

# A Plane Ticket without a Destination: Analysis of the Metaphors Used by Expatriates

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**How to cite this paper:** Fiorito, M. P., Carracedo, A., & Foltynnek, F. (2025). A Plane Ticket without a Destination: Analysis of the Metaphors Used by Expatriates. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 15, 535-549. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2025.153030>

**Received:** April 6, 2025

**Accepted:** June 3, 2025

**Published:** June 6, 2025

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## Abstract

This research aims to analyze the conceptualization of migration in the discourse of the wives and children of expatriates through the use of metaphors, applying the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and a qualitative analysis by thematic axes. Migration is a traumatic experience; therefore, its meaning can be favored by the use of metaphorical expressions. Furthermore, the migratory movements of expatriates have special characteristics, as they are usually sudden, transitory, the destination does not always respond to their own desire, and in the case of adolescents it does not respond to their own need either. From what was expressed by expatriate's wives and adolescents, six categories were found: uncertainty, difficulty, yearning, not belonging, movement and temporality.

## Keywords

Metaphor, Migration, Expatriates, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Migratory Grief, Linguistic Analysis

## 1. Introduction

Expatriates are individuals who, due to their valuable skills or knowledge to a company, are transferred to another country for a previously agreed period of time, generally less than five years (Tharenou, 2015). In 2018, there were 29,944 expatriate workers in Mexico linked to multinational companies and diplomatic positions. Of these, eight out of ten were men (Ramírez-García & Lozano Ascencio, 2018). Working with expatriates promises to be an exciting field of research and represents a valuable complement to mainstream migration studies. However, since addressing a relatively neglected type of migration, the topic does not necessarily resonate with orthodox empirical and theoretical aspects (Fechter &

Walsh, 2010). Most research has focused on the workers while their family has been left aside, even though it is known that one of the reasons for the desertion or low performance of the expatriate worker is due to unhappiness or poor family adaptation (Bednarova et al., 2018). This research will focus on the expatriate's wives and adolescents, and will seek to gather information about their experiences of the migration process through metaphors.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

A metaphor is a cognitive mechanism that establishes, through a projection process (mapping), a link between two disparate domains, one target (the domain to be understood) and another one source (the borrowed domain). Target domains are less tangible (e.g., personality) and source domains are generally perceived in a more direct way (e.g., a taste or texture) and highlight some aspect in a way that is useful and intuitive (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). According to Kövecses (2010), the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) highlights that it can be very difficult to understand the meaning of intangible concepts without comparing them with something perceived more directly (for example, a color or a taste). For the author, metaphorical thinking fulfills this purpose, being functional to individuals when it comes to understanding the world.

Metaphorical conceptualization is explained by three principles of cognitive theory: 1) The mind is embodied. This means that human bodily experience in the world is based on pairing sensorimotor experiences, such as moving or touching, with subjective experience. 2) Thoughts are largely unconscious. This means that the system of metaphors is part of the human cognitive unconscious, hence its abundant and automatic use in social discourses. 3) Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical, with most of our non-physical (psychological, social) reality being conceptualized through physical reality or experience (Arcimavičienė, 2008).

Migrants experience a sense of loss of control, anguish, rupture and fragility (Guinsberg, 2005). In the particular case of expatriates, constant transition is a threat to their identity, due to the inherent disconnection that can arise when entering the unfamiliar and unknown (Hayden & Thompson, 2001). Seeing themselves stripped of their external frame of reference, the individuals question their identity (Guinsberg, 2005). The migration experience also involves a change in how time is perceived, at times leading to a sense of disruption, which leads to a disruption in the identity as well (Meeus, 2012; Slobodin, 2019).

A fundamental component when creating meaning and forming identity (Noble-Carr et al., 2014) is the sense of belonging, defined as the personal feeling of being part of a certain group, place or social sector (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). Given their highly mobile lifestyle, expatriates have difficulty identifying specific places of belonging (Nette & Hayden, 2007), and their sense of belonging corresponds more to the relationships they establish with others in the same situation. In addition, they have to face the reality of adapting to different cultural environments without their own family or the host country expecting them to put down roots there, given the conviction that they will return to their country of

origin (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2017). Likewise, they are aware that their social context is not stable and that their relationships and friendships may be lost with the next move (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2017). Fechter (2009) proposes the term “expat community” as a third space that is neither entirely from the country of origin nor from the new one, but is constructed and inhabited by expatriates, regardless of their nationality. A sense of belonging to the expatriate community emerges, transcending cultural boundaries and centered on the shared experience of a certain lifestyle (Arnett, 2002; Erez & Gati, 2004).

Migration is not an isolated traumatic experience, suffered at the time of departure or arrival, but rather falls within the category of cumulative traumas (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1984). Migratory grief is a complex grief because it is multiple, partial and recurrent (Gilbert, 2008). In many cases, these griefs are not processed or resolved, a phenomenon explained by the fact they are characterized as disenfranchised (Doka, 1999). They are not recognized or supported by society, and are considered insignificant. In the case of expatriation, it is socially expected that having exponentially improved their quality of life, their economy, and being exposed to new cultures and opportunities, expatriates should concentrate on the benefits while ignoring their past (Gilbert, 2008). The lack of any social recognition of their loss or need to grieve exacerbates the grief, leaving the person isolated in their suffering (Doka, 1999).

A metaphorical construction of the self can greatly expand the capacities to reflect and act intentionally on the environment (Fetterman et al., 2016). In relation to this, Fechter and Walsh (2010) point out that, despite being a relatively privileged group of immigrants, many of the expatriates seem to inhabit global capitalist flows without a strong sense of agency over their opportunities for mobility or settlement. According to Golden and Lanza (2013), cognitive linguistics and especially the current metaphor theories provide an excellent theoretical framework to analyze metaphors of culture in the narrative of migrants, favoring its understanding. The metaphorical expression used in relation to an event may point to the same or to different metaphors, giving rise to contradictory interpretations of the same phenomenon. The authors found that migrants’ conceptualization of “culture” was expressed through the metaphor of “object” as something that was found and that provoked fascination or rejection, or as an “object” tool such as a “backpack” and that led to a certain flexibility and a feeling of mastery and adaptation. The author argues that the speaker might negotiate varying degrees of agency through the choice of metaphorical expression, through the construction of interactional/pragmatic identity (Golden & Lanza, 2013).

Researchers have resorted to the use of metaphors to represent the stress and grief of the migration process. Achotegui (2012) uses the figure of the mythological hero Ulysses to personify the Syndrome of the immigrant with chronic and multiple stress. The author characterizes the syndrome by its stressors, defining them as loneliness, fear, the struggle for survival, the lack of a sense of control and a support network, which are added to the classic stressors of migration such as change of language, culture, landscape, etc. On the other hand, Fiorito et al. (2023) use the

figure of Antaeus to describe a syndrome in expatriated children. The authors point out that children have fewer tools to deal with the stressors of emigration than adults, and that it is also a move that is not sought by the child. In addition, it is not a single move but several throughout their childhood. As [Schaetti \(2002\)](#) points out, the main source of continuity for the (TCK) is discontinuity. The experience of constant and sudden changes, uncertainty, and the lack of family and social ties generates chronic and symptomatic distressing experiences that can be understood through the myth of Antaeus, the giant who took power from the earth (Gaia) and could only be defeated by being separated from it by Hercules, who raised him into the air ([Fiorito et al., 2023](#)). [Engbersen \(2018\)](#) addresses the notion of “liquid migration” in relation to intra-European migration flows, highlighting that the key dimension of the concept is temporality; this contributes to a liquid life lived in conditions of constant uncertainty. A central element of the notion of liquidity is the transformation of *solid* institutions (class, family, work, community, neighborhood, state, etc.) towards more flexible and lax institutions ([Bauman, 2005](#)).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the use of metaphors and migration. For example, [Keskin et al. \(2019\)](#) studied the perception of migration in the metaphors of Turkish high school students, while [Arcimaviciene and Baglama \(2018\)](#) collected and analyzed metaphors in American and European media in relation to refugees. These are the two types of study most present in the bibliography on migration and metaphors, the analysis of metaphors about migrants used by the media, and the analysis of metaphors used by recipients ([Binotto, 2015](#); [Türk & Atasoy, 2020](#); [Zwitter et al., 2022](#)). There is no bibliographic evidence of the analysis of metaphors used by migrants themselves (expatriates or other types of migrants) in relation to their subjective experience.

### 3. Methodology

An exploratory study was carried out with a qualitative approach. The sample was non-probabilistic, consisting of 22 participants. The sample size is considered adequate for a thematic study ([Ahmed, 2025](#)). The inclusion criteria was being the wife or child (over fifteen years old) of an expatriate, currently residing in Mexico City for a period of no less than six months. Participants were recruited through chat rooms in residential areas where expatriates tend to be located, and in forums and social networks that bring them together. A questionnaire was administered through Google Form, which included socio demographic questions (age, gender, educational level, immigration status, time since migrating, time of residence in Mexico, how many countries have lived in), as well as two open-ended questions: 1) If you had to describe your experience as an expatriate/migrant using a metaphor, which one would come to mind? 2) How do you feel when you think of these representations of your experience? The results of these questions are given in [Table 1](#).

A thematic analysis was carried out based on the data collected ([Burnard, 1991](#), [Barrera et al., 2012](#)) by two researchers independently to reduce bias and increase internal reliability ([Martínez Miguélez, 2006](#)). It was found that the categories

were not always mutually exclusive and in some cases it was decided to assign metaphors to more than one category, since it could be broken down into two or more sections. For example, “Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up” which is assigned to movement, difficulty and uncertainty.

#### 4. Results

The metaphors used by expatriate wives and adolescents to describe the migration experience can be grouped into six categories which are shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 1.** Study sample.

Age	Countries in which they lived	Time in Mexico (years)	Metaphor
15	3	4	Making a pizza without flour.
15	4	2	A polar bear lost in a jungle.
16	3	1.5	It's like trying to catch a football with a baseball glove.
19	7	4	I'm like a shooting star, I feel like I'm losing my shine and I don't know where I'm going to fall.
19	3	4	Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up.
19	3	4	Every time I come back I feel like time is rushing by, for me time is like it has stopped, but for those who stayed time kept moving forward, it's strange because I do feel like I've traveled a lot.
21	3	3.5	Moving to another country distorts time.
37	3	1.8	The flight out of my nest.
40	4	8	Life is an uncertain path.
40	3	2	A paper boat in the sea at night.
44	2	1.5	My heart shrinks when remembering my streets
45	4	1.8	The expatriate is like an ostrich, as birds do not identify with it because it does not fly, but for animals that run, it has wings, and it does not belong there either.
46	4	8	Wings.
48	4	7	A long journey full of stops.
50	2	2. 5.	Having 2 homes.
50	3	4	The expat experience is like climbing a mountain and then sliding down it.
50	2	1.8	A little bird.
50	3	2	A big and strong tree, but with small roots.
50	3	1	A plane ticket with no destination.
50	6	2	The flying house from “Up”.
57	5	4	A moving truck.
58	7	2.3	Nomads with privileges.

**Table 2.** Categories and metaphors.

Non-belonging	Having 2 homes.
	The expatriate is like an ostrich, as birds do not identify with it because it does not fly, but for animals that run, it has wings, and it does not belong there either.
	Nomads with privileges.
Yearning	A big and strong tree, but with small roots.
	A polar bear lost in a jungle.
	My heart shrinks when remembering my streets
	Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up.
Movement	The flight out of my nest.
	The flying house from “Up”.
	Wings.
	A long journey full of stops.
	A moving truck.
	The expat experience is like climbing a mountain and then sliding down it.
	A little bird.
Difficulty	Making a pizza without flour.
	It’s like trying to catch a football with a baseball glove.
	A paper boat in the sea at night.
	The expat experience is like climbing a mountain and then sliding down it.*
	Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up.*
	I’m like a shooting star, I feel like I’m losing my shine and I don’t know where I’m going to fall.*
Uncertainty	I’m like a shooting star, I feel like I’m losing my shine and I don’t know where I’m going to fall.*
	Life is an uncertain path.
	A plane ticket with no destination.
	Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up.*
Temporality	Every time I come back I feel like time is rushing by, for me time is like it has stopped, but for those who stayed time kept moving forward, it’s strange because I do feel like I’ve traveled a lot.
	Moving to another country distorts time.

\*This metaphor was assigned to more than one category.

## 5. Discussion

Next, an analysis of the categories seen in **Table 2** is carried out.

### 5.1. Not belonging

Metaphors such as “The expatriate is like an ostrich, since birds don’t identify with it because it doesn’t fly, but for animals who run, it has wings, so it doesn’t belong

there either” or “A polar bear lost in a jungle”, imply alienation as they define their non-belonging for opposition, with a feeling of exclusion and of being exposed to their environment. Nette and Hayden (2007) note that many TCKs present a sense of rootlessness that even continues when they return to their home country since they do not know the lingo or expectations of their peers in that place.

Other metaphors in this category, such as “A big and strong tree, but with small roots”, reflect the difficulty of creating a solid foundation in a high-mobility environment. In this case, although the individual may be developed and successful in terms of visible achievements, like the tree that grows in size and strength, he lacks the deep stability that roots provide, that is, the lasting connections both personally and socially. This metaphor highlights how constant displacement, frequent moves or life in changing environments make the process of establishing stable family or community relationships difficult.

The individual is trapped in a state of instability, with social and cultural ties that are not fully established, which can generate a feeling of disconnection or isolation. The inability to “put down roots” implies a loss of identity and belonging, since the person does not have a place or a solid network to rely on in the long term. This affects the ability to form deep relationships, feel a true sense of community, and integrate the new culture in a meaningful way.

“You’ve got two homes” shows their not belonging to a single group, even though people have multiple places in which they belong (family, ideologies, football clubs, etc), these are simultaneous, and in expatriates you can observe fluid alternations and mobile belongings. The person who provided that metaphor said they felt “adrenaline and flexibility”.

## 5.2. Yearning (Migratory Grief)

One participant elaborated the metaphor “My heart shrinks when remembering my streets”. Guinsberg (2005) points out the union between the individual, their streets and the relationships they establish, what we call everyday life, generates the experience of themselves supported by that continuity of time and space.

Many individuals expressed feelings of sadness and exhaustion, with one person sharing “Sadness for the time lost between moving and adapting to new countries.” The grief they experience is multifaceted, involving both physical and symbolic losses. “The time” refers to moments that were not lived, creating a sense of mourning for experiences that never came to be. This grief contrasts with the longing for what once was, such as “my streets,” a reflection of the connection to familiar places and past identities that were left behind. The loss encompasses not only tangible things, like physical locations or relationships, but also the emotional and personal aspects tied to a sense of belonging and rootedness in a previous life.

## 5.3. Movement

Movement metaphors were the most prevalent, likely due to the high mobility of



expatriates, as previously mentioned. Additionally, this prevalence may stem from the way in which, as the theory of conceptual metaphor suggests, we tend to symbolize abstract concepts more readily through physical sensations or bodily experiences. Movement, with its inherent sense of transition, change, and direction, provides a powerful framework for understanding the challenges and emotional states faced by expatriates. Whether it's the feeling of being in constant motion, navigating unfamiliar spaces, or the struggle to find stability, the metaphor of movement resonates strongly with the experience of living between different places, cultures, and identities.

This category can be divided between those that make a passive reference to the subject: "A moving truck", "The flying house from "Up"", "A long journey full of stops"; and those that have the subject as an active agent: "The expat experience is like climbing a mountain and then sliding down it", "The flight out of my nest". This is particularly relevant when considering the agency that individuals perceive over their own experiences. Those who used these movement metaphors often described feelings of anxiety, instability, and exhaustion. One individual expressed it succinctly, saying, "I feel the constant fatigue of trying to understand a culture as something necessary, but not chosen." This highlights the emotional toll of navigating a new cultural landscape, where the need to adapt becomes a burden rather than a choice.

The use of movement metaphors reflects not just a physical journey, but an emotional and psychological one, where the individual may feel they are being carried along by circumstances rather than actively steering their own course. The feeling of being in constant motion, without the power to fully control the direction or pace, often leads to a sense of exhaustion and frustration. In this case, the "movement" represents not only the act of adapting to a new culture but also the mental and emotional energy required to do so under conditions that might feel imposed or unavoidable.

#### 5.4. Difficulty

Some of the metaphorical categories coincide with the migratory stressors described by Achotegui (2012). The metaphors "A paper boat in the sea at night" or "Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up" imply loneliness, fear, lack of sense of control and network, and struggle for survival. This finding is important because Achotegui (2012) proposes his syndrome for migrants in extreme conditions "we consider that living migration in good conditions (simple grief) is not the same as emigrating in extreme situations (extreme grief), when the conditions are so difficult that there are no possibilities of elaborating the grief and the person enters a situation of permanent crisis, it is this type of migratory grief that is characteristic of the Ulysses syndrome." In this study, the people who produced the metaphors described above had been expatriates for six and seven years, they were a nineteen year old teenager and a forty year old woman, but both had already changed countries three times in that period. The



lack of sense of agency is revealed in the way they perceive difficulty, “not knowing where I will end up”, revealing a similarity with migrants in extreme conditions’ grief. Even though they experience a “privileged migration”, not going through objective danger, subjectively they live it as an extreme and threatening situation, describing it as being in “a paper boat in the sea at night”.

The teenagers explicitly expressed the feeling of lacking tools to face the challenge: “It’s like trying to catch a football with a baseball glove”, “Making a pizza without flour”. These metaphors imply the expatriate experience coming across as impossible, as an impractical and non-viable task. In adults, the difficulty was reflected in a hostile description of the environment and implicitly a lack of tools: “A paper boat in the sea at night”, “The expat experience is like climbing a mountain and then sliding down it”. The way of living in the world changes, either partially or totally (Guinsberg, 2005), which entails an arduous process of adaptation, often extended over time. Additionally, there is the fact that, when experiencing recurrent moves, once the person manages to stabilize and adapt, the time comes to leave the country and begin the process again. That is why “climbing a mountain”, a task that requires time, skills, effort, tiredness; and then “sliding down it”, something much faster, dizzying and practically instantaneous, that leaves you back to square one to start all over.

### 5.5. Uncertainty

Uncertainty is often an inevitable part of adapting to a new cultural or environmental environment, especially when it comes to expatriation (Zhu et al., 2016), and they express it as: “Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up” or “A plane ticket with no destination”. The participants stated that this contributes to feelings of tiredness, sadness, confusion about their future paths and a desire to settle down. This type of change involves facing a completely different system, which not only encompasses new behaviors and attitudes, but also underlying norms and rules that guide daily interactions. Social expectations, the way people communicate, and the codes of conduct that define what is appropriate or acceptable may be markedly different from what the person was accustomed to in their home country. This difference in cultural norms can generate a feeling of bewilderment and lack of control, as the expatriate must learn new ways of relating, negotiating and making decisions in a context where previous conventions no longer apply. Adapting to this new reality not only requires a deep understanding of language and customs, but also a flexibility to redefine your own behaviors and adjust your expectations according to the new rules that govern that environment (Zhu et al., 2016).

This finding is closely connected to one reported by Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk (2017) in their study of Third Culture Kids (TCKs). In their research, one of the participants, a girl, expressed a poignant sentiment: “I would like to know my next destiny, my next fate”, which was accompanied by a deep sense of bleakness. This statement as well as the ones collected in this research highlights a core aspect of

the expatriate experience, the emotional turmoil and uncertainty that many of them feel due to their transnational lifestyles, and an ongoing search for stability amidst constant change.

On the other hand, metaphors such as “Life is an uncertain path” or “I’m like a shooting star, I feel like I’m losing my shine and I don’t know where I’m going to fall” not only expressed uncertainty about the destination or the future, but also the lack of control over them. Participants expressed feelings of loneliness, isolation and hope. Gilbert (2008), describes one of the losses experienced as the “loss of a safe and trustworthy world”. Not having control over whether the next location will be safe to move around, if their behavior and traditions will have to change or be regulated, or how people would approach them, definitely has an impact on the feeling of uncertainty. Suddenly stripped of almost everything they knew to be true, their sense of authorship and willpower vanish, leaving them with complex feelings, arduous to deal with.

### 5.6. Temporality

One participant expressed: “Moving to another country distorts time”. Another metaphor that explores this distortion further is: “Every time I come back I feel like time is rushing by, for me time is like it has stopped, but for those who stayed time kept moving forward, it’s strange because I do feel like I’ve traveled a lot”. Time appears split, the time of the subject and the time of the others without him. This can be explained by the fact that migration can alter or interrupt a person’s sense of continuity, making the migration process feel different from the “real life” in their place of origin (Parreñas, 2010; Slobodin, 2019). This can include a perception of time as vague, elastic, with accelerations and decelerations, or time compressions and expansions (Slobodin, 2019).

In another study, we found manifestations about the fear of being forgotten (Fiorito et al., 2023). There is an awareness of knowing that there is a story in which one does not participate, temporality is important when constructing the personal script, and these ruptures in temporality are threats to identity. It is worth noting that these metaphors were produced by adolescents, where identity is under construction and depends strongly on the groups of belonging (in this case the extended family, their social referents from the country of origin, “those who stayed”). Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk (2017) declared that TCKs exhibit a strong attachment to the family left behind, remembering the time and diversion at home as a meaningful experience. This rises and idolizes the perception of what they lost, leading them to wish to be in another place than where they actually live. The individuals reported feeling sad in one case and confused in the other. In the category of yearning, one of the participants said he felt “sad for the lost time”, also revealing a distortion, a time jump.

Regarding the differences in the production of metaphors based on the age of the participants, it was observed that the younger participants, between the ages of 15 and 18 years, produced metaphors related to the difficulty due to a lack of

tools. Their international mobility pattern means that their lives are marked by a constant discontinuity of places, people, and languages (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Schaetti, 2002). They do not spend enough time in each culture to adapt, learn the language or internalize its customs, which leads them to the feeling of not having the tools to deal with their situation (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009; Hervey, 2009). Additionally, there are certain tools necessary for adaptation, such as global competencies or cultural intelligence, which depend on and are built with age and experiences (Aldulaimi et al., 2021; Earley & Ang, 2003).

Participants between the ages of 19 and 25 years proposed metaphors related to uncertainty, movement, and temporality. Youth is a period in life characterized by greater freedom to make autonomous and meaningful decisions compared to childhood (Halpern-Felsher et al., 2016). Young expatriates have spent a large part of their developmental years outside their native culture due to the occupation of one of their parents, and when they finish secondary education and start university, many must choose where to live and whether or not to follow their family in their expatriation plan (Hofhuis et al., 2023). These characteristics of young life are reflected in metaphors that simultaneously symbolize uncertainty and movement, like “Sometimes I feel like a leaf in the wind, not knowing where I will end up”; and distortion of time.

Ultimately participants 26 years and older, proposed more varied metaphors compared to the other two groups. They relate to themes such as not belonging, since it is difficult to generate intimate and deep relationships when spending so little time in each place; difficulty, related to the fact that repeated moves generate cumulative stress; and grief, which is complex in this case, given its multiplicity and recurrence (Doka, 1999; Fail et al., 2004).

Concerning the number of countries in which participants lived and their length of expatriation, it can be seen that those who have lived in a greater number of countries proposed more metaphors that fall under the category of movement. This could be explained by the fact that, having lived a greater number of multicultural experiences, they have a larger cultural background. Earley and Ang (2003) believe that cultural intelligence reflects people’s ability to gather and process information in a new cultural context. Individuals with high CQ have a broad understanding of multicultural situations; this ability is characterized by not being innate, but rather developed through experience and learning (Earley & Ang, 2003).

## 6. Conclusion

Expatriate migration movements are characterized by several particularities that make them unique compared to other types of migration. These moves are often sudden and temporary, meaning expatriates do not always have full control over the timing or destination of their journey. This lack of autonomy when choosing a destination can generate feelings of uncertainty and bewilderment, especially among those who are not the main drivers of migration, such as the children and

wives of expatriates. This aspect of migration, where personal agency is limited or even non-existent, is reflected in the metaphors used by these groups. The wives and children of expatriates, not having full control over their circumstances, find in metaphors a way to express their experiences in a symbolic way, facilitating the understanding of their subjective experiences, which are often difficult to articulate in words.

The use of metaphors in this context is essential to explore these individuals' sense of agency. Through metaphors, they can express their feelings of loss, frustration, disorientation. These symbolic representations offer a deeper insight into the way they perceive their role in the migration process, providing a window into their emotional and psychological world.

Furthermore, metaphors created by expatriate wives and adolescents do not only have descriptive or narrative value, but can be used as practical tools. On the one hand, these metaphors can serve as guides for the design of support systems that facilitate the relocation and adaptation of expatriates, since they allow the identification of the emotional and psychological needs of migrants. On the other hand, metaphors can have therapeutic applications, helping individuals to better process and manage the challenges of migration by allowing them to externalize their thoughts and feelings in a more accessible and understandable way.

In this way, the analysis of metaphors not only offers a richer and more nuanced understanding of expatriates' experiences, but also opens up possibilities for improving the processes of accompaniment and support for those going through the complex transition of migration. Metaphors, in this sense, become a valuable tool for both individuals and the professionals who work with them, facilitating communication and understanding in a context marked by change and uncertainty.

## Limitations

The survey methodology does not allow for follow-up questions, which would have been enriching to expand on the emotions or thoughts that were triggered by the metaphors. Future investigations may include face-to-face interviews.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the participants who took part in this research.

## Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

**Maria Paula Fiorito:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, writing—original draft, Writing—review & editing. **Antonio Carracedo:** Writing—review & editing. **Florencia Foltynnek:** Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing—review & editing.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or per-

sonal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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