



The art of baring emotions through metaphors:

An analysis of love metaphors found
in *La La Land's* soundtrack

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I. Abstract

We can express our thoughts and feelings through language in a more effective and powerful way thanks to metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In other words, metaphors are not just used as a mere ornamental device but as a forceful cognitive tool to reason and comprehend our socio-physical experiences with the world (Evans and Green 2006, Kövecses 2002). In this line, musical romantic films may be said to transport the viewer to a world of music and dance in which emotions can be conveyed using metaphors by means of lyrics. The aim of this study is to disclose linguistic evidence of LOVE conceptual metaphors appearing in the soundtrack of the film *La La Land* (Berger and Chazelle 2016). In order to do so, a series of linguistic metaphors were identified in the lyrics. Then, the conceptual metaphors on which the metaphorical expressions were based were carefully analysed by unveiling the source and target domain (e.g. LOVE IS AN OBJECT, LOVE IS A FIRE, among others) and the type of metaphor (structural, ontological or orientational). Thereupon, the most relevant mappings were illustrated so as to elucidate the conceptual projections among domains that help us to conceptualise and comprehend the domain of LOVE. Overall, the results obtained contribute to a better understanding of how we construe and reason about the cognitive domain of LOVE in terms of other domains of experience, which, in turn, gives rise to metaphorical expressions.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, linguistic metaphor, emotions, *La La Land*, mappings.

II. Introduction

Many people believe that metaphors are only used by poets or writers. Nevertheless, the truth is that almost in every culture and society metaphors are a major component and play a key role in reasoning and everyday communication. Conceptual metaphors (henceforth CMs) are used continually, both intentionally and unintentionally, in poetic and everyday language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In fact, it has been conclusively showed that CMs are so omnipresent that we as language speakers do not always recognise them (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

The present paper can be framed within the field of Cognitive Linguistics, which comprises multiple areas of study. The central aim of this paper is the analysis of CMs. This research will contribute in several ways to our understanding of CMs and will provide a basis for further discussion. To date, research has established that CM is a



major area of interest within the field of linguistics aiming at achieving a better «understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another» (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5).

2.1. Contextualisation and theoretical background

In the pages that follow, an overview of the analysed film *La La Land*, as well as a detailed depiction of its background, will be provided. An explanation of the CMT postulated by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, as well as the three different types of metaphors, distinguished by the two aforementioned authors, will be a central part of this particular section of the study. This research will shed a contemporary light on the contentious issue of the significance of metaphors when conceptualising emotions. Hence, the necessary contextualisation and theoretical background is provided in this particular section of the paper.

2.1.1. La La Land

La La Land (City of stars) can be defined as a musical romantic film created and directed by Damien Chazelle. The screenplay of the musical was first written in 2010, but the writer was unable to find a proper studio to produce the film until years later. 9 December 2016 was the day of the release in the United States of America.

It is worth highlighting that the title *La La Land* is typically used to portray Los Angeles and Hollywood, which is where the setting of the film was located. This particular title has a symbolic meaning, as *La La Land* appears to be the perfect definition of a person who dreams, therefore someone who is detached from the real world.

Regarding its plot, the film tells the story of an aspiring actress (Mia Dolan) and a struggling jazz pianist (Sebastian Wilder) who, after running into each other several times, decide to go out and meet. During their relationship, some difficulties appear which led them to make choices. In this line, *La La Land* tries to make the audience understand how difficult relationships can be when each of the two members has a different dream and perspective in life.

With regard to the soundtrack of this particular film, it was composed by Justin Hurwitz and, without doubt, it transports the viewer to a world of music and dance. In this way, by making use of songs, the true meaning of the film can be conveyed. Similarly, the carefully written soundtrack will be a main focus of the analysis conducted in this paper.

2.1.2. Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT)

«The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has been highly influential both within Cognitive Linguistics and within the cognitive

and social sciences, particularly in neighbouring disciplines like cognitive psychology and anthropology» (Evans and Green 2006: 296). The aforementioned theory was postulated by Lakoff and Johnson throughout the book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), in which they broke away with the classical view of metaphor. In the aforementioned book, an analysis in depth of this theory as well as clear examples of it are showed. Hence, the conventional insights of metaphors were challenged and the cognitive nature of metaphor, rather than just a linguistic ornament was claimed.

Thus, Lakoff and Johnson stated that «metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action» (1980: 3). In fact, research has consistently showed that CMs are also present in other modes of expression such as gestures, visual arts, visual representations and so forth (Kövecses 2017). With that in mind, our conceptual system is essentially metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3).

In this light, metaphors are analysed as «a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target» which «are often referred to as mappings» (Kövecses 2002: 6). Therefore, there are two different domains in each conceptual metaphor, having each of them a distinct name.

The first one is generally referred to as *source domain* which is typically more concrete and is used in order to comprehend another conceptual domain. The conceptual domain that is trying to be understood is called *target domain*, which is generally more abstract and complex. Some examples of target domains would be LIFE, LOVE, ANGER, DESIRE, SADNESS and MELANCHOLY. Whereas some worth-mentioning instances of source domains would be JOURNEY, OBJECTS, FIRE, ANIMALS and DEVICES. Hence, it can be observed how we as human beings try to understand the target domain in terms of the source domain (Kövecses 2002).

Taking that into account, to better understand the source and target domain of a given metaphor, let's take LOVE IS AN OBJECT as an example. Before proceeding to analyse the aforementioned instance, it is worth mentioning that LOVE is one of the most difficult domains to understand because it refers to an abstract emotion. Therefore, that is the main reason why people always try to understand it by means of another concept, in this particular case, AN OBJECT. Hence, it can be highlighted that in the previously mentioned example the target domain is LOVE (because it is what we want to understand) and OBJECT is the source domain (since it is the concept being used to understand the notion of LOVE).

In this line, we are not always conscious of making use of metaphors. It is so automatised for us as human beings that we do not even realise that what we are conveying is actually a metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Thus, in order to enhance its

understanding, linguistic metaphors are going to be provided in order to portray a more complete and accurate view of LOVE IS AN OBJECT. Hence, some worth-mentioning linguistic metaphors are: «*hearts that break*», «*one thing everybody wants*» and «*all we are looking for is love from someone else*».

To continue, it also needs to be remarked that existing works have demonstrated the unidirectionality of metaphors. That implies that the directional structure of a metaphor goes from source domain to target domain and not the other way round. For instance, in the CM LOVE IS AN OBJECT, we as language speakers conceptualise LOVE in terms of an OBJECT and not the opposite (Evans and Green 2006).

2.1.3. Types of metaphors

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), it is worth highlighting that metaphors can be classified into three main categories: structural, orientational and ontological metaphors.

First of all, structural metaphors are the most recurrent and the most used type of metaphors. In this line, this particular kind of metaphors are stated to be conventional metaphors which are understood and expressed in terms of another structured, sharply defined concept, e.g. ARGUMENT IS WAR. Hence, some linguistic metaphor instances are «*Your claims are indefensible*», «*He attacked every weak point in my argument*» and «*you disagree? Okay, shoot*» (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

Oriental metaphors are based on the understanding of a concept in terms of another based on the orientation in space. For that particular purpose, particles such as *up-down*, *in-out* or *near-far* are employed. A clear example of it would be MORE IS UP OR LESS IS DOWN. Thus, some linguistic metaphor instances such as «*Speak up, please*» and «*Keep your voice down, please*» are worth mentioning (Kövecses 2010).

Next, the third type of metaphors is the *ontological metaphor*. In this case, abstractions are showed as something physically concrete. Abstract ideas are understood in terms of concrete elements. Therefore, one of the most common mechanisms for ontological metaphors is «*personification, which makes use of one of the best source domains we have, ourselves. In personifying nonhumans as humans, we can begin to understand them a little better*» (Kövecses 2002). A notable example of ontological metaphor is LOVE IS AN OBJECT. Thus, some linguistic metaphors instances such as «*Hearts that break*», «*one thing everybody wants*», and «*all we are looking for is love from someone else*» are worth highlighting.

2.1.4. *The significance of metaphors when conceptualising emotions*

A considerable amount of existing research recognises the key role played by metaphors when trying to understand emotions. In fact, the emotion concepts having received attention from a variety of scholars in this tradition include anger, fear, happiness, sadness, love, lust, pride, shame, and surprise (Kövecses 2000). It has been argued that «the use of metaphors in emotions is not a simple factual description but it is strongly related to our experience and perception» (Kövecses 1989: 2).

The present paper aims to extend our knowledge on how metaphors allow us to comprehend emotions. Therefore, valuable insight into the current approaches of emotional language will be gained. Silvestre (2009: 23) points out that «language and thought are interdependent and strongly rooted in our bodily experience and in our physical and social interaction with the environment».

Many scholars hold the view that the way in which we as human beings use the language to depict emotions is rather alluring. In fact, it has been claimed that «most people are not surprised to discover that emotional concepts like love and anger are understood metaphorically» (Lakoff 1993: 212). This can be illustrated briefly by analysing the metaphor LUST IS HEAT (Kövecses 1988, Lakoff 1987). Sexual desire is being conceptualised as the heat caused by the fire when burns. Therefore, several conventional expressions such as «*I am on fire for him*» exemplify its use.

Metaphors are widely used in order to conceptualise emotions and feelings. And the concept of LOVE, which is the basis of this analysis, is perhaps the most highly «metaphorised» emotion concept (Kövecses 2000).

III. Objectives

The aim of the present research was to gain better understanding of LOVE metaphors present in the film *La La Land*. In order to do so, the role of metaphors in the soundtrack of a musical romantic film were examined. This analysis was based on the identification and explanation of the aforementioned LOVE metaphors. The present study was also designed to determine the different mappings of the previously analysed metaphors. Hence, the study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the relevance of metaphors in our daily communication.

IV. Method

The study has been conducted following four steps. First, articles and papers about CMs were thoroughly examined. For this purpose,

the different approaches of Evans and Green (2006), Kövecses (1988, 1989, 2000, 2002, 2010 and 2017), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1987 and 1993) and Silvestre (2009) were employed. Thus, theoretical background about CMT was a key aspect when analysing the findings of this research. Information about the analysed film, *La La Land*, was examined to gather as much background information on the film as possible. The next step was to identify and interpret the different CMs and metaphorical expressions related to LOVE which appeared in the soundtrack of the film.

Overall, the main focus of the paper was the analysis of emotional language highlighting the use of metaphors referring to emotions. For this purpose, the linguistic metaphors identified were classified according to their source and target domain as well as type of metaphor.

The final step of the study was to determine the corresponding mappings which were analysed in order to better understand what the aforementioned CMs meant. The data provided a deeper insight into the use of CMs in musical romantic films.

4.1. Materials used

In order to accomplish this study, contemporary source materials were employed. The film *La La Land* was watched. This research set out to review in detail the CMs appearing on the lyrics of the aforementioned film, which were downloaded from <https://www.azlyrics.com>, a data bank in which song lyrics are stored.

V. Results

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Love is stated to be one of the most difficult concepts to understand, that is why several *source domains* can be employed in order to convey its meaning. In fact, it can be claimed that it is not easy to understand due to the fact that love is not only an emotion; it implies a relationship as well. Hence, it also partakes of metaphorical source domains that customarily depict human relationships (Kövecses 2000). Thus, this study will focus on the *target domain* of LOVE and the different *source domains* that can be mapped onto it.

This section of the paper aims to identify, classify and describe the metaphorical expressions, the CMs and their corresponding mappings found in *La La Land's* soundtrack.

5.1. Love is an object

LOVE IS AN OBJECT is the CM that motivates the following metaphorical expressions which are thereupon studied and can be

identified as an ontological metaphor. In this line, love, which is an emotion, is understood as something concrete, in this particular case an object.

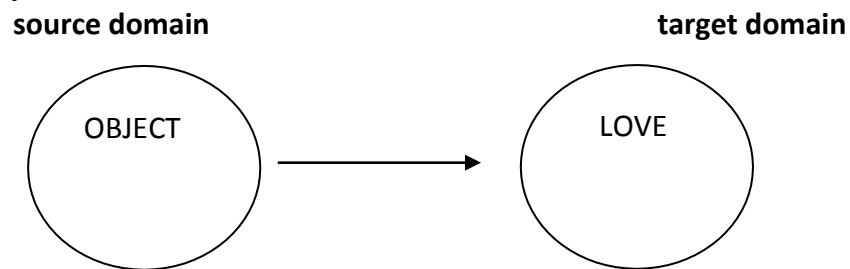


Figure 1. Representation of LOVE IS AN OBJECT

The notion of an OBJECT relates the fact of being loved to something visible and tangible. Therefore, it refers to it as something that can be manipulated. Hence, several metaphorical expressions related to the CM LOVE IS AN OBJECT have been selected and assessed in La La Land's soundtrack.

(1) «[...] Hearts that break»

Line (1) is sung during the ninth stanza, verse three of the song *The Fools Who Dream* interpreted by Mia Dolan. This notion reflects an emotional struggle which is suffered by someone.

In this specific metaphorical expression, it can be observed how LOVE is seen as an object and acquires its attributes and properties. Thus, the link between the *source domain* OBJECT and the *target domain* LOVE may be understood by conveying that hearts can be broken as if they were objects. Therefore, being heart-broken is directly related to suffering because of love (see Figure 2).

«[...] one thing everybody wants [...]»

This instance (2) can be found in the third verse of the second stanza of the aforementioned song *City of Stars*. This particular example depicts that LOVE is a desirable object. On this basis, the link between the *source domain* OBJECT and the *target domain* LOVE (see Figure 2) may be understood by conveying that hearts are given some properties of objects which can be possessed. Therefore, LOVE is understood as something visible and tangible (see Figure 2).

«[...] All we are looking for is love from someone else»

This metaphorical expression (3) appears on the third stanza; verse seven of the song *City of Stars*. In this line, LOVE is seen a sought-after object by human beings. Through this instance, the relation between the *source domain* OBJECT and the *target domain* LOVE can be regarded as love possessing object characteristics.

Hence, love is seen as an object which has possibility of being sought-after. In this line, the people manipulating the object are the lovers, in this case they are trying to find the OBJECT/LOVE.

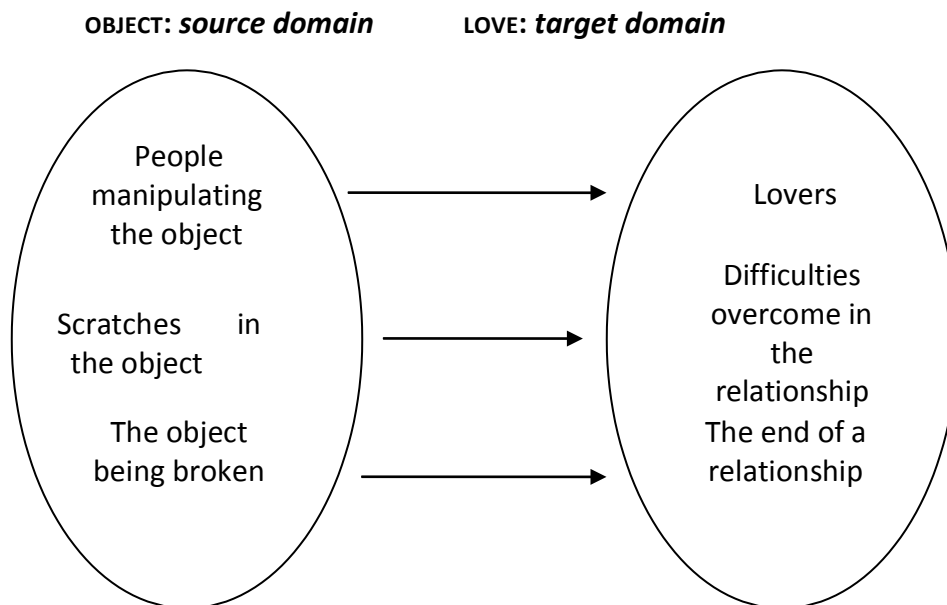


Figure 2. Mappings of LOVE IS AN OBJECT

5.2. Love is an illness

LOVE IS AN ILLNESS is the CM studied and analysed in the next metaphorical expressions. In this way, this CM can be classified as a structural metaphor. Consequently, in this particular CM LOVE is conveyed and understood in terms of a structured and defined concept, on this occasion AN ILLNESS.

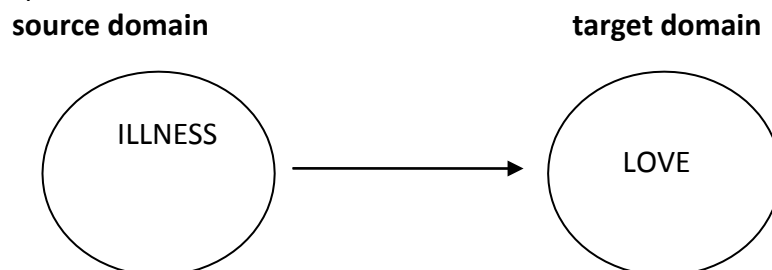


Figure 3. Representation of LOVE IS AN ILLNESS

This CM can be better understood by conveying that it relates the feeling of love with an illness and the feeling of pain. Therefore, the lovers are seen as the people who suffer due to the problems and agonies caused by the relationship.

To further understand this CM, an example of a metaphorical expression based on LOVE IS AN ILLNESS is going to be showed and analysed from the Audition song, *The Fools Who Dream*.

«[...] here's to the hearts that ache»

To begin with, the verse exposed in example (4) is sung during the second stanza third verse of the audition song *The Fools Who Dream* by Mia Dolan. Regarding this particular metaphorical

expression, the fact of not being in love is related to a feeling of relief since love is considered to be a painful experience. In this line, the people who suffer are the lovers who are trying to find the cure to their relationship. Therefore, in this instance, being in a relationship is in fact related to being ill (see Figure 4).

Subsequently, another example of LOVE IS AN ILLNESS can be found in La La Land's soundtrack, more specifically in the fourth and fifth verse of the first stanza of The Fools Who Dream.

She spent a month sneezing, but said she would do it again.

In this particular metaphorical expression, it can be observed how love is seen as something that makes you feel ill, in this concrete case «sneezing». Therefore, it is seen as a painful process in which the people who suffer are the lovers. In addition, finding the cure to the disease could be related to finding a solution in order to fix the relationship (see Figure 4).

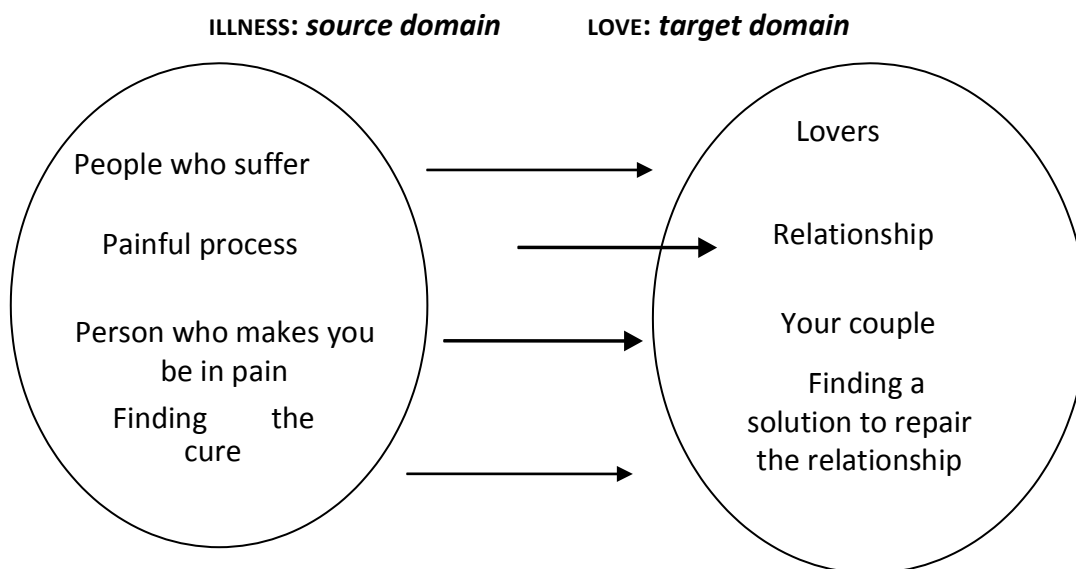


Figure 4. Mappings of LOVE IS AN ILLNESS

5.3. Love is a journey

LOVE IS A JOURNEY is the CM illustrated in the below analysed metaphorical expressions. In this light, it is worth mentioning that the previously mentioned CM can be classified as a *structural metaphor*. Thus, LOVE is understood and conveyed in terms of another structured and defined concept, in this case JOURNEY (see Figure5).

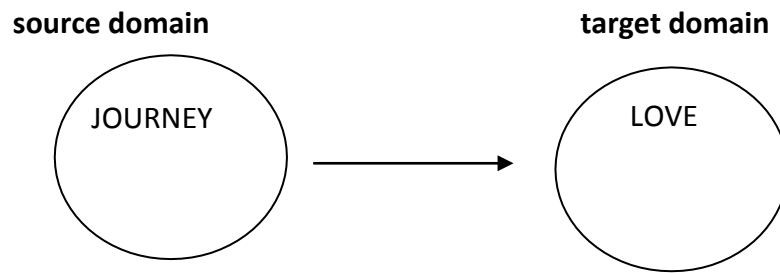


Figure5. Representation of LOVE IS A JOURNEY

This CM relates the concept of being loved or to love someone with travelling. With that in mind, taking into account the previously showed mappings, love can be identified as a journey in which the lovers are the travellers.

Hence, several metaphorical expressions based on the CM LOVE IS A JOURNEY have been selected and analysed in *La La Land's* song *City of Stars*.

(6) «[...] who knows where it will lead us»

Example (6) is sung during the sixth stanza; verse three of the audition song *The Fools Who Dream* by Mia Dolan. In this concrete metaphorical expression, LOVE is showed as a representation of a JOURNEY taking into account their corresponding mappings.

Furthermore, the events in the relationship are linked to the journey and the choices about what to do refer to the decisions about which way to go in the journey. In this particular example, the character shows uncertainty about the future path of their lives.

(7) I don't care if I know just where I will go.

This concrete metaphorical expression (7) is sung during the sixth stanza, first verse of the song *City of Stars* by Mia Dolan. In this concrete example, love is once again depicted as a journey with its corresponding mappings (see Figure 6). The analysis reveals that the lovers are illustrated as the travellers in the journey whereas the love in the relationship itself is seen as the vehicle of it (see Figure 6). Moreover, the goal(s) of the relationship are understood as the destination of the journey. Hence, in this example, the main character claims not caring about where she will go. In this light, it can be understood as the final destination of the journey of the relationship.

Hence, taking all of these aspects into account, the lovers, the love in the relationship, the events in the relationship, the progress accomplished, the difficulties found and the goals in the relationship are key constituent elements of LOVE, the *target domain*, (Kovescs 2002) (see Figure 6).

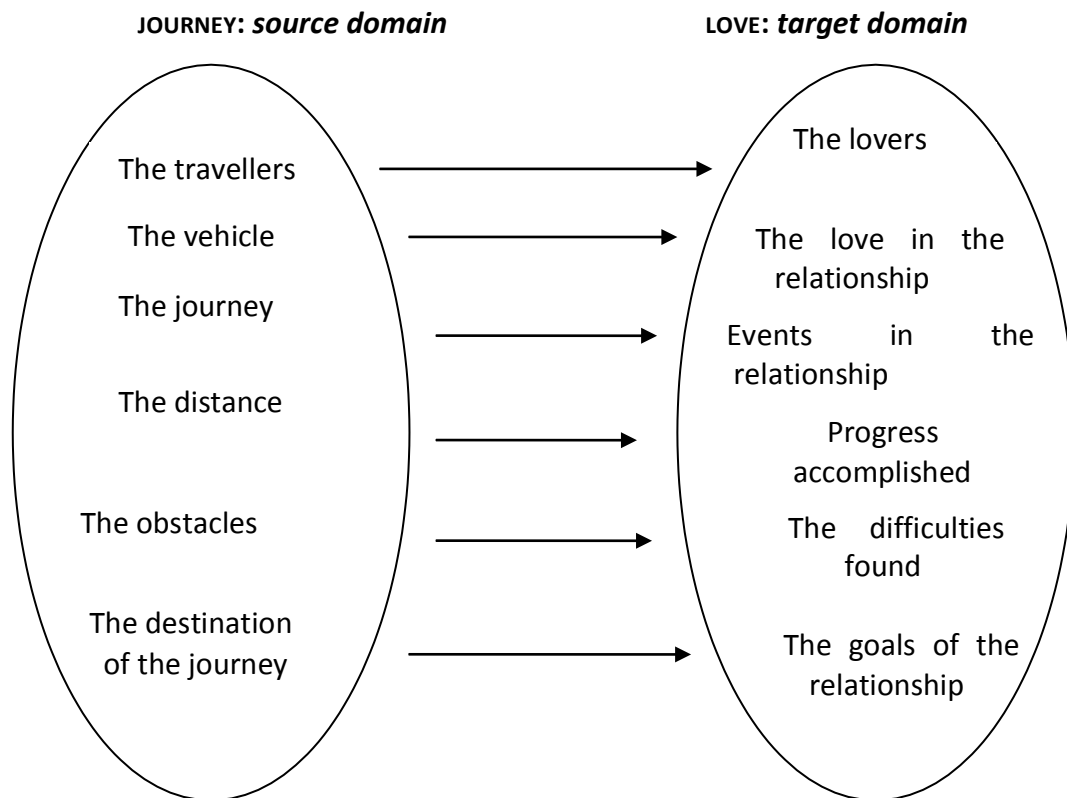


Figure 6. Mappings of LOVE IS A JOURNEY

5.4. Love is up

LOVE IS UP is the CM underlying the following metaphorical expressions. On top of this, LOVE IS UP can be categorised as an orientational metaphor. In this line, the idea of LOVE is understood by conveying a concept based on the orientation in space, which in this particular case is UP.

The different parts of the CM LOVE IS UP as well as its conceptual projections will be showed and discussed in the section below.

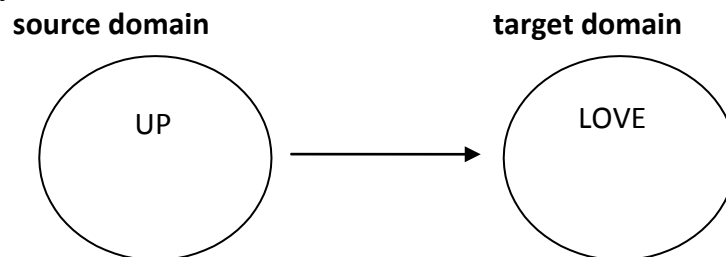


Figure 7. Representation of LOVE IS UP

This CM links the feeling of love with being up or in a higher position. Therefore, a series of metaphorical expressions based on its corresponding CM LOVE IS UP has been selected from *La La Land's* soundtrack and discussed thereupon.

(8) [...] Take our rhythm to new heights.

Considering example (8), it is sung during the second stanza; verse three of the *City Of Stars* (Solo). It can be claimed that this particular metaphorical expression can be understood in terms of LOVE represented as being something placed in a higher position (see Figure 8).

Therefore, this metaphorical expression can be interpreted as LOVE acquiring the attributes of being UP. In turn, the link between the source domain UP and the target domain LOVE may be understood by conveying that LOVE is something positive and desirable as well as being UP. In this line, it is considered that the higher the better.

(9) Someone who could lift you off the ground.

Instance (9) appears during the refrain of the song *Someone in the Crowd*. This example illustrates very clearly the CM LOVE IS UP, conveying that being up means being in love. The person that can lift you up is represented as your lover.

In this light, being up is linked with being in a pleasant and happy stage. Hence, the fact of being up is also associated with the concept of «heaven» since it is perceived as the perfect place above the sky. Thus, ascendance can be understood as the different stages in the relationship, i.e. going to live together, marrying, having kids and so on. In the following figure, the different mappings of LOVE IS UP are showed (see Figure 8).

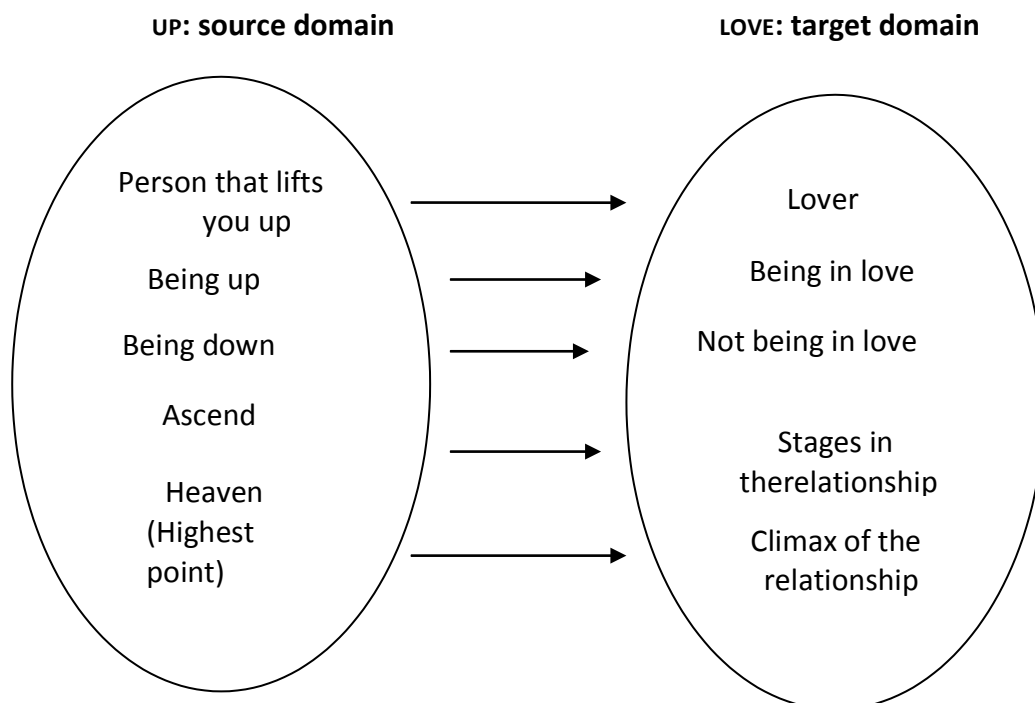


Figure 8. Mappings of LOVE IS UP

VI. Conclusion

In recent decades, major advancements in the field of Cognitive Linguistics and emotion examination have been made. The present paper was designed to determine the effect of LOVE metaphors in musical romantic films. In order to do so, a series of CMs appearing in the soundtrack of the film *La La Land* were analysed and the different *source domains* used in order to understand the *target domain* LOVE in this particular kind of genre were identified. In this line, some of the most salient CMs found in the previously mentioned study LOVE IS AN OBJECT and LOVE IS A FIRE, among others.

Considering the results of the research and their implications, it is important to pinpoint that CMs play a vital role in the understanding of musical romantic films. In this light, by making use of CMs in the soundtrack of *La La Land*, the true meaning of the film can be conveyed.

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