

METAPHORS IN DICKENS'S "A CHRISTMAS CAROL": A LINGUISTIC AND PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

NGUYEN THI VAN DONG*

ABSTRACT: This article presents a stylistic analysis of metaphors in Charles Dickens's novella "A Christmas Carol", aiming to examine their linguistic characteristics, distribution patterns, and narrative functions in prose fiction. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory presented by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) and stylistic frameworks proposed by I. R. Galperin, the study analyzes metaphors according to four criteria: grammatical realization, degree of novelty, structural complexity, and the explicitness of departure and arrival terms. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining qualitative stylistic analysis with quantitative description. The research dataset consists of 45 metaphorical expressions extracted from the original English text of the novella through close textual reading. Qualitative analysis is used to identify, classify, and interpret metaphors in their narrative contexts, while quantitative methods are applied to calculate frequency and distribution across the five staves. The findings reveal that nominal and sustained metaphors are predominant, indicating Dickens's preference for imagery-based and extended figurative expression. Recurring metaphors related to coldness, darkness, chains, and physical containment form a coherent semantic network reflecting the protagonist's moral isolation and subsequent redemption. The study demonstrates that metaphors in prose fiction function as central mechanisms of meaning construction rather than merely ornamental devices. In addition, the findings highlight the pedagogical value of literary metaphors for enhancing interpretative skills and figurative language awareness in English language teaching.

KEY WORDS: Metaphor; stylistics; "A Christmas Carol"; prose fiction; figurative language; English language teaching.

RECEIVED: January, 09th, 2026.

EDITED: June, 24th, 2026

1. Introduction

Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a cognitive and expressive system through which meaning is constructed and interpreted. Among various rhetorical devices, metaphor occupies a central position due to its capacity to extend meaning, structure abstract thought, and enhance expressive precision. By establishing implicit associations between conceptually distant domains, metaphors enable speakers and writers to conceptualize complex experiences in more concrete and accessible linguistic forms.

From a linguistic perspective, metaphor is not merely a stylistic feature of literary language but a fundamental mechanism of meaning extension that operates across both everyday discourse and literary texts. This view is strongly supported by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which reconceptualizes metaphor as a cognitive process underlying human thought rather than a purely decorative feature of language. Subsequent studies, such as those by Dancygier and Sweetser (2014), further emphasize the interaction between metaphor, cognition, and discourse context, highlighting the importance of stylistic and semantic analysis in understanding metaphorical meaning in extended texts.

Despite extensive research on metaphor in poetry, song lyrics, and short texts, systematic linguistic investigations of metaphor usage in prose fiction, particularly in the novella genre, remain limited. The studies tend to prioritize cognitive or thematic interpretations while paying less attention

*Dr; Hanoi Open University; Email: dongntv@hou.edu.vn

to stylistic classification and structural patterns of metaphors in narrative discourse. In the Vietnamese research context, metaphor studies have similarly focused on poetic and folkloric genres, leaving prose fiction relatively underexplored from a stylistic standpoint.

Addressing this gap, this study conducts a stylistic analysis of metaphors in Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol". Drawing on the classification frameworks proposed by E. Slave, I. R. Galperin, and Galdi, the study aims to identify, classify, and analyze metaphorical expressions in terms of grammatical realization, novelty, structural complexity, and contextual functioning. By examining metaphors as integral components of narrative meaning construction, this study contributes to a deeper linguistic understanding of metaphor use in prose fiction and highlights its relevance for language-based literary analysis.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Metaphor as a Linguistic Mechanism of Meaning Construction

In linguistic theory, metaphor is understood not merely as a rhetorical ornament but as a fundamental mechanism through which meaning is extended and structured. Traditional rhetorical definitions view metaphor as an implicit comparison between two entities based on perceived similarity. However, modern linguistic approaches emphasize metaphor's role in semantic expansion, allowing abstract or experiential concepts to be conceptualized through more concrete linguistic forms. This perspective recognizes metaphor as an integral component of meaning-making processes in both everyday and literary language.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory represents a major theoretical shift by positioning metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon underlying human thought. According to this view, abstract concepts such as time, emotion, morality, and social relations are systematically structured through metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied experience. While the present study does not primarily adopt a cognitive analytical framework, conceptual metaphor theory provides an essential theoretical foundation for understanding why metaphorical expressions are meaningful, coherent, and recurrent across discourse types.

2.2. Stylistic Approaches to Metaphor in Literary Texts

Stylistics offers a linguistic framework for analyzing how metaphors function within specific textual contexts. From a stylistic perspective, metaphor is examined in terms of its formal realization, expressive potential, and contribution to narrative meaning. Galperin (1981) emphasizes that metaphor in literary discourse operates at the lexical-semantic level and plays a significant role in shaping imagery, characterization, and thematic development. Unlike cognitive approaches that focus on underlying conceptual mappings, stylistic analysis prioritizes observable linguistic forms and their contextual functions within a text.

In prose fiction, metaphors are often embedded in narrative structure rather than isolated as poetic figures. They interact with characterization, setting, and plot progression, contributing to textual cohesion and stylistic consistency. This makes stylistic analysis particularly suitable for examining metaphors in novellas, where figurative language is integrated into extended narrative discourse.

2.3. Contemporary Perspectives on Metaphor Classification and Scope of the Study Analysis

In contemporary linguistic research, metaphor is no longer treated as a uniform phenomenon but is commonly classified into several interrelated types, most notably lexical metaphor, conceptual (cognitive) metaphor, and grammatical metaphor. Clarifying these distinctions is essential for situating the present study within current theoretical developments and for defining its analytical scope.

First, lexical metaphor refers to metaphorical meaning realized through individual lexical items, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. This type corresponds closely to traditional stylistic analysis, where metaphor is identified at the level of linguistic expression. Lexical metaphors are observable in the surface structure of the text and are typically analyzed in terms of grammatical realization, semantic transfer, and stylistic effect (Galperin, 1981; Leech & Short, 2007). Due to their

explicit linguistic form, lexical metaphors are particularly suitable for systematic classification and quantitative analysis in literary discourse.

Second, conceptual metaphor, as proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), refers to underlying cognitive mappings between a source domain and a target domain (e.g., *emotion is heat*, *life is a journey*). These metaphors operate at a deeper level of cognition and structure how abstract concepts are understood through embodied experience. Conceptual metaphors are not always directly visible in linguistic form but can be inferred from recurring patterns of metaphorical expressions across a text (Kövecses, 2020). In literary works, they often manifest through clusters of related lexical metaphors forming coherent semantic networks.

Third, grammatical metaphor, developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics by M. A. K. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), involves the expression of meaning through non-congruent grammatical structures, such as nominalization or metaphorical transitivity choices. This type highlights how grammar itself can encode metaphorical meaning, particularly in more formal or abstract discourse. However, grammatical metaphor tends to be more prevalent in academic and expository texts than in narrative fiction.

Based on these distinctions, it is important to clarify the analytical scope of the present study. This research primarily adopts a lexical–stylistic approach to metaphor, focusing on metaphorical expressions as they are realized in the linguistic surface of the text. The analysis is therefore centered on lexical metaphors, which are systematically classified according to grammatical realization, degree of novelty, structural complexity, and explicitness.

At the same time, the study acknowledges that these lexical metaphors may reflect broader conceptual metaphor patterns, particularly in the form of recurring semantic domains such as coldness, darkness, and confinement. Thus, while conceptual metaphor is not the primary object of analysis, it serves as an interpretive background that helps explain the coherence and recurrence of metaphorical imagery in the novella. Regarding grammatical metaphor, although it constitutes an important direction in contemporary metaphor studies, it is not systematically examined in this research due to its limited occurrence in the selected dataset and the study’s focus on stylistically salient expressions in narrative prose.

In summary, the present study adopts a mixed but hierarchically structured approach, in which lexical metaphor serves as the primary analytical focus, conceptual metaphor provides interpretive support at the semantic level and grammatical metaphor is acknowledged but not included as a central analytical category. This clarification ensures both theoretical alignment with current metaphor research and methodological consistency in the analysis of metaphor in *A Christmas Carol*.

2.4. Metaphor in Prose Fiction and Narrative Meaning

Metaphor in prose fiction differs from metaphor in poetry in both form and function. While poetic metaphors often foreground imagery and aesthetic impact, metaphors in narrative prose are typically context-dependent and serve broader narrative purposes. They contribute to the construction of character psychology, moral evaluation, and ideological positioning within the text.

In “A Christmas Carol”, metaphors related to physical coldness, darkness, chains, and confinement function as symbolic representations of moral isolation and spiritual imprisonment. These recurring metaphorical patterns form a coherent semantic network that supports the novella’s central theme of moral transformation. A stylistic approach allows these metaphors to be analyzed not only as isolated figures of speech but as components of an integrated narrative system.

2.5. Theoretical Framework of the Present Study

Based on the theoretical perspectives discussed above, the present study adopts a stylistic framework that integrates grammatical, semantic, and contextual approaches to metaphor analysis. Metaphors in “A Christmas Carol” are examined according to four analytical dimensions: grammatical realization, degree of novelty, structural complexity, and contextual explicitness. This

framework provides a systematic basis for data analysis and ensures that the interpretation of metaphorical expressions is grounded in established linguistic theory.

By combining these theoretical foundations, the study establishes a coherent analytical model that supports both qualitative interpretation and quantitative description of metaphor usage in prose fiction. This theoretical framework underpins the subsequent analysis and enables the study to produce linguistically valid and replicable research findings.

3. Methods and Research Materials

This study adopts a linguistically oriented research design to investigate metaphor usage in Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol". In order to achieve the research objectives, both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed, with qualitative stylistic analysis serving as the primary approach.

The qualitative method is used to identify, classify, and interpret 45 metaphorical expressions selected from the novella. Metaphors are analyzed according to stylistic frameworks proposed by I. R. Galperin, focusing on grammatical realization, degree of novelty, structural complexity, and the presence of departure and arrival terms. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of how metaphors function linguistically and stylistically in narrative discourse.

To support the qualitative findings, a quantitative method is applied to calculate the frequency and distribution of metaphor types across the novella's five staves. Each metaphorical occurrence is counted once, although it may be discussed under multiple classificatory dimensions. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, are used to reveal overall patterns of metaphor usage.

The research materials consist of the original English text of "A Christmas Carol" as the primary data source. Secondary materials include stylistic and linguistic studies on metaphor that provide theoretical support for the analysis. Data collection is conducted through close textual reading, followed by systematic selection, classification, and analysis of metaphorical expressions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Overview of Metaphor Use in "A Christmas Carol"

The study identified a total of 45 metaphorical expressions in Charles Dickens's novella "A Christmas Carol". These metaphors were systematically analyzed and classified according to four criteria: grammatical realization, degree of novelty, structural complexity, and the presence of departure and arrival terms, following stylistic frameworks proposed by I. R. Galperin. It should be noted that the same metaphorical expression may be analyzed under more than one classificatory criterion; however, each occurrence is counted only once in the total dataset.

The findings indicate that metaphors in the novella are not employed randomly but function as an organized linguistic system contributing to characterization, thematic development, and emotional intensification. Dickens makes extensive use of metaphor to portray moral transformation, social criticism, and psychological states, particularly through the depiction of Scrooge's inner change from emotional isolation to moral awareness.

4.1.2. Classification of Metaphors

Metaphors Classified by Part of Speech

Nominal metaphors: According to E. Slave's classification, nominal metaphors are realized primarily through nouns or noun phrases. In *A Christmas Carol*, nominal metaphors constitute a significant proportion of metaphorical expressions and serve as key vehicles for symbolic representation.

In both examples below, nominal metaphors rely on metaphorical noun phrases to express abstract qualities or character traits. Unlike verbal metaphors, which foreground actions and processes, nominal metaphors tend to fix meaning in identity, attributes, or states of being, making them particularly effective for characterisation and thematic emphasis in literary texts.

Example 1: “*But she had a **large heart**.*”

This expression is a nominal metaphor because the metaphorical meaning is realized through a noun phrase (*large heart*), rather than through an action or process. Literally, the phrase would refer to the physical size of a human heart. However, in this context, it clearly does not describe a biological feature. Instead, *heart* metaphorically represents emotions, kindness, and moral character, while the adjective *large* intensifies these qualities. The metaphor maps a concrete physical entity (the heart as an organ with size) onto an abstract personal trait (generosity, compassion, and sympathy). This nominal metaphor is conventional yet expressive. It enables the author to condense a complex moral evaluation of the character into a brief, vivid image. By using a noun-based metaphor, Dickens emphasizes the *state of being* rather than an action, which is typical of nominal metaphors. The phrase plays an important role in characterisation, presenting the girl as morally rich despite her physical fragility.

Example 2: “*Scrooge was **the Ogre** of the family.*”

This is another strong instance of nominal metaphor, where the noun *ogre* is metaphorically assigned to a human character. Literally, an *ogre* is a mythical creature associated with cruelty, fear, and menace. In this sentence, *Scrooge* is not compared to an ogre through a simile; rather, he is directly identified as one, which strengthens the metaphorical force. The metaphor transfers attributes from the source domain (a terrifying, inhuman monster) to the target domain (Scrooge’s personality and social role). Through this noun phrase, *Scrooge* is portrayed as unapproachable, frightening, and emotionally harmful to others, especially within a familial context. As a nominal metaphor, this construction functions to redefine identity rather than describe behavior. It compresses a judgment of character into a single noun, making the evaluation immediate and impactful. The metaphor also draws on shared cultural knowledge, allowing readers to instantly grasp the negative connotations associated with Scrooge.

Verbal metaphors: Compared to nominal metaphors, verbal metaphors are structurally more complex and often implicit, typically foregrounding the arrival term while leaving the departure term to be inferred. In the following examples, verbal metaphor operates through the metaphorical use of action verbs, shifting them from a concrete domain to an abstract one. This not only enhances imagery but also deepens the psychological and interpersonal portrayal of characters in the text.

Example 3: “*Scrooge never **painted out** Old Marley’s name.*”

This is a typical example of a verbal metaphor because the verb *paint out* is not used in its literal, physical sense. Literally, *to paint out* means to cover or erase something by applying paint. In this context, however, Scrooge does not perform any actual act of painting. Instead, the verb metaphorically refers to a mental and emotional process, namely forgetting or erasing someone from memory. The metaphor maps a concrete physical action onto an abstract cognitive process. By using *paint out* instead of *forget*, the author makes the act of remembering or forgetting more vivid and tangible. The departure term (*forget*) is omitted, and only the arrival term (*paint out*) is expressed, which is characteristic of many verbal metaphors. This usage emphasizes that Marley’s memory remains indelible in Scrooge’s mind.

Example 4: “*Introduce him to me, and I’ll **cultivate** his acquaintance.*”

The verb *cultivate* functions metaphorically in this sentence. In its literal sense, *cultivate* refers to agricultural activity, preparing land and nurturing plants so that they grow. Here, however, the verb is applied to a social relationship, which cannot be cultivated in a physical sense. This verbal metaphor conceptualizes human relationships as living entities that require care, time, and attention to develop. By transferring the verb from the domain of farming to that of social interaction, the author presents friendship as something that can be gradually nurtured and improved. The metaphor enriches the description of the character’s attitude, suggesting openness, patience, and goodwill toward others.

Adjectival metaphors: Adjectival metaphor is one of the parts used in literary works. Although the frequency is not so frequent as nouns or verbs, the metaphorical adjective also contributes to the

character of the works. Adjectival metaphors operate by assigning non-literal qualities through adjectives, shifting them from concrete or physical meanings to abstract, emotional, or evaluative ones. In the selected examples, the adjectives *poor* and *solitary* enrich characterization and mood by condensing complex judgments and emotions into compact descriptive forms. Below are two examples of adjectival metaphors selected from the selected examples, together with clear academic explanations.

Example 5: “A **poor** excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!”

This is an instance of an adjectival metaphor because the adjective *poor* is used metaphorically rather than literally. In its literal sense, *poor* refers to a lack of money or material resources. In this context, however, it does not describe economic condition but rather the quality or moral value of an excuse. The adjective transfers meaning from the material domain (poverty, deficiency) to the abstract evaluative domain (insufficiency, unacceptability). By calling the excuse *poor*, Scrooge metaphorically frames the clerk's request as morally and logically deficient. The adjectival metaphor intensifies Scrooge's irritation and highlights his harsh, judgmental attitude.

Example 6: “A **solitary** child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.”

The adjective *solitary* functions metaphorically in this sentence. While it literally means alone, here it goes beyond a simple physical description and conveys a psychological and emotional state. The child is not merely without company; he is emotionally isolated and socially abandoned. This adjectival metaphor extends the meaning of *solitary* from physical separation to emotional loneliness, allowing the reader to perceive the child's inner suffering. The metaphor deepens the atmosphere of abandonment and sadness, contributing to the emotional impact of the scene. As an adjectival metaphor, it characterizes the noun *child* by attributing to it an abstract emotional quality through an adjective. Overall, nominal metaphors are the most frequent, followed by verbal and adjectival metaphors, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of metaphors by part of speech

Type of metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
Nominal	18	40%
Verbal	17	37,78%
Adjectival	10	22,22%
Total	45	100%

Nominal metaphors dominate because nouns enable Dickens to construct stable symbolic images related to characters and abstract moral concepts, while verbal and adjectival metaphors foreground psychological processes and narrative atmosphere.

Metaphors Classified by Novelty

From the perspective of stylistic expressiveness, the degree of metaphorical novelty plays a crucial role in determining both the aesthetic impact and interpretive demands of a literary text. Following Galperin's criterion of novelty, metaphors in *A Christmas Carol* are categorized into genuine (original) metaphors and trite (dead) metaphors. This classification allows for an examination of how Dickens balances creativity and conventionality in order to achieve both expressive intensity and communicative clarity.

Genuine metaphors: are characterized by contextual unpredictability and strong expressive force, as their meanings cannot be fully anticipated from conventional usage. They often require active interpretation from readers and thus contribute significantly to emotional engagement and imaginative involvement.

Example 7: “The fog **came pouring** in at every chink and keyhole.”

In this example, the verb phrase *came pouring* personifies *fog* as an active agent. This metaphor creates a vivid and dynamic image, transforming a natural phenomenon into a symbolic representation of moral obscurity and social suffocation. The metaphor not only enhances the

atmospheric setting but also indirectly reflects the ethical darkness of the society in which Scrooge lives.

Example 8: “Don’t be *cross*, uncle!”

Here, the adjective *cross* metaphorically encodes emotional irritation. By mapping a physical or spatial notion onto an emotional state, the metaphor allows readers to conceptualize Scrooge’s anger in tangible terms, thereby making his psychological condition more accessible and concrete. Trite metaphors are conventionalized expressions that have become deeply embedded in the language system. Although their metaphorical origin may no longer be consciously perceived, they continue to function as efficient tools for meaning transmission.

Example 9: “To *edge* his way along the crowded paths of life ... was what the knowing ones call ‘nuts’ to Scrooge.”

The verb *edge* metaphorically represents a cautious, emotionally distant *way of living*, emphasizing Scrooge’s deliberate avoidance of social involvement. Meanwhile, *nuts* functions as an evaluative metaphor denoting perceived abnormality. Despite their conventionality, these metaphors remain effective in conveying social judgment and character evaluation with minimal interpretive effort.

Table 2. Distribution of metaphors by novelty

Type of metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
Genuine	24	53,33%
Trite	21	46,67%
Total	45	100%

Overall, genuine metaphors slightly outnumber trite ones, particularly in scenes involving supernatural encounters and emotional climax. This distribution suggests that Dickens strategically employs novel metaphors to heighten expressive originality and emotional intensity, while relying on trite metaphors to ensure narrative fluency and interpretive accessibility. The coexistence of these two types reflects a stylistic balance that enhances both the artistic quality and communicative effectiveness of the novella.

Genuine metaphors slightly outnumber trite ones, particularly in scenes involving supernatural encounters and emotional climax, enhancing expressive originality.

Metaphors Classified by Structure

From a structural perspective, metaphors can be categorized into simple and sustained types, depending on the extent to which metaphorical imagery is developed within the discourse. This classification is particularly useful in stylistic analysis, as it reveals how metaphor contributes not only to local meaning construction but also to textual cohesion and thematic continuity in literary narratives. Simple metaphors consist of a single metaphorical transfer and typically function at the sentence level. Although structurally concise, they often play an important role in highlighting specific character traits or evaluative judgments.

Example 10: “External *heat and cold* had little influence on Scrooge.”

In this example, *heat and cold* extend beyond their literal meteorological meanings to metaphorically represent emotional responsiveness and human warmth. The metaphor emphasizes Scrooge’s moral rigidity and emotional detachment, suggesting that neither hardship nor comfort is capable of affecting his inner disposition.

Example 11: “I wonder if you don’t go into *Parliament*.”

Here, *Parliament* metaphorically represents persuasion, moral authority, and rhetorical competence. The metaphor is used ironically to characterize the speaker as overly earnest or morally assertive, thereby contributing to indirect characterization and interpersonal dynamics within the narrative.

Sustained metaphors: Unlike simple metaphors, sustained metaphors develop a chain of interconnected images that extend across clauses or sentences. These metaphors create cumulative meaning and often serve as a powerful stylistic device for psychological and moral depiction.

Example 12: “Hard and sharp as *flint*... solitary as an *oyster*.”

This sustained metaphor constructs a sequence of images associated with hardness, sharpness, and enclosure. By linking Scrooge to *flint* and *oyster*, Dickens intensifies the portrayal of emotional coldness and social isolation. The accumulation of images allows readers to perceive Scrooge’s character as a coherent moral and psychological entity rather than as a set of isolated traits.

Example 13: “I have but to *swallow* this...”

The metaphor *swallow* represents reluctant acceptance or forced belief. Although only the arrival term is explicitly stated, the departure term, conceptualizing acceptance as physical ingestion, is implicitly inferred by the reader. This implicit sustained metaphor reflects Scrooge’s internal resistance and highlights the tension between rational disbelief and unavoidable recognition.

Table 3. *Distribution of metaphors by structure*

Type of metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
Simple	19	42,22%
Sustained	26	57,78%
Total	45	100%

Overall, sustained metaphors occur more frequently than simple metaphors in “A Christmas Carol”, indicating Dickens’s tendency to elaborate metaphorical imagery over extended stretches of discourse. This structural preference enhances narrative coherence and reinforces central themes, particularly those related to emotional isolation and moral transformation.

Metaphors Classified by Departure and Arrival Terms

From a structural - semantic perspective, metaphors can be classified according to the presence or absence of their core components: the departure term (source domain) and the arrival term (target domain). On this basis, metaphors in “A Christmas Carol” are categorized as explicit or implicit. This distinction is important in stylistic analysis, as it reflects different degrees of semantic transparency and reader interpretive involvement. Explicit metaphors contain both the departure and arrival terms within the linguistic surface of the text, enabling readers to readily identify the metaphorical mapping without substantial inferential effort.

Example 14: “...the fiddler *plunged his hot face into a pot of porter*.”

In this example, physical exhaustion is metaphorically represented through a vivid, exaggerated action. The concrete imagery of *plunging one’s hot face into a pot of porter* allows readers to directly visualize fatigue and relief following intense activity. The explicit presence of metaphorical components ensures immediacy of comprehension while enhancing sensory and emotional impact. Implicit metaphors, by contrast, express only one component of the metaphorical structure, typically the arrival term, while the departure term remains unstated and must be inferred from context. Such metaphors require greater cognitive engagement from the reader.

Example 15: “No *eye* at all is better than an evil eye.”

Here, the metaphor relies on the implied association between *eye* and moral intention or judgment. The comparison suggests that moral blindness is preferable to malevolent perception, implicitly evaluating Scrooge’s character. By omitting the departure term, the metaphor invites readers to actively reconstruct the figurative meaning, thereby reinforcing moral interpretation rather than stating it overtly.

Table 4. *Distribution of metaphors by explicitness*

Type of metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
Explicit	20	44,44%
Implicit	25	55,56%
Total	45	100%

Overall, implicit metaphors appear more frequently than explicit ones in the novella. This stylistic preference indicates Dickens's tendency to rely on reader inference when conveying moral judgment and character evaluation, allowing metaphor to function as a subtle yet powerful mechanism of meaning construction.

4.1.3. Distribution of Metaphors Across the Novella

Table 5. *Distribution of metaphors across staves*

Stave	Title	Frequency	Percentage
I	Marley's Ghost	14	31,11%
II	The First of the Three Spirits	8	17,77%
III	The Second of the Three Spirits	9	20%
IV	The Last of the Spirits	7	15,56%
V	The End of It	7	15,56%
Total		45	100%

Metaphors are most frequent in Stave I, where Dickens intensively employs figurative language to construct Scrooge's moral deficiencies, emotional isolation, and psychological rigidity. In the subsequent staves, metaphor frequency gradually decreases, paralleling the narrative movement from moral confrontation to ethical resolution. This distribution suggests that metaphor functions most prominently at moments of moral tension and character establishment, rather than merely as a decorative stylistic device throughout the novella.

4.2. Discussion

This study demonstrates that metaphor in "A Christmas Carol" functions as a core linguistic and stylistic resource rather than a peripheral rhetorical ornament. Dickens's metaphorical language systematically contributes to meaning construction, narrative cohesion, and character development, particularly in the representation of moral values and psychological transformation. Through metaphor, abstract ethical concepts are rendered tangible, enabling readers to engage with the narrative both cognitively and emotionally.

The dominance of nominal and sustained metaphors reflects Dickens's stylistic preference for imagery - based and extended figurative expression. Such metaphors allow meaning to unfold gradually across narrative sequences, reinforcing key themes such as alienation, redemption, and social responsibility. This finding supports stylistic approaches that view metaphor as an organizing principle of discourse rather than an isolated linguistic feature.

In addition, the distribution of metaphors across the staves suggests that metaphorical density is closely linked to stages of moral tension and narrative development, with a higher concentration in the opening stave where Scrooge's ethical rigidity is established. This pattern further confirms the functional role of metaphor in shaping narrative progression and character transformation.

Furthermore, the interplay between genuine and trite metaphors indicates a deliberate balance between creativity and conventionality. While genuine metaphors enhance originality and emotional intensity, particularly in supernatural and climactic scenes, trite metaphors ensure interpretive accessibility and reinforce shared cultural understandings. This combination strengthens both the expressive power and communicative effectiveness of the novella.

Compared with metaphor studies in poetry and other short genres, which often prioritize semantic or cognitive classification, the present study highlights the narrative and stylistic functions of metaphor in prose fiction. The analysis demonstrates that metaphors in a novella operate at multiple levels, simultaneously shaping characterization, advancing plot, and conveying ideological meaning. From an educational perspective, these findings underline the potential of literary metaphor analysis as a tool for developing learners' interpretative competence, figurative awareness, and critical reading skills in English language classrooms.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that metaphor in “A Christmas Carol” functions as a central linguistic and stylistic mechanism for organizing narrative meaning, rather than merely serving a decorative rhetorical role. By adopting a stylistic approach to metaphor in a prose novella, the research extends metaphor studies beyond the commonly examined domains of poetry and short texts, thereby contributing to a less explored area of literary stylistics.

A major contribution of the study lies in its integrated analytical framework, which combines traditional stylistic classifications of metaphor with narrative and functional interpretation. The findings reveal that Dickens’s metaphors operate across multiple discourse levels, simultaneously shaping imagery, character psychology, and moral ideology. The predominance of nominal and sustained metaphors highlights Dickens’s preference for extended figurative patterns that gradually unfold meaning and reinforce key themes such as alienation, redemption, and social responsibility.

In addition, the study demonstrates that both genuine and trite metaphors play complementary roles within the narrative. While genuine metaphors enhance imaginative engagement and emotional intensity, particularly in supernatural and climactic scenes, trite metaphors contribute to interpretive accessibility and shared cultural understanding. This interaction underscores the functional significance of conventional metaphor in prose fiction.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that literary texts with rich metaphor such as “A Christmas Carol” are valuable resources for developing learners’ figurative awareness, interpretative competence, and critical reading skills in English language education.

Future research may extend this analytical framework to other works by Dickens or to prose fiction from different literary periods in order to examine whether similar metaphorical patterns and functions can be observed. Further studies could also integrate corpus-based or cognitive approaches to explore the interaction between stylistic metaphor and readers’ interpretation in a broader empirical context.

REFERENCES

English

1. Cameron, L., & Low, G. (2021), *Researching and applying metaphor in the real world*. John Benjamins.
2. Charteris-Black, J. (2021), *Analyzing political speeches: Rhetoric, discourse and metaphor* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
3. Dancygier, B., & Sweetser, E. (2014), *Figurative language*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Dickens, C., & Schlicke, P. (2020), *Charles Dickens and the language of literature*. Oxford University Press.
5. Forceville, C., & Urios-Aparisi, E. (Eds.). (2022), *Multimodal metaphor: Applications and case studies*. Routledge.
6. Galperin, I. R. (1981), *Stylistics* (3rd ed., pp. 291). Vysshaya Shkola.
7. Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014), *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
8. Kövecses, Z. (2020), *Extended conceptual metaphor theory*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980), *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
10. Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007), *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose* (2nd ed.). Longman.
11. Le, Thi Giao Chi & Luu, Ngoc Bao Trang. (2023), An Investigation into Conceptual Metaphors of WATER in English and Vietnamese Poetry. *International Journal of English Language Studies*. 5(2), 57-65.
12. Littlemore, J. (2020), Metaphor in language teaching. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 11(1), 25–47.

13. Pollio, H. R. (2018), *Metaphor: Implications and applications*. Psychology Press.
14. Semino, E. (2021), *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
15. Thornborrow, J., & Wareing, S. (1998), *Patterns in language: Stylistics for students of language and literature*. Routledge.
16. Vu, Phuong Anh. (2021), *A study of metaphors used in "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens*. (M.A. thesis, Hanoi Open University).

Vietnamese

17. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hợp (2016), “Ẩn dụ ý niệm người phụ nữ là món ăn” trong tiếng Việt”. *Tạp chí Khoa học Đại học Tân Trào*, 2(2), 72-79.
18. Chu Thị Huyền Mi (2022), “Ẩn dụ ý niệm và ý nghĩa trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh”. *Tạp chí Thiết bị Giáo dục*, 259(2), 45-56.
19. Liêu Linh Chuyên, Trần Văn Phước, Hà Thị Hương Trần (2022), “Đặc điểm văn hóa và Ngôn ngữ của Ẩn dụ tri nhận về Người dạy và Người học trong tiếng Hán”. *Tạp chí Khoa học Đại học Huế: Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn*, 131(6B), 35-52.

Ẩn dụ trong tác phẩm “A Christmas Carol” của Dickens:

Một góc nhìn ngôn ngữ học và sự phạm

Tóm tắt: Bài viết này trình bày phân tích phong cách học về các phép ẩn dụ trong tiểu thuyết ngắn “A Christmas Carol” của Charles Dickens, nhằm mục đích xem xét các đặc điểm ngôn ngữ, mô hình phân bố và chức năng tự sự của chúng trong văn xuôi hư cấu. Dựa trên các khung lý thuyết phong cách do E. Slave, I. R. Galperin và Galdi đề xuất, nghiên cứu phân tích các phép ẩn dụ theo bốn tiêu chí: sự hiện thực hóa ngữ pháp, mức độ mới lạ, độ phức tạp về cấu trúc và tính rõ ràng của các thuật ngữ bắt đầu và kết thúc. Phương pháp hỗn hợp được sử dụng, kết hợp phân tích phong cách định tính với mô tả định lượng. Bộ dữ liệu nghiên cứu bao gồm 45 biểu thức ẩn dụ được trích từ văn bản gốc tiếng Anh của tiểu thuyết ngắn thông qua việc đọc kỹ văn bản. Phân tích định tính được sử dụng để xác định, phân loại và diễn giải các phép ẩn dụ trong bối cảnh tự sự của chúng, trong khi các phương pháp định lượng được áp dụng để tính toán tần suất và phân bố trên năm chương. Kết quả cho thấy các phép ẩn dụ danh nghĩa và kéo dài chiếm ưu thế, cho thấy Dickens ưa thích các biểu đạt hình tượng dựa trên hình ảnh và mở rộng. Các ẩn dụ lặp đi lặp lại liên quan đến sự lạnh lẽo, bóng tối, xiềng xích và sự giam cầm về thể xác tạo thành một mạng lưới ngữ nghĩa mạch lạc phản ánh sự cô lập về mặt đạo đức và sự cứu chuộc sau đó của nhân vật chính. Nghiên cứu này chứng minh rằng các ẩn dụ trong văn xuôi hư cấu đóng vai trò là cơ chế trung tâm của việc xây dựng ý nghĩa chứ không chỉ đơn thuần là các thủ pháp trang trí. Ngoài ra, các phát hiện nhấn mạnh giá trị sự phạm của các ẩn dụ văn học trong việc nâng cao kỹ năng diễn giải và nhận thức về ngôn ngữ hình tượng trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: Ẩn dụ; phong cách học; “A Christmas Carol”; văn xuôi hư cấu; ngôn ngữ hình tượng; giảng dạy tiếng Anh.