# 'Our Father': Praying Cognitively

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**Abstract**: *The paper analysis the manner in which the catholic English speakers and the orthodox Romanian ones situate themselves in relation to the well-known prayer 'Our Father' and tries to identify possible different cognitive perceptions of the God-worshiper relationship based on five different English variants of this prayer and the official Romanian one.*

**Rezumat:** *Lucrarea analizează maniera în care vorbitorii catolici de limbă engleză, pe de o parte, şi cei români ortodocşi, pe de altă parte, se situează în relaţia cu bine-cunoscuta rugăciune* Tatăl nostru *şi încearcă să identifice eventuale percepţii cognitive diferite asupra relaţiei Dumnezeu-credincios pe baza a cinci variante diferite ale acestei rugăciuni în limba engleză şi a variantei româneşti oficiale.*
**Cuvinte-cheie**: *rugăciunea* Tatăl nostru, *percepţii cognitive, metaforă ontologică, metaforă structurală*

## 1. Purpose

The paper analysis the manner in which the catholic English speakers and the orthodox Romanian ones situate themselves in relation to the well-known prayer *Our Father* and tries to identify possible different cognitive perceptions of the God-worshiper relationship based on five different English variants of this prayer and the official Romanian one. Starting from the principle that "one who communicates, communicates oneself", I placed the prayer that lies at the core of Christian faith under the scrutiny of Layoff's cognitive view upon the ability of language to verbalize the manner in which the mind conceptualize its surrounding world. The premises I rely on is the fact that provided there were any differences in perceiving the relationship between the worshiper and God at an inner, mental level, these differences should emerge at the level of verbalization as well.

## 2. Corpus

In order to perform such an analysis I have selected the following 5 most representative English variants of Our Father and the official Romanian orthodox variant to compare them:

1.  The variant used in the Roman Catholic Mass
2.  The Ecumenical variant
3.  The Early Modern variant (1611)
4.  The variant present in *The New Testament* in Modern English (1963)
5.  The variant from *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928)

The reason behind choosing these variants was twofold: (i) the wish to have a rather extended time interval as far as the English texts are concerned in order for the selection to be relevant in terms of the evolution of the text itself; (ii) the principle of equal representation, i.e. I selected variants of the prayer from various areas of the Christian scope – from the Roman-Catholic version to the Ecumenical one.

## 3. The analysis

The method of analysis consists of several clear steps: (i) identify the metaphors; (ii) identify the cognitive patterns; (iii) identify the target concepts; (iv) identify the source concepts; (v) establish the predominant conceptual metaphor; (vi) identify the main source concepts; (vii) isolate any unique elements that may add special significance to one of the versions; and finally (viii) organize and interpret the data.

After having performed all these steps, the data have been organized in a series of tables according to various criteria that are mentioned in each of them and they go as follows:

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Table 1

| | Roman-Catholic Mass | Ecumenical | Early Modern 1611 | The New Testament in Modern English 1963 | Book of Common Prayer 1928 | Romanian Orthodox | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Metaphors | 16 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 16 | 17 | 14.5 |
| Patterns | 12 | 12 | 9 | 8 | 12 | 13 | 11 |
| Target concepts | 11 | 11 | 8 | 8 | 11 | 12 | 10.16 |
| Source concepts | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4.33 |
| Predominant metaphor | Ontological (81.25 %) | Ontological (80 %) | Ontological (92.3 %) | Ontological (80 %) | Ontological (81.25 %) | Ontological (94 %) | |
| Unique elements | - | - | - | - | - | X | |

As one can clearly see from Table 1, the Ontological metaphor is predominant in all 6 variants. An ontological metaphor is a metaphor in which an abstraction, such as an activity, emotion, philosophical concept or idea, is represented as something concrete, such as an object, substance, container, or person. To put it differently, it seems that this prayer is primarily concerned with shifting abstract concepts such as GOD (conceptualized as OUR FATHER – a PERSON – in all versions), HEAVEN, KINGDOM, WILL, TRESPASSES, MISTAKES, TEMPTATION, GLORY, POWER and EVIL from a rather remote realm of abstract concepts to a closer area populated with concrete concepts much easier to understand, a world in which human mind can label things and, therefore, easily arrange them in clearer structures. While the **ontological** metaphor is offering us the ability of viewing one concept (the **TARGET** concept) by means of entities and substances (the **SOURCE** concept), the **structural** metaphor provides us with the necessary means to not only orient concepts, make reference to them or quantify them, but to structure, to conceptualize an abstract, maybe otherwise difficult to grasp, concept by means of another "highly structured and clearly delineated concept" [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 61]. Keeping this difference in mind, I made an inventory of metaphors and classified them into the two types mentioned above (see Table 2). Consequently, the Romanian orthodox version displays the largest number of metaphors (17) closely followed by the Roman-Catholic version and that found in The Book of Common Prayer from 1928 (16). At the other end of the list, the smallest number of metaphors is to be found in the 1963 New Testament version (10); however, it is worth mentioning here that this version and the Early Modern one are shorter than the rest of the versions since they do not contain the final formula "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen." present in all the other 5; had this final part been present, the number of metaphors would have certainly been higher.

As far as the ontological-structural ratio is concerned, the Romanian version takes again the first position in the hierarchy since 96% of the metaphors at work in this version are ontological and only 6% are structural. Why is this significant? In order to answer this question, I should first comment a little bit more upon the efficiency of this prayer seen as an instrument of clarifying the relationship between the worshiper and God. Volumes have been written on this topic from a theological perspective and the complexity of this relationship is well-known; however, I do not intend to approach this issue from a theologian's perspective. What I am interested in is this: "Does this prayer make things less complicated for the worshiper?" Based on the definition of the ontological metaphor, one can sustain that such a metaphor is easier for someone to understand than a structural one. Therefore, the higher the ratio of ontological metaphors as compared to the structural

ones in a text, the clearer the message gets and easier to understand. In conclusion, in terms of efficiency, the Romanian version proves to be the best as it keeps things as simple as possible.

Table 2

| | Roman-Catholic Mass | Ecumenical | Early Modern 1611 | The New Testament in Modern English 1963 | Book of Common Prayer 1928 | Romanian Orthodox |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Metaphors | 16 | 15 | 13 | 10 | 16 | 17 |
| Ontological | 13 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 13 | 16 |
| Structural | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

Since all metaphors refer to a concept by means of another, I thought it relevant to identify the TARGET concepts, i.e. what the metaphors are trying to "explain", and the SOURCE concepts, i.e. the concepts by means of which the TARGET ones are "explained". After identifying these concepts, I classified them according to frequency. The results, as it can be seen in Table 3, demonstrate once more – this time from a cognitive perspective – that *Our Father* is about the relation between PERSON and GOD's HEAVEN/KINGDOM. While this conclusion does not come as a surprise, an interesting element has surfaced after analysing the total inventory of both TARGET and SOURCE concepts.

Table 3

| | Roman-Catholic Mass | Ecumenical | Early Modern 1611 | The New Testament in Modern English 1963 | Book of Common Prayer 1928 | Romanian Orthodox |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target concepts | PERSONS 4 HEAVEN 2 KINGDOM 2 NAMES WILL EARTH TRESPASSES TEMPTATION EVIL POWER GLORY | PERSONS 3 HEAVEN 2 KINGDOM 2 NAMES WILL EARTH SINS TIME EVIL POWER GLORY | PERSONS 4 HEAVEN 2 KINGDOM WILL EARTH DEBTS TEMPTATION EVIL | PERSONS 3 NAMES KINGDOM WILL EARTH HEAVEN DEBTS TEMPTATION EVIL | PERSONS 4 HEAVEN 2 KINGDOM 2 NAMES WILL EARTH TRESPASSES TEMPTATION EVIL POWER GLORY | PERSONS 3 HEAVEN 2 KINGDOM 2 CENTURIES 2 NAMES WILL EARTH MISTAKES TEMPTATION EVIL POWER GLORY |
| Source concepts | OBJECT 10 CONTAINER 3 PRISON TERRITORY TARGET | OBJECT 10 CONTAINER 2 PRISON TERRITORY TARGET | OBJECT 8 CONTAINER 4 PRISON | OBJECT 7 CONTAINER PRISON TERRITORY | OBJECT 10 CONTAINER 3 PRISON TERRITORY TARGET | OBJECT 11 CONTAINER 4 TERRITORY PERSON |
| Main source concept | OBJECT | OBJECT | OBJECT | OBJECT | OBJECT | OBJECT |
| Unique elements | | | | | | X |

The uniformity and almost symmetry of all 6 versions of the prayer in terms of most frequent TARGET concepts and main SOURCE concept are significantly contradicted by an element specific only to the Romanian version. All five English versions conceptualize the target concept of EVIL by means of the source concept PRISON. The only exception is the Romanian *Tatăl nostru* which uses a different, unique source concept: in the Romanian cognitive perception, EVIL is a PERSON. I consider this feature of paramount importance since it personalizes the relation with evil; in the Romanian perception, evil is no longer a distant concept, an impersonal "prison" but it is a BEING. It seems to me that such a conceptualization abandons any euphemism that might be hidden in the impersonal meaning of the concept PRISON and unveils evil as an active agent among us the mortals, always paying attention to our mistakes and constantly ready to act and make the most of them.

### 3. Conclusion

Conceptual metaphors are indispensable tools in the daily process of relating to the world around us; we could not make sense of our experience in the absence of these imaginative mechanisms. Applying a cognitive analysis to the central prayer of Christian faith has revealed that English believers perceive differently the idea/concept of EVIL than the Romanian do in spite of the fact that generally speaking this prayer uses the same set of conceptual patterns and performs more or less similar functions. The study of these differences in terms of metaphoric paradigms will highlight the manner in which we shape our reality and the result will contribute to a better intercultural understanding.

**Appendix**

The findings presented above have been gathered when analyzing the following versions of the text under scrutiny in this paper:

**Roman-Catholic Mass**

| | |
|---|---|
| Our Father, | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| who art in heaven, | HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| hallowed be thy name; | NAMES ARE OBJECTS |
| thy kingdom come; | KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS |
| thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. | WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| Give us this day our daily bread; | |
| and forgive us our trespasses | TRESPASSES ARE OBJECTS |
| as we forgive those who trespass against us; | PERSONS ARE TARGETS |
| and lead us not into temptation, | TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| but deliver us from evil. | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS<br>EVIL IS A PRISON |
| For the kingdom, the power,<br>and the glory are yours<br>now and for ever. | KINGDOMS ARE OBJECTS<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT |

Metaphorical instances (16 metaphors, 12 patterns):

| Ontological metaphors | Structural metaphors |
|---|---|
| PERSONS ARE OBJECTS (3)<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER (2)<br>KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS (2)<br>NAMES ARE OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>PERSONS ARE TARGETS<br>EVIL IS A PRISON |

| TRESPASSES ARE OBJECTS<br>TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT | |
|---|---|

| Main concepts: | |
|---|---|
| Target concepts (11) | Source concepts (5) |
| PERSONS (4) | OBJECTS (10 instances) |
| HEAVEN (2) | CONTAINER (3 instances) |
| KINGDOM (2) | PRISON, TERRITORY, TARGETS |
| NAMES, WILL, EARTH, TRESPASSES, TEMPTATION, EVIL, POWER, GLORY | |

Predominant metaphor: ONTOLOGICAL (81.25%), STRUCTURAL (18.75%)

**Ecumenical**

| Our Father in heaven, | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
|---|---|
| hallowed be your name, | NAMES ARE OBJECTS |
| your kingdom come, | KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS |
| your will be done, | WILL IS AN OBJECT |
| on earth as in heaven. | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| Give us today our daily bread. | - |
| Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. | SINS ARE OBJECTS<br>PERSONS ARE TARGETS |
| Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. | TIME IS AN OBJECT<br>EVIL IS A PRISON<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| For the kingdom, the power,<br>and the glory are yours,<br>now and forever. Amen. | KINGDOMS ARE OBJECTS<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT |

Metaphorical instances (15 metaphors, 12 patterns):

| Ontological metaphors | Structural metaphors |
|---|---|
| PERSONS ARE OBJECTS (3)<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER (2)<br>KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS (2)<br>NAMES ARE OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>SINS ARE OBJECTS<br>TIME IS AN OBJECT<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>PERSONS ARE TARGETS<br>EVIL IS A PRISON |

| Main concepts: | |
|---|---|
| Target concepts (11) | Source concepts (5) |
| PERSONS (3) | OBJECTS (10 instances) |
| HEAVEN (2) | CONTAINER (2 instances) |
| KINGDOM (2) | PRISON, TERRITORY, TARGETS |
| NAMES, WILL, EARTH, SINS, TIME, EVIL, POWER, GLORY | |

Predominant metaphor: ONTOLOGICAL (80%), STRUCTURAL (20%)

**Early Modern 1611**

| Our father which art in heauen, | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
|---|---|
| hallowed be thy name. | NAMES ARE OBJECTS |
| Thy kingdom come. | KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS |
| Thy will be done in earth as it is in heauen. | WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>EARTH IS A CONTAINER<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| Giue us this day our daily bread. | |
| And forgiue us our debts as we forgiue our debters. | DEBTS ARE OBJECTS<br>DEBTERS ARE OBJECTS |
| And lead us not into temptation, | TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| but deliuer us from euill. Amen. | EVIL IS A PRISON<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |

Metaphorical instances (13 metaphors, 9 patterns):

| Ontological metaphors | Structural metaphors |
|---|---|
| PERSONS ARE OBJECTS (4)<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER (2)<br>KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS<br>NAMES ARE OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>EARTH IS A CONTAINER<br>DEBTS ARE OBJECTS<br>TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT | EVIL IS A PRISON |

| Main concepts: | |
|---|---|
| Target concepts (8) | Source concepts (3) |
| PERSONS (4) | OBJECTS (8 instances) |
| HEAVEN (2) | CONTAINER (4 instances) |
| KINGDOM, WILL, EARTH, DEBTS, TEMPTATION, EVIL | PRISON |

Predominant metaphor: ONTOLOGICAL (92.3%), STRUCTURAL (7.7%)

**The New Testament in Modern English 1963**

| Our Heavenly Father, | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
|---|---|
| may your name be honored; | NAMES ARE OBJECTS |
| May your kingdom come, | KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS |
| and your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. | WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| Give us this day the bread we need, | |
| Forgive us what we owe to you, | |
| as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us. | |
| Keep us clear of temptation, | TEMPTATION IS AN OBJECT<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |

| | |
|---|---|
| and save us from evil. | EVIL IS A PRISON<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |

Metaphorical instances (10 metaphors, 8 patterns):

| Ontological metaphors | Structural metaphors |
|---|---|
| PERSONS ARE OBJECTS (3)<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER<br>KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS<br>NAMES ARE OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>TEMPTATION IS AN OBJECT | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>EVIL IS A PRISON |

| Main concepts: | |
|---|---|
| Target concepts (8) | Source concepts (4) |
| PERSONS (3) | OBJECTS (7 instances) |
| NAMES, KINGDOM, WILL, EARTH, HEAVEN, TEMPTATION, EVIL | CONTAINER, PRISON, TERRITORY |

Predominant metaphor: ONTOLOGICAL (80%), STRUCTURAL (20%)

**Book of Common Prayer 1928**

| | |
|---|---|
| Our Father, who art in heaven, | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| Hallowed be thy Name. | NAMES ARE OBJECTS |
| Thy kingdom come. | KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS |
| Thy will be done, | WILL IS AN OBJECT |
| On earth as it is in heaven. | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
| Give us this day our daily bread. | |
| And forgive us our trespasses, | TRESPASSES ARE OBJECTS |
| As we forgive those who trespass against us. | PERSONS ARE TARGETS |
| And lead us not into temptation, | TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| But deliver us from evil. | EVIL IS A PRISON<br>PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen. | KINGDOMS ARE OBJECTS<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT |

Metaphorical instances (16 metaphors, 12 patterns):

| Ontological metaphors | Structural metaphors |
|---|---|
| PERSONS ARE OBJECTS (3)<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER (2)<br>KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS (2)<br>NAMES ARE OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>TRESPASSES ARE OBJECTS<br>TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>PERSONS ARE TARGETS<br>EVIL IS A PRISON |

| Main concepts: | |
|---|---|
| Target concepts (11) | Source concepts (5) |
| PERSONS (4) | OBJECTS (10 instances) |
| HEAVEN (2) | CONTAINER (3 instances) |
| KINGDOM (2) | PRISON, TERRITORY, TARGETS |
| NAMES, WILL, EARTH, TRESPASSES, TEMPTATION, EVIL, POWER, GLORY | |

Predominant metaphor: ONTOLOGICAL (81.25%), STRUCTURAL (18.75%)

**Romanian**

| Tatăl nostru care eşti în ceruri, | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER |
|---|---|
| sfinţească-se numele Tău, | NAMES ARE OBJECTS |
| vie împărăţia Ta, facă-se voia ta,<br>precum în cer aşa şi pe pământ. | KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER<br>EARTH IS A TERRITORY |
| Pâinea noastră cea de toate zilele, | |
| dă-ne-o nouă astăzi | |
| şi ne iartă nouă greşelile noastre | MISTAKES ARE OBJECTS |
| precum şi noi iertăm greşiţilor noştri | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS |
| şi nu ne duce pe noi în ispită | PERSONS ARE OBJECTS<br>TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER |
| ci ne izbăveşte de cel rău. | EVIL IS A PERSON |
| Că a Ta este împărăţia şi puterea şi slava, | KINGDOMS ARE OBJECTS<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT |
| Acum şi pururea şi în vecii vecilor, Amin. | CENTURIES ARE OBJECTS<br>CENTURIES ARE CONTAINERS |

Metaphorical instances (17 metaphors, 13 patterns):

| Ontological metaphors | Structural metaphors |
|---|---|
| PERSONS ARE OBJECTS (3)<br>HEAVEN IS A CONTAINER (2)<br>KINGDOMS ARE (MOVING) OBJECTS (2)<br>CENTURIES ARE OBJECTS<br>CENTURIES ARE CONTAINERS<br>NAMES ARE OBJECTS<br>WILL IS AN OBJECT<br>MISTAKES ARE OBJECTS<br>TEMPTATION IS A CONTAINER<br>POWER IS AN OBJECT<br>GLORY IS AN OBJECT | EARTH IS A TERRITORY<br>PERSONS ARE TARGETS<br>EVIL IS A PERSON |

| Main concepts: | |
|---|---|
| Target concepts (12) | Source concepts (4) |
| PERSONS (3) | OBJECTS (11 instances) |
| HEAVEN (2) | CONTAINER (4 instances) |
| KINGDOM (2) | TERRITORY, PERSON |
| CENTURIES (2) | |

| NAMES, WILL, EARTH, MISTAKES, TEMPTATION, EVIL, POWER, GLORY | |
|---|---|

Predominant metaphor: ONTOLOGICAL (94%), STRUCTURAL (6%)

**References**:

Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1980.