



# A Study on the Construction of Ecological Consciousness in *The Old Man and the Sea* from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor

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## Abstract

The majority of the analyses on *The Old Man and the Sea* are conducted from the perspectives of literature, systemic functional linguistics, and translation, while few are conducted from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics. Conceptual metaphors from cognitive linguistics have the potential to analyze human thinking. Therefore, based on the theory of conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics, this article aims to analyze the complex ecological consciousness of the old man in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Research indicates that the calamity faced by the old man is attributed to the insignificance of human beings. Human beings are intricately connected to all things and depend on each other. Human beings are incapable of conquering nature by themselves. On the contrary, it is imperative for individuals to love and respect nature, abide by its laws, and live in harmony with it.

## Keywords

*The Old Man and the Sea*, conceptual metaphor, ecological consciousness, discourse analysis

## 1. Introduction

The saga of *The Old Man and the Sea* was written by the late American author Ernest Hemingway. An old fisherman named Santiago goes to sea to catch fish. There was nothing for eighty-four days. However, he wasn't discouraged. He finally caught a big marlin. On his return, he came across a group of sharks so that the big marlin was nothing but a skeleton. The book has sparked a wave of academic inquiry, with studies focusing on the iceberg theory, tough man image, nihilism, and tragic consciousness. Some scholars have paid attention to the ecological ethos of the old man, but they mostly analyze it from the perspective of literary analysis or functional linguistics, and few studies examine the ecological consciousness conveyed by the discourse in this work from the perspective of conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy in cognitive linguistics. This article aims to examine ecological consciousness of the old man based on conceptual metaphors, focusing on two aspects: respect for nature and consequences of human expansion.

## 2. Theoretical basis

### 2.1 Conceptual metaphor theory

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed the conceptual nature of metaphor, revealing that it is not only a rhetorical device but also a basic way of thinking and a cognitive tool. Metaphor is a system for mapping conceptual domains, one-way mapping from the source domain to the target domain. The information in the source domain is usually

concrete and easy to understand, whereas the information in the target domain is usually abstract and difficult to understand. The conceptual metaphor emphasizes that human beings are good at using simple and concrete things to understand complex and difficult things. The process of mapping from the source domain to the target domain is also a process for understanding abstract concepts with concrete concepts. The metaphor can be written in A IS B format.

## 2.2 The previous studies for *The Old Man and The Sea*

*The Old Man and the Sea*, one of Hemingway's renowned literary masterpieces, has sparked a significant amount of research enthusiasm among Western critics from diverse perspectives since its publication in 1952. For instance, Burhans (1960) interpreted the values of love, courage, and loneliness in the novel through the utilization of symbolism and satire. Baker (1961) analyzed the heroic spirits of human nature, which are not afraid to admit defeat and fight bravely. Wan (2004) thought that *The Old Man and the Sea* had built a "female-absent phenomenon". In recent years ecological criticism has become a fresh trend in literary criticism. More and more scholars have begun to re-examine this work from an ecological viewpoint. For example, Love (1990), the pioneer of American Ecological Criticism, thought that the novel embodied the conflict between human will and natural laws, and explained Hemingway's emphasis on the relationship between humans and the earth. Fleming (1999) analyzed the reason why this novel was so closely related to nature, referring to Hemingway's personal experiences. Ma and Hao (2009) analyzed the conflict between the ecological consciousness and the tough man image in the novel from the perspective of critical discourse analysis and revealed Hemingway's contradictory ecological views. Yao (2010) examined the multidimensional relationships between humans and nature. Chen (2013) explored the contradictory ecological views in this novel and discussed the root cause from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. In recent years, many studies have focused on the work, but most of them focus on the problem of English-Chinese translation (Liu Zhao & Sun Ce, 2022; Jia Liqin, 2022; Bi Miaomiao & Zhang Baihua, 2022; Yu Dongyun & Song Baoping, 2021; Huang Zhonglian & Zhang Tian, 2021).

## 2.3 Analysis of ecological discourse

There are two primary dogmas in the field of ecolinguistics. One of them was referred to as Haugenian Dogma (Haugen, 1972), while the other was referred to as Halliday Dogma (Halliday, 1990). Haugenian Dogma regarded ecolinguistics as a metaphor. The relationship between language and speech communities was compared to the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. Whereas Halliday Dogma regarded language as a fundamental component of society or the entire ecosystem. He emphasized the significant impact of language on environmental concerns. Halliday (2003, pp. 139-174) maintained that language has serious effects on our ecological environment. He believed that linguists should make a contribution to ecological protection by raising people's attention to grammar and making it clear how grammar promotes growthism and classism.

There are two distinct subcategories for discourse analysis in the field of ecolinguistics, namely the analysis of ecological discourse and the ecological analysis of discourse. The first focuses on ecological discourses, while the latter concentrates on ecological elements of all kinds of discourses. This thesis aims to analyze the ecological relationships of Ernest Hemingway's famous novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*, which belong to the latter. The primary fundamental theory of ecological discourse analysis is systematic functional linguistics, and the research findings of cognitive linguistics are scarce.

## 3. The ecological consciousness construction

### 3.1 Respect for all kinds of life in the world

*The Old Man and the Sea* have repeatedly reflected on Santiago's reverence and empathy towards other animals. He held a high regard for the diverse life forms found in nature and empathized with the distress of each creature. The most commonly used metaphor is ANIMALS ARE HUMANS.

Example 1: "He was sorry for the birds, especially the small delicate dark terns that were always flying and looking and almost never finding, and he thought, the birds have a harder life than we do except for the robber birds and the heavy strong ones."

There is a metaphor "The weak animals are weak persons". Under the guidance of anthropocentrism, a growing number of individuals believe that humans should obtain resources from nature and that the entirety of the universe

is intended for human beings. A bird is merely an animal, unworthy of sympathy or compassion, yet in Hemingway's work, the old man displays compassion for the fragile bird. He spoke with a great deal of emotion as if he sympathized with the weak. It indicates that the old man does not believe that anthropocentrism is a correct ecological philosophy view. On the contrary, humans' compassion towards the weak is important, as it demonstrates that the old man's heart elevates all things in the world to a comparable level with human beings.

Example 2: "He was very fond of flying fish as they were his principal friends on the ocean."

The old man Santiago views the flying fish as a friend. The metaphor "Animals are friends" is repeated in the story, but how can an animal be a friend of a person? Only the two sides of the exchange of interests cannot be considered friends. Friends should be mutual help and support. This relationship will make people feel friendly and warm. In the story, the flying fish guides the old man to seek out large fish so that the old man regards flying fish as companions and friends.

Example 3: "But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things ...."

There is a metaphor "The sea is a woman". Many people view the sea only in terms of profit, they catch fish and then sell it to factories for processing in order to make profits. Santiago, on the other hand, has a love and reverence for the sea. To him, the sea is more like a woman, sometimes like a mother, nurturing human beings, and allowing human beings to take resources. But there is a limit to the mother's tolerance of her children, and she has the right to punish her own children who have made mistakes. So, when humans take too much, the mother will get angry and scold the child.

Example 4: "Most people are heartless about turtles because a turtle's heart will beat for hours after he has been cut up and butchered. But the old man thought, I have such a heart too and my feet and hands are like theirs."

The majority of individuals exhibit no pity towards the turtle's death in the first half of this sentence. They have no respect for life, especially the lives of these weak creatures, so the killing of these creatures does not stir their hearts. Nevertheless, the old man deemed it a particularly cruel act, as he possessed a heart similar to that of a turtle, and possessed similar hands and feet. Hence, he and the turtle shared similar organs. Upon witnessing the turtle's slaughter and dissection, he was unable to refrain from comparing his body to the turtle's. He felt the pain in his heart, in his hands and feet. The old man possesses a high degree of compassion and empathy, which is the most basic emotion that humans should have.

Example 5: "You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother."

There are two metaphors for big fish: "Big fish are competitors" and "Big fish are brothers". The old man in the article tries his best to catch the big marlin. The old man possessed considerable strength and expertise in the field of fishing. Despite his age being old, he maintained a strong belief in his ability to fish. When the old man was catching the big marlin, he felt that the big marlin was an experienced player like him. This marlin is larger than fishes that the old man has seen or heard of. The old man is not sure whether he can win the contest with the big marlin, but he does not want to give up. The old man compares the large marlin to his brother. The old man and the big marlin have similar characteristics, that is, they both do not want to admit defeat. Finally, in the contest, the old man exerted himself and successfully killed the big marlin.

Example 6: "... He was still sleeping on his face and the boy was sitting by him watching him. The old man was dreaming about the lions."

There is a metaphor that the lion is vitality and youth. Dreaming of the lion may reflect the old man's desire for vitality and youth. In the article, the old man mentioned that he had witnessed a lion during his youth. It can be said that the lion is used to replace his glory. The lion is the emblematic animal of the African grasslands, a symbol of strength and vitality. Hence, the lion mentioned many times in the article exemplifies the old man's recollections of youthfulness and vitality.

### 3.2 The consequences of human expansion

Example 7: "In the night sharks hit the carcass as someone might pick up crumbs from the table. The old man paid no attention to them and did not pay any attention to anything except steering. He only noticed how lightly and how well the skiff sailed now there was no great weight beside her."

A metaphor that appears in the text is "the shark is the avenger". In the article, the old man repeatedly stressed that because he had gone too far, he had lost his good luck. Going too far here seems to suggest that man has touched the

boundary of harmony with nature. When a man crosses the boundary, man will be punished by nature. Because he did not catch a fish for 84 days, the kind of psychological conquest in his heart became stronger when he met the big marlin. He aspires to capture large marlin by utilizing his proficient fishing skills and formidable ability to captivate the attention of others. Despite successfully catching the large marlin, he was ultimately punished by nature, as the shark devoured all of his prey, leaving only the skeleton of the large marlin. Because he was aware of his failure, he no longer wanted to fight the shark, and he allowed the shark to continue eating the little meat left on the big marlin. He realized that he was ultimately defeated by nature. He dragged the skeleton of the big marlin back to the island, and he will continue to be doubted by the island masses. They seem to have no concern for the fate of the old man during this fishing excursion. All they see is that the old man is failing. The paper attempts to explain that, if human beings want to conquer nature in order to embody their own value, they will inevitably be punished by nature.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*, the story of the old man fishing is the main line, and another line reflects the relationship between the old man and various small creatures in the process of fishing. The old man loves and respects nature and gets along harmoniously with many small creatures on the sea. For the old man, these creatures deserve respect and love. Simultaneously, they provide the old man with a significant amount of pleasure and assistance during the fishing process. The old man considered Marlin to be his brother, a brother as powerful, skilled, and equal as he was. He greatly valued, respected, and loved this brother. He aimed to defeat his brother in order to garner the admiration of other people and establish his own worth. Ultimately, the old man successfully caught the large marlin. During his return, the old man encountered a school of sharks. These sharks are like nature's punishment for the old man. These sharks are fierce and powerful, and their strength is many times greater than the old man so the old man looked at the marlin being bitten by sharks. Finally, he carried the skeleton of the big marlin back to the island. He was unable to succeed. It can be asserted that he successfully caught the big marlin, however, he failed in his attempt to combat the forces of nature. This story is an ongoing reminder. It is unhealthy and incorrect to constantly seek out benefits from nature and gain inner values. Human beings are very small in comparison to nature. Even though we have the strength and skill, we shall be failing against the formidable forces of nature.

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