

## A Semantic Investigation of Container Image Schema in American Short Stories

Ghazwan Mohammed Dawood<sup>a</sup> and Prof. Amthal Mohammed Abbas<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>College of Basic Education, University of Mosul, Mosul, Iraq

[ghazwan893@gmail.com](mailto:ghazwan893@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup>Professor in Linguistics and Translation, College of Basic Education, University of Diyala, Diyala, Iraq

[mohammedam2010@gmail.com](mailto:mohammedam2010@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The expression 'image schema' has attracted a large number of linguists who have conducted extensive research on it as it shapes our perception of the world. This mental characteristic is critical in allowing community members to participate as active or passive speakers/hearers in daily life circumstances. The study is an attempt to investigate the container image schema in American short stories. The purpose of this study is to examine the image schema from a cognitive semantic perspective. It is hypothesized that image schema may significantly contribute to text comprehension/understanding. The more our comprehension, the more readily our community will accept us as regular people. It is anticipated that the study would include a practical component in which an American short story will be analyzed. The short story selected is "stormchaser" by Adam Marek. The model used for analysis is based on Johnson's taxonomy (1987).

**Keywords:** image schema. container schema. American short stories, cognitive semantics.

### Introduction

The expression "image schema" first appeared in the late 1990s works of Johnson and Lakoff. According to them, there is a significant connection between image schemas and the physical reactions that a person has while interacting with his/her surroundings. Concepts such as an item's shape, location, and trajectory of movement are symbolically represented in image schemas. Furthermore, Johnson (1987: 104) and Lakoff (1993: 202) see these embodied ideas as conceptual building blocks for more abstract concepts and conceptual domains, giving structure for more abstract concepts and domains. Thus, image-schematic conceptions serve as a starting point for more complex thoughts and ideas.

Gibbs and Colston (1995: 349) made an important point when maintaining that "Image schemas may be generally defined as dynamic analog representations of spatial relationships and activities in space."

"While image schemas are derived from perceptual and motor processes, they are not sensorimotor processes themselves." However, they believe that "Image schemas exist across all perceptual modalities, a need for any sensorimotor coordination in our experience."

Gibbs emphasizes the abstract nature of image schemas across multiple modalities, stating that they "are more abstract than conventional visual mental images and are composed of dynamic spatial patterns that underpin the spatial connections and movement observed in real concrete images" (ibid: 91).

Nonetheless, image schemas were considered as emergent properties of our bodily link to the world and as attractors in complex human self-organizing systems. Thus, despite his acknowledgment of the spatial nature of image schemas, Gibbs considers spatial and non-spatial schemas similarly as 'attractors': source, route, and goal are all treated equally with balance or resistance (ibid: 114).

In a nutshell, an image schema is a condensed representation of perceptual experience that acts as a bridge between spatial and conceptual structure. According to Johnson, these patterns "form as meaningful structures for us mainly via our bodily movements through space, our manipulations of objects, and our perceptual experiences" (Johnson, 1987: 29).

Image schema serves as 'distillers' of spatial and temporal perceptions. According to cognitive linguistics, these compressed experiences serve as the basis for structuring information and thinking about the world. As a result, visiting the library and obtaining a book may be conceptually grouped with a variety of other instances that share only the same image-schematic structure (ibid).

Croft and Cruse's (2004: 45) base their model on a differentiation of eight principle image schemas every one of which is partitioned into various image schemas, as demonstrated in table 1 below.

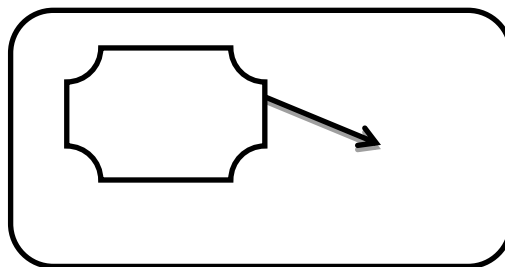
Space	Location, UP-down, front-back, left-right, near-far, center-periphery, contact, straight, verticality
Force	Compulsion, blockage, counterforce, diversion, restraint-removal, enablement, attraction, resistance
containment	Container, in-out, surface, full-empty, content
Locomotion	Momentum, path
Balance	Axis balance, twin-pan balance, point balance, equilibrium
Identity	Matching, superimposition
Multiplicity	Merging, collection, splitting, iteration, part-whole, count-mass, linkage
Existence	Removal, bounded space, cycle, object, process, agent

## 1. Container Image Schema

Physical encounters shape the container schema. Our bodies, for example, may be regarded as containers or as things contained inside containers (Johnson 1987: 21; Lakoff ,1987: 272; Krzeszowski ,1993: 314). In the former case, our bodies function as three-dimensional containers in which we can breathe, eat, and drink (Johnson ,1987: 21).Our bodies may be regarded as things contained inside containers such as rooms, homes, or buildings in the later instance. As a result, we may sleep in the bedroom, leave the home, and enter a building.

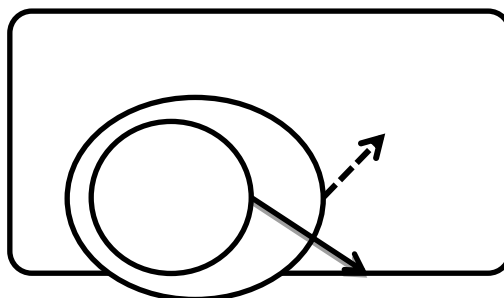
The container schema may serve as a foundation for metaphorical statements. The source domain (container) may be translated to target domains such as (body), (mind), and (chest), eliciting metaphors such as "the body is a container," "the mind is a container," and "the chest is a container" (ibid:22).

According to Johnson and Lakoff (1987), the container image schema is composed of three structural elements: an interior, a boundary, and an exterior, as shown in figure (1). The circle is divided into two parts in the structure: the interior, which is the region inside the border, and the boundary itself, which is the area beyond the boundary. Additionally, the schema's fundamental logic states that if container A is contained inside container B



**Figure 1: The Structural Elements of the Container Schema**

and container C is contained within A, then C is contained within B, as shown in figure (2) (Lakoff, 1989: 272).



**Figure 2: The Basic Logic of the Container Schema**

### 2.1 Characteristics of the Containment Schema

Deane (1992: 355) illustrates that the containment schema's characteristics are as follows:

1. Containment shields the contents from extraneous influences.
2. The confinement of a container's boundaries constricts the activities confined inside.
3. The container's placement determines the position of the contained item.
4. Depending on one's ability to study the contents of the container, the container restricts one's ability to inspect the contained object.
5. Containment is transitive: if C is contained inside A and A is contained within B, C is contained within B show figure (2).

## 2.2 Body is a Container

Our bodies, as stated before, may be regarded as three-dimensional containers. We can consume food and liquids with our mouths, hear noises with our ears, and smell fragrances with our noses. Similarly, we may create anything out of our bodies, such as talk, weep, and vomit. Thus, the mouth, ears, nose, and eyes may be viewed as points of entry and exit for the container. For example One might say that an aircraft is approaching American *airspace*. The container schema gives inferential structure to many abstract domains through conceptual metaphor, such as when someone is in *danger* wants to *escape*. In time-telling, the container schema is applied to portions of the clock face to create bounded regions with particular interpretations (Johnson,1999:32).

## 2.3 Mind is a Container

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that the mind may also serve as a container for information, ideas, and emotions. By translating the source domain (container) to the target domain (mind), the metaphor of the mind as a container may be extended.

And, according to Bereiter(2002,101), the container metaphor for mind seems to exist in discourses. Consider the following illustration:

1. *If someone is missing, you must stop thinking about him; you must put him out of your Mind (BNC).*

In example 1, the mind is conceived as a container and perceived as an item contained inside the container. As a result, the person is "thinking about him" since this thing has taken up residence in his mind. Therefore, the only way to cease thinking about him is to remove the item from its container, namely the mind.

## 2.4 Chest is a Container

As with the mind, the chest is viewed as a major container for emotions. The chest cavity is situated in the neck area and serves as a container for organs such as the heart, breast, and lungs. Additionally, the chest may be utilized metaphorically as a container. For instance, Lakoff and Kovecses (1987: 197) offer numerous English-language metaphorical conceptions of *angry* in example 2 bellow in which anger is metaphorically conceptualized as heat.

2. *Don't get hot under the collar (ibid).*

'Hot' denotes 'anger', and the expression 'hot under the collar' means that the chest involves anger.

### 2.5 Clock is a Container

According to Williams (2004:53), when we read the third hour and fifty-five minutes, the indicator is near four, but it is read within the third hour. Therefore, the third hour is considered the container, despite its proximity to fourth hour.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 The Model

The model of analysis is based on Johnson's (1987) taxonomy of container schema. The model includes three main items, things, human and circle. Each of the three main items is divided into sub-items as illustrated in figure 3.

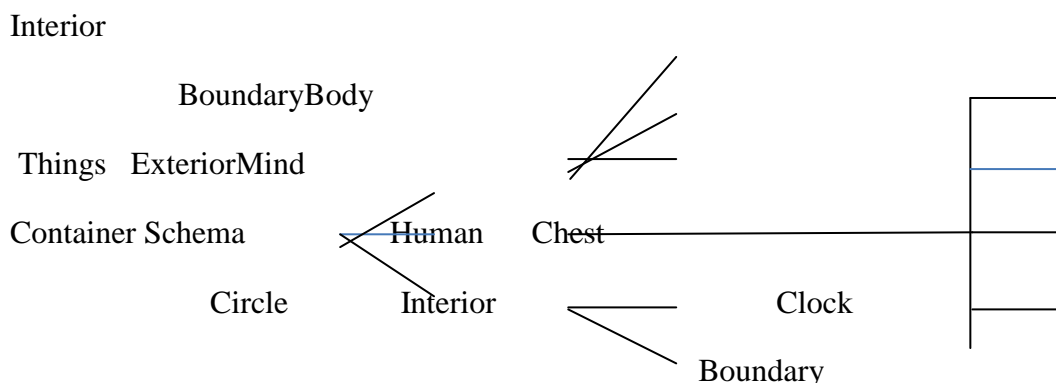


Figure (3) the model of the study

### 3.2 Data Collection

The data collection is based on a single short story, the *stormchaser* by Adam Marek,

### 3.3 Analysis and Discussion

#### 3.3.1 Analysis

No	Text	Image schema
1	It's so windy today	force-counterforce
2	My son Jakey and I	link
3	at the window	part-whole
4	watching leylandii bow to each other	force-enablement
5	and the snails being blown across the patio	container
6	like sailboats	link
7	We've been watching	force-enablement

8	for fifteen minutes	link
9	Jakey says, 'I'm scared	down- status
10	'Of tornadoes	cycle
11	'Listen,' I say, no tornadoes are coming here	up
12	we got in the car	container
13	drove around all day	cycle
14	like the stormchasers on 'TV	force-enablement
15	lucky to find one	force-enablement
16	Very lucky	up
17	'But what if we did? There is a noise from behind us	force-blockage
18	We both look at the fireplace	force-attraction
19	The wind is playing the chimney like a flute	force-enablement
20	'Even if we were really lucky	up
21	and did find one	part-whole
22	I say, in England	container
23	it would be a tiny thing	down
24	We don't get	force-blockage
25	the big ones here	up
26	'An F4?' he asks	up
27	We have watched documentaries about tornadoes	center-periphery
28	since he was a baby. Among six-year-olds	path
29	he is an expert	up
30	'No way,' I say	force-blockage
31	'An F2	down
32	if we were really lucky	up
33	'Big enough	up
34	to suck up a person?	force-attraction
35	He is imagining the tornado is like a straw	link
36	in the sky's mouth	container
37	I can see this	force-enablement
38	'Nuh-uh,' I say. 'Just big enough	up
39	to fling a couple of roof tiles, about, or knock over some	force-counterforce
40	He is not going to believe me, sitting here in the house	container
41	with the wind whoo-whooping	force-counterforce
42	around our walls	center-periphery
43	like a ghost	down
44	'Go get changed out of your jim-jams	force-removal of restraint
45	I say. 'I'll show you that there's nothing to be afraid of	up schema
46	While Jakey looks for his shoes	up schema
47	I pack lunch for us	force-enablement
48	in a cotton shoulder bag	container

A Semantic Investigation of Container Image Schema in American Short Stories

49	for me, chicken-liver pate and apple chutney sandwiches	link
50	for Jakey, cheese spread sandwiches, a fun-size Twix	link
51	'All set?' I say when he gets to the bottom	down
52	of the stairs	force-enablement
53	He is wearing	force-enablement
54	the bright yellow sou'wester	up
55	and macintosh that he has finally grown into	path
56	I bought them for him	up
57	before he was born	path
58	when he was just in my imagination.' We'd better go	path
59	say goodbye to mum,' I say	force-compulsion
60	We creep upstairs together	path
61	peep around the bedroom door	force-enablement
62	in bed	container
63	Mum is still in bed	force-blockage
64	She has the light out. Yesterday the dentist at the hospital	container
65	pulled four wisdom teeth	part-whole
66	from her mouth	container
67	She has been in bed for a whole day	container
68	and mostly silent	force-blockage
69	'Where are you going?	path
70	she says. Even her voice sounds wounded	down
71	'We're going	path
72	tornado chasing	force-enablement
73	'We won't be long	up
74	I say.'Can I get you anything?	force
75	'No.	force-blockage
76	'Are you feeling okay?' Jakey asks	up
77	She pulls the duvet over her head	force-enablement
78	Just go away,' she says	force-compulsion
79	We drive	path
80	It feels good	up
81	doesn't it?' I say. 'Seen any tornadoes yet?	center-periphery
82	Jakey looks around	force-compulsion
83	He says nothing	down
84	The bendy roads	force-diversion
85	between the hedgerows	path
86	are full of fallen branches	force-blockage
87	so I go slow	down
88	We live in the countryside	container
89	a little house	down
90	all on its own	part/whole

91	our plot is a dark green triangle in the middle	balance
92	of a bright yellow sea of rapeseed	center-periphery
93	I have seen it from the air	force-enablement
94	in a microlight. The photograph I took is in our bathroom	container
95	I stare at it every time I pee	force-enablement
96	'Where shall we go?	path
97	I say. 'If we were proper stormchaser	link
98	Jakey, we'd have a Doppler radar and a laptop	part/whole
99	so we could find the tornadic part of the storm	part/whole
100	We are real stormchasers,' he says	link
101	I'm watching the road	force-enablement
102	carefully	up
103	but I can see his pout from the corner of my eye	force-enablement
104	You're right	up
105	I say. 'But we don't have Doppler	down
106	so we'll have to rely on our instincts	up
107	tell me where you think the tornadoes will touch dow	force-compulsion
108	Jakey presses the window	force-enablement
109	button till the window is open the whole way	part/whole
110	He sticks his head out	force-enablement
111	I slow the car	down
112	and move into the middle of the road	balance
113	so he doesn't get hit	force-removal of restraint
114	by the sticky-out branches	force-blockage
115	that the hedge-mower has missed	down
116	I'm going slow enough	down
117	that I can watch Jakey	force-enablement
118	He is looking up into the sky	force-attraction
119	holding the door frame with both hands	force-compulsion
120	The wind is throwing his shaggy hair	force-counterforce
121	all around his head	center-periphery
122	His hair is cornfield-blond, the same as mine	link
123	His mum's is almost black	up
124	That way,' he says, pointing north-east	path
125	When we get to the motorway	path
126	the car is hard to control	down
127	The wind bullies our left-hand side	force-counterforce
128	The windscreen wipers	center-periphery
129	are overwhelmed with this much rain	force-removal of restraint
130	We feel enclosed	force-compulsion
131	in the car	container



A Semantic Investigation of Container Image Schema in American Short Stories

132	We are like a head in a hood	container
133	Jakey gets to choose the radio station	force-enablement
134	'Mum listens to this radio station,' he says	force-enablement
135	I do not like pop music	down
136	but I do like to hear Jakey sing	up
137	We've been driving for twenty minutes	path
138	when ahead we see a smudge of yellow on the horizon	container
139	The rain is thinning	down
140	The cars coming towards us on the other side	path
141	have their lights off	down
142	In the rear-view mirror is a procession of lit headlamps	part/whole
143	'We should turn around,' I say	force-diversion
144	'No. It's this way,' Jakey says	force-counterforce
145	'Are you sure?' 'Uh-huh	up
146	We reach sunlight	path
147	The wet tarmac around us is steaming	force-compulsion
148	'Are you sure the tornadoes are this way, Jakey?' 'No	down
149	'Shall we turn around?	path
150	It looks like the end of the world back the way we came	source-path-goal
151	go round the roundabout three times	cycle
152	Jakey giggles, pinned to the door by physics	up
153	We go back the way we came	path
154	I break the speed limit	force-compulsion
155	We eat our lunches from our laps while we drive	container
156	'If you're scared of tornado	down
157	I say, 'why do you want to see one so badly?	down
158	Jakey shrugs, finishing his apple juice	up
159	Stormchasers drive thousands of miles to find them	path
160	drive around for weeks sometimes	link
161	'How far have we driven?	up
162	'About 80 miles. Shall we go home now?')	path
163	Mum'll be wondering where we are	down
164	'Yes,' he says	up
165	The sun follows us back	path schema
166	We lead it all the way to	force-attraction
167	our front gates	part/whole
168	Jakey picks up handfuls of the leaves that are heaped	force-enablement
169	and drops them again	removal of restraint
170	I put Jakey's lunch rubbish	force-enablement
171	in the cotton bag	container
172	before I get out. I open the front door	part/whole
173	and we both go inside	path

174	'We're home!	container
175	I call, wiping my feet. No answer	down
176	I tiptoe upstairs	path
177	Our bed is empty	container
178	'Dad!' Jakey calls out. I run downstairs	path
179	In the living room	container
180	the coffee table is on its side against the wall	force-counterforce
181	One of its legs is broken off	force
182	The TV is face down on the carpet	down
183	The mantelpiece above the fireplace is bare	force-enablement
184	All holiday souvenirs are on the floor	force-enablement
185	Some are smashed	force-counterforce
186	on the slate tiles in front of the wood burner	part/whole
187	Jakey's toys are tipped from his box	force-counterforce
188	In the middle of it all	balance
189	sitting on the floor with her arms round her legs	down
190	her forehead on her knees, is mummy	down
191	Jakey moves towards her	path
192	I hold him back with my hand	force-blockage
193	'Don't. There's glass,' I say	down
194	'You okay, mummy?	up
195	When it came through? 'No answer. No movement	down
196	Only she and I know	link

### 3.3.2 Findings

According to the process of analysis, the container schema was applied (23%), while the story's 'path schema' was (13%). Additionally, the 'link schema' was (6%). In the story, the term 'balance schema' was assigned a value of (1%). The term 'center-periphery' reached (3%). On the other hand, the story's 'force schema' was used (32%). Finally, the story's 'up schema' was recorded (14%) and "down schema" reached (14%). The study findings can be sketched through the following:

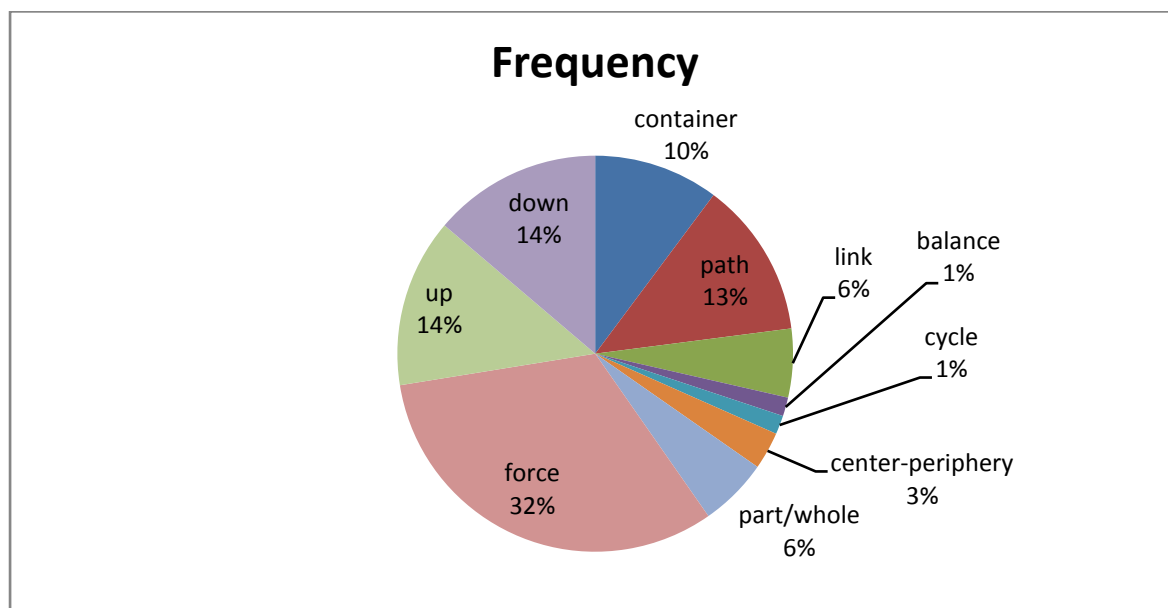


Figure 4: Image schema frequency in Stormchaser story

## Conclusions

The study comes up with the following conclusions:

1. The container schema occupies a respectable part in cognitive semantics.
2. Writers, in general, include their works with redundant use of container schema.
3. The story analyzed shows insignificant use of container image schema as compared to other types of image schemas.
4. Schemas, for most, contribute to the understanding of discourse.

## References

1. Adam, M. (2012). **The stormchaser** .Comma Press, UK, and ECW Press in North America.
2. Deane, P. (1992) . **Grammar in Mind and Brain. Explorations in Cognitive Syntax**. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
3. Johnson, M. (1987). **The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason**. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.
4. Krzeszowski, T. (1993). **The axiological parameter in preconceptual image schemata**. In Richard Geiger, & Brygida Rudzka-Ostyn, eds., *Conceptualization and mental processing in language* 307-329. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
5. Lakoff, G. (1987). **Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind**. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.
6. Lakoff, G and Johnson, M. (1980). **Metaphors we live By**. Chicago: University of Chicago press .
7. Lakoff, G. and Kovecses, Z. (1987). **The Cognitive Model of Anger Inherent in American English. Cultural Model in Language and thought**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8. Williams, R. (2004.). **The Source-Path-Goal Image Schema in Gestures for Thinking and Teaching.**US:Lawrence University.