Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
ISSN: 2583-2387 (Online)
Vol. 5(5), Nov 2026, pp, 1-9
Journal homepage: https://sprinpub.com/sjahss

Research Article

Ontological metaphors and English collocations: A corpus-based study with pedagogical insights

Thanh Thai Nguyen

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Thu Dau Mot University, Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Conceptual metaphor; ontological metaphor; English collocations; cognitive mechanisms; corpus

Article History:

Received: 17-05-2026
Revised: 15-10-2026
Accepted: 05-11-2026
Published: 18-11-2026

ABSTRACT

Given the research gap, the present study examines the role of ontological metaphors in English collocations. The study employed Pragglejaz Group's (2007) methods to examine the material by Burns (2005). Using Steen's (2009) approach, the propositional and semantic analysis of these samples uncovered 15 ontological metaphors. These ontological metaphors were then analyzed within the frameworks of image schema and embodiment to uncover their underlying cognitive mechanisms. Supported by findings from the COCA corpus and the OZDIC dictionary, the analysis revealed that ontological metaphors play a motivating role in structuring collocational patterns. They achieve this by motivating conceptualizations of abstract domains—such as BODY, EMOTION, STATE, MIND, THOUGHT, LIFE, TIME, VISUAL FIELDS, and HUMAN PERSONALITIES —through cognitive mechanisms including the 'container' schema, the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, objectification, and materialization. From this result, the study suggests that a deeper understanding of human cognitive mechanisms can facilitate more effective pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning English collocations. In this sense, future research should further explore the efficacy of metaphor-based approaches in collocation teaching and their implications for applied linguistics and language education.

Cite this article:

Nguyen, T. T. Ontological metaphors and English collocations: A corpus-based study with pedagogical insights. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, *5*(5), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v5i5.655

1. Introduction

Metaphor has long been regarded as a rhetorical device associated mainly with poetic or literary language (Richards, 1965; Leech, 1969; Ricoeur, 1977). However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) transformed this view by conceptualizing metaphor not merely as a feature of language, but as a fundamental mechanism of human thought. In their view, conceptual metaphor—or metaphor in thought (Kövecses, 2020)—shapes how people perceive, understand, and interact with the world. As such, metaphor both structures language use and reflects how people conceptualize experience (Kövecses, 2002, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). This perspective has been further developed in subsequent work by scholars such as Kövecses (2002, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2021), Langacker (2008, 2013), Croft and Cruse (2004), Evans and Green (2006), Hu (2023), Benczes et al. (2024), whose studies have helped clarify and extend Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Their work has shown that metaphor provides a convincing explanation of how language encodes human understanding of the world. For example, Kövecses's research on the metaphors of *love* and *emotion* demonstrates how abstract experiences are understood through more concrete domains. Expressions such as *in love* or *fall in love* reflect the metaphor LOVE IS A CONTAINER, in which love is conceptualized as a bounded space that shapes how individuals experience and talk about romantic relationships. Over time, such metaphorically motivated expressions may become conventionalized as common English collocations.

Since the emergence of CMT, research on conceptual metaphor has steadily increased. However, most studies have focused on metaphor in literature (e.g., Rasse et al., 2020), journalistic discourse (e.g., Herrera-Soler, 2006), political discourse (e.g., Ahrens, 2009; Musolff, 2023; Hakim et al., 2024; Ksatria, 2024), and images (e.g., Huang, 2023). These studies have mainly aimed to identify conceptual metaphors in texts and discourses, often with pedagogical or translational implications. At the same time, other cognitive linguistic studies have provided important insights into language structure and meaning. For example, Talmy (2000a, 2000b) examined the linguistic encoding of motion, while Tyler and Evans (2003) showed that English prepositions are conceptually motivated and systematic. Similarly, studies on English phrasal verbs (e.g., Mahpeykar & Tyler, 2015; Milošević & Pavlović, 2018, 2020; Mhealldin et al., 2024) have demonstrated that their meanings are shaped not only by lexical components but also by cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy. Despite these contributions, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of conceptual metaphors in English collocation construction—an area that remains challenging for both EFL learners and teachers (Cheng, 2019; Gablasova et al., 2017; Turan, 2012).

*Corresponding Author:
thaint@tdmu.edu.vn (T. T. Nguyen)
https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v5i5.655
© 2026 The Authors. Published by Sprin Publisher, India. This is an open access article published under the CC-BY license
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

Building on this research gap, the present study aims to examine the role of conceptual metaphors in English collocations, with a specific focus on ontological metaphors. This focus is motivated by the fact that ontological metaphors conceptualize abstract phenomena—such as emotions, actions, and events—in terms of concrete entities, thereby structuring how such concepts are expressed and understood in language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example, *emotion* may be conceptualized as a *substance* (*She was filled with anger*), while *past experience* may be conceptualized as an *object* (*He left his past behind*). Such patterns are widely attested in English collocations, suggesting their systematic role in language use. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1) What ontological metaphors are present in the examined material?

2) What roles do these metaphors play in constructing English collocations?

The results help explain the roles of ontological metaphors in English collocations. Consequently, the study aims to propose practical suggestions for EFL learners to enhance their acquisition of English collocations and for EFL teachers to improve the process of teaching English collocations. These suggestions serve as a reliable foundation for applying CMT into language education and for guiding further research in applied linguistics.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor and Ontological Metaphor

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), argues that people understand one conceptual domain in terms of another through systematic mappings. Metaphors are thus rooted in cognition and everyday experience, not merely language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). For example, MORE is conceptualized as UP, as in *She got a high score*. Overall, metaphors are conceptual, support the understanding of abstract ideas, are not solely based on similarity, and are an inherent part of human thought.

Based on their cognitive function, conceptual metaphors are classified into three types: structural, orientational, and ontological (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003; Kövecses, 2002, 2010). Structural metaphors explain one domain through another, as in ARGUMENT IS WAR. Orientational metaphors rely on spatial patterns, such as MORE IS UP, as in *She got a high score*. Ontological metaphors conceptualize abstract ideas as objects, substances, or containers, enabling people to reason about them, as in MIND IS A MACHINE (*My mind isn't operating today*).

Ontological metaphors, as a subtype of conceptual metaphors, allow abstract domains such as events, emotions, and states to be understood as entities, containers, or substances (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003; Evans & Green, 2006; Kövecses, 2002, 2010, 2016). This makes abstract concepts easier to understand, refer to, categorize, and quantify. For example, conceptualizing MIND as a MACHINE motivates expressions such as *My mind isn't operating today* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to Lakoff and Johnson, such metaphors are grounded in human physical experience with objects, substances, and containers.

2.2. Types of Ontological Metaphor

As noted above, *container* is one of the most common source domains in ontological metaphors. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), abstract ideas are often conceptualized as containers based on human experience with being physically *inside* or *outside* bounded spaces. Through this schema, abstract concepts such as events and states can be understood as containers, as in *Are you in the race on Sunday?* or *I'm in a bad mood*. In such cases, participation in an event or experience of a state is metaphorically framed as being within a bounded space. Thus, the container metaphor serves as an important ontological means of understanding abstract events and states (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002, 2010).

Related to the *container* metaphor, *entity* or *substance* metaphor is another major type of ontological metaphor, in which abstract concepts are understood as physical objects or substances. This allows people to refer to, classify, organize, and quantify abstract experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002, 2010). For example, in *My fear passed quickly*, *fear* is conceptualized as a moving object, while in *She's filled with love*, *love* is conceptualized as a substance that can fill a container.

Personification is another type of ontological metaphor identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). It allows people to understand events, actions, activities, or states in terms of human attributes such as intentions, actions, and characteristics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002, 2010). By attributing human qualities to abstract concepts, personification makes them easier to describe and understand. For example, in expressions such as *Christmas is here* or *Life has cheated me*, *Christmas* and *life* are represented as if they were human agents.

From the discussion above, it is clear that ontological metaphors play an important role in shaping how people understand abstract concepts and, consequently, how they use language to express them. Examining these metaphors is therefore essential for understanding how native English speakers form collocations. Such understanding may also help EFL learners better grasp how English speakers conceptualize the world, thereby supporting more effective collocation acquisition.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Materials

The primary data for this study were collected from *101 Healing Stories for Kids and Teens: Using Metaphors in Therapy* by Burns (2005). This source was selected because its stories are designed to help children identify and address problems related to personality, emotions, mental states, and life events—domains that are often conceptualized through more concrete entities, containers, or substances (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010). Therefore, it provides a rich source of ontological metaphors. In addition, data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the OZDIC English Collocation Dictionary were used for further discussion. These sources were not employed to identify ontological metaphors, but to examine their relationship with English collocations and to provide deeper insight into the role of ontological metaphors in collocational patterns.

3.2. Research Procedure

The identification of conceptual metaphors followed a three-step procedure. First, Pragglejaz Group's method (2007) was used to detect metaphorical words by comparing their contextual and literal meanings; sentences containing such words were then recorded. Second, propositional analysis was conducted following Steen (2009) to derive metaphorical ideas based on contextual interpretation. Finally, source and target domains were identified using Croft and Cruse's (2004) categorization framework, with mappings formulated as TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN.

For example, in the sentence *He screamed in fear*, the preposition *in* is identified as metaphorical because its contextual meaning contrasts with its literal sense of physical enclosure. Since *fear* is not a physical entity, the expression can be understood through a comparison with the experience of being surrounded by walls. Just as physical enclosure restricts movement and limits

awareness of the outside, fear may mentally constrain an individual, overwhelm cognition, and inhibit action. Propositional analysis shows that the sentence means *He screamed while experiencing fear*. This indicates that the abstract experience of fear is conceptualized through the more concrete experience of containment. According to Croft and Cruse's (2004) categorization framework, *fear* belongs to the domain of emotion, while *being inside a surrounding structure* belongs to the domain of containment. Therefore, this example instantiates the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS A CONTAINER.

After the analysis was completed, the number of sentences containing metaphorical words (hereafter, linguistic samples) in each story was counted and presented in a chart to assess their prevalence. The identified conceptual metaphors were then classified into structural, orientational, and ontological types, and their frequencies, together with the frequencies of the linguistic samples realizing them, were presented in a table to determine their prominence. In addition, the frequencies of the source domains underlying the ontological metaphors were displayed in a chart to examine their relative prevalence. This procedure provided an overall quantitative overview of the findings and specifically addressed Research Question 1.

To address research question 2, the identified ontological metaphors were discussed individually through the frameworks of image schema (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) and embodiment (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010; Evans & Green, 2006). This aimed to uncover the underlying cognitive mechanisms that motivate these metaphorical conceptualizations—in other words, the foundations that give rise to the identified ontological metaphors. The findings from this discussion will be used to offer insights into the roles of ontological metaphors in relation to English collocation, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of their significance in language learning and teaching.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. 'Container' Metaphors and their Roles in English Collocations

According to Lakoff (1990, 1993), the *container* schema is a conceptual structure grounded in human experience with physical containment. Everyday experiences such as being in a room, going out of a building, or putting objects into a bag provide the cognitive basis for this schema. Beyond physical space, it also extends metaphorically to structure abstract concepts.

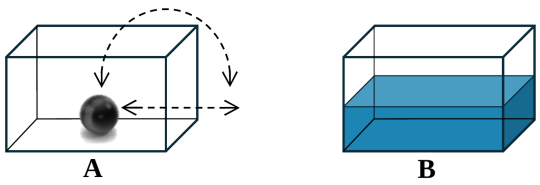


Figure 1. The schemas of a container and the objects it contains

As identified, 'container' metaphors statistically stand out as the most prevalent subtype of ontological metaphors. They represent how eight abstract concepts—BODY, EMOTION, STATE, MIND, THOUGHT, LIFE, TIME, and VISUAL FIELDS—are conceptualized through the activation of the 'container' source domain.

First, human body parts are both concrete and abstract: while physically observable, their functions—such as mental processes—are intangible. To conceptualize these processes, people often draw on the *container* schema, viewing body parts (e.g., the head) as containers that hold thoughts, emotions, or knowledge. This is reflected in expressions such as '*in* his *head*', '*in* her *heart*', '*in* my *head*', '*burst with* worry/excitement', and '*burst out* laughing', as found in samples [1] to [6]. Accordingly, the metaphor BODY AS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) illustrates how containment structures the linguistic expression of bodily experience. This pattern is also evident in collocations listed in the OZDIC dictionary, such as *enter one's head*, *put something into one's head*, and *put something out of one's head*.

(1)	BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR THE EMOTIONS	story	page
[1]	Lots of *scary* thoughts raced around *in* his *head*.	S73	p.178
[2]	Once you give it a go you discover that the *fears* are all *in* your *head*.	S30	p.100
[3]	Strangely, she thought, the pain as she cut through her own skin was nothing compared to the *pain in* her *heart*.	S89	p.207
[4]	He was about to *burst with* the worry of it all.	S61	p.157
[5]	Seeing what was happening, he *burst out* laughing.	S77	p.185
[6]	When Dave reached the shallows he was *bursting with* excitement.	S12	p.65

Second, emotion, as an abstract concept, is often conceptualized as a container through the *container* schema. This is reflected in expressions such as *in fear* or *in a mood* as seen in samples [7] and [8], where emotional states are treated as bounded spaces. Accordingly, the metaphor EMOTION AS A CONTAINER (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) explains the use of containment-related language to describe emotions. Evidence from the OZDIC dictionary shows collocations such as *in anger* and *in hatred*, while data from the COCA corpus further confirm this pattern, with expressions like *in sadness*. These examples illustrate how emotions are systematically structured through the container metaphor. An example is 'She watched his eyes as they began dimming *in sadness*'.

(2)	EMOTION IS A CONTAINER	story	page
[7]	It was so wonderful to drift off to the sound of the waves lapping the beach, especially when you never quite knew just what *mood* they might be *in*.	S41	p.123
[8]	He roared *in* pain and *fear*.	S33	p.106

Third, STATE is a broad and abstract category that includes concepts such as trouble, difficulty, misery, danger, and depression (Croft & Cruse, 2004). To make such concepts easier to understand, people often conceptualize them as concrete entities, especially as containers (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this study, the metaphor STATE AS A CONTAINER is reflected in samples [9]–[16], where states are understood as bounded spaces that people can be *in* or *out of*. This pattern is also evident in collocations such as *in depression* (OZDIC) and *in anxiety* (COCA), showing how the container schema structures the linguistic expression of psychological states. An example is 'they do not have to live *in anxiety*'.

(3)	STATE IS A CONTAINER	story	page
[9]	I am always *in trouble*, answered Tess.	S38	p.115
[10]	Best put him *out of his misery*.	S08	p.56
[11]	He could get *into trouble*.	S59	p.151
[12]	She really wished she could be *in their shoes* and do the things that they were doing.	S39	p.117
[13]	We're all *in* the same *boat*.	S14	p.69
[14]	What a *dilemma* he found himself *in*.	S62	p.158
[15]	You see, if echidnas find themselves *in danger*, they have two ways of getting *out of trouble*.	S37	p.113
[16]	You weren't *in any hurry*.	S46	p.131

Fourth, the concept of MIND is abstract and difficult to define, but it is often conceptualized as a container that holds thoughts,

feelings, and memories. This is reflected in expressions such as *into his mind*, *filled his mind*, and *in her memory* (samples [17]–[19]). Grounded in the experience of containers holding contents, the metaphor MIND AS A CONTAINER (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) shapes how cognitive processes are expressed in language. This pattern is also evident in collocations such as *in mind* (OZDIC) and in COCA examples like *an empty mind*, as in 'Swedes are so good at golf because, in golf, you need an *empty* mind.

(4)	MIND IS A CONTAINER	story	page
[17]	Sometimes the thoughts of the dark would *creep back into his mind* and again he would start to feel scared.	S69	p.169
[18]	The stories of the old-time sailor *filled his mind*.	S22	p.85
[19]	They had stayed *in her memory* all that time from her early childhood.	S07	p.54

Fifth, THOUGHT is also an abstract concept, but in the examined material it is conceptualized as a container. This is reflected in expressions such as *in these thoughts* and *in her thoughts* (sample [20]), where thought is treated as a bounded space capable of holding contents. The metaphor THOUGHT AS A CONTAINER (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) thus illustrates how the container schema structures language about cognitive processes. This pattern is also supported by COCA data, where words such as *fulfill* and *full* are used metaphorically with *thought*, as in 'A thought that does not *fulfill* itself in some act, is not a *full* thought'.

(5)	THOUGHT IS A CONTAINER	story	page
[20]	When she started looking at and thinking about the witch again, the cottage loomed big and frightening *in her thoughts*.	S21	p.83

Sixth, LIFE is conventionally considered an abstract concept that is challenging to define. However, in the examined material, LIFE is conceptualized as a CONTAINER that holds events and emotions. This metaphorical representation is reflected in the semantic features of the verb 'fulfill' and the adjective 'full' in samples [21] and [22]. The LIFE AS A CONTAINER metaphor is based on the analogy between life and a container, both capable of holding contents. This metaphor (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) illustrates how people activate the 'container' schema to conceptualize life, shaping the language used to describe it. As a matter of illustration, in the COCA corpus, the adjective 'empty' appears in 48 linguistic expressions and is used metaphorically to describe life, as in the sentence, 'It's an *empty* life we're living'.

(6)	LIFE IS A CONTAINER	story	page
[21]	How will I ever *fulfill* my life while being seated in this chair?	S93	p.215
[22]	I have a *full* life ahead of me.	S98	p.223

Seventh, TIME is conventionally regarded as an abstract concept that is difficult to define. In the examined material, TIME is conceptualized as a CONTAINER. This metaphorical conceptualization is evident in the semantic features of the verb 'fill' in sample [23]. The TIME AS A CONTAINER metaphor is based on the analogy between time and a container, both having boundaries and capacity. This metaphor (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) illustrates how people activate the 'container' schema to conceptualize time, shaping language about temporal experiences. In fact, in the COCA corpus, the preposition 'into' appears in 18 linguistic expressions and is used metaphorically to describe time, as seen in the sentence 'I dive *into* a new year of making lunches, soccer games, and more writing time'. Similarly, the verb 'fill' is also used metaphorically to describe time, as in 'It is a year *filled* with milestones'.

(7)	TIME IS A CONTAINER	story	page
[23]	That week, he put on the gloves and *filled* his *nine and a half minutes* each day by piling the trash into the bags.	S78	p.186

Eighth, an analysis of two linguistic samples ([24] and [25]) revealed that the VISUAL FIELD is metaphorically conceptualized as a CONTAINER. The semantic features of the preposition 'out' in '*out of* sight' and 'in' in '*in* sight' suggest that this conceptualization is shaped by the 'container' schema. The VISUAL FIELD AS A CONTAINER metaphor is based on the parallel between human vision and a container's boundaries. This metaphor (Lakoff, 1990, 1993) illustrates how people use the 'container' schema to conceptualize vision, shaping language about sight. As a matter of fact, in the COCA corpus, the preposition 'out of' appears in 4,436 linguistic expressions and is used metaphorically to describe sight, as in the sentence 'If your favorite post has disappeared *out of* sight, you can find it'. Similarly, the preposition 'into', appearing in 2,249 linguistic expressions, is also used metaphorically to describe sight, as in 'Not one but two more Tigers were coming into view, heading up'.

(8)	VISUAL FIELDS ARE CONTAINERS	story	page
[24]	She found that once she was *out of sight* they didn't care much.	S90	p.209
[25]	Soon he had the town garbage dump *in sight*.	S47	p.133

In brief, the findings highlight the central role of *container* metaphors in motivating the conceptualization of abstract domains such as BODY, EMOTION, STATE, MIND, THOUGHT, LIFE, TIME, and VISUAL FIELDS through the container schema. Evidence from the examined material, COCA, and the OZDIC dictionary shows that these domains are often expressed through language associated with containment. As a result, prepositions such as *in*, *out*, *inside*, *outside*, and *into*, along with verbs like *fill*, *spill*, *open*, and *empty*, and adjectives such as *full*, *empty*, and *open*, commonly structure collocational patterns used to describe these abstract concepts. These findings therefore reinforce the important role of the container schema in motivating English collocations in these domains.

4.2. 'Moving Object' Metaphors and their Roles in English Collocations

'Moving object' metaphors are grounded in the human conceptualization of MOTION (Talmy, 2000a, 2000b), particularly through the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema derived from physical experience. This schema provides the basis for understanding movement in space and, metaphorically, for structuring abstract concepts. In this study, *moving object* metaphors were the second most frequent subtype of ontological metaphors in the examined stories, representing how EMOTION, THOUGHT, and TIME are conceptualized through the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema.

Table 2. Six key elements of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema (Talmy, 2000a, 2000b)

Elements	Role	Cognitive function
SOURCE	Defines the starting point	Frames motion in time and space
PATH	Describes the route	Encodes directionality and manner
GOAL	Marks the endpoint	Implies purpose or completion
LANDMARK	Serves as a fixed reference	Structures spatial awareness
TRAJECTOR	Represents the moving entity	Directs attention and perception
FORCE DYNAMICS	Explains cause of motion	Differentiates active/passive movement

First, the metaphor EMOTION AS A MOVING OBJECT is structured by the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema, as reflected in motion verbs such as *pass*, *stay*, *race*, *go*, *stop*, *subside*, and *leave* (samples [26]–[32]). Although these verbs typically describe physical movement, they are used metaphorically to represent emotions as entities that can emerge, move, and disappear. This pattern shows how emotion is conceptualized through motion (Talmy, 2000a, 2000b). Evidence from the OZDIC dictionary and COCA further supports this, with expressions such as *anger subsided*, *let his hatred go*, and *sadness went away*.

(9)	EMOTION IS A MOVING OBJECT	story	page
[26]	Could he do what Tom did, and remind himself that feelings like *fear* will *pass* and won't *stay around* forever?	S69	p.170
[27]	His hands felt sweaty and his *heart* was *racing*.	S18	p.76
[28]	So I tell myself that the *feeling* will *go*.	S69	p.169
[29]	The *scary feelings* didn't *stop*.	S73	p.178
[30]	Caroline kept walking, thinking of home and letting the *fear subside* as she thought of those nice feelings of having a warm supper with her family.	S21	p.83
[31]	The *fear* of falling to his death like the old-time sailor *refused to leave* him.	S22	p. 85

Second, the metaphor THOUGHT AS A MOVING OBJECT is also structured by the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema, as reflected in motion verbs such as *slow down*, *race*, and *come back* (samples [32]–[34]). These verbs metaphorically represent thought as an entity that can move, return, or change speed, showing how thought is conceptualized through motion (Talmy, 2000a, 2000b). This pattern is also evident in collocations such as *a thought crossed my mind* (OZDIC) and *a lot of thought went into the design* (COCA).

(10)	THOUGHT IS A MOVING OBJECT	story	page
[32]	He tried to *slow down* his thoughts and his words.	S18	p.76
[33]	Lots of scary thoughts *raced* around in his head.	S73	p.178
[34]	Thoughts of the ghost kept *coming back* to him.	S22	p.85

Third, TIME is also conceptualized as a moving object, as seen in motion verbs like 'go by,' 'pass,' 'passing,' and 'arrive' in samples [35] to [38]. This metaphor is grounded in our perception of motion, where time is treated as a physical entity capable of movement. Therefore, the TIME AS A MOVING OBJECT ontological metaphor reflects how humans conceptualize time through the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema (Talmy 2000a, 2000b). This conceptualization enables people to commonly use language associated with the concept of MOTION to talk about time. In fact, OZDIC Dictionary lists several verb collocations for the word 'time', such as 'come' in the sentence 'You'll feel differently about it when the time *comes*'. Furthermore, an examination of the COCA corpus revealed that the verb 'stop' is also employed metaphorically to talk about time as in 'Time *stops* for no one, for no house.'

(11)	TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT	story	page
[35]	As the *months* and *years went by,* things turned from bad to worse.	S89	p.207
[36]	It was really thirsty— so thirsty that it was feeling weaker and weaker with each *passing day*.	S75	p.181
[37]	The *year* has *passed* and my mum and dad have never returned.	S93	p.215
[38]	Finally the *day arrived*.	S10	p.59

In brief, the findings highlight the important role of *moving object* metaphors in motivating the conceptualization of abstract domains such as EMOTION, THOUGHT, and TIME through the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema. Evidence from the examined material, as well as from COCA and the OZDIC dictionary, shows that these concepts are often expressed through language associated with MOTION. As a result, motion verbs such as *go*, *come*, *pass*, *arrive*, *return*, *stay*, *race*, *stop*, *subside*, *leave*, and *slow down* commonly structure collocational patterns used to describe these abstract domains. These findings further underscore the role of the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema in motivating English collocations related to EMOTION, THOUGHT, and TIME.

4.3. 'Object' Metaphors and their Roles in English Collocations

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003) and Kövecses (2010), *object* or *entity* metaphor is a type of ontological metaphor in which abstract concepts are understood as concrete physical objects. Grounded in human experience with objects, this metaphor enables people to refer to, classify, organize, and quantify abstract concepts. In this study, *object* metaphors show how EMOTION and STATE are conceptualized through objectification.

First, although emotions are intangible and cannot be directly perceived like physical objects, they are often conceptualized as objects in human cognition. This objectification allows emotions to be understood as entities that can be hidden, changed, or removed. In the data, this is reflected in transitive verbs such as *touch*, *blow away*, and *let go of* (samples [39]–[41]). The metaphor EMOTION AS AN OBJECT thus shows how language associated with physical objects is used to describe emotion. This pattern is also evident in COCA, for example in *hide my anger*.

(12)	EMOTION IS AN OBJECT	story	page
[39]	It was as if she were *blowing* her *scary* feelings *away*.	S81	p.195
[40]	The story of the homeless people *touched* his *heart* and he began to wonder what he could do to help these people.	S03	p.50
[41]	You need to let *go of* that *fear* and relax a little.	S12	p.65

Second, states are also conceptualized as objects that can be manipulated or removed. This is reflected in transitive verbs such as *bounce* and *stir up* (samples [42]–[43]), which treat states as entities that can be physically acted upon. The metaphor STATE AS AN OBJECT therefore shows how language associated with physical objects is used to describe states. This pattern is also evident in collocations such as *take the worry out of traveling* (OZDIC) and COCA examples like *kick away his anxiety*.

(13)	STATE IS AN OBJECT	story	page
[42]	The worries *bounced* from one person to another.	S18	p.76
[43]	When she got restless, she tended to *stir up* a bit of *trouble*.	S38	p.115

In short, the findings indicate that 'object' metaphors play a crucial role in motivating human conceptualization of abstract concepts like EMOTION and STATE through objectification. In addition, conceptualizing these abstract concepts as objects motivates the use of language associated with physical objects to talk about them, as reflected by the findings from the COCA corpus and the OZDIC dictionary. In other words, the 'object' metaphors play a crucial role in structuring the collocational patterns of language used to describe abstract concepts such as EMOTION and STATE. By conceptualizing these domains as objects, people can express them using linguistic structures typically associated with physical entities. Specifically, transitive verbs (e.g., *touch, blow away, hide, stir up, reduce, take out, kick away*) are frequently used to describe actions performed on these abstract domains. Furthermore, these findings highlight the importance of objectification in motivating English collocations related to EMOTION and STATE.

4.4. 'Substance' Metaphors and their Roles in English Collocations

Besides *entity* metaphor, *substance* metaphor is another type of ontological metaphor in which abstract ideas are understood as physical substances (Kövecses, 2010). Grounded in human experience with liquids and solids, this metaphor enables abstract concepts to be more easily expressed in language. In this study, *substance* metaphors show how EMOTION and HUMAN PERSONALITIES are conceptualized through their perceived similarities to physical substances.

First, the metaphor EMOTION AS A SUBSTANCE is reflected in expressions such as *fun-filled* [44], where the human body is conceptualized as a container and emotion as the substance filling it. This metaphor allows emotions such as happiness, anger, and sadness to be expressed through language associated with physical substances. Evidence from the OZDIC dictionary includes collocations such as *be filled with anger* and *be full of sadness*, while COCA provides examples like *fills the chest with happiness*.

(14)	EMOTION IS A SUBSTANCE	story	page
[44]	And is there anyone else you think of as a *fun-filled* person–or do you think that you've got enough things to work on already?	S43	p.127

Second, the metaphor HUMAN PERSONALITIES AS SUBSTANCES is reflected in expressions such as *spread* and *overflow* [45], where the human body is conceptualized as a container and personality traits as substances within it. This metaphor motivates the use of substance-related language to describe traits such as kindness, confidence, and generosity. COCA data support this pattern with examples such as *filled with kindness*, *filled with confidence*, and *full of kindness*.

(15)	HUMAN PERSONALITIES ARE SUBSTANCE	story	page
[45]	What Trevor had started with his *kindness* grew and *spread* throughout the community. It wasn't long before people's *generosity overflowed* from his dad's garage…	S03	p.50

In short, the findings highlight the important role of *substance* metaphors in motivating the conceptualization of abstract domains such as EMOTION and HUMAN PERSONALITIES through materialization. Data from the examined material, together with evidence from COCA and the OZDIC dictionary, show that these concepts are often expressed through language associated with physical substances. As a result, verbs such as *fill with*, *be full of*, *spread*, and *overflow* commonly structure collocational patterns used to describe emotions and personality traits. These findings therefore underscore the importance of materialization in motivating English collocations in these domains.

4.5. Pedagogical Insights into English Collocation Learning and Teaching

The findings highlight the significant role of ontological metaphors in motivating the formation and use of English collocations. They show that human conceptualization of the world shapes how language is used to describe it. This insight has important implications for EFL teaching and learning, suggesting that a deeper understanding of cognitive mechanisms can support more effective approaches to teaching English collocations.

For EFL learners, mastering English collocations requires more than rote memorization; it involves internalizing the ontological metaphors that underlie collocational patterns. Since native speakers often process collocations through cognitive mechanisms such as containment, movement, objectification, and materialization, learners need to develop metaphorical awareness to approach more native-like fluency. Understanding expressions such as *kick away one's anxiety* or *in trouble* can help learners retain, retrieve, and produce collocations more meaningfully. In this way, a metaphor-based approach may support deeper and more effective learning than simple memorization.

In light of these findings, EFL teachers should integrate metaphor-based instruction into their teaching. Rather than presenting collocations as arbitrary combinations, teachers can guide learners to understand the conceptual metaphors underlying them. By showing how native speakers conceptualize abstract ideas through metaphor, learners can form meaningful connections that enhance recall and accurate use. This approach not only improves lexical competence but also promotes deeper cognitive engagement in language learning.

An important pedagogical issue is the extent to which cognitive mechanisms are shared across languages. Schemas such as containment, movement, objectification, and materialization appear widely across linguistic communities, providing a cognitive basis that can facilitate the learning of English collocations. For example, many languages conceptualize time as movement and emotions as contained substances. However, cross-linguistic differences must also be considered, as not all languages employ the same metaphorical mappings. As a result, direct transfer from learners' L1 may lead to non-native collocational patterns, such as *do a decision* instead of *make a decision*. Raising learners' awareness of these differences is therefore essential for reducing transfer-related errors and improving communicative accuracy.

Despite these, the integration of these insights into EFL teaching and learning offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically effective approach to English collocation acquisition. By fostering an understanding of ontological metaphors and their role in motivating collocational structures, teachers can enhance learners' metaphorical cognitive competence, thereby improving fluency, accuracy, and productive language use. Furthermore, by leveraging universal cognitive schemas while addressing cross-linguistic differences, learners can develop a more intuitive grasp of English collocations, ultimately.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings show that ontological metaphors play an important role in motivating and structuring English collocations. They help speakers conceptualize abstract domains such as EMOTION, STATE, MIND, LIFE, and TIME through more concrete source domains, including containment, movement, objects, and substances. As a result, language associated with these source domains becomes a cognitive basis for expressing abstract meaning. For example, motion-related prepositions such as *into* and *out of* are often used metaphorically to describe transitions in abstract states, as in *out of his misery* and *into his mind*. These findings suggest that English collocations are not arbitrary, but are systematically shaped by metaphorical extensions grounded in human experience, consistent with Cheng (2019) that the meanings of words are extended from their original literal usage based on human experience of the physical world. This suggests that collocations are not arbitrary but are systematically shaped by the central sense of words through metaphorical extensions.

These findings highlight the crucial role of ontological metaphors in motivating English collocations and their implications for EFL teaching and learning. Instead of relying on rote memorization, learners should internalize the underlying metaphors to achieve more native-like fluency, while teachers can adopt metaphor-based instruction to support this process. At the same time, cross-linguistic differences should be considered to avoid transfer-related errors. These insights also suggest

directions for future research, particularly in evaluating the effectiveness of metaphor-based approaches to teaching English collocations.

References

Ahrens, K. (2009). Analyzing conceptual metaphors in political language. In K. Ahrens *(ed.), Politics, gender, and conceptual metaphors*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230245235_1

Benczes, R., Benczes, I., Ságvári, B., & Szabó, L. (2024). When life is no longer a journey: the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the metaphorical conceptualization of life among Hungarian adults – a representative survey. *Cognitive Linguistics, 35*(1), 143-165. https://doi.org/10.1515/cog-2023-0050

Burns, G. W. (2005). *101 healing stories for kids and teens: Using metaphors in therapy*. John Wiley & Sons.

Cheng, Y. (2019). The metaphorical use of collocations: A corpus-based study. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 9*(3), 107-116. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n3p107

Chui, K. (2011). Conceptual metaphors in gesture. *Cognitive Linguistics, 22*(3), 437-458. https://doi.org/10.1515/cogl.2011.017

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Routledge.

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

Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2008). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.

Gablasova, D., Brezina, V., & McEnery, T. (2017). Collocations in corpus-based language learning research: Identifying, comparing, and interpreting the evidence. *Language Learning, 67*(1), 155–179. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12225

Hakim, A. S., Citraresmana, E., & Lyra, H. M. (2024). Political conceptual metaphors in the 2024 presidential election on Kompas.com. *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa, 10*(3), 902–914. https://doi.org/10.55637/jr.10.3.10451.902-914

Herrera-Soler, H. (2006). Conceptual metaphors in press headlines on globalisation. *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics, 4*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1075/arcl.4.02her

Hu, Z. (2023). *Metaphor and cognition*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-3852-0_7

Huang, Y. (2023). Visual metaphors in advertising: An interplay of visual structure, visual context, and conceptual tension. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 30*(7), 762–791. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2023.2177708

Kövecses, Z. (1986). *Metaphors of anger, pride, and love: A lexical approach to the structure of concept*. John Benjamins.

Kövecses, Z. (1988). *The Language of love: The semantic of passion in conversational English*. Bucknell University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (1990). *Emotion concepts*. Springer-Verlag.

Kövecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling*. Cambridge University Press.

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

Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2015). *Where metaphors come from: Reconsidering context in metaphor*. Oxford University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2016). A view of "mixed metaphor" within a conceptual metaphor theory framework. In W. R. Gibbs (ed.), *Mixing Metaphor*, 3–16. John Benjamins Publishing.

Kövecses, Z. (2020). *Extended conceptual metaphor theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2021). Standard and extended conceptual metaphor theory. In W. Xu and J. R. Taylor (ed.), *The Routledge handbook of cognitive linguistics*, 171–184. Routledge.

Ksatria, A. (2024). Conceptual metaphor as a means of persuasion in Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's speech. *JADEs Journal of Academia in English Education, 5*(1), 58-73. https://doi.org/10.32505/jades.v5i1.8798

Lakoff, G. (1990). The invariance hypothesis: Is abstract reason based on image schemas? *Cognitive Linguistics, 1*, 39-74.

Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed.) (pp. 202-251). Cambridge University Press.

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

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by* (2nd ed.). Chicago University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (2008). *Cognitive grammar. A basic introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (2013). *Essentials of cognitive grammar*. Oxford University Press.

Leech, G. N. (1969). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. Longman.

Mahpeykar, N., & Tyler, A. (2015). A principled cognitive linguistics account of English phrasal verbs with up and out. *Language and Cognition, 7*(1), 1–35. https://doi.org/10.1017/langcog.2014.15

Milošević, I., & Pavlović, T. (2020). A cognitive semantic exploration of English plant phrasal verbs with the particle out and their Serbian counterparts. *Poznan Studies in Contemporary Linguistics, 56*(4), 681-709. https://doi.org/10.1515/psicl-2020-0023

Milošević, I., & Pavlović, T. V. (2018). A cognitive-linguistic investigation of English phrasal verbs related to plants. *Facta Universitatis Series: Linguistics and Literature, 15*(2), 219-233. https://doi.org/10.22190/FULL1702219M

Musolff, A. (2023). Metaphorical framing in political discourse. In P. Cap (ed.), *Handbook of political discourse*, 145–163. Elgaronline. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800373570

Pragglejaz Group. (2007). MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol, 22*(1), 1–39.

Rasse, C., Onysko, A., & Citron, F. M. M. (2020). Conceptual metaphors in poetry interpretation: A psycholinguistic approach. *Language and Cognition, 12*(2), 310–342. https://doi.org/10.1017/langcog.2019.47

Richards, I. A. (1965). *The philosophy of rhetoric*. Oxford University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1977). *The rule of metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies in the creation of meaning in language*. University of Toronto Press.

Steen, G. (2009). From linguistic form to conceptual structure in five steps: Analyzing metaphor in poetry. In G. Brône & J. Vandaele (eds.), *Cognitive poetics: Goals, gains, gaps* (pp. 197-226). Mouton de Gruyter.

Talmy, L. (2000a). *Toward a cognitive semantics: Vol. I: Concept structuring systems*. MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6847.001.0001

Talmy, L. (2000b). *Toward a cognitive semantics: Vol. II: Typology and process in concept structuring*. MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6848.001.0001

Turan, Ü. D. (2012). Collocations with mind in corpus and implications for language teaching. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 49/A*, 331- 348.

Tyler, A., & Evans, V. (2003). *The semantics of English prepositions: Spatial scenes, embodied meaning and cognition*. Cambridge University Press.