

THE FUNCTION OF METONYMY IN THE FORMATION OF LANGUAGE MEANING

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ABSTRACTS	ARTICLE INFO
Metonymy is one of the important figures of speech in the process of forming meaning in verbal communication. This paper discusses the function of metonymy as a tool to convey meaning effectively and efficiently in everyday language as well as in rhetorical and cultural contexts. Through a semantic approach, this study explains how metonymy helps enrich messages by replacing a word or phrase with a term that has a close association relationship. The main functions of metonymy include accelerating the communication process, creating an interesting stylistic effect, and facilitating the delivery of complex meanings simply. In addition, metonymy also plays an important role in shaping social and cultural perceptions through the use of terms that represent certain institutions or concepts, for example the use of "istana" to refer to the government. This paper uses literature studies and analysis of examples in Indonesian to show various forms of metonymy and their roles. Thus, this paper is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the function of metonymy in forming language meaning as well as being a reference for further linguistic and semantic studies.	<p>Article History: <i>Received: July 9th, 2025</i> <i>Revised: July 16th, 2025</i> <i>Published: July 2025</i></p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: <i>Metonymy, Semantic Meaning, Figurative Language, Language and Cognition, Meaning construction</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a system of rules and structures but also a dynamic tool used by humans to convey complex thoughts, emotions, and social realities. Among various linguistic devices, figurative language plays a central role in shaping how meaning is constructed and interpreted. One of the most common yet often overlooked forms of figurative language is metonymy—a cognitive and rhetorical process where a concept is referred to by something closely associated with it. Unlike metaphor, which is based on similarity, metonymy relies on conceptual proximity. It appears in everyday expressions, media discourse, literature, and even casual conversation, demonstrating its pervasive role in communication.

Despite its frequent use, metonymy is often underestimated in linguistic analysis, especially in comparison to metaphor. Many studies prioritize metaphor as the main cognitive tool in meaning-making, while metonymy is seen as merely stylistic or ornamental. This perspective ignores the deeper cognitive function of metonymy in helping speakers convey meaning more economically and vividly. The problem arises when this neglect leads to a limited understanding of how language truly operates in natural settings. Without a clear grasp of how metonymy works, both linguists and language learners may miss essential insights into semantic development, cultural references, and even social identity expressed through language.

This paper aims to explore the function of metonymy in constructing meaning in language, particularly in its semantic and communicative dimensions. By analyzing examples from daily communication, media texts, and existing literature, this study highlights how metonymy contributes to linguistic efficiency, expressiveness, and conceptual clarity. The discussion also seeks to reposition metonymy not as a secondary stylistic device, but as a fundamental element in the cognitive and semantic architecture of language. Through this analysis, the paper hopes to contribute to a more balanced and comprehensive view of figurative language in linguistic research.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with the research type categorized as library research. Library research relies on existing written sources as the primary data, including books, scholarly journals, academic articles, research papers, and other relevant documents. This method is chosen because the study does not involve fieldwork or empirical data collection, but rather focuses on a theoretical and conceptual exploration of metonymy and its role in meaning construction. By analyzing a range of academic literature, this research aims to uncover the cognitive and semantic functions of metonymy and examine how it operates within various language contexts.

The data used in this research are derived from diverse and credible academic references related to semantics, figurative language, and cognitive linguistics. These include books by linguistic scholars, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, and other published works that discuss metonymy from both theoretical and applied perspectives. The selected sources align closely with the main theories adopted in this study, such as conceptual metonymy theory, types of meaning in semantics, and the distinction between metonymy and metaphor. By using these materials, the study builds a comprehensive understanding of how metonymy contributes to meaning formation in language, both structurally and contextually.

Data collection was carried out through systematic literature review, involving both manual searches in physical libraries and digital searches through academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and online journal platforms. The sources were selected purposively based on their relevance, scholarly credibility, and theoretical contribution to the topic. Key content from each source—including definitions, classifications, examples, and functions of metonymy—was recorded and organized for analysis. The goal was to gather a wide range of perspectives that reflect the conceptual and practical roles of metonymy in language use.

The data were analyzed using a content analysis method, which involves in-depth examination of texts to extract and interpret information related to the use and function of metonymy. Each finding was reviewed within the framework of conceptual and semantic theories presented earlier in the study. The analysis process involved identifying recurring themes, comparing viewpoints among scholars, and synthesizing insights to form a unified understanding of metonymy's role in meaning-making. This method ensures that the conclusions drawn are consistent with the research questions and objectives outlined in Chapter I and grounded in the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter II.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed numerous metonymic expressions present in everyday communication, mass media, and literary works. These expressions demonstrate a strong

associative link between two concepts within the same cognitive domain. For instance, terms like “the Palace” are often used to represent the government, while “Hollywood” refers to the American film industry, and “Shakespeare” symbolizes his literary works rather than the person himself. These patterns indicate that language users tend to choose terms that are more familiar and representative when conveying complex ideas, thereby making communication faster and more effective. In the Indonesian context, these expressions often rely on shared cultural understanding and social norms, which enables audiences to comprehend the intended meaning without needing explicit explanation. Therefore, the identification of such expressions confirms that metonymy functions as an essential element of everyday language, not just a stylistic choice.

The findings highlight that metonymy serves several key functions in communication, especially in enhancing clarity and brevity. One significant role is its ability to simplify expression by allowing speakers to refer to broader ideas through closely associated terms. This strategy increases the efficiency of discourse without losing the depth of meaning. Additionally, metonymy adds expressive power to language by conveying subtle cultural or emotional undertones. For example, referring to the courtroom as “the green table” evokes a specific atmosphere beyond just naming the place. Furthermore, metonymy often operates as a symbolic stand-in for groups, institutions, or abstract concepts, such as using “hot seat” to describe a high-pressure leadership position. These functions show that metonymy supports the speaker’s cognitive process while simultaneously reflecting the audience’s shared knowledge, thus enabling effective and impactful communication.

From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, the use of metonymy in the analyzed data demonstrates how language reflects human thought patterns shaped by daily experiences and social context. The relationships between terms used in metonymy are not random but rooted in repeated experiences and cultural conventions. For instance, recognizing that “the pen” symbolizes a writer or the act of writing stems from habitual associations formed over time. Moreover, the meaning of a metonymic expression often depends heavily on context, as the same phrase can convey different meanings depending on the situation and the participants involved. This implies that understanding language goes beyond lexical definitions and involves inferential reasoning based on background knowledge. Consequently, cognitive linguistic principles are vital in explaining the rationale behind metonymic usage and its role in meaning-making.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that metonymy is more than just a rhetorical ornament—it is a fundamental mechanism in constructing meaning. Its widespread use across different forms of discourse highlights its cognitive role in simplifying complex concepts and enriching expression. By allowing one concept to stand for another within the same domain, metonymy enables speakers to convey nuanced ideas in a more accessible way. This study, through a semantic and cognitive lens, affirms the vital function of metonymy in shaping how language is both produced and interpreted in real-life communication.

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