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Kamila Midor

Cultural differences in conceptualization of loss and grief as expressed by Americans and Poles

COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY

Expertly using the toolkit of cognitive linguistics, Kamila Midor describes how Americans and Poles talk and think about loss and grief. In doing so, she provides us with deep insight into the forces that shape the ways they construct and experience these unavoidable aspects of the human condition.

Dr. Zoltán Kövecses

Professor emeritus
Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

About the author

Kamila Midor is a linguist and translator from Poland. She holds a PhD in linguistics from Jagiellonian University in Kraków, where her dissertation—later updated as this book—explored cross-cultural differences in the conceptualization of loss and grief in American and Polish contexts, integrating insights from cognitive linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies. In 2015–2016, she was a visiting student researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, where she further developed her expertise in cognitive linguistics and interdisciplinary research methods. Her research combines qualitative analysis, conceptual metaphor theory, and conceptual integration theory to examine how language shapes emotional experience. In addition to her academic work, she is actively involved with the Institute of the Good Death (Instytut Dobrego Śmierci), a Polish foundation that promotes open, compassionate dialogue around death, loss, and grief in contemporary society. Her interdisciplinary training and experience position her to contribute unique insights at the intersection of linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies, making her work relevant to scholars, students, and practitioners interested in the language of grief and emotional expression across cultures.

Summary

How do people put into words the experience of losing someone they love? This book offers a systematic, cross-cultural linguistic analysis of how loss and grief are conceptualized in American and Polish contexts, revealing both shared human patterns and culturally specific ways of expressing and processing bereavement.

Drawing on qualitative data from nearly eighty participants who had lost a loved one to five years before participating in the study, the study examines the metaphors and conceptual blends through which individuals articulate their experiences of grief. Using the frameworks of conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual integration theory, the book identifies recurrent conceptual structures—such as absence, emptiness, pain, inanimate physical object, and journey—that speakers draw on to make sense of profound emotional disruption. While many of these schemas appear across both cultural groups, the analysis reveals important differences in their subtypes, linguistic realizations, and cultural meanings. Notably, some patterns challenge the dominant view of grief as exclusively negative, including personifications such as grief as a guest in American narratives and grief as a teacher in the Polish data.

The book fills a significant interdisciplinary gap between linguistic research on metaphor and psychological scholarship on grief. It is the first work to develop empirically grounded conceptual models of loss and grief for American and Polish speakers based on qualitative linguistic data, offering a novel, culturally sensitive perspective on bereavement.

Accessible yet theoretically rigorous, the book will be valuable as a research reference, a methodological model for qualitative metaphor analysis, and a resource for classroom use. It will appeal to scholars and students in cognitive linguistics, cultural studies, psycholinguistics, and cross-cultural communication, as well as to psychologists, therapists, counselors, social workers, and others working professionally with grief and loss.

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