

# Conceptual Metaphors in the Song Lyrics of Blowin in the Wind by Bob Dylan (1963).

Vuong Huu Vinh<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Thi Lan Anh<sup>2</sup>, Nguyen Thi Vinh Binh<sup>3</sup>, Tran Thi Ngoc Mai<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dong A University, Da Nang, Vietnam, vinhvh@donga.edu.vn, ORCID: 0009-0003-9501-5677

<sup>2</sup>Academy of Finance, Hanoi, Vietnam, nguyenthilananh@hvtc.edu.vn, ORCID: 0000-0001-8946-2129

<sup>3</sup>Thuongmai University, Ha Noi, Vietnam, binhntv@tmu.edu.vn, ORCID: 0009-0006-2997-4337

<sup>4</sup>Hanoi Open University, Hanoi, Vietnam, maittn3108@hou.edu.vn, ORCID: 0009-0006-7051-7250

## HOW TO CITE:

Vuong Huu Vinh , Nguyen Thi Lan Anh , Nguyen Thi Vinh Binh, Tran Thi Ngoc Mai (2026). Conceptual Metaphors in the Song Lyrics Of Blowin in the Wind by Bob Dylan (1963).. International Journal of Special Education, 41(16s), 149-164

## ABSTRACT:

This study investigates conceptual metaphors in the lyrics of Blowin' in the Wind by Bob Dylan from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the research explores how metaphorical language structures the representation of social and moral issues in the song. The study applies the Metaphor Identification Procedure proposed by the Pragglejaz Group to systematically identify metaphorical expressions in the lyrics. The analysis reveals four dominant conceptual metaphors: TRUTH IS WIND, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD, and IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS. These metaphors map abstract concepts such as truth, freedom, and social awareness onto concrete experiential domains including natural phenomena, movement, animals, and sensory perception. The findings demonstrate that metaphorical language in the song plays a central role in shaping its philosophical and socio-political message. The study further argues that these metaphorical mappings reflect the historical and cultural context of the early 1960s in the United States, particularly the social tensions associated with the American Civil Rights Movement and the broader geopolitical climate of the Cold War. By framing complex social issues through embodied experience, the song invites listeners to reflect on questions of justice, peace, and moral responsibility. The findings contribute to research in cognitive linguistics by demonstrating how conceptual metaphors operate within song lyrics as structured cognitive models rather than isolated stylistic devices. The study also highlights the pedagogical value of song lyrics as authentic materials for teaching metaphor and critical discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, protest songs, metaphor in music discourse, Bob Dylan

## COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2026 Authors.  
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Music has long functioned as a powerful medium through which societies express collective emotions, cultural values, and political concerns.

Among the various components of music, song lyrics often serve as a vehicle for articulating social realities, ideological struggles, and historical change. In many cases, lyrics convey complex messages

about identity, justice, and human experience through poetic and figurative language.

One of the most influential protest songs of the twentieth century is *Blowin' in the Wind*, written by Bob Dylan in 1963. Shortly after its release, the song became closely associated with the American Civil Rights Movement and gained recognition as a symbolic voice for social justice. Its simple structure, consisting mainly of rhetorical questions, addresses fundamental concerns such as freedom, peace, and human dignity. Despite the apparent simplicity of its language, the song communicates profound reflections on war, inequality, and moral responsibility.

A key factor contributing to the enduring influence of the song is its extensive use of metaphorical imagery. The lyrics employ natural elements, spatial movement, and perceptual experiences to express abstract ideas about justice and social awareness. Through these images, the song transforms complex ethical questions into accessible experiential forms. Within the field of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is no longer regarded merely as a decorative feature of language. Instead, it is understood as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, abstract ideas are structured through systematic mappings from more concrete experiential domains. From this perspective, metaphorical expressions in song lyrics can reveal how individuals conceptualize and communicate social and moral issues.

Although *Blowin' in the Wind* has received extensive attention in cultural studies and music criticism, relatively little research has examined its metaphorical structure from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Most discussions of the song have focused on its historical significance, political message, or cultural impact rather than on the cognitive mechanisms underlying its metaphorical language. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the conceptual metaphors embedded in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* and to explore how these metaphors contribute to the construction of meaning related to social justice and human values. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What conceptual metaphors can be identified in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind*?
2. How do these metaphors structure the representation of social and moral concerns in the song?
3. What cognitive and cultural meanings are conveyed through these metaphorical mappings?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary research connecting cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and music studies. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates how metaphorical structures in song lyrics can reflect broader cultural and historical contexts.

In response to the research gap identified above, the present study focuses on identifying the dominant conceptual metaphors that shape the meaning of Dylan's lyrics and examining how these metaphors function as cognitive tools for interpreting issues such as justice, peace, truth, and social awareness. Additionally, the study explores the historical and cultural implications of these metaphorical constructions within the context of the social movements of the 1960s.

Through systematic metaphor analysis, this research aims to deepen our understanding of how Dylan's songwriting transforms complex social questions into powerful symbolic expressions. At the same time, it contributes to the broader discussion of metaphor in musical discourse and its role in shaping cultural meaning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) represents one of the most influential developments in cognitive linguistics. According to this framework, metaphor is not merely a stylistic device used in literary language but a fundamental structure of human thought. Individuals understand abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete and familiar experiences.

Within this theoretical model, conceptual metaphors consist of systematic correspondences between two domains: a source domain, which is typically concrete and grounded in physical

experience, and a target domain, which is more abstract. These mappings allow individuals to reason about complex ideas through familiar experiential structures.

For example, the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY enables people to understand life experiences in terms of spatial movement. Elements of the journey domain correspond to aspects of human life: travelers represent individuals, roads represent life paths, obstacles represent difficulties, and destinations represent goals. Such conceptual mappings are reflected in everyday expressions such as “follow a path in life,” “reach a goal,” or “face obstacles.”

Since its introduction, CMT has been widely applied in the analysis of different types of discourse, including political rhetoric, media communication, literary texts, and everyday conversation. The theory provides a powerful analytical framework for identifying the cognitive structures underlying metaphorical language.

## 2.2 Metaphor in Song Lyrics

Song lyrics constitute a particularly rich domain for metaphor analysis. Due to their poetic and expressive nature, lyrics frequently employ figurative language to convey emotional and symbolic meanings. Metaphor allows songwriters to express personal experiences and social concerns in ways that resonate with audiences.

Previous research indicates that metaphorical imagery in music often draws upon experiential domains such as nature, movement, spatial orientation, and perception. These domains provide concrete experiences through which abstract emotions and ideas can be conceptualized.

For instance, emotional states are frequently described using spatial metaphors such as rising, falling, or being lost. Similarly, natural phenomena such as storms, rivers, or wind often function as symbolic representations of emotional or social change.

Within musical discourse, metaphor serves not only an aesthetic function but also a communicative one. By using metaphorical language, songwriters can

express complex ideas while maintaining poetic subtlety and interpretive openness.

## 2.3 Protest Songs and Social Metaphor

Protest songs represent an important cultural form that emerged in response to social and political change. Throughout the twentieth century, musicians frequently used songs to address issues such as war, inequality, and civil rights.

Metaphor plays a crucial role in shaping the persuasive power of protest music. Natural imagery—including wind, storms, roads, and rivers—is often used to symbolize social transformation and moral struggle. These metaphors allow artists to express criticism indirectly while still conveying powerful social messages.

Within this tradition, Blowin’ in the Wind occupies a distinctive position. The song combines simple language with universal themes, making it accessible to a wide audience while retaining profound philosophical depth. Its metaphorical imagery invites listeners to reflect on fundamental questions about justice, peace, and human responsibility.

## Research Gap

Previous studies have demonstrated the significance of metaphor in song lyrics as a means of expressing emotions and personal experiences. Research applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory to musical discourse has shown how metaphorical mappings structure the representation of feelings such as sorrow, nostalgia, and longing.

For instance, Vuong Huu Vinh (2025) analyzed conceptual metaphors in Paul McCartney’s song “Yesterday,” revealing how emotional states are conceptualized through metaphors related to separation, darkness, and time. This line of research highlights the potential of song lyrics as valuable data for examining metaphor in language and culture.

However, much of the existing research has focused primarily on metaphors representing individual emotions rather than collective social or political concerns. Relatively few studies have investigated how conceptual metaphors function in

protest songs that address broader issues such as justice, equality, and war.

One notable example is Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind*. Although the song has been widely discussed in historical and cultural studies, its metaphorical structure has rarely been examined systematically within the framework of cognitive linguistics.

Therefore, the present study aims to address this research gap by identifying the conceptual metaphors embedded in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* and analyzing how these metaphors structure the representation of social and moral issues. In doing so, the research seeks to provide new insights into the cognitive and cultural significance of metaphor in protest music.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study investigates the conceptual metaphors embedded in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. The analytical framework is primarily grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), while also incorporating several complementary theoretical perspectives within cognitive linguistics and discourse studies. These include embodied cognition, image schema theory, systematic metaphor identification procedures, cultural dimensions of metaphor, and multimodal metaphor theory.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide an integrated framework for explaining how metaphorical language in song lyrics reflects underlying cognitive structures and contributes to the construction of social meaning.

The theoretical framework of this research consists of six interconnected components.

The first is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which serves as the foundational lens for the study. The second component involves embodied cognition and experiential grounding, explaining how physical experiences shape abstract thought. The third focuses on image schemas as conceptual structures, while the fourth establishes systematic metaphor identification procedures to ensure methodological rigor. The fifth element addresses the cultural variation of metaphor, accounting for diverse

interpretations. Finally, the sixth component explores multimodal metaphor in music discourse. Each component contributes to understanding how metaphorical language in the song functions cognitively and culturally.

#### 3.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory serves as the central theoretical foundation for the present study. Within cognitive linguistics, metaphor is viewed not merely as a rhetorical device but as a fundamental mechanism through which humans structure thought and conceptualize abstract experiences.

According to this framework, conceptual metaphors involve systematic mappings between two conceptual domains: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain typically consists of concrete experiences grounded in physical interaction with the world, whereas the target domain involves abstract concepts that are more difficult to grasp directly.

The general structure of conceptual metaphor can be represented as:

The TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN mapping, exemplified by *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*, allows individuals to conceptualize life experiences through spatial movement. In this framework, the traveler, road, obstacles, and destinations correspond to the person, life events, difficulties, and goals, respectively. Such structural overlaps manifest in everyday idioms like "reaching a goal" or "moving forward," proving that metaphorical language reflects deep-seated cognitive structures rather than isolated phrasing.

In songwriting, these metaphors act as cognitive instruments for articulating complex social concerns through accessible imagery. Abstract notions of freedom or justice are often grounded in concrete, everyday experiences. For instance, in *Blowin' in the Wind*, natural elements like wind and roads serve as source domains to frame moral inquiries about war and human dignity. Consequently, Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers a robust framework for decoding the profound metaphorical architecture within song lyrics.

### 3.2 Embodied Cognition and Experiential Grounding

Here is the rewritten version in English, integrating the lists into a cohesive academic narrative and using UPPERCASE for the conceptual models as requested - The Architecture of Embodied Cognition. A foundational principle in cognitive linguistics is embodied cognition, which emphasizes that human conceptual systems are fundamentally grounded in bodily experience and interaction with the physical environment. According to this perspective, abstract reasoning does not function independently of sensory and motor experiences; instead, conceptual structures emerge from recurring patterns of bodily interaction with the world. This explains why many conceptual metaphors rely on experiential domains related to spatial orientation, movement, and physical forces.

Because humans experience these domains directly through bodily engagement, they serve as ideal source domains for metaphorical reasoning. For instance, experiences of physical movement provide the cognitive basis for metaphors such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY, PROGRESS IS FORWARD MOVEMENT, or PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS. Similarly, sensory experiences related to vision generate metaphors such as UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING and IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS. In song lyrics, references to natural elements evoke strong metaphorical meanings because they are anchored in these shared experiences.

Familiar images like wind, sky, and roads function effectively as vehicles for conveying abstract ideas to a broad audience. The wind metaphor in Blowin' in the Wind illustrates this principle particularly well. As an invisible phenomenon perceived indirectly through movement, sound, or the sensation of air on the skin, wind provides an appropriate source domain for conceptualizing elusive concepts such as truth or moral insight. Ultimately, embodied cognition explains why certain metaphors are so cognitively effective and widely understood across different contexts.

### 3.3 Image Schemas and Conceptual Structuring

Another pivotal concept within this theoretical framework is the notion of image schemas, which are recurring patterns of sensory-motor experience that structure human cognition at a preconceptual level. These schemas arise from repeated bodily interactions with the environment and provide the basic organizational patterns for conceptual thought. Common image schemas—such as PATH, CONTAINER, BALANCE, FORCE, UP-DOWN, and CENTER-PERIPHERY—remain abstract yet grounded in our physical interaction with the world.

Among these, the PATH schema is particularly relevant to the present study as it emerges from the fundamental experience of moving through space. This schema typically integrates a starting point, a trajectory, movement along that path, and an eventual destination. Such a structure underlies the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, where the traveler corresponds to the individual, the path represents life experiences, and the destination symbolizes life goals. In the lyrics of Blowin' in the Wind, references to roads and walking activate this PATH schema, conceptualizing human life and social struggle as a purposeful movement toward justice or freedom. Additionally, the VERTICALITY schema structures metaphors involving spatial orientation, where looking toward the sky relies on an upward orientation to symbolize knowledge, awareness, or transcendence. By identifying these underlying schemas, it becomes possible to uncover the deeper patterns of conceptual organization that shape the song's meaning.

### 3.4 Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

A major methodological challenge in metaphor research is determining whether a particular linguistic expression should be interpreted metaphorically. To address this issue, researchers have developed systematic methods for identifying metaphorical language in discourse. One of the most widely used methods is the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group. This procedure provides a clear

and systematic framework for identifying metaphorically used words in a text.

The procedure consists of four main steps:

- a. Read the entire text to gain a general understanding of its overall meaning.
- b. Determine the lexical units in the text. A lexical unit may be a single word or a multi-word expression that functions as a single semantic unit.
- c. Establish the contextual meaning of each lexical unit as it appears in the specific context of the text.
- d. Determine whether the lexical unit has a more basic meaning in other contexts. The basic meaning is usually more concrete, related to bodily action or physical experience, more precise, and historically older. If the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it, the lexical unit is identified as metaphorically used. The use of a systematic procedure such as MIP increases the reliability and transparency of metaphor analysis. It enables researchers to justify their interpretations of metaphorical expressions and ensures that the analytical process can be replicated by other scholars.

In this study, MIP serves as the methodological basis for identifying metaphorical expressions in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* by Bob Dylan.

### 3.5 Cultural Variation of Conceptual Metaphor

Although many conceptual metaphors are grounded in universal bodily experiences, their specific realizations often vary across cultures. Cultural knowledge influences both the selection of source domains and the interpretation of metaphorical imagery. Some metaphors appear to be nearly universal because they arise from shared human experiences. Others, however, reflect culturally specific symbolic traditions. For example, the dove as a symbol of peace has strong associations within Western cultural and religious traditions. When this image appears in song lyrics, it evokes cultural narratives related to harmony, reconciliation, and spiritual symbolism. Similarly,

wind may symbolize freedom, change, uncertainty, or the spread of ideas depending on the cultural context. In the case of *Blowin' in the Wind*, the metaphor of wind resonates with broader cultural narratives associated with social transformation during the 1960s. The metaphor reflects the historical context of the civil rights movement and the broader atmosphere of political change. Understanding the cultural dimension of metaphor therefore plays an essential role in interpreting the ideological meanings embedded in song lyrics.

### 3.6 Multimodal Metaphor in Music Discourse

Recent developments in metaphor research emphasize that metaphors can be expressed not only through verbal language but also through multiple semiotic modes. This perspective is known as multimodal metaphor theory. In musical discourse, metaphor may operate simultaneously across linguistic and musical modes. The lyrics provide verbal expressions of metaphor, while elements such as melody, rhythm, and performance style may reinforce or extend metaphorical meanings. In *Blowin' in the Wind*, the repetitive structure of the refrain strengthens the thematic emphasis on searching for answers. At the same time, the song's simple melodic structure contributes to its sense of universality and accessibility. Although the present study focuses primarily on metaphorical expressions in the lyrics, acknowledging the multimodal nature of music discourse provides a broader understanding of how metaphor functions within protest songs.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative cognitive linguistic approach to examine conceptual metaphors in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind*. The analysis focuses on identifying metaphorical expressions and uncovering the conceptual structures that organize the song's representation of social and moral concerns. The research integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory with a systematic metaphor identification procedure based on the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). This methodological combination allows for a structured

and transparent analysis of metaphorical language. The study addresses three main research questions:

1. What metaphorical expressions occur in the lyrics of the song?
2. What conceptual metaphors underlie these expressions?
3. How do these metaphors structure the representation of themes such as truth, peace, and social awareness?

#### 4.2 Data

The data for this study consist of the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind*, written by Bob Dylan and released in 1963. The song contains three verses composed primarily of rhetorical questions, each followed by a repeated refrain.

The lyrics provide a rich dataset for metaphor analysis because they include numerous references to natural phenomena, spatial movement, and sensory perception. These elements are particularly relevant for analysis within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory.

### 3. Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis in this study follows the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group. This method provides a systematic approach for identifying metaphorically used lexical units in discourse. The procedure consists of four main steps.

#### Step 1: Reading the Entire Text

First, the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* by Bob Dylan were read several times in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall meaning of the text. This step allowed the researcher to identify the main themes present in the song, including justice, peace, freedom, and moral awareness.

#### Step 2: Identifying Lexical Units

In the second step, the lyrics were segmented into lexical units. A lexical unit may consist of a single word or a multi-word expression functioning as a single semantic unit. Particular attention was given to words associated with movement, natural phenomena, animals, and perception, such as road,

walk, sea, dove, sky, wind, and see, since these lexical items potentially indicate metaphorical usage.

#### Step 3: Determining Contextual and Basic Meanings

Next, the contextual meaning of each lexical unit was determined based on how it is used in the lyrics. After establishing the contextual meaning, the researcher identified the basic meaning of the same lexical unit in other contexts. The basic meaning generally refers to a more concrete, physical, or historically primary sense of the word, often found in dictionary definitions.

#### Step 4: Identifying Metaphorical Use

Finally, the contextual meaning was compared with the basic meaning. If the contextual meaning differed from the basic meaning but could be understood through comparison with it, the lexical unit was identified as being used metaphorically. This comparison allows the researcher to determine whether metaphorical mapping occurs between two conceptual domains. After metaphorical expressions were identified, they were grouped according to their underlying conceptual metaphors. Through this analytical process, the study was able to reveal the conceptual structures that organize the meaning of the song. The analysis ultimately identifies four dominant conceptual metaphors embedded in the lyrics. The first is *TRUTH IS WIND*, which maps natural phenomena onto the concept of truth. The second is *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*, representing existence through the domain of movement. The third is *PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD*, which uses animal imagery to conceptualize peace. The fourth is *IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS*, grounding social awareness in sensory perception. These metaphors serve as the cognitive foundation through which the song expresses reflections on social justice, moral responsibility, and the search for peace. By applying the four step MIP procedure, the study systematically identifies metaphorical expressions in the song lyrics and traces them back to their underlying conceptual metaphors. This methodological approach ensures that metaphor identification is not based solely on intuitive

interpretation but follows a transparent and replicable analytical process. The identified metaphors are further examined in the findings section in order to reveal the cognitive structures that shape the representation of social and moral issues in *Blowin' in the Wind*. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of metaphor in song lyrics as a means of expressing complex emotions and experiences. Scholars such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are understood via concrete experiences. Building on this theoretical framework, a number of studies have applied conceptual metaphor theory to the analysis of musical discourse. For instance, Vuong Huu Vinh in 2025 analyzed conceptual metaphors in the song *Yesterday* by Paul McCartney, demonstrating how emotions such as sorrow and nostalgia are conceptualized through metaphorical mappings related to separation, darkness, and time. Such research highlights that song lyrics provide a rich linguistic and cultural resource for examining how metaphor structures emotional meaning.

Despite these contributions, much of the existing research has primarily focused on metaphors that represent personal emotions and individual psychological experiences in music. Comparatively fewer studies have examined how conceptual metaphors operate in songs addressing broader social, moral, and political issues. In particular, the metaphorical structures embedded in protest songs have not been extensively explored from a systematic cognitive linguistic perspective. One notable example is *Blowin' in the Wind* by Bob Dylan, a song widely recognized as a symbolic voice of social conscience during the American Civil Rights Movement. Although the song has been frequently discussed in cultural and historical studies, its metaphorical structures have rarely been analyzed using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by identifying the conceptual metaphors in the lyrics of the song and examining how these metaphors structure the representation of social and moral issues as well as their cognitive and cultural meanings.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Overview of Conceptual Metaphors in the Song

The metaphorical analysis of the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* by Bob Dylan reveals a coherent conceptual system that structures the song's philosophical reflection on justice, peace, and human responsibility. Drawing upon the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson and applying the Metaphor Identification Procedure developed by the Pragglejaz Group, the study identifies four dominant conceptual metaphor models that organize the meaning of the song. These conceptual metaphors function as cognitive mechanisms that allow listeners to understand abstract socio-political issues through familiar physical experiences. In particular, the lyrics employ metaphors grounded in natural phenomena, movement through space, animal symbolism, and visual perception. Through these mappings, complex moral questions about justice, war, and social responsibility become cognitively accessible.

The analysis identifies the following conceptual metaphors:

1. TRUTH IS WIND
2. LIFE IS A JOURNEY
3. PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD
4. IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS

These metaphors collectively construct a conceptual network that frames the central message of the song. Rather than providing explicit political statements, the lyrics use metaphorical questions to invite listeners to contemplate social injustice and moral responsibility. This indirect rhetorical strategy was particularly significant during the early 1960s in the United States, when debates about civil rights, war, and social equality were becoming increasingly visible in public discourse. The song emerged during the period of the American Civil Rights Movement and the growing international tensions associated with the Cold War. These historical circumstances shaped the cultural significance of the metaphors used in the lyrics, allowing the song to function simultaneously as a poetic reflection and a subtle form of social critique.

**Table 1. Frequency of Conceptual Metaphors in the Song**

| Conceptual Metaphor       | Linguistic Examples                  | Frequency |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| LIFE IS A JOURNEY         | roads, walk down, years, exist, free | 5         |
| TRUTH IS WIND             | answer blowing in wind               | 3         |
| PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD | white dove sailing, sleeping         | 3         |
| IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS    | turn head, not see                   | 3         |
| <b>Total</b>              |                                      | <b>14</b> |

The distribution indicates that LIFE IS A JOURNEY is the most dominant conceptual metaphor in the song. This finding aligns with cognitive linguistic research showing that journey schemas are among the most fundamental conceptual structures humans use to understand social progress and moral development.

## 5.2 TRUTH IS WIND

The most iconic metaphor in the song is TRUTH IS WIND, which forms the philosophical core of the lyrics. Through this metaphor, the abstract concept of truth is conceptualized using the experiential domain of natural phenomena.

### Source–Target Mapping

| Source Domain:     |   | Target Domain:       |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|
| Wind               |   | Truth                |
| invisible force    | → | hidden truth         |
| constant movement  | → | circulation of ideas |
| difficult to grasp | → | elusive answers      |

### Example (1)

“The answer, my friend, is Blowin’ in the Wind.” The first interpretation concerns the metaphorical conceptualization of truth as a natural force. Wind is invisible yet perceptible through its effects, making it an effective source domain for representing intangible knowledge. By describing the answer as “blowing in the wind,” the lyric suggests that truth is already present in the surrounding environment, even if it remains difficult to capture or articulate. The second

interpretation relates to the cognitive dimension of metaphorical reasoning. Humans often understand abstract concepts through sensory experiences derived from interaction with the physical world. Wind is a familiar phenomenon that people experience daily, and its properties such as movement, invisibility, and unpredictability provide a rich conceptual framework for understanding complex moral questions. The third interpretation connects the metaphor to the social climate of the early 1960s in the United States. During the period of the American Civil Rights Movement, many citizens were increasingly aware of racial injustice, yet public consensus on how to address these issues remained uncertain. The metaphor implies that the answers to these moral dilemmas were already circulating within public consciousness, waiting to be acknowledged.

### Example (2)

“The answer is Blowin’ in the Wind.”

The first observation is that repetition reinforces the metaphor’s conceptual significance. By repeating the phrase, the song transforms the metaphor into a symbolic refrain that structures the entire narrative of the lyrics. The second observation is that the metaphor suggests a paradoxical relationship between presence and absence. The wind exists everywhere yet cannot be easily grasped, which parallels the difficulty of articulating clear solutions to complex social problems. The third observation concerns the communicative function of the metaphor. Instead of presenting definitive answers, the lyric encourages listeners to engage in reflection and

dialogue, thereby transforming the song into a participatory form of social discourse.

### 5.3 LIFE IS A JOURNEY

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY structures several rhetorical questions in the lyrics. Within this framework, human existence and social struggle are conceptualized through the experiential domain of physical movement through space.

#### Source - Target Mapping

##### Example (3)

“How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?”

The first interpretation concerns the metaphorical representation of dignity as a destination that can only be reached after traveling along numerous roads. Roads represent life experiences and struggles that individuals must endure before achieving recognition as equal members of society. The second interpretation relates to the historical context of the American civil rights struggle. During the early 1960s, African Americans faced systemic barriers to political participation, education, and economic opportunity. The metaphorical roads therefore symbolize the long and difficult journey toward equality that marginalized communities were forced to undertake. The third interpretation emphasizes the rhetorical power of the question. By asking how many roads must be traveled before someone is recognized as human, the lyric exposes the moral contradiction of a society that claims to value equality while denying it to certain groups.

##### Example (4)

“How many years must a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea?”

The first interpretation conceptualizes time as a form of distance within the journey metaphor. Mountains symbolize long-standing social structures that appear permanent but can eventually be transformed through gradual processes. The second interpretation suggests that social change often occurs slowly, much like geological transformation. The metaphor therefore encourages listeners to recognize the persistence

required to overcome deeply entrenched systems of injustice.

##### Example (5)

“How many years can some people exist before they’re allowed to be free?”

The first observation is that the lyric frames freedom as the endpoint of a metaphorical journey. Individuals must travel through years of struggle before reaching the destination of liberation. The

| Source domain:<br>Journey |   | Target domain:<br>Life |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------|
| roads                     | → | life paths             |
| walking                   | → | life experience        |
| distance                  | → | time                   |
| destination               | → | freedom                |

second observation highlights the moral critique embedded within the metaphor. By emphasizing the duration of this journey, the lyric draws attention to the unjust delay of civil rights for marginalized populations.

### 5.4 PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD

Another significant conceptual metaphor in the song is PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD, represented through the image of the white dove.

#### Source-Target Mapping

| Source domain:<br>Vision |   | Target domain:<br>Knowledge |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| seeing                   | → | understanding               |
| blindness                | → | ignorance                   |
| turning away             | → | avoiding truth              |

##### Example (6)

“How many seas must a white dove sail before she sleeps in the sand?”

The first interpretation concerns the symbolic representation of peace through the image of the dove. In many cultural traditions, the white dove symbolizes harmony and reconciliation. By depicting the dove as traveling across seas, the lyric conceptualizes peace as something that must

journey through difficult and uncertain environments. The second interpretation connects the metaphor to the global political tensions of the early 1960s. During the period of the Cold War, fears of nuclear conflict and ideological confrontation shaped international relations. The traveling dove metaphorically represents humanity's ongoing search for peace in a world divided by political rivalries. The third interpretation focuses on the destination of the journey. The phrase "sleep in the sand" implies a state of rest and stability, suggesting that peace can only emerge after overcoming numerous obstacles.

#### Example (7)

"Before she sleeps in the sand."

The first interpretation is that sleep functions as a metaphor for tranquility and safety. Peace can only rest when the conditions for stability have been established. The second interpretation highlights the emotional dimension of the metaphor. The resting bird evokes a sense of relief and calm, reinforcing the longing for a world free from violence and conflict.

### 5.5 IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS

The final conceptual metaphor identified in the song is IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS, which maps the domain of visual perception onto the domain of knowledge and awareness.

#### Source–Target Mapping

| Source domain: |   | Target domain:   |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| <b>Vision</b>  |   | <b>Knowledge</b> |
| seeing         | → | understanding    |
| blindness      | → | ignorance        |
| turning away   | → | avoiding truth   |

#### Example (8)

"How many times can a man turn his head pretending he just doesn't see?"

The first interpretation is that turning one's head represents the deliberate avoidance of moral responsibility. Vision symbolizes awareness, and refusing to look symbolizes the rejection of knowledge. The second interpretation connects the

metaphor to the social dynamics of racial discrimination during the civil rights era. Many individuals were aware of injustice yet chose to ignore it in order to maintain social stability. The metaphor therefore criticizes the passive complicity of those who refuse to acknowledge inequality. The third interpretation concerns the ethical dimension of perception. To see injustice creates an obligation to respond, and the lyric challenges listeners to confront uncomfortable truths rather than avoid them.

#### Example (9)

"Pretending he just doesn't see."

The first observation is that ignorance is portrayed as an intentional act rather than a passive state. The verb "pretending" indicates that individuals may consciously choose to deny what they know to be true. The second observation suggests that the lyric exposes a broader social phenomenon in which denial functions as a mechanism for preserving existing power structures.

### 6. Discussion

This study aims to examine how conceptual metaphors operate in the lyrics of Blowin' in the Wind by Bob Dylan. Guided by the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the analysis explored the metaphorical structures that shape the song's reflection on social justice, peace, and human awareness. The discussion below addresses the three research questions proposed in this study.

#### 6.1 Conceptual Metaphors in the Song Lyrics

The first research question seeks to identify the specific conceptual metaphors present within the lyrics of the song. The subsequent analysis reveals four dominant conceptual metaphors that systematically organize the semantic structure of the text. These include TRUTH IS WIND, which frames the intangible nature of moral insight, and LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which structures human experience through spatial movement. Additionally, the lyrics utilize PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD to conceptualize the elusive and transitory nature of harmony, while IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS serves to represent a lack of awareness or social

consciousness. Together, these primary mappings demonstrate how the song utilizes concrete, experiential imagery to articulate complex social and existential themes.

These metaphors demonstrate that the song relies heavily on embodied experiences to communicate abstract ideas. Natural phenomena, movement, animals, and sensory perception serve as source domains through which complex moral questions are conceptualized.

The first observation concerns the metaphor TRUTH IS WIND, which forms the central philosophical message of the song. In this mapping, the natural phenomenon of wind serves as the source domain for conceptualizing truth. Wind is invisible yet perceptible through its effects, which makes it an appropriate metaphor for answers that exist but remain difficult to capture. By repeatedly stating that “the answer is Blowin’ in the Wind,” the lyrics suggest that solutions to social problems already exist in the surrounding environment but require awareness and reflection in order to be recognized.

The second observation involves the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which structures several rhetorical questions in the song. The metaphor maps elements of physical travel—such as roads, walking, and distance—onto the abstract domain of human experience. Roads represent life paths, walking represents lived experience, and distance represents time or effort. Through this mapping, the song portrays social progress as a gradual journey toward justice and equality.

The third observation concerns the metaphor PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD, expressed through the image of the white dove. In many cultural traditions, the dove symbolizes peace and reconciliation. By depicting the dove as traveling across seas before finding a place to rest, the song conceptualizes peace as something that must navigate obstacles and uncertainties before it can be achieved.

The fourth observation involves the metaphor IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS, which maps the sensory experience of vision onto the cognitive domain of knowledge. Seeing represents

understanding, while blindness represents ignorance. In the lyrics, turning one’s head and pretending not to see symbolize the deliberate avoidance of moral responsibility.

Together, these metaphors demonstrate that the song’s meaning is structured through systematic conceptual mappings rather than isolated figurative expressions.

## 6.2 The Role of Metaphors in Structuring Social and Moral Issues

The second research question asks: How do these metaphors structure the representation of social and moral issues in the song?

The first point to consider is that the metaphors organize the lyrics into a coherent narrative about social progress. The metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY frames human history as a movement through time toward justice. Roads and years represent stages in this journey, while freedom represents the destination. This conceptualization encourages listeners to view social change as a process that requires perseverance and collective effort.

The second point is that the metaphor TRUTH IS WIND positions truth as something present but intangible. This metaphor suggests that moral answers are not hidden or inaccessible; instead, they exist within the social environment. However, like wind, they are difficult to grasp unless individuals actively seek them. The metaphor therefore emphasizes the importance of awareness and reflection in addressing social problems.

The third point concerns the metaphor IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS, which introduces a critical perspective on human behavior. By equating ignorance with blindness, the song implies that many social injustices persist not because people lack information but because they refuse to acknowledge what they see. Turning one’s head symbolizes the conscious avoidance of uncomfortable truths.

The fourth point relates to the metaphor PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD, which represents peace as a fragile and dynamic condition. The image of the dove traveling across seas suggests that peace must

overcome numerous obstacles before it can be realized. This metaphor reflects the geopolitical tensions of the early 1960s, when the world was shaped by ideological divisions and the threat of armed conflict.

These metaphorical structures collectively frame the song as a reflection on the moral challenges facing society. Rather than offering explicit political arguments, the lyrics use metaphorical questions to encourage listeners to contemplate the nature of justice, responsibility, and social change.

### 6.3 Cognitive and Cultural Meanings of the Metaphorical Mappings

The third research question asks: What cognitive and cultural meanings do these metaphorical mappings convey?

The first cognitive implication concerns the role of embodied experience in shaping abstract thought. According to conceptual metaphor theory, humans understand complex ideas by mapping them onto familiar physical experiences. The metaphors identified in the song reflect this principle by grounding abstract concepts such as truth, peace, and justice in everyday experiences with natural phenomena, movement, animals, and sensory perception.

The second cognitive implication involves the way metaphors organize moral reasoning. The metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY encourages listeners to interpret social progress as a path toward a goal. This conceptualization implies that injustice represents an obstacle or delay within that journey, thereby framing moral action as a form of movement toward a better future.

The third implication concerns the cultural symbolism embedded in the metaphors. The image of the white dove, for example, carries strong cultural associations with peace in Western traditions. Similarly, wind often symbolizes change, movement, and the spread of ideas. These cultural associations enrich the metaphorical meaning of the lyrics and contribute to their emotional resonance.

The fourth implication relates to the historical context of the song. The lyrics were written during a period marked by the American Civil Rights

Movement and the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War. Within this context, the metaphors serve as indirect commentary on contemporary social issues. The song's rhetorical questions highlight the persistence of inequality and the urgency of confronting injustice.

The final implication concerns the universality of the metaphors used in the song. Because the metaphors are grounded in fundamental human experiences, they remain accessible to listeners across different cultures and historical periods. This universality contributes to the enduring influence of the song as a cultural and political statement.

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

### 7.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the conceptual metaphors present in the lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* by Bob Dylan using the analytical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the methodological procedure of the Metaphor Identification Procedure. The analysis identified four major conceptual metaphors that structure the meaning of the song: TRUTH IS WIND, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD, and IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS.

The results demonstrate that metaphor plays a crucial role in shaping the song's reflection on social justice, peace, and moral awareness. Rather than functioning merely as decorative language, metaphors provide the cognitive framework through which listeners understand the song's philosophical message.

The metaphor TRUTH IS WIND conveys the idea that answers to moral questions already exist within society, though they may be difficult to capture. The metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY frames social progress as a continuous process requiring perseverance. The metaphor PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD represents peace as a fragile and dynamic condition that must navigate numerous obstacles. Finally, the metaphor IGNORANCE IS BLINDNESS highlights the ethical responsibility of recognizing and confronting injustice.

Together, these metaphors form an integrated conceptual network that transforms the song into a powerful cultural artifact reflecting the moral concerns of the early 1960s.

### 7.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to research in cognitive linguistics by demonstrating how conceptual metaphor theory can be applied to the analysis of song lyrics. The study confirms that metaphorical language in music operates according to systematic cognitive principles rather than random stylistic choices.

The research also illustrates how metaphorical models interact within a larger conceptual network. Instead of functioning independently, the metaphors identified in the song reinforce one another to create a coherent narrative about truth, awareness, and social progress. This interconnected structure supports the view that conceptual metaphors are part of broader cognitive systems that shape human understanding.

### 7.3 Cultural and Social Implications

The analysis highlights the role of metaphor in expressing social critique during periods of political tension. The song emerged during a time when issues related to civil rights and international conflict dominated public discourse in the United States. Through metaphorical language, the song addresses these issues in a way that invites reflection rather than confrontation.

The enduring popularity of the song demonstrates the capacity of metaphor to transcend specific historical contexts. Because the metaphors used in

the lyrics are grounded in universal human experiences, they remain relevant to audiences across different cultures and historical periods.

### 7.4 Pedagogical Implications

The findings also have implications for language education and literary analysis. Song lyrics provide accessible examples of conceptual metaphor in everyday language, making them valuable resources for teaching cognitive linguistics. Analyzing metaphor in songs can help students understand how abstract ideas are structured through embodied experience.

Furthermore, integrating music into linguistic analysis may increase student engagement and encourage interdisciplinary approaches to language study. Songs that address social themes can also stimulate discussions about cultural values, historical events, and ethical responsibility.

### 7.5 Limitations and Future Research

Although the study provides a detailed analysis of conceptual metaphors in a single song, its scope is limited. Future research could expand the dataset by analyzing additional songs from the folk and protest music tradition. Comparative studies could also examine how conceptual metaphors vary across different languages and cultural contexts.

Another potential direction for future research involves investigating how listeners interpret metaphorical language in music. Empirical studies using surveys or experimental methods could provide insight into how audiences cognitively process the metaphors embedded in song lyrics.

**Table: MIP Coding of Metaphorical Expressions**

| No | Lyric Expression   | Basic Meaning    | Contextual Meaning        | Metaphorical? | Conceptual Metaphor       |
|----|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1  | roads              | physical paths   | life experiences          | Yes           | LIFE IS A JOURNEY         |
| 2  | walk down          | move on foot     | go through life struggles | Yes           | LIFE IS A JOURNEY         |
| 3  | years exist        | time duration    | long period of oppression | Yes           | LIFE IS A JOURNEY         |
| 4  | allowed to be free | physical release | social freedom            | Yes           | LIFE IS A JOURNEY         |
| 5  | white dove         | bird             | symbol of peace           | Yes           | PEACE IS A TRAVELING BIRD |

|    |                   |                      |                                  |     |                              |
|----|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----|------------------------------|
| 6  | dove sail<br>seas | bird traveling       | peace searching<br>for stability | Yes | PEACE IS A TRAVELING<br>BIRD |
| 7  | sleep in<br>sand  | resting              | peace achieved                   | Yes | PEACE IS A TRAVELING<br>BIRD |
| 8  | answer<br>blowing | wind<br>movement     | truth circulating                | Yes | TRUTH IS WIND                |
| 9  | wind              | moving air           | invisible truth                  | Yes | TRUTH IS WIND                |
| 10 | turn his<br>head  | physical<br>movement | ignore injustice                 | Yes | IGNORANCE IS<br>BLINDNESS    |
| 11 | doesn't see       | lack of sight        | lack of awareness                | Yes | IGNORANCE IS<br>BLINDNESS    |

## 8. References

- George Lakoff, G., & Mark Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed., pp. 202–251). Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of Chicago Press.
- Zoltán Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2015). *Where metaphors come from: Reconsidering context in metaphor*. Oxford University Press.
- Jonathan Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2011). *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2014). *Analysing political speeches: Rhetoric, discourse and metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ortony, A. (Ed.). (1993). *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, L., & Maslen, R. (2010). *Metaphor analysis: Research practice in applied linguistics*. Equinox.
- Semino, E. (2008). *Metaphor in discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
- Semino, E., & Demjén, Z. (2017). *The Routledge handbook of metaphor and language*. Routledge.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, R. W. (2017). *Metaphor wars: Conceptual metaphors in human life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Steen, G. J. (2010). *A method for linguistic metaphor identification*. John Benjamins.
- Pragglejaz Group. (2007). MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 22(1), 1–39.
- Deignan, A. (2005). *Metaphor and corpus linguistics*. John Benjamins.
- Goatly, A. (1997). *The language of metaphors*. Routledge.
- Forceville, C., & Urios-Aparisi, E. (2009). *Multimodal metaphor*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Littlemore, J., & Low, G. (2006). *Figurative thinking and foreign language learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, M. (1996). *The literary mind*. Oxford University Press.

- Barcelona, A. (2000). *Metaphor and metonymy at the crossroads*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Musolff, A. (2004). *Metaphor and political discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Musolff, A. (2016). *Political metaphor analysis*. Bloomsbury.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2018). *Fire metaphors: Discourses of awe and authority*. Bloomsbury.
- Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't think of an elephant!*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Koller, V. (2004). *Metaphor and gender in business media discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gibbs, R. W., & Steen, G. J. (1999). *Metaphor in cognitive linguistics*. John Benjamins.

#### **Studies on metaphor in music and song lyrics**

- Tagg, P. (2012). *Music's meanings: A modern musicology for non-musos*. Mass Media Scholars Press.
- Frith, S. (1996). *Performing rites: On the value of popular music*. Harvard University Press.
- Moore, A. (2012). *Song means: Analysing and interpreting recorded popular song*. Ashgate.
- Gracyk, T. (2001). *Rhythm and noise: An aesthetics of rock*. Duke University Press.
- Perone, J. E. (2001). *Songs of the Vietnam conflict*. Greenwood Press.
- Eyerman, R., & Jamison, A. (1998). *Music and social movements*. Cambridge University Press.
- Street, J. (2012). *Music and politics*. Polity Press.

#### **Studies on the songs of Bob Dylan**

- Gray, M. (2006). *The Bob Dylan encyclopedia*. Continuum.
- Marqusee, M. (2003). *Chimes of freedom: The politics of Bob Dylan's art*. New Press.
- Williams, R. (2014). *Bob Dylan: The man in me*. Pegasus Books.
- Wilentz, S. (2010). *Bob Dylan in America*. Doubleday.

### **9. Author Declaration**

#### **Acknowledgement of Originality**

The authors hereby declare that the research presented in this manuscript, titled "Conceptual Metaphors in the Song Lyrics of *Blowin' in the Wind* by Bob Dylan (1963)", is entirely their own original work. It has not been previously published, in whole or in part, in any peer-reviewed journal or edited volume, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources of information, data, and literature utilized in this study have been appropriately cited and referenced in accordance with standard academic conventions.

#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could inappropriately influence, bias, or compromise the integrity, findings, and conclusions of this research. No external funding or commercial sponsorships were received for the execution of this study.