

FEMINIST METAPHOR IN AYU UTAMI'S NOVEL: *SAMAN* AND *MAYA*

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Abstract

This study analyzes the types of feminist metaphors appear in *Saman* and *Maya* by Ayu Utami. In addition, this research examines how women's experiences are conceptually structured through metaphor. Feminist metaphors in this study refer to metaphorical expressions that represent women's experiences and gender relations within the narrative. The analysis adopts the conceptual metaphor framework proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, which classifies metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this study analyzes metaphorical expressions related to women's experiences in both novels. The findings reveal that structural metaphors dominate the data. A total of 192 data are identified. There are 96 structural metaphors are identified in *Saman* and 93 in *Maya*, while only two orientational metaphors and one ontological metaphor are found in *Maya*. This pattern indicates that women's experiences in the novels are conceptualized through complex cross-domain mappings that connect gendered experiences with other domains such as objects, sensory perception, and biological relations. The study contributes to feminist literary linguistics by demonstrating how metaphor functions not merely as a language device, but as a conceptual mechanism that shapes the representation of women's experiences in narrative discourse as well. It also highlights the role of conceptual metaphor in revealing underlying gender ideologies embedded in contemporary Indonesian literature

Keywords – *feminist metaphor, conceptual metaphor, ayu utami, gender representation*

Introduction

Metaphor is both a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon that plays a crucial role in shaping how humans understand and represent reality. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphor is understood as a conceptual mapping between a source domain and a target domain, enabling abstract concepts to be comprehended through more concrete experiences. Thus, metaphor is not merely a linguistic expression but a fundamental structure of thought underlying meaning-making.

In literary texts, the function of metaphor becomes more complex as it operates not only at the cognitive level but also at aesthetic and ideological levels. Literature employs metaphor to construct emotional experience, deepen imagination, and represent power relations and identity. Therefore, analyzing metaphor in literary works allows researchers to uncover how texts construct reality through specific conceptual patterns.

The works of Ayu Utami, particularly *Saman* and *Maya*, are widely recognized as significant contributions to contemporary Indonesian literature, characterized by rich figurative language. These novels explore themes such as the body, sexuality, spirituality, and power relations through dense and layered metaphors, positioning metaphor as both a cognitive and ideological instrument that frames readers' understanding of experience.

Recent studies have demonstrated that metaphor functions not only as a linguistic device but also as a complex conceptual, cognitive, and ideological mechanism across various discourses. Neurolinguistic research in *Brain and Language* shows that metaphor processing involves sensorimotor activation and operates in a context-dependent and graded manner, supporting the view that metaphor is grounded in embodiment as well as abstraction (Zhu et al., 2026). In psychological and social contexts, studies in *Acta Psychologica* reveal that metaphor plays a significant role in identity construction, as seen in depression discourse where metaphors such as *DEPRESSION IS DARKNESS* and *SELF IS OBJECT* shape subject positioning (Liao et al., 2026). Furthermore, research in the *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* indicates that metaphor comprehension is closely linked to cognitive capacity and meaning integration, highlighting its role in abstract thinking (Fernandes et al., 2026).

Within cognitive linguistics, research in *Lingua* shows that metaphor often interacts with other rhetorical devices such as hyperbole to produce complex meanings through cross-domain mapping (Chen & Ahrens, 2026). In public and political discourse, studies in *Language Sciences* demonstrate that metaphor functions as a tool for ideological legitimation and persuasion, varying across genres and communicative contexts (Tan et al., 2026). Similarly, research in *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* highlights that abstract phenomena such as inflation are conceptualized through concrete metaphors (e.g., objects or fire), shaping public perception (Nguyen et al., 2026).

In cultural and literary contexts, metaphor serves as a medium for representing existential experiences and cultural values. A study in the *Journal of Bali Studies* shows that metaphors, particularly journey metaphors, are used to frame concepts of death and finality within specific cultural frameworks (Widiatmika et al., 2026). Likewise, research on Balinese performing arts demonstrates that figurative language bridges emotion, aesthetics, and moral values, reinforcing the pedagogical function of metaphor (Yulianti et al., 2026). In legal discourse on social media, metaphor is used to express moral judgments and social attitudes (Hendrastuti et al., 2026). At a broader conceptual level, metaphor can also function as a political and material framework, as illustrated in the "lifeboat" metaphor in climate discourse discussed in *Global Constitutionalism* (Scharenberg, 2025).

Taken together, these studies confirm that metaphor is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing cognitive, linguistic, social, and ideological dimensions. However, despite the extensive development of metaphor studies across various domains, there remains a lack of research that systematically identifies types of conceptual metaphors in Indonesian literary texts, particularly in stylistically complex works such as *Maya* and *Saman*.

Previous studies tend to emphasize thematic interpretation and ideological critique, while systematic classification of metaphor types based on conceptual frameworks remains limited. Yet, categorizing metaphors into structural, ontological, and orientational types is essential for understanding how abstract experiences; such as emotion, the body, and social relations are conceptualized in texts. The absence of such mapping leads to a limited

understanding of the conceptual structures underlying meaning representation in literary works. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by identifying the types of conceptual metaphors found in *Maya* and *Saman*, aiming to provide a more systematic understanding of how metaphor operates within literary discourse.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson. This approach is employed to identify and classify metaphors based on conceptual mappings, allowing for an in-depth analysis of meaning construction rather than quantitative measurement. The data are drawn from two contemporary Indonesian novels, *Saman* and *Maya* by Ayu Utami, selected for their rich metaphorical language and thematic complexity related to the body, sexuality, spirituality, and power relations.

Data were collected through document analysis by closely reading the texts, identifying metaphorical expressions, and classifying them based on conceptual mappings between source and target domains. The researcher functioned as the primary instrument, supported by analytical tools such as classification tables, metaphor categories (structural, ontological, and orientational), and mapping frameworks. Data analysis followed systematic stages: identifying linguistic metaphors, determining conceptual domains, classifying metaphor types, analyzing cross-domain mappings, and interpreting their conceptual meanings. The research procedure involved defining the research focus, reviewing relevant theory, collecting and classifying data, conducting conceptual analysis, and drawing conclusions based on the findings.

Finding and Discussion

In this study, the metaphors analyzed are categorized as feminist metaphors. Feminist metaphors is referring to metaphor in which relate to women's experiences and gender relations as represented in the novels *Maya* and *Saman*. The analysis is grounded in *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). Within this framework, metaphor is not merely viewed as a linguistic device, but as a fundamental mechanism through which humans understand and conceptualize abstract experiences.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that human cognition is inherently metaphorical. In other words, metaphors are not limited to linguistic expressions; they also shape the way individuals think, perceive, and act. Furthermore, they propose that metaphors operate through systematic mappings between two conceptual domains. Through this process, abstract concepts (target domains) are understood in terms of more concrete and familiar concepts (source domains). Consequently, metaphor functions as a cognitive tool that enables individuals to comprehend complex and abstract aspects of everyday life.

Lakoff and Johnson further classify conceptual metaphors into three primary types: structural metaphors, orientational metaphors, and ontological metaphors. Based on this classification, the metaphors identified in the novels *Maya* and *Saman* are analyzed and categorized into these three types. The results of this classification are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Types of Metaphor

Novel	Types	Amount
Saman	Structural	96
	Structural	93
Maya	Orientalational	2
	Ontological	1

a. Structural Metaphor

Structural metaphor is considered a complex type of metaphor in which one concept is systematically understood through the structure of another. In this type of metaphor, the source domain is used to organize how individuals conceptualize particular experiences. For this reason, structural metaphors frequently appear in everyday language and play a crucial role in shaping human thought.

Seorang laki-laki seperti dia mestinya menikah dengan perawan yang manis, tetapi dia mengawini seorang janda [6 - BSu - Str - Ste - Smn – 26]

An example can be seen in the expression *perawan yang manis* (“a sweet virgin”), which frames the concept of a woman through the domain of taste. The term *sweet*, which literally refers to a sensory experience, is used metaphorically to describe a woman’s perceived attractiveness, often associated with innocence and submissiveness. Through this mapping, an abstract quality such as personal appeal is understood in terms of a concrete sensory experience. As a result, intangible characteristics become more imaginable and accessible to the reader, as if they could be directly “tasted.”

Aku ini ternyata sebuah porselin cina [35 - BSu - Str - Ste - Smn – 127]

Another example appears in the expression *Aku ini ternyata sebuah porselin cina* (“I am a Chinese porcelain”), where a woman is conceptualized as a fragile object. This metaphor constructs a mapping between femininity and fragility, emphasizing delicacy, value, and vulnerability. Porcelain, as a physical object, is easily broken and cannot be restored once damaged. Similarly, the metaphor reflects a social belief that a woman’s value is tied to her “intactness,” particularly in relation to virginity. Through this mapping, an abstract social judgment is conveyed through a concrete physical object, making the concept more tangible for the reader.

Mereka menerima lamaran, menerima benih. [120 - BSu - Str - Sub - May – 46]

A further example is found in the expression *Mereka menerima lamaran, menerima benih*. (“they accept proposals, accept seeds,”) which reflects the social construction of women as passive participants in relationships. The repetition of the verb *accept* emphasizes the positioning of women as recipients, while *seed* metaphorically refers to sperm. This structural metaphor organizes social experience through a giver–receiver schema, reinforcing a conceptual framework in which men are active agents and women are passive recipients. Thus, the metaphor does not merely describe an event but constructs a particular understanding of gender roles.

Ia ingin memberi rasa kenyang serta kuasa bagi si hewan buas. Ia ingin meneteskan darah. [159 - BSu - Str - Ste - May – 83]

Finally, the expression *memberi rasa kenyang serta kuasa bagi si hewan buas* (“to feed the beast and give it satisfaction”) represents intimate relationships through the domain of instinct and biological need. The male figure is conceptualized as a wild animal, while the female figure is positioned as the provider of satisfaction. Additional imagery such as “*she wanted to shed blood*” intensifies the metaphor by invoking bodily and visceral experiences. Through this mapping, emotional and physical experiences are understood via instinctual and biological domains, allowing readers to grasp complex experiences in a more concrete and embodied way.

Overall, these examples demonstrate that structural metaphors in the novels function as powerful conceptual tools. They do not merely embellish language. However, they also actively shape how experiences, particularly those related to women, the body, and gender relations, are understood and interpreted.

b. Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors are related to spatial orientation derived from human physical experience, such as up–down, inside–outside, and front–back. Unlike structural metaphors, which organize one concept through another, orientational metaphors provide a spatial framework that structures how abstract experiences are understood.

Ia keluar, telah berbasuh dan menjelma Sita. Kemuliaannya akan memancar. [123 - BSu - Ori - Ste - May – 46]

An example can be seen in the expression *Ia keluar, telah berbasuh dan menjelma Sita. Kemuliaannya akan memancar.* (“she emerged, cleansed, and transformed into Sita. Her nobility would radiate.”) This metaphor appears in the narrative describing Maya’s internal reflection. As a dancer who does not conform to conventional standards of beauty, Maya experiences a transformation when performing on stage. She imagines herself as Sita, a noble and virtuous female figure from the Ramayana. In this context, the term *emerged* does not merely indicate physical movement but signifies a conceptual shift from a marginalized identity to a more valued and symbolically elevated one.

The spatial orientation of “outward movement” represents a transition from a previous state to a new one. Similarly, the expression “*her nobility would radiate*” reinforces this orientation by depicting a quality that spreads outward from a central source. Through this orientational mapping, an abstract process of transformation is conceptualized in terms of spatial movement, making it more accessible to the reader.

Dalam tari, ia melambung dan menjadi mulia sebagai Sita. Setelah itu ia jatuh ke tanah lagi. [141 - BSu - Ori - Ste - May – 68]

Another example is found in the expression *Dalam tari, ia melambung dan menjadi mulia sebagai Sita. Setelah itu ia jatuh ke tanah lagi.* (“in dance, she soared and became noble as Sita, but afterward she fell back to the ground.”) This metaphor employs vertical spatial orientation (up–down) to represent changes in Maya’s psychological state. The term *soared*

indicates an upward movement associated with elevation and value, while *fell to the ground* represents a return to a lower, less valued state. Conceptually, the upward movement symbolizes empowerment and transformation, whereas the downward movement reflects a return to reality. Thus, abstract emotional experiences are structured through spatial schemas rooted in bodily experience.

c. Ontological Metaphor

Ontological metaphors occur when abstract experiences are conceptualized as entities, objects, or substances. This type of metaphor allows individuals to define, delimit, and analyze otherwise intangible experiences.

Ia akan meninggalkan dirinya yang ia kenal dalam cermin. [117 - BSu - Ont - Ste - May – 45]

An example is the expression “she would leave the self she recognized in the mirror.” This metaphor reflects Maya’s internal thoughts as a marginalized dancer who is often overlooked due to her physical appearance. However, on stage, she transforms into a different, celebrated identity.

In this case, the concept of the self, which is inherently abstract, is constructed as a separable entity. The verb leave implies that the self has an independent existence that can be detached from the individual. Thus, psychological transformation is understood through a conceptual framework that treats identity as an object that can be abandoned or replaced.

Furthermore, the presence of the mirror reinforces this ontological construction by functioning as a medium of reflection. Conceptually, the mirror acts as a boundary that separates different versions of the marginalized self and the idealized self presented on stage. Through this metaphor, complex internal experiences become more concrete and analyzable, as they are framed in terms of relationships between entities.

The dominance of structural metaphors in the novels *Saman* and *Maya* can be linked to Ayu Utami’s reflective and conceptual writing style. In both novels, characters’ experiences are not merely described directly but are frequently understood through conceptual mappings that connect abstract experiences with more concrete and familiar domains. Structural metaphors enable complex experiences, such as interpersonal relationships, bodily experiences, and inner conflicts, to be organized within specific conceptual frameworks. This is evident in the way human experiences are mapped onto domains such as objects, sensory perception, and biological processes. Through these mappings, abstract experiences become more structured and accessible to readers. This pattern indicates that metaphorical language in both novels functions not only as a stylistic feature but also as a fundamental mechanism for constructing meaning within the narrative. In other words, structural metaphors play a central role in shaping how characters’ experiences are represented and understood throughout the text.

Discussion

This study demonstrates a clear dominance of structural metaphors in *Maya* and *Saman*, while orientational and ontological metaphors appear only three times. This imbalance is not incidental but reveals a systematic conceptual strategy in which meaning is primarily constructed through structured cross-domain mappings. Such a pattern challenges the

tendency in previous studies to treat metaphor typology as merely classificatory rather than analytically consequential.

Within *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, metaphors are often framed as cognitively neutral mechanisms for understanding abstract concepts. For instance, studies on economic discourse show how abstract phenomena such as inflation are conceptualized through concrete domains to facilitate public understanding (Nguyen et al., 2026). However, such approaches tend to overlook the ideological implications embedded in source-domain selection. The present study demonstrates that metaphors such as those framing women as fragile objects or passive recipients encode and reproduce gendered hierarchies, thus operating as ideological constructs rather than neutral cognitive tools.

Similarly, embodiment-based accounts argue that metaphor comprehension is grounded in sensorimotor experience (Zhu et al., 2026). While relevant, this perspective proves insufficient in explaining the findings. In these novels, the body is not merely a perceptual entity but an ideological site shaped by cultural norms and power relations. This aligns with research showing that metaphors play a role in identity construction and social positioning, as seen in studies of depression discourse (Liao et al., 2026) yet extends it by demonstrating that metaphors not only construct identity but also stabilize asymmetrical power relations.

Furthermore, while previous research highlights the persuasive and ideological functions of metaphor in political discourse (Tan et al., 2026), it rarely interrogates the dominance of specific metaphor types. This study shows that structural metaphors are not incidental but central in organizing meaning, particularly in framing gender, body, and relational dynamics. Thus, metaphor should be understood not as a neutral cognitive device or static cultural reflection, but as a dynamic discursive mechanism through which meaning, identity, and power are actively constructed and negotiated.

Conclusions

This study set out to identify and analyze the types of conceptual metaphors in Maya and Saman using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The findings reveal a clear dominance of structural metaphors, while orientational and ontological metaphors occur only minimally. This distribution indicates that meaning in both novels is primarily constructed through systematic cross-domain mappings that organize abstract experiences into more concrete conceptual frameworks.

Beyond classification, the study demonstrates that metaphors in these texts are not ideologically neutral. Structural metaphors, particularly those related to women, the body, and gender relations, actively shape how these experiences are understood, often reinforcing patterns of passivity, fragility, and asymmetrical power. Thus, metaphor functions not only as a cognitive mechanism but also as a discursive tool that produces and normalizes social meanings.

Moreover, the findings challenge the dominance of cognitive-centered approaches by showing that metaphor operates within broader cultural and ideological contexts. The body, as represented in the metaphors, emerges not merely as a biological entity but as a socially constructed and contested site. In conclusion, this study highlights that metaphor in literary texts serves as a fundamental mechanism for constructing meaning, identity, and power relations. It also underscores the importance of systematically identifying metaphor types to better understand the conceptual structures underlying literary representation.

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