Language as a peace or war vehicle. Ambivalent metaphorical expressions in the Colombian context[1]

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LANGUAGE AS A PEACE OR WAR VEHICLE. AMBIVALENT METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT: This study aimed at providing evidence for the Lakoff and Johnson postulates (1980) regarding the fact that metaphors are part of our conceptual system and, as a result, of our daily life; as well as at bringing evidence about their ambivalence through the analysis of some metaphors used in Colombia and in some Latin-American contexts to refer peace by using warlike expressions. A textual corpus was compiled based on the Colombian newspapers *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* (2018-2020) and a software component was developed to extract possible ambivalent metaphorical expressions from those newspapers. The results showed a relationship between the human conceptual system and the experience of armed conflict when speaking about peacebuilding using metaphorical expressions. Thus, the language used in the Colombian culture is permeated by ambivalent metaphorical expressions referring to warlike language and violence when speaking about peace.

KEYWORDS: peacebuilding; armed conflict; ambivalence; metaphorical expressions; conceptual metaphor.

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. Conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions. 3. Lexical ambivalence. 4. Language, violence and peacebuilding. 5. Methodology. 6. Analysis and results. 7. Conclusions. 8. References.

EL LENGUAJE COMO VEHÍCULO DE PAZ O DE GUERRA. EXPRESIONES METAFÓRICAS AMBIVALENTES EN EL CONTEXTO COLOMBIANO

RESUMEN: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo proporcionar evidencia de los postulados de Lakoff y Johnson (1980) respecto al hecho de que las metáforas forman parte de nuestro sistema conceptual y, por ende, de nuestra vida cotidiana. Asimismo, se buscó aportar evidencia sobre su ambivalencia a través del análisis de algunas metáforas utilizadas en Colombia y en ciertos contextos latinoamericanos para referirse a la paz utilizando expresiones bélicas. Se compiló un corpus textual basado en los periódicos colombianos *El Tiempo* y *El Espectador* (2018-2020), y se desarrolló un componente de software para extraer posibles expresiones metafóricas ambivalentes de dichos periódicos. Los resultados mostraron una relación entre el sistema conceptual humano y la experiencia del conflicto armado al hablar sobre la construcción de la paz utilizando expresiones metafóricas. Así, el lenguaje empleado en la cultura colombiana está permeado por expresiones metafóricas ambivalentes que hacen referencia a términos bélicos y de violencia al hablar sobre la paz.

PALABRAS CLAVE: construcción de paz; conflicto armado; ambivalencia; expresiones metafóricas; metáfora conceptual.

SUMARIO: 1. Introducción. 2. Metáforas conceptuales y expresiones metafóricas. 3. Ambivalencia léxica. 4. Lenguaje, violencia y construcción de paz. 5. Metodología. 6. Análisis y resultados. 7. Conclusiones. 8. Referencias.

LE LANGAGE COMME VÉHICULE DE PAIX OU DE GUERRE. EXPRESSIONS MÉTAPHORIQUES AMBIVALENTES DANS LE CONTEXTE COLOMBIEN

RÉSUMÉ : Cette étude visait à apporter des preuves aux postulats de Lakoff et Johnson (1980) selon lesquels les métaphores font partie de notre système conceptuel et, par conséquent, de notre vie quotidienne ; ainsi qu'à démontrer leur ambivalence à travers l'analyse de certaines métaphores utilisées en Colombie et dans certains contextes latino-américains pour désigner la paix en recourant à des expressions guerrières. Un corpus textuel a été constitué à partir des journaux colombiens *El Tiempo* et *El Espectador* (2018-2020), et un composant logiciel a été développé pour extraire des expressions métaphoriques potentiellement ambivalentes de ces journaux. Les résultats ont montré une relation entre le système conceptuel humain et l'expérience du conflit armé lorsque l'on parle de consolidation de la paix en utilisant des expressions métaphoriques. Ainsi, le langage utilisé dans la culture colombienne est imprégné d'expressions métaphoriques ambivalentes faisant référence à un langage guerrier et à la violence lorsqu'il s'agit de parler de paix.

MOTS-CLÉS : Consolidation de la paix, conflit armé, ambivalence, expressions métaphoriques, métaphore conceptuelle.

SOMMAIRE: 1. Introduction. 2. Métaphores conceptuelles et expressions métaphoriques 3. L'ambivalence lexicale 4. Le langage, la violence et la construction de la paix 5. Méthodologie 6. Analyse et résultats 7. Conclusions 8. Références.

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1. Introduction

Colombia has suffered the effects of an armed conflict for more than five decades, in the development of which a wide variety of actors, both legal and illegal, have been involved and have found in violence the means to transform the context or defend their causes. As a result, there are 9,379,858[2] victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, with drug trafficking, indiscriminate violence, and human rights violations, among other factors affecting the daily lives of its inhabitants in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres.

In response to this situation, different governmental actors have carried out initiatives to achieve peacebuilding and reconciliation. One of these peacebuilding initiatives was the signing of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP[3] at the end of 2016, based on this agreement, different national and international bodies have promoted strategies to change the culture of war for a culture of peace.

Language and communication have taken on great importance in relation to the aforementioned aims, considering that language, as a means of communication, allows relationships to be built and different perceptions of reality to be expressed. In this sense, this study also constituted a peacebuilding initiative from the word, allowing the experiences and thoughts of a given culture to be named and externalized, and thus to be a vehicle for violence or peace (Durango *et al.*, 2022), depending on its use.

From the perspective of language, different studies have been carried out in the Colombian context on the conceptual metaphor related to the armed conflict. Estrada (2000) presents a political reflection on the language of war in Colombian politics, as well as the metaphor and its effects on the understanding of the Colombian conflict. The author indicates that the war has led to the spontaneous use of expressions, including metaphors, which lead to collective behavior, create different perceptions of political life, and have an impact on the construction of individual and collective imaginations. For his part, Salcedo (2009) focuses on metaphors in the journalistic discourse as a tool for understanding the world and the Colombian armed context. The author suggests that metaphor refers to a conceptual world that allows for the understanding of the culture and characteristics of a community that shares the same experience and that, through language, can constitute prototypical frames of reference.

Olave (2012) conducted an interdisciplinary study on the argumentative dimension of conceptual metaphor, based on Fauconnier and Turner's Theory of Conceptual Integration (1994, 1996, 1998, 2002) and Toulmin's argumentative model (2007 [1958]). One of the pieces of evidence found was the legitimization of the warlike nature of the conflict by the actors who use metaphorical resources. Finally, (Hernández *et al.*, 2019), based on discourse analysis, investigated the metaphor of the invasion based on the social imaginaries of ex-guerrillas in relation to the Colombian post-conflict. It was concluded that some metaphors may generate a sense of war; however, there are others that would help to build peace scenarios.

In addition to these studies and with the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic, Solís (2020) analyzes the use of war metaphors and metonymies in the political discourse of the Peruvian president during the pandemic. Her research, grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, reveals how structural war metaphors served to reframe the public health crisis as a militarized conflict. These metaphors, while effective in mobilizing collective action, also obscured the real human and economic costs of the pandemic. Solís argues that this rhetorical strategy, initially persuasive, eventually lost its efficacy as the pandemic progressed. Her findings emphasize how metaphorical language can shape public perception and policy response, a phenomenon that resonates with the Colombian context where similar metaphors are used to discuss peace and conflict.

These findings highlight that metaphorical language serves as a fundamental framework in public discourse rather than a simple stylistic device. (Lovón *et al.*, 2021) show how the use of war metaphors in Peruvian and global media during the COVID-19 pandemic cast the virus as an enemy, hospitals as battlegrounds, and citizens and healthcare workers as soldiers. Their mixed-methods analysis concluded that while these metaphors effectively mobilized collective behavior, they also risked fueling stigmatization and emotional fatigue. In the end, the authors argue that these discursive practices reflect deeper cognitive models of crisis and response, and they call for a more reflective and critical approach to the use of militarized language in public communication.

In the previous studies, a general interest in the analysis of metaphor in political discourses concerning the Colombian armed conflict and its implications for social imaginaries is evident; however, efforts have not

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[2] Statistics from the Victims Unit, updated to 31 October 2022, available at https://cifras.unidadvictimas.gov.co/Cifras/#!/infografia.
[3] Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army).

been directed towards the identification and analysis of metaphors that contain a warlike character in the context of the peace process and that, therefore, represent an ambiguity, given that warlike language is used to talk about peacebuilding. To speak of peace in the Colombian context, sometimes expressions with violent overtones are used[4], due to the collective war imaginary and the use of a polarized political speech in which the other is identified as the competition to be defeated, e.g.,

(1) "arm yourself with courage" (armarse de valor)
(2) "fight for peace" (pelear por la paz).

The above allows for the identification of a need to promote strategies for the construction of a lexicon of a culture of peace and reconciliation from the use and interpretation of language. Thus, the aim of this study was to provide evidence of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) postulates that metaphors are part of our conceptual system and, therefore, of our everyday life; as well as, to provide evidence that such metaphorical language is ambivalent because it refers to peace and reconciliation using warlike expressions. The aim is to generate social awareness that will lead to a transformation in the use of language.

This article is structured as follows. First, the conceptual aspects related to conceptual metaphors, metaphorical expressions, lexical ambivalence, as well as language, violence, and peacebuilding are presented; second, the methodology implemented for the conformation of the corpus of ambivalent metaphorical expressions analyzed is announced; third, the analysis carried out and the results obtained are exposed; last, conclusions and recommendations are shown.

2. Conceptual Metaphors and Metaphorical Expressions

Language and experience are two ideas that are strongly linked and which give life to what we know as metaphor. Although society is used to understanding the concept from its function as a poetic resource, other authors, such as Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff, 1993) have established cognitive approaches to metaphor, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

According to this theory, conceptual metaphor is a phenomenon of thought in which one domain is represented in terms of another thanks to the knowledge one has of a specific conceptual field. According to Lakoff (1993), metaphor serves as a mechanism for understanding abstract concepts and for abstract reasoning. Conceptual metaphors motivate a set of systematic mappings or ontological correspondences between the domains involved that allow inferences to be made from projections of knowledge or epistemic correspondences (Soriano, 2012). These mappings between domains, according to contemporary theories constitute metaphors, which are at the level of thought and at a primary level; additionally, metaphorical expressions correspond to the linguistic expressions that emerge from these mappings and are at a secondary level (Lakoff, 1993).

One of the characteristics of systematic cross-domain mappings is their partiality; that is, not all the features that emerge in the source domain are mapped onto the target domain. This partiality is explained by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) by means of the principle of invariance. According to this principle, metaphorical mappings conserve the imago-schematic structure of the source domain, in coherence with the structure and the activated characteristics in the target domain. Since this principle does not explain which features are projected between domains, Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) proposes that only prototypical properties of the source domain are projected (Property Selection Processes) and Kövecses (2002) indicates that the source domain projects conceptual information that is part of its main focus of meaning.

Conceptual metaphors can be classified according to their motivation (Grady, 1999), complexity (Grady, Taub and Morgan, 1996), conventionality (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980 and Lakoff and Turner, 1989), function (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), and generality (Lakoff and Turner, 1989), among others. For the purposes of this paper, the classification proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) will be taken into account. They point out that, according to their function, metaphors can be orientational, ontological or structural.

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4 The examples of expressions with violent overtones are taken from the Colombian context; however, some of them are not exclusive from Colombia and can be found in other speaking Spanish countries.

Orientational metaphors relate to spatial patterns, such as up-down, inside-outside, back and forth, among others, which can be established through people's physical experiences with their environment. An example of this type of conceptual metaphor is

(3)　"HAPPY IS UP"[5]

which can be materialized with metaphorical expressions such as

(4)　"talking to you raised my spirits and this new haircut boosted my self-esteem"

Ontological metaphors highlight the experience of human beings with objects, in such a way that ideas, emotions, and events, among others, are considered entities. In the conceptual ontological metaphor,

(5)　"THE MIND IS A MACHINE"

metaphorical expressions such as

(6)　"today, I am not processing information well"
(7)　"my memory has been erased"

can be mentioned. Within this second type of metaphor, personification is also considered, in which non-human entities are given human characteristics, e.g.,

(8)　"INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY".

This metaphor gives rise to expressions such as

(9)　"inflation must be fought"
(10)　"inflation is our worst enemy".

Finally, structural metaphors allow for the organization of the knowledge of the target domain taking into account the broad conceptual structure provided by the source domain.

(11)　"A DISCUSSION IS A WAR"

is an example of this type of metaphor, as evidenced by expressions like

(12)　"They have attacked my arguments"
(13)　"I have to defend my point of view".

Another important aspect to note in the CMT framework is the embodied nature of some conceptual metaphors, as the mappings between domains are grounded in embodied everyday knowledge and experiences (Lakoff, 1993). Lakoff and Johnson state that 'metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 39).

In sum, metaphor is recognized as a cognitive resource that underlies different metaphorical expressions that facilitate communication and are present in everyday discourse. In the same way, the experiential relationship of subjects with their environment is highlighted to give meaning to abstract concepts by means of concrete concepts. Conceptual metaphors and their manifestations in language are a reflection of the social, cultural, economic, emotional, and other conditions that surround human beings.

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[5]　Conceptual metaphors are represented with small capital letters.

3. Lexical Ambivalence

Ambivalence is seen as the existence of two opposing interpretations in relation to the same object. According to Bauman (2005) ambivalence can be considered as a disorder in the specificity of language, since there is a failure of the denotative function that language should perform. This could be because language has shortcomings that hinder terminological precision or due to incorrect linguistic use.

Lüscher (2011) states that, traditionally and as a concept of everyday use, ambivalence is understood as the coexistence of emotions or attitudes that are contrary with respect to a situation or an entity; the author also suggests that ambivalence is not only restricted to emotional and attitudinal contradictions, but also migrates to the cognitive and volitional level, i.e. contradictions in situations that require decision-making, such as becoming independent at work, getting married, starting a family, among others. In the case of the present work, the contradictions that give rise to ambivalence emerge at the level of language and people's actions, mediated by feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and intentions that are constantly contrasted. Similarly, Lüscher (2011) points out that social relations and structures as well as interests are also contrasted, leading to the emergence of ambivalence. More systematically, the author suggests:

> First, there is the dynamic search for the significance or meaning of persons, relationships, or objects. Second, the notion of ambivalence draws to our attention that we can be confronted with a specific kind of conflict. This conflict is between options, which are reduced (or which we reduce) to juxtapositions that we attribute to contradictory forces or conceive of as polarizations, often expressed as fundamental differences. These forces can be of different strength and thus are not balanced (Lüscher, 2011: 195).

In the case of this work, ambivalence is unconsciously present in the metaphorical war language used by people to refer to peacebuilding processes. This is possibly due to the influence that the armed conflict has had on the Colombian people.

4. Language, Violence, and Peacebuilding

Violence can be considered, according to Galtung (1969), as the distance between what could be and what is; that is, between the ideal state of peace and the current state of peace. For the author, there are three types of violence: direct, structural, and cultural.

For the purpose of this paper, cultural violence is a concept related to language, conflict, and peacebuilding processes. The author defines it as unalterable and persistent over time: it is related to direct and indirect violence since these can be legitimized through any aspect of a culture. Through cultural violence, both the act of structural violence and the act of direct violence find their foundation and become acceptable or reasonable (Galtung, 2016).

In addition, Galtung (2003) states that the origin of any conflict lies in a contradiction, and may have to do with attitudes conditioned by the culture and behaviors determined by patterns that are acquired in situations of conflict. In this sense, violence that manifests itself through language refers to all the symbolism that is present in the environment, which has been endowed with meaning by convention, and which, in turn, can legitimize other types of violence or move towards them with ease.

The relationship between cultural violence and language is evident, which, in addition to transmitting information, allows for other actions to be carried out, such as comforting, encouraging, or persuading; however, language also serves to intimidate, threaten, and denigrate. It could be argued that language is a potent entity, as it enables individuals to bring about various outcomes, including those of a violent nature (Sanfélix, 2006). In short, language can serve as both a direct and indirect vehicle for violence, a phenomenon that may become normalized in contexts affected by conflict.

This study is based on the concept of imperfect peace, which, as an analytical category, includes the mechanisms that favor a peaceful solution to conflicts, recognizing the practices that contribute to greater peacebuilding in the face of future conflicts. Therefore, peace is conceived, even in the midst of the conflicts that are inherent to human beings, as an achievable and unfinished process, in constant change and construction, that can be influenced by many factors of everyday life (Muñoz, 2003).

In addition, the concept of everyday peace proposed by Mac Ginty (2014) was found essential. The author highlights the individual and collective practices carried out by people in the midst of societies fragmented by conflicts in coping with their daily lives in the face of direct or indirect violence and minimizing or avoiding the consequences that contribute to larger processes of peacebuilding. In this sense, the gradual transformation of language can contribute to the resolution of conflicts, the construction of peaceful environments, and the modification of the established war imagination.

5. Methodology

The methodological route proposed in this work was developed in different phases. First, in the acquisition phase, 145 articles (news appearing in a certain section of a newspaper) from the electronic copies of the Colombian national newspapers *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*, both of which have nationwide circulation, published between the years 2018 and 2020, were taken as a working basis. In the newspaper *El Tiempo*, the sections Justice (Conflict and Drug Trafficking and Special Jurisdiction for Peace) and Politics (Peace Process) were analysed. Regarding *El Espectador*, the sections Peace on the ground, News (peace and memory), and Colombia 2020 were analysed. The acquisition phase consisted of the exploration and automatic downloading of links to websites containing the texts under analysis that made up the textual corpus. It is important to note that the metaphorical expressions identified in these articles were produced by various actors of the armed conflict, such as guerrilla members, displaced people, newspaper columnists, and politicians, thus reflecting the diversity of voices and perspectives within the Colombian sociopolitical context.

The theoretical foundations of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 1994), rooted in cognitive linguistics, were originally designed to address questions about metaphor as a mechanism of human cognition. These theoretical models, however, serve as a basis for corpus linguistics, which adopts and operationalizes them in the analysis of real-world language use. By integrating these frameworks with the methodological rigor of corpus linguistics, it becomes possible to empirically ground metaphor research through the construction and analysis of authentic language corpora. In this way, corpus linguistics brings theory into applied contexts, offering observable evidence of how metaphorical expressions function in everyday discourse.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical or literary tool, but a mechanism of human cognition, shaping the way we conceptualize abstract domains through more concrete and embodied experiences. In their view, metaphors illustrate how our everyday reasoning, actions and thoughts are structured metaphorically. Consequently, metaphorical language present in news often reproduces these conceptual mappings that originate in spontaneous and embodied experience. The above aligns with the cognitive linguistics perspective that views language use in real contexts, including media discourse, as a window into conceptualization processes.

The second stage, named preprocessing phase, was developed to facilitate the detection of related expressions with violence and peace in the aforementioned articles, a software component in the Python programming language was developed, using the packages Pandas, Tkinter, and BeautifulSoup. These packages are related to data analytics, visualization, data natural language processing, and textual content extraction based on standards-based tagging such as HTML, XML, and JSON.

Three lists were used for the computational process: a list of some metaphorical expressions, e.g.,

(14) "to be on the lookout" (estar en la mira),
(15) "to stick a dagger" (clavar un puñal),
(16) "set piece battle" (armar una batalla campal);

a list of peace-related expressions, e.g.,

(17) "peace process" (proceso de paz),
(18) "peaceful reconciliation pact" (pacto pacífico de reconciliación),
(19) "imperfect peace" (paz imperfecta);

and a list of lexical units, e.g.,

(20) *stalking*,
(21) *extortion*,
(22) *negotiation*,

The inclusion criteria for the expressions and lexical units were based on connotations of war and warlike content, as well as connotations related to peace and reconciliation (Estrada, 2004; Estrada, 2010; Olave, 2012). With regard to metaphorical expressions, the study *Léxico de la Cultura de Paz*[6] promoted by the Peace Council of the Republic of Argentina was taken as a point of reference.

Third, in the processing and classification phase, after processing the lists, 491 records were identified. A software tool developed for this purpose served as a preliminary aid for the identification of possible metaphorical expressions. Subsequently, manual filtering was carried out, and duplicate contexts, titles, and references to other articles were eliminated, resulting in 369 records. From this set, a manual review was conducted to identify ambivalent expressions, without restricting them initially to metaphorical forms, resulting in the selection of 52 records with potential ambivalent expressions. After this, based on three (3) expert judgments, metaphorical expressions were selected according to the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Following this selection, the underlying conceptual metaphors of these expressions were also identified using the same theoretical framework. Finally, a corpus of analysis was formed with 23 ambivalent metaphorical linguistic expressions and their contexts. The following are examples of ambivalent metaphorical linguistic expressions:[7]

(23) "Fears of *uprooting the seeds of peace* are fulfilled by what appears to be the announcement of the extermination of those promoting the implementation of the peace agreement between the national government and the FARC guerrillas, as evidenced by the murders".[8]

(24) "The FARC leader, Rodrigo Londoño, known in his time as a fighter as "Timochenko," believes that a sector of economic power in Colombia is *blocking the peace* to which he led the guerrillas, now a political party with the same acronym".[9]

(25) "Villagers *fight to reconstruct the memory of the conflict*".[10]

(26) "Crisis in the FARC process: Will Colombia *let peace slip away*? The peace process between the Colombian state and the FARC is faltering just when it is at its most decisive stage: the implementation of the agreements".[11]

(27) "Oleander Granda, ex-combatant and now community leader of San Agustín de Leones, said that the murder of the president of the Junta de Acción Comunal of this sector, Bernardo de Jesús Chancí, on November 26, meant that his community *wanted to bury the illusions of peace* of the people".[12]

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[6] https://diccionariodelapaz.blogspot.com/p/lexico-cultura-de-paz.html

[7] For the purpose of this paper the contexts were translated into English by the authors; however, the original contexts were in Spanish.

[8] Context in Spanish: 'Los temores de *arrancar la semilla de la paz* se cumplen por cuenta de lo que parece ser el anuncio del exterminio de quienes promueven la implementación del Acuerdo de Paz suscrito entre el Gobierno nacional y las guerrillas de las Farc, y que se evidencian en los asesinatos.'

[9] Context in Spanish: 'El líder de las FARC, Rodrigo Londoño, conocido en su época de combatiente como "Timochenko", considera que un sector del poder económico en Colombia *bloquea la paz* a la que él condujo a la guerrilla, ahora un partido político con las mismas siglas'.

[10] Context in Spanish: 'Los pobladores *luchan por reconstruir la memoria del conflicto*'.

[11] Context in Spanish: 'Crisis en el proceso con Farc: ¿Dejará Colombia que se le *escape la paz*? El proceso de paz entre el Estado colombiano y las Farc tambalea justo cuando está en su etapa más decisiva: la de la implementación de los acuerdos'.

[12] Context in Spanish: 'Por su parte, Oleander Granda, excombatiente y ahora líder comunitario de la vereda San Agustín de Leones, dijo que el asesinato del presidente de la Junta de Acción Comunal de este sector, Bernardo de Jesús Chancí, el pasado 26 de noviembre, significó para su comunidad *querer enterrar las ilusiones de paz de su pueblo*.'
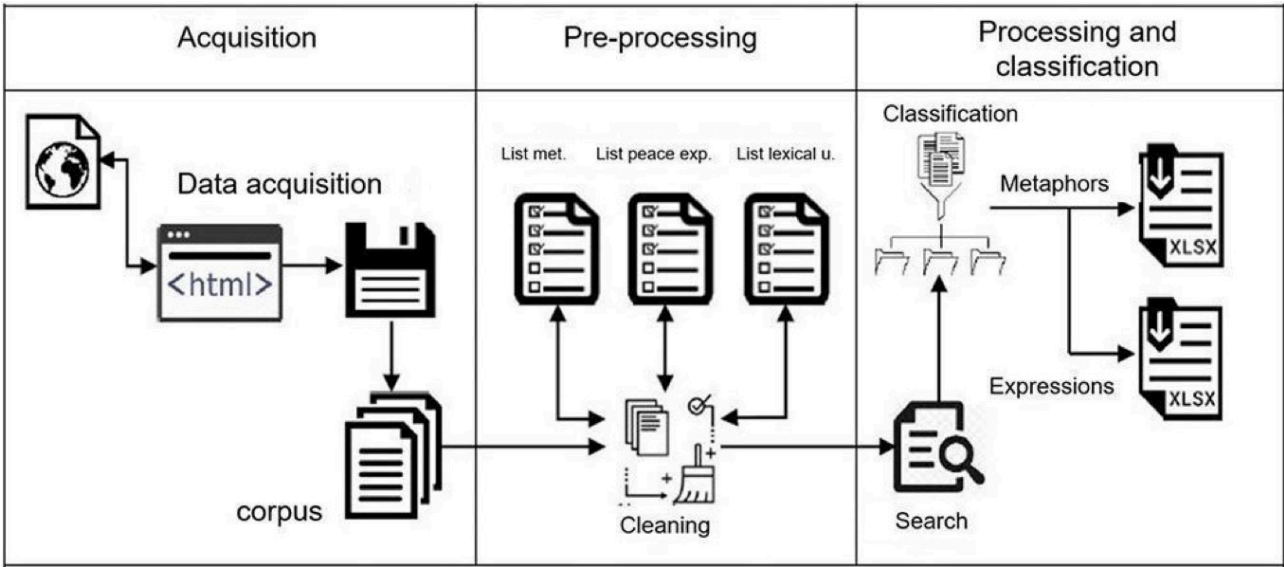
Figure 1: Phases of the Process
Source: Figure elaborated by the engineer Jairo Iván Vélez Bedoya (Caldas University) and translated by the authors.

The result of this process allowed for the extraction of the expressions and their respective contexts. The development of this software component in the Python programming language is illustrated as follows:
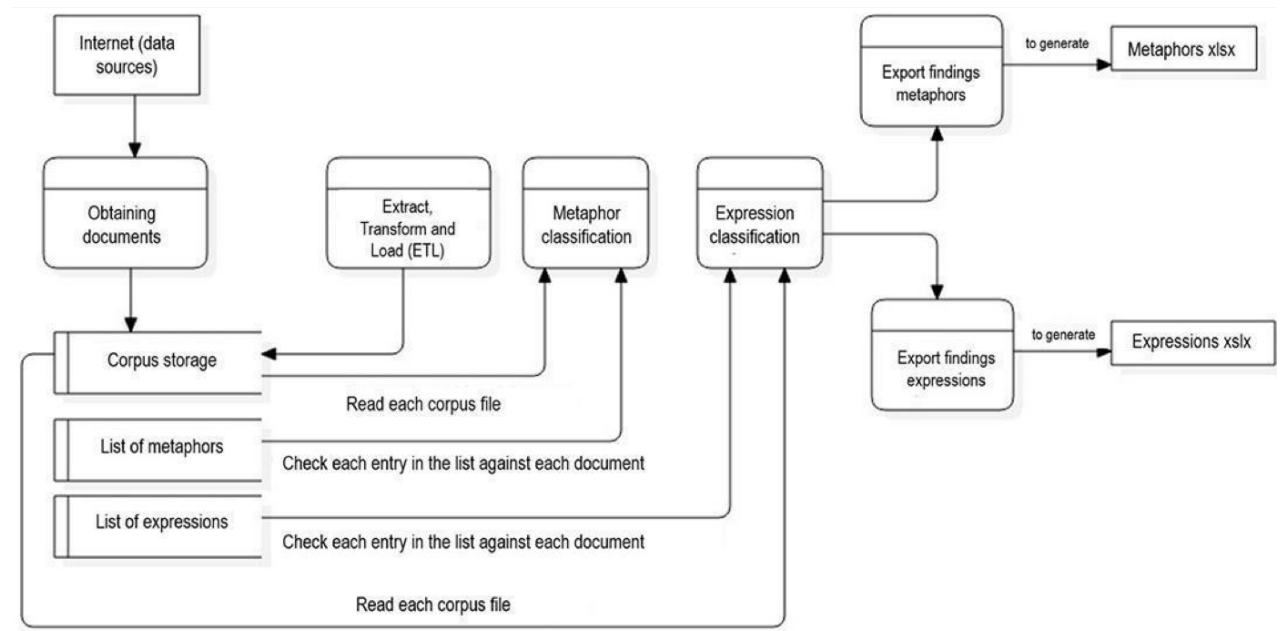

Figure 2: Data Flow for Text Extraction, Cleaning and Classification
Source: Figure elaborated by the engineer Jairo Iván Vélez Bedoya (Caldas University) and translated by the authors.

The metaphorical expressions identified in this study are a reflection of the everyday life and lived experiences of the Colombian people. These expressions, embedded in the nation's oral traditions and considered in the written texts (newspapers), reveal how individuals make sense of complex realities through language. These metaphors offer insight into how the ongoing impact of armed conflict, peace processes, and efforts at reconciliation shapes collective narratives and imaginaries. In this way, metaphors selected in this study become a product of Colombia's reality.

6. Analysis and Results

For the purpose of data analysis, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff, 1993) was taken into consideration. The metaphorical linguistic expressions underlie conceptual metaphors where two domains are elicited: on the one hand, the source domain is activated thanks to the expression of the metaphorical sentence that represents a concrete concept, i.e., the concept that is part of the experiences of the subject with the world; on the other hand, the target domain is activated by the abstract expression of the sentence. Some of the characteristics of the source domain are mapped onto the target domain (ontological correspondences) that allow inferences to be made (epistemic correspondences) to achieve the comprehension of the linguistic metaphorical expression (Soriano, 2012). The above process is represented in the following figure.
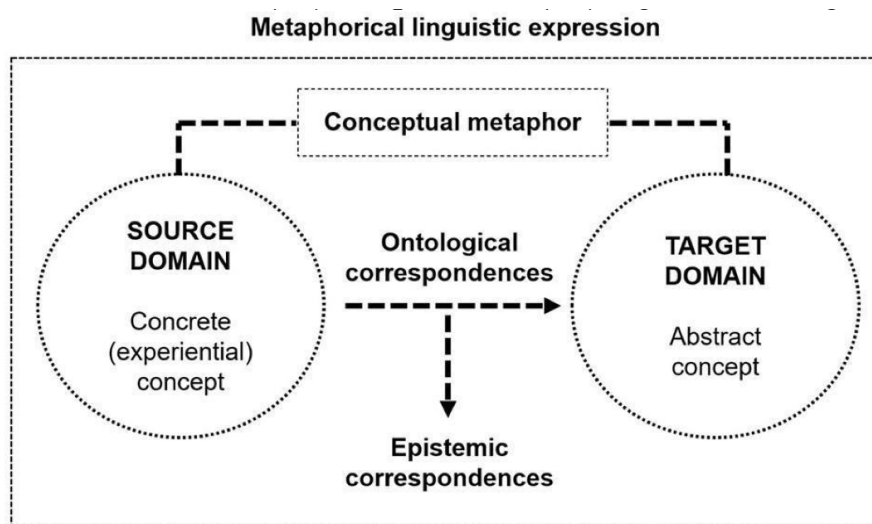

Figure 3: Source Domain (SD) - Target Domain (TD) - Epistemic Correspondences
Source: authors' own elaboration based on CMT.

This section explains the analysis performed, which is illustrated with five metaphorical expressions selected from the 23 belonging to the corpus of analysis.

One of the metaphorical expressions that was analysed under the elements of the schematic presented earlier was: *to want to bury people's illusions of peace.*

> Oleander Granda, ex-combatant and now community leader of San Agustín de Leones, said that the murder of the president of the Junta de Acción Comunal of this sector, Bernardo de Jesús Chancí, on November 26, meant that his community *wanted to bury the illusions of peace* of the people. (Hatrichiz, 2019).

In the metaphorical expression of interest, the illusions of peace or the hopes and desires to achieve peace are personified in this context, signifying that these hopes and desires to achieve peace die as a result of violence. An ontological metaphor is evident because 'illusions of peace' acquire human characteristics: birth, growth, reproduction, and death. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that personification is not a single, general process, since each personification is distinct and determined by the aspects of people that are chosen. Accordingly, one could think of a specific personification process and a more concrete conceptual metaphor: ILLUSION OF PEACE IS A DECEASED. In this way, the illusion of peace is conceived as a human being who has passed away and whose presence on earth cannot be tangibly seen. Therefore, its departure is seen as an invaluable and definitive loss for society.
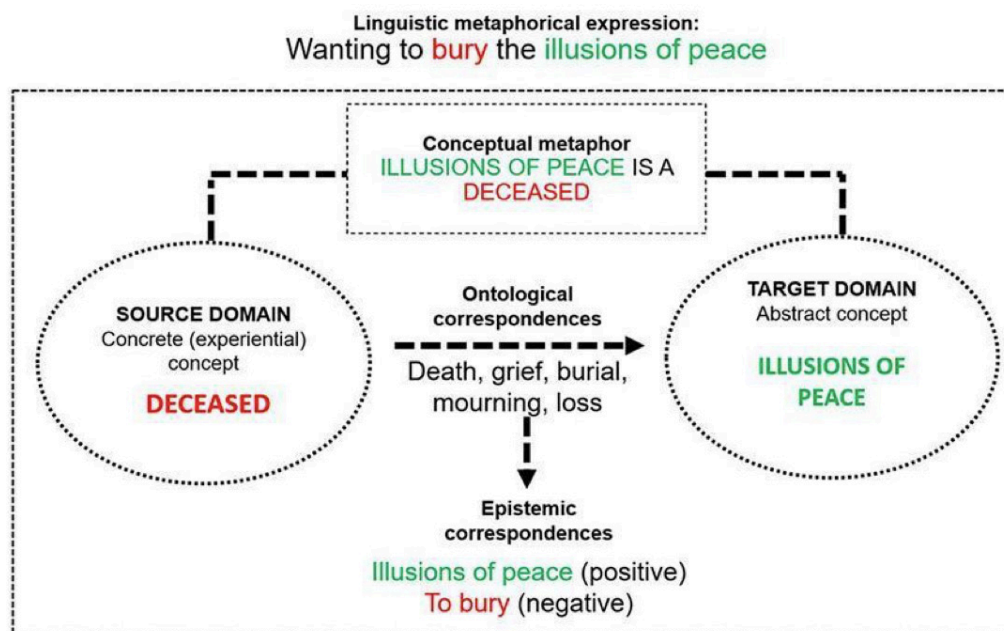
Figure 4: SD, TM, and Epistemic Correspondences Emerging from the Metaphorical Linguistic Expression
– to want to bury the illusions of peace
Source: authors' own elaboration.

The verb 'to bury' in this context is approached through its second meaning in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (DLE): 'to give burial to a corpse'. This definition reinforces the metaphorical framework of personification, where the 'illusions of peace' are treated as a deceased human being, thus legitimizing the conceptual metaphor through linguistic conventions that link burial to death.

It can be inferred, therefore, that those associations are made between the Source Domain (SD) and the Target Domain (TD), which activate the concepts 'DECEASED' and 'ILLUSION OF PEACE,' through the linguistic expressions 'bury' and 'illusions of peace.' The SD feature that is activated is the notion of death, as well as other features such as grief, burial, mourning, and loss, which are mapped onto the TD.

The above allows for the establishment of epistemic correspondences or inferences about the meaning of the expressions that are conceived, in this case, in ambivalent terms, insofar as they are presented as antagonistic. The ambivalence of the metaphorical expression is made manifest by activating an idea with a negative referent: 'to bury,' within a context that seeks to promote an encouraging cause for the country: 'illusions of peace.'

The ambivalence of this metaphorical expression does not stem from the meaning of the verb 'to bury' itself, which holds an inherently negative connotation. Rather, the ambivalence arises from its use within a context that seeks to refer to peacebuilding, a positive and hopeful endeavor. Thus, the negative semantic charge of the word contrasts sharply with the aspirational nature of the surrounding discourse, creating a tension between form and content.

The embodied nature of the metaphor and its motivation in the subject's sensory experiences with the world are evident in the expression *to want to bury the illusions of peace,* particularly with death, and with the context of violence that Colombia has suffered. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert that people can understand such metaphors (personification as an extension of the ontological metaphors that give meaning to the world) as long as they are understood based on their own goals, motivations, and characteristics. That is to say, it is only possible to understand an abstract concept such as illusions of peace if it is transformed into a counterpart, an entity with characteristics inherent to the nature of the individual.

The next metaphorical expression analyzed was: *to fight to reconstruct the memory of the conflict.*

Villagers *fight to reconstruct the memory of the conflict.* (Valdés, 2020).

First, the idea of memory of the conflict as a structure that one wants to build again is stated in this context. This corresponds to a conceptual metaphor of a structural type: MEMORIES ARE BUILDINGS. Like buil-

dings, memories need to be built and rebuilt by putting pieces together to create solid structures. However, such reconstruction in this context is accompanied by a struggle to achieve the end.
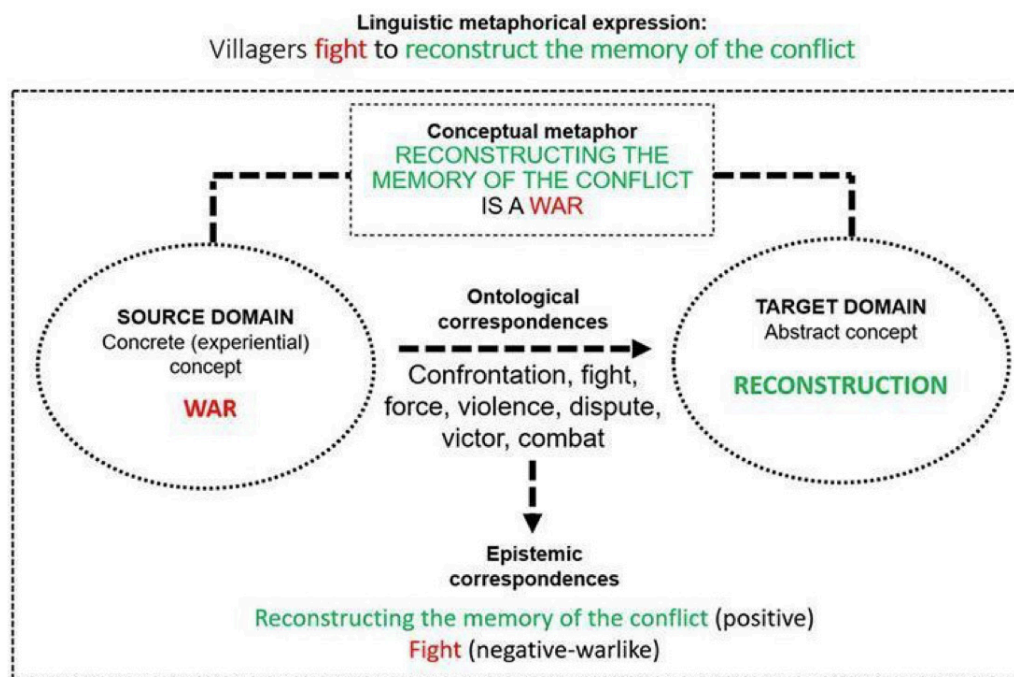

Figure 5: SD, TD, and Epistemic Correspondences Emerging from the Metaphorical Linguistic Expression
to fight to reconstruct the memory of the conflict
Source: authors' own elaboration.

Through the linguistic expressions 'fight' and 'reconstruct the memory of the conflict,' the concepts of the source and target domains 'WAR' and 'RECONSTRUCTION' are activated. The characteristics that are activated in the SD of war: confrontation, fight, force, violence, dispute, victor, and combat, are mapped onto the TD of reconstruction to establish the epistemic correspondences that allow for the understanding of what the expression represents in essence, that is, despite using an expression with a warlike connotation (fight), it is intended to allude to a desire for peace and the reconstruction that is conceived as a resurgence.

Such reconstruction requires the joint work of a group of workers, having the appropriate construction materials, and following a work route. In line with the above, the same association could be made with the idea of reconstructing the memory of the conflict, i.e., taking into account the actors involved in the conflict, the facts, and the consequences of these acts.

In terms of ambivalence, there is a recurrent use of warlike expressions such as "to fight," which, particularly in the Colombian context, evokes meanings tied to combat and confrontation. In Colombia, where society has been deeply affected by decades of armed conflict, the verb 'fight' is predominantly interpreted through a violent lens, often understood as 'to fight or combat', under one of the meanings provided by DLE, reflecting a collective cognitive schema shaped by historical experiences of war. This semantic orientation influences how even expressions that advocate for peace, such as 'fighting for peace', are conceptualized through a warlike frame, suggesting a reconstruction of the memory of conflict by non-peaceful means. This can be seen in the contextualized use of the term 'fight' across different media and everyday discourse in Colombia, where it typically evokes confrontation rather than perseverance or effort, according to one of the entries stated in DLE. Based on Muñoz Onofre (2012); Mejía Azuero (2016); (Castro Caycedo *et al.*, 2005); Muñoz Onofre, (2018); Villanueva López & Vargas (2022), the term 'fight' in the Colombian context is predominantly associated with combat and armed confrontation. These works demonstrate that 'fight' is rarely neutral; instead, it carries a distinctly warlike connotation, frequently used in political, guerrilla, and institutional discourses to justify or narrate violence, reinforcing a collective semantic framing rooted in decades of conflict.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that humans, as rational beings, have institutionalized the concept of fighting in various domains, including war. This helps explain how experiences of struggle, competition, and survival instinct are embedded in metaphorical language, especially when warlike expressions are used to

refer to peace and reconciliation. The metaphorical use of 'fight' in this context reveals a deep-rooted contradiction.

Bauman (2005) conceptualizes ambivalence as a disruption in the specificity of language, where the limits and imprecision of linguistic expressions open the door to multiple and conflicting interpretations. In Colombia, the phrase 'to fight for peace' illustrates this disruption clearly: the term evokes a context of violence while aiming to promote a positive and constructive social goal. Lüscher (2011) further elaborates that ambivalence is not confined to emotional or attitudinal tensions but also extends to cognitive and volitional domains, where beliefs, decisions, and social meanings clash. According to Lüscher, this type of conflict often results from the juxtaposition of opposing forces, such as war and peace, which, although seemingly incompatible, coexist within the same linguistic expression. In metaphorical terms, 'to fight for peace' encapsulates a form of cognitive dissonance that reflects both the structural characteristics of language and the profound cultural imprint left by prolonged conflict.

The following metaphorical expression analysis is: *a section of the economic power in Colombia is blocking peace.*

> The FARC leader, Rodrigo Londoño, known during his time as a fighter such as "Timochenko," considers that *a sector of the economic power in Colombia is blocking the peace* to which he led the guerrillas, now a political party with the same acronym (*El Espectador*, 2019).

In the previously referenced metaphorical expression, peace is conceived as an object: PEACE IS A DYNAMIC OBJECT IN MOTION. In this sense, peace is seen as an object that can be obstructed and stopped from continuing its trajectory. Likewise, a violent burden is given to the metaphorical expression by incorporating the action 'blocking', that according to the DLE it refers to "intercept, obstruct or close the way"; that is, the course of peace that has been built is obstructed. It is considered a violent action as it implies that the blocking is done abruptly and without respecting the normal course of the obstructed object. From a conceptual metaphor perspective, this expression activates mappings from the source domain of PHYSICAL OBSTRUCTION (BLOCK) to the target domain PEACE. This metaphor implies intentionality, agency, and resistance, elements that conceptually contrast with peace, thus generating ambivalence.
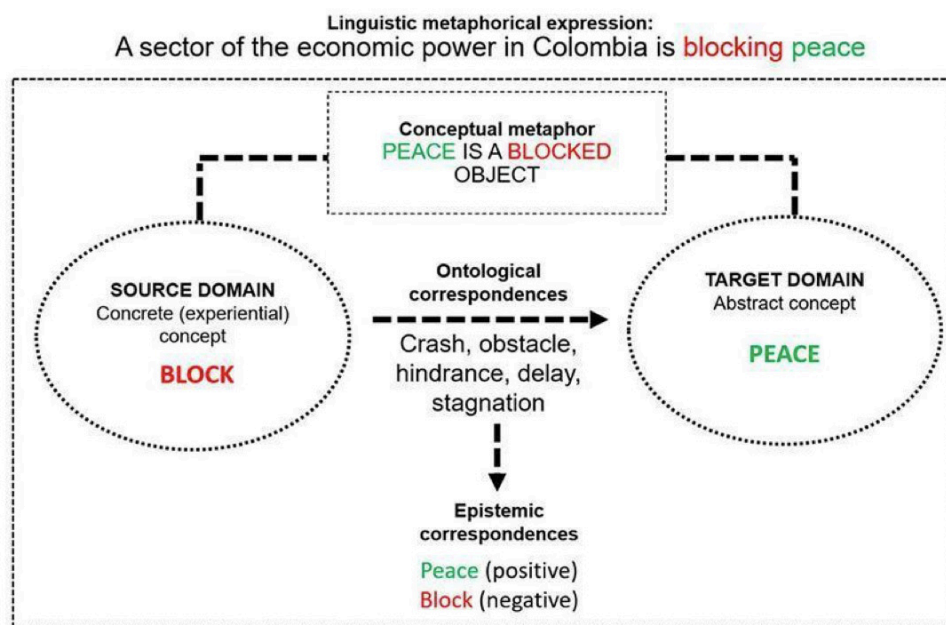

Figure 6: SD, TD, and Epistemic Correspondences Emerging from the Metaphorical Linguistic Expression
a sector of economic power in Colombia is blocking peace
Source: authors' own elaboration.

In this metaphor, associations between SD and TD are presented, which activate the concepts 'BLOCK' and 'PEACE' by means of the linguistic expressions 'block' and 'peace.' The characteristics of the SD that are

activated and mapped onto the TD are: crash, obstacle, hindrance, delay, and stagnation. In the TD, the characteristics of a moving object whose trajectory can be intentionally interrupted by the effects of an agent are activated. Likewise, it activates the idea of fragility or vulnerability of such an object, which cannot move forward by its own means. In this sense, the TD of peace is conceived as a vulnerable and interrupted object. The use of blocking evokes confrontation and conflict, mapping warlike semantics onto discourses of peace. In this regard, peace is embedded in war terminology. As suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), these metaphorical structures are not only rhetorical, but are also part of the cognitive structure shaped by the experience, in this case, decades of Colombian conflict. This suggests that even the illusions and aspirations for peace are framed by the core of war that peace seeks to overcome.

Another analyzed metaphorical expression is the following: *the fears of uprooting the seed of peace.*

> *The fears of uprooting the seed of peace come true with what seems to be the announcement* of the extermination of those who promote the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

This metaphorical linguistic expression invokes deep-rooted conceptual metaphors grounded in both biological and violent imagery. It presents a high degree of ambivalence, merging the semantic fields of growth and destruction within the framework of peace discourse in Colombia.

At the core, this expression activates the ontological metaphor PEACE IS A PLANT, a common metaphor that conceptualizes peace as something organic, delicate, and requiring cultivation. The expression 'seed of peace' suggests potential, beginning, and a future that must be nurtured. However, the metaphor 'uprooting the seed' introduces a violent act that interrupts this natural process, evoking UPROOTING IS DESTRUCTION, which signals an intentional denial or erasure of that potential.
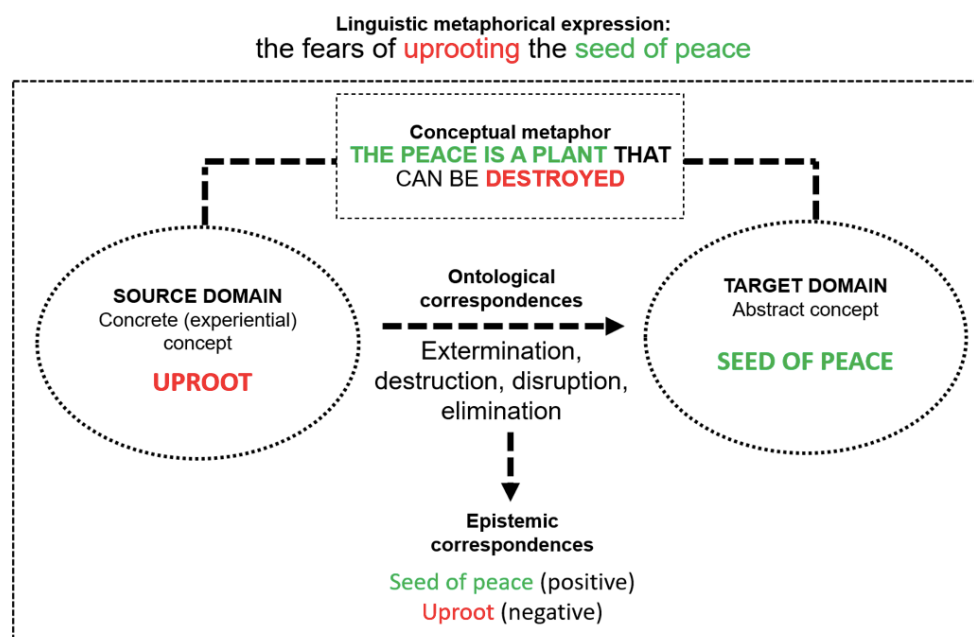

Figure 7: SD, TD, and Epistemic Correspondences Emerging from the Metaphorical Linguistic Expression
the fears of uprooting the seed of peace
Source: authors' own elaboration.

In the metaphorical expression "uprooting the seed of peace", the source domain is uprooting, a physical action typically associated with removing a plant from the ground abruptly. This domain activates ontological correspondences such as extermination, destruction, elimination, and disruption. These features are systematically projected onto the TD, the seed of peace, which is conceptualized as a nascent and fragile process requiring care and growth. The ontological projection enables epistemic correspondences in which peace is interpreted not as a stable or guaranteed state, but as a vulnerable entity subject to violent interruption. Consequently, the act of uprooting is understood as a metaphor for the intentional dismantling or sabotage of the peace process by violent actors, portraying peace as something that can be destroyed before it has the chance

to flourish. This mapping reveals the fragility of peace in contexts like Colombia, where the "seed of peace" is threatened by forces seeking to prevent its realization.

This metaphor encapsulates the cognitive dissonance of talking about peace through metaphors of violence and death. It reflects what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as metaphorical structuring of abstract concepts through embodied and concrete experiences; here, the act of planting and violently uprooting a seed serves to understand peace and its fragility in Colombia.

The metaphor also reveals linguistic ambivalence: it expresses support for peace while representing its failure through extermination, hence reinforcing a cognitive schema rooted in violence. As noted by Bauman (2005) and Lüscher (2011), ambivalence arises when linguistic expressions simultaneously activate contradictory interpretations, in this case, the nurturing of peace and the threat of its destruction. It underscores how, in the Colombian context, even discourses that seek to defend peace are infused with metaphors that frame it within cycles of violence.

Finally, the metaphorical expression *a bomb in the heart of the peace agreement* is analyzed:

> *Denying the existence of a conflict is a bomb in the heart of the peace agreement, and its first victims will be the military.* (De la Calle, 2020)

The idea of the peace agreement as a living entity with a heart. This corresponds to a conceptual metaphor of an ontological type: THE PEACE AGREEMENT IS A HUMAN BODY. Like a human body, the agreement has a vulnerable core, its heart, which sustains its life and functionality. A bomb in the heart thus suggests a direct, destructive attack on the most vital part of the agreement.
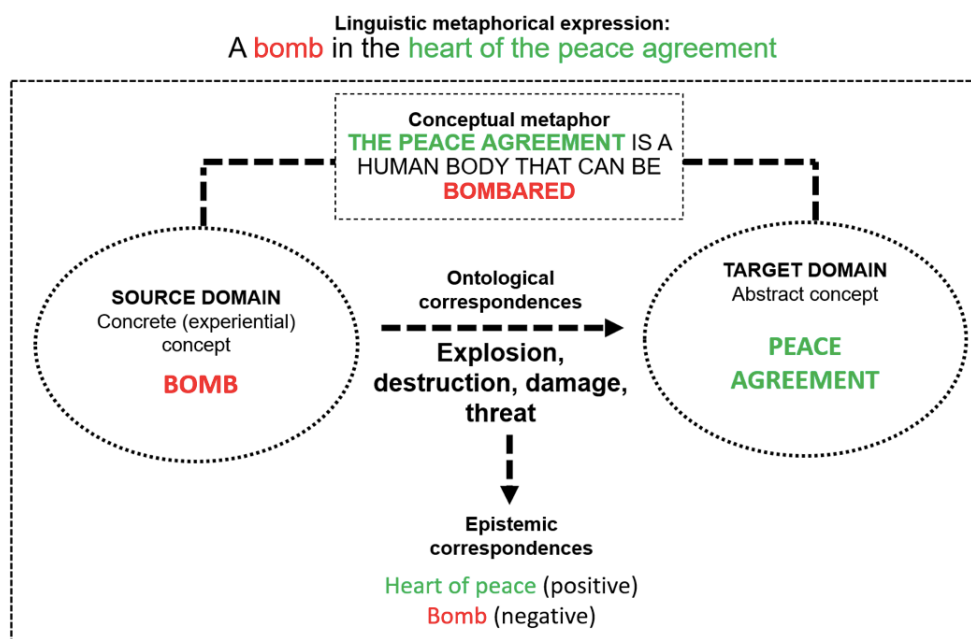

Figure 8: SD, TD, and Epistemic Correspondences Emerging from the Metaphorical Linguistic Expression
a bomb in the heart of the peace agreement.
Source: authors' own elaboration.

The metaphorical expression "a bomb in the heart of the peace agreement" draws from a SD centered on a bomb, which activates ontological correspondences of explosion, destruction, damage, and threat, based on one of the definitions of the DLE: an explosive artifact fitted with a device to detonate at a convenient time. These elements are projected onto the TD, the peace agreement, which is metaphorically represented as a living body, particularly through the reference to its heart. This projection constructs an ontological metaphor: THE PEACE AGREEMENT IS A HUMAN BODY, and more specifically, ITS HEART IS ITS CORE PRINCIPLES OR PURPOSE. Through this metaphor, the denial of the conflict is conceptualized as a violent, internal attack, one that threatens the most vital part of the agreement.

The epistemic correspondences that emerge portray denial not as a passive omission, but as an active, aggressive force that can internally destabilize and potentially destroy the peace process. In terms of ambiv-

alence, the metaphor portrays peace (a constructive, nonviolent ideal) using the lexicon of warfare and fatal injury. This tension highlights what Bauman (2005) defines as a disruption in linguistic specificity, where one expression, like bomb in the heart, can evoke multiple, conflicting meanings. In the Colombian context, where war and peace coexist in collective memory and discourse, this metaphor encapsulates the fragility of reconciliation and the persistent presence of violence even in peacebuilding narratives.

Following Lakoff and Johnson's Theory (1980), the metaphor reveals how abstract political and social processes are understood in terms of concrete physical experiences (damage, explosion, pain), embedding cultural experiences of conflict into everyday language. Therefore, the metaphor does not merely describe a political and social problem, it shapes understanding, frames threat, and prefigures consequences in terms that evoke Colombia's violent past.

The aforementioned five metaphorical expressions analysis allows for the exemplification of how linguistic expressions are the tangible manifestation of conceptual metaphors that are found at the level of thought and that are consolidated as part of the human conceptual structure, as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The use and understanding of metaphorical language present in the expressions analyzed, as well as their automaticity, demonstrate the role of embodied experience in a context of armed and violent conflict. It is perceived that, unconsciously, war language or negative connotations are used to refer to ideals of peacebuilding and reconciliation. In the case of the Colombian context, it seems that metaphorical expressions and their ambivalence are incorporated into the conceptual systems of individuals, which are a product of immersion in a country that, for decades, has been trying to achieve peace and reconciliation between the parties to the armed conflict.

> The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1993: 4).

7. Conclusions

This study confirmed the relationship between the human conceptual system and the experience of armed conflict in the Colombian context, as the findings revealed that people speak about peace through ambivalent metaphorical expressions rooted in war-related language and imagery. This phenomenon supports Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) postulates regarding the metaphorical nature of thought and its grounding in embodied experience. The linguistic ambivalence observed reflects more than rhetorical tension: it embodies a society's unresolved trauma, where the aspiration for peace remains symbolically entangled with the lexicon of violence.

Despite institutional efforts to promote communication centered on reconciliation, war-related language remains a dominant feature of Colombian society. This is reflected in the discursive practices of the national print media, where metaphorical expressions with violent undertones are still used even in discussions of peacebuilding. This reveals the pervasiveness of metaphorical ambivalence within the collective imaginary.

In light of these findings, there is an urgent need to reconceptualize the metaphorical language embedded in peacebuilding efforts. If, as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue, our conceptual systems shape how we act in the world, then transforming peace discourse entails more than introducing new narratives; it requires reconfiguring the metaphors through which peace is imagined, felt, and enacted. Drawing on Bauman's (2005) idea of ambivalence as a disruption in meaning, this ambivalent metaphorical language signals a cultural impasse, in which peace remains conceptually embedded in the very structures of thought that sustained war.

Thus, language emerges not as a neutral tool but as a symbolic battleground. The metaphors we inherit and reproduce shape not only how we speak, but how we remember, feel, and act. In post-conflict Colombia, rethinking metaphorical language is key to dismantling the cognitive residue of violence. The solution does not lie merely in replacing war metaphors with peaceful ones, but in generating conceptual alternatives that allow Colombians to experience peace outside the frameworks of combat, resistance, or loss. Only through a profound transformation of these metaphorical structures can discourse contribute meaningfully to everyday peace and symbolic reconciliation.

Although this study focused on Colombia, similar metaphorical patterns might be observable in other Latin American societies marked by systemic violence, socio-political instability, and historical traumas. Countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Brazil display public discourses in media, education, and politics. In today's digital media ecosystem, such discourses transcend borders, enabling the transnational circulation of conflict-based metaphorical frames across the region. Consequently, we call for a broader, comparative perspective that interrogates the role of metaphor in the shaping of regional narratives on peace, conflict, and social transformation in Latin America.

Finally, fostering critical awareness of language use is essential. Promoting lexical frameworks that align with reconciliation values may contribute to what Mac Ginty (2014) calls "everyday peace", a bottom-up process of transforming entrenched metaphorical meanings in a society historically marked by violence. This reconceptualization is not just a linguistic challenge, but a cultural and cognitive imperative for sustainable peace.

Declarations of interest: None

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