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Conceptualizing Motherhood Through Metaphors of Grief and Hope

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Abstract - **Language is not only a tool for communication, but also a cognitive device that enables individuals to understand and interpret their life experiences. By addressing the issue of how language reflects emotional experiences related to loss and recovery within parenting communities, showing how metaphorical expressions reflect Western perceptions of motherhood and emotional resilience. This research aims to explore how conceptual metaphors, namely baby blues, sunshine baby, rainbow baby, angel baby, golden baby, and sunrise baby reflect emotional experiences, coping mechanisms, and meaning-making processes among parents who have experienced childbirth or infant loss. The study involved qualitative descriptive analysis with purposive sampling of online narratives shared by parents, following stages of data collection, metaphor identification, and conceptual mapping The results reveal that light, color, and nature metaphors are dominant, showing how linguistic expressions transform grief into shared narratives of hope and healing, in accordance with the study's objective to explore language as a cognitive and emotional tool.**

Keywords – *Baby, Experience, Metaphore, Motherhood, Parenting*

INTRODUCTION

Language is not just a communication tool, but is also a way individuals to express emotions, form abstract concepts, and frame complex social realities. One of the main ways to truly understand the connection between language and human mind is by conceptual metaphor. According to The book "Conceptual Metaphor Theory" [1], further explains that metaphors play a crucial psychological role in helping individuals make sense of complex or distressing experiences by framing them in familiar, concrete concepts [2]. Metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another [3]. The book by Jeannette Littlemore and Sarah Turner offers valuable insights into metaphors related to pregnancy loss [4], however, it does not specifically examine the distinct terminologies that arise from such experiences. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the role of metaphorical language in shaping emotional narratives about parenthood, loss, and recovery, namely baby blues, sunshine baby, rainbow baby,

angel baby, and golden baby. Through metaphorical framing, people can organize emotional experiences, maintain coherence in their life narratives, and even find meaning or hope amid negative emotions. In other words, metaphors function not only as a style of language, but also as a cognitive mechanism that shapes human thought.

Terms that we analyze are widely known on social media, parenting websites, and even in social communities as symbolic ways to describe the emotional experiences of parents. Through these metaphors, it can be seen how language emotionally affects them and helps a deeper connection with their feelings and with others who share similar experiences to be formed. The loss is both literally and metaphorically situated with the body [4]. On a deeper level, these terms show how people use language to give meaning to pain, to find comfort, warmth and to turn their emotions into something more understandable to other people. Each term has its own unique conceptual mapping that represents an emotional journey from the sorrow caused by

miscarriage and postpartum sadness to the happiness and new hope that follow.

Although these expressions are broadly used in public discourse and have become deeply embedded in contemporary communication especially across social media platforms, parenting forums, and psychological support communities, linguistic studies that investigate their conceptual structures, cultural underpinnings, and emotional implications remain relatively scarce. As noted by Littlemore and Turner pregnancy loss involves a shift into a "different reality" which is often metaphorically or metonymically enacted, with parents engaging in parenting behaviours despite the loss of their children [4]. These terms function as more than just comforting labels, they serve as rich metaphorical constructions that allow individuals to articulate complex, emotional realities related to birth, loss, grief, and healing.

Analyzing these metaphors is therefore important to understanding how language operates as a powerful cognitive and emotional tool. Through metaphor, individuals are able to share their experiences, transform private pain into shared narratives, and find symbolic meanings that help them make sense of difficult life experiences. From a cognitive linguistic perspective, these expressions reveal how complex emotional experiences such as mourning or renewal are grounded in familiar conceptual mappings such as light and darkness, storm and rainbow, or heaven and earth. On a cultural level, these metaphors also reflect societal values surrounding motherhood, hope, and remembrance, shaping how people collectively talk about and cope with sensitive experiences as metaphor is rooted in the culture of a nation and largely reflects the content of the culture, such as overall social values, religious beliefs, aesthetic orientation, etc [5].

Hence, exploring these metaphorical expressions provides insight not only into the relationship between language and emotion, but also into how communities construct empathy, solidarity, and resilience through shared linguistic symbols. "metaphorical expressions are more than the decoration of daily language use. Metaphorical expressions are widely used in all types of discourse, written or spoken, consciously or subconsciously." [6].

To analyze the conceptual metaphors embedded in the terms we will be applying the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory [1]. Focusing on

identifying source and target domains with these expressions and interpreting their emotional and cultural significance. By exploring metaphors such as light, color, and weather, to reveal how language shapes the way people process and communicate emotional experiences. Eventually this study claims that metaphors shown represent cultural constructions of purity, comfort, loss, and renewal, showing how metaphorical expressions reflect Western perceptions of motherhood and emotional resilience.

This research aims to explore how conceptual metaphors, namely "golden baby," "sunshine baby," "rainbow baby," "baby blues," "sunrise baby," and "angel baby," reflect emotional experiences, coping mechanisms, and meaning-making processes among parents who have experienced childbirth or infant loss. By identifying and analyzing these metaphors, this study seeks to reveal how language functions as a cognitive and emotional tool for expressing grief, healing, and hope.

This research provides insights into how individuals linguistically construct meaning from trauma and renewal, offering valuable perspectives for interdisciplinary studies in linguistics, psychology, and grief counseling. Furthermore, these findings highlight the therapeutic potential of metaphors as a medium through which parents can express complex emotions and reconstruct their sense of identity and continuity after loss. According to Cuenca, "pregnancy loss, in all its forms (miscarriage, abortion, and fetal death), is one of the most common adverse pregnancy outcomes nowadays." She further explains that the term encompasses a wide range of clinical presentations, with "early pregnancy loss" referring to a non-viable intrauterine pregnancy either an empty gestational sac or an embryo without cardiac activity before 10 weeks + 6 days of gestation [7].

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on describing the meaning and function of conceptual metaphors found in the terms *baby blues*, *golden baby*, *rainbow baby*, *sunshine baby*, *sunrise baby* and *angel baby* within digital discourse. The data were analyzed qualitatively through identification, classification, and interpretation based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson

[1] and further developed by Landau, who emphasizes the psychological function of metaphors in constructing meaning from emotional experiences [2].

The research was conducted on September 15 until October 15, 2025, in Jakarta. All activities were carried out online and through data searches on various digital platforms and online media containing journals, books, and reflective articles about pregnancy and postpartum experiences. This study uses all western sources. The success of this research is measured by the clarity of the conceptual patterns identified and the consistency of metaphorical meanings across the analyzed data.

Data were collected using purposive sampling, focusing on narratives that reflect the emotional and psychological experiences of mothers after childbirth or the loss of a child. The selection was based on the contextual and semantic relevance of the narratives to the conceptual metaphors under investigation, rather than on the presence of explicit metaphorical expressions. This approach aligns with the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). which views metaphor as a cognitive mechanism underlying thought and emotion, not merely as a linguistic ornament. Therefore, even narratives without overt metaphorical language were included if they revealed underlying conceptual mappings such as loss as darkness, healing as light, or hope as rebirth. The data were drawn from online forums, and digital storytelling platforms where mothers share authentic accounts of their lived experiences. In total, data were collected from 18 online sources, resulting in a corpus of approximately 300,000 words. Such purposive selection ensured that the corpus contained rich emotional content suitable for identifying conceptual structures that shape the mothers' understanding of their experiences.

Each narrative was analyzed to identify linguistic elements that contain conceptual imagery such as light, color, warmth, or spirituality. These elements were then categorized into corresponding conceptual domains.

As shown in table 1, metaphorical expressions namely "baby blues," "sunshine baby," "rainbow baby," "angel baby," "golden baby," and "sunrise baby" describe how parents interpret the emotional spectrum of loss, healing, and hope through symbolic imagery. Each term represents a unique conceptual metaphor, based on natural experiences and colors. Collectively, these metaphors serve as a cognitive framework that helps individuals understand the complex emotional transitions associated with the birth and loss of a baby. The blending of abstract experiences of grief, longing, and renewal into concrete, culturally resonant symbols. Through this system of metaphors, life and death are depicted not as opposites, but as interconnected cycles of light, color, and emotion, allowing parents to navigate grief while finding meaning, continuity, and emotional reconciliation.

Table 1. Conceptual metaphor

Term	Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Metaphor
Baby Blues	The color blue= sadness, loneliness	Postpartum depression, sadness	Emotion Is Color/ Sadness Is Blue
Sunshine baby	Ray of sunshine= a sense of warmth happiness and new life	A birth after sadness/ birth after dark times	New Life Is Sunlight/ Hope Is Light
Rainbow baby	Renewal and hope bright and beautiful new colors that appear after the storm	A child born after loss, a symbol of hope after loss	Joy Is Color After Storm/ Healing After Loss Is A Rainbow
Angel baby	Angel represents a sacred unseen entity that resides in heaven.	Baby that is dead, lost a child, sadness mixed with spiritual acceptance	Death/ Loss Is Returning To Heaven
Golden baby	Golden conveys a sense of luxury, high value, and something precious or special	This baby signifies the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, and the lucky parents feel at having two healthy	A Golden Baby Is The Baby That Is Born After A Rainbow Baby
Sunrise baby	Light emerges after darkness	Life Follow Loss	Life And Death Are The Cycle Of Light

RESULT AND DISSCUSION

This research identifies five conceptual metaphors represented in the digital discourse surrounding the terms *baby blues*, *sunshine baby*, *rainbow baby*, *angel baby*, *golden baby* and *sunrise baby*. Each metaphor reflects the emotional and psychological experiences of motherhood, particularly in relation to birth, loss, and healing. The metaphors reveal how language constructs meaning through the association between physical or natural imagery and emotional states.
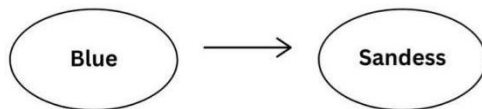
Figure 1. Word "blue" relates to sadness

As shown in figure 1, blue is often associated with feelings of sadness, to the point where the phrase "feeling blue" is quite universally understood to convey a sense of melancholy [8]. This symbolic association between the color blue and emotional distress extends into the term maternity blues, sometimes known as baby blues, postnatal blues, or post-partum blues, which refers to a state of low mood and mild, temporary, self-limiting depressive symptoms that may emerge in the days immediately following childbirth [9]. The use of "blue" in this context metaphorically links the emotional experience of sadness to the postpartum period, emphasizing the transient yet emotionally heavy feelings mothers may encounter after giving birth. Clinically, baby blues is described as a mild affective disorder syndrome that often appears in the first week after delivery, tends to worsen on the third to fifth day, and lasts for about two weeks [10].
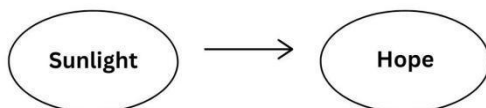
Figure 2. Word "sunlight" relates to hope

As presented in Figure 2, light captures a value of hope, and its extended meanings reveal its potential as a conceptual structure that transcends purely visual interpretation, carrying deep cultural and emotional significance [11]. Within this framework, the term sunshine baby emerges as a metaphor rooted in the symbolism of light, representing joy, renewal, and the warmth that follows darkness. Interestingly, the term sunshine is often applied retrospectively, once a following sibling is lost, reflecting how experiences are reframed within the

broader fertility journey [12]. In this context, the sunshine baby embodies hope and emotional recovery, illuminating life after grief much like sunlight breaks through after a storm.
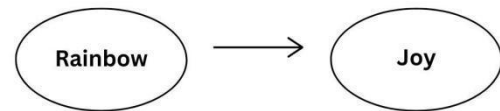
Figure 3. Word "rainbow" relates to joy

The findings in Figure 3, the term rainbow is symbolic of a new life that fits into a wider family narrative, representing hope that emerges only after suffering. While it does not refer directly to the lost infant, the label rainbow baby embodies the relationship between the lost and living children, marking the continuity of life and resilience after grief [12]. Extending this symbolism, the concept of rainbow joy signifies more than ordinary happiness; it reflects a sense of liberation of identity, transformation, and the promise of a new future [13]. Metaphorically, rainbow baby and rainbow joy encapsulate the emotional and existential renewal that follows loss, framing the child not only as a source of happiness but as a marker of hope, healing, and new possibilities.
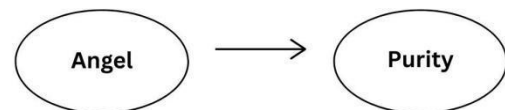
Figure 4. Word "angel" relates to purity

As shown in Figure 4, the term angel baby metaphorically draws from the symbolic representation of angels as embodiments of purity, innocence, and spirituality. Angels are often depicted as divine beings who exist in a realm untouched by earthly flaws, representing moral perfection and eternal peace. According to Youvan DC, "the wings of angels symbolize their spiritual purity and their role as intermediaries between God and humanity," highlighting their association with holiness and transcendence [14]. When this symbolism is applied to the phrase angel baby, it conveys the image of a child who is pure and untainted, often one who has passed away and is believed to reside in heaven. In this sense, angel baby serves as a metaphor for an infant who, though no longer living, is seen as spiritually elevated and eternally innocent, bridging the human and divine just as angels do.
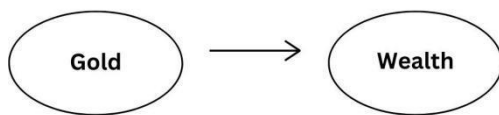
Figure 5. Word "gold" relates to wealth

It is shown in Figure 5, the color gold symbolizes wealth, prestige, and a successful life [15]. Gold, often associated with rarity and high value, carries connotations of achievement, fulfillment, and something deeply treasured. In this sense, the term golden baby, or pot of gold baby, refers to a baby born after a rainbow baby, symbolizing the ultimate reward after a journey of loss and healing [16]. Just as gold represents prosperity and triumph, the golden baby metaphorically embodies hope, abundance, and emotional richness following previous hardships, portraying the child as a precious culmination of resilience and grace.
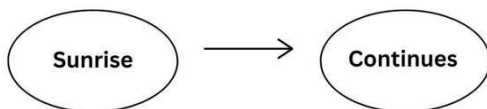

Figure 6. Word "sunrise" relates to continues

As shown in Figure 6, sunrise symbolizes life after death, serving as a metaphor for new beginnings and resurrection, representing the soul's journey from the darkness of death into a renewed or eternal existence [17]. In this context, the surviving twin is often referred to as the sunrise baby, as the rising sun heralds a new day and embodies a renewed sense of hope and continuity after loss [18]. Metaphorically, the sunrise baby captures the idea of life emerging from tragedy, illuminating both renewal and the emotional resilience of families navigating grief.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From this study, it can be seen that a conceptual metaphor is used as a bridge between language, cognition, and emotion. Allowing individuals to express complex emotional experiences related to loss, grief, and recovery. The analysis of the term *angel babies, sunshine babies, baby blues, rainbow babies, sunrise babies, and golden babies* reveals that most metaphors use light, color, and nature imagery to express their emotions. These metaphors symbolize emotional transitions from sadness to acceptance, from darkness to light, and from grief to renewal. Through these symbolic mappings, language not only communicates feelings but also facilitates healing and collective understanding among individuals who share similar experiences,

and it also has become an integral part of Western culture.

For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the analysis by including perspectives from other cultures to explore whether similar metaphors exist in non-Western contexts and how cultural backgrounds influence emotional expression. Fellow researchers could also include interviews or surveys with parents to gain deeper insights into how these events affect them and if they can relate to these metaphoric terms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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