

# METAPHORS FOR CHANGE

## Re-Metaphorizing the Metaphors We Live By

“...we are too liable to consider our civilization as the ultimate goal of human evolution, thus depriving ourselves of the opportunity of learning from the teaching of others. My whole outlook upon life is determined by one question: How can we recognize the shackles tradition has lain upon us? For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them.”

— Franz Boas, “The Shackles of Tradition”

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is about languages, cultures, and ideologies—how our languages are not just an adaptation to communicate ideas, but part of a collective system that reinforces ideas and ways of thinking. In the vein of critical linguistics, I argue that ideologies are “pervasively present in language” — that common language carries cultural norms and ideologies and that when spoken, maintains them (Fairclough 1989). What is often considered literal language is really structured by conceptual metaphors, which are culturally variable. For instance, when talking about time, English speakers will say, I *wasted so much time* today, I need to learn to *spend my time* better, to *invest it* in important things, I’m *running out of time*, I don’t *have the time* for that. These are linguistic manifestations of the cultural metaphors TIME IS MONEY and TIME IS A COMMODITY—metaphors we both speak with and think with. In capitalist culture, language carries and maintains capitalist ideologies.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson began the discourse about conceptual metaphors with their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), and since then, linguists have researched the metaphors of non-Western cultures. Lakoff and Johnson state that “Much of cultural change arises from the introduction of new metaphorical concepts and the loss of old ones. For example, the Westernization of cultures throughout the world is partly a matter of introducing the TIME IS MONEY metaphor into those cultures” (Lakoff 1980). The loss of languages and their metaphors accompanies this cultural change. However, many endangered indigenous languages and cultures, who have not Westernized, still maintain vastly different conceptual systems. The Inari Saami of Northern Finland, for example, conceptualize time in a metaphor that could be the antithesis of TIME IS MONEY: the Saami, who do not traditionally schedule their time based on a Western work-day but time their actions based on their ecosystem, use the metaphor TIME IS NATURE. The word for day, *beaivi*, has the same root as the word for sun, *beivvaš*. Work done in the day is *beivvebargu*. The concept of

‘day’ is inseparable from what a ‘day’ means in nature—the earth is lit by the *sun*. Instead of saying that something is *a waste of time*, an Inari-Saami would say *Tallet maid kal leibi-lase*, meaning: ‘And this is supposed to get us more bread.’ In this phrase, Time is not mentioned at all, only the outcome of the effort—and the most important outcome is to find food, not money.

This metaphor, like the language and culture, is endangered—an endangered way of conceptualizing and understanding the world. In a time of expanding mono-culturalism, cultural diversity becomes even more important. Franz Boaz, an earlier linguist and thinker asked: “How can we recognize the shackles tradition as lain upon us? For when we recognize them, we are also able to break them.” I think we can use the diversity of metaphors (and the ways of understanding the world that metaphors express) to recognize and become more conscious of our own metaphors—and then question them. Must we conceptualize time in terms of money? By speaking of time in terms of money, are we unconsciously supporting and perpetuating the capitalist system that created that metaphor?

These are questions worth (see the metaphor?) asking. By identifying conceptual metaphors that inform the way we think and speak, speakers become more conscious of them. And we can identify metaphors in American English by comparing them to non-Western metaphors, such as those of the Saami—which supports language revitalization processes and reaffirms the importance of diversity in the cultural ecosystem of the world. Conscious recognition can lead to ‘breaking the shackles,’ updating and re-metaphorizing the “Metaphors We Live By”, and propelling active language and social change.

## 1.0 Introduction: Framing With Metaphors

“A metaphor is a mask that molds the wearer’s face.” (Erazim Kohák 1976)

We hear and use metaphors in everyday speech—unless you consciously listen for them, metaphors slide in language unnoticed. “Dead metaphors,” metaphors that were once novel but have since been incorporated into “literal” speech, pervade everything we say (Cornelia Müller 2008). As in the example TIME IS MONEY, we speak constantly of *having* time, *losing* time, *wasting* time. Considering these metaphors as “dead” seems inaccurate, since they are alive and well in our everyday speech. However, there is a distinction between metaphors such as TIME IS MONEY and more recent, consciously constructed metaphors such as those used in political rhetoric.

During the Bush administration, the phrase “tax relief” started to come out of the White House, and since then it has been a common phrase both parties use to express the idea of lowering taxes (Lakoff 2004). What the Democratic party didn’t consider, however, was the metaphor behind this phrase: if there must be “relief” for taxes, then taxes are something that need to be fixed, as in “medical relief,” “disaster relief,” “Katrina Relief,” “stress relief”—using the metaphor that TAXES ARE AN AFFLICTION. This is counter-productive for Democrats advocating for higher taxes for the upper classes: “For there to be relief there must be an affliction, an afflicted party, and a reliever who removes the affliction and is therefore a hero. And if people try to stop the hero, those people are villains for trying to prevent relief” (Lakoff 2004:3). This metaphor doesn’t consider that taxes are a necessary part of citizenship to provide infrastructure, and the Democrats that use it don’t realize that “they’re shooting themselves in the foot”

(Lakoff 2004:4). These examples of recent political rhetoric use new metaphors to frame topics in certain ways. In his analysis of political rhetoric and framing, George Lakoff speaks of framing as more than a rhetorical strategy, but a means for change:

“In politics our frames shape our social policies and the institutions we form to carry our policies. To change our frames is to change all of this. Reframing *is* social change.

You can't see or hear frames. They are part of what cognitive scientists call the “cognitive unconscious”—structures in our brains that we cannot consciously access, but know by their consequences: the way we reason and what counts as common sense. We also know frames through language. All words are defined relative to conceptual frames. When you hear a word, its frame (or collection of frames) is activated in your brain.

Reframing is changing the way the public sees the world. It is changing what counts as common sense. Because language activates frames, new language is required for new frames. Thinking differently requires speaking differently.” (Lakoff 2004:xv)

Being aware of the metaphors we hear and then speak can not only help us be more discriminate participants in social and political systems, but using metaphors consciously can also change the debates of social and political systems by changing the frames of the arguments.

Not only politicians use metaphors—every speaker uses metaphorical language constantly, but those who have media power should be especially

conscious of their metaphors: “whether in national politics or in everyday interaction, people in power get to impose their metaphors” (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 157). Environmental scientists introduced the concept of non-native/introduced species with the term “invasive species,” framing the issue with a war metaphor. Non-native species are compared to an invading army, characterized as “aggressive” “invaders” that can “take over,” “displace” natives. Metaphors can shape the frame of an argument: with the metaphor of “invasive,” non-native species are effectively characterized and immediately understood as harmful to the environment.

The ethics of metaphors could be debated—is using a war metaphor to characterize non-native species fear-mongering, using the language of xenophobia? Though incredibly important, discussing the ethical implications of specific metaphors would be a different set of work and is beyond the scope of this paper. In this paper, I am interested in critically analyzing metaphors to *identify* their implications, the frames they activate, and the ideologies they are rooted in. As informed listeners and speakers, we can analyze and identify the metaphors we hear to consciously choose which metaphors we want to use—those with frames and ideologies we agree with. For example, if politicians identified the metaphor behind “tax relief,” many might not use it because of the implied values.

If language is “the primary domain of ideology,” and “ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent,” we can learn to question what we are, through using our languages, consenting to in our cultures (Fairclough 4). We can question what ideologies our languages support and maintain by critically

examining our languages—in this paper, I examine our metaphors. The next section discusses in more detail the theory behind language analysis and conceptual metaphors, which are those “dead” metaphors that are mostly understood as literal language. Many theorists argue that conceptual metaphors are cognitively based, while others argue that with only linguistic evidence, there is no proof that metaphors are part of cognition. I contend that cognitive or not, metaphors are definitely culturally-based and form cohesive metaphor schemas within the language of a culture.

This prepares us for section 2, which identifies the capitalist metaphors we live by that result from living in a capitalist culture. There, I compile metaphors that illustrate how capitalist ideologies are schematized in English. Sections 2.1 through 2.4 each identify an ideology and the metaphors that reflect and perpetuate that ideology through being spoken.

Other cultures and languages do not necessarily share the capitalist metaphors used in English, and in section 3 I identify five endangered indigenous languages that use metaphors that counter the capitalist metaphors. This comparative approach is an effective way to further our critical metaphor analysis, and I hope shows the beauty and necessity of linguistic and metaphorical diversity as part of ideological diversity.

### **1.1 Conceptual Metaphors, Cultural Metaphors**

Thirty-some years ago, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson started to write about metaphors in a way that would take discussion of metaphor out of its isolated cubbyhole in English classrooms and into the political sphere. In their

book, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson showed that metaphor isn't only in poetry or figurative language but in the way we think, in our conceptual systems. Which makes sense—we understand much of our experience through metaphor. When trying to describe something unfamiliar, we start with 'it was like...' and figure out something that is similar enough to compare the unfamiliar with—'Did you see that strange thing she made? It is sort of like this other thing that we are familiar with...'

Metaphors aren't just constructed in language, though, and are usually not even used consciously. Most of the metaphors that we speak go unnoticed because they are so commonly used that they're perceived as being literal language. The all-caps metaphors that follow in this paper are what Lakoff and Johnson called *conceptual metaphors*—metaphors that shape the way we talk because they are present in our conceptual system, which shapes the way we think. The sentences that come after the conceptual metaphors are examples of how the metaphor can be used in language.

ARGUMENT IS WAR  
She *won* the argument,  
Her criticisms were *right on target*,  
He couldn't *defend* his claims,  
She *attacked* every *weak point* in his argument,  
She *shot down* all of his arguments,  
He *lost* the argument.  
(Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 4)

The italicized words above all demonstrate how the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR is linguistically manifested, how it is used in normal, everyday, speech



that is considered *literal*. However, this conceptual metaphor (along with most) is entirely relative to language and culture. In a discussion with a classmate, who is a native speaker of Mandarin, we began talking about an argument our class had gotten into, and I was going on about how violent it was, saying I thought our position was stronger, etc., and he was baffled. He hadn't understood the argument that way at all, and spoke about the collaborative aspects of the event—we had worked together to come to common understandings, each side presented their thoughts convincingly (not combatively), and he had learned a lot from it. It seems that he perceived the event this way because his native culture and language understands argument not as war, but as collaboration. ARGUMENT IS COLLABORATION is very likely a metaphor used to speak about argument in Mandarin.

Different linguists and theorists have discussed metaphor as a cognitive process, a linguistic phenomenon, or a cultural reality. In the language of cognitive science, metaphor is a process of cognitively mapping the path between a source domain (WAR, in the above example) and target domain (ARGUMENT), or as Idström puts it, “the target domain is construed and described in terms of the source domain” (Idström 162). This can be seen as speculative, though, because the theory is based on “the *observation* that the metaphoric expressions of a language show a tendency to follow a pattern: the target domain is described by several conventional linguistic expressions in terms of a coherent source domain” (Idström 162, italics mine). For example, in the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, argument is described “in terms” of war. Lakoff holds, however, that

metaphor “is not a linguistic expression. It is a mapping from one conceptual domain to another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1989: 203). With the term *conceptual*, Lakoff and Johnson and theorists following in their footsteps hold that metaphors are cognitive processes, just as languages are.

Anna Idström says that many linguists argue that “linguistic research can only speculate about the cognitive processes underlying linguistic expressions,” but in her analysis of conceptual metaphor theory, she counters:

“On the other hand, recent empirical studies have found evidence of conceptual metaphors existing independently of language (see Casasanto 2009). This of course suggests that the conceptual metaphor indeed is primary, and the systematic features of figurative language follow from this cognitive mapping between two conceptual domains. In conclusion, it seems that there is no consensus about the matter.” (Idström 163)

The example Idström cites (Casasanto 2009) is a psychology experiment that demonstrated that right-handed people tended to associate the space to their right with positive ideas and the space to their left with negative ideas. The opposite was true of left-handed people, who associated rightward space with negative ideas despite the fact that metaphors and “idioms in English associate good with right but not left” (Casasanto 2009).

Whether metaphors are cognitive or linguistic, the cultural and social realities of metaphors are undeniable. As “language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other non-linguistic parts of society,” the metaphors of a language are going to reflect the society they are born and spoken

in (Fairclough 22). The metaphors of a language are also the metaphors of the society and culture that uses the language because

“there is not an external relationship ‘between’ language and society, but an internal and dialectical relationship. Language is part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena” (Fairclough 23).

Therefore, language is a key component of any social struggle, and Fairclough says that “in so far as dominant conventions are resisted or contested, language use can contribute to changing social relationships” (Fairclough 20). With this in mind, I turn to common metaphors used in English that are rooted in the capitalist system we live in.

## **2.0 Capitalist Metaphors We Live By**

“Analytic act is a political act. Awareness matters. Being able to articulate what is going on can change what is going on—at least in the long run” (Lakoff 2004:74)

In this section, I demonstrate that metaphors are culturally systematic: that linguistic phrases systematically use metaphors that conform to specific *cultural schemas*. (Strauss and Quinn stress that the foundation of linguistic meaning is based on cultural schemas 2003: 48.) In western cultures, capitalism is no longer only economic system but part of culture, inextricable from even fundamental conceptualizations about time, and space. These cultural conceptualizations are heavily laden with capitalist ideologies. Within a western,

capitalist cultural schema, metaphors—whether considered linguistic, conceptual, or both—are coherent with one another through the continuity of these capitalist ideology. When analyzing our metaphors, we must remember not only the “social determination of language use, but also the linguistic determination of society” (Fairclough 19).

In this section I identify, describe, and critically prod at several metaphors that use capitalist ideology: “Critical is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people—such as the connections between language, power and ideology” (Fairclough 5).

TIME IS MONEY is one of the more obvious conceptual metaphors in English because it is also a phrase used often. It seems to be endemic in the capitalist world, where you are actually paid for the time that you work. Common linguistic expressions reflect this metaphor and demonstrate the use of the metaphor not only in the way we speak about TIME but the way we (often unknowingly) conceptualize it:

TIME IS MONEY

You’re *wasting* my time.

This gadget will *save* you hours.

I don’t *have* the time to *give* you.

How do you *spend* your time?

That flat tire *cost* me an hour.

I’ve *invested a lot of* time in this.

I don’t *have enough* time to *spare*.

You’re *running out of* time.

You need to *budget* your time.

*Put aside some* time.

Is that *worth* your while?

Do you *have any* time *left*?

He's living on *borrowed* time.  
You're not *using* your time *profitably*.  
I *lost a lot* of time when I was sick.  
*Thank you for* your time.  
(Lakoff and Johnson 2002)

These metaphorical expressions are used in everyday language and are considered neither figurative nor metaphorical by most English speakers. However, the phrases and words associated with money plainly illustrate the metaphorical way in which capitalist culture relates time to money. If metaphors are conceptual in nature, understanding through metaphors causes us to understand one part of a concept in terms of another: if TIME IS MONEY is a part of your conceptual system, you comprehend TIME through the lens you use to comprehend MONEY. The metaphorical lens of MONEY, however, is not entirely (metaphorically) clear, and MONEY will inevitably obscure some aspects of TIME while highlighting others. Lakoff and Johnson give the following examples: you can't "get your time back" if you *spend time* on something; one can "*give you a lot of their time*, but you can't give the same time back" (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 525).

However, "the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY does not exist because we naively believe that time is something like money. Instead, it has been conventionalised, because it describes aptly our culture-specific attitude towards time in appropriate contexts" (Idström 163). This is key, for whether or not you believe metaphors are conceptual, metaphors are certainly active windows through which we can understand a culture's attitude about the metaphor's target domain. The western, capitalist attitude about time is that it is

a concrete entity, something that is measured by clocks and used in schedules: it is like money, and money is a limited resource and a valuable commodity.

## 2.1 Resources and Commodities

In western culture, time, like money, is a very valued commodity. When we are employed, we are most often paid by the amount of time spent working; we pay taxi cabs and hotel bills for the time we use them; one can *buy* time, *pay* attention, *run out of* time. In western culture, TIME IS MONEY is the most common way to conceptualize time, and that metaphor entails another metaphor speak with: TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, which entails that TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY. These entailments are also expressed in our language: “of the expressions listed under the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, some refer specifically to money (*spend, invest, budget, profitably, cost*), other to limited resources (*use, use up, have enough of, run out of*), and still other to valuable commodities (*have, give, lose, thank you for*)” (Lakoff and Johnson 2002:9). The metaphor and metaphorical entailments create a coherent structure in our conceptual system through which we perceive and experience time.

We are paid for the hours we work but can also be paid for the ideas we think of, which turns creativity, intelligence, and ideas into commodities to be bought and sold. These human *properties* are used for commercial competition and become the *property* of the individual instead of collective *resources*.

IDEAS ARE MONEY/COMMODITIES  
Put in your *two cents' worth*,  
a *wealth* of ideas,  
*rich* in ideas,

a *treasure trove* of ideas  
I don't *buy* that idea,  
that idea won't *sell*,  
that's a *worthless* idea,  
she's a *source* of *valuable* ideas,  
my ideas don't have a chance in the *market*.  
(Lakoff and Johnson 2002)

Ideas are resources in another conceptual metaphor, and while the phrases could indicate the primacy of individual interests, understanding ideas as natural resources instead of as commodities makes them more public, more for the collective interests.

IDEAS ARE RESOURCES  
Don't *use* that *ineffective* idea,  
he *ran out of* ideas,  
don't *waste* your thoughts on that,  
let's *pool* our ideas,  
she's *resourceful*,  
we've *used up* our ideas,  
that's a *useless* idea,  
that idea will *go a long way*.  
(Lakoff and Johnson 2002)

## 2.2 Up-Down Hierarchy

Conceptual metaphors are culturally and linguistically relative. However, metaphors that have a basis in physical experience are often common across cultures. Spatial metaphors such as CONSCIOUS IS UP and UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN ("Get *up*. Wake *up*. I'm *up* already. He *rises* early in the morning. He *fell* asleep. He *dropped* off to sleep. He's *under* hypnosis. He *sank* into a coma") are often common between cultures because of the common physical body and orientation humans share. There is a "physical basis" for these metaphors: when

humans are asleep or unconscious, they are horizontal, and we stand up once we awaken.

CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN

Get *up*,  
 wake *up*,  
 I'm *up* already,  
 they *rise* early in the morning,  
 he *fell* asleep,  
 he *dropped* off to sleep,  
 she's *under* hypnosis, *under* anesthesia,  
 they *sank* into a coma

HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP;  
 SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN

She's at the *peak* of her health,  
 Lazarus *rose* from the dead,  
 He's in *top* shape,  
 He *fell* ill,  
 She's *sinking* fast,  
 They *came down* with the flu,  
 Their health is *declining*,  
 He *dropped* dead

HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN

I'm feeling *up*,  
 That *boosted* my spirits,  
 My spirits *rose*,  
 I got *high*,  
 Thinking about her always gives me a *lift*,  
 I'm feeling *down*,  
 I'm *depressed*,  
 He's really *low* these days,  
 I *fell* into a *depression*,  
 My spirits *sank*  
 (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 15)

Experiences that are *less* physical and *more* cultural are conceptually structured by metaphors that are relative to cultures and societies. The qualifiers are crucial, though: our spatial concepts are structured by our continuous spatial experience and interactions, and thus emerge from constant motor functions associated with being UP or DOWN within our particular gravitational field. There is no “direct



physical experience,” as every experience occurs within “a vast background of cultural presuppositions” (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 57).

There is a big web of metaphors about UP and DOWN, and many, if not all, of them engage with our cultural systems of hierarchy. There are *upper* and *lower* classes, social *ladders*, *superiors* who have the *upper* hand and *inferiors* who are *under* control. There is an experiential basis for these metaphors, but they also obviously play into ideas about social structure. Following are many UP/DOWN metaphors, so we can see their scope and influence and be able to point them out, because they are extremely pervasive throughout our conceptual systems. The metaphors all place positively-associated concepts with UP and negatives with DOWN.

HAVING CONTROL OR FORCE IS UP;  
 BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL OR FORCE IS DOWN  
 I have control *over* him,  
 I am *on top* of the situation,  
 She's in a *superior* position,  
 She's at *the height* of her power,  
 She's in *high* command,  
 They're in the *upper* echelon,  
 Her power *rose*,  
 She ranks *above* me,  
 He is *under* my control,  
 He *fell* from power,  
 His power is on the *decline*,  
 He is my social *inferior*,  
 He is the *low man* on the totem pole

MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN  
 The number of books printed each year is *falling*,  
 her draft number is *high*,  
 her income *rose* last year,  
 artistic activity has *gone down* this year,  
 the number of errors she made is *low*,  
 his income *fell* this year,  
 he is *underage*,

turn the heat *down*

GOOD IS UP; BAD IS DOWN

Thinks are looking *up*,  
we hit a *peak* last year, but it's been *downhill* ever since,  
Things are at an *all time low*,  
she does *high*-quality work

VIRTUE IS UP; DEPRAVITY IS DOWN

She is *high*-minded,  
they have *high* standards,  
they are *upright*,  
she is an *upstanding* community member,  
that was a *low* trick,  
don't be *underhanded*,  
she wouldn't *stoop* to that,  
that would be *beneath* them,  
he *fell* into the *abyss* of depravity,  
that was a *low-down* thing to do.  
(Lakoff and Johnson 2002)

The connections between all of the metaphors and concepts is really amazing:  
they are systematically organized by the common metaphors UP IS 'POSITIVE'  
and DOWN IS 'NEGATIVE.'

### **2.3 "Progress"**

MONEY, TIME, and the entailments of UP are all tangled in concepts of *progress*, which I briefly defined earlier. More money is more control; MORE, MONEY, and CONTROL are all UP, and UP is virtuous, good. When metaphors for time interact with these ideologies in our conceptual systems, time becomes a vehicle to get UP, to have MORE. In western conceptual systems the idea of timelines, and deadlines in the future, and future-thinking and forward-thinking

are often assumed and not noticed. Here are some metaphors that demonstrate how we think of time as linear, forward, and up.

FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE AHEAD

I'm looking *forward* to the book fair,  
*Before us* is an awesome opportunity,  
 I can't *face* the future,  
 Have to meet the future *head-on*

TIME IS AN OBJECT MOVING TOWARD YOU

The time will *come* when,  
 The time has *long since gone* when,  
 The time for action has *arrived*,  
 We don't want this opportunity to *pass us by*.

TIME IS STATIONARY AND WE MOVE THROUGH IT

As we go *through* the years,  
*Further* into the 80s,  
 We're *approaching* the end of the year  
 (Lakoff and Johnson 2002)

By constantly moving toward a future time, one with more (more time is more money), we are moving toward this idea of progress—this *ideology* of progress. This linear model of time, space, and resources supports and maintains the ideas that progress is up, is built up, that we get there by making and selling and buying and using MORE.

## 2.4 Moral Accounting

A wide-spread metaphor to describe morality is MORAL ACCOUNTING; that moral actions improve another's well-being, and improving well-being is metaphorically understood as increasing wealth. This is a complicated relationship of the metaphors GOOD IS UP, MORE IS UP, HEALTH IS UP, and

POWER IS UP. It is generally GOOD to have MORE POWER, and those in POWER have MORE wealth. Wealth is then associated with HEALTH, which is also UP. Another relationship could be that of health, which often *declines* over TIME. And TIME IS MONEY, so if health declines with MORE TIME, there could be less MONEY.

All is of this is just suggestive, and what I'm trying to get at is the complicated, tangled, intertwining of all of these metaphors in our conceptual systems. And how the tangles aren't necessary, just culturally systematized.

Lakoff and Johnson explanation of MORAL ACCOUNTING:

“Since morality is concerned with well-being, whether one's own or that of another, fundamental experiences concerning well-being give rise to conceptual metaphors for morality. People are better off in general if they are strong not weak; if they can stand upright rather than having to crawl; if they eat pure, not rotten, food; and so on. These correlations give rise to metaphors of morality as strength and immorality as weakness, morality as uprightness and immorality as being low, morality as purity and immorality as rot, and so on. Since you are better off if you have the things you need rather than if you don't, there is a correlation of well-being with wealth. Hence, there is a wide-spread metaphor in which moral action is conceptualized as increasing another's well-being, which is metaphorically understood as increasing their wealth. Immoral action, therefore, is conceptualized as decreasing another's wealth. Thus, if someone does you a favor, you are in her debt and seek to repay the favor. This is the basis of the metaphor of Moral

Accounting, in which morality prescribes a balancing of the moral books.” (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 250)

The idea of MORAL ACCOUNTING is present in phrases like,

I'm in her *debt*,  
I have to *repay* the favor,  
The state says prisoners have to *repay* their *debt* to society,  
She was *charged* with disorderly conduct.  
Corporations remove mountain tops in Appalachia at the *expense* of the people,  
BP hasn't been held *accountable* for their gross negligence.

These metaphorical phrases all show conceptualizations of morality as a check-book balancing, a system of I-O-U's. From one entity to another, one individual to another. Morality specifically improves another's well-being, which is distinct and separate from your own.

### **3.0 Learning From the Teaching of Others**

To be conscious of our languages we have to be aware of what else is possible—we have to look outside of the box that is our conceptual system and see what other systems are out there and learn “from the teachings of others” (Boas). We can learn of other possible conceptualizations by looking at other languages and cultures. In a capitalist culture we think with capitalist metaphors, but surely not everyone in every language and culture does: conceptual systems, ideologies, and conceptual metaphors are all entirely culturally relative. By comparing metaphors from capitalist cultures to those found in non-capitalist cultures, we can “[learn] from the teaching of others,” which I believe is the only way to “recognize the shackles tradition has lain upon us” and then “break them.”

### **3.1 Endangered Metaphors, Endangered Ways of Thinking**

In this section, I use metaphors from endangered languages as *counter-metaphors*, presenting metaphors that correspond with the capitalist western metaphors that I'm questioning, but do not engage with the capitalism. This comparative approach is "a means of limiting [our] own inherent ontological biases" (Bird-David 2008).

Lakoff and Johnson say: "Much of cultural change arises from the introduction of new metaphorical concepts and the loss of old ones. For example, the Westernization of cultures throughout the world is partly a matter of introducing the TIME IS MONEY metaphor into those cultures" (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 145). Indigenous languages are "crowded out by bigger languages" and industrialization and the extraction of natural resources have severely impacted most indigenous cultures' environments and livelihoods (Harrison 5). Westernization and capitalism are the primary reasons for the quickening extinction of indigenous languages, so it is important to use endangered and indigenous languages to re-metaphorize this language and demonstrate the necessity of linguistic and cultural diversity. Most large languages in dominant cultures have already adopted the capitalist metaphors—small and endangered languages from cultures who haven't taken up (or been taken in by) capitalism offer some of the only evidence that we do not in fact have to think/talk this way.

Linguistic diversity, like cultural diversity and biodiversity, is necessary for human health. Monoculturalism gets us into trouble—for example, the five species of corn that are now grown exclusively in commercial agriculture are killing the soil and heightening the food crisis. A western monoculturalism of peoples tied together by capitalism does the same thing. Capitalism demands production and consumption, and constant production that uses the same, limited resources will kill those resources that it depends on—like the monocultures of crops killing the soil:

“It is a reliable criterion of ecological thinking if culture is not confused with monoculture. By now the dangers of monocultures have become well known in the domain of agriculture and we know that the ideal conditions for production at the same time present ideal conditions for disturbances of all kinds. Analogously this also appears to be the case with linguistic monoculture” (Weinrich 95).

Language is a primary element of identity; cultures, tribes, nations, social communities of any kind tend to group themselves according to common language. So when I talk about the importance of linguistic diversity, I’m also talking about cultural diversity. Same with linguistic and cultural relativity—since members of a culture have common conceptual systems which are expressed linguistically, language and culture are intertwined almost inextricably.

I found the indigenous *counter-metaphors* in anthropology papers, linguistics research, and online dictionaries. Some of the sources identified the conceptual metaphors and talked about them in those terms, but others did not

identify the metaphors, and from those I have used the linguistic data present in the paper to find them.

The endangered languages I quote and talk about are: Inari Saami, spoken in the Arctic Circle in Scandinavia; Nayaka, spoken by a hunter-gatherer tribe in South India; Aymara, Malagasy, Toba, spoken by indigenous peoples in Peru and Bolivia.

### **3.2 Comparing Metaphors to Recognize our Shackles**

As opposed to languages situated in capitalism, many of the metaphors of endangered indigenous languages concern the earth. The language encodes information about the environment of the culture, their ecosystem and how they are a part of it. Natural order, as opposed to human-made order, is the primary source-domain.

#### **Inari Saami: TIME IS NATURE**

Inari Saami is spoken in the areas surrounding Lake Inari in northern Finland, and the culture is “traditionally based on fishing, hunting, and reindeer-husbandry in the harsh conditions of Lapland.” Transportation and hunting depended on the weather, and “human life depended overtly on natural resources, fish and game of the wilderness” and so “the Inari Saami made every endeavour to predict the weather and timed their actions according to the weather” (Idström 161). Inari Saami was the primary language in Inari Saami communities until the 1950s, when a rapid language shift to Finnish occurred. It



has since been revitalized, but is spoken by only 350 people. And of those, only 250—mostly older people—speak it as their first language.

Anna Idström (2010) analyzes Inari Saami metaphors of time and compares them to the western metaphors expressed in both English and Finnish. Because the majority of Saami people no longer learn the language natively, some of the traditional metaphorical expressions of the Inari Saami are unknown to young speakers in the Inari Saami society. This language shift accompanies the changes to the environment of the Inari Saami: with the establishment of road systems farther and farther north, Finnish settlers have been moving north into the Lapland areas the Saami inhabit; the damming of fishing rivers, the 1940s regulation of lakes, and the 1960s “motorization and capitalization of the reindeer economy” have severely harmed the Saami’s abilities to live off of and with the land. However, Idström says that “Notwithstanding these changes and also not unexpectedly given the durability of phrasal lexemes, the old Inari Saami way of life is still reflected in the Inari Saami metaphors of time” (Idström 161-2).

We have seen that English uses the metaphors TIME IS MONEY, TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY, and TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE. Finnish, another language that is part of western culture, uses the same metaphors:

(1) *Haaska-a-t*                      *kallis-ta*                      *aika-a-ni*  
 waste-PRS-2SG    expensive.SG-ACC    time-ACC.SG-POSS.ISG  
 ‘You are wasting my precious time.’

(2) *Tämä*                      *tekninen*                      *apuneuvo*                      *säästä-ä*                      *aika-a-si*  
 this                      technical.NOM.SG                      gadget.NOM.SG    save-3SG.PRS    time-  
 ACC.SG-2SG

‘This gadget will save you time.’

- (3) *Miten kulut-a-t aika-a nykyään?*  
 how spend-PRS-2SG time-ACC.SG nowadays  
 ‘How do you spend your time these days?’

(Idström 166)

The Inari Saami, however, as part of a non-westernized, non-capitalist culture, do not conceptualize time with any of these metaphors. Time for the Saami is not an entity in itself to focus on or manipulate (as is it when you live in a pre-set schedule and are paid by the hour), but is perceived as a *context*. The Inari Saami phrases that correspond with *wasting time* in English and Finnish do not mention time at all, but focus instead on the result of the proposed action:

- (4) *Tallet maid kal leibi-lase*  
 then supposed EMPH bread.NOM.SG-more.NOM.SG  
 ‘And this is supposed to get us more bread.’

- (5) *Tallet maid kal mäli-salgâ*  
 then supposed EMPH soup.NOM.SG-piece\_of\_meat.NOM.SG  
 ‘And this is supposed to get us a piece of meat in the soup.’

(167 Idström)

These phrases are responses to proposed tasks that are not considered useful—and for a people who depended solely on their abilities to find food and shelter in the harsh Lapland climate, useful tasks are those that help feed the community. In a capitalist culture, tasks considered useful are usually about earning money that you then use to buy food (for yourself and perhaps your family).

Because “[t]ime is the context, not the centre of attention,” time is understood as an environment. Discussing the data collection of Inari Saami phrases concerning any mention of time, Anna Idström says that “the word meaning ‘time’ is mentioned explicitly in only a couple of cases; yet many of the idioms presuppose the concept of time implicitly. In these cases, the source domain for the metaphor—or more precisely, metonymy—is not money but nature. The Inari Saami people frequently refer to certain moments or periods of time by mentioning what happens in nature at that time” (Idström 168). This reference is the act of metonymy, a form of metaphor. The referential quality of Saami idioms are seen in the following expressions of seasons: (6) and (7) refer to autumn; (8) refers to what we know as the month of October, when in Lapland the whitefish spawn.

(6) *riemnjis*            *kamâs-iiđ-is*            *koco*  
fox.NOM.SG.        leg-ACC.PL-POSS.SG<sub>3</sub>    hang.SG<sub>3</sub>.PRS  
‘Fox is hanging up his legs.’

(7) *illâ-muorâ*                            *äigi*  
flaming-coal-tree.GEN.SG            time.NOM.SG  
‘the time when the trees have the colour of flaming coals’

(8) *noro-kyeli*                            *äigi*  
gathering-fish.GEN.SG    time.NOM.SG  
‘the time when the fish gather together’

(Idström 168-9)

In these phrases (and many more examples: see Idström 2010), time is a location, not a resource to be saved, money to be spent, or a commodity to be wasted. The location is always nature, since that is where and how the Saami live.

In these metaphorical expressions, “the target domain is time, and the source domain is nature,” which can lead us to conclude that the primary operating metaphor to talk about time in Inari Saami is TIME IS NATURE. However, the mapping from target to source domain is not as clear in this metaphor as it is in TIME IS MONEY. Nature is not a concretely identified substance as money is, and so time is understood not in terms of one concrete substance. Rather, time is as complex as nature is—not a single entity, but a network and ecosystem of happenings.

TIME IS NATURE is coherent with Saami culture, because “[n]ature was the index of time in traditional Inari Saami culture” (Idström 171):

“daily life followed the rhythm of nature, consisting of reindeer, fishing, hunting and weather. The individual timed his actions by making observations of his natural environment and spontaneously reacting to these observations. For example, fog is an indicator of a good time for fishing whitefish, because the whitefish swim in surface water on a foggy day. There is no preset schedule for determining when to catch whitefish; the fog triggers the action. This schema has even been lexicalised. The expression *riäská-pivdemsoŋŋâ*, ‘weather for catching whitefish,’ means foggy weather.

[(10)] *riäská-pivdem-soŋŋâ*  
 whitefish.ACC.SG—fishing.NOM.SG—weather.NOM.SG  
 ‘weather for catching whitefish’

If someone telephones from Inari to Helsinki and says that it is a *riäská-pivdemsoŋŋâ* in Inari, the friend in Helsinki knows that the weather is foggy, even if the fog is not mentioned.” (Idström 174)

The metaphor is not only logical, but extremely useful: because time is systematically understood as nature, simply knowing the word for a foggy day, for example, will inform you of a likely food resource that day.

The TIME IS NATURE metaphor can be seen even in individual words used to talk about time in Saami. The following words are translations from Northern Saami into English from a dictionary compiled by Kimberli Mäkäräinen (2007). The notes that follow each word set are not meant to definitively interpret but suggest possible relationships and to illustrate the connectedness of the domains time and nature.

*álgu*: start, beginning; embryo

The word for beginning is also the word for the beginning of life, embryo.

*beaivet*: during the day

*beaivi*: day

*beaivvaš*: sun

*beaivválaš*: daily (adj.)

*beaivválaččat*: daily (adv.)

*beaivvebargu*: daywork

The concept of ‘day’ is inseparable from what a ‘day’ means in nature—the earth is lit by the *sun*.

*birramihttu*: circumference

*birranbeaivi*: day, calendar day (the whole 24-hour period)

*birrasii*: about, around

*birrastat*: environment, surroundings

To refer to the length of the day, you prefix *beaivi*, day, with the root to describe ‘circumference’, cyclical ‘around’-ness, which moves with the environment, the life that surrounds.

*boahtimuš*: origin; provenance, beginnings; source, roots; birth; foundation

*boahtteáigi*: future

*boahtte jagi*: next year

*boahttevahkku*: next week

The root of ‘boahht-’ is used for ‘origin’ and ‘birth’ and ‘roots,’ it roots the ‘future’.

*diibmoáigi*: clock time

*diibmobálká*: hourly wages

‘Clock time’ and ‘hourly wages’ are lexically related, keeping distinct natural time, which you can’t be paid for. This shows that the Western conceptualization of time is lexically separate from the traditional Saami conceptualization.

The Saami metaphor TIME IS NATURE is exciting because it demonstrates that metaphors and ideologies are entirely based in the social system of culture—so if we were members of an entirely different culture (a non-western-capitalist culture) we would likely understand fundamental concepts such as time differently helps us to be more conscious of the ways in which we understand and communicate. As is now obvious, money, which is a completely abstract human concept, does not have to affect the way humans perceive time.

Even beyond expanding our awareness of how we understand, there is much to be learned from the Saami metaphors. When TIME IS NATURE, progress is no longer about accumulating more wealth over time, but about living in

nature over time—and if we conceptualize time and the future in terms of the earth we are living time in, our future is more clearly perceived as being tied to the future of the earth. Which it is.

*biras*: environment

*birasviessu*: community center

The root of ‘community center’ is ‘environment’—individuals are part of communities are part of the environments they live with.

### **Aymara, Malagasy, Toba: FUTURE IS BEHIND YOU**

In Aymara, Malagasy, and Toba (and many other indigenous cultures), you can see the past in front of you, because you experienced it and know it. The future is then behind you. In Aymara, “the past” is spoken as *nayra timpu*: eye time, ‘the time before my eyes.’ “Tomorrow” is *q’ipi uru*: back day, ‘the day at my back’. Past events in Malagasy are described as “in front of the eyes” and future events as “behind.” A speaker of Malagasy said that the future is “behind” because “none of us have eyes in the back of our head” (Radden, Gunter, Dahl 1995: 198). The invisible future passes behind the speaker, becomes visible when it’s present, and faces the speaker once the time is past.

Toba’s model of time is even more complex, combining the conception of the PAST IS IN FRONT OF YOU with TIME IS CYCLICAL. Moving in a counter-clockwise circle,

“Time first moves from the observer’s view until it is halfway up the circle at recent past, from where it moves out of view and ends up as

remote past opposite present time, where it merges with remote future. Time then comes back from behind the observer, and halfway down on the other side of the circle it becomes immediate future, from where it moves back into present time. The logic of this time model requires that the observer turn around if he wants to see the immediate future approaching from behind. Interestingly, speakers of Toba and Aymara look over their left shoulders when looking into the future” (Radden, Gunter, Dahl 1995: 198).

If we can conceptualize time as circular, cyclical, we change the way we think of progress—it doesn’t have to be forward or up, but around. We face the past, learn and know the past, to turn around to the future. And the future becomes the past. We are responsible for past and future because one becomes the other. Growth and progress are around, circular, recycling, not up and more and ahead.

### **Nayaka: LIVING TOGETHER**

Morality can be re-metaphorized from its individualistic, money capital-based system of MORAL ACCOUNTING. In Nayaka, the conceptual understanding of morality is not based on the moral transactions of individuals but on the collective actions that affect all members of the collective—helping another is helping yourself.

In his ethnography about the Nayaka, Nurit Bird-David recounted a story that illustrates the concept of LIVING TOGETHER: an abandoned mongoose cub was found in the forest and brought back to the community hamlet and passed on



to a nursing mother, who fed the cub. Nurit was surely surprised, but says “my Nayaka companions did not indulge my attempt to make it an issue: as far as they were concerned, the cub simply needed and was given food”(Bird-David 534). It was not an moral act of “sharing,” because there is no word in Nayaka for “share” (which comes from the old English word ‘scearu’ meaning cutting or division, and commonly means dividing an item up or using an item jointly between individuals—which assumes and creates separate individuals). Instead, it was an act of LIVING TOGETHER “with diverse yet immediate others, human and another-than-humans, focusing on the process of being with them, more than on the essence of their respective beings” (Bird-David 525).

Individualism plays no part in a Nayaka conceptual system. Instead of growing up as the process of learning to “stand on your own feet,” “make your own decisions,” “look after yourself,” and “live your own life,” Nayaka grow up and develop *budi*: “the skill of living together,” “the ability to wisely act with others.”

With the Nayaka metaphor of LIVING TOGETHER, we can rethink the individualistic ideas of moral accounting and think of ourselves as part of something bigger. I like to think of individual humans as cells of a larger organism of humanity, which interacts and lives in an even larger ecosystem of all organisms—the earth itself could be conceptualized as an organism that we are all a part of.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

With consciousness of language, every speaker can assume responsibility for the language they use, and work with conventional metaphors to update, expand, criticize, and create new metaphors:

“New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it. If a new metaphor enters the conceptual system that we base our actions on, it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to.” (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 145)

The metaphors we live by are cultural and societal, and when we speak with them, we think in them, act—we reinforce our culture and society—so when politicians, scientists, journalists, or anyone with the ability to influence brings a new metaphor in the conceptual system of a culture and society, the metaphor will “alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to.” Using new metaphors is as unavoidable as using old ‘dead’ metaphors, however. Describing new technologies, new scientific discoveries, new problems (i.e. the ‘greenhouse effect’, linguistic ‘extinction’) is easiest and most accessible with the use of metaphors. We need metaphors. We also need to use metaphors responsibly and consciously, which can lead to a more educated speaking community.

In his paper on metaphors in the sustainability movement, Thomas Princen stresses that metaphors with ecological values must become normative:

“The fact that metaphors are inescapable, that they ‘provide normative interpretations,’ that they ‘affect how we perceive the world and act,’ and that social theorists have long employed ‘natural’ metaphors (the state as a person or organism; the public as a body; global relations as a system with core and periphery, all in a balance of power) suggests that new metaphors, ecological ones, can indeed be constructed ... The critical state of the environment suggests that such metaphors *must* be constructed. This is, indeed, a normative issue.” (Princen)

With social and political change comes linguistic change. Metaphor is an important aspect of language because it often goes unrecognized yet affects the way entire cultures understand and act in the world.

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