ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

ISSN: 2692-515-x, Impact Factor: 9.23
American Academic publishers, volume 6, issue 01,2026

Journal: https://www.academicpublishers.org/journals/index.php/ijai

PHRASEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT "CONSCIENCE" IN MODERN ENGLISH: A COGNITIVE, AXIOLOGICAL AND LINGUOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The article provides an in-depth cognitive-semantic and axiological analysis of the phraseological representation of the concept "conscience" in modern English. The research is grounded in contemporary cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, and phraseological studies. The study examines how phraseological units serve as a primary linguistic mechanism for verbalizing moral cognition, ethical self-regulation, and evaluative judgment. Drawing on British and American English material, the paper identifies the internal structure of the concept, including its semantic core, near and far periphery, and dominant metaphorical models. Special attention is paid to the interaction between linguistic meaning, cultural values, and moral norms encoded in phraseology. The results demonstrate that phraseological units not only reflect individual moral experience but also function as carriers of collective ethical knowledge, thus playing a crucial role in shaping the English linguistic worldview.

Keywords: conscience, moral cognition, phraseological units, conceptual metaphor, axiological linguistics, linguistic worldview, evaluation.

Introduction

The anthropocentric paradigm in modern linguistics has profoundly reshaped approaches to language analysis by foregrounding human cognition, culture, and systems of values as central components of linguistic inquiry. Within this paradigm, language is no longer interpreted merely as an autonomous system of signs or formal structures; rather, it is understood as a cognitive and semiotic mechanism through which individuals conceptualize reality, organize experience, and transmit socially and culturally significant meanings. This shift has led to the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from cognitive science, psychology, philosophy, and cultural studies into linguistic research.

One of the most productive and theoretically significant directions within the anthropocentric framework is the study of concepts, which are viewed as complex mental constructs integrating linguistic meaning, encyclopedic knowledge, cultural memory, and evaluative attitudes. Concepts function as mediators between language and thought, enabling

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speakers to interpret abstract phenomena and regulate social behavior. In this sense, conceptual analysis allows researchers to reconstruct the cognitive structures underlying linguistic units and to reveal how culturally shared values are encoded and reproduced through language. Among various conceptual domains, moral and ethical concepts occupy a particularly prominent position due to their abstract nature, normative character, and strong axiological load. These concepts are not only cognitively complex but also socially significant, as they contribute to the regulation of interpersonal relations and the maintenance of social order. The concept of "conscience" represents a fundamental moral category that governs human behavior, ensures internal self-regulation, and reflects culturally conditioned notions of responsibility, guilt, and moral accountability. Despite its apparent universality, conscience is conceptualized and evaluated differently across cultures and linguistic communities, which makes its linguistic realization a subject of sustained scholarly interest.(Langacker, 1987; Talmy, 2000).

Phraseological units are especially relevant for the study of moral concepts because they encode evaluative meanings in a figurative, emotionally charged, and culturally marked form. Unlike neutral lexical items, phraseological expressions preserve collective experience and reflect stable cognitive models through which moral judgment is interpreted and communicated. Their metaphorical and expressive nature allows abstract ethical notions to be conceptualized in concrete, embodied terms, thereby increasing their pragmatic and persuasive impact in discourse. As a result, phraseological units function not only as linguistic signs but also as carriers of cultural norms and moral values. Therefore, the analysis of phraseological units that verbalize the concept of conscience provides a valuable methodological tool for uncovering deep cognitive, axiological, and linguocultural mechanisms shaping ethical perception in the English-speaking worldview. By examining the semantic structure of these units, their dominant metaphorical models, and their evaluative and pragmatic functions, the present study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how moral experience is linguistically conceptualized and culturally transmitted in modern English. (Wierzbicka, 1992; Kövecses, 2005).

Methodological Framework

The present study is conducted within the theoretical and methodological paradigm of cognitive linguistics, axiological linguistics, and phraseological theory, which together provide an integrated perspective on the interaction between language, cognition, and value systems. This interdisciplinary framework makes it possible to examine phraseological units not only as fixed linguistic expressions but also as cognitive and cultural constructs that encode moral knowledge and evaluative meanings. The methodological basis of the research combines approaches from linguistics, cognitive science, and cultural studies, aiming to reveal both the semantic content and the conceptual organization of phraseological units representing the concept of *conscience*. Such a комплексный (complex) approach ensures a systematic analysis of linguistic data at multiple levels, including lexical, conceptual, metaphorical, and pragmatic dimensions. (Lehrer, 1993).

The study employs the following research methods:

Conceptual analysis, which serves as the primary tool for reconstructing the internal structure of the concept *"conscience"*. This method allows for the identification of its core

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semantic features, axiological components, and cognitive functions within the English linguistic worldview.

Componential and semantic analysis, used to determine the invariant and variable semantic components of phraseological units. This method makes it possible to distinguish evaluative, emotional, and rational elements within phraseological meaning and to establish semantic oppositions that structure the concept.

Conceptual metaphor analysis, based on the theoretical framework proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, is applied to reveal metaphorical mappings that underlie moral cognition. Through this method, abstract ethical experiences are shown to be conceptualized via concrete, embodied domains, which plays a crucial role in the phraseological representation of conscience.

Contextual and discourse analysis, which enables the interpretation of phraseological units in authentic communicative contexts. This approach allows for the examination of pragmatic functions, stylistic variation, and evaluative force of phraseological expressions across different types of discourse, including literary and journalistic texts.

Phraseosemantic field modeling, employed to structure the analyzed material by distinguishing the semantic core, near periphery, and far periphery of the concept. This method helps to reveal hierarchical relations among phraseological units and to demonstrate the dynamic and multi-layered nature of the concept.

The empirical material for the study consists of phraseological units selected from authoritative English explanatory and phraseological dictionaries, as well as data drawn from linguistic corpora and literary texts representing both British and American English usage. The inclusion of corpus-based and textual data ensures the reliability, representativeness, and authenticity of the analyzed material, thereby strengthening the validity of the research findings.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Conceptual and Semantic Core of “Conscience”

The semantic core of the concept “conscience” is constituted by phraseological units that explicitly verbalize moral awareness, ethical responsibility, and mechanisms of internal self-regulation. Units such as *clear conscience*, *guilty conscience*, *a bad conscience*, and *prick one’s conscience* directly encode the speaker’s internal moral evaluation and the assessment of one’s actions in relation to socially accepted norms. These expressions represent conscience as an inner evaluative instance that functions independently of external control. From a cognitive perspective, the semantic unity of these phraseological units reflects the conceptualization of conscience as an autonomous mental authority responsible for monitoring behavior and producing moral judgments. This representation is structured through the dominant conceptual metaphor CONSCIENCE IS AN INNER JUDGE, which presupposes the existence of moral norms, rational evaluation, and personal accountability. (Moon, 1998).

The metaphor implies an internalized legal or judicial model, where actions are “examined,” “evaluated,” and “sentenced” within the individual’s cognitive space. The

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evaluative polarity expressed through adjectives such as *clear*, *guilty*, and *bad* reinforces a binary moral opposition between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This polarity reflects the axiological nature of the concept and highlights the role of conscience as a regulator of moral choice. Furthermore, the frequent collocation of *conscience* with evaluative modifiers indicates the high degree of semantic stability and conventionalization of these phraseological units in English. The stability and high frequency of core units across different registers and discourse types suggest that conscience is conceptualized not as a situational emotional response but as a constant and universal internal mechanism. This supports the view that conscience functions as a foundational cognitive construct embedded in the moral worldview of English-speaking communities.

2. Peripheral Zones and Moral Conceptual Networks

The near and far periphery of the concept includes phraseological units that encode conscience implicitly through moral consequences, emotional reactions, and existential self-assessment. Expressions such as *have blood on one's hands*, *sell one's soul*, *carry a burden of guilt*, and *live with oneself* do not explicitly name conscience; instead, they activate its meaning through associated experiences of guilt, moral compromise, inner conflict, and irreversible ethical choice. These phraseological units expand the semantic field of conscience by establishing conceptual links with other moral and ethical categories, including *sin*, *shame*, *honour*, *responsibility*, *remorse*, and *redemption*. (Wierzbicka, 1997)

As a result, conscience emerges as a nodal concept within a broader moral conceptual network that integrates religious, social, and psychological dimensions of ethical behavior. The peripheral representation of conscience increases pragmatic expressiveness by shifting from direct moral labeling to metaphorical implication. This indirectness intensifies emotional impact and persuasive force, allowing speakers to convey moral judgment without explicit condemnation. In discourse, such units often function as powerful rhetorical devices that evoke shared moral knowledge and prompt self-reflection in the addressee. Moreover, the periphery demonstrates the dynamic and context-dependent nature of the concept, revealing how conscience interacts with situational factors and cultural narratives. This interaction highlights the flexibility of moral conceptualization and the ability of phraseological units to adapt to different communicative intentions.

3. Metaphorical Models of Moral Experience

Metaphor constitutes a fundamental cognitive mechanism underlying the phraseological representation of conscience, enabling abstract moral experience to be structured in terms of embodied and perceptually accessible domains. The analysis identifies several dominant metaphorical models that systematically organize the phraseosemantic field of conscience.

The metaphor CONSCIENCE IS A VOICE, as realized in expressions such as *the voice of conscience*, conceptualizes moral judgment as inner speech or internal dialogue. This model emphasizes the communicative nature of conscience and presents it as an internal advisor or moral guide that warns, instructs, and evaluates behavior. The metaphor CONSCIENCE IS A PHYSICAL BURDEN, exemplified by expressions like *a heavy conscience*, represents guilt as psychological pressure or weight. This metaphor draws on bodily experience and highlights the

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emotional discomfort and mental strain associated with moral transgression. The metaphor CONSCIENCE IS A DAMAGED BODY PART, as seen in *a wounded conscience*, conceptualizes moral violation as injury or trauma. This model emphasizes the lasting and potentially irreversible consequences of ethical misconduct and reflects the depth of moral suffering. Together, these metaphorical models demonstrate that the conceptualization of conscience in English relies heavily on embodied cognition. By mapping moral experience onto physical sensation, voice, and injury, phraseological units make ethical evaluation cognitively salient, emotionally vivid, and pragmatically effective.

4. Axiological and Pragmatic Functions

Phraseological units representing conscience perform a strong axiological function by expressing approval, condemnation, or moral warning. In discourse, they often serve pragmatic purposes such as persuasion, moral instruction, and social control. Through repeated use, these units contribute to the reinforcement of moral norms and the transmission of ethical values across generations, confirming their role as carriers of collective moral consciousness.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the concept of "conscience" in modern English is linguistically realized through a complex, hierarchically organized system of phraseological units that reflect both individual moral cognition and collectively shared ethical values. These units form a structured phraseosemantic field comprising a clearly defined semantic core and multiple peripheral layers, each of which contributes to the multidimensional representation of moral experience. The core units directly verbalize internal moral judgment and ethical self-control, while peripheral expressions expand the conceptual field by integrating emotional, existential, and evaluative dimensions of conscience. The analysis confirms that metaphorization, axiological evaluation, and associative expansion constitute the principal cognitive mechanisms underlying the phraseological representation of conscience. Through metaphorical models grounded in embodied experience, abstract moral phenomena are rendered cognitively accessible and emotionally salient. Evaluation functions as a key organizing principle, reinforcing binary moral oppositions and enabling phraseological units to serve as instruments of moral assessment, persuasion, and social regulation. The findings further demonstrate that phraseological units play a central role in shaping and maintaining the English moral worldview, as they encode culturally specific norms of responsibility, guilt, and moral accountability. By functioning as carriers of collective ethical knowledge, these units contribute to the transmission of moral values across discourse types and generations, thereby reinforcing the continuity of cultural and ethical traditions within the language community. From a theoretical perspective, the cognitive-axiological approach adopted in this research proves effective in revealing the internal organization of abstract moral concepts and their linguistic realization. The integration of cognitive linguistics and phraseological theory allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how language mediates between moral cognition and cultural values. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the productivity of phraseosemantic field modeling for the analysis of complex conceptual domains. The results of the study may serve as a foundation for further research into the cross-linguistic and intercultural representation of moral concepts, as well as for applied studies in translation, discourse analysis, and intercultural communication. By elucidating the mechanisms through which conscience is conceptualized in

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language, the research contributes to broader discussions on the relationship between language, cognition, and ethics in modern linguistics.

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