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METAPHORICAL AND METONYMIC PROPERTIES OF ENGLISH -LY ADVERBS: A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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Received:08.12.2025 *Revised: 09.12.2025* *Accepted:10.12.2025*	*Through a cognitive-semantic analysis, the article looks into the metaphorical and metonymic mechanisms affecting the English adverbs made with the -ly suffix. The research applying conceptual metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics to the English language, shows that -ly adverbs are the result of systematic mappings between abstract and concrete domains, thus reflecting the basic cognitive processes in language.*
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cognitive semantics, metaphor, metonymy, adverbs, -ly suffix, conceptual mapping, English morphology	

Through a cognitive-semantic analysis, the article looks into the metaphorical and metonymic mechanisms affecting the English adverbs made with the -ly suffix. The research applying conceptual metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics to the English language, shows that -ly adverbs are the result of systematic mappings between abstract and concrete domains, thus reflecting the basic cognitive processes in language.

Introduction

The systematic creation of adverbs through the suffix -ly is one of the most productive derivational processes in English morphology, but the cognitive-semantic mechanisms that these formations rely on have not yet been thoroughly examined in linguistic literature. Traditional grammatical methods have systematically described the functions of the -ly adverbs in syntax, while cognitive linguistics opens a way of scrutinizing these linguistic units as mirrors of the very basic and universal human conceptual structures and processes of meaning-making [1]. The concept of metaphor and metonymy being basic cognitive mechanisms rather than mere rhetorical devices was proposed by Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, which also showed that these mechanisms let humans understand abstract ideas through the more concrete experiential domains. [2]. This paper

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aims to show that the -ly adverbs have been intricating metaphorical and metonymic principles, thus analyzing the conceptual structures that motivate their extensions of meaning and patterns of use. The investigation fills the morphological semantics gap by revealing that derivational processes are not random but rather cognitively rooted in systematic conceptual mappings [3].

Methodology and literature review

The methodological framework of this study combines corpus-based analysis with cognitive-semantic theoretical approaches, specifically referring to Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory and Kövecses' refinements of metaphor identification procedures [4]. This analytical methodology includes a systematic examination of -ly adverbs that are obtained from contemporary English linguistic corpora, and the main focus is on revealing the implicit conceptual mappings that govern the semantic extensions and contextual applications of these adverbs. Past scholar studies have laid down some principles that are pertinent to this analysis: Langacker's cognitive grammar framework points out that grammatical constructions are realized as content embodied by concepts rather than just being formal structures [5], and at the same time, Barcelona's comprehensive treatment of metonymy unveils its presence in both the grammatical and lexical systems [6]. In particular, addressing adverbial semantics, Ernst's thorough investigation of adverb classes gives syntactic bases that are shared with semantic considerations [7].

The Russian linguistic tradition, especially in works that investigate functional-semantic categories, provide additional views on adverbial systems and the corresponding cognitive processes [8]. The literature suggests that manner adverbs are often the case of orientational metaphors (MANNER IS SPATIAL ORIENTATION), which can be seen in expressions such as "highly sophisticated" or "deeply moved," where vertical and depth schemas are utilized to shape abstract evaluative meanings. Likewise, temporal adverbs are shown to apply metonymic principles, where a specific time point is used to represent an entire duration or process, illustrating the cognitive principle of metonymic contiguity.

Results and discussion

The cognitive-semantic examination discloses three main metaphorical patterns, such as orientational metaphors, ontological metaphors, and structural metaphors, under the -ly adverb semantics and each of them reflecting different conceptual mapping processes. Orientational metaphors are the most common ones in manner and evaluative adverbs, where vertical UP-North-DOWN-South schemas determine value and intensity very

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systematically. Adverbs like "highly," "deeply," "lowly," and "superficially" are the instances of the metaphorical concepts of IMPORTANCE IS VERTICALITY and INTENSITY IS DEPTH, which are at work here, as they map spatial relationships onto abstract evaluative dimensions through embodied experiential correlations between physical position and social status or emotional intensity. The pattern is a clear indication of cognitive economy, as spatial concepts grounded in bodily experience provide very accessible source domains for comprehending abstract target domains. Ontological metaphors are the main ones in adverbs expressing mental states and emotional conditions, where abstract psychological processes are turned into concrete terms.

The terms or expressions like "mentally", "emotionally", "spiritually", and "physically" are showing the metaphor MIND IS CONTAINER and are considering consciousness as a limited space where different processes take place, hence allowing the usage of spatial language to talk about one's inner states. The use of metonymy is seen here being applied not only to temporal and aspectual adverbs but also on a grand scale where a specific point in time is used to refer to the process or duration through the contiguity relationship. Temporal adverbs like "immediately", "instantly", "gradually", and "eventually" demonstrate the salient aspect of this cognitive principle whereby temporal limits are used to signify complete event structures. The analysis goes on to expose the existence of systematic polysemy in the -ly adverbs, which can be characterized as a situation whereby one form acquires various meanings in different semantic domains due to the use of metaphorical and metonymic links. To illustrate, "clearly" is used in epistemic, perceptual, and manner domains in analogy to the systematic mappings between visual perception and understanding (UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING), showcasing how cognitive processes yield predictable semantic expansions instead of random homonymy. These trends are indicative of common cognitive practices although they are carried out through language-specific morphological means, thus implying that grammatical deriving processes are the reflection of conceptual structuring rather than being merely about form.

Conclusion

This cognitive-semantic investigation demonstrates that English -ly adverbs systematically employ metaphorical and metonymic mechanisms reflecting fundamental conceptual structures rather than arbitrary semantic associations. The analysis establishes that orientational metaphors structure evaluative and manner adverbs through spatial schemas, ontological metaphors enable conceptualization of abstract processes through

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concrete domains, and metonymic principles generate temporal and aspectual meanings through contiguity relationships. These findings contribute significantly to morphological semantics by revealing that derivational processes embody cognitive principles, suggesting that grammatical structure and conceptual organization maintain systematic relationships. The demonstrated patterns of metaphorical mapping and metonymic extension in -ly adverbs illuminate broader theoretical questions regarding the cognitive foundations of grammatical systems and the relationship between embodied experience and linguistic structure.

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