



***From Seeing to Understanding: The Conceptual Metaphor
 UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT in Julian of Norwich's
 "Revelations of Divine Love"***
***Od widzenia do rozumienia. Metafora pojęciowa
 ROZUMIENIE JEST ŚWIATŁEM w „Objawieniach
 Bożej Miłości” Juliany z Norwich***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The article discusses the interplay between language, cognition and culture from a cognitive diachronic perspective, focusing on the relation between religion and metaphorical thought. It investigates the role of the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT in religious discourse, using the example of *The Revelations of Divine Love*, written by Julian of Norwich, a late medieval anchoress.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The paper draws on the Extended Conceptual Metaphor approach, Zoltán Kövecses's elaboration of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The universalist bias of CMT means that the theory tends to ignore the sociocultural context of historical data, prioritising the influence of universal human embodiment on metaphorical thought. Using Kövecses's approach, the paper shows how the gap in CMT methodology may be bridged to yield more reliable results.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The present study connects Kövecses's approach to Cognitive Linguistic research into sociocultural situatedness. To exemplify the problem, the analysis examines the cognitive-cultural underpinnings of Julian's use of the metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The analysis shows that the metaphorical conceptualisation pattern may well derive from Julian's sociocultural situatedness. The paper indicates that the anchoress's metaphorical thought should be seen as embedded in the late medieval sociocultural context, rather than being considered solely in terms of universal aspects of embodiment.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE APPLICATIVE VALUE OF RESEARCH: The study concludes that the idea of sociocultural situatedness may be pivotal in the analyses of historical texts. It seems important to incorporate this idea into Kövecses's approach, which may inform the methodology of cognitive diachronic research into metaphorical conceptualisations. Furthermore, the results may be applied to teaching students how to approach historical texts, helping

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them gain a better understanding of the relation between metaphorical thought and culture. This has also wider implications for learning how to apprehend current social and cultural contexts, in which religion and religious discourse play pivotal roles.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS, CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR, JULIAN OF NORWICH, RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE, SOCIOCULTURAL SITUATEDNESS**

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Artykuł podejmuje kwestię wzajemnych oddziaływań pomiędzy językiem, poznaniem a kulturą z perspektywy badań o charakterze kognitywno-diachronicznym, zwracając szczególną uwagę na relację pomiędzy religią a metaforą pojęciową. Artykuł omawia rolę metafory pojęciowej ROZUMIENIE TO ŚWIATŁO w dyskursie religijnym na przykładzie *Objawień Bożej miłości* Juliana z Norwich, późnośredniowiecznej angielskiej mistyczki.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: W artykule przyjęto metodologię tzw. rozszerzonego ujęcia metafory pojęciowej, opracowanego przez Zoltána Kövecsesa na podstawie teorii metafory pojęciowej, która podkreśla rolę uniwersalnych aspektów ludzkiego ucieleśnienia jako głównych źródeł metafor pojęciowych. Artykuł ukazuje, jak uwzględnić wpływ kontekstu społeczno-kulturowego w metodologii diachronicznych badań nad metaforą pojęciową.

PROCES WYWODU: Analiza tekstu *Objawień Bożej miłości* łączy model Kövecsesa z koncepcją usytuowania społeczno-kulturowego, rozwijaną w językoznawstwie kognitywnym. Badanie omawia możliwe uwarunkowania poznawczo-kulturowe użycia metafory ROZUMIENIE TO ŚWIATŁO w dziele Juliana.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Wyniki badania wskazują, że metaforyczne konceptualizacje w tekście mistyczki motywowane są nie tylko uniwersalnymi aspektami ucieleśnionego poznania, ale wynikają one w znacznej mierze z usytuowania autorki w późnośredniowiecznym środowisku społecznym i kulturowym.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Badanie wskazuje na znaczenie koncepcji usytuowania społeczno-kulturowego w badaniach tekstów historycznych. Należy powiązać podejście Kövecsesa z koncepcją usytuowania społeczno-kulturowego, co pozwoli wzbogacić metodologię badań diachronicznych dotyczących metafor pojęciowych. Wyniki mają zastosowanie praktyczne, ponieważ mogą być wykorzystane w nauczaniu analizy tekstów historycznych w sposób pomagający studentom lepiej zrozumieć relację pomiędzy kulturą a metaforą pojęciową. Takie ujęcie ma również pewne implikacje dla pogłębiania wiedzy na temat bieżących kontekstów społecznych i kulturowych, w których religia i dyskurs religijny odgrywają kluczową rolę.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **DYSKURS RELIGIJNY, JĘZYKOZNAWSTWO KOGNITYWNE, JULIANA Z NORWICH, METAFORA POJĘCIOWA, USYTUOWANIE SPOŁECZNO-KULTUROWE**

Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is often described as “a modern school of linguistic thought” (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 3), encompassing theories and methods based on the shared commitment to offer insights into the patterns of conceptualisation that underlie language in use. One of the most prominent theories of the CL movement is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). As Evans and Green (2006) say, “metaphor is not simply a matter of language” (p. 303). It stems from the embodied nature of human cognition. Conceptual metaphors derive from mappings between conceptual domains. Such correspondences between the source and the target domain typically allow us to reason about an abstract phenomenon in terms of another (usually more concrete) concept. For instance, in the sentence *Astronomers are time travellers*, the concept of TIME is understood in terms of the concept of SPACE (hence the conceptual metaphor TIME IS SPACE).

Standard CMT is focused on the embodied nature of the mind and how it gives rise to metaphorical conceptualisation. Thus, it is argued to exhibit a universalist bias (cf. Geeraerts & Grondelaers, 1995). The disregard of intra- and intercultural metaphorical variation has not gone unnoticed in cognitive diachronic research on metaphor. Discussing the basic methodological flaws of the research, Geeraerts (2015) mentions the “natural experience only” fallacy, which “neglects the cultural background of cognitive processes” (p. 26). The scholar stresses the need to incorporate the history of both ideas and of material culture into the study of conceptual metaphors (Geeraerts, 2015, pp. 21–22).

In adopting a Cognitive Linguistic perspective, the current study addresses the need to situate historical texts in their sociocultural contexts so as to gain a better understanding of the factors that shaped them. It seeks to offer new insights into research on conceptual metaphor (CM), particularly in relation to cognitive diachronic studies. To illustrate the problem with relevant historical data, the paper offers a qualitative analysis of how the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT is used in Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*, a mystical text dating from the late Middle English period. The study adopts Zoltán Kövecses’s contextualist version of CMT and connects it to the CL notion of sociocultural situatedness. The paper shows that both conceptions may inform cognitive diachronic research. It concludes with possible practical applications of the results.

Conceptual Metaphors in Religious Discourse: Research Methods and Analytical Tools

With respect to the studies of language and religion, Richardson et al. (2021, p. 1) argue that language use is one means that affords us the possibility of exploring religious thought and practice. In the words of Sharifian (2021),

[...] spiritual systems such as religions embody particular worldviews or systems of conceptualizing life, death, morality, creation, the life hereafter, fate, and so on. Since these

conceptualizations are more or less shared across any speech community that believes in the same faith, religions can be viewed as providing systems of cultural conceptualizations (p. 9).

CL is often recognised as a theoretical and methodological framework that facilitates rigorous and principled research into the conceptualisations underpinning religion and spirituality (cf. e.g. Jindo, 2009). When applied to religious discourse, CM may be a useful tool for analysing how people reason about abstract ideas such as the relation between humans and God, truth, afterlife, etc. (DesCamp & Sweetser, 2014). Since metaphors are part of the shared repository of a community's knowledge (common ground; cf. Kövecses, 2022), the identification of such thought patterns may help gain insight into contemporary cultures and their social realities as well (Ferrando, 2019).

Advances in cognitive science have borne out the need to contextualise linguistic data. For Barsalou (2016), the recent strand of research into situated/grounded cognition shows that the mind

doesn't simply reside in a set of cognitive mechanisms. Instead, cognition emerges from these mechanisms as they interact with sensory-motor systems, the body, the physical environment, and the social environment (p. 14).

To account for those phenomena, some CL scholars have advocated the idea of socio-cultural situatedness. As Frank (2008) puts it, the conception implies

the way(s) in which individual minds and cognitive processes are shaped by their being together with other embodied minds, i.e., their interaction with social and cultural structures, such as other agents, artifacts, conventions, etc. and [...] with language itself (p. 1).

Overall, the situated/grounded approach underscores the primacy of context and the role it may play in human cognition.

The idea of sociocultural situatedness dovetails with Zoltán Kövecses's version of CMT, Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory. What Kövecses (2005) posits is that "[b]odily experience may be overridden by both culture and cognitive processes" (p. 4). According to the scholar, there are a number of parameters that help explain how context interacts with metaphorical conceptualisation. The scholar distinguishes four types of contextual factors: situational context (physical, social and cultural), discourse context (co-text, knowledge about the topic/the speaker/the hearer and previous discourses on the same topic), conceptual-cognitive (the metaphorical conceptual system itself, which encompasses conventionalised metaphorical meanings, ideology, awareness of past events and the interests and concerns of the individuals involved) and bodily context (the individual's bodily specificities) (Kövecses, 2022, pp. 111–114). Since it is important to grasp the context as a complex whole, I argue that Kövecses's contextual types may be subsumed under the idea of the language user's sociocultural situatedness, embracing the interplay of local and global factors that influence how language users interact with one another across space and time.

The Metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*

The aim of the analysis is to explore metaphorical conceptualisation patterns in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (*Revelations*), which dates back to the time when mysticism thrived in England. The analysis explores the sociocultural underpinnings that underlie the mystic's use of the metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT and examines the role it may play in structuring the text that recounts her mystical experience.¹

An Overview of Research on Julian of Norwich's Writings

Julian of Norwich's *Showings*, written in the Middle English period, is one of the most intriguing mystical works. It is related to the tradition of affective piety, which centred on Jesus' incarnation and emphasised the suffering humanity of Christ (Baker, 1994). In 1373, when she was thirty years old, Julian became gravely ill; when she thought she was on her deathbed she received a series of revelations, or showings, which she recorded once she recovered. Two versions of the narrative about the event exist. One is the earlier version, the "Short Text" (ST), and the other is the "Long Text" (LT), written by Julian after many years of meditation on what she had been shown. This paper concentrates on the latter. As indicated by Jenkins and Watson (2007), the ST is also known as *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, whilst the LT is sometimes referred to as *A Revelations of Love*. Thus, I also refer herein to the LT as *Revelations*.

The mystic's work has been explored from a range of scholarly perspectives. As we gather from Glasscoe (2005), some of the research lines pertain to the theological aspects of Julian's texts, whilst others concern the type of religious discourse (apophatic vs cataphatic)² or the genre the work represents. With respect to Julian's theological thought, one of the dominant research themes is the motherhood of Christ (cf. e.g. Pallicer, 1992), whose crucifixion is compared to childbirth. Another research strand focuses on the significance of the visual and material culture of the Middle Ages for Julian's spirituality and writings (Hagen, 2004).

The conventional iconography of affective piety, designed to spur the individual's emotional engagement in devotional practices, lies at the core of the mystic's attempt to spread her ideas among her fellow Christians, to whom she addresses her work.

¹ The usefulness of conceptual metaphor as an analytical tool has already been recognised in cognitive approaches to pre-modern literature. For instance, Lakoff and Johnsons' CMT is invoked in Cervone (2012) and Harbus (2012). However, being literary in their aims and scope, the studies do not address the linguistic issues central to the present paper. Also, for more on the significance of pre-modern literatures as sources of historical data for linguists, see Kozłowska (2023).

² For the apophatic ("by negatives") and cataphatic ("by analogy and image") ways of talking about God (see Dyas et al., 2005, p. 207).

Importantly, Julian transforms the imagery of the first account, imparting an apophatic dimension to the images in the LT (Gillespie & Ross, 1992), where darker overtones are also present.

Novotny's recent study (2019) provides a glimpse into the life of the community in which Julian would have lived. As the scholar says,

[...] any medieval person with eyes and ears lived in a sea of language. It cycled through the period in sermons, mystery plays and liturgical rituals. It circulated in prayer books, psalters and picture bibles. It was represented in crucifixes, statues of saints and stained glass. All of these forms of narrative, and the depictions of such narrative in art, influenced the language during the fourteenth century. [...] Julian of Norwich [...] pulled deeply from the reservoir of rhetorics heard in sermons, performed in dramas and seen in the art surrounding her (Novotny, 2019, p. 560).

To conclude, Novotny (2019) situates the composition of the anchoress's writings in the context of late medieval Norwich and its culture. In so doing, the scholar offers revealing insight into the ways in which the local environment might have influenced Julian's work.

The Metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*

The first example comes from Chapter 4. It recounts the event which prompted the series of revelations Julian experienced:

My parish priest was sent for to be present at my death, and by the time he came my eyes were fixed and I could not speak. He set the cross before my face and said, "I have brought you the image of your Maker and Saviour. Look upon it and be comforted." [...] After this my sight began to fail and the room was dark all around me as though it had been night, except for the image of the cross, in which I saw an ordinary, household light – I could not understand how. Everything except the cross was ugly to me, as if crowded with fiends.³

It is necessary to begin our discussion with this example because for Julian all the revelations converge on the image of the cross. As she says, the First Revelation is the pivot on which "all the showings that follow are founded and in which they are all united" (Chapter 1). It is interesting to note that the image of the light in the cross might be explained using the metaphor TRUTH IS A LIT OBJECT (Vereza & Puente, 2017, p. 9). That is to say, the moment of seeing the light in the cross could be understood as the point at which Julian's endeavour to grasp the meaning of the showings began. It is marked by the presence of light emanating from the cross, but at the same time by the darkness enveloping everything else in the room, and so obscuring her vision.

³ The excerpts are taken from the e-book version by Spearing (Julian of Norwich, 1998). No page numbers are provided in the e-book.

In Chapter 10, Julian conjures up the image of the crucifix again, but this time the focus changes as she attends to the details of Christ's face and the changing colours that reveal his agony, which she saw "in distress and darkness":

And after this I saw with my bodily sight in the face of Christ on the crucifix which hung before me, which I was looking at continuously, a part of his Passion [...]. And once I saw how half his face, beginning at the ear, was covered in dry blood until it reached the middle of his face, and after that the other half was covered in the same way, and meanwhile the first part was as before. I saw this bodily, in distress and darkness, and I wished for better bodily sight to see it more clearly. And I was answered in my reason, "If God wants to show you more, he will be your light. You need no light but him."

The two scenes, one from Chapter 4 and the other from Chapter 10, are based on Passion icons insofar as the figure of the crucifix signals the common ground shared in the late mediaeval community of Julian's fellow Christians (see also Chapter 16). The interplay of the concepts of LIGHT and DARKNESS (indicating the lack of light, i.e. understanding) is also present in the excerpt from Chapter 10, which to some extent seems to invoke the *via negativa* tradition.⁴ Seeking to look beyond what concrete images help understand, Julian adds a new layer of meaning to the conventional iconography of affective piety. As pious emotions cease to suffice in Julian's pursuit of God's meaning, the anchoress candidly admits her limited understanding of the showing, but says God will be her light, i.e. God will give her as much understanding as she needs.

Finally, it is worth invoking Chapter 83 of *Revelations*, in which Julian concludes the following:

Our faith is a light, coming kindly and naturally from everlasting day, which is our father, God; and in this light our mother, Christ, and our good lord, the Holy Ghost, lead us in this transitory life. This light is allotted prudently, supporting us in the night according to our need. The light is the cause of our life, the night is the cause of our suffering and of all our woe, through which we deserve reward and thanks from God; for we, eagerly knowing and believing in our light through mercy and grace, walk in it surely and strongly. And when woe ends, our eyes shall suddenly be opened, and in the brightness of light our sight will be clear; and this light is God our Maker and the Holy Ghost in Christ Jesus our Saviour. Thus I saw and understood that our faith is our light in our night, light which is God, our everlasting day.

It should be indicated that in these three examples the concept of LIGHT is accompanied by the concept of DARKNESS (implied in the excerpt above by the lexical item *night*). However, what seems more significant is that, whilst dark overtones seem to dominate the scenes in the excerpt from Chapters 4 and 10, in the excerpt from Chapter 83 the word *light* occurs as many as nine times, as it interconnects the concepts of GOD and FAITH (and indirectly LIFE, whereby life is created by God, understood as the source of light).

⁴ For the notion of *via negativa*, stressing the unknowability of God, see Pollard and Boening (1997).

In view of the foregoing, it is possible to offer concluding thoughts. The scope of the paper does not allow a detailed discussion of how the phenomenon of light was conceptualised in the Middle Ages. However, studies such as Gillespie (2013) provide insight into the medieval metaphysics of light. The author discusses the writings of Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1175–1253), the bishop of Lincoln and a mediaeval scholar. In his treatise, *De luce* [On light], Grosseteste (1942) posits that God is the uncreated light (*lux*). As Gillespie (2013) clarifies, *lux* gives rise to another type of light, called *lumen*. Thus, the sun and the moon are the sources of *lumen*, not *lux*. Importantly, in Grosseteste's theory, light intertwines the spiritual and physical/corporeal aspects of reality (Trepczyński, 2017).

Grosseteste's conception appears relevant to the present discussion because it provides a useful framework for tracing the progress of Julian's spiritual understanding, recounted in *Revelations*. Thus, on the one hand, more light received from God in the showings implies the mystic's greater understanding of the divine message, achieved after years of prayer and contemplation. On the other hand, even though the anchoress might not have read any of Grosseteste's treatises, she might have been familiar with such ideas because of her sociocultural situatedness (cf. Gillespie, 2013; Novotny, 2019). In other words, Julian's use of the metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT does not seem arbitrary, but appears to have been motivated (at least to some extent) by relevant discourses with which she and her fellow Christians could have been familiar (cf. the opening line in the excerpt from Chapter 83: "Our faith is a light, coming kindly and naturally from everlasting day, which is our father, God").

A Nexus of Metaphorical Conceptualisations in *Revelations*

Although the bodily-based connection between the ability to perceive and the availability of light is independent of culture, the way Julian uses the metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT implies her situatedness in the Middle English culture. This can be seen in the imagery of *Revelations*, based on the concept of LIGHT. The imagery evolves from the concrete images of Christ's suffering and death on the cross towards "an imageless and apophatic contemplation" (Gillespie & Ross, 2004, p. 132). Importantly, in the later chapters, the concept of LIGHT serves as a source concept for the target domains of GOD and FAITH (GOD IS LIGHT and FAITH IS LIGHT). In this way, Julian's use of the source concept LIGHT gives rise to a complex network of metaphorical conceptualisations that spreads throughout the text, intertwining its various sections into one coherent whole.

To summarise, the metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS LIGHT is part of the wider conceptual network. In *Revelations*, the metaphor not only ensures a coherent discourse, but also reflects the axiological system of Christianity that characterised the mystic's socio-cultural milieu. If so, the motivation behind its use goes well beyond the universal (bodily-based) aspects of perception, which is enabled by light as a physical phenomenon.

Conclusions, Recommendations and the Applicative Value of the Research

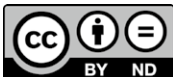
The study has shown that the idea of sociocultural situatedness may be instrumental in developing the methodology of cognitive diachronic research. Kövecses's approach should be expanded to include the notion of situatedness, as the latter idea captures the intricate interplay of various contextual factors in one coherent whole. The results of the study may have practical implications for teaching students how to approach religious texts that are embedded in the cultural contexts of the past. Students may develop skills of intercultural and interreligious dialogue through understanding the complexity of the relation between culture and religion in historical contexts. In so doing, students might also gain insight into those contemporary contexts in which religion and religious discourse play pivotal roles.

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