

THE STRENGTH BEHIND GROWTH: EXPLORING METAPHORS IN PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR'S POEM, *THE SEEDLING*

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Abstract

This research analyzes the types of metaphors in Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Seedling* using Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory. A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two different things. A metaphorical poem has the ability to create and translate the figurative language contained in the content of the poem, especially where there are deep personal and emotional experiences". The research uses descriptive qualitative methods to obtain a clear and systematic description of the metaphors found in this poem. The findings show that there are three kinds of metaphors identified in the poem "The Seedling." Those are ontological, image scheme, and orientational. The metaphors used in Paul Laurence Dunbar's 'The Seedling' speak to the stages of human improvement, utilizing characteristic pictures such as seeds, roots, daylight, and rain. Each allegory is utilized to portray desires, dreams, trusts, and the plausibility of developing into a grown up in spite of having to overcome numerous challenges. Understanding the meaning and function of metaphors will broaden our conception of language as a learning medium with strong implications for language and literacy teaching.

Keywords: *image schema; metaphor; ontological; orientational; poem*

1. Introduction

Literature is an art form based on language. As a work of art, literature has functioned as a channel of expression, a variety of ideas, human emotions, experiences, and ways of seeing the world that are united through the use of words. According to Moody in (Rahman, 2019), the unique combination of intelligence and art in humans that can present an idea or the emergence of a human feeling through beautiful words and expressions is called literature which explains that a literary work does not only consist of the language contained in it but more than that. Apart from the material, literature can also symbolize beauty and entertainment, expression of beauty and also has a function as a means of education and knowledge (Nahdhiyah & Maharani, 2023). Literary works collect various forms of writing that exist and have artistic and intellectual value. Literary works have several types, including fiction, poem, drama, essays, and written works that have various aesthetic values. The word literature comes from the Latin 'literature', which means "writing". This definition refers to works that are considered to have qualities such as language beauty,

creativity, and great influence on listeners and readers. Metaphor is one which is always found in literary works.

One example of a metaphor that people often use in their daily lives is "Time is money". If interpreted and examined literally, the sentence means that time is equal to money. Meanwhile, the actual implied meaning of the sentence is talking about how valuable time we have, and it is the same as valuable money, and the most important thing is that people should not waste time on things that are not important. Everyday conversations often use metaphors, but metaphors are also often found in literary works. Literary works are an alternative for writers to channel or write metaphorical sentences because they can be found in various platforms such as books, movies, and on poem (Anone, Putri, & Winarta, 2023).

It can be clearly understood that metaphors are also frequently used in everyday life and they are commonly regarded as cognitive structures that are the basis of abstract reasoning and thinking (Cortazzi & Jin, 2021). According to Chomsky, the physiological roles of the brain can be considered a physical representation of a natural object, which is a basic element that arises from the complex operations of the human mind. This viewpoint highlights the interaction between brain structures and thinking processes, implying that human biology plays a significant role in our mental abilities, such as language and thought. By combining the domains of languages, psychology, and neuroscience, Chomsky's observations highlight the need of comprehending how these mental processes might be translated into the physical structure of the brain. This relationship emphasizes the significance of studying both the concrete and scientific facets of our biological existence and the abstract components of human cognition (Barman, 2012).

Poem holds a special place in the literary world as a means of expressing feelings, experiences, and thoughts of general themes through a string of carefully chosen and distinctive words and expressions. Gill in Rahman (2019) asserts that a poem is a collection of ideas, feelings, places, people, and events that have happened. Poems can explore feelings and can create a picture of the human experience; poem is not just ordinary speech or writing, it is an object that is specifically created using words. Poem has a form of imitation and is the most potent literary form. The structure of poetic works is determined by the language used, including rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and metaphor. Poems can cover a wide range of topics, from philosophy of life to nature and love. Poem, on the other hand, differs greatly from prose in that it uses a more structured word choice, more rhythm, and more sound. Metaphor is one of the most crucial literary devices in poem writing, out of all the other forms of literature that are employed. Metaphor is one of the most significant literary devices in poem writing out of all the other forms of literature that are employed. '*The Seedling*' by Paul Laurence Dunbar is the subject of this study's analysis of metaphor.

One of poem's most significant forms and strategies for expressing a wide range of intricate ideas is metaphor. For this reason, a metaphor enables the author or poet to combine abstract ideas with more concrete or palpable imagery. Metaphor serves as a conduit between inputs and a deeper meaning in a poem, allowing the reader to periodically and personally rearrange their thoughts. Metaphor analysis in poem studies frequently reveals hidden meanings that are not readily evident to the reader or commonly perceived. During the Civil War, Paul Laurence Dunbar, an African-American poet, was born in Kentucky on June 27, 1872, to two enslaved parents. His poem gained international recognition in America, and he rose to prominence as one of the first well-known black poets of the 19th

and early 20th centuries. Many audiences recognize Paul Laurence as a poet who could convey human life and who had a significant.

The impact on America during the years following the Civil War. Paul frequently employs metaphors and natural symbolism in his poems to discuss a range of topics that occur in people's lives. His poem "The seedling," which depicts the development of a human seed over time, is among his best-known works. The use of metaphor in this poem depicts the various stages of human life, from the very beginning of potential to the achievement of adulthood, which is full of various obstacles, problems, and challenges of life that will be lived later (Joshi, 2020).

Metaphorical poems have the ability to create and translate the figurative language contained in the content of the poem, especially, where there are deep personal and emotional experiences (Ichien, Stamenković, & Holyoak, 2023). Human cognition is considered one of the peak abilities found in human life. Metaphors are applied in poems and there is definitely one that is used most often or widely. The process of understanding or structuring an abstract through a relationship in a tangible or concrete form is called conceptual metaphor (Kartika & Mulyadi, 2024). Figurative meanings that implicitly compare between two different objects can replace or identify one word with another are called metaphors (Musfira, 2021).

The purpose of this study was to determine how the journey of human existence might be revealed through the use of metaphors in religious literature, namely in Paul Laurence's novel "The Seedling." By examining the psychological aspects of 'The Seedling' and contrasting plant metaphors with actual human existence, this study contributes to a literary analysis and serves as a learning tool. This study also seeks to demonstrate how the poem "The Seedling" uses metaphors to highlight the significance of each development that will be encountered.

2. Literature Review

Lakoff and Johnson Conceptual Metaphor

The type of metaphor that is often used refers to some facts from the linguistic part that can describe the reader's imagination. Even the situations and emotions written in the poem can occur from the patterns of social life at the time, because poem is a work of art that is poured out with language that uses a lot of figures of speech. Poem is a reflection of the life lived by the author. This condition often involves many aspects related to them. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) asserts that categorical metaphor is the outcome of mental construction. Metaphor serves as a comparable set of principles that enable the conceptualization of two elements. It is a cognitive mechanism that determines which of two domains is understood from the first domain by comparing a source domain with a target domain, as well as between entities in the target domain and the source domain, to clarify data retrieval (Pratiwi, Sujatna, & Indrayani, 2020). According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), there are three categories of conceptual metaphors: orientational, ontological, and Image Schema.

a. Structural Metaphor

By mapping relationships between two different domains—the source domain, which offers a familiar framework from which we can gain insights, and the target domain, that represents the idea or concept we aim to understand—structural metaphors play a critical role in influencing our comprehension of complex concepts. These metaphors originate from our interactions with the social and physical world and are ingrained in our cultural

experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Beyond just being verbal expressions, structural metaphors are important because they are cognitive tools that aid in navigating and making sense of our experiences. These metaphors enable us to understand abstract concepts through more tangible experiences by creating systematic links between the target and source domains. As a result, structural metaphors have a tremendous impact on how we think and see the world, going beyond simply enhancing our language. Reflecting the complex interactions between language, cognition, and culture, they improve our capacity for reasoning, communication, and engagement with difficult concepts by bridging the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

b. Orientational Metaphor

A conceptual framework known as an orientation metaphor can be utilized as a spatial orientation to understand abstract concepts and events. Metaphors can help to understand relationships, emotions, and circumstances by orienting to ideas that are more complicated and sometimes difficult to understand. Metaphors can reveal meanings embedded in language and are often based on the author's own experiences. They provide a bridge of communication and a better way of thinking to connect abstract ideas to a tangible or describable space. The fact that certain individuals who perform this role are aware of the fundamental spatial orientation of human existence is the source of the term "orientation metaphor". According to Monasterio (2023), the orientation metaphor corresponds to the orientations of the human experience, including Up-Down, In-Out, Front-Back, etc. Physical experience or life's journey might give rise to spatial orientation. Humans are the primary organizers of daily life and direction. Moreover, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) assert that metaphors can offer ideas about spatial orientation. In line with that, Monasterio asserts that one concept is a subset of another. Metaphorical idea in another instance, and one type arranges systems to respect one another rather than organizing concepts in other situations (Monasterio, 2023).

c. Ontological Metaphor

The basic theory known as ontological metaphor explains how readers comprehend and conceive abstract concepts by using more tangible, vivid, or lived physical events as a framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

However, this metaphor used well-known ideas from finance and resource management to make sense of more ethereal experiences. It may think about time and love in ways that feel more tangible and controllable to this ontological metaphor. It can more easily and clearly traverse complex cognitive landscapes by projecting these intangible concepts onto tangible events. In general, the study of ontological metaphors demonstrates the complex interrelationships of language, cognition, and actual experiences, demonstrating the close connection between our metaphors and how we perceive the world.

d. Image schema

Schema plays an important role in the formation of an existing concept as well as triggering a large number of learned conceptual metaphors (Jun, et al., 2023). The Source and originality can be realized by the experience required to create a research concept in a person, especially on abstract concepts. Comprehension and concept formation are important outcomes of a schema, and this triggers a variety of conceptual metaphors that

are being learned. Cognitive structure is part of the schema that helps individuals organize and translate all information based on previous experience and knowledge that has been passed through. Readers can understand new information and connect with it by using the method of schemes that have been known, thus facilitating understanding and memory (Jun et al., 2023). The interaction between schemes and conceptual metaphors allows us to navigate complex cognitive landscapes, especially when dealing with abstract concepts. By implementing these widely recognized mental models, we are able to connect seemingly distinct concepts, which increases our comprehension and communication abilities.

Figurative Language in Poetry

According to Drew in Anggiamurni (2020), poem is the most direct and persistent kind of communication between art and language, and it also becomes the most intense and concentrated form of communication. Figurative language is used in a poem to enhance storytelling through a variety of distinctive strategies, including metaphors. Ultimately, figurative language in a poem is more than just ornamentation; it is a potent narrative device that improves storytelling by arousing feelings, reiterating ideas, and producing a seamless and engrossing reading experience. Poets utilize the maximum expressive capacity of figurative language to enthrall readers and listeners and create a lasting impression by using subtle language tactics while paying attention to the elements of taste and hearing. Therefore, the use of metaphorical language is still a crucial component of a poem's creativity and potency in expressing feelings.

Wainwright (2004) explains that studying or writing poetry offers an awareness that will address language and grammar issues. As a result, reading a poem does not just occasionally result in a lack of understanding. Reading or writing requires understanding the language being used. Therefore, it develops a keener awareness of the linguistic aspects at play when one takes the time to study and reflect on poem, whether through debate, writing an opinion article, or just thinking about its topics and language. This method helps identify grammar, reading, and the ways in which these components contribute to meaning and interpretation by illuminating grammatical features that could otherwise be overlooked. For instance, the book emphasizes the significance of word choice, sentence structure, and punctuation—all of which have the power to significantly change a passage's intended meaning or tone. By closely examining these components, readers can better grasp the content by becoming aware of the nuances that influence how they interpret it. For instance, the book stresses the significance of punctuation, sentence structure, and word choice—all of which have the ability to drastically change a passage's intended meaning or tone. By closely examining these elements, readers can gain a deeper comprehension of the material by being conscious of the subtleties that influence their interpretation.

Figurative language is an expressive word that has a meaning that is different from its literal delivery. A writer states a true fact using literal language. The comparisons that exist in figurative language writing add certain linguistic points (Wibisono & Widodo, 2019). Figurative speech is the use of a word to convey a meaning different from its literal meaning. When a writer or speaker deviates from the standard denotation of a word for emphasis or novelty, it is referred to as a figure of speech. Poets frequently utilize a variety of strategies, including metaphors, when they decide to use figurative language. In addition to improving the language, these strategies aid in creating a more vivid image of the subject under discussion. A metaphor, for instance, can explicitly compare two dissimilar items, revealing parallels that deepen their significance. Through the use of figures of speech, an author can

reveal new levels of meaning that encourage the reader to use their imagination to comprehend the text in a more complex and nuanced way. By skillfully employing metaphors and other figurative language, poets evoke strong feelings and vivid imagery in their readers, urging them to delve deeper into the content. This encourages the reader to read a deeply meaningful work.

Metaphor in Dunbar's Work

The poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, a well-known author renowned for his vivid use of language and imagery. The study intends to reveal the underlying ideas that these metaphors represent by examining the metaphors used in the story and demonstrating how they enhance the reader's interaction with the content. In addition to being linguistic devices, metaphors also function as cognitive frameworks that direct interpretation, enabling readers to relate abstract concepts to more concrete, well-known experiences. This link-making process improves understanding by rendering difficult concepts more approachable and relevant.

Symbols and metaphors are common ways for literary works to mirror human life. Paul Laurence describes the growth of plants, particularly seedlings, in his work "The Seedling," which is seen as a symbolic representation of the course and journey of human existence. Metaphors are significant, symbolic, and useful. Metaphors like plant seedlings are frequently employed in symbolism to depict a person's range of feelings around change or hardship. It is relevant to actual life. Human life is frequently challenged in order for humans to mature. They need a reason for existing, which may be found in biological processes like those that plant seeds go through. This concept offers insight into the circumstances of human existence and has a deep significance for the human experience that is comparable to nature.

The use of a word or phrase that differs from its literal meaning is the meaning of metaphor itself. The understanding of metaphor is not related to the limitations of figurative language, but a way of being able to communicate about the world through its writing (Fadhila & Juanda, 2023). There must be a reason for the tendency to use metaphors in poems and the most dominant one corresponds to the situation that occurs in the depiction of the content of the written poem and can also occur due to the psychological conditions or experiences of those involved that are included in the written poem.

3. Research Method

In order to achieve the primary goal of this study, which is to systematically characterize and identify data sources before conducting an analysis of them, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative research methodologies. This method expands on a thorough analysis of the phenomena that occur in the linguistic domain (Emzir, 2009). In descriptive qualitative research, the theoretical framework can guide the researcher in conducting the research such as in developing guides for data collection and analysis, or writing discussions. A theoretical framework aids in maintaining the study's focus and coherence by offering an organized lens through which to view the research issues (Emzir, 2009). As Monika (2020) stated in analyzing metaphor, which has the title "Metaphor Analysis in Kate Chopin's 'A Family Affair'". This research is conducted to find the types and meanings contained in the short story "A Family Affair" by Kate Chopin. In this study the author used a qualitative descriptive method to find the types of metaphors in the existing data source.

The metaphors were identified manually by closely reading the poem and categorizing instances based on Lakoff and Johnson's taxonomy (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By employing this analyzing technique, the researcher conveys a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter and extracts intricate nuances from linguistic events research on metaphor analysis. Additionally, by using Lakoff and Johnson taxonomy, it facilitates the organization and interpretation of the data, enabling the researcher to make significant inferences based on accepted ideas. In terms of writing discussions, the theoretical framework provides a basis for placing findings in the larger context of the study, allowing the researcher to connect their findings to theories and literature already in existence. In this sense, the theoretical framework plays a crucial role in improving the overall thoroughness and rigor of the research process, which in turn leads to a more thorough comprehension of the phenomena under investigation. With a concentration on the complex and intricate meanings ingrained in language, the items that are investigated in this study fall within the semantic domain.

3. Result and Discussion

The poem:

The Seedling

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

As a quiet little seedling
Lay within its darksome bed,
To itself it fell a-talking,
And this is what it said:

"I am not so very robust,
But I'll do the best I can;"
And the seedling from that moment
Its work of life began.

So, it pushed a little leaflet
Up into the light of day,
To examine the surroundings
And show the rest the way.

The leaflet liked the prospect,
So, it called its brother, Stem;
Then two other leaflets heard it,
And quickly followed them.

To be sure, the haste and hurry
Made the seedling sweat and pant;
But almost before it knew it
It found itself a plant.

The sunshine poured upon it,
And the clouds they gave a shower;

And the little plant kept growing
Till it found itself a flower.

Little folks, be like the seedling,
Always do the best you can;
Every child must share life's labor
Just as well as every man.

And the sun and showers will help you
Through the lonesome, struggling hours,
Till you raise to light and beauty
Virtue's fair, unfading flowers.

The metaphors that are used in Paul Laurence Dunbar's '*The Seedling*' speak to the stages of human improvement utilizing characteristic pictures such as seeds, roots, daylight and rain. Each allegory is utilized to portray desires, dreams, trusts, and the plausibility of developing into a grown-up in spite of having to overcome numerous challenges. Through this position investigation, ready to see how detailed and philosophical the conveyance of the ethical message within the sonnet is around the significance of trust and time for the development and improvement of human creatures. The findings are the following.

Stanza & Line	Line	The kind of metaphor
Stanza 1 (1)	<i>As a quiet little seedling</i> <i>Lay within its darksome bed, To itself it fell a-talking, And this is what it said</i>	Ontological
Stanza 2 (1)	<i>I am not so very robust</i> <i>But I'll do the best I can;"</i> <i>And the seedling from that moment Its work of life began</i>	Ontological
Stanza 3 (1 & 2)	<i>pushed a little leaflet</i> <i>Up into the light of day,</i> <i>To examine the surroundings And show the rest the way.</i>	Image Schema
Stanza 6 (1&2)	<i>the sunshine poured upon it"</i> <i>And the clouds they gave a shower;</i> <i>And the little plant kept growing Till it found itself a flower.</i>	Orientational
Stanza 7 (1)	<i>Little folks, be like the seedling,</i> <i>Always do the best you can;</i> <i>Every child must share life's labor Just as well as every man.</i>	Ontological

Table 1. The Occurrence of Metaphor

Based on the table above, there are three kinds of metaphors. Those are ontological, image schema, and orientational. The examples are as follows.

Data 1

Metaphor: Ontological

From stanza 1 line 1, the phrase "**As a quiet little seedling**" is an ontologies metaphor. This phrase evokes the idea of a child or young adult whom is both delicate and full of promise. The idea that youth is an expression of vulnerability and innocence, like a newly planted seed, is encapsulated in this metaphor. The phrase "quiet" conveys a feeling of serenity and possibly reflection, suggesting that the person may be in a developmental stage where they are taking in their surroundings, much like a seedling sneakily consuming food from the ground.

Furthermore, a comparison to a seedling suggests a slow yet groundbreaking growing process. A young child needs a loving environment to encourage their development, similar to how a seed needs sunlight, water, and fertile soil to grow and eventually blossom into a strong plant. This metaphor accentuates each child's innate potential, implying that they can develop into something powerful and lovely with time and nurturing. It emphasizes the value of showing patience in fostering their development and understanding that they are still forming their identities and skills. In this sense, the metaphor illustrates the promise and opportunities that await them while also highlighting the frailty of youth.

Data 2

Metaphor: Ontological

From the stanza 2 line 1, there is an ontological metaphor that develops when the seedling demonstrates a lack of self-confidence by saying, "**I am not so very robust.**" This sentence shows that even though a seedling may be smaller or not as strong as other plants, it still has the potential to withstand adversity and existing obstacles. This is not a consciousness barrier emphasizing that it is equally important to be committed and to work as hard as achievable to overcome any obstacles that may arise.

This metaphor effectively expresses a sense of promise and optimism. Despite being in less than perfect circumstances, the seedling illustrates that everyone has the capacity to strive and flourish, regardless of their visible talents or flaws. Limitations are a part of a bigger process of growth, not the end of the journey. The seedling suggests that hope can flourish even in the most trying circumstances if one is willing to work for it.

Data 3

Metaphor: Image Schema

From stanza 3 line 1 and 2, the sentence of "**Pushed a little leaflet up into the light of day,**" has an essential structural metaphor. Alongside representing the plant's actual growth, this physical activity additionally represents an expanded attempt to get beyond the several challenges encountered. The seedling indicates a strong desire to rise from the shadows and enter the hopeful the brightness of life as it pushes its tiny leaflet up towards the light.

This metaphor indicates that hardship is an integral part of any growing process. Lifting a leaf to the light can be interpreted in the context of life as an individual's attempt to confront challenges and obstacles that might hinder their progress. These obstacles may take the form of anxieties, uncertainties, or even adverse outside circumstances. Therefore, pushing the leaf represents tenacity and the bravery to get up in the face of difficulty.

Data 4

Metaphor: Orientational

From stanza 6 in lines 1 and 2, there are orientational metaphors in the sentences "**The sunshine poured upon it**" and "**the clouds also gave a shower**". The sentences effectively illustrate natural elements as representations of external supports that are crucial to life's journey. Bright sunshine symbolizes the good vibes, optimism, and support required for development. Its many rays offer warmth and sustenance, much like the encouragement we get from those close to us—friends, family, or mentors—who help us advance.

However, the clouds which generate rain symbolize a more difficult part of life, where rain can be seen as obstacles or issues that need to be faced. Rain may seem like an issue, but it is also crucial for evolution. Plants cannot survive without water, which serves as an example of how challenges are often necessary to promote our growth and education. In this sense, rain can be viewed as a life lesson that develops resilience and makes us stronger and more knowledgeable individuals.

Data 5

Metaphor: Ontological

From stanza 7 in line 1 "**Be like the seedling**" The lines in the poem have an ontological meaning that highlights the existence and nature of children and seedlings. With this comparison, it explains that this stanza aims to inform readers of the comparison between seedlings and children. Just as plant seedlings have the opportunity to grow and change to become more mature. So, children have a lot of potential to become themselves. This analogy can show that children are in their early stages of growth. This growth does require effective nurturing and care. This analogy shows that children are in the early stages of their life journey, needing proper nurturing, care and conditions to develop. Seedlings are often associated with vulnerability, innocence, and the need for support to reach maturity, implying that children are also in a formative phase where the environment and people around them greatly influence their development.

Moreover, this comparison underscores the natural and necessary process of growth, inviting readers to consider the different stages of development in seedlings and children. Ultimately, the book reinforces the idea that, like seedlings reaching for the sunlight, children should be encouraged to strive for their aspirations and goals, highlighting the importance of recognizing and nurturing the potential that lies within each child.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that there are three kinds of metaphors in the poem "The Seedling" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Those are ontological, image scheme, and orientational. The metaphors used in Paul Laurence Dunbar's 'The Seedling' speak to the stages of human improvement, utilizing characteristic pictures such as seeds, roots, daylight, and rain. Each allegory is utilized to portray desires, dreams, trusts, and the plausibility of developing into a grownup in spite of having to overcome numerous challenges. In the poem "The Seedling," there are many ontological metaphors in the poem "The seedling" because these metaphors usually compare an object with the self-motivation that exists in humans, activities that exist, and characteristics contained in a human being. They also use the word seedling to describe a human being who is growing and experiencing the process of life, because that is what makes this ontological metaphor dominant in this poem. This study reveals the underlying ideas in these metaphors that are represented in

Dubar's poem, by examining the metaphors used in the poem and demonstrating how they enhance the reader's interaction with the content. Moreover, in African-American literature, metaphors also function as cognitive frameworks that direct interpretation, enabling readers to relate abstract concepts to more concrete, well-known experiences. Therefore, for further study or other research should take a consideration such as comparing metaphors in Dunbar's other works or analyzing how metaphors function in other African-American poets' writings.

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