

# IMAGE METAPHORS FOR HAIR WITH THE ANIMAL AND PLANT SOURCE DOMAINS

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*Summary:* This research is carried out within the framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and examines a group of image metaphors that map animal and plant images onto the image of the hair. The metaphors presented capture a range of attributive features of the target domain such as shape, color, thickness/ thinness, length, tidiness/ untidiness, curliness/ straightness, stiffness/ softness, etc. The study shows that several of the metaphors identified also function as the source of polysemy in English. According to the CMT, metaphor is first and foremost a conceptual phenomenon. The primarily conceptual nature of many image metaphors scrutinized is evidenced by the fact that they manifest not only linguistically, but also in the form of pictorial metaphors.

## 1. Introduction

The hair is the most eye-catching part of the body and a universal marker of human identity. As such, it conveys a lot of information about its wearer: it signifies his/ her gender, social position, cultural heritage, political views, etc. Due to its pliability, the hair can be shaped into a range of versatile styles. It comes then as no surprise that the hair has been used to convey symbolic meaning throughout the world since ancient times. Many of the verbal and pictorial hair images that people use are therefore grounded in the underlying image metaphors. They map an image belonging to a specific physical domain onto the image of the hair. What all this means is that for human beings, the hair is not merely a body part, but also an incarnation of their deeply-held beliefs, evaluations, wishes, dreams. In this paper written within the framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a group of metaphors that map diverse animal and plant images onto the image of the hair will be analyzed.

As is known, the CMT holds that metaphor is primarily a conceptual phenomenon. The fundamentally conceptual nature of many image metaphors presented in this study is attested by the fact that they manifest not only linguistically, but also in the form of pictorial images. Despite the widespread character of the metaphors under scrutiny, they received little attention from cognitive linguistics. The paper aims to partially remedy this problem. It consists of the following parts. Part I is introduction; Part II provides a brief theoretical background of the research; Part III presents and analyzes the image metaphors identified by the current study. Finally, Part IV summarizes the main results of this research.

## 2. Theoretical background

In cognitive linguistics, a clear demarcation line is drawn between image metaphors and structural metaphors. Image metaphors are portrayed as «one-shot metaphors» which map one conventional mental image onto another and struc-

tural metaphors are characterized as the mental constructions that map many concepts in the source onto the multiple concepts in the target [Lakoff 1987; Lakoff, Turner 1989]. Let us illustrate the aforementioned difference by example<sup>1</sup>:

(1) I need a new hat for my *shiny dome*.

Obviously, in the above verbal expression, the mental image of a dome is projected onto the mental image of the head. It can therefore be classified as an image metaphor. Cognitive linguists have also established that in image metaphors, aspects of the part-whole structure of one image are mapped onto aspects of the part-whole structure of another [Lakoff, Turner 1989: 90]. Such a principle also holds true of the metaphor presented above: both objects in the source and target domains make up part of a whole structure: the dome is the part of an entire building; the head is the part of the whole body. Moreover, according to the same theoretical model, image mapping involves not only the mapping of part-whole relationships, but also the mapping of attributes [see *ibid*]. In the metaphor under scrutiny, the rounded shape of the dome is mapped onto the similar shape of the head. In addition, the shining of the dome is mapped onto the shining of the hairless head.

Now, the conceptual construction below is an example of a structural metaphor [Lakoff 1993: 206-207].

#### LOVE IS A JOURNEY

- (2) We're at a *crossroads*.
- (3) The relationship isn't *going anywhere*.
- (4) We're *spinning our wheels*.

In this metaphor, the lovers correspond to travelers; the love relationship correlates with the vehicle and the lovers' common goals correspond to their common destinations on the journey. The illustration at hand shows clearly how, in a structural metaphor, a number of concepts in the source domain may correlate with several concepts in the target. At this point, it is important to emphasize that image metaphors are common in both poetry and everyday language. For instance, (1) is an example of such a metaphor used in everyday conversation.

The following excerpt is an image metaphor encountered in poetry [Andre Breton, quoted in Lakoff, Turner 1989: 90].

(5) *My wife... whose waist is an hourglass.*

There are two mental images here: that of an hourglass and of a woman; the middle of the hourglass gets mapped onto the woman's waist.

It is established knowledge that metaphor often provides the basis for polysemy [Lakoff 1987; Sweetser 1991]. This appears to be characteristic of different types of metaphors and image metaphors are not exception. Let us first explain how this claim applies to ontological metaphors. In his work, Z.Kövecses presents the following metaphor for anger [Kövecses 1986: 14]:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/idioms/dome> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER

- (6) You make my *blood boil*.
- (7) *Simmer down!*
- (8) Let him *stew*.

This is a container metaphor. According to the CMT, container metaphors belong to the category of ontological metaphors [Lakoff, Johnson 1980]. In their literal sense, the expressions *boil*, *simmer*, and *stew* are temperature terms describing a heated fluid. In the linguistic metaphors above, they are used figuratively to characterize the emotion of anger. Importantly, their metaphorical meanings are encoded in dictionaries as follows: *boil* is defined as ‘to be extremely angry’ and *simmer* and *stew* as ‘to be/ feel angry’<sup>2</sup>.

The aforementioned words derive their extended meanings from the metaphorical mapping present in the metaphor ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER.

In addition, *seethe* belongs to the same group of temperature terms. In its metaphorical use, it has the meaning ‘to be very angry’<sup>3</sup>. This extension of meaning is grounded in the aforementioned emotion metaphor. As seen here, an ontological metaphor may give rise to a meaning change in a whole group of words and expressions.

Image metaphors may also cause meaning extension. For example, THE HEAD IS A DOME metaphor presented above functions as the source of polysemy for the word *dome*. In dictionaries, the figurative meaning of *dome* is defined as ‘a person’s head’<sup>4</sup>. Such a meaning derives from the metaphorical extension from the domain of the DOME to the domain of the HEAD. Moreover, dictionaries describe the metaphorical meaning of *hourglass* as «having a notably slim or narrow waist»<sup>5</sup>. This meaning is the result of the image mapping present in the hourglass metaphor mentioned above. However, all of the above is not to say that each and every image metaphor leads to figurative meaning construction. It is crucial to point out that whereas ontological metaphors may give rise to meaning extension in a whole group of lexical items, image metaphors seem to function as the source of polysemy for isolated words.

### 3. Image metaphors for hair identified by this study

The source domain images commonly mapped onto the mental image of the hair include different types of animals. For instance, in the following excerpt, the image of a snake is mapped onto the image of braided hair<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/boil\\_2](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/boil_2) (Retrieved on 28.01.13), [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/stew\\_2](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/stew_2) (Retrieved on 28.01.13), [http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/simmer\\_1](http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/simmer_1) (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>3</sup> see [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/seethe\\_1?q=seethe](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/seethe_1?q=seethe) (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>4</sup> see, for example, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dome> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>5</sup> see <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hourglass> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>6</sup> from Ann Petry, quoted in <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/hair> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

(9) Braid of hair... *like a thick black snake.*

This linguistic expression is associated with the underlying image metaphor A BRAID OF HAIR IS A SNAKE. The metaphor is motivated by the similarity between the shape of the snake and that of the braided hair: both objects have long and narrow form. In addition, the color of the snake is mapped onto the color of the hair and the thickness of the snake is projected onto the thickness of the hair. There is, however, an important difference between the image metaphors analyzed in the previous section and the snake metaphor currently under discussion. While the former maps part of a source domain object onto the part of a target domain object, the latter metaphor maps the body of the whole animal onto the part of the human body (the hair).

The mental association between the image of the hair and that of the snake is not a new phenomenon. It can be traced back at least to the time of Greek antiquity. In Greek mythology, Medusa was believed to be a Gorgon whose spine-chilling gaze turned people into stones. She was portrayed as having living snakes in place of hair. Moreover, E.G.Gitter, who studied the role of the hair symbolism in the Victorian era, demonstrates that the femme fatale in the literature of that period was portrayed, among other things, as having her hair plaited into a serpent. Gitter quotes an excerpt from Christina Rossetti's poem *Prince's Progress* where the Prince gets seduced by a milkmaid. The following two lines taken from the poem give us a vivid picture of the milkmaid's hair-style [Christina Rossetti, quoted in Gitter 1984]:

- (10) Who twisted her hair in a winning braid,  
And writhed it in shining serpent coils.

Victoria Sherrow, the author of *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History*, tells us that narratives about female figures whose hair metamorphosed into serpents can be encountered in Indian and African cultures [Sherrow 2006: 58].

Finally, the snake imagery is frequently used in the modern hair fashion industry. In one of its issues, the *Glamour UK Magazine* presents a pictorial illustration of the female hair trends for 2012. In one picture, the sections of hair twisted together on the head of a model resemble twisting snakes<sup>7</sup>. The picture under scrutiny is the surface manifestation of the underlying metaphor TWISTS OF HAIR ARE SNAKES.

In the following image metaphor, part of the body of an animal is projected onto the hair<sup>8</sup>:

- (11) ...Kendrick is pulled aside by a kimono-clad man with *hair like porcupine quills.*

Here the animal body part image mapped onto the target domain is that of porcupine quills. The verbal metaphor at hand manifests the mental construction THE HAIR GROWING UPRIGHT IS PORCUPINE QUILLS. In this meta-

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/beauty-and-hair/hair-trends/2012/01/spring-summer-2012-hair-trends-hairstyles#!image-number=44> (Last accessed on 20.04.13).

<sup>8</sup> [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-07-05/entertainment/ca-9234\\_1\\_orange-county-performing-arts-center](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-07-05/entertainment/ca-9234_1_orange-county-performing-arts-center) (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

phor, the uprightness of porcupine quills is mapped onto the similar attribute of human hair. The mapping is motivated by the physical resemblance between the two objects in the source and target domains.

Generally speaking, image metaphors where various animal body parts are mapped onto the hair of a human being are widely known in the English-speaking world. Therefore, in what follows, I would like to mention some of them in passing without much elaboration.

(12) The girl flipped her *pigtails* over her shoulders.

(13) She ties her *ponytail* with a green ribbon.

(14) He tossed back his *mane* of white hair.

As a result of such a metaphorical process, the lexical items *pigtail*, *ponytail*, and *mane* which originally used to refer to animal body parts have extended their meanings to the domain of the human body part (the hair). This is evinced from the dictionary definitions of the words mentioned<sup>9</sup>.

Another group of metaphors identified by this study maps the mental images of various plants onto the mental image of the hair. In the metaphorical expression presented below, sparse tufts of hair on a balding head are portrayed as fronds<sup>10</sup>.

(15) ...I could see so much scalp between a few lank *fronds* of hair.

The underlying metaphor here is SPARSE TUFTS OF HAIR ON A BALDING HEAD ARE FRONDS. The plant image that springs to mind in this context is that of a palm tree. The metaphor maps the topmost part of the tree onto the hair. By the way, the visual images of the tops of some palm trees are reminiscent of human heads covered with hair<sup>11</sup>.

Once again, the above metaphor is motivated by the physical resemblance: both the plant fronds and the tufts of hair conveyed by the metaphor have a long and thin shape.

Moving to the next topic, it is common knowledge that the cornrow hairstyle is deeply entrenched in the African culture. This is a style where the hair is plaited close to the scalp in rows. Under the word entry for *cornrow* Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides a pictorial image of this hair fashion<sup>12</sup>. The rows of braided hair presented in that image bear similarity to the lines of corn in cornfields<sup>13</sup>. The bare skin between the braids resembles the soil between the corn rows. The pictorial image being discussed is the surface manifestation of the underlying metaphor THE SECTIONS OF HAIR BRAIDED CLOSELY TO THE SCALP ARE CORNROWS. It is important to emphasize that the 'hair

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<sup>9</sup> see, for example, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ponytail> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pigtail> (Last accessed: 28.01.13), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mane> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/a-bald-appeal-to-male-vanity-1325370.html> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>11</sup> see, for example, <http://fineartamerica.com/featured/palm-tree-heads-deborah-smolinske.html> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>12</sup> see <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cornrow> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>13</sup> compare, <http://www.universitypressclub.com/archive/2011/10/hey-princeton-saturday-night-in-the-library-edition> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

braid' definition of *cornrow* encoded in dictionaries originates from the mapping of the source domain of CORNROW onto the target domain of THE HAIR.

Moreover, the following metaphorical expression belongs to the American author Nelson Algren<sup>14</sup>:

(16) *Hair ... like ripe wheat.*

It is the verbal manifestation of the image metaphor THE HAIR IS RIPE WHEAT. The metaphor maps individual wheat stalks onto the strands of hair. The color of the ripe wheat is mapped onto the color of the hair. It should also be pointed out that some fashionable hair braids sported, for example, by the famous actress Sienna Miller and Ukraine's former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko also have the shape of ripe wheat stalks. The pictorial images of their hairstyles frequently appear in the mass-media<sup>15</sup>. Clearly, such hair images can be seen as the pictorial manifestations of the metaphor A BRAID OF HAIR IS A RIPE WHEAT STALK. In the previous image metaphor, wheat stalks were mapped onto the individual strands of hair. In this metaphor, a wheat stalk is mapped onto a braid of hair.

In wheat stalks, kernels are joined together into a neat and well-proportioned chain-like structure. It is very elegant. In a parallel fashion, the hair sections are plaited into a tidy and well-proportioned chain-like pattern in the hairstyle under discussion. Hence, it is also perceived as elegant. Not only does the metaphor under scrutiny map the wheat image onto that of the braided hair, but it also transfers positive connotations associated with the source domain onto the target domain.

Modern fashion designers and image makers pursue likeable images. In this endeavor, they often use positive and easily recognizable symbols. Undoubtedly, such a symbolic image was also used in the creation of the hairstyles worn by famous figures like Yulia Tymoshenko and Sienna Miller.

Apart from the aforementioned connotations, wheat is also associated with abundance and prosperity in many cultures. As we all know, dreams of plenty and prosperity are familiar to many generations of people throughout the globe. In addition, wheat is also a source of nourishment. Therefore, the hair image under consideration also carries the connotation that its wearer is a feminine, nurturing figure.

In past centuries, it was a tradition for people to adorn their heads with wheat ears. For example, wreaths of wheat ears were worn by Tudor brides; and the head of the Greek goddess of the earth and agriculture *Demeter (Ceres)* was embellished with such wheat stalks<sup>16</sup>. The Morgan dollar, a US dollar coin

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<sup>14</sup> from Nelson Algren, quoted in: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/hair> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>15</sup> see [http://ww1.prweb.com/prfiles/2011/08/23/8742226/Yulia\\_Tymoshenko-black%20in%20pearls.jpg](http://ww1.prweb.com/prfiles/2011/08/23/8742226/Yulia_Tymoshenko-black%20in%20pearls.jpg) (Last accessed: 28.01.13), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/fashion/07braid.html> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>16</sup> Vickery 2010: 131-132; <http://www.shmoop.com/demeter-ceres/photo-demeter.html> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

issued from 1878 to 1904, contains the portrait of Lady Liberty who wears a cap decorated with two heads of wheat<sup>17</sup>.

Now, a number of common plant metaphors used in English convey the image of untidy hair. The following verbal metaphor maps the mental image of *thatch* onto the image of thick untidy hair. Hence, it mirrors the metaphor THICK UNTIDY HAIR IS THATCH<sup>18</sup>.

(17) A young man with a *thatch* of untidy blond hair.

Even in this case, the metaphor is based on the visual resemblance between the two objects contained in its source and target domains: thick untidy hair covering on a person's head often resembles the thatch used for the roofing of houses. In addition, the metaphor maps the color of the thatch onto the color of the hair.

The metaphorical use of *thatch* meaning 'thick untidy hair' is registered in dictionaries<sup>19</sup>. Such a meaning derives from the mapping of the thatch image onto the image of thick and unruly hair.

In the below metaphor, the image of a bush is mapped onto that of thick and unruly hair<sup>20</sup>:

(18) The baby was born with a surprising *bush* of black hair.

The above linguistic expression reflects the image metaphor THICK UNTIDY HAIR IS A BUSH. Here, the density of the bush is mapped onto the thickness of the hair. The untidiness of the plant is mapped onto the similar feature of the hair. Dictionaries define the figurative sense of *bush* as 'a thick growth of hair'<sup>21</sup>. Obviously, the image metaphor under discussion gives rise to such a meaning. Unlike previously analyzed cases, here the whole plant is mapped onto the hair.

The following verbal expression characterizes untidy hair in terms of a hayrick after a hurricane<sup>22</sup>.

(19) You remember, her *hair up like a hayrick after a hurricane*...

It is related to the underlying metaphor UNTIDY HAIR IS A HAYRICK AFTER A HURRICANE. It maps the mental image of an extremely untidy hayrick onto the similar image of hair. The hay sprigs sticking out of a hayrick are mapped onto the untidy strands of hair sticking straight up on the head of a person.

In the metaphorical sentence below, thin curly pieces of hair are characterized as tendrils<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> see <http://www.govmint.com/pages/morgan-silver-dollar.asp> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>18</sup> see <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/thatch> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>19</sup> see, for example, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/thatch> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>20</sup> see [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/bush\\_1?q=bush](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/bush_1?q=bush) (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>21</sup> see [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/bush\\_1?q=bush](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/bush_1?q=bush) (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2007/feb/21/politicalcolumnists.politics> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>23</sup> see <http://www.heraldsotland.com/life-style/real-lives/champion-at-the-bit-1.1113514> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

(20) Damp *tendrils* of hair stick to my forehead.

This metaphorical expression mirrors the image metaphor THIN CURLY PIECES OF HAIR ARE TENDRILS. The metaphor maps part of a plant onto the hair. Both objects contained in the source and target domains of this metaphor have a thin and curly appearance. Moreover, the extended 'hair' sense of the word *tendrils* can also be found in dictionaries<sup>24</sup>.

The image metaphor that will be described next is commonly utilized to describe facial hair on a male<sup>25</sup>.

(21) His face was covered with the *stubble* of several nights.

Here the image of short, stiff plant stalks remaining in the fields after harvest is mapped onto the image of a short stiff hair growth on a man's chin when he has not shaved for several days. Hence, the underlying metaphor is SHORT STIFF HAIR ON A MAN'S CHIN IS STUBBLE. Here, both the hair growth portrayed and the stubble are short and stiff.

We have seen above that in many image metaphors that people use, a range of individual plant images such as wheat, corn, fronds, bush, stubble, etc. are systematically mapped onto that of the hair on the basis of the physical resemblance between the former and the latter. Apart from that, there is also an obvious similarity between the general image of a plant and the hair. For instance, a plant grows from under the ground to the surface in the same way as the hair grows from under the skin. Such a similarity may also give rise to the mapping of plant images onto that of the hair. One should also not leave out of account the role of powerful cultural beliefs in people's conceptualization of themselves. For instance, *The Bible* contains a doctrine on the earthly origin of human beings. In Genesis 2:7, it is said that God created «man of the dust of the ground»<sup>26</sup>. Hence, if in people's conceptual system, a person is soil, then it is not surprising that the hair growing from the body is imagined to be a plant.

That far, it has been demonstrated how in some metaphors disparate plant images get mapped onto the mental image of the hair. Now, the question that inevitably arises here is whether the mapping in the opposite direction is possible. The answer to that query is in the affirmative. To illustrate this idea, let us just look at a single example<sup>27</sup>.

(22) Primarily a tropical plant, *maidenhair* grows best in warm climates...

Maidenhair is a fern with thin elegant fronds. *Collins English Dictionary* tells us that the plant derives its name from the hair like appearance of its delicate fronds<sup>28</sup>.

Hence, the above metaphorical expression is the verbal manifestation of the underlying image metaphor FERN FRONDS ARE THE TUFTS OF A

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<sup>24</sup> see <http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/tendrils> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>25</sup> see <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/stubble> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>26</sup> see <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/ot/gen/2?lang=eng> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

<sup>27</sup> see <http://www.gardenguide.com/74923-grow-maidenhair.html> (Retrieved on 28.01.13).

<sup>28</sup> see <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/maidenhair-fern> (Last accessed: 28.01.13).

MAIDEN'S HAIR. In this case, the image of the tufts of a maiden's hair is mapped onto that of the individual fern fronds. It is common knowledge that in many cultures, the image of a young unmarried woman is associated with beauty and elegance. Obviously, in the metaphor under scrutiny, such a positive connotation related to the source domain is transferred to the target domain. Finally, the 'plant' meaning of maidenhair originates from the conceptual mapping in the aforementioned image metaphor.

#### 4. Conclusions

This study has identified a number of image metaphors in which disparate animal and plant images are systematically mapped onto the image of the hair. Not only do such metaphors map one mental image onto another, they also transfer cultural connotations associated with their source domains onto the target domain. The metaphors analyzed highlight such attributive features of the target domain as shape, color, thickness/ thinness, length, tidiness/ untidiness, curliness/ straightness, stiffness/ softness, etc. The research has also established that the image mappings in many of the examined metaphors have resulted in the fact that a range of expressions initially used to designate animals and plants have extended their meanings to denote the human hair. Hence, this provides additional evidence that image metaphors function as the source of metaphorical extension and semantic change.

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