



Linguistics

Task

What do conventional metaphors tell us about our society and culture?

Brief explanation

We do not always speak literally. In fact, how we speak every day is full of indirect and non-literal language, among which we find metaphors. This video summarises what ‘metaphors’ are and presents some examples that we use every day, often without even realizing that we are speaking metaphorically: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww9V1IA-HwI>.

In this task, we’d like you to identify one, or more, metaphor that people use in everyday speech. This (these) metaphor(s) should be common enough for most speakers to recognize it (if you need some inspiration, here is a list of metaphors we can find in the English language: <https://www.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~sugimoto/MasterMetaphorList/metaphors/index.html>).

You can then explore how your chosen metaphor(s) is/are used in the language, the connection between the two concepts involved in the metaphor, and what it can tell us about society and culture (either how society and culture affect the metaphors we use or how the metaphors we use affect our society and culture). We give some suggestions for online resources below, but you could equally well explore books of your own or in a library.

The task is to write an essay of up to 1000 words about your chosen metaphor(s): in what everyday language expressions it can be seen, what two concepts it links, and what it tells us about our society and culture.

Helpful resources

Together with the video introducing metaphors in everyday language and the list of example metaphors suggested above, you can also have a look at the following resources:

How metaphors help us understand the world (also includes metaphors from other languages): <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20200710-the-words-that-stretch-how-we-think>

Instances of (i) how metaphors influence society and culture and (ii) how society and culture influence the metaphors we use: <https://medium.com/bending-the-arc/master-metaphors-to-build-understanding-of-complex-issues-a4af0e857bff>