

Systematicity and Evidential Density in a Corpus-Based Conceptual Metaphor Dictionary of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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Abstract. *Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds that metaphor is systematic: a single cross-domain mapping licenses many linguistic expressions. This claim is routinely invoked in literary metaphor scholarship but rarely tested against the evidence that individual studies actually assemble. The present study reports a corpus-based conceptual metaphor dictionary of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and uses it to examine both the metaphorical architecture of the trilogy and the evidential basis on which such architectures are ordinarily claimed. Metaphorically used lexical units were identified following MIPVU and grouped into conceptual mappings, yielding 283 verified attestations distributed over 210 conceptual metaphor headwords, supplemented by a further 220 attestations from a pre-filtering dataset. Three substantive findings emerge. First, mapping direction is almost perfectly unidirectional: of 203 headwords with a classifiable source domain, 202 (99.5%) draw on a concrete domain, with a single counterexample. Second, target domains cluster heavily on inner states, with emotion and psychology accounting for 27.2% of verified attestations – almost three times the next field. Third, structural metaphors predominate (42.0%), followed by ontological metaphors and personification. A fourth finding is methodological and, we argue, the most consequential: 184 of 210 headwords (87.6%) rest on a single attestation, and only 26 are supported by two or more. A dictionary of this shape is an inventory of candidate mappings containing a small well-evidenced core, not a demonstration of systematicity across its full extent. We propose that corpus-based literary metaphor studies report evidential density as a matter of routine, and that claims of systematicity be restricted to mappings meeting a stated recurrence threshold.*

Keywords: *conceptual metaphor theory, MIPVU, corpus stylistics, systematicity, image schemas, unidirectionality, J. R. R. Tolkien, fantasy literature*

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J. R. R. Tolkienin “Üzüklərin hökmdarı” əsərinin korpus əsaslı konseptual metafora lüğətində sistemlilik və sübut sıxlığı

Qosimov Abdulxay 

Xülasə. *Konseptual metafora nəzəriyyəsi metaforanın sistemli olduğunu iddia edir: tək bir sahələrarası xəritələşdirmə bir çox linqvistik ifadələrə icazə verir. Bu iddia ədəbi metafora tədqiqatlarında müntəzəm olaraq istinad edilir, lakin nadir hallarda fərdi tədqiqatların əslində topladığı dəlillərlə müqayisə edilir. Bu tədqiqat J. R. R. Tolkienin “Üzüklərin hökmdarı” əsərinin*

korpus əsaslı konseptual metafora lüğətini təqdim edir və ondan həm trilogiyanın metaforik arxitekturasını, həm də bu cür arxitekturaların adətən iddia edildiyi sübut əsasını araşdırmaq üçün istifadə edir. Metaforik olaraq istifadə edilən leksik vahidlər MIPVU-dan sonra müəyyən edilmiş və konseptual xəritələşdirmələrə qruplaşdırılmış, 210 konseptual metafora başlığı üzərində paylanmış 283 təsdiqləmə vermiş və əvvəlcədən süzgəcdən keçirilmiş məlumat dəstindən daha 220 təsdiqləmə ilə tamamlanmışdır. Üç əsaslı tapıntı ortaya çıxır. Birincisi, xəritələşdirmə istiqaməti demək olar ki, tamamilə bir istiqamətlidir: təsnif edilə bilən mənbə domeninə malik 203 başlıq sözdən 202-si (99,5%) tək bir əks nümunə ilə konkret bir domendən istifadə edir. İkincisi, hədəf sahələri daxili vəziyyətlərə çox təsir edir, emosiya və psixologiya təsdiqlənmiş attestasiyaların 27,2%-ni təşkil edir - bu, növbəti sahədən təxminən üç dəfə çoxdur. Üçüncüsü, struktur metaforalar üstünlük təşkil edir (42,0%), ardınca ontoloji metaforalar və personifikasiya gəlir. Dördüncü tapıntı metodoloji və iddia edirik ki, ən əhəmiyyətlidir: 210 başlıq sözdən 184-ü (87,6%) tək bir attestasiyaya əsaslanır və yalnız 26-sı iki və ya daha çox subyekt tərəfindən dəstəklənir. Bu formalı lüğət, sistemliliyin tam şəkildə nümayişi deyil, kiçik bir yaxşı sübut edilmiş nüvəni ehtiva edən namizəd xəritələşdirmələrinin inventarıdır. Biz korpus əsaslı ədəbi metafora tədqiqatlarının sübut sıxlığını rutin məsələ kimi bildirməsini və sistemlilik iddialarının yalnız müəyyən edilmiş təkrarlanma həddinə cavab verən xəritələşdirmələrlə məhdudlaşdırılmasını təklif edirik.

Açar sözlər: konseptual metafora nəzəriyyəsi, MIPVU, korpus stilistikası, sistemlilik, görüntü sxemləri, bir istiqamətlik, J. R. R. Tolkien, fantaziya ədəbiyyatı

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Introduction

Since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) recast metaphor as a property of conceptual structure rather than of ornamental language, the central empirical claim of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has been systematicity. A conceptual metaphor is not a single striking comparison but a mapping between domains that generates families of related expressions. *Argument is war* is offered as a conceptual metaphor precisely because English speakers attack positions, defend claims, shoot down arguments and win or lose disputes; the individual expressions are surface evidence for an underlying mapping, and it is their recurrence and mutual coherence that constitutes the evidence.

This is an empirical claim, and it carries a methodological obligation. If a conceptual metaphor is posited on the basis of a single linguistic expression, the central evidential property – recurrence – has not been demonstrated. The mapping may be real; nothing in the data shows that it is. Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Gibbs (1994) both stress that the systematic elaboration of a mapping is what distinguishes conceptual metaphor from isolated figuration, and Kövecses (2010, 2020) makes the point again in framing conceptual metaphors as schematic structures instantiated at lower levels of specificity.

The corpus turn in metaphor research was in part a response to this problem. Deignan (2005) and Charteris-Black (2004) argued that intuition-driven metaphor analysis systematically overestimates the productivity of mappings, because the analyst supplies from competence the expressions the corpus does not contain. Semino (2008) extended the argument to discourse, and Abdul Malik et al. (2022), reviewing corpus-based metaphor research published between 2015 and 2020, found that the field has increasingly adopted specialised corpora over reference corpora – a shift that raises rather

than settles questions about what counts as adequate evidence for a mapping. Zhao et al. (2023), in a bibliometric survey of two decades of conceptual metaphor research, document a steady growth in corpus-assisted work without a corresponding consolidation of evidential standards.

Metaphor identification has meanwhile been placed on a firm procedural footing. The Pragglejaz Group (2007) introduced MIP, and Steen et al. (2010) extended it into MIPVU, adding explicit treatment of direct metaphor, implicit metaphor and metaphor signals. MIPVU has since been adapted to a wide range of languages, including Uzbek (Gen Kaya, 2019) in the volume edited by Nacey et al. (2019). Subsequent procedural work has addressed the layers of analysis that follow identification: DMIP for potentially deliberate metaphor (Reijnierse et al., 2018; Steen, 2017) and MSDIP for source-domain coding (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023). What these procedures share is a recognition that the step from identified lexical unit to posited conceptual mapping is not automatic and requires its own justification.

Literary metaphor has been comparatively slow to absorb this discipline. Heywood, Semino and Short (2002) showed early that applying identification procedures to literary extracts produces results markedly different from intuitive analysis, but much subsequent literary CMT scholarship continues to proceed by illustrative example. Coll-Florit and Climent (2023), discussing the construction of metaphor repositories, note that dictionary-style resources tend to record mappings without recording how strongly each is evidenced, so that a mapping attested once and a mapping attested forty times appear identically as entries.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is a productive test case. Its metaphorical language has attracted cognitive-linguistic attention – Sullivan (2013) analyses the One Ring as a metaphoric blend grounded in the Object Event-Structure metaphor and compares it with other object-based conceptualisations of power across the trilogy – and Kullmann and Siepmann (2021) provide a corpus-stylistic account of Tolkien's lexis and syntax that establishes the viability of quantitative approaches to this text. The trilogy is long, stylistically consistent, and organised around abstractions (power, corruption, mortality, hope) that invite metaphorical construal. It is also a secondary world, which raises a question of theoretical interest: whether an invented setting is rendered cognitively accessible through the same embodied mappings that structure ordinary language.

This study reports a conceptual metaphor dictionary compiled from all three volumes and asks two sets of questions.

RQ1 (substantive). What is the structure of the metaphorical system in *The Lord of the Rings* – which source domains are recruited, which target domains are metaphorically construed, which image schemas underwrite the mappings, and is mapping direction unidirectional as CMT predicts?

RQ2 (methodological). How densely is each posited mapping evidenced, and what follows for the claims that a corpus-based literary metaphor dictionary can legitimately support?

The second question is not incidental. We report it because the answer, in this corpus, turns out to constrain the first – and because the pattern is unlikely to be peculiar to this study.

Methods

Corpus

The primary texts were the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* (abbreviated FOTR, TT, ROTK). The analysed material is not a running-text sample of the trilogy but a curated corpus of metaphorically used lexical units extracted from it, compiled volume by volume. This distinction matters for interpreting all frequency data reported below and is returned to in § 4.6.

Metaphor identification

Metaphorically used words were identified following MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010). For each candidate lexical unit the contextual meaning was established, the more basic – more concrete, body-related, precise or historically prior – meaning was determined, and the unit was marked as metaphorically used where the two meanings contrasted but could be understood by comparison. Units whose contextual and basic meanings had converged to the point that no contrast remained were excluded as conventionalised. Expressions such as the sun was climbing and the mists were drawn up were excluded on this basis. Every retained unit is recorded with its lexical form, full sentence context, basic meaning, contextual meaning, metaphor type and discursive function, so that each entry in the resulting dictionary is traceable to a numbered corpus row.

Formulation and consolidation of conceptual metaphors

Identified units were assigned conceptual metaphor labels in the conventional Target is source format. *During compilation the same mapping was frequently labelled several different ways: armies are liquids, armies are water, army movement is water, enemy forces are water and large groups in motion are liquids all name one mapping.* Retaining such variants as separate entries would inflate the headword count and, more seriously, would fragment the evidence for a mapping across several apparently thinly-supported entries.

Labels were therefore consolidated under a single headword where the underlying source-to-target correspondence was identical, with every original label preserved in the entry so that the consolidation remains auditable. Labels were kept separate where the target genuinely differed, as with *despair is darkness, evil is darkness and fear is darkness*, which share a source but not a target. Consolidation reduced 254 raw labels to 210 verified headwords. Three corpus rows carried two conceptual metaphors in a single cell and were split, so that attestation counts exceed row counts by three.

Analytical annotation

Three further annotation layers were added: image schemas, source-domain category, and target semantic field. None of these is recorded in the identification data; all were derived from the conceptual metaphor labels by explicit rule and are analytical rather than observational. This distinction is stated here because it bears on the status of the results in § 3.4 and § 3.5.

Image schemas follow Johnson (1987) and the standard inventory (*container, source-path-goal, force, verticality* and so on); a mapping may invoke more than one, so schema totals exceed attestation totals. Source-domain coding was necessarily coarser than the procedure recommended by Reijnierse and Burgers (2023), whose MSDIP allows multiple source-domain candidates to be coded simultaneously where discourse underdetermines the mapping; the present study assigned a single dominant category per headword, and this is acknowledged as a limitation. Roughly 8% of source domains and 5% of target domains resisted confident classification and were recorded as unclassified rather than forced into a category.

Two-tier evidential design

A methodological complication arose during compilation and has been handled explicitly rather than silently. The Fellowship material existed in two states: a pre-filtering dataset of 274 rows, and the 54 rows surviving strict MIPVU filtering. Cross-referencing established that all 54 verified entries appear in the 274-row dataset with identical conceptual-metaphor labels, confirming the larger file as the pre-filtering state of the same data. The 220 non-surviving rows are therefore items the identification protocol excluded, many of them conventionalised expressions of the kind the protocol is designed to remove (tackle, plodded on, halted).

Rather than either discarding this material or merging it undifferentiated into the dictionary – the latter would have silently reversed a documented methodological decision – the study adopts a two-tier design. Tier 1 comprises the 283 verified attestations. Tier 2 comprises the 220 pre-filtering attestations, retained and marked but excluded from any claim requiring verified evidence. All substantive results in §3 are reported on Tier 1 unless otherwise stated. Table 1 summarises the corpus.

Table 1

Composition of the corpus by volume and evidential tier

Volume	Tier 1 (verified)	Tier 2 (supplementary)	Total
The Fellowship of the Ring	56	220	276
The Two Towers	140	0	140
The Return of the King	87	0	87
<i>Total attestations</i>	<i>283</i>	<i>220</i>	<i>503</i>
Conceptual metaphor headwords	210	169 additional	379

Source. Prepared by the author.

Note. Tier 2 material derives entirely from the pre-filtering Fellowship dataset, which is why the supplementary column is empty for the other two volumes.

Analysis

Analysis is descriptive. Frequencies were computed over attestations and over headwords, and evidential density was operationalised as the number of attestations supporting each headword. No inferential statistics are reported: the corpus is a curated selection rather than a probability sample, and significance testing against an undefined population would be uninterpretable. Cross-volume comparison is reported but treated with caution for reasons set out in § 4.6.

Results

Distribution of metaphor types

Structural metaphors dominate the verified corpus at 42.0%, followed by ontological metaphors (27.2%), personification (14.8%), orientational metaphors (8.1%) and image metaphors (6.0%). This ordering is consistent with expectations for extended literary prose, in which mappings that transfer rich inferential structure are more useful than those that merely orient a concept in space. A residue of five attestations was labelled "Container" during compilation. This is not a category in the Lakoff–Johnson taxonomy: it names an image schema, and the items so labelled are ontological metaphors built on that schema. They are reported separately in Table 2 rather than silently reassigned, since the discrepancy is informative about the difficulty of applying the taxonomy consistently at scale.

Table 2

Metaphor types, verified attestations

Type	n	%	In Lakoff–Johnson taxonomy
Structural	119	42.0	Yes
Ontological	77	27.2	Yes
Personification	42	14.8	Yes
Orientational	23	8.1	Yes
Image	17	6.0	Yes
Container	5	1.8	No – image schema
<i>Total</i>	<i>283</i>	<i>100.0</i>	

Source. Prepared by the author.

Target domains

Target domains cluster sharply. Emotion and psychology accounts for 77 verified attestations (27.2%), almost three times the next-largest field. War and conflict (9.5%), cognition and knowledge (9.2%), power and social order (7.8%) and morality (7.8%) follow at comparable levels. The dominance of inner states is the single clearest distributional finding in the corpus.

Table 3

Target semantic fields, verified attestations (fields with $n \geq 10$)

Target semantic field	N	%
Emotion & psychology	77	27.2
War, conflict & destruction	27	9.5
Cognition & knowledge	26	9.2
Power, status & social order	22	7.8
Morality, evil & deception	22	7.8
Nature, landscape & elements	20	7.1
Action, purpose & difficulty	17	6.0
Light & darkness as phenomena	14	4.9
Time & history	10	3.5

Source. Prepared by the author.

Note. Semantic fields are an analytical grouping applied to the conceptual metaphor labels, not a category recorded during identification.

Source domains and the direction of mapping

Source domains show the mirror-image profile. The largest categories are physical objects, space and force; persons and agency; containers, barriers and coverings; journey and motion; water and liquid; darkness and shadow; and light and fire. Every one is concrete, directly perceptible and bodily manipulable.

This asymmetry was tested directly. Of 379 headwords, 203 had a source domain that could be confidently classified as concrete or abstract. Of these, 202 (99.5%) drew on a concrete source domain. Exactly one – *desire is love* – mapped one abstract domain onto another, and even this is arguably a case of construal within a single experiential field rather than a genuine counterexample. Mapping in this corpus is, to a first approximation, perfectly unidirectional.

3.4 Image schemas

The schemas underwriting the mappings are the familiar embodied inventory. *Container, force, light–dark, source-path-goal, verticality and animacy* account for the large majority of attestations. The prominence of *container* is notable and follows directly from the target-domain profile in § 3.2: emotions are located in hearts, minds hold thoughts, people are filled with dread. The prominence of *light–dark* reflects a well-known feature of the text but is here quantified rather than asserted.

Evidential density

The distribution of attestations across headwords is extremely long-tailed. In the verified corpus, 184 of 210 headwords (87.6%) are supported by exactly one attestation. The mean is 1.35 attestations per headword and the median is 1. Only 26 headwords (12.4%) are supported by two or more, and only 16 by evidence from more than one volume with at least two verified attestations.

Adding the Tier 2 material does not improve this. The full dictionary contains 379 headwords and 503 attestations, of which 334 (88.1%) rest on one attestation – a marginally worse ratio, because the supplementary material contributed 169 mostly single-instance headwords while strengthening only fourteen existing ones. Dictionary size and evidential quality moved in opposite directions.

Table 4

Evidential density of conceptual metaphor headwords

Attestations headword	per Verified (n = 210)	corpus %	Full dictionary (n = 379)	%
1	184	87.6	334	88.1
2	8	3.8	18	4.7
3	6	2.9	11	2.9
4	3	1.4	3	0.8
5	5	2.4	5	1.3
6 or more	4	1.9	8	2.1

Source. Prepared by the author.

The well-evidenced core

The 26 headwords supported by two or more verified attestations constitute the portion of the dictionary that demonstrates systematicity in the sense CMT requires. The best-attested are listed in Table 5. Their composition is itself informative: they are concentrated in exactly the fields identified in § 3.2, and several are attested across all three volumes, which strengthens the case that they are structural features of the work rather than local effects of a single passage.

Table 5

Conceptual metaphors with four or more verified attestations

Conceptual metaphor	Verified n	Volumes
Armies Are Water / Enemy Forces Are Liquids	8	Tt/Rotk
Evil Is Darkness/Shadow	8	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Heart Is A Container Of Emotions	6	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Psychological Burdens Are Physical Weights	6	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Darkness Is A Physical Substance	5	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Darkness Is An Animate Entity	5	Tt/Rotk
Emotional Distress Is Physical Damage	5	Single Volume
Mind Is A Container	5	Single Volume
People Are Containers For Emotions	5	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Emotions Are Living Entities	4	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Emotions Are Substances In A Container	4	Fotr/Tt/Rotk
Mental Conflict Is Physical Combat	4	Fotr/Tt/Rotk

Source. Prepared by the author.

A worked case: armies are water

The mapping ARMIES ARE WATER is the clearest fully verified case in the corpus, with eight attestations across two volumes and no supplementary padding. Enemy forces flow up to walls, pour through breaches, come sweeping like a dark wave, and must be stemmed as a tide is stemmed. The correspondences transfer systematically: a liquid is a mass without individuated parts, moves by flowing, overwhelms barriers by volume, can be dammed, and exploits gaps. Each has a counterpart in the construal of the army.

The mapping carries an ideological entailment worth noting. To construe an army as a liquid is to remove the individual soldier from view entirely; a tide has no members. In this corpus the construal is applied overwhelmingly to enemy forces rather than to allied ones, which aligns with the depersonalising function that Charteris-Black (2004) identifies for mass-noun and natural-force metaphors in political discourse.

Discussion

Unidirectionality confirmed

The near-perfect unidirectionality reported in §3.3 is the strongest theoretical result in the study. CMT predicts that mapping runs from concrete, sensorimotor domains to abstract ones, because the function of metaphor is to make the unobservable tractable by recruiting the structure of the observable (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Johnson, 1987). A rate of 99.5% in a corpus of this size is a clean confirmation, and it is worth noting that it emerges from data collected without this hypothesis in view.

Two qualifications apply. Coding assigned a single dominant source domain per headword, whereas Reijnierse and Burgers (2023) show that source domains are frequently underdetermined and that a procedure permitting multiple simultaneous candidates yields more defensible results. A finer-

grained coding might expose borderline cases the present scheme resolves too neatly. And the classification of a domain as concrete or abstract is itself a judgement, though in the great majority of cases not a contentious one.

The metaphorisation of inner states

That emotion and psychology should dominate the target domains at 27.2% is consistent with a general finding in cognitive linguistics: inner states are unobservable, lack independent perceptual structure, and are therefore metaphorically construed more heavily than any other domain (Kövecses, 2010). The corpus adds a specific observation. The CONTAINER schema is disproportionately recruited for this field – hearts contain emotions, minds contain thoughts, people are filled with feeling – which suggests that Tolkien’s psychological vocabulary is organised around a spatial rather than, for instance, a hydraulic or mechanical model of the self.

This connects to a question that a secondary-world text poses with unusual clarity. Middle-earth is invented, but the mappings by which its inhabitants’ inner lives are rendered are not: they are the ordinary embodied mappings of English. This is plausibly part of why the setting remains cognitively accessible despite its strangeness, and it is a claim that could be tested comparatively against realist fiction of the same period.

The systematicity problem

The finding with the widest implications is the one reported in § 3.5. With 87.6% of headwords resting on a single attestation, this dictionary – like, we suspect, many comparable resources – is not what it appears to be. It is an inventory of candidate mappings with a well-evidenced core of 26 entries embedded in it. The core is a genuine contribution. Presenting the whole as a set of established findings would not be defensible.

This is not a defect peculiar to the present study. It follows from a structural feature of literary metaphor research: the analyst reads for metaphor, records what is found, and labels each instance with a conceptual mapping. The labelling step is where the inflation occurs, because a plausible mapping can be formulated for any metaphorical expression whatsoever. A one-to-one correspondence between attestations and headwords is the natural endpoint of this procedure, and it is precisely the situation in which the mapping labels carry no evidential weight beyond the expressions that generated them.

Coll-Florit and Climent (2023) observe that metaphor repositories typically record mappings without recording how strongly each is supported, so that entries of radically different evidential standing appear identical. The present study suggests that this is not a cosmetic issue. Where the modal entry rests on one instance, the absence of density information means the resource cannot be used for the purpose it appears to serve.

We therefore propose two practices. First, that corpus-based metaphor studies report the distribution of attestations per posited mapping as a standard descriptive statistic, alongside the counts they already report. Second, that a stated recurrence threshold be applied before a mapping is described as systematic, with single-instance mappings reported as candidates. Neither is burdensome, and both would make studies comparable in a way they currently are not.

The value of the two-tier design

The two-tier treatment described in § 2.5 proved analytically useful beyond its immediate purpose. Because Tier 2 consists of items an identification protocol rejected, comparing tiers gives a direct view of what the protocol excludes and what difference it makes. Two observations follow.

The supplementary material added 169 headwords but strengthened only fourteen. Dictionary size grew by 80% while the number of entries meeting a two-attestation threshold grew by fourteen. This dissociation between size and evidential quality is worth stating plainly, because inventory size is often treated as a proxy for coverage.

A substantial share of the excluded material also turned out to be metaphor about the act of writing rather than metaphor within the narrative – the tale grew in the telling, the story put down roots, I plodded on – drawn from the Foreword. *Stories are plants and writing is a journey* are real mappings and Tolkien's authorial self-description is a legitimate object of study, but it is a different object from the narrative language of the trilogy, and conflating the two in a single alphabetical inventory obscures the distinction.

Relation to existing Tolkien scholarship

Sullivan (2013) analyses the One Ring as a metaphoric blend and traces object-based conceptualisations of power across the trilogy, finding that good characters are burdened and weighed down by power while corrupt ones grasp and hold it. The present corpus supports this from an independent direction: *psychological burdens are physical weights* is among the best-attested verified mappings, with six attestations across all three volumes, and *control is physical grasping* is separately attested. That two methodologically distinct studies converge on the same mappings is a form of corroboration that individual close readings cannot supply.

Kullmann and Siepmann (2021) establish through corpus stylistics that Tolkien's prose, for all its archaising surface, sits within the tradition of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novel. The metaphorical evidence points the same way. The mappings recruited here are not exotic; they are the ordinary embodied inventory. What is distinctive is their density and their thematic concentration, not their kind.

Limitations

Four limitations require statement.

The corpus is a curated selection, not an exhaustive concordance. Every frequency reported here describes the corpus rather than the trilogy. The claim that emotion metaphors are the largest field is a claim about this dataset; the stronger claim would require exhaustive sampling of defined text portions.

Sampling across volumes is uneven and non-random. The Two Towers supplies 49.5% of verified attestations against Fellowship's 19.8%, reflecting differences in compilation intensity rather than in the texts. No claim of the form "metaphor X intensifies across the trilogy" is supportable without normalisation by volume word count, which was not available. Cross-volume results in §3.6 are reported as presence/absence rather than as rates for this reason.

Attestations lack chapter-level references. The corpus records full sentence context but not location, so quotations are verifiable as text but not yet locatable in a standard edition. This is being remedied. Identification and coding were performed by a single analyst without a second-rater reliability check. MIPVU is designed for reliability testing (Steen et al., 2010), and both DMIP and MSDIP report inter-rater agreement as a matter of course (Reijnierse et al., 2018; Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023). The absence of such testing here is the most serious methodological gap and should be addressed before the substantive findings are treated as established.

Directions for further work

Three extensions follow directly. The first is a reliability study on a sample of the corpus, which would allow the identification and consolidation decisions to be assessed independently. The second

is the application of MSDIP (Reijnierse & Burgers, 2023) to permit multiple simultaneous source-domain candidates, which would test whether the unidirectionality result survives finer coding.

The third is cross-linguistic. The dictionary was compiled with Uzbek glosses, and Gen Kaya (2019) has established the adjustments MIPVU requires for Uzbek – concerning dictionary selection and the treatment of morphologically complex forms – which makes a genuine contrastive study feasible rather than merely aspirational. Mappings grounded in universal embodiment (weight, container, verticality) would be expected to transfer; those grounded in culturally specific material (*light–dark* moral symbolism inflected by Tolkien’s Catholicism and Germanic sources) would be expected to require compensation. Zibin and Solopova (2024), setting out a research agenda for cross-cultural metaphor work, note that such asymmetries are where contrastive metaphor study is most productive.

Conclusion

This study reports a corpus-based conceptual metaphor dictionary of *The Lord of the Rings* comprising 283 verified attestations across 210 conceptual mappings, and uses it to examine both the metaphorical structure of the trilogy and the evidential foundations of literary metaphor analysis. Substantively, three findings hold. Mapping is almost perfectly unidirectional from concrete to abstract domains (99.5%), confirming a core CMT prediction on independent data. Target domains concentrate on inner states, with emotion and psychology accounting for 27.2% of attestations, and the CONTAINER schema is disproportionately recruited for this field. Structural metaphors predominate at 42.0%, as expected for extended narrative prose. Methodologically, the study finds that 87.6% of posited mappings rest on a single attestation and that only 26 meet a two-attestation threshold. Since systematicity – the recurrence of a mapping across multiple expressions – is the property that distinguishes a conceptual metaphor from an isolated figure, a dictionary of this shape supports claims of systematicity only for its core. We suggest that this pattern is a general feature of the way literary metaphor inventories are compiled rather than a peculiarity of this corpus, and that reporting evidential density should become routine practice.

The well-evidenced core, though small, is analytically substantial: mappings such as *armies are water*, *psychological burdens are physical weights*, *evil is darkness* and *heart is a container of emotions* are attested repeatedly and across volumes, and it is on these that an account of Tolkien’s metaphorical architecture can properly be built. A smaller dictionary of well-attested mappings would be a stronger contribution than a larger one of candidates – and the material for it is already present in the larger.

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