövecses 2005b).

B. What source domains and mediator entities help understand the notion of morality in various languages and contexts? In other words, what conceptual metaphors motivate the interpretation of morality in Hungarian and German?

According to conceptual metaphor theory, abstract notions (target domains) are understood employing certain mediator, concrete notions (source domains). Target domains can be reached not only via source domains. We have extensive knowledge of source domains, however we do not use each element of this knowledge equally. Which source domain is chosen for which target domain in the process of conceptualization can depend on numerous factors, e.g. physical environment, social factors, cultural context, personal life experience, and so forth. Taking this into account, I assume that
– in the conceptualization of the notion “morality” in Hungarian and German the same source domains will be used with different preferences, i.e. some source domains will be more frequent, while others will be peripheral;
- differences arise in the extent a conceptual metaphor is elaborated (Kövecses 2015: 28). The elaborated conceptual metaphors have a higher number of correspondences/mappings or metaphorical entailments. It can be presumed that the elaboration of conceptual metaphors within the morality target domain in Hungarian and German differs.
– it can occur that some equivalents of conceptual metaphors are more foregrounded in one language, while in the other they are less emphasized or are not present at all (Kövecses 2005b: 123). Presumably, similar differences will emerge in the present research as well.

C. What is morality’s dominant folk theory in the languages under analysis? Are similarities or differences significant?
The formation of metaphorical meaning can vary depending on the context. Advancing from context to language, one can ascertain its influence on our conceptualization, context can determine the way we build up meaning for ourselves. In the process of interpretation we choose the circumstances that are relevant for us in a particular situation. Routine knowledge of the world forms our folk theories that can even differ from person to person and serve as the basis for the greater part of our cultural knowledge (Kövecses–Benczes 2010: 58). Thus, we can assume that
– there is not only one folk theory in a particular culture. Side by side with the dominant model, other alternative folk theories can be set up in a community speaking the same language due to regional, cultural, economic, social and other factors.
– taking into account the results of earlier intercultural studies (Emanatian 1995, Wierzbicka 1999, Yu 2003, Kövecses 2010b, Kövecses et al. 2015, Sharifian 2006, 2011, 2017, Oster 2012) I assume there will be similarities at the level of ontological metaphors, while at the level of structural metaphors organizing them, differences will presumably prevail.

D. What causes the possible differences in conceptualization between the two languages? Metaphorical language expressions can reflect fundamentally different cultural and ideological background (Kövecses 2005b: 157). We can assume that
– although the metaphorical language expressions and conceptual metaphors describing the notion of "morality" are similar in the contexts under analysis, one cannot speak of universal
character. The specific character can be expressed by a different cultural and ideological background that influences the metaphorical conceptualization.

E. Can the system of values elaborated by Lakoff (1996) to interpret morality be manifested in the language of Hungarian and German communities? Studying western political ethics, Lakoff (1996) concludes that in the background of our concept of morality there are two fundamental family models. The strict father model is typical of people emphasising conservative moral values, while the caring parent model is characteristic of liberal people. In both models different moral notions enjoy priority and treat the notion of “morality” in a different way. This leads me to the assumption that – the former system of values is reflected in Hungarian, while the latter one does so in German.

4. The research corpus

I conducted my research on two corpora, each containing 3000 language units. The Hungarian-language sample was compiled from the Hungarian National Corpus (hereinafter MNSZ2) run by the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Corpus contains 187.6 million words in context from five regions: Hungary, Transylvania, Upper Hungary, Voivodina, and Transcarpathia. I do not analyse regional differences in detail as far as constituent corpora yielded different matches in the process of keyword search. Therefore, they do not serve as the basis for representative comparison. Despite all that, the character of the corpus under analysis gives us a comprehensive picture of the Hungarians’ moral outlook. MNSZ2 contains texts from five styles (newspaper, belles-lettres, scientific, official, personal) starting from 2002. In the course of searching for keywords I excluded belles-lettres style from the analysis because I did not want to include specific metaphors found in fiction texts. It can be explained by the fact that this work does not aim at introducing linguistic creativity; instead its goal is to analyse metaphorical language expressions occurring in everyday language use. I searched for the word erkölcs in its word stem form with these criteria and found 10440 matches, out of which I randomly compiled a 3000 language expression sample. I worked with full-sentence query to determine the metaphorical language expressions’ context with maximum accuracy. After excluding

1 http://mnsz.nytud.hu/
repetitions, 2216 language expressions out of 2657 were considered metaphorical based on the criteria for analysis (see details in the “Methodological considerations” subchapter).

For the German sample, I used Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache\(^2\) (The Digital Dictionary of the German Language, hereinafter (DWDS) national corpus. I searched in the “reference- and newspaper corpus” that combines several constituent corpora. Its advantage is that it covers approximately the same styles as MNSZ2. Moreover, the time range the texts originate from can be set as well. DWDS constituent corpus contains 5.9 billion words in context for the period 1473-2018. However, for the sake of representative comparison I searched for the word *Moral* in the period 2000-2018. This way I obtained 8884 matches and randomly picked out 3000 test samples containing matches similarly to the Hungarian language. After I excluded repeated words, 2948 language units remained; among them 2320 were considered metaphorical.

The study samples are summarized in table 1.

### Table 1 The research corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>The searched word</th>
<th>Total number of matches</th>
<th>Test sample</th>
<th>Test sample without repetition</th>
<th>Metaphorical language expressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian National Corpus</td>
<td>’erkőcs’</td>
<td>10440</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2657</td>
<td>2216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Dictionary of the German Language</td>
<td>’Moral’</td>
<td>8884</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2948</td>
<td>2320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. The structure of the thesis

The doctoral thesis will consist of four large thematic units (parts), with each one further subdivided into several chapters and subchapters.

\(^2\) [https://www.dwds.de/](https://www.dwds.de/)
After the introduction (chapter 1), chapter 2 defines the basic notions of cognitive linguistics that serves as the theoretical framework of the dissertation, viz., conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, conceptual framework, cultural model, linguistic relativism, conceptual relativism, conceptualization and others. The second major subject (chapter 3) of the theoretical part deals with the notions of context and cultural background as the factors influencing conceptualization, with the fundamentals and methods of intercultural comparison. Then I summarise the definition and the possible interpretations of the notion morality in other disciplines, thus systematising the major philosophical, theological, and humanities definitions. I thoroughly study the cultural model of morality within the framework of cognitive paradigm based on the works of Lakoff (1995, 1996, 2002) and Lakoff–Johnson (1999), analyse the model or models of morality elaborated on the material of the English language (chapter 4). At the end of the theoretical part, I present the major characteristic features of researches in corpus linguistics – their advantages and drawbacks –, procedures of identifying and analysing metaphors, as well as the methods of study applied in the present research (chapter 5).

Chapters 6 and 7 cover the results of my research. First of all, I will analyse and systematise the metaphors related to morality based on the Hungarian-language model, and then I will do the same with the German-language expressions I consider metaphorical. I elaborated the dominant folk theory and the alternative model of morality for both languages. At the end of the thematic unit, I reveal the similarities, differences between the two languages, as well as their possible causes.

In the last chapter 8, I summarise the main theses of the dissertation, answer the research questions, analyse whether I managed to substantiate the research hypotheses or they have to be discarded. At the end of the main part of the thesis, I point out the possibilities of further researches and their directions.

At the end of the dissertation come the references.

6. The research method applied in the dissertation

The dissertation is based on Kövecses’s (1986, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2015) cultural model-theory and in particular on the finding that cultural model is a category including prototypical and peripheral members. A prototypical cultural model of a notion is essentially a folk theory based on the knowledge of people belonging to a particular culture that is reflected in everyday language (Kövecses 2006b: 369).
The central part of the work is the analysis of the material applying the methodology of corpus linguistics, i.e. “moving from the bottom upwards”. The empirical research is divided into two large parts. First of all, I compiled a language corpus from Hungarian and German databases. To achieve this I used erkölcs and Moral keywords with full-sentence concordance. The extended version database of the Hungarian National Corpus was used with reference to the Hungarian language. To compile the German-language corpus I searched the Digital Dictionary of the German Language, whose advantage is the setting to analyse the occurrence of the notion in different time range, thus enabling me to work with language material belonging to nearly the same period (2002-2018).

The course of analysis is as follows:
The keywords in the search were “erkölcs” and “Moral” because they can be considered core members of the category “morality”. In the chosen constituent corpora, I searched for these keywords and collected 3000 random uses, as well as language expressions.

In this work, I applied the metaphor identification process elaborated by the Pragglejaz group (2007) (MIP), then further developed by Steen et al. (2010) (MIPVU) to determine what language phrases were metaphorical. The application of this multiple-stage procedure excludes subjectivity and the researcher’s language intuition (Kövecses 2010a: 5):

Reading the whole text (full example sentences) to determine the general meaning.
Subdivision of the text (example sentence) into language units and words.
a) Semantic analysis of the words, whether there are polysemantic words among them.
b) Determining the primary meaning of all the words in the text.
Taking into account context: if the primary meaning and the meaning in the text differ, determining the basis of the metaphor.
I grouped figurative language expressions according to conceptual metaphors and analysed the identified mediator entities, as well as the source domains.
I arranged the identified conceptual metaphors, where possible, into main groups and subgroups. In the process of analysis, I moved from ontological metaphors to more specific structural metaphors. I excluded from the analysis those conceptual metaphors whose metaphorical language manifestation was present only once in the corpus (occurred at the 1st type level).
I identified the mappings and metaphorical entailments forming conceptual metaphors. I considered it an important step as far as the more mappings participate in forming meaning and are manifested in language, the more elaborated the conceptual metaphor is.
I determined the frequency of the identified conceptual metaphors in the context under analysis.

I elaborated the notion’s prototypical cultural model in Hungarian and German based on the obtained results. I analysed the similar and differential characteristics of the models in detail. The comparison of the conceptual metaphors in the two languages, their frequency of occurrence, as well as elaboration gives the dissertation its intercultural character. On the basis of the results, I answered the research questions and analysed whether the hypotheses set up at the beginning of the thesis were substantiated or not.

7. Summary of the findings

In my dissertation, I have examined the metaphorical conceptualization of the notion ‘morality’ based on the linguistic corpora of two languages, Hungarian and German. I have based my research on the theoretical theses of cognitive linguistics; during my investigation I have applied the research methods of corpus linguistics. Primarily, I have analysed and categorised the notional metaphors of morality; however, I have also tackled notional metonyms, without which it was impossible to interpret certain phrases.

In my analysis, I relied primarily on the moral concept constructed by Lakoff – Johnson (1999). I examined how well their system referring to the American society holds its place in the Hungarian and German cultural contexts. Other disciplines have contributed to the conclusions, e.g. philosophy, cognitive psychology, and dictionary definitions in monolingual dictionaries. The research results of the dissertation support the hypotheses set at the beginning of the dissertation.

It became clear during the research that the concept of morality is motivated by a sense of well-being in both languages. In the motivation of the metaphor, our basic physical needs are equally present, but the basis of experience is different due to differences in social relations. The linguistic material of the Hungarian corpus manifests both the metaphors WELL-BEING IS WEALTH and MORAL ACCOUNTING schemes, while no example of the latter was found in German expressions. Thus, one element of the experiential basis, the experience of interaction, is not manifest in German metaphorical expressions.

In both languages, I have identified the following ontological metaphors: MORALITY IS A HUMAN BEING, MORALITY IS FORCE, MORALITY IS AN OBJECT, MORALITY IS SUBSTANCE/MATERIAL, THE MORAL ACTION IS SELF-PROPELLED MOTION. There have been shifts in emphasis concerning the occurrence of ontological metaphors, while differences have been
found with regard to structural metaphors. In the conceptualization of the notion of ‘morality’ in Hungarian and German the same source domains appeared with different preferences, i.e. some source domains are more common while others are peripheral. Some mappings of conceptual metaphors are more prominent in one language, while less pronounced or non-existent in another.

Although I have not been able to provide examples of every element of the family models on the basis of either the Hungarian or the German corpus, the dominant elements allow me to state that in the German corpus liberal ideas are dominant, while in Hungarian conservative values prevail.

At the end of the analyses, I constructed lay models from conceptual metaphors. ‘Morality’ has a dual role in the corpus:

a) on the one hand, as an independent entity;

b) on the other hand, it is realized in the dynamics of ‘ego’ and ‘temptation’.

Accordingly, two generic-level lay models can be constructed by the identified conceptual metaphors. One is a static model built on the metaphor MORALITY IS ENTITY. The other one is a dynamic model in which the metaphor MORALITY/PURITY IS FORCE is dominant. In the latter case, an alternative lay model can be constructed in German, in which morality appears as an external evil force.

All in all, cognitive science provides us with analytical tools, such as metaphor and metonymy research, that give us a much deeper understanding of morality. Morality is interpreted through mappings based on our experiences, such as: prosperity, balance, order, light / darkness, power, etc. If our moral concepts are metaphorical, their structure and logic derive primarily from the source domain that underlies the metaphor. According to this, morality is understood through structures deductible from human experience from different fields. Our moral concepts have no monolithic, homogeneous, constant system. For example, we have various non-permanent metaphorical structures about the concept of well-being that we operate in our moral thinking. The one we select, e.g. WELL-BEING IS WEALTH or WELL-BEING IS HEALTH depends on the hierarchical structure of our family model, our goals, our interests and the current context.

Our moral metaphors strongly influence how we think, for example, about education, or social concepts, which means that our moral conceptual system is forced to engage in educational and social contemplation as well as politicization. However, I tried to avoid this during the writing of the dissertation, since it was not the purpose of forming an opinion on the political orientation, social sphere, etc. of the individual language communities.
Cognitive linguistics has provided two important guides to moral understanding: first, a deeper comprehension of what moral thinking is and where it comes from; secondly, the ability to get into the small details of which moral metaphor we were using, or which others were using, and the role that metaphor played in drawing the moral inference.

8. References


### 9. Publications on the topic

