# Metaphor of Life in "Reminders of Him": A Conceptual Metaphor Study

**Desak Kadek Vitri Dwi Yani[1*], I Made Rajeg[2], Ni Made Ayu Widiastuti[3]**
[1-3] Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

Jln. Nias No.13 Sanglah Denpasar 80114 Bali, Indonesia
*Korespondensi penulis*: dwi.21056@student.unud.ac.id

*Abstract. This study explores the metaphor of life in Colleen Hoover's novel Reminders of Him, aiming to identify the types of linguistic metaphors and analyze the conceptual metaphors that underlie them. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, which classifies metaphors into structural, ontological, and orientational categories, this study highlights the role of metaphor as a cognitive tool, not merely a stylistic device. A qualitative method was employed, with data collected using AntConc software by focusing on parts of the novel containing the word "life." The Metaphor Identification Procedure was applied to identify linguistic metaphors, which were then categorized based on the word class of the lexical units that were used metaphorically. The results of this study show four types of linguistic metaphors involving the noun "life": nominal, verbal, adjectival, and prepositional. These forms portray life as a physical object, a process, a possessed attribute, or a container. These linguistic metaphors reflect eight conceptual metaphors, including five ontological metaphors (LIFE IS OWNERSHIP, LIFE IS A CONTAINER, LIFE IS AN ENTITY, LIFE IS AIR, LIFE IS A PLACE) and three structural metaphors (LIFE IS A MACHINE, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, LIFE IS A CHALLENGE). The diversity of these conceptual metaphors illustrates the rich representation of life in the novel.*

*Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor, Life, Linguistic Metaphor, Novel, Reminders of Him*

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Metaphors play a crucial role in everyday human communication, not merely as stylistic elements, but as foundational tools for understanding and expressing experiences. People frequently use metaphorical language in both casual and formal conversations, often without conscious awareness, as seen in expressions like "time is money" or "she is at the top of her game." Lakoff and Johnson (2003) introduced a cognitive perspective that redefines metaphor as more than a linguistic device, viewing it instead as central to human thought, perception, and behavior. Supported by scholars like Gibbs (1994), this view argues that human conceptual systems are metaphorical, shaped by physical and cultural experiences. A key distinction is made between linguistic metaphors, which are specific phrases that convey metaphorical meaning, and conceptual metaphors, which are mental structures that allow one abstract concept to be understood in terms of a more concrete one. Lakoff and Johnson categorize conceptual metaphors into structural, ontological, and orientational types, each shaping how individuals cognitively engage with abstract ideas.

Based on this theoretical foundation, this study focuses on identifying linguistic metaphors related to the concept of life in Colleen Hoover's novel Reminders of Him and analyzing the conceptual metaphors underlying them. This novel was chosen due to its rich use of figurative language that deepens emotional engagement. The study uses the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), developed by the Pragglejaz Group and expanded by Steen

(2010), to systematically distinguish metaphorical expressions from literal ones through lexical and contextual analysis and classifies metaphors according to their word class categories of the lexical units used metaphorically such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions to provide a comprehensive linguistic analysis. Additionally, the conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) is used to analyze the conceptual metaphor that underlies the identified linguistic metaphor. This combined approach offers deeper insight into how metaphor functions cognitively and linguistically within contemporary fiction.

Several previous studies have investigated metaphors from different perspectives. Maruf and Ningsih (2020) examined life metaphors in traditional oral discourse within the Kajang community, uncovering how metaphor reflects local ideologies through cultural and spiritual lenses. Lapasau and Setiawati (2021) focused on metaphors in Indonesian literary works, particularly the Tetralogy of Laskar Pelangi, revealing metaphor as a reflection of Malay cultural values and identifying several life metaphors that emphasize struggle, dedication, and hard work. Safira (2022) explored metaphorical expressions in poetry, showing how conceptual metaphors give form to abstract ideas like ambition and life through ontological and structural categories.

Although previous studies offer valuable insights into metaphor use, they mainly focus on dominant metaphor types and cultural interpretations, often overlooking how different parts of speech, such as nominal, verbal, and adjectival metaphors, interact within a single narrative to create layered meanings. Addressing this gap, the present study applies Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory along with the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to analyze metaphors of life in Reminders of Him. By categorizing metaphors based on the word class categories of the lexical units used metaphorically, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how various parts of speech shape metaphorical meaning. This research contributes to the broader field of cognitive and literary studies by offering a detailed linguistic and conceptual analysis that can inform future metaphor research in contemporary literature.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses MIP and conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) to explain and analyze the data.

**Metaphor Identification Procedure**

This study applies the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a systematic method developed by the Pragglejaz Group and elaborated by Steen (2010), to identify metaphorically used words in discourse. Grounded in cognitive linguistics, MIP distinguishes metaphorical

from literal meanings by analyzing lexical units in context through four steps: understanding the text, identifying lexical units, determining their contextual meaning, and comparing it to the basic meaning. If a contrast exists, the unit is marked as metaphorical. In addition to MIP, the study adopts a classification of linguistic metaphors based on their lexical units' word class that are used metaphorically, such as nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial, and prepositional. This classification helps reveal how different parts of speech shape metaphorical meaning.

## Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory posits that human thought is fundamentally metaphorical, influencing not only language but also perception and emotion. This theory explains how one conceptual domain (target) is understood through another, more concrete domain (source), forming the basis of a metaphor. The connection between these domains is established through a mapping system, which defines the systematic correspondences that allow people to reason about abstract concepts using familiar, tangible experiences. Conceptual metaphors are crucial for interpreting meaning across various forms of discourse, including literature, poetry, and film. According to Kövecses (2010), conceptual metaphors consist of a source domain and a target domain, where the target is typically more abstract. Understanding is facilitated when elements from the source domain help clarify those in the target domain. Conceptual metaphors are categorized into three types: structural, ontological, and orientational. Structural metaphors use one structured concept to understand another, as in "ARGUMENT IS WAR." Ontological metaphors view abstract experiences as entities or substances, like in "my mind does not operate." Orientational metaphors relate to spatial orientation derived from physical or cultural experience, such as "happy is up" and "sad is down." These categories help explain how metaphor functions cognitively to shape human understanding.

## Literature Review

There were three literature reviews in this research. The literature review was selected based on the relevance of the research to this study, which is related to the object and theory underlying the research.

The first previous study by Maruf and Ningsih (2020) explores the metaphorical conceptualization of life in the oral tradition of the Kajang people, known as Pasang ri Kajang. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Analysis, they applied ethnographic methods such as interviews and observations to identify dominant metaphors like LIFE IS SIMPLICITY and LIFE IS RITUALS. These metaphors reflect the Kajang people's emphasis

on humility, spirituality, and the sacredness of rituals, revealing deep-rooted cultural and ethical values.

Lapasau and Setiawati (2021) examined life metaphors in an Indonesian literary tetralogy, focusing on how metaphor conveys Malay cultural values. Through a descriptive qualitative method based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, they identified 21 metaphorical expressions categorized into nine main conceptual metaphors, such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY and LIFE IS WAR. Their findings highlight how metaphor functions as a cognitive tool that communicates life experiences and cultural identity rather than serving merely as a stylistic device.

Safira (2022) analyzed metaphors in Helena Natasha's poetry collection, The Call, to understand how figurative language represents life. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, she categorized 24 metaphorical expressions into ontological, structural, and orientational types, with ontological metaphors being the most dominant. Prominent conceptual metaphors such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY and AMBITION IS FIRE or LIGHT emphasize the poet's portrayal of life as a dynamic process and ambition as a motivating force.

While the previous studies provide valuable insights into metaphor in oral and poetic traditions, they tend to focus on dominant metaphor types or isolated expressions, often ignoring the linguistic variation found in contemporary fiction. This study fills that gap by examining how linguistic metaphors appear in various word classes including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions, in Colleen Hoover's novel Reminders of Him. Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study explores how different grammatical forms shape metaphorical meaning and contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, cognition, and literary expression.

## 3. METHOD

A qualitative method was used in this study. This method was used to explain the data and to describe it according to the facts found in the data. This study analyzed metaphors of life in Colleen Hoover's novel Reminders of Him, using data from the 2022 digital edition accessed via PDFCOFFEE.com. The novel was selected due to its rich metaphorical language, particularly involving the word "life." Data collection involved converting the novel to plain text and using AntConc software to identify the linguistic metaphor. Overall, there are 150 instances of the keyword "life," of which 118 were classified as linguistic metaphors using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). The analysis employed a qualitative, descriptive method grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, focusing on word classes and contextual

meanings to identify types and patterns of metaphors. Conceptual mappings between source and target domains were then established and organized in tables for clarity. The findings were presented both informally through narrative explanation and formally through tables based on Lakoff and Johnson's theory, highlighting how metaphors shape the understanding of life in the novel.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section contains the analysis of life metaphors in Reminders of Him. The analysis is conducted to answer the research questions regarding the types of linguistic metaphors and conceptual metaphors of life used in the novel. The analysis is based on Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory.

**Linguistic Metaphor**

Linguistic metaphors are language expressions that reveal underlying conceptual metaphors, allowing abstract ideas to be conveyed through familiar words and phrases (Lakoff, 1993).

**Nominal Metaphor**

Metaphor involves a noun referring to an abstract concept.

Data [1] Can you help me put all the **pieces** of my broken *life* back together?

- Contextual meaning: the word piece refers metaphorically to the fragmented or damaged state of the speaker's life, implying emotional trauma or hardship. It conveys a sense of brokenness and the desire to restore wholeness.
- Basic meaning: the noun piece means a portion of an object that has been broken, cut, or separated from a whole, typically referring to tangible, physical items like glass or wood.
- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning and can be understood by comparison with it: the abstract emotional damage or aspects of life can be understood in terms of physical objects that can be broken into pieces.

Data [2] Because every single one of us has been making her *life* a living **hell**.

- Contextual meaning: the word hell refers to a person's extremely painful and miserable life situation, suggesting emotional suffering caused by others and likening it to a state of torment.

- Basic meaning: the noun hell is traditionally defined as a place of eternal punishment and torment in religious beliefs, where souls suffer due to sins, often depicted as filled with fire and fear.

- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning and can be understood by comparison with it: the emotional suffering in daily life is compared to the intense torment of religious hell. The metaphor helps express psychological pain by mapping the severe, hopeless qualities of hell onto real-life experiences.

**Verbal Metaphor**

A verb is used metaphorically to describe an abstract process or experience in terms of physical or concrete action.

Data [3] A body you created, **breathed** *life* into.

- Contextual meaning: The word breathed metaphorically describes the act of giving life, particularly through childbirth, suggesting that the subject brought a lifeless body into a living state.

- Basic meaning: the verb breathe refers to the physical process of inhaling and exhaling air through the lungs, a vital biological function necessary for sustaining life

- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning and can be understood by comparison with it: the metaphor connects the act of giving life to the act of breathing, allowing the abstract concept of creation to be understood through the familiar, physical process of breathing.

Data [4] I'm happy for him, at least *life* **works out** for some people.

- Contextual meaning: the phrasal verb works out metaphorically refers to life turning out well or leading to a successful outcome, suggesting that life can unfold positively through some internal process or alignment of circumstances.

- Basic meaning: work out literally means the proper functioning or resolution of something, such as a machine or plan, where everything operates as expected or produces a correct result.

- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the metaphor compares life's success to the smooth operation of a machine, mapping qualities like functionality, logic, and resolution onto the emotional and unpredictable nature of human experience.

Data [5] When do I accept that maybe my *life* won't **intersect** with Diem's.

- Contextual meaning: The word intersect metaphorically describes the possibility that two lives may never connect or overlap, conveying emotional distance and the uncertainty of forming a meaningful relationship.
- Basic meaning: the verb intersect literally means to physically cross or meet at a point, as in two lines or roads coming together at a junction, often used in spatial or mathematical contexts.
- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the metaphor maps physical paths onto human lives, allowing the concept of relationships and emotional connection to be understood as intersecting or separate lines, highlighting how people's life journeys may or may not meet.

**Adjectival Metaphor**

An adjective metaphorically attributes a concrete quality to something abstract.

Data [6] Like I was living some horror story, and not my **own** *life*.

- Contextual meaning: the adjective word own metaphorically expresses a sense of disconnection from one's life, suggesting that the speaker feels they lack control or personal ownership over it.
- Basic meaning: the adjecyive own means having legal or rightful possession of something, typically referring to tangible items like property or personal belongings, implying control and responsibility.
- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning and can be understood by comparison with it; the abstract concepts such as identity and life itself are understood in terms of physical ownership.

Data [7] My *life* just became ten times more **difficult** than it was.

- Contextual meaning: the word difficult describes the speaker's life as full of emotional struggles and challenges, suggesting that life feels harder to manage and is not progressing smoothly.
- Basic meaning: the adjective difficult refers to something that requires a great deal of effort to complete or endure, typically applied to tasks or situations that are physically, mentally, or emotionally demanding.
- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning and can be understood by comparison with it: the abstract experience of life is understood in terms of physical effort or struggle.

**Prepositional Metaphor**

Data [8] Since the day they accepted me **into** her *life*, I've never felt unwelcome.

- Contextual meaning: the word into metaphorically conveys the idea of being welcomed or integrated into someone's personal or emotional life, emphasizing inclusion, emotional presence, and the transition from outsider to insider in a relationship.

- Basic meaning: the preposition into refers to physical movement toward the inside of something, such as entering a room or container, marking a shift from outside to inside a defined space.

- Contextual meaning vs basic meaning: the metaphor maps physical entry into a space onto emotional or relational inclusion, allowing the abstract experience of connection and belonging to be understood in spatial terms as entering someone's life or world.

**Conceptual Metaphor**

Conceptual metaphors are cognitive mechanisms in which one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another, usually more concrete domain. These metaphors reflect how people think and understand abstract concepts by relating them to familiar physical experiences. In principle, linguistic metaphors are manifestations of underlying conceptual metaphors. Below are some of the conceptual metaphors that underlie the linguistic metaphors identified earlier.

LIFE IS OWNERSHIP

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS OWNERSHIP frames the abstract experience of life as if it were a tangible possession, like a house or personal item, emphasizing control, autonomy, and responsibility. This metaphor allows individuals to speak about life in terms of having, losing, or reclaiming it, as seen in expressions in data [6], the use of the adjective "own," which conveys personal possession and agency. Classified as an ontological metaphor, it assigns physical object qualities to the abstract concept of life, enabling people to conceptualize life as something they can possess, manage, or be deprived of.

LIFE IS A CONTAINER

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A CONTAINER portrays life as a bounded physical space that can hold people, emotions, and experiences, allowing it to be understood in spatial terms rather than as an abstract timeline. Linguistic expressions Linguistic expressions in data [8] reflect this conceptual metaphor, using the preposition "into" which suggests that individuals can enter or exist within life, reinforcing the image of life as having physical boundaries. Classified as an ontological metaphor, this conceptual metaphor simplifies abstract experiences

by framing them as objects contained within life, enabling people to discuss emotions and events as if they were stored inside a box or room.

## LIFE IS AN ENTITY

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS AN ENTITY is an ontological metaphor that allows the abstract concept of life to be understood as a concrete object that can be divided, seen, or altered. We can see in data [1], the linguistic expression treats life as something that can be broken into parts, much like a physical substance. This metaphor makes the idea of life more tangible and relatable by connecting it to physical experiences, helping people grasp and communicate complex aspects of life through familiar, object-based imagery.

## LIFE IS AIR

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS AIR is an ontological metaphor that frames life as a vital, invisible substance essential for survival, much like air. The linguistic expression in data [3] supports this metaphor by using a physical action, breathing, to describe the abstract idea of giving or bringing life into something. Suggesting that life can be transferred or infused, just as air enters and exits the body. This metaphor offers a vivid and intuitive understanding of life as something constantly present and necessary, yet intangible, allowing people to grasp the abstract nature of life through the familiar experience of breathing.

## LIFE IS A PLACE

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A PLACE is an ontological metaphor that helps people understand the abstract concept of life through spatial language, presenting it as a physical environment. The linguistic expression in data [2] shows the implementation of this conceptual metaphor. Life is described as a terrifying and painful place, such as hell, to express deep emotional suffering. This metaphor makes intense emotional experiences easier to relate to by connecting them to familiar physical settings. By framing life as a place that can be pleasant or distressing, it shows how spatial thinking influences the way people perceive and talk about life.

## LIFE IS A MACHINE

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A MACHINE is a structural metaphor that describes life as something that can be operated, adjusted, or managed like a machine. In data [4], life is portrayed as a functioning system that can either operate smoothly or face problems, much like a mechanical device. This metaphor uses the language of machinery to express how life can be structured, maintained, or repaired, helping people conceptualize life in terms of system, function, and efficiency. Below is the mapping of LIFE IS A MACHINE.

Table 1. Mapping the relation of LIFE IS A MACHINE

| Source Domain (MACHINE) | Target Domain (LIFE) |
|---|---|
| Internal parts and systems | Interconnected experiences and stages |
| Can function or break down | It can go smoothly or fall apart |
| Require input and maintenance | Requires effort, decisions, and care |
| Control or operate a machine | Manage or take control of life |

## LIFE IS A JOURNEY

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is a structural metaphor that frames life as a path or road, with individuals seen as travelers moving through different stages and experiences. It uses the concrete concept of physical travel to help people understand and talk about the abstract nature of life. In data [5], life is depicted as a crossroads, representing key moments of decision or change. This metaphor offers a clear way to describe life's direction, challenges, transitions, and goals. Below is the mapping of LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

Table 2. Mapping the relation of LIFE IS A JOURNEY

| Source Domain (JOURNEY) | Target Domain (LIFE) |
|---|---|
| A traveler | A person living life |
| Direction | Orientation of a life |
| Starting point | Birth or beginning of a phase in life |
| Change direction | Change careers or relationships |

## LIFE IS A CHALLENGE

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A CHALLENGE is a structural metaphor that presents life as something requiring strength, effort, and persistence, similar to overcoming an obstacle. It frames life as an active struggle rather than a passive experience. In data [7], the use of the adjective "difficult" illustrates this metaphor by highlighting how life can involve hard-to-manage situations, much like real-life challenges. This metaphor helps people understand and describe life in terms of goals, obstacles, and the effort needed to succeed. Below is the mapping of LIFE IS A CHALLENGE.

Table 3. Mapping the relation of LIFE IS A CHALLENGE

| Source Domain (CHALLENGE) | Target Domain (LIFE) |
|---|---|
| Rules | Social norms |
| Difficulty | Life struggles or emotional burdens |
| Demand effort | Life requires work and persistence |
| Prepare or train for it | Build skills or resilience in life |

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study identified four types of linguistic metaphors involving the noun "life": nominal, verbal, adjectival, and prepositional, each contributing to metaphorical meaning in different ways. Nominal me taphors present life as a physical object, verbal metaphors describe life through action, adjectival metaphors assign life concrete qualities, and prepositional metaphors frame life as a space. These expressions are surface realizations of deeper conceptual metaphors. Ontological metaphors, such as LIFE IS OWNERSHIP, LIFE IS A CONTAINER, LIFE IS AN ENTITY, LIFE IS AIR, and LIFE IS A PLACE, describe life as something tangible. Structural metaphors, including LIFE IS A MACHINE, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, and LIFE IS A CHALLENGE, portray life as a system or structured process. These metaphors reveal how abstract experiences are understood through concrete domains and influence perception, emotion, and cognition in literature. Overall, the study emphasizes that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a fundamental structure of human thought that deepens our understanding of life.

Future research is encouraged to go beyond the concept of "life" by exploring other abstract themes, such as pain or freedom, in various literary works. Expanding the study to include cross-cultural or comparative perspectives can provide insights into how metaphors differ across languages and cultures. Additionally, using computational tools or corpus-based approaches can enhance the accuracy and scope of metaphor identification in larger datasets.

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