



Metaphorical Representations of Goodness in Thai: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract: In cognitive linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) offers an essential framework for understanding how abstract concepts are made accessible through metaphorical mappings from concrete, experiential domains. This study investigates the metaphorical expressions and conceptual metaphors associated with the Thai noun “Kwamdee,” or “goodness.” Employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative analyses, the research utilizes corpus analysis in combination with salience-based metaphor analysis. Data were selected from the Thai National Corpus, provided by the Department of Linguistics at Chulalongkorn University. Out of 2,042 occurrences, a sample of one hundred metaphorical expressions was analyzed to examine the conceptualization of “goodness” in Thai. The findings reveal that “goodness” is predominantly and most extensively represented through five central metaphors: GOODNESS IS PROPERTY, followed by GOODNESS IS OBJECT, GOODNESS IS PLANT/WAR, GOODNESS IS ACT, and GOODNESS IS BUILDING. These metaphors are ranked by metaphorical salience, measured by the frequency of conceptual mappings within the corpus, revealing both culturally specific and universal patterns in the linguistic representation of moral ideas. The findings offer valuable insights into language education, translation, and cross-cultural communication by illustrating how moral reasoning is embedded in Thai linguistic and cultural frameworks.

Keyword: conceptual metaphors, metaphorical expressions, corpus-based metaphor, goodness metaphor in Thai

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Introduction

As proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), a conceptual metaphor involves mapping elements from a familiar source domain onto a more abstract target domain, allowing individuals to comprehend complex ideas in more definite terms. These domains serve as mental frameworks in which the source domain often grounded in physical experiences provides the structure needed to conceptualize the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Building on this foundation, Kövecses (2010) highlights that metaphor is not simply a linguistic device but a fundamental cognitive structure that shapes perception and understanding across languages and cultures.

The interpretation of moral concepts, such as “goodness,” has been a crucial point in metaphor research across various languages. Accordingly, moral values are often abstract, requiring individuals to use metaphorical language to communicate notions of morality and advantage (Lakoff, 1996; Kövecses, 2005). Recent studies underscore how different cultures employ unique metaphorical expressions for moral concepts, reflecting socially specific understandings. For instance, Partovi et al. (2021) conducted a comparative study of English and Persian to examine metaphorical expressions of goodness, identifying cultural variations that suggest metaphorical understandings are shaped by distinct societal values. The study reveals that while some metaphors for goodness may have universal aspects, others are culturally specific, reflecting unique moral perceptions shaped by language and social context.

Despite a growing number of research on moral metaphors, the concept of “goodness,” or “Kwamdee” in Thai, remains unexplored. Thai language and culture offer unique perspectives on moral values, and examining how “goodness” is expressed metaphorically could provide valuable insights into the cognitive and cultural frameworks that shape moral reasoning in Thai society. Thai culture places a strong emphasis on values such as respect, harmony, and humanity, which influence the metaphorical language surrounding goodness. This study investigates how the concept of “goodness” is framed within the Thai language through a combination of corpus analysis and salience-based metaphor analysis.

The study of metaphorical framing in language contributes to broader discussions about the relationship between language, culture, and cognition. Research in cognitive linguistics suggests that metaphors do more than reflect cultural beliefs; they actively shape cognitive processes and influence how people perceive abstract concepts such as morality (Gibbs, 2019; Semino & Demjén, 2022). By identifying both culturally specific and potentially universal metaphors for goodness, this research aims to uncover how Thai speakers conceptualize morality, highlighting the intersections of linguistic expression and cultural values.

This research will focus on analyzing how “goodness” is expressed metaphorically in Thai, using a corpus-based approach. One hundred instances of “Kwamdee” will be randomly sampled from the Thai National Corpus at Chulalongkorn University, allowing for the systematic analysis of authentic language use, and enabling researchers to identify patterns in metaphorical expressions of morality (Deignan et al., 2018). By combining corpus analysis with salience-based metaphor analysis, this study will not only quantify the prominence of specific metaphors for goodness but also provide qualitative insights into their cultural significance. Salience-based analysis enhances corpus-based metaphor theory (CBMT) by identifying which metaphors appear most frequently and significantly in Thai discourse on morality (Cameron & Deignan, 2006; Steen et al., 2010).

The findings from this research are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how moral concepts are framed in Thai, with implications for language education, translation, and intercultural communication. By offering insights into how Thai speakers conceptualize goodness, this study can also help non-Thai speakers better understand and accurately convey these moral values.

The Objective of the Study

This study explores metaphorical expressions and conceptual metaphors of “goodness” in Thai, examining their cultural and cognitive significance to understand how abstract moral concepts are encoded in the language.

Research Questions

1. What metaphorical expressions do Thai speakers use to convey the concept of “goodness”?
2. What are the predominant conceptual metaphors for “goodness” in Thai?
3. How do these metaphorical expressions and conceptual metaphors reflect the cultural and cognitive significance of “goodness” within Thai society?

Literature Review

Metaphor is a universal and essential element of human language and cognition, extensively studied across a range of disciplines such as linguistics, cognitive science, psychology, philosophy, and literary studies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). The literature review in this study presents a comprehensive overview of the principal theories, key concepts, and significant research findings pertaining to metaphors. It explores how metaphors not only shape linguistic expressions but also influence thought processes and conceptual frameworks across different cultural contexts (Lakoff, 1993; Núñez & Sweetser, 2006). By examining various academic contributions, this review highlights the multifaceted role of metaphors in enhancing our understanding of complex ideas and facilitating communication (Gibbs, 1994; Fauconnier & Turner, 2003).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and has since become a foundation of cognitive linguistics. CMT suggests that metaphors are not simply stylistic elements of language but serve as fundamental cognitive mechanisms. Through metaphors, abstract concepts are understood via more concrete, experiential domains. For example, the metaphor “ARGUMENT IS WAR” allows people to conceptualize arguments in terms of conflict and victory, using language like “attacking” points or “defending” a viewpoint (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theory represents a change in thinking, reimagining metaphors as essential cognitive structures that shape perception, influence thought processes, and guide linguistic expression (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

By mapping elements from concrete, evident experiences to abstract domains, metaphors play an essential role in forming human thought and perception (Gibbs, 2006). The connection between metaphor and embodied cognition, an approach that suggests cognitive processes are grounded in bodily experiences further supports CMT’s assumption. For instance, embodied cognition theorizes that concepts of “up” and “down” are often linked to positive and negative emotions, respectively, because of physical experiences (e.g., standing upright versus lying down in defeat) (Gibbs, 2006). This integration of CMT with embodied cognition offers a comprehensive framework, illustrating how metaphors influence physical experiences to make abstract ideas accessible, thereby influencing both language and cognitive processing.

In educational settings, metaphors also aid significantly in learning and comprehension, especially for complex ideas. Research across multiple disciplines demonstrates the effectiveness of metaphors in enhancing conceptual development, facilitating knowledge transfer, and fostering creative thinking (Ortony, 1993). For instance, in science education, metaphors like “DNA as a blueprint” help students understand elaborate biological processes by relating them to familiar ideas. Such applications underscore the instrumental role of metaphors in both pedagogical theory and practice, emphasizing how metaphors foster deeper learning by connecting new concepts to students’ existing knowledge (Ortony, 1993).

Lakoff and Johnson’s foundational contributions include specific conceptual metaphors that shape

moral language, such as “GOOD IS UP” and “MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS.” These metaphors exemplify how moral values can be rooted in spatial and sensory experiences, such as associating goodness with height or morality with cleanliness (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These examples lay the groundwork for analyzing culturally specific metaphorical structures, as seen in studies on Thai language, where metaphorical expressions may reveal both universal and unique aspects of moral reasoning.

The work of Kövecses (2005) further expands on CMT by exploring cultural variations in metaphorical language. According to Kövecses, different cultures construct moral metaphors in ways that align with culturally significant values. For example, some cultures may associate “goodness” with light or “purity,” reflecting cultural ideals of morality (Kövecses, 2005). This research suggests that Thai metaphors for goodness might similarly embody values particular to Thai society, such as purity or prosperity, revealing both shared and distinct aspects of moral conceptualization across cultures.

Corpus-Based Metaphor Study

Corpus-Based Metaphor Theory (CBMT) is a systematic approach to analyzing metaphorical language that relies on large collections of text, or corpora, to identify and interpret patterns of metaphor usage. CBMT provides a structured methodology for examining metaphorical expressions across various genres, styles, and communicative contexts, leveraging corpus linguistics techniques to analyze authentic language data. This approach enables researchers to observe how metaphors function in real-world discourse and offers insights into the cognitive and communicative roles of metaphor in shaping thought and language (Deignan et al., 2018).

The foundational work in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) speculates that metaphors serve as cognitive tools linking concrete source domains to abstract target domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). CBMT operationalizes this framework by using corpus data to empirically detect metaphorical patterns. Through the systematic analysis of extensive language samples, researchers can observe how these underlying conceptual mappings manifest across different communicative contexts, providing a strong empirical basis for studying metaphor (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2006).

Recent studies underscore the importance of CBMT in understanding cross-cultural and contextual variations in metaphor usage. For instance, Deignan et al. (2018) discuss how corpus analysis reveals metaphorical variation across languages and cultural contexts, underscoring that while some metaphorical structures may appear universal, their usage, frequency, and interpretation can be culturally specific. The present study, then, aligns with studies on Thai metaphors, where distinct cultural values may shape metaphorical expressions of concepts like “goodness.”

Integration of Salience-Based Analysis

The incorporation of salience-based metaphor analysis within CBMT enhances the consistency and complexity of metaphor studies. Salience-based analysis focuses on identifying the prominence or salience of specific metaphorical expressions, which are quantified by assessing frequency, distinctiveness, and elaboration within the corpus (Cameron & Deignan, 2006). By examining metaphorical salience, researchers can pinpoint which metaphors apply the most significant influence on thought and discourse within linguistic communities, providing a more nuanced understanding of metaphorical structures (Cameron & Low, 2010).

In addition, a study by Steen et al. (2010) uses CBMT and salience-based analysis to investigate metaphor frequency in various genres and finds that metaphors like “ARGUMENT IS WAR” are not

only frequently used but also deeply embedded in types of discourse, such as political debates. This finding emphasizes that certain metaphors gain prominence in specific genres due to their ability to echo with the discourse's thematic focus, making salience a valuable metric for understanding metaphorical influence in language.

Additionally, Zhang and Ma (2019) applied CBMT to examine the metaphorical expressions of moral concepts across Chinese and English corpora, incorporating salience analysis to determine which metaphors were most prominent in each language. Their study revealed that metaphors like "GOODNESS IS LIGHT" were prevalent in both languages but carried distinct cultural connotations, demonstrating how CBMT and salience-based analysis together reveal both shared and culture-specific metaphorical patterns in moral discourse.

Broader Implications of Corpus-Based Metaphor Study

The methodology structured by CBMT not only allows for the identification of metaphorical expressions but also provides insights into broader linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. By examining extensive corpora, CBMT enables researchers to capture the diversity of metaphor usage, thereby offering empirical support for understanding metaphor's role in discourse and communication (Deignan et al., 2018). The approach allows for a detailed investigation into how metaphors frame social and moral concepts, with implications for language education, translation, and intercultural communication. In summary, CBMT, especially when combined with salience-based analysis, provides a comprehensive and data-driven approach to metaphor studies. This framework enables researchers to explore how metaphorical language shapes thought and reflects cultural values, offering valuable insights for understanding both universal and culturally specific aspects of metaphorical language.

Quantitative Studies of Metaphorical Salience

Accordingly, Corpus-Based Metaphor Theory (CBMT) has become a central framework for examining metaphorical language by leveraging quantitative measures to analyze large linguistic corpora. Through methods such as frequency analysis and collocation analysis, CBMT allows researchers to systematically evaluate the distribution and prominence of metaphors in language data, providing key insights into the cognitive, communicative, and cultural dimensions of metaphor use (Steen et al., 2010; Deignan et al., 2018). By analyzing the prevalence and contextual patterns of metaphorical expressions, CBMT reveals how metaphors contribute to shaping conceptual frameworks across different discourse domains.

Quantitative studies in CBMT frequently use salience-based metaphor analysis to determine which metaphors hold prominence within specific linguistic communities or genres. Salience-based analysis considers factors such as frequency, distinctiveness, and contextual elaboration to assess how metaphors gain influence and remain relevant in discourse. For instance, Deignan et al. (2018) demonstrated how salience-based analysis within CBMT could identify metaphorical expressions that are culturally specific with a notion that some metaphors are central to certain genres or cultural discourses, while others are more universal.

Quantitative approaches in CBMT have advanced with the development of computational tools, allowing for more precise and accessible analysis of metaphors. Besides, Semino and Demjén (2022) emphasize how computational methods enhance metaphor analysis by identifying patterns in large corpora that would be challenging to detect manually. By integrating computational techniques with CBMT, researchers can conduct robust frequency and salience analyses, revealing metaphorical trends across massive datasets. This methodological evolution has expanded the applicability of

CBMT in digital linguistics, especially in contexts such as social media and online communication, where metaphor use reflects dynamic cultural shifts.

Saliency-based metaphor analysis has also shown its efficiency in studies focusing on specific communicative contexts. Zhang and Ma (2019), for instance, applied CBMT to examine metaphors of moral concepts in Chinese and English, using frequency and collocation analyses to identify which metaphors, such as “GOODNESS IS LIGHT,” held greater saliency within each culture. Their findings underscored the cognitive and cultural tone of metaphors, illustrating how saliency-based quantitative measures highlight both shared and divergent metaphorical structures across languages.

In addition, the saliency-based analysis within CBMT supports interdisciplinary applications by deepening the understanding of metaphor’s role in shaping complex social and communicative constructs. Cameron and Deignan (2006) note that saliency-based approaches allow researchers to observe how certain metaphors rise to prominence or decline within specific contexts, which is especially valuable for understanding dynamic shifts in public discourse. This integration not only provides insights into the durability and evolution of metaphors in language but also facilitates interdisciplinary research by applying CBMT to domains such as cognitive science, cultural studies, and communication.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study combines corpus analysis and saliency-based metaphor analysis, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This mixed-method approach provides a robust framework for investigating the conceptual metaphors associated with the notion of “goodness” in Thai. A random sample of one hundred instances was selected from a total of 2,042 occurrences identified in the Thai National Corpus, which is provided by the Department of Linguistics at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Each of these one hundred linguistic expressions relating to “goodness” was accurately analyzed.

This approach enables the examination of the frequency and prominence of each metaphorical expression, by this means identifying the most salient metaphors in the corpus. The quantitative aspect involves counting occurrences and mapping the frequency of each metaphor, while the qualitative component focuses on a contextual interpretation of how these metaphors conceptualize “goodness.” This methodological constructive collaboration enhances the comprehensiveness of the analysis, providing a deeper insight into how the abstract concept of goodness is linguistically and conceptually framed in Thai culture.

Findings

Goodness in Thai: Analysis of Metaphor Categories

The analysis of the Thai corpus revealed one hundred linguistic expressions that exemplify the metaphorical conceptualization of “goodness.” Fifteen distinct conceptual metaphors were identified as motivating these linguistic expressions, as documented in the Thai National Corpus. Each conceptual metaphor is characterized by elemental and systematic correspondences, which are exemplified below. In these examples, the underlined words or phrases represent the metaphorical linguistic expressions within each correspondence or word form, illustrating how abstract concepts are concretely performed through language.

(1) GOODNESS IS FOOD.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS FOOD” is illustrated in the Thai phrase

“รสความดีอาจสะกิดใจผู้อ่านให้คิด ให้ชื่นชม ให้เห็นจริงตามที่แสดง” (The taste of goodness may touch the hearts of readers)

[Rót kwaam dee aat sà-gít jai pûu àan hâi kít, hâi núek chom, hâi hěn jing dtaam tîi sà-dǎeng]

This metaphor frames goodness as something nourishing and fulfilling, making an abstract moral quality more perceptible by relating it to food, which is experienced through taste. In the phrase “The taste of goodness may touch the hearts of readers” making them think, appreciate, and see the truth as it is displayed.”

(2) GOODNESS IS AN ACT.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS AN ACT” is exemplified by the Thai statement

“ความดีคือกรกระทำที่ก่อให้เกิดความสุขแก่คนหมู่มากที่สุด” (Goodness is the act that brings the great happiness to majority of people)

[Kwaam dee kheu gaan gra-tham tîi gòr hâi gèrt kwaam sùk kâe khon mùu mâak tîi sùd]

GOODNESS IS AN ACT. that conceptualizes goodness as a behavior that brings about joy and satisfaction, emphasizing its actionable and positive impact within society.

(3) GOODNESS IS PROPERTY

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS PROPERTY” is demonstrated in the Thai phrase

“การสั่งสมบุญบารมีคือความดี” (The act of giving and practicing generosity is goodness)

[Gaan-sàng sǒm-bun-baam-mii kheu kwaam dee]

The metaphor GOODNESS IS PROPERTY is represented in “The act of giving and practicing kindness is goodness” where goodness is framed as an attribute that can be developed and accumulated, treating moral virtue as a form of personal wealth or property.

(4) GOODNESS IS PLANT.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS PLANT” is captured in the Thai expression

“ปลูกความดีไว้ในใจลูกของเจ้า” (Planting goodness in the heart of your child)

[Plûuk kwaam dee wái nai jai lôuk kǎawng jâ]

The phrase “Planting goodness in the heart of your child” illustrates GOODNESS IS PLANT, revealing goodness as something that can be cultivated. This metaphor aligns moral growth with the care and development required for plant growth.

(5) GOODNESS IS OBJECT.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS OBJECT” is illustrated by the Thai phrase

“คนคนนั้นก็ส่งต่อความดีกระจายความดีออกไป” (Then that person also spreads goodness by passing it on)

[Khon khon nán gôr sòng dtàw kwaam dee gà-jai kwaam dee àawk bpai]

In the phrase “Then that person also spreads goodness by passing it on” GOODNESS IS OBJECT likens goodness to an evident item that can be transferred or distributed, emphasizing its transmissible nature.

(6) GOODNESS IS BUILDING.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS BUILDING” is exemplified by the Thai sentence

“เราขึ้นอยู่กับฐานของความคิด” (We stand on the foundation of goodness)

[Rao yûen yùu bon thaan kǎawng kwaam dee].

The phrase “We stand on the foundation of goodness” represents GOODNESS IS BUILDING, where goodness is viewed as a stable foundation upon which other qualities and actions are constructed.

(7) GOODNESS IS WAR.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS WAR” is conveyed through the Thai phrase

“การเอาชนะความชั่วด้วยความดี” (The act of triumphing over evil with goodness)

[Gaan ao kwaam dee chá-ná kwaam chûa]

This metaphorical view of goodness as a force that battles against evil highlights its role as a moral weapon to overcome difficulty.

(8) GOODNESS IS WEATHER.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS WEATHER” is illustrated in the Thai sentence

“แต่ที่จริงแผ่นดินที่ดูจะเหือดแห้งความคิดแทบไม่เหลือเลย” (In reality, the land is parched, with almost no trace of goodness left)

[Tháe thî jing phàen din thî duu jà hǔat hǎeng kwaam dee tâep mâi lǎua looei] This metaphor conceptualizes goodness as a dynamic element, like weather, which sustains and nourishes but whose absence leaves an environment unfruitful.

(9) GOODNESS IS HUMAN ORGAN

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS HUMAN ORGAN” appears in the phrase

“ความคิดเป็นเสมือนเลือดที่หล่อเลี้ยงกายและอากาศที่ผมหายใจ” (Goodness is like the lifeblood that nourishes the body and the air I breathe)

[Kwaam dee bpen sa-muean lǎuat thî lòr liang gaai lae aa-gàat thî phǒm cháai hǎai jai,]

“Goodness is like the lifeblood that nourishes the body and the air I breathe.”

This metaphor portrays goodness as essential for survival, affiliated to blood or air.

(10) GOODNESS IS THEORY.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS THEORY” is exemplified by the Thai phrase

“ไ้ระบบความคิดความชอบนี้แหละ” (This system of goodness and preference)

[Ai rá-bop kwaam dee kwaam châwp nî làe]

GOODNESS IS THEORY presents goodness as a guiding framework, organized into principles or beliefs that direct behavior.

(11) GOODNESS IS HUMAN BODY.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS HUMAN BODY” is reflected in the Thai sentence

“คุณทวาคใช้ทั้งสองข้างแทนความคิดและความชั่ว” (You employ both hands equally, replacing goodness and evil)

[Khún t^huat cháai p^hiang muu seǔang kâang t^haen kwaam dee lae kwaam chûa] “You employ both hands equally, replacing goodness and evil.” This metaphor treats goodness as part of the human body, suggesting that it is as integral and tangible as the physical actions performed with our hands, highlighting the active role of goodness in balancing moral actions.

(12) GOODNESS IS JOURNEY.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS TRAVELLING” is captured in the Thai phrase

“การแสวงหาความดีต้องให้ดีแก่ตัวเองและผู้อื่น” (The pursuit of goodness requires us to be good to ourselves and to others)

[Gaan sa-waeng hǎa kwaam dee dtông hâi dee kêe dtua eng lae pûu èun]

This metaphor likens the pursuit of goodness to a continuous path of self-improvement and compassion.

(13) GOODNESS IS ANIMAL.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS ANIMAL” is illustrated by the Thai statement

“กิลินเป็นหนึ่งในสัตว์ซึ่งใหญ่ของจีนร่วมกับมังกรและหงส์บริษขได้กับความดี” (Kylin is one of the great mythical creatures of China, symbolizing goodness)

[Gi-len bpen nèung nai sàt yîng yài kǎawng Jiin ruam gáp mang-kon læe hǒng bprîap dâi gáp kwaam dee]

This metaphor associates goodness with Kylin, a mythical animal, emphasizing the animal’s symbolic representation of virtue and moral integrity within cultural lore.

(14) GOODNESS IS SENSORY.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS SENSORY” is represented in the Thai phrase

“กลิ่นหอมแห่งความดีจรจายไปไกล” (The fragrant scent of goodness spreads everywhere)

[Klîn hǒm hàeng kwaam dee khǒn khǎ-john khǎ-yai bpai glai]

This metaphor uses the sensory experience of a pleasant scent to represent the pervasive and influential nature of goodness, suggesting that it can be perceived and appreciated much like a widespread, delightful aroma.

(15) GOODNESS IS ELEMENT.

The conceptual metaphor “GOODNESS IS ELEMENT” is articulated in the Thai sentence

“ใจคุณจะยิ่งเข้าถึงลงไปใต้น้ำทิพย์แห่งความดีชนิดนั้นๆ บังเกิดความรู้สึกดีขึ้นกว่าที่เคย” (Your heart will dive deeper into the sublime waters of that goodness)

[Jai khun ja yîng kâo læuk long bpai nai naam-thíp hàeng kwaam dee chá-nít nán-nán bang-gèrt kwaam bpee-dti-yin-dee tuǎi kheun gwàa thii koei]

This metaphor demonstrates GOODNESS IS ELEMENT, proposing that goodness has a fundamental and profound effect, like water that can filter and elevate experiences deeply.

The Token Frequency of Linguistic Expressions Belongs to a Conceptual Metaphor

In the study, all occurrences of linguistic expressions were categorized under specific conceptual metaphors. Additionally, a token frequency analysis was conducted on all metaphorical expressions related to “goodness” within the corpus. Three distinct calculations were performed for each of the conceptual metaphors identified within the corpora, and percentages were calculated as follows: the percentage of the number of tokens that belong to a specific metaphor was derived from the total number of metaphorical tokens; the percentage of the number of types was calculated from the total number of metaphorical expression types; and the percentage of metaphorical mapping types was derived from the total number of metaphorical mapping types.

The study also utilized the type-token distinction to determine the diversity of linguistic expressions motivated by the same conceptual metaphor. This involved tallying the type of frequency of linguistic expressions that belong to a specific conceptual metaphor. These tallies were systematically presented in Table 1 of the study, providing a quantitative measure of how metaphorical expressions are used to conceptualize “goodness” across different linguistic instances.

Table 1

The Token Frequency of Linguistic Expressions Belongs to a Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual Metaphors	Numbers of Metaphorical Expressions	Ranked
GOODNESS IS FOOD	3	
GOODNESS IS AN ACT	16	4
GOODNESS IS PROPERTY	22	1
GOODNESS IS PLANT	15	3
GOODNESS IS OBJECT	17	2
GOODNESS IS BUILDING	4	5
GOODNESS IS WAR	15	3
GOODNESS IS WEATHER	2	
GOODNESS IS HUMAN ORGANS	1	
GOODNESS IS THEORY	1	
GOODNESS IS HUMAN BODY	1	
GOODNESS IS JOURNEY	1	
GOODNESS IS ANIMAL	1	
GOODNESS IS SENSORY	1	
GOODNESS IS ELEMENT	1	

Discussions

The conceptual metaphors of “goodness” in Thai, as revealed through the analysis of one hundred linguistic expressions from the Thai National Corpus, highlights the culturally and cognitively embedded nature of how abstract concepts are articulated in language. Each metaphor provides a distinct lens through which the concept of “goodness” is understood and communicated within the Thai context, reflecting broader societal values and cultural norms.

In addition, the findings illustrate how Thai culture uses metaphorical language to frame the concept of goodness, reflecting broader moral values. Metaphors such as “GOODNESS IS PLANT” and “GOODNESS IS BUILDING” provide insight into Thai culture’s emphasis on moral development and stability. These metaphors align with Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) claim that metaphors are cognitive tools that shape both thought and language.

Cultural Reflections: A Comparative Analysis

The diversity of metaphors ranging from “GOODNESS IS FOOD” to “GOODNESS IS ELEMENT” demonstrates how Thai culture integrates everyday experiences with moral concepts. For example, the metaphor “GOODNESS IS FOOD” not only implies that goodness is nourishing but also essential, similar to nutrition. This could reflect a cultural emphasis on moral and ethical nurturing as fundamental to societal well-being. This integration of metaphorical conceptualization is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which theorizes that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but also in thought and actions (Lakoff & Johnson,

1980). These metaphors serve as a bridge between the abstract domain of moral values and the concrete domains of everyday experience, highlighting the profound role that cultural context plays in shaping cognitive patterns (Kövecses, 2010).

A Cross-Cultural Context of Metaphors for “goodness” for abstract concepts like “goodness” vary across cultures, reflecting each society’s values, beliefs, and cognitive structures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). While universal themes often emerge, specific cultural contexts shape how metaphors are constructed and understood. In English, for example, goodness is frequently associated with metaphors like “GOODNESS IS LIGHT” and “GOODNESS IS PURITY.” These metaphors evoke ideas of clarity, truth, and moral virtue, as in phrases such as “a beacon of goodness” or “a pure heart” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Such metaphors align goodness with visibility and cleanliness, suggesting that moral virtue is something to be seen and admired (Kövecses, 2010).

In Persian, goodness often aligns with metaphors of “goodness as beauty” and “goodness as fragrance.” The Persian phrase بوی خوبی (booy-e khoobi), or “the scent of goodness,” represents goodness as a quality that can be recognized and appreciated, spreading like a pleasant aroma that others naturally settle toward (Partovi, Ghasemi, & Bagherzadeh Kasmani, 2021). Similarly, Persian metaphors often emphasize goodness as an inner beauty, suggesting that moral virtue enhances one’s character, much like aesthetic beauty enhances physical appearance (Partovi et al., 2021; Kövecses, 2010).

In the Thai context, metaphors for “goodness” highlight different cultural dimensions. Expressions like “GOODNESS IS PROPERTY” and “GOODNESS IS PLANT” suggest that goodness is something cultivated and accumulated, reflecting a cultural emphasis on moral growth and the evident effects of good. Thai metaphors also conceptualize goodness as “GOODNESS IS AN ACT” and “GOODNESS IS BUILDING,” where goodness is perceived as something to be actively constructed and maintained over time, underscoring a perspective of goodness as a foundational, stable force in one’s life and community (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

By comparing these cultural metaphors, the study gains insight into the unique ways that goodness is interpreted and valued across societies, illustrating both universal human concepts and the culturally specific dimensions that give them intensity. This cross-cultural approach to metaphor not only enhances our understanding of how different languages represent moral values but also underscores the role of cultural context in shaping cognitive and linguistic structures (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Partovi et al., 2021).

Cognitive Universality and Specificity

While some metaphors, like “GOODNESS IS WAR” and “GOODNESS IS JOURNEY,” suggest universal cognitive processes in conceptualizing conflict and progress through longitudinal and aggressive imagery, others such as “GOODNESS IS FOOD” or “GOODNESS IS ELEMENT” might highlight more culturally specific associations. These metaphors suggest that the Thai language encapsulates a unique interplay between the physical environment and moral reasoning, tying natural elements and everyday acts to ethical behavior.

This observation aligns with Lakoff and Johnson’s declaration in Conceptual Metaphor Theory that metaphors are not only a linguistic expression but also a reflection of our thought processes, deeply influenced by cultural and environmental factors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Additionally, Kövecses’ works on metaphor and emotion provide insights on how different cultures may develop unique metaphorical expressions based on their distinct experiences and cultural practices (Kövecses, 2010).

Metaphorical Diversity and Ethical Implications

The range of metaphors underscores the complexity of “goodness” as a multifaceted concept. For instance, “GOODNESS IS BUILDING” and “GOODNESS IS PROPERTY” imply stability and ownership, suggesting that goodness can be built upon or accumulated, reflecting a view of morality as something that can be developed over time and maintained through conscious effort. On the other hand, “GOODNESS IS HUMAN ORGAN” emphasizes the innate or essential nature of goodness, likening it to a vital component of human existence. These interpretations are informed by Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which put forward that our understanding and conceptualization of abstract concepts are mediated by more concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Furthermore, the idea that metaphors can reflect both constructed and inherent qualities of concepts such as goodness is also supported by later expansions in metaphor theory, which explore how cultural and individual experiences shape the metaphors we use (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). In conclusion, these theoretical perspectives illustrate how metaphor serves as a crucial cognitive tool in organizing and interpreting human experience across different cultural and individual contexts.

Educational and Communicative Implications

In an educational setting, understanding these metaphors can enhance educational strategies by tailoring moral education to resonate more deeply with Thai students’ intrinsic understandings of goodness. Additionally, recognizing how goodness is framed can aid communicators in crafting messages that align with the audience’s deep-seated conceptual frameworks, thus making ethical communication more effective and resonant. This approach is supported by Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which emphasizes that metaphors not only shape our language but also our thought processes and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By applying this theory to education, teachers can more effectively connect abstract moral concepts with students’ lived experiences and cultural contexts, thus fostering a deeper understanding and engagement with ethical issues.

Furthermore, the educational application of metaphors as cognitive tools is further elaborated in Lakoff and Johnson’s later works, where they discuss how understanding and using metaphors can influence how people perceive and act upon various aspects of their lives (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). The theory provides a framework for how metaphors can be strategically used in communication to not only convey information but also shape attitudes and behaviors, making it particularly relevant in settings where shaping ethical perspectives and decisions is crucial.

Further Study

This exploration opens pathways for comparative linguistic studies to examine how “goodness” is metaphorically conceptualized across languages and cultures, enriching our understanding of universal and culture-specific aspects of moral reasoning and the cognitive foundations of ethics. Lakoff and Johnson’s foundational work on Conceptual Metaphor Theory underscores the potential for cross-cultural studies in metaphor, suggesting that such studies could illuminate how diverse societies conceptualize abstract ideas like goodness through everyday experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Future research could compare Thai metaphors of goodness with those in other languages to investigate the balance of universality and cultural specificity in moral metaphors. Analyzing these metaphors deepens the understanding of Thai language and culture, shedding light on the cultural and cognitive dimensions of how goodness is perceived and valued within Thai society. This

reflective role of language in shaping and mirroring moral thought has practical applications in linguistics, psychology, cultural studies, language education, and intercultural communication.

Integrating these conceptual metaphors into educational curricula, particularly in English or ethics instruction, could help students grasp complex moral ideas through familiar linguistic structures, fostering a culturally relevant and deeper understanding of ethics. This approach may enhance moral reasoning and empathy, essential aspects of holistic education.

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