

A Cognitive Linguistic Framework for Multimodal Metaphors in the Graphic Novel *Maus*[†]

Eugene Chung*

<http://doi.org/10.38119/cacs.2025.35.6>

Received August 31, 2025; accepted September 19, 2025; published online September 30, 2025

Abstract: This study develops a cognitive linguistic framework for analyzing multimodal metaphors in graphic novels, with a focus on Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. While research on multimodal metaphor has advanced significantly in domains such as advertising, film, and political cartoons, graphic novels remain comparatively underexplored and are often examined primarily as trauma narratives. This study addresses that gap by proposing a replicable framework that identifies four principal units of analysis - visual motifs, verbo-pictorial interactions, layout, and sequential structures - and classifies them in relation to established levels of linguistic metaphor analysis. The analysis demonstrates that multimodal metaphors in *Maus* fulfill three interrelated narrative functions: they represent trauma and emotional experience as affective interiority, reveal power asymmetries through ideological critique, and structure memory and temporality through sequential and spatial design. By integrating insights from cognitive linguistics and comics studies, the article extends Conceptual Metaphor Theory into the domain of graphic novels. The framework not only illuminates how *Maus* realizes complex figurative meanings across visual and verbal modes but also provides a methodological foundation for future research on multimodal metaphor in long-form narrative media.

Keywords: multimodal metaphor, graphic novels, cognitive linguistics, *Maus*, trauma, narrative functions

[†] This research was supported by a faculty research grant from the College of Liberal Arts at Korea University in 2025.

* Eugene Chung, Korea University, Korea, E-mail: echung2@korea.ac.kr

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the study of multimodal metaphor has developed into a well-established field, with influential analyses of advertising, film, and political cartoons demonstrating how metaphors emerge from the interaction of multiple communicative resources (Forceville, 1996; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Tsakona, 2009). This body of work has significantly advanced metaphor theory by extending conceptual metaphor beyond the verbal domain and showing how images, words, and layout can jointly construct figurative meaning.

Despite these advances, graphic novels remain an underexplored site within this literature. Scholarship on graphic novels has predominantly addressed their testimonial and political dimensions, particularly in relation to trauma, memory, and identity (Chute, 2010; Baetens & Frey, 2015). While these studies underscore the affective and ideological force of visual metaphors, they have typically been case-driven and descriptive. Few attempts have been made to develop a systematic and replicable framework capable of capturing the unique communicative resources of the graphic novel, such as panel sequencing, page layout, and recurring iconography. As a result, existing analyses are difficult to compare across texts, and their findings cannot be easily integrated into broader metaphor theory.

This article addresses that gap through a detailed analysis of Spiegelman's (1986, 1992, 1993, 1996) *Maus*. Widely recognized as a landmark text in both comics studies and cultural discourse, *Maus* offers a particularly compelling case for examining multimodal metaphor. It has become canonical not only because it narrates the Holocaust through the innovative device of animal allegory, but also because it exemplifies how graphic novels can represent memory and history in ways unavailable to purely verbal media. As Chute (2010) and others have shown, *Maus* has often been read primarily as a trauma narrative, highlighting the intergenerational transmission of Holocaust memory. At the same time, its complex communicative design, including recurring iconography (mice, cats, pigs), panel sequencing, and page layout, provides rich material for investigating how multimodal metaphors function at visual, verbal, and narrative levels.

For these reasons, *Maus* is uniquely positioned to serve as a test case for the proposed framework. It is sufficiently well-studied to ensure that new findings can be situated within ongoing scholarly debates, yet its communicative richness allows for a systematic analysis of multimodal metaphors that moves beyond trauma to address ideological critique and temporal structuring. By focusing on *Maus*, this study demonstrates how a single graphic novel can illuminate broader theoretical questions about metaphor, narrative, and multimodality.

Drawing on cognitive linguistics and comics studies, this study develops a cognitive linguistic framework that extends linguistic metaphor theory into the multimodal domain. The framework identifies the principal units of analysis through which multimodal metaphors are realized, namely visual (iconographic), verbo-pictorial, layout, and sequential structures. It further classifies these multimodal metaphors by aligning them with established levels of linguistic metaphor analysis: pictorial metaphors correspond to lexical metaphors, verbo-pictorial metaphors to phrasal metaphors, layout-driven metaphors to discourse metaphors, and sequential metaphors to narrative metaphors. Finally, it links these types to distinct narrative functions, showing how multimodal metaphors in *Maus* convey affective interiority, articulate

ideological critique, and manipulate temporal structuring. The study is guided by the following research questions (RQ).

RQ1. What are the key units of analysis through which multimodal metaphors are realized in *Maus*?

RQ2. How can multimodal metaphors in *Maus* be systematically classified in linguistic terms, by extending categories of metaphor analysis to the interaction of image, text, layout, and sequential structure?

RQ3. What narrative functions do these multimodal metaphors perform in representing trauma and memory?

By addressing these questions, this article makes three contributions. Theoretically, it extends Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and discourse metaphor research into the multimodal environment of graphic novels. Methodologically, this study develops a replicable framework that bridges cognitive linguistics and comics studies, situating *Maus* within its narrative and visual traditions (Groensteen, 2007; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Conceptually, it repositions graphic novels not only as sites of cultural testimony but also as theoretically significant resources for advancing multimodal metaphor research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Extensions

The study of metaphor in cognitive linguistics was decisively shaped by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which proposed that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but a fundamental mechanism of thought. Metaphor involves systematic mappings from a concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain, allowing complex or intangible experiences to be structured in terms of embodied knowledge. This theoretical shift profoundly influenced the analysis of figurative language across disciplines, establishing metaphor as central to cognition and communication.

Subsequent research extended CMT beyond the level of individual lexical items to consider discourse and narrative metaphors (Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2008). This line of work highlighted how metaphor organizes larger stretches of discourse, framing political debate, shaping public understanding of social issues, and structuring narrative coherence. In doing so, it demonstrated that metaphor functions not only at the level of words and phrases but also as a discourse-organizing principle.

More recently, scholars have emphasized the need to account for metaphors that operate across different modes of communication, leading to the development of multimodal metaphor theory (Forceville, 1996; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Tsakona, 2009). In this framework, metaphors are identified when two domains are mapped onto one another through the interaction of at least two resources, such as image, written text, sound, or gesture. Studies of advertising, film, and political cartoons have shown how multimodal metaphors are realized through verbo-pictorial combinations, cinematic techniques, and sequential visual framing.

This body of work has substantially broadened metaphor theory beyond the verbal domain, reinforcing the view that metaphor is best understood as a multimodal phenomenon.

Nevertheless, despite these advances, research has concentrated disproportionately on genres such as advertising and political cartoons, while narrative forms like graphic novels remain comparatively underexplored. Existing analyses of graphic narratives have often been descriptive and case-specific, without a replicable framework for identifying units, types, and functions of multimodal metaphor. This gap motivates the present study, which systematically integrates insights from cognitive linguistics with analytical perspectives from comics studies to account for the distinctive communicative resources of the graphic novel.

2.2 Graphic Novels, Trauma, and Beyond

Scholarship on graphic novels has frequently foregrounded their testimonial and affective dimensions, particularly in relation to trauma, memory, and political violence. *Maus* has become a paradigmatic case, often analyzed as a trauma narrative that exemplifies the medium's capacity to represent historical catastrophe and its intergenerational transmission (Chute, 2010). This trauma-centered perspective has been crucial in demonstrating how visual and verbal metaphors in comics articulate affective interiority and bear witness to experiences that resist straightforward verbalization.

However, an exclusive focus on trauma risks narrowing the analytical scope of graphic novel studies. Beyond testifying to traumatic memory, graphic narratives also stage ideological critique, exposing power relations, stereotypes, and cultural hierarchies (Baetens & Frey, 2015). Moreover, their semiotic resources, including panel sequencing, layout, and compositional design, enable complex forms of temporal structuring, shaping the reader's perception of memory, duration, and narrative coherence (Groensteen, 2007; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). These dimensions suggest that the graphic novel is not only a medium for witnessing trauma but also a distinctive site where multimodal metaphors serve diverse narrative and discursive functions.

This study builds on these insights while moving beyond a trauma-exclusive perspective. Rather than treating trauma as the sole or dominant focus, it situates *Maus* within a broader framework. In this framework, multimodal metaphors serve three interrelated functions: affective interiority, which relates to trauma and emotional experience; ideological critique, which addresses power and hierarchy; and temporal structuring, which organizes memory and narrative sequencing.

2.3 Comics Studies and Visual Discourse

Research in comics studies has emphasized the distinctive formal and semiotic resources of the medium. Groensteen (2007) conceptualizes the comic as a network of interdependent panels, introducing the notion of arthrology to describe how meaning emerges from the relations among panels. His framework demonstrates that sequence, page layout, and iconic

repetition are not merely stylistic features but fundamental organizing principles of graphic narrative. Baetens and Frey (2015) further situate the graphic novel within broader cultural and aesthetic traditions, arguing that its hybrid form requires an analytical approach attentive to both visual and literary dimensions.

In parallel, the field of visual discourse analysis has provided systematic tools for examining how images operate as discourse. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, showing how framing, salience, and spatial organization influence the interpretation of visual texts. Their framework has been applied to a wide range of multimodal data, from advertising to digital communication, and it is particularly relevant to the study of graphic novels, where page composition and panel sequencing frequently determine the realization of metaphor.

Taken together, comics studies and visual discourse analysis offer complementary perspectives. Comics studies highlights the medium's formal affordances, such as sequentiality, layout, and recurring iconography, whereas visual discourse analysis provides a systematic vocabulary for describing how these resources shape meaning. Building on both traditions, the present study integrates insights from cognitive linguistics with the formal analyses of comics studies and the semiotic categories of visual discourse analysis. This integrative approach supports the development of a replicable framework for multimodal metaphor analysis in *Maus*, one that addresses not only trauma but also ideological critique and temporal structuring as core narrative functions.

2.4 Summary and Research Gap

The review above has outlined three key strands of scholarship relevant to this study. First, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) established metaphor as a central mechanism of thought, later extended to discourse and narrative levels (Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2008). Second, multimodal metaphor research has shown how metaphors emerge through the interaction of different communicative resources, particularly in advertising, film, and political cartoons (Forceville, 1996; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Tsakona, 2009). Third, research in comics studies and visual discourse analysis has provided tools for understanding the distinctive affordances of graphic narratives, including sequentiality, layout, and recurring iconography (Groensteen, 2007; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Baetens & Frey, 2015).

Despite these advances, two limitations remain. Most existing analyses of graphic novels are case-driven and descriptive, focusing primarily on trauma testimony without articulating a systematic framework for identifying the units, types, and functions of multimodal metaphor. Moreover, while multimodal metaphor theory has been rigorously developed in relation to advertising and political cartoons, it has rarely been extended to long-form narrative media such as the graphic novel, where sequentiality and layout play crucial roles in metaphor realization.

This gap motivates the present study. By examining *Maus*, the research develops a cognitive linguistic framework that (1) identifies key units of analysis—visual (iconographic), verbo-pictorial, layout, and sequential structures; (2) classifies these in relation to established levels of linguistic metaphor analysis; and (3) links them to narrative functions, specifically affective interiority, ideological critique, and temporal structuring. In doing so, the study

integrates insights from cognitive linguistics with comics studies to propose a replicable framework for analyzing multimodal metaphor in graphic novels.

3. Methodology and Analytical Framework

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in cognitive linguistics and applied to multimodal data. Rather than surveying a broad corpus, it focuses on a single case study of *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991). A single-text focus is methodologically appropriate because *Maus* is both paradigmatic and exceptionally rich in its multimodal strategies. It is widely recognized as a canonical work in comics studies and cultural discourse, frequently analyzed as a trauma narrative but less often examined for its systematic deployment of multimodal metaphors.

The case study design serves two purposes. First, it allows for close examination of how multimodal metaphors operate across verbal, visual, and sequential resources in a sustained narrative. Second, it provides an opportunity to test and refine the proposed cognitive-linguistic framework, demonstrating how it can be applied in a replicable manner. The aim is not statistical generalization but theory building: by analyzing *Maus* in depth, the study develops categories and procedures that may be extended to a broader corpus of graphic novels in future research.

A key principle of this design is image–text integration. The analysis moves beyond verbal description by directly referencing panels and sequences, linking visual details with linguistic categories of metaphor. Both verbal expressions (e.g., dialogue, captions, symbolic lexical choices) and visual-symbolic resources (e.g., predator–prey iconography, uniforms, spatial hierarchies) are treated as equally integral to metaphor realization. This ensures that theoretical claims are grounded in observable textual and visual evidence, and that the framework remains transparent, replicable, and adaptable for further application.

3.2 Data and Unit of Analysis

The data for this study consist of the complete two-volume edition of *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1991). Both volumes are treated as a unified narrative, as the second continues and completes the story begun in the first.

Maus recounts the Holocaust through the testimony of Vladek Spiegelman, the father of the author. Its most distinctive feature is the use of anthropomorphic allegory: Jews are represented as mice, Germans as cats, and Poles as pigs. This visual coding, combined with personal testimony and historical narrative, has established *Maus* as a canonical work in both comics studies and cultural discourse. The text provides particularly rich material for the analysis of multimodal metaphor, since its meaning depends on the interplay of verbal narration, visual iconography, page layout, and sequential structure.

For the purposes of analysis, the unit of analysis refers to the basic level at which meaning is identified and interpreted. The panel is taken as the primary unit, as it constitutes the minimal semiotic frame where verbal and visual resources co-occur. At the page level, metaphors may be realized through layout, framing, and compositional design. At the sequential level, extended metaphors emerge through continuity or disruption across multiple panels. In addition, iconographic motifs such as the recurring animal allegories of mice, cats, and pigs, function as symbolic units that cut across panels and sequences to establish metaphorical mappings of identity and hierarchy. Four categories of communicative resources are operationalized for analysis.

- (1) Four categories of communicative resources
 - a. Visual (iconographic): recurring motifs such as mice, cats, and pigs that establish metaphorical mappings of identity and hierarchy.
 - b. Verbo-pictorial: interactions between text and image, where dialogue, captions, or titles anchor or reframe visual content.
 - c. Layout: spatial composition, framing, and page organization that convey metaphorical structures beyond single panels.
 - d. Sequential: narrative continuity and repetition across panels and pages that realize extended metaphors over time.

By defining these analytical units, the study ensures that both verbal expressions and visual-symbolic resources are systematically incorporated into the analysis of multimodal metaphor. This design allows for consistent classification and comparison of examples, supporting the framework's emphasis on transparency and replicability.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework developed in this study builds on insights from cognitive linguistics while adapting them to the multimodal environment of the graphic novel. Its aim is to provide a replicable structure for identifying and classifying multimodal metaphors in *Maus*, moving beyond case-driven interpretation to a systematic account of how meaning is constructed across modes. The framework operates on three interrelated levels: the units through which metaphors are realized, the types of metaphor that these units instantiate, and the narrative functions they perform.

At the first level, metaphors are examined in relation to the communicative resources that realize them. Four resources are distinguished: visual motifs such as the recurrent animal allegories, verbo-pictorial interactions between text and image, layout patterns including framing and page composition, and sequential structures that unfold across multiple panels or pages. These units provide the basic analytic foundation for identifying multimodal metaphors.

At the second level, these units are classified in terms of types of metaphor, which are aligned with established levels of metaphor analysis in linguistics. Pictorial metaphors

correspond to lexical metaphors, in which single images function analogously to words—for instance, the cat standing for the Nazi and the mouse for the Jew. Verbo-pictorial metaphors correspond to phrasal metaphors, where text and image combine to produce figurative meaning, as when characters wear masks that signal disguise or assimilation. Layout-driven metaphors correspond to discourse metaphors, realized through page design and spatial relations that shape meaning across larger textual units. Sequential metaphors correspond to narrative metaphors, where continuity and recurrence across panels realize extended figurative mappings over time.

Finally, at the third level, these types are linked to narrative functions that are particularly salient in *Maus*. Some metaphors articulate affective interiority, expressing trauma and emotional experience through figurative strategies. Others perform ideological critique, exposing asymmetrical power relations, domination, and identity manipulation. Still others contribute to temporal structuring, organizing memory, duration, and narrative coherence through sequential and layout-based devices.

By integrating units, types, and functions, the framework provides a systematic and replicable method for analyzing multimodal metaphor in graphic novels. It situates *Maus* not only as a narrative of testimony but also as a site where verbal, visual, and sequential resources jointly construct complex figurative meanings.

3.4 Analytical Procedure for Multimodal Metaphor

The procedure for analyzing multimodal metaphors in *Maus* adapts the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU; Steen et al., 2010) to the domain of graphic narrative. MIPVU was originally designed to provide a step-by-step method for identifying metaphor in linguistic data. It relies on the principle that a lexical unit can be identified as metaphorical if its contextual meaning contrasts with a more basic, concrete meaning, and if the contextual meaning can be understood in comparison with the basic one. While MIPVU was created for verbal analysis, its emphasis on systematicity and replicability provides a strong foundation for multimodal adaptation.

In this study, the logic of MIPVU is extended to visual and narrative data. Instead of focusing solely on lexical contrasts, the analysis considers how visual motifs, verbo-pictorial interactions, page layouts, and sequential structures may generate figurative meaning through cross-domain mappings. The procedure proceeds in three stages. First, potential metaphors are identified in verbal text, images, and their integration. Second, each candidate is classified according to the unit of analysis defined in Section 3.2: visual, verbo-pictorial, layout, or sequential. Third, the identified metaphor is interpreted in terms of its narrative function, showing whether it conveys affective interiority, articulates ideological critique, or contributes to temporal structuring.

This adaptation of MIPVU ensures that the analysis is transparent and replicable. The focus is not on impressionistic interpretation but on consistent procedures that can be applied across data and reproduced by other researchers. For illustration, a few well-known examples from *Maus* can be mentioned briefly. The depiction of Jews as mice and Nazis as cats functions as a visual metaphor that exemplifies ideological critique, while the use of fragmented panels to

depict memory loss illustrates how layout can serve as a metaphor for trauma. A fuller set of representative examples is presented in Chapter 4, where the analytical framework is applied in detail.

4. Analysis of Multimodal Metaphors in *Maus*

This chapter applies the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 3 to the two volumes of *Maus*. The analysis is organized according to the four categories of metaphor realization: visual, verbo-pictorial, layout, and sequential. A final section examines how these resources interact to create complex multimodal metaphors of power and oppression. Each section illustrates how the identified metaphors function within three narrative domains: affective interiority, ideological critique, and temporal structuring, thereby demonstrating how the framework captures the distinctive semiotic ecology of the graphic novel.

4.1 Visual Metaphors

Visual metaphors in *Maus* are realized most prominently through animal allegories, in which ethnic and political identities are mapped onto animal figures. These iconographic motifs function as pictorial metaphors corresponding to lexical-level mappings in language. Just as a single lexical item may represent an entire conceptual domain, the depiction of a character as a mouse, cat, or pig encodes a social identity and its associated power relations in a single visual sign.

As shown in Figure 4.1 (a), Nazi police officers are depicted as pigs interrogating a Jewish family. The animal heads, attached to human bodies in uniform, function metaphorically: the pig signifies Polish authorities collaborating with the Nazi regime, while the mice signify Jewish victims under interrogation. This visual metaphor condenses complex political relationships into an instantly legible schema of identity and power.

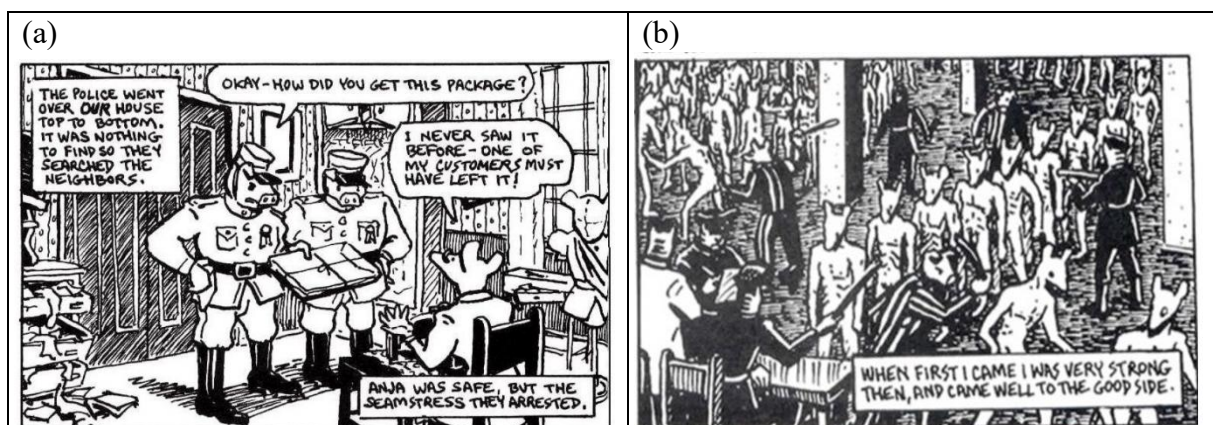


Figure 4.1 Visual metaphors of power relations

Figure 4.1 (b) presents another striking example, in which prisoners at Auschwitz are depicted as mice under the control of Nazi guards shown as cats. The predator–prey schema is central here: the cats stand for domination, surveillance, and violence, while the mice represent vulnerability and subjugation. Moreover, the repetition of nearly identical mouse figures, stripped of individuality, reinforces the reduction of human beings to anonymous bodies within the machinery of genocide.

When read together, these examples illustrate how *Maus* employs visual metaphors to articulate ideological critique. By mapping national and ethnic identities onto animal forms, Spiegelman exposes the arbitrariness and brutality of racial hierarchies. The allegorical coding not only visualizes domination but also critiques the processes of stereotyping and dehumanization that sustain it. In doing so, *Maus* demonstrates how metaphor extends from linguistic expression to visual representation, where identity and power are communicated through spatial, bodily, and iconographic design.

4.2 Verbal Mode and Testimony

Verbo-pictorial metaphors in *Maus* emerge when text and image interact to construct figurative meaning. These instances correspond to phrasal-level metaphors in linguistic analysis, where two semiotic resources combine to yield a single metaphorical expression. In such cases, the visual imagery provides the figurative mapping, while the accompanying verbal text anchors, reframes, or complicates its interpretation.

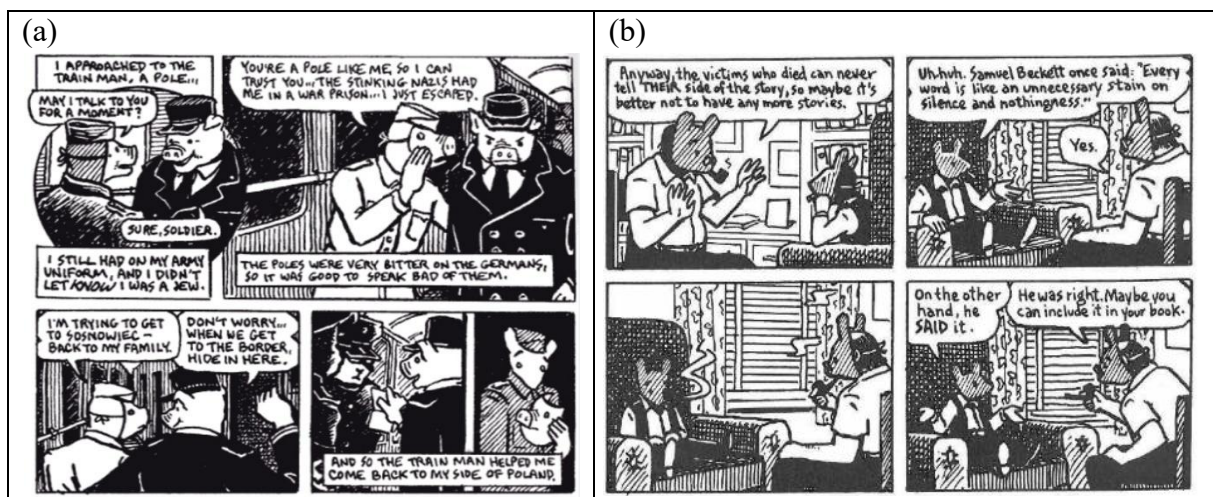


Figure 4.2 Verbo-pictorial metaphors of disguise and identity

Figure 4.2 (a) presents one of the most striking examples. In *Maus I* (Spiegelman 1986), Jewish characters attempt to pass as Poles by wearing pig masks. The mask functions metaphorically, signifying disguise and the precariousness of identity under Nazi occupation. The visual representation dramatizes the act of “hiding one’s true face,” while the verbal text such as dialogue and captions clarifies the necessity of concealment and the danger of exposure. This verbo-pictorial metaphor corresponds to a phrasal-level expression of assimilation and

disguise, and its narrative function is ideological critique, as it highlights how identity is both unstable and manipulable under systemic oppression.

Figure 4.2 (b) illustrates a reflexive case in *Maus II* (Spiegelman 1993), where the author inserts himself into the narrative and directly questions the logic of animal allegory. Characters explicitly comment on their own animalized representations, and the verbal acknowledgment of being seen as “mice” or “pigs” interacts with the imagery itself, producing a reflexive metaphor in which allegorical figuration becomes self-conscious. This combination of image and text foregrounds the arbitrariness of racial and ethnic labeling, reinforcing the critique of imposed identities.

In combination, Figures 4.2 (a) and 4.2 (b) demonstrate that verbo-pictorial metaphors operate not merely as visual devices but as critical commentaries on identity, assimilation, and survival. The interplay of image and text reveals how metaphor is co-constructed across semiotic modes, producing meanings that neither resource could generate independently.

4.3 Layout-Driven Metaphors

Layout-driven metaphors in *Maus* emerge when the spatial composition of the page itself conveys figurative meaning. These instances correspond to discourse-level metaphors in linguistic analysis, since the layout organizes larger units of meaning across panels rather than within a single image or phrase. In Spiegelman’s work, the page layout is never a neutral container; it often participates in the metaphorical construction of trauma, memory, and disorientation.

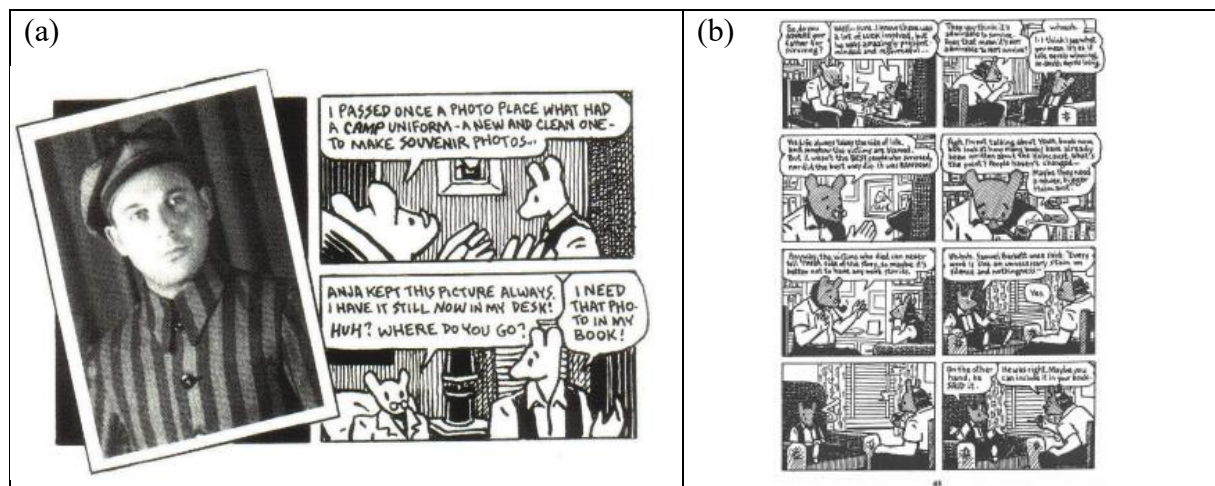


Figure 4.3 Layout-driven metaphors of trauma and memory

Figure 4.3 (a) illustrates this function in *Maus II*, where Vladek recounts traumatic memories of Auschwitz. The page is fragmented into uneven and discontinuous panels, with abrupt shifts in perspective and framing. This disrupted layout metaphorically represents the fractured nature of memory. The instability of the visual arrangement parallels the instability of recollection, showing trauma not only in what is narrated but also in how the narrative is

materially presented on the page. Here, layout functions as a discourse-level metaphor of fragmentation, and its narrative function is affective interiority, giving readers access to the subjective experience of trauma.

Figure 4.3 (b) presents another case where layout contributes to metaphorical meaning. In a conversation between Art and his therapist, the panels are arranged in repetitive, nearly claustrophobic sequences. The uniformity of the layout reflects the circularity of the dialogue, as the discussion revolves around guilt, memory, and the impossibility of closure. This repetition transforms the layout into a metaphor for entrapment, suggesting that the narrator is caught in an endless cycle of retelling and reinterpretation. The narrative function here combines affective interiority with temporal structuring, as the layout visualizes both the persistence of trauma and the difficulty of moving beyond it.

Viewed as a whole, Figures 4.3 (a) and 4.3 (b) demonstrate how layout-driven metaphors in *Maus* translate psychological and temporal experiences into spatial design. The disrupted or repetitive arrangement of panels does not merely illustrate memory but enacts its instability, creating a discourse-level metaphor that makes trauma visible in the very structure of the page.

4.4 Sequential Metaphors

Sequential metaphors in *Maus* emerge when repetition and recurrence across panels create figurative meanings that extend beyond individual images. These instances correspond to narrative-level metaphors in linguistic analysis, as the metaphor resides not in a single sign but in the patterned unfolding of events across time. Through parallel sequences and iterative structures, Spiegelman employs the grammar of comics to visualize inevitability, persistence, and the cyclical nature of memory.

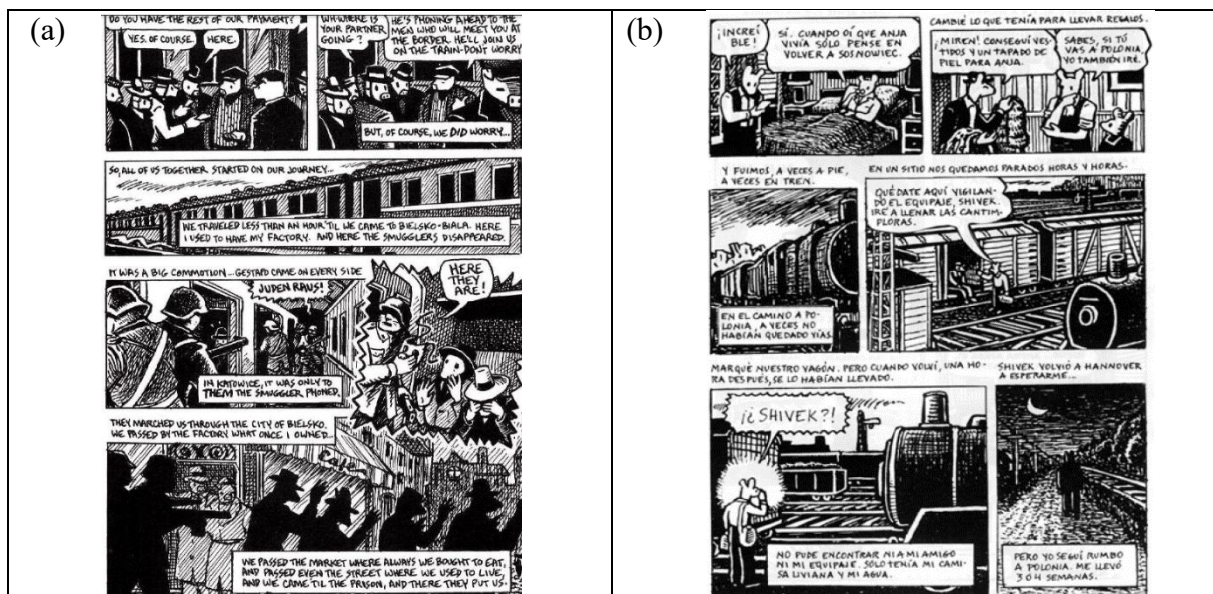


Figure 4.4 Sequential metaphors of inevitability and memory

Figure 4.4 (a) exemplifies this strategy in *Maus I*, where deportation trains are depicted across a sequence of nearly identical panels. The visual repetition of the train, combined with minimal narrative progression, creates a metaphor of inevitability. Just as repetition in verbal discourse can signal inevitability or fatality, the recurrence of the train imagery metaphorically enacts the mechanical and unstoppable logic of deportation. The sequence denies narrative variation: each panel looks almost the same, emphasizing the sense that events unfold automatically, without agency or escape. This sequential metaphor functions primarily as temporal structuring, translating historical inevitability into visual rhythm and conveying the relentlessness of systemic violence.

Figure 4.4 (b), by contrast, illustrates how sequential structures can render memory as cyclical rather than linear. Across several pages in *Maus II*, images of trains and railway tracks recur in slightly varied forms, framing Vladek's recollections of displacement and loss. In this example, the return to similar imagery—train cars, tracks, and nocturnal journeys—functions as a metaphor for recollection itself. The visual recursion enacts the experience of memory as repetitive and unresolved, as if the past continually resurfaces rather than moving forward toward closure. The narrative function here integrates temporal structuring with affective interiority: temporality is refigured as circular, while the reader experiences the protagonist's entrapment in recurring memories of trauma and separation.

Taken together, Figures 4.4 (a) and 4.4 (b) demonstrate the flexibility of sequential metaphors in *Maus*. The first case emphasizes the historical inevitability of deportation through visual repetition, aligning with research on discourse and narrative metaphors that frame systemic processes as inescapable (Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2008). The second case highlights the cyclical quality of traumatic recollection, resonating with cognitive linguistic accounts of metaphor as structuring not only language but also the lived experience of memory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). Together, these examples show how sequential structures in graphic novels expand the scope of multimodal metaphor theory by revealing how repetition across panels can model both historical processes and psychological states.

4.5 Multimodal Metaphors of Power and Oppression

The preceding sections have analyzed visual, verbo-pictorial, layout-driven, and sequential metaphors as distinct categories. Yet in *Maus*, these resources rarely operate in isolation. Instead, they converge to form complex multimodal metaphors that foreground systemic power relations and ideological oppression.

For example, the predator–prey schema of cats and mice, the use of masks to signify disguise, the fragmented layout of traumatic recollection, and the sequential recurrence of deportation trains do not function independently. Rather, they intersect to construct a larger metaphorical ecology in which domination is rendered inevitable, identities are destabilized, and trauma resists closure. This convergence demonstrates that multimodal metaphors are not merely local devices but global structuring principles of narrative.

From this perspective, *Maus* shows that the experience of oppression is conveyed not only through historical testimony but also through the formal resources of the graphic novel. Readers encounter oppression as both historically inescapable and psychologically enduring, shaped by the integration of visual motifs, textual anchors, and compositional design. This synthesis underscores the value of the proposed framework: by distinguishing units and types of multimodal metaphor while also accounting for their interaction, it becomes possible to capture the full complexity of meaning-making in graphic novels.

5. Discussion

This chapter situates the findings of the analysis within broader debates on metaphor theory, narrative studies, and multimodal analysis. The aim is not to repeat the results in detail but to interpret their significance in relation to existing scholarship. In doing so, the discussion highlights three key contributions: the identification of systematic units of analysis, the classification of multimodal metaphor types, and the articulation of their narrative functions in *Maus*. These contributions are elaborated in the following sections: relation to previous studies, theoretical implications, and methodological implications.

5.1 Positioning within Existing Studies

The findings of this study extend prior research on multimodal metaphor in several ways. Earlier work has concentrated on genres such as advertising, film, and political cartoons (Forceville, 1996; Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Tsakona, 2009), demonstrating how images and text interact to produce figurative meaning. By contrast, graphic novels have received limited attention, and most existing analyses have been descriptive and case-driven, focusing primarily on trauma, memory, and identity (Chute, 2010; Baetens & Frey, 2015).

The present analysis of *Maus* confirms the importance of these themes but also moves beyond them by offering a replicable framework that systematizes how multimodal metaphors are realized. In particular, the identification of four analytical units (visual, verbo-pictorial, layout, sequential) shows that the semiotic resources of graphic novels can be examined with the same rigor as those of other multimodal genres. In this way, the study bridges the gap between discourse-oriented analyses of metaphor (Musolff, 2004; Semino, 2008) and multimodal research in cognitive linguistics, situating graphic novels within the larger field of metaphor studies.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the study demonstrates that multimodal metaphors in graphic novels can be systematically aligned with established categories of linguistic metaphor analysis. Pictorial

metaphors correspond to lexical metaphors, verbo-pictorial metaphors to phrasal metaphors, layout-driven metaphors to discourse metaphors, and sequential metaphors to narrative metaphors. This alignment strengthens the claim that metaphor is not bound to a single semiotic channel but is a general cognitive phenomenon manifested across modes.

Moreover, the identification of three recurrent narrative functions— affective interiority, ideological critique, and temporal structuring— extends conceptual metaphor theory into new narrative contexts. Rather than treating metaphor as a local stylistic device, the analysis shows that it serves as an organizing principle for representing trauma, power, and memory in graphic narratives. This confirms and elaborates on recent proposals that metaphor operates at discourse and narrative levels, offering new insights into how graphic novels embody these functions through multimodal strategies.

5.3 Methodological Implications

Methodologically, the study offers a framework that enhances the replicability and comparability of multimodal metaphor analysis. Previous studies of graphic novels have often relied on close reading without a systematic procedure, making it difficult to compare findings across texts. By adapting the logic of metaphor identification procedures such as MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010) to multimodal contexts, this study demonstrates how systematic categories can be established without reducing the complexity of the medium.

The framework also has broader applicability beyond *Maus*. By distinguishing units, types, and functions, it provides a flexible but consistent method that can be extended to other graphic narratives, as well as to multimodal genres such as animation, interactive media, and digital storytelling. In this way, the study contributes not only to the analysis of a single canonical text but also to the development of tools for future multimodal research in metaphor studies.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how multimodal metaphors are realized and function in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. Guided by three research questions, it asked: (1) What are the key units of analysis through which multimodal metaphors are realized in *Maus*? (2) How can these metaphors be systematically classified in linguistic terms, by extending categories of metaphor analysis to the interaction of image, text, layout, and sequential structure? and (3) What narrative functions do these multimodal metaphors perform in representing trauma, memory, and power?

The analysis yielded three main findings. First, with respect to the units of analysis, the study identified visual/iconographic, verbo-pictorial, layout, and sequential structures as the principal modes through which multimodal metaphors are realized in graphic novels. Second, in terms of classification, these categories align with established levels of linguistic metaphor analysis: pictorial metaphors with lexical metaphors, verbo-pictorial with phrasal metaphors, layout-driven with discourse metaphors, and sequential with narrative metaphors. Third,

regarding narrative functions, the analysis revealed three recurrent roles of multimodal metaphor in *Maus*: expressing trauma and emotional experience as affective interiority, articulating power relations as ideological critique, and shaping memory and temporal progression as temporal structuring.

By addressing these questions, the article makes several contributions. Theoretically, it extends Conceptual Metaphor Theory and discourse metaphor research into the multimodal environment of graphic novels. Methodologically, it develops a replicable framework that adapts linguistic metaphor analysis to multimodal texts, enabling systematic comparison across works. Conceptually, it positions graphic novels not only as sites of cultural testimony but also as theoretically significant resources for advancing multimodal metaphor research.

At the same time, the study has certain limitations. Its focus on a single text, albeit a canonical one, raises questions of generalizability. Future research could expand the corpus to include a wider range of graphic narratives across cultures and genres, test the applicability of the framework to other multimodal media such as animation or digital storytelling, and incorporate reader-response studies to examine how audiences interpret these metaphors. Another promising avenue is the integration of computational methods, including AI-assisted metaphor detection, which could enhance the scalability of multimodal analysis.

In conclusion, this article proposes and demonstrates a framework that captures the distinctive multimodal ecology of the graphic novel. By systematically identifying units, types, and functions of metaphor in *Maus*, it provides a foundation for both close textual analysis and broader comparative work. Ultimately, the framework shows that graphic novels are not merely vehicles of testimony but also rich laboratories for investigating how metaphor operates across semiotic modes.

References

- Baetens, J., & Frey, H. (2015). *The graphic novel: An introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bateman, J. A. (2008). *Multimodality and genre: A foundation for the systematic analysis of multimodal documents*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bateman, J. A., Wildfeuer, J., & Hiippala, T. (2017). *Multimodality: Foundations, research and analysis—A problem-oriented introduction*. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Chute, H. (2008). Comics as literature? Reading Graphic Narrative. *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 123(2), 452–465. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2008.123.2.452>
- Chute, H. (2010). *Graphic women: Life narrative and contemporary comics*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Cohn, N. (2013). *The visual language of comics: Introduction to the structure and cognition of sequential images*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Forceville, C. (1996). *Pictorial metaphor in advertising*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Forceville, C., & Urios-Aparisi, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Multimodal metaphor*. Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Groensteen, T. (2007). *The system of comics* (B. Beaty & N. Nguyen, Trans.). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. (Original work published 1999)
- Hiippala, T. (2015). *The structure of multimodal documents: An empirical approach*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Jewitt, C. (Ed.). (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge.
- LaCapra, D. (2001). *Writing history, writing trauma*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. Northampton, MA: Kitchen Sink Press.
- Musolff, A. (2004). *Metaphor and political discourse: Analogical reasoning in debates about Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- O'Halloran, K. L. (2016). Multimodal analysis and digital technology. In A. Baldry & E. Montagna (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary perspectives on multimodality: Theory and practice* (pp. 239–260). Campobasso, Italy: Palladino.
- O'Halloran, K. L., & Smith, B. A. (Eds.). (2011). *Multimodal studies: Exploring issues and domains*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Satrapi, M. (2004). *Persepolis* (English ed.). New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Semino, E. Semino, E. (2008) *Metaphor in Discourse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spiegelman, A. (1986). *Maus I: A survivor's tale*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Spiegelman, A. (1992). *Maus II: A survivor's tale*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Spiegelman, A. (1993). *Maus I & II Paperback Box Set*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Spiegelman, A. (1996). *The Complete Maus: A survivor's tale*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Steen, G. J., Dorst, A. G., Herrmann, J. B., Kaal, A. A., Krennmayr, T., & Pasma, T. (2010). *A method for linguistic metaphor identification: From MIP to MIPVU*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/celcr.14>
- Tsakona, V. (2009). *Language and image interaction in cartoons: Towards a multimodal theory of humor*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(9), 1171–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.12.003>
- Whitlock, G. (2007). *Soft weapons: Autobiography in transit*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.