

## A Cognitive Analysis of Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky*.<sup>1</sup>

LORENA PÉREZ HERNÁNDEZ

Dpto. de Filologías Modernas

Universidad de La Rioja

e-mail: loperez@dfm.unirioja.es

### ABSTRACT

*This paper attempts to carry out an analysis of Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* within the framework of Lakoff's (1996) theory of the self and Johnson's (1987) theory of image-schemas. It is our aim to show how the interplay between the two theories sheds some light on the nature of the three main characters and on some aspects of the structure and the overall interpretation of the novel.*

KEY WORDS: cognitive metaphor, image-schemas, literary interpretation

### RESUMEN

*En este artículo, realizamos un análisis de la novela de Paul Bowles *El Cielo Protector* dentro del marco de dos teorías cognitivas: la teoría de Lakoff (1996) sobre la estructura interna del concepto 'persona' y la teoría de los esquemas de imagen de Johnson (1987). Nuestra intención es señalar cómo la interacción de estas dos teorías puede aplicar algunos aspectos de la construcción de los personajes y de la estructura narrativa de la obra, así como permitir una nueva interpretación global de la novela.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: metáfora cognitiva, esquemas imagísticas, interpretación literaria

### I. INTRODUCTION

According to Lakoff (1987), the nature of human cognitive processes can be studied by looking at the way they **influence some** of our most common activities, especially language. In this **connection**, there is mounting **evidence** that metaphors are more a **matter** of thought than of language, linguistic metaphors being **just** a reflection of the structure of our conceptual system (Lakoff, 1993). Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Lakoff (1993) **have** pointed out that conceptual metaphors are not just the invention of **creative** writers and poets, but that, on the contrary, they belong to our human conceptual system, literary or poetic metaphors being **just** a **creative** exploitation of what is otherwise a common everyday

phenomenon. Since metaphors are cognitive constructs, not just linguistic phenomena, we should be able to find **evidence** for them not only in everyday language, but also in the output of other human activities (e.g. literature). The present paper attempts to apply Lakoff's (1996) theory of the conceptual structure of the self, on the one hand, and Johnson's (1987) theory of image-schemas, on the other, to the analysis of the characters and of some aspects of the narrative structure of Paul Bowles's (1949) novel *The Sheltering Sky*.

In the novel, three North American citizens (Port, Kit and Turner), a couple and one of their friends, **arrive** in Northern Africa in an attempt to flee from the devastation which the Second World War had left behind in the western world. **Then**, they start a journey into the innermost part of the Sahara, during which their authentic personalities are gradually revealed. As they approach the centre of the Sahara, the central episodes of the novel begin to take place. Turner, unable to adapt himself to the extreme life conditions of this part of the continent, **leaves** the couple and returns to a more civilized town. Port is infected by a deadly virus and, **after** a prolonged agony, passes away. Finally, Kit, who seems incapable of coming to terms with her husband's death, **loses** her mind and **runs** away with a **caravan** of nomads. For **some** time, she abandons herself to a relationship with one of the merchants (Belqassim), who keeps her as his mistress. Eventually, fearing for her life, Kit flees from Belqassim, but she still refuses to go back to her former life in the civilized world. Therefore, Turner's efforts to find her are in vain.

Having this in mind, our main aim is to show how the interplay between the two theories mentioned above **provides** the grounds for the construction of the three main characters and how it sheds new light on **some** aspects of the structure and the overall interpretation of the novel. In so doing, we will **provide** further **confirmation** of the theories proposed by Lakoff (1996) and Johnson (1987).<sup>2</sup> We shall proceed in four stages. First, we shall offer a description of Johnson's (1987) theory of image-schemas and of Lakoff's (1996) theory of the self. Given that a general knowledge of both theories is essential to the understanding of the present paper, we shall offer a lengthy description of them, omitting only those aspects which are not central to **our** study. Whenever **possible**, we will **also** try to exemplify them with passages from the novel. Second, we shall **devote** the central part of our paper to analysing the **importance** of these cognitive theories as regards the construction of the three main characters in *The Sheltering Sky*. This central section of the paper will be further divided into two parts. The **first** one will be concerned with showing how Lakoff's (1996) system of metaphors on the self allows us to understand the nature and reactions of the main characters of the novel, which would **otherwise** be left unexplained. Thus, our main hypothesis will be that the three protagonists (Port, Kit and Turner) can be **taken** to represent respectively the three main constituent parts of a human being: the subject, the **inner** self, and the outer self. The second part of this section will be devoted to another cognitive aspect of the construction of the characters, namely, the fact that it is largely based on spatial structures (image-schemas). The conceptual dependency between these domains (i.e. 'space'-human being') is so noticeable that we **think** it is worthy to **devote some** space to its analysis. Finally, in the third part of the present paper, we shall briefly **deal** with **some** aspects of the structure and meaning of the novel, which can **also** be given an interesting interpretation under the light of both Lakoff's (1996) and Johnson's (1987) theories.

## I. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF HUMAN BEINGS AND REALITY

According to Johnson's (1987) theory on the nature of human knowledge, 'our understanding and conceptualization of reality is largely based on the existence of **some** non-propositional pre-conceptual abstract<sup>4</sup> structures known as image-schemas,' which are directly meaningful to us. These are skeletal representations of our knowledge about the organization of space and spatial relations. **Some** such schemas **have been** identified of which we shall consider for this paper the so-called container, path, and verticality schemas (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1989). This pre-conceptual stage of understanding refers **only** to those concrete objects which are related to our own physical experience. In a second stage of understanding, these bodily-based image-schemas are metaphorically mapped onto other concrete and abstract concepts which are different from our own body, thus expanding our knowledge and understanding of the world. As will be shown below, our conceptualization of the concept 'human being', seems to follow a similar cognitive process.

## 11.1. IMAGE-SCHEMAS AND THE CONCEPT 'HUMAN BEING'

As pointed out by Johnson (1987:21), our conceptualization of the human being is primarily based on the container image-schema, which originates in our own bodily experience. Since our childhood we are aware that our bodies are three-dimensional containers into which we introduce certain substances (e.g. food, air, etc.) and from which other substances emerge (e.g. blood, food wastages, etc.). We are also aware, **through** our daily physical experience, that our bodies are contained in their surroundings (e.g. rooms, clothes, etc.) and **also** that our interaction with objects usually involves placing them into or out of other objects. Out of **all** these everyday physical experiences, we abstract their basic **common structural features** to build the image-schema of a container. The fact that our conceptualization of human beings is founded upon this kind of structure can be observed from a large number of everyday expressions such as the following: *This boy keeps all his feelings inside, he never externalizes them, He looks like a hooligan, but he is a great kid in the inside*, etc. Furthermore, the essential role played by the container image-schema in the understanding of the concept of 'human being' can also be observed from the existence of lexicalized expressions such as 'introverted' or 'egocentric'.

Moreover, Johnson (1987:22) has shown that image-schemas give way to a series of rational entailments which can be expressed propositionally:

1. *To be inside a container entails to be protected from outside forces.* For example, on page 222 of the novel, we read: «His reaction was always the same: a sensation in which **the outer parts of his being rushed inward for protection...**»<sup>6</sup>

2. *To be fixed in a container entails that the fixed object is either accessible or inaccessible to the outer observer.* That is to say, the object is **fixed** in the container either to be observed or to be hidden. The characters in *The Sheltering Sky* exit their habitual container (the postwar American society) and, as the novel unfolds, they gradually **enter** a **diametrically** new container (the inner Sahara). It is precisely the location of **the** characters in a radically different container from their own that allows us to **carry** out an objective observation of their actions, which are **often** marked in contrast to those typical of Northern

African culture.

3. *To be inside a container usually limits and constraints the forces operating within it.* We shall see in the second part of the present paper that as the characters move towards the interior of the Sahara, the signs of western culture **gradually** disappear and together with them, those moral, social, and cultural forces and **rules** that constrain the characters' behaviour **also become** less noticeable. To reach the centre of the Sahara means to **have** exited the usual western social and cultural container completely. And it is precisely at **this** point that the main characters in our novel start to **behave** according to their own selves, regardless of social constraints, **and** that the most relevant episodes of the novel take place.

In a recent paper, Fomés and Ruiz de Mendoza (1996) **have** undertaken an expansion of Johnson's description (1987: 22) of the internal logic of the container image-schema by means of combining it with other experientially basic concepts **like** control, harm, and benefit. As a result, they **have** put forward a list of six generic entailments, two of which stand out for our purposes:

1. Two or more **dynamic entities** can interact more easily if they are within the limits of a container **than** if they are separated by those limits; moreover, if one of those **entities** has a strong will and a capacity for making decisions, it will be able to control the **rest**. This applies to our novel. As pointed out above, the **three** protagonists of the novel **find** themselves within the limits of a new container (Northern Africa), which enables them to interact in a more intense way. Moreover, Port, who represents their rational **subject**, is able to control the others while they are still within the same boundaries. When Tumer moves to a different **village**, however, he is no longer under Pon's influence.

2. If a certain entity which is **outside** the limits of a container wishes to control another entity or **entities** which are within the boundaries of the container, the farther away these are from the limits of the container, the more difficult they will be to control. That is, control may be prevented by container boundaries. This particular aspect of the logic of the container image-schema can be particularly observed with respect to Kit and Tumer's relationship. Tumer is **only** able to influence Kit's feelings or behaviour when they are both sharing the same environment (**e.g.** the train to **Boussif**) or when Kit is **outside** Port's area of influence.

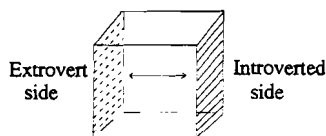
## 11.2. THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE SELF

Spatial structures, such as the container image-schema described above, are **often** used as the **source** domains in metaphoric mappings whose **aim** is to structure more abstract concepts such as the entity 'human being'. This kind of metaphoric mapping has **been** extensively studied by Lakoff (1996) who has **also** put forward a system of conventional conceptual metaphors which seems to be automatically and unconsciously used **in** our understanding of the human being. We shall now **try** to offer a brief description of those metaphors which appear as most productive regarding the construction of the characters **in** the novel.

According to Lakoff (1996), the concept of 'human being' is understood as an ensemble of a **subject** and a self (what he calls the Divided Person Metaphor). The **subject**


is the locus of reason, consciousness, and subjective experience, while the self includes other aspects of a person such as his **body**, emotions, past, etc. The subject is usually in control of the self, especially when it is **in** its usual location: **in** or above the self. But sometimes the subject may **lose** control over the self, which **leaves** the latter without a **guide** (this is the **Lost of Self Metaphor**). Moreover, incompatible aspects or interests of a person are conceptualized as different people in conflict (different selves) or as people being **in** different places (the **Split and Scattered Self**). This metaphor is essential to the understanding of our cognitive analysis of the characters of the novel, since, as will be further explained in the next section, it is the central hypothesis of this paper that its three main characters represent respectively the three main constituent elements of a human being: Port (subject), Kit (inner-self) and Turner (outer-self). Another **significant** metaphor, regarding our analysis of *The Sheltering Sky*, is the so-called **True Self Metaphor**, which refers to the **kind** of self which is compatible with the cosmic values of the subject (**spiritual**, moral, and vocational values). According to this metaphor, the **true** self is conceptualized as the self which shares the same place with the subject. Two other kinds of self which will **also prove** relevant to our analysis are the **private** self and the **public** self, which are conceptualized respectively as the interior self and the exterior self (it should be reminded **here** that a person is usually understood as a container with both an interior and an exterior). As pointed out by Lakoff (1996), these metaphors are usually found in connection with two other mappings: hidden is invisible is out, and essential is **central/inessential** is peripheral. **Finally**, Lakoff refers to the Self as a **Servant Metaphor**,<sup>9</sup> which will **also** be found in our account of *The Sheltering Sky* and according to which the subject is the master and the self its **servant**.


As can be **observed**, the understanding of most of the metaphors proposed by Lakoff is based on a number of basic spatial relations. Among the image-schemas that function as the **source** domain of the above metaphors, we **have**, as mentioned before, the verticality, path, and container schemas. **Some** metaphors make use of more than one of these schemas or **else** they combine an image-schema with one or more independent metaphors.<sup>8</sup> **The** Split Self metaphor, for **instance**, requires both the path image-schema and the container schema. Thus, we **find** expressions like the following: *His personality is rather unstable, he is always going back and forth from his more extrovert to his more introverted side and from his rational to his emotional side*. In this example, the metaphor focuses on the path schema, the container schema being implicit.



In other cases, the verticality image-schema is used together with a **very** general metaphor: **GOOD-IS-UP**. As regards the conceptualization of the human being, its most

important, high qualities (traditionally those related to reason and morality) are to be found at the top of an imaginary vertical axis.

 Consciousness, reason,  
moral, happiness, etc

 Unconsciousness, passion,  
immorality, sadness,  
irrationality, etc.

According to this way of conceptualizing reality, we observe that to be conscious is to be up / to be unconscious is to be down, rationality is up / passions, emotions, irrationality are down, and finally, happiness is up / sadness is down. Lakoff (1996) exemplifies these **three** groups of metaphors with the following everyday **language** sentences: ***He fell asleep, He kept control over his emotions, He feels a bit down today.*** None of these expressions could be understood without taking into account the verticality image-schema to which words like 'fell', 'over' or 'down' refer. **Several** examples supporting Lakoff's proposal can also be found in *The Sheltering Sky*.

He **awoke**, opened his eyes. The room meant very **little** to him; he **was too deeply immersed** in the non-being from which he had **just** come (p. 11). // And presently within her, **deeper than the weeping** for the wasted years, **she found a ghastly dread** all formed and growing (p. 218). // **His being was a well** a thousand miles **deep**; he rose **from the lower regions with a sense of infinite sadness** (p.124).

Moreover, it should be noted that the examples found in the novel are more elaborate **instances** of this phenomenon due to schemata **enrichment**. They do not only **illustrate** the combination of the verticality image-schema and the associated metaphor GOOD IS UP, but more **importantly**, they **reveal** the necessity of taking into account one more **cognitive** model, the container image-schema, in order to achieve a **full** metaphorical interpretation. Thus, the above examples invoke the verticality image-schema only indirectly, as an implicit aspect of the container image-schema, which is the one that is actually being focalized by words like "deeper", "well", or "**immersed**". **Every** container has a top **and** a bottom part **and** therefore, it **partakes** of the up-down orientation of the verticality image-schema. However, **some** aspects of the **internal** logic of the container image-schema **allow** us to **explain** in a complementary manner why human positive qualities are **often** conceptualized as being **up**, whereas negative qualities are understood as being down. Thus, positive attributes are conceptualized as being at the top of an imaginary vertical axis, not only **because** there exists a general metaphor (GOOD IS UP) that **allows** this understanding; but also, **because** it follows from the logic of the container **image-schema** (Fornés and Ruiz de Mendoza, 1996) that those qualities that are located at the top part of a container are more visible than those

which are at the bottom. Taking this into account, it makes sense that traditionally human qualities such as irrationality and passion **have often been** regarded as belonging to the hidden, innermost part of a person (=container), while rationality and morality, on the contrary, **have been commonly taken** as positive visible qualities which need not be concealed.

### III. THE COGNITIVE MECHANISMS INVOLVED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHARACTERS OF *THE SHELTERING SKY*

It is the purpose of this section to show how the cognitive mechanisms described above shed new light on the **construction** of the characters of Paul Bowles's novel. As was advanced in the introduction, this section consists of two different parts. **The** first one will be concerned with the application of Lakoff's theory of the **internal** structure of the self to the analysis of the nature of the characters of the novel; the second part will **deal with the** relationship between the concepts of 'space' and 'human being', as well as with its implications for the understanding of the nature of the three protagonists.

#### III.1. CHARACTERS AND METAPHORS

Going back to the **first** of our proposals and focusing on the divided person and the split self metaphors, we shall look for evidence in the novel in favour of the view that the three main characters represent different aspects of the **same** human being: Port represents the subject, Kit the interior self, and Turner the exterior **self**.<sup>9</sup> As we shall shortly see, there are so many passages in the novel that **provide** evidence of such a dissociation of the constituent parts of a human being in the main characters that we believe it is **important** to underline and analyse this fact. Even if such an effect had not **been** consciously sought by the author, the fact that this metaphorical cognitive model of the human being is at work **here** interestingly reveals the unconscious, automatic nature of such mechanisms, which has so often **been** pointed out by Lakoff (1987).

Port is introduced to us as the prototype of rational person, the subject who exerts control over the **actions** and decisions of the self. He is the one who had planned and organized their trip to Africa and the one who had persuaded Kit and Turner to follow **him**.

(...) he had **been** tempted to go back aboard and see about **taking** passage for the continuing voyage to **Istanbul**, but it would **have been** difficult to do without losing face, **since it was he who had cajoled them into coming to North Africa** ( p.13).

**Because** he symbolizes the subject, Port **also** appears as the locus of subjective experience, reason, and consciousness. He **does** not accept his own culture without first comparing it to others (p.13) and he **does** not believe in objective reality. Notice, for instance, his words on page 84: «But my world is not humanity's world. It is the world as **I** see it.» Most of the time, it is Port who decides and **plans** the course of action of the whole group. For instance, although at a certain point both Kit and Port himself want to get rid of Turner, it is Port that **devises** a scheme to do it and carries it out successfully (pp.122-124).

However, his rationalistic supremacy is of little use when he is forced to face his emotional problems with Kit. As should be expected from the fact that he represents the subject (rational part of the human being), he lacks the necessary intuition to get by in the world of feelings and emotions.

Experience had taught him that **reason could not be counted on in such situations**. There was always an extra element, mysterious and not quite within reach, that one had not reckoned with. **One had to know, not deduce. And he did not have the knowledge** (p.130).

Insecurity in this field leads him to refuse to make decisions and to avoid action:

**(...) he would temporarily abandon the idea of getting back together with Kit**. In his present state of disquiet he would be certain to take **all** the wrong turnings, and would perhaps lose her for good. **Later, when he least expected it, the thing might come to pass of its own accord** (p. 132).

It is also precisely **because he does not feel** in control of the situation when he has to **deal** with feelings and emotions, that his logical attitude towards this **universe** is one of defence, as can be read on page 100: «(...) he was unable to break out of the cage into which he **had** shut himself. **The cage he had built long ago to save himself from love.**»

Kit, on the contrary, has **all** the necessary intuition and knowledge to get by **in** the world of feelings and interpersonal relationships. According to the divided person metaphor described above, she would represent the interior self that forms part of every human being. From the beginning, Kit is presented to us as at the opposite pole of the rational being represented by Port (p.43). Her capacity to face life and to interact with the world and the people that surround her is constrained by an irrational fear and by her belief in an array of omens **and dreams** that can easily paralyse her. While Pon was unable to face and **deal** with emotions, Kit is incapable of rationalizing **and** freeing herself from this irrational, **unjustified** fear of omens. As has already **been** pointed out, it is usually Port that **makes** **all** the decisions, and when she is going through a particularly **critical** phase, she relies blindly on him.

Nevertheless, when it comes to feelings and emotions, Kit feels at ease. She **does** possess **this** kind of knowledge:

It was such places as this, such moments that he loved above **all else** in life; **she knew that, and she also knew that he loved them more if she could be there to experience them with him** (p.100).

The split self metaphor (interior versus exterior self) allows us to **justify** the **presence** of a character, Tumer, whose role in the novel is not always clear and who everybody (the characters, the narrator, and **some** readers, **among** whom **I** would like to include myself) would like to get rid of, **because** of his being mainly a dull character, a hypocrite and an «**essentially simple individual**» (p.67). If Port represents the rational part of a human being (subject) and Kit its emotional counterpart (inner self), Turner seems to **fit perfectly** well within this human puzzle as the exterior self, **i.e.** as that part of every person which is subject to the social and cultural conventions of its own civilization.



Turner's personality **traits** are characterized neither by reason nor by emotions, but by hypocrisy, falsehood (p.46), the art of gossiping (p.20), gallantry (p.66), an extreme obsession for hygiene (p.112), the quiet complying with the conventional **rules** and laws of society (p.253), and by other **features** all of which **have** an equal origin in western society. As he gets immersed in the Northern African environment, his attitudes and habits, deeply ingrained in western culture, clash with those of Africa, to which he can never **fully** adapt himself.

'No', Turner said **obstinately**. 'One thing I can't stand is filth'. 'Yes, you're a real **American, I know**', said Kit."(p.112). // And he would **have** to admit that he had left them and gone off by himself, that he **hadn't been able to 'take' the desert** (p.255).

Unlike Port, who **does** not accept his own civilization without comparing it to others (p.13), Turner complies with social conventions without hardly questioning them (as in the religious ceremony for Port's burial on page 253). In contrast to Kit, who looks for true feelings and for a stable relationship with Port, Turner's attempt to seduce her has **little** to do with **love**. On the contrary, he seems to be seeking a **mere** trophy to exhibit in society:

Assuredly he was not **in love** with the poor girl. His **overtures** to her had **been** made out of pity (**because** she was a woman) and out of vanity (**because** he was a man), and the two feelings together had awakened the acquisitive **desire** of the trophy collector, nothing more (p.254).

As shown above, Turner represents the exterior social self, and as such he is a constituent part of the human being, but **also** a peripheral one, an inessential part of a person which can be easily ignored and which Paul Bowles actually **leaves** out of the novel throughout its central episodes. Nevertheless, he is the only character in the novel who seems to escape a fatal destiny during their trip to the **inner** Sahara, which leads us to wonder if Paul Bowles's intention in this novel is to offer an utterly **pessimistic** view of the human being, as if people **had** to put aside their rational and emotional selves (Port and Kit) **in** order to **survive** in this world. But, **while** this is **just** a hypothesis, what can be easily **proved** is that Turner's main and **only** role **in** this novel is to function as the exterior social **conscience** of the characters.

**He dragged Port over in front of the mirror. 'Look at yourself', he commanded.**" (the morning after Port's adventure with Marhnia. p.50).

The particular view which we **have** put forward on the **nature** of the main characters of *The Sheltering Sky* allows us to explain their behaviour and, especially, it allows us to understand Kit's **course** of action after Port's death. The **three** protagonists together represent one person with an essential part (subject plus interior self) and a peripheral **side** (exterior self). According to the scattered self metaphor, only when **all** these parts exist together can a person function correctly. What happens in the fictional universe of this novel **is** that those three constituent parts **have been taken** apart and as should **logically** follow from the above metaphor, none of them will be able to function properly on its own. Port **dies**. Kit **loses** her

mind. And at first sight, it seems that Turner (exterior self) **does** not suffer the negative effects of such a dissociation. but on the whole, he has **also been** affected since going back to America without Kit, after Port's death, seems to him «**unthinkable** from **every** point of view» (p.255). Thus, he, too, **is** unable to **carry** on with his normal life.

The first character to disappear from the story, however, is Port (p.235). This episode signals the «**first moments of a new existence**»(p.237) for Kit. A new life in which, Port (her guide, her reason) being dead, Kit will closely **follow** her husband's original **plans** and will continue her journey to the innermost regions of Northern Africa. Port was her consciousness, which she **know** lacks, as can be **seen** on page 238: «**And yet, deeper than the empty region which was her consciousness**, in an obscure and innermost part of her mind, an idea must already had **been** in gestation...».<sup>10</sup> Consistently with the lack of consciousness and reason that Port's death has left behind, Kit's acts from this moment onwards will necessarily be irrational, as the narrator is **careful** to **emphasize** on page 268: «(...) instead of feeling the omens, she now would make them, be them **herself**.» **Because** Port (the subject) has died and is not in control any more, Kit (the self) feels lost and without a guide (Loss of Self Metaphor). In several passages, the narrator insists on the lack of control that Kit experiences over her actions.

Once in the garden **she found herself pulling off her clothes** (p.246). // **She only did the things she found herself already doing** ( p.276). // **She let him pull her** along the market (p.302).

On other occasions, the emptiness left by Port's death is directly addressed: «**And yet, deeper than the empty region that was her consciousness..**» p.238. Her behaviour seems to be **ruled** by **mere** physical needs such as hunger, defence against dangers, etc. This can be **observed** in the following passages: «**When she was hungry**, she rose, picked up her bag, and walked **among** the rocks...» p.300.// «'I must get out', she **thought**» (as she realized that she was in danger at Belqassim's. p.294). Kit's life seems to **have been** reduced to **existence**, and her mental activity seems to **have** stopped. We find evidence for this on pages 269: «**She raised no problem** for herself; she was content to be relaxed and to see the soft unvaried landscape going **by**» and 267: «**It was good merely to lie** there, to exist and ask **no questions**.» Having reduced herself to her most basic status, she even rejects the most characteristic of **human** rational activities, language. And together with language, she avoids thoughts:

It was so long since she **had canalized** her thoughts by **speaking loud**...(p.276). // **The** words were coming back, and inside the wrappings of the words, there would be thoughts lying there (p.302).

Before we move on to the next part of our paper, it is important to point out that the metaphors we **have** just analysed (divided person, split self) constitute the foundation of the whole system of metaphors on the **internal** structure of the self that we **have described** above. Therefore, we **shall also** be able to find evidence within our novel **in favour** of this fact. **Some** of those metaphors on the structure of the self **have already been** exemplified above (e.g. loss of the self, exterior self, etc.); others (e.g. **true** self), **because** of their **intimate** relationship to spatial aspects, will be dealt with in the next part of our paper. But before we

move on to that, we would like to exemplify briefly the last of the metaphors that **make up Lakoff's** system: the Self as Servant metaphor.

As has already **been** pointed out, since the subject represents reason and since it controls and **makes** decisions for the self, it is possible to conceptualize it as the master who tells the self what to do and how to **behave**. This seems to be the case in the novel, where Kit (the **inner-self**) logically represents the slave. As such, she must carry out her master's needs and **desires**: «**And** she had accompanied **him** without reiterating her complaints too often or too **bitterly**»(p.13). She must also please him, **because** she belongs to him: « 'You **know** that means **little** to me (...), but if you'll be happier there- **I** mean healthier- we should go, by **all means**»(p.164); «**Against** her **will**, she forced herself to admit that she still belonged to Port...»(p.45).

### III.2. SPACE AND CHARACTERS

We shall now focus our analysis on a number of spatial relationships which form the basis of the characters' **construction**. More specifically, we shall underline **some** of the interrelations that can be observed between the characters' actions and behaviour and the container and verticality image-schemas.

It should be noted again **here**, that most of the cognitive processes that we are about to describe (use of image-schemas and their metaphoric projections) are so deeply ingrained in our cognitive systems that Paul Bowles's use of these mechanisms in *The Sheltering Sky* is very probably unconscious. Nevertheless, this should not lead us to ignore them, since they are **some** of the most **common** mechanisms which we use automatically in order to understand abstract concepts such as personal relationships, passions, rationality, irrationality, death, life, etc. The fact that the author of **this** novel can be shown to **have** made use of these cognitive constructs, especially if it was unconsciously, can be taken as **evidence** that we actually comprehend and conceptualize reality **in** this way.

We would like to **propose** that **in** the novel it is possible to observe at least **three** occasions on which the concepts of space and character cut each other as the latter borrows its **structure** from the **former**.<sup>11</sup> This happens as follows:

#### - *container image schema + essential self*

As has already **been** shown, human beings are often conceptualized as containers with a central part which is essential (subject and self) and another peripheral part which is not as important as the first one (exterior self). Furthermore, the concept 'human being' cannot be understood unless it is contained within a bounded space (e.g. a room, a country, or the biggest container of all: the world). Such a container **also** has a centre and a periphery. In *The Sheltering Sky*, there is a moment when the main characters (Port and Kit), who represent the central and essential parts of the human being, arrive at the innermost central area of the **Sahara**, and it is precisely then that the story reaches **its climax** and the essential episodes (Port's death and Kit's incursion **in** the desert) take place. While this happens, the third protagonist, Turner, nearly disappears from the plot. According to his nature (exterior peripheral self), his **contributions** to the **plot** occur at the beginning and at the end of the novel, while during the central episodes, he only appears sporadically.

Moreover, the narrator's frequent **references** to the fact that the main characters are approaching the central area of the Sahara **serve** the purpose of building an increasingly tense atmosphere which seems to be announcing the most relevant episodes. During their trip to Sba, when Port's **disease** has already **become manifest**, we are reminded: «It had **been** one strict, undeviating course inland to the desert, and now he was very nearly at the **center**.»(p. 198). And it is precisely in Sba where one of the most important episodes of the novel takes place, namely, Port's death, whose temporal proximity had **been announced** by means of the descriptive focalization on yet another aspect of the container image schema: its limits. During Kit and Port's trip to El Ga' a, when Port's illness **first becomes** apparent, the narrator **makes reference** to the **limits** of the world-container": «The new moon had slipped behind the **earth's sharp edge**.» (p.180)

*- container image schema + true self*

The true self metaphor, that which conceptualizes the self as being compatible with the values of the subject and which stands for a realized person, is equally based on the container image-schema. Therefore, those realized aspects of a human being are **conceptualized** as a self who is **in** the same bounded space as the subject, while those unrealized aspects of a person are understood as a self who is not in the same bounded area as the subject.

Taking into consideration that Port and Kit represent respectively the subject and the self that can be found **in** every human being, it is possible to pose the question of whether those moments when these characters **feel** realized and at ease with themselves and when they appear as compatible characters, can be related to the container-space where they are found at those precise moments. That is, we wonder whether there is **some** kind of correlation between the location of the characters and the state of their personal relationship.

It is easy to **find evidence** for the fact that Kit's happiness seems to depend to a considerable extent on the nearby **presence** of Port. When they part from each other (e.g. journey by train to Boussif), Kit feels bad, lost, without a guide, unable to control her actions or to face life unless she is under the effects of alcohol. In many other passages, what she actually says outlines such a need of Port's physical closeness: «Don't think about me. Whatever happens, I'll be **all** right if I'm with you.»(p.129).

The same phenomenon can be observed as regards Port. On page 100, we are told: «It was such places as this, such moments that he **loved** above **else** in life; she knew that, and she **also** knew that he **loved** them more if she could be there to experience them with **him**.» It seems that not only their realization as individuals, but **also** the welfare of their relationship depends on their being in the same place. The narrator refers to this need on page 105: «(...) such bond required that they be alone **together**.». As a matter of fact, those moments when their relationship undergoes a certain tension or when there is an argument between them are underlined with the recurrent scene of one of the characters leaving the shared environment. For **instance**, when Port **teases** Kit regarding her omens about the trip to Boussif (e.g. «**Good night**, she said suddenly, and shut the **door**» p.63), or when Port finally decides to **join** the Lyles in their trip by car to Boussif (e.g. «**Well**, by God, you can go on the train with him, then. And **I** hope there's a wreck! He went into his room and **dressed**» p. 77).

On the contrary, those moments of **intimate communication** between Port and Kit, those when they both **feel** more realized, always seem to take place in bounded **areas**. For

instance, their talk under the mosquito net in Bou Noura : «**When** it was well fastened they slid underneath with the bottle and lay there quietly as the afternoon wore on.»(p.165). When their chat **takes** a tum and they start to argue, Kit gets out of the net : « 'I **refuse** to discuss it', she said haughtily, climbing down from the bed and struggling her way through the folds of netting that hung to the floor.s(p.167).

Logically, Port's death, the moment when their definite separation takes place, is highlighted by the physical **distance** between them. Since they no longer share **life**, they cannot share the same space-container **any** more. Port is in his room in the fort, while Kit is **outside** the fort. As a matter of fact, before Port's death, Kit and Tumer try to return to the room, but to no **avail**, since the door of the fort is closed: «**The** moon had reached the center of the **sky** when they arrived at the fort and found the gate locked.s(p.233). **Because** they no longer share the same space, **all** communication between them is impossible, their relationship has failed and Port's death is unavoidable. Kit herself foresees what is going to happen : «**How** do we know he's not already dead? He could die there **all** alone! We'd never know. Who could stop **him**?» (p.234).

- *verticality schema* + *rational/passional self*

It can also be observed that there is a correlation between those passages where the characters let themselves be ruled either by reason or by passion and the place where they are at that moment. It is now the verticality image-schema that has **been** activated in such a fashion that those actions of the characters that are ruled by reason, consciousness and **morality** take place in high places, while their passional or irrational actions predictably take place in lower scenarios.

At the beginning of the novel, Port's affair with Marhnia involves a gradual descending of the character from the streets of the town to the **valley**. In order to get to Marhnia's tent, he had to **climb** down «**a narrow iron staircase** (which) was fastened to the **side** of the wall. It had no railing and **led straight downward at a steep angle.**» (p.33).

On the contrary, one of the few episodes where Port and Kit **have** a quiet talk and reflect rationally on their relationship, takes place on the top of the **mountains** that surround Boussif (p.99: «**They** started to **climb** upward (...) The desert was directly below them, much **farther** down than the plain from which they had **just climbed.**»)<sup>13</sup>

**Finally**, Port's death (subject-locus of consciousness and reason) takes place in the fort, which is located on the highest part of the city. **Right after** her lover's death, Kit (the self, the locus of **irrationality** and emotions) **starts** to descend towards the border of the city, which anticipates her incursion in an irrational world ruled by emotions, physical needs, and sheer intuition (i.e. the time of her relationship with the merchant, Belqassim).

She breathed deeply and **walked ahead, down toward the city** (...) **Quickly she descended the hill** (p.240). // **Below, in** the wide black mass **formed** by the tops of the palms, the **drums** were still going. The sound came from the direction of the ksar, the Negro village in the middle of the oasis (...) **Several** walks led off to the oasis, she chose the narrowest...( p.245).

As a matter of fact, from the very moment when Port **becomes** ill and **is**, therefore, unable to carry on with his role as Kit's rational **guide**, the mental states through which Kit

goes are **symbolized** by means of **diverse** spatial references. Together with the verticality schema, which explains her descent **towards** an **irrational** state, we can **also** point out the use of another metaphor, whose **source** domain is represented by the labyrinth of **narrow** streets in El Ga'a and which symbolises the mental blockage that Kit is suffering at that moment.

Even **here** at the edge of town it was still a **maze**. The streets were constructed in such a way that **each stretch seemed to be an impasse with walls at the end** (p.189).// He, **seeing her staring eyes**, and still understanding nothing, put his hand comfortingly on her shoulder and said: 'Come'. **She did not hear him**, but **she let him pull her away** from the wall (...) The sudden darkness of a tunnel **broke into her self-imposed hypnosis** ( p.192).

#### IV. THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF "LIFE" AND "WORLD" AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE STRUCTURAL UNITY OF THE NOVEL

Before we finish our analysis of the construction of the characters in Paul Bowles's novel under the new light of the cognitive mechanisms we **have** described above, it is necessary to mention briefly two other conceptual metaphors which make it possible for us to understand two basic concepts of human **existence**, life and the world, both of which **also** play an **important** role in the understanding of the novel.

The metaphorical **treatment** which the **first** of these concepts receives in *The Sheltering Sky* has two main functions. On the one hand, it helps to build up the consistency of the characters, who will be shown to act in the last episodes of the novel according to the restrictions that the previous metaphorical understanding of life as a journey by train **imposes** on them; and on the other hand, it helps to **confer** structural unity to the novel by anticipating in a metaphorical key **some** of its most central episodes: Port's death, Kit's loss of mind, and Tumer's well-being.

Even though this is not the only metaphor that we use in our understanding of life, we **often** conceptualize the former as a journey, as can be **seen** from such everyday language expressions as *Youth is the most beautiful stage of life* or *Before we reach our final destination, we would all like to have had some of our dreams fulfilled*. Such a conventional, very probably even cross-cultural, metaphor can be found in **several** passages of the novel, usually in Port's mouth. He **himself** interprets his dream about a train which kept **putting** on speed and then suddenly came to a stop, as a symbol of life itself (pp. 17-18). **Later** on in the novel, he keeps **elaborating** on the same metaphor:

'You **know what?**'- he said with great earnestness. 'I **think** we're both afraid of the same **thing**. And for the same reason. We've never managed, either of us, **to get all the way into life**. We're **hanging on to the outside** for all we're **worth**, convinced we're going to **fall off at the next bump**. Isn't that true?' (p.101).

In the passage above, Port seems to view life as a journey by train. **The** choice of a train instead of other means of transport such as a bicycle, an aeroplane, or a car seems quite fortunate, given that the domain of trains holds more similarities with the domain of life than the other means of transport to which we **have** just **referred**. For **instance**, it is an essential

difference between travelling by train and travelling by car or on bicycle that in the first case, passengers do not **have** the ultimate control over the direction or speed of their journey. The driver has this control. Likewise, as regards life, people do not **have** control over their final destiny, nor over the way in which a specific stage of their lives will unfold. The length of a journey by train, as opposed to the **brevity** of a journey on bicycle, and the fact that journeys by train usually consist of several stages (cf. **flights**, which are more direct), **makes** this means of transport a better candidate for the **source** domain of the above metaphor. Lakoff and Tumer **have** extensively shown that life is **often** conceptualized as a journey (Lakoff and Tumer, 1989: 3-4). In the context of the novel, we **find** a more specialized metaphor, LIFE IS A JOURNEY BY TRAIN, which gives rise to at least four mappings and **several** entailments:

### MAPPINGS:

- Life is a train (**this** mapping arises metonymically from the actual mapping 'Life is a journey by train'.)
- Living is travelling by train.
- People are passengers.
- Bumps are the problems that people **have** to face along their lives.

### ENTAILMENTS:

- If one is inside the train, one is deeply involved in his/her life.
- If one is hanging on to the **outside** of the train, one is not really involved in ~~his~~ life.
- If one is inside the train, one is protected against bumps and can concentrate on living his/her life.
- If one is hanging on from **outside**, one can **fall** off at any bump and one is ~~also~~ too afraid of the perils to concentrate on life itself.

The relevant location assigned to the dream episode (right at the **beginning** of the novel) and **also** to its interpretation by **Port** (right during his trip to Boussif with the Lyles), leads us to consider that Kit and Tumer's alternative trip by train is not just sheer coincidence. As a matter of fact, its symbolism within the context of the novel seems to follow logically from what has **been** said above. Kit and Turner choose to travel by train (=life) and in the end, they are the two characters who **survive** their incursion into Northern Africa. Furthermore, Kit gets on the train reluctantly, she is afraid of travelling (=living) and she needs to be under the effects of alcohol to cope with the idea of the **journey**. On the contrary, Tumer travels without a care. He is not scared of travelling in the **least**. **These** differences as regards their attitudes to their journey by train to Boussif appear to be an anticipation of what the last part of their trip along the Sahara will be like. The parallelisms between this episode and the last chapters of the novel are **striking**. In both cases, there is the absence of Pon and the following loss of control by Kit, who **does** not seem to be able to **carry** on with her life when **Port** is not by her **side**; in both episodes, Kit tries to **flee** away from Tumer and, in both cases, her attempt to get rid of **him** involves an incursion into the **unknown** Northern African world and a period of contact with the natives (visit to the third

class **carriage** in the train; relationship with Belqassim); in both episodes, Turner **does** not seem to **have** a care in the world, other than a certain concern for the physical **discomfort** of the **journey** by train, in the **first** case, and the social consequences of **returning** to New York without Kit, in the second case.

The only difference is that in the last chapters of the novel, the **source** domain (travel-train) is not mentioned any more. Nevertheless, the characters' reactions in these climactic episodes had **been** metaphorically anticipated by their reactions to the trip by train to Boussif, which reinforces their psychological plausibility and makes them appear as consistent **well-**constructed characters, at the same time that it confers a higher degree of structural unity on the novel.

The concept of life is intimately related to another notion which is equally essential to human beings: the world. The conceptualization of this entity is central to the understanding of **several** aspects of the novel, from its title to one of its most significant episodes: Pon's death. Furthermore, the fact that this concept is also understood on the basis of the container image-schema shows the natural tendency of the human cognitive apparatus and conceptual systems towards economy (a limited **number** of image schemas constitute the **structural** base upon which we **have** built our **entire** conceptual systems). One of the best instances of the conceptualization of the world in this fashion can be found on page 275: «(...) the **entire** sky was **like** a metal **dome** grown white with **heat**». As depicted in the novel, the world-container seems to consist in the **earth** surface covered by a dome-shaped sky which functions as a sort of lid. As should be expected, our concept of the world, **because** it is based on the container image-schema, logically **partakes** of **all** its rational entailments, hence its protective "sheltering" nature.

'You know', said Port, and his voice sounded **unreal**, as voices are **likely** to do **after** a long pause in an utterly silent spot, '**the sky here's** very strange. I **often** have the sensation when I look at it that it's a **solid** thing up there, **protecting us** from what's **behind**'(p.101).

To such an extent has the world-container metaphor **proved** productive that its elaboration has given way to extensions in which death and its characteristic **features** (darkness, the unknown, fear, etc.) are **conceptualized** as that which is to be found **outside** the world-container. These extensions are **also** to be found in *The Sheltering Sky*, and they are essential to the understanding of the passage in which Port's death is depicted:

He opened **his** eyes, shut his eyes, saw only the **thin sky stretched across to protect him**. Slowly **the split would occur, the sky draw back**, and he would see what he never had doubted lay behind (p.233). // **A black star appears, a point of darkness in the night sky's clarity**. Point of darkness and **gateway to repose**. Reach out, **pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky**, take repose (p.235).

## V. FINAL REMARKS

The present cognitive analysis of the characters in *The Sheltering Sky* has allowed us to put forward **some** explanations about their behaviour and about **some** of their reactions



which would otherwise be difficult to comprehend (e.g. Kit's loss of mind after Port's death. Tumer's little involvement in the plot during the most relevant episodes...).

Furthermore, the analysis of the characters in terms of image-schemas and their metaphorical **projections** could lead us to an alternative reading of the novel, according to which, the story that is being told to us would not be the story of three persons but the story of a human being who is unable to keep a balance between the constituent elements of its being (rationality, emotions, and social interaction) and would be, therefore, unable to lead a **normal life**.<sup>14</sup> Port's death is unavoidable, since at a given point he himself decides to stop making decisions and to stop reflecting on matters, and his nature being prototypically rational, such an attitude is equivalent to **committing** suicide. By **running** away Kit attempts to avoid the pain and the feeling of emptiness that Port's death has left behind, but Kit is the self, the locus of emotions, and attempting to avoid this suffering requires to **erase** Port completely from her mind, together with **all** feelings and emotions, and therefore, to reject life itself, since they are the same person:

(...)she once had thought that if Port should die before she did, she would not really believe he was dead, but rather that he had **in some** way gone back inside **himself** to stay there, and that he never would be conscious of her again; so that **in reality it would be she who would have ceased to exist, at least to a certain degree** (p 237).

Eventually, as has already **been** pointed out above, the social **external** pan of every human being, represented by Tumer, needs to reencounter at least his emotional counterpart, Kit, in order to be able to go back to his **normal** life in **America**. The second and, most probably conclusive, disappearance of Kit will prevent **him** from going back to his **ordinary** life, since, what kind of a society would readily admit as one of its **members** a being who has lost not **only** its rational nature, but **also** its feelings and emotions?

## NOTES

1. This paper is an extended version of a previous one presented at the 5th International Conference on Narrative. University of Kentucky. Lexington (Kentucky), 18th-20th October, 1996. This research has **been** funded by the University of La Rioja. Research project number 96PYB33JMA.

2. Not being a literary critic, I do not intend to carry out a narratological analysis of the novel. My approach is that of a cognitive **linguist** and I believe that **some** cognitive theories such as those described in this paper can be used as **analytic** tools in order to carry out a **study** of the novel. **The** results of such an analysis should be complementary to those that **arise** from more traditional approaches.

3. See also Lakoff's (1989) paper for a comprehensive summary on the nature of human conceptual **structure**.

4. In this respect, Ruiz de Mendoza (personal **communication**) has pointed out that **all** **idealized** cognitive models, not just image-schemas, can **attain** abstract status. Thus, there are abstract propositional models such as Schank and Abelson's **plan + goals** modules (1977). Rumelhart and Thorndyke's 'story **grammars**' (1975, 1977), or Ruiz de Mendoza and Otal's '**macroschemas**' (1994, 1995). There are abstract metaphoric and **metonymic** models like Lakoff and Tumer's EVENT-STRUCTURE metaphor (1989) or Peña's ENTITIES-ARE-CONTAINERS metaphor (19%). **And finally, image-schemas** are but another type of abstract model. **All** these generic, abstract **structures** **serve** the purpose of allowing us to **deal** with a large number of reasoning processes in a cognitively economical way.

5. It is not **known** to what extent image-schemas lie at the base of human understanding. Lakoff's (1990) hypothesis is that **all** reasoning is image-schematic. In this **connection**, he **provides** examples of the application of the Invariance Principle in the cases of image metaphors and of **generic-level** structure interpreted in **terms** of image-schematic structure. Nevertheless, Ruiz de Mendoza (1996) makes an interesting observation to the effect that Lakoff's Invariance Principle, in its present formulation, is incapable of offering a satisfactory explanation of other related phenomena. He takes into account metaphors such as *My neighbour is a dragon*, where both the **source** and the target domains are concrete, and which differ considerably from mappings of the LOVE-IS-A-JOURNEY kind, where the **source** domain is concrete, whereas the target domain is abstract. As Ruiz de Mendoza (1996) points out, this kind of mapping is **also** subject to constraints on the correspondences based on **generic-level** structure, but interestingly enough, this generic structure is neither image-schematic nor interpretable in image-schematic terms. It is propositional. Therefore, Ruiz de Mendoza puts **forward** an alternative version of the Invariance Principle, which he tentatively formulates as follows: *Metaphorical mappings preserve the generic-level structure of the source domain in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain.*

6. **Bold** in this and subsequent examples has **been** added by the author of this paper

7. Peña (1996) has observed that the interaction between the container image-schema and the idealized cognitive model of control **results** in a number of generic entailments. One of them states that control **may** be prevented by container boundaries. It **should** be noted **here** that Peña's version of the general **logic** of the container image-schema introduces a degree of generalization which **would allow** Lakoff to dispense with this metaphor. **Because**, given that the **normal** location of the self is within the subject's **boundaries**, it follows logically that the latter can **exert** its control over the former.

8. As pointed out by Fornés and Ruiz de Mendoza (1996), image-schemas may **also** be combined with other Idealized Cognitive Models. More **specifically**, they introduce the concept of the 'enrichment' of image-schemas by **means** of projections from other cognitive models, including propositional cognitive models such as the Control ICM.

9. **The birth** of this 'person' is **symbolically** described at the **beginning** of the novel: "The little freighter had spewed them out from its **comfortable** **bow** the **day** before onto the hot docks..." (p.13). At that moment their journey to the **innermost parts** of **Northern Africa starts**. As **will** be shown **later**, **life is commonly** and unconsciously conceptualized as a journey. The symbolic value of the characters' journey along **Northern Africa** seems to **follow** logically. **Nevertheless**, we shall not pursue this aspect of the novel any **further** since it is not the **primary goal** of our analysis.

10. It is **necessary** to remember that human beings are **conceptualized** as containers in which the subject (**consciousness/reason**) is **prototypically located** over the self. Since Port (=consciousness) has died, this region is now empty. Kit's idea emerges from a deeper region, the locus of **irrationality**. **And** this is reflected in the **nature** of her actions from this moment on.

11. **In** the need of a deeper, more systematic **study**, we do not **dare** to **claim** a universal status for the phenomenon of the **criss-crossing** of 'space' and 'human being'. However, it is our **intuition** that the interrelationship **between** these concepts is not only to be found in the context of Paul Bowles's narrative. On the contrary, we believe that it **could have** a more general applicability if only **because** the understanding of an abstract concept (i.e. 'human being') is always in need of a more concrete concept (i.e. 'space') from which to **borrow** its structure.

12. As shall be **seen** when dealing with the world-container metaphor, death is **usually conceptualized** as whatever there is **outside** the world-container. As opposed to life, which is understood as taking place within the **limits** of that container.

13. **The presence** at the top of the **mountain** of the venerable Arab, who is praying, appears as a **symbol** of morality as **corresponds** to such a **high** scenario, **while** the man they **had** come across at the feet of the mountains, who was shaving his pubic **hair**, seems to symbolize just the opposite.

14. **We acknowledge** that Bowles's novel is, as a matter of fact, the **story** of three characters. It is only by **means** of approaching it from the point of view of cognitive linguistics that this alternative reading **becomes available**.

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