

# A Tale of Two Cities: A Multimodal Study of City Metaphors in Picture Books

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This research aims to explore cognitive characteristics reflected by multimodal metaphorical depiction of city through assaying 266 data collected from 32 picture books composed by the Taiwanese writer/illustrator Jimmy Liao, who has gained international acclaim and recognition for his figural imagery on global urbanization. Although city metaphors can be found in earlier studies regarding literature, architecture, and sociology (e.g., Borer, 2013; Lynch, 1960; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2013), they are rarely taken under cognitive investigation. These city metaphors not only encapsulate a figurative wealth of human emotions toward urbanization but are deep-rooted in the human conceptual system (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) frequently manifested through multimodal media in the modern age (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). This study thus undertakes to examine how the imagery of city can be conceptualized through multimodal metaphors in picture books and what messages of human psyche and cognitive beauty can be observed therefrom.

Our findings show that city can be realized via eight major kinds of multimodal metaphors: CITY IS A VIRTUAL WORLD, CITY IS A CONFINED SPACE, CITY IS A DENSELY COVERED LAND, CITY IS A COMPLEX NETWORK, CITY IS TOYS, CITY IS A WIDE AND PLANE AREA, CITY IS AN AQUATIC AREA, and CITY IS A PERSON. These multimodal metaphors are argued to reflect not only the wild imaginations in the human thought but also 'individual solitude and interpersonal alienation' in the metaphorical sketch of the city, the latter revealing the experience of collective trauma shared by today's city dwellers. Interestingly, these metaphors seem to be a harmonious fusion of both bizarre and ordinary elements. Therefore, we propose the 'city magic surrealism' as a cognitive approach to understanding the illogical human subconscious based on the dynamics of multimodal simile and oxymoron (see Teng & Sun, 2002). In a nutshell, this research sheds new light on the urban imagery from a multimodal-figurative perspective, in hopes of making interdisciplinary contributions to the studies of metaphor, cognition, literature, arts, culture, and psychology.

## References

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