Cognitively Motivated Meanings for Idioms

The Metaphorical and Metonymical Structures of two Semantically Equivalent but Structurally Different Idioms in English and Swedish

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Abstract

This paper analyses the similarities and differences of the cognitive structures of the English-Swedish idiom pair *to step into someone’s shoes* and *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) in order to investigate possible conceptual or embodied motivations for their meanings. Using dictionaries and corpora to support all findings, the conceptual nature and intended meaning of each idiom were closely analysed and compared. The investigation shows metaphorical, metonymical and embodied structures which might possibly explain why these two idioms mean the same thing as a whole even though they are lexically different from each other. The results indicate that conceptual and embodied mechanisms have motivated the meanings of the idioms, thus suggesting that idiom comprehension in general as well as second language learning would greatly benefit from a more cognitive approach.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, motivation, embodiment
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1 Introduction

Idioms are very common in languages, and identical idioms can be found in different languages, including English and Swedish. Take the English idiom *to put the lid on* and the Swedish idiom *att lågga locket på* (to put the lid on [lit.]) as an example: these two idioms are not only structurally identical (i.e. they include the same words), they also both mean ‘to prevent something from reaching the public’. There are, however, other idioms that as a whole are semantically equivalent (i.e. they mean the same thing) but lexically different (i.e. they include different words). The English idiom *to step into someone’s shoes* and the Swedish idiom *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) are good examples of this type of idiom pair. Although they both mean ‘to take over someone else’s job or responsibility’, they are structured differently and do not include the same lexical items. This study will deal with the question of how it is possible for two structurally different idioms to convey the same meaning, and thus hopefully provide some insight into how language is formed. Have two different idioms ended up meaning the same by mere chance? Or are there cognitive motivations (i.e. understandable thought processes and reasons) behind the coinage of the idioms which help explain both the differences and similarities between them? A lot of research has been undertaken into the matter of the cognitive aspects of language, but since a cross-linguistic cognitive linguistic study into a specific English-Swedish idiom pair seems not to have been conducted before, this research will add new knowledge to this linguistic field.

Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) was a groundbreaking work in the field of cognitive linguistics. Their study on, and re-definition of, the use of metaphors in language changed our understanding of language. They claimed that language is formed and understood by the way people cognitively conceptualise their experiences of the world around them. Zoltán Kövecses is one of the leading scholars on the topic of conceptual metaphors today, and his *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2010) is one of the most comprehensive introductions to the topic of metaphor and thought. Lakoff and Johnson, as well as Kövecses, introduce the topic of conceptual metonymy, a cognitive concept in language that is related to, but different from, the concept of metaphors. Nordlander’s research into the use of metonymy in the
Kriol language (2007) is just one of many studies done on how metonymy helps form language.

Kövecses (2010) devotes an entire chapter to the area of idioms specifically. Here he proposes that the meanings of idioms are cognitively motivated by the conceptual processes of metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge, and he further argues for the benefits of using a cognitive linguistic approach in second language learning. Psychologist and linguist Heather Bortfeld (1997) has studied how conceptual understanding of idioms in one language can benefit and aid in the understanding of idioms in other languages as well.

Embodied motivation for the meanings in language is another field that has gained much attention in recent years. Marlene Johansson Falck and Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. (2012) have studied how bodily experiences with the everyday world affect how metaphorical language is used by speakers. Natalie A. Kacinik (2014) argues in her study that embodiment should not only be studied in relation to metaphors but also idioms, because embodiment seems to play a bigger role in idiom comprehension than previously thought.

This research project will take a cognitive linguistic approach in the study of a structurally different, but semantically identical, idiom pair from two different languages. A cognitive approach seems appropriate since the main idea behind the project is to understand the underlying motivations behind language formation. The fields of metaphor and metonymy seem especially appropriate when dealing with idioms, since idioms are particularly inclined to use various forms of imagery in their linguistic structures. Apart from the metaphorical and metonymic motivations for the meanings of the idioms, the possibilities of embodied motivations will also be investigated. Hopefully, this study will complement and support the studies mentioned above and inspire further studies into the field of cognitive and conceptual understanding of idioms. A deeper understanding of the cognitive relationship between idioms in different languages could also benefit idiom comprehension in second language learning.
2 Aim and research questions

The main aim of this project is to investigate the motivations behind the meanings of the two idioms *to step into someone’s shoes* and *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]), and to see if their meanings appear to be cognitively motivated. The results can then be used to either support or contradict the claims by cognitive linguists that there are conceptual and embodied motivations behind the meanings of language in general and, in this case, idioms in particular. In order to reach this aim, this research proposes the following three questions:

1. In what way, or ways, are the semantically equivalent, but lexically different, idioms in English and Swedish similar in regard to their underlying metaphorical, metonymic and embodied structures?
2. In what way, or ways, do the idioms differ in regard to these structures?
3. How are these differently structured idioms capable of conveying the same meaning?
3 Theoretical framework

This study uses the field of cognitive linguistics as a theoretical framework since the aim of the project is to see if there are any cognitive motivations behind the idioms. More specifically, the area of conceptual metaphors and metonymies is applied in the analysis. The paper follows Kövecses’ (2010) understanding of these conceptual mechanisms. The brief investigation into possible embodied motivations follows the understanding of embodiment as described by Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012).

Idioms are often rich in imagery, which means that the idiomatic expressions produce concrete images, or pictures, in the minds of people, often in order to convey a more abstract message. This can be seen in the idiom to put the lid on where the concrete image of someone putting a lid on a container is used to convey the more abstract action of preventing something from reaching the public. Since idioms employ so much imagery in their constructions, one might wonder why the idioms have been constructed with these specific imageries. Is it mere chance, or are there other reasons?

In his discussion on idioms, Kövecses (2010) claims that “idioms are products of our conceptual system and not simply a matter of language […] hence the meanings of idioms can be seen as motivated and not arbitrary” (p. 233). According to him, it is no accident that idioms look the way they do; they have been motivated by conceptual mechanisms when they were coined. Kövecses (2010) goes on to list the three most common conceptual mechanisms behind idioms: “The kinds of mechanisms that seem to be especially relevant in the case of many idioms are metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge” (p. 233). These three aspects of our conceptual system seem to play a vital role in the formation of idioms, and it is important to understand what is understood by these terms.

Kövecses (2010) defines the first element, metaphor, as “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain” (p. 4). This means that when we talk about a specific concept, we use terms, words, expressions that belong to another concept to make sense of the first concept. The following examples are from Kövecses’ book (2010, p. 6):

LOVE IS A JOURNEY

Look how far we’ve come.
We’re at a crossroads.
We’ll just have to go our separate ways.
We can’t turn back now.

These examples show that we use expressions related to our experiences of one domain, a JOURNEY, to better understand our experiences of another domain, LOVE. This connection is then stated as the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY. Sentences such as those above are examples of how this metaphor is then applied in everyday speech, in metaphorical linguistic expressions. As Kövecses (2010) explains:

We thus need to distinguish conceptual metaphor from metaphorical linguistic expressions. The latter are words or other linguistic expressions that come from the language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain. … The use of small capital letters [for the idiom] indicates that the particular wording does not occur in language as such, but it underlies conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it. (p. 4)

A conceptual metaphor is not used in language, but is rather a conceptual idea in our minds that allows us to create a multitude of metaphorical linguistic expressions based on this metaphor. Kövecses (2010) summarises this relationship efficiently: “We can state the nature of the relationship between the conceptual metaphors and the metaphorical linguistic expressions in the following way: the linguistic expressions (i.e., ways of talking) make explicit, or are manifestations of, the conceptual metaphors (i.e., ways of thinking)” (p. 7). Metaphors are conceptual ideas in our minds, and they underlie the linguistic expressions that we use when talking.

In his discussion on metaphors, Kövecses makes three important observations. First, it must be noted that the domain that the metaphorical expressions is drawn from is called the source domain, while the domain that is understood in these terms is called the target domain (2010, p. 4). One of Kövecses’ observations regards the nature of the two domains used in the metaphor: “An important generalization that emerges from these conceptual metaphors is that conceptual metaphors typically employ a more abstract concept as target and a more concrete or physical concept as their source (2010, p. 7). This is seen in the example used above: the target domain LOVE is an abstract concept, while the source domain JOURNEY is much more concrete. Kövecses’ second
observation regards the connections between the two domains: “There is a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target in the sense that constituent conceptual elements of B [target domain] correspond to constituent elements in A [source domain]. Technically, these conceptual correspondences are often referred to as mappings” (2010, p. 7). In all linguistic expressions relating to a certain metaphor, there are some constituent elements of both domains which correspond with each other. These correspondences are what allow the metaphor to work. An example of this from Kövecses (2010) relates again to the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor (p. 9):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: JOURNEY</th>
<th>Target: LOVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the travelers</td>
<td>the lovers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the vehicle</td>
<td>the love relationship itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the journey</td>
<td>events in the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the distance covered</td>
<td>the progress made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the obstacles encountered</td>
<td>the difficulties experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the destination of the journey</td>
<td>the goal(s) of the relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here several constituent elements of the source domain correspond to other elements in the target domain, and these elements underlie all the linguistic expressions based on the metaphor. Kövecses’ (2010) third observation regarding metaphors regards certain occasional mappings that only apply to a few and not all linguistic expressions. Usually there is such rich knowledge about the source target that additional knowledge is mapped onto the target domain in certain expressions. Kövecses (2010) explains: “When rich additional knowledge about a source is mapped onto a target, we call it metaphorical entailment to distinguish it from most of the mappings we have seen so far” (p. 122). In other words, metaphorical entailment is knowledge that is mapped onto certain metaphorical expressions, but which cannot be seen as constituent, or core, elements in all linguistic expression related to the conceptual metaphor. A non-constituent element of JOURNEY is that we sometimes get lost, and this rich knowledge about journeys can be seen as metaphorical entailments in linguistic expressions about feeling lost in a love relationship.
Kövecses (2010) defines his second element, metonymy, in the following way: “In metonymy we use one entity, or thing, […] to indicate, or to provide mental access to, another entity. […] We try to direct attention to an entity through another entity related to it. In other words, instead of mentioning the second entity directly, we provide mental access to it through another entity” (p. 172). This means that we sometimes use certain words when we actually talk about something different but related. A few of Kövecses’ examples are as follows (p. 173):

PART FOR WHOLE
We need some good heads on the project.

EFFECT FOR CAUSE
It’s a slow road.

PLACE FOR ACTION
America doesn’t want another Pearl Harbor.

Here certain words are used to direct the attention to another closely related entity.

Kövecses’ third element is the easiest to define: “By conventional knowledge as a cognitive mechanism, I simply mean the shared knowledge that people in a given culture have concerning a conceptual domain (2010, p. 243). Conventional knowledge simply refers to whatever knowledge people commonly have in a society regarding a certain domain. Together with metaphor and metonymy, these three mechanisms will provide an understanding of the motivations behind idioms according to Kövecses.

Although the idea that meanings are grounded in our experiences is central to the understanding of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 154-155), Kövecses (2010) only briefly mentions the possibilities of embodied motivations for idioms: “An idiom is not just an expression that has a meaning that is somehow special in relation to the meanings of its constituent parts, but it arises from our general knowledge of the world embodied in our conceptual system” (p. 233). Kövecses never explains how this general knowledge of the world becomes embodied in our conceptual system, but simply goes on to explain that this embodied knowledge often takes the
form of metaphors, metonymies and conventional knowledge in the formation of idioms. For a better understanding of the embodiment process and the embodied motivations for word meanings, this paper will instead follow the understanding of Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012).

In their discussion on the metaphorical usage of *path* and *road*, Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012) argue that metaphorical meanings are significantly “motivated by people’s ongoing bodily experiences … in the real world” (p. 264). People gain knowledge from interacting with the everyday world around them, and this knowledge is then used in the formation of metaphors. In the conclusion of their paper, Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012) recapitulate the importance of understanding embodied motivations:

The motivations for metaphorical word meanings arise from systematic, bi-directional couplings between embodied experience, thought, and language that are continually shaping one another in the minds of contemporary speakers. It may be difficult to tease apart different types of motivations (e.g., embodied, cognitive, linguistic, pragmatic) for why various words are ultimately used in specific metaphorical ways. At the very least, though, bodily experience provides a major role in how conceptual metaphors emerge. (p. 268-269)

Even though it might be difficult to definitively ascertain the exact motivations for the use of certain words in metaphorical expressions, it is at least important to consider the possibilities of embodied motivations since they play such an important role in the formations of metaphorical language.
4 Material and method

The analysis of the two idioms was carried out in four stages: definition, conceptual similarities, conceptual differences and embodiment. The material and method used in each of these steps will be explained in further detail below.

First, a clear definition of the two idioms was necessary before any analysis concerning the motivations of their semantics or linguistic structures could be performed efficiently. Initially, the two idioms were compared on a purely lexical basis in order to demonstrate that the idioms are lexically different. Each individual lexical item of one idiom was compared with those of the other idiom. Next, a definition of the meaning of the two idioms as a whole was accomplished in order to show that the idioms are semantically equivalent. This was carried out with the use of two respected and well-known dictionaries: the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (OALD) and Svenska Akademiens Ordbok (SAOB). The similarities between the two definitions were then compared and discussed briefly. Finally, a number of example sentences were given where the idioms are being used in real life so that the definition presented could be verified. The sentences were collected from two corpora, the British National Corpus (BNC) and Språkbankens Korp (SBK), both of which contain a large and varied body of writings in British English and Swedish respectively.

Second, an investigation was conducted into any possible conceptual similarities between the two idioms that could explain the semantic equivalence between them. The conceptual commonalities thus found were then analysed in order to see if these concepts were used in a literal or, more likely, a metaphorical sense, which is often the case with idioms. Any metaphorical usages were then analysed further in order to determine what concepts were being targeted through these metaphors and if they too were similar between the two idioms. At this point it was then possible to suggest a common underlying conceptual metaphor which would explain why the meanings of the two idioms as a whole were the same. In order to explore whether or not this truly is a conceptual metaphor, an attempt was made to see if there were any metaphorical linguistic expressions used in both English and Swedish that could corroborate the validity of the metaphor. Any such linguistic expressions were subsequently searched for in the two corpora BNC and SBK, so that it could be verified that these metaphorical expressions were not the researcher’s own fabrication but indeed were used in real life.
Finally, the structure and mappings of the metaphor were analysed in accordance with the metaphorical framework presented by Kövecses (2010). First, all the sentences from BNC and SBK were analysed in order to find the constituent elements that are implied in all the sentences. These elements would then constitute the metaphorical mappings for the underlying conceptual metaphor. Next, in order to find out if any metaphorical entailment was involved in the two idioms, the idioms were analysed for any further mappings that might not have been present in the core mappings.

Third, the specific word choices in the two idioms were studied closely in order to understand the motivations that led to such different lexical structures in the idioms. Following Kövecses’ (2010) suggestion concerning the motivation for word choices in idioms, it was examined if there are any metaphors, metonymies, conventional knowledge or a combination thereof which might have conceptually motivated the specific uses of shoes and mantel (mantle) in the two idioms respectively. This was done by looking for any conceptual links between the specific item of clothing included in each idiom and the intended metaphorical target domain. For each suggested metaphor or metonymy, corroborating linguistic expressions were searched for and then verified in BNC and SBK, following the same method as in the second stage.

Fourth and finally, a brief investigation into possible embodied motivations for the uses of shoes and mantel (mantle) was conducted. It was examined if a person’s bodily experience of these items of clothing could be connected to the target domain in the idioms’ underlying conceptual metaphor. Any such links would then indicate the existence of embodied motivations for the specific words in the two idioms.
5 Results and analysis

5.1 Definition

The two idioms *to step into someone’s shoes* and *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) are not very similar on the surface. The only words that are the same are the infinitive markers and the possessive pronouns (*to* and *someone’s/någons*), which are abstract function words that carry less meaning than the lexical content words in the expressions. The verbs and nouns, which convey the most meaning to the phrases, are, however, quite different from one another. *Step into* and *axla* (shoulder) are completely different actions, and the words *shoes* and *mantle* (mantle) refer to two entirely different objects. If one would picture one person stepping into a pair of shoes and another putting on a mantle or cloak, the actions performed would indeed be very dissimilar.

As idioms, however, these phrases are not meant to be understood literally, and looking them up in a dictionary reveals that the two expressions, although unlike on the surface, carry the same idiomatic meaning. OALD defines *to step into someone’s shoes* as “to continue a job or the work that somebody else has started”, and SAOB defines *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) as “att någon upptager någon annans avbrutna verksamhet, träder in i någon annans ställe, spelar någon annans roll (to take over somebody else’s interrupted work, take somebody else’s place, play somebody else’s role [own translation])”. These definitions will be summarised and expressed more succinctly in this essay as “to take over someone else’s responsibility”, where the word *responsibility* will refer to any type of responsibility as defined in the dictionaries previously (*job*, *work*, *verksamhet* (work), *ställe* (place), *roll* (role)).

To show a few examples of how the idioms are used in everyday life, a number of example sentences will be listed below. These will also serve as supporting evidence for the definition stated above. All the example sentences in this essay, unless stated otherwise, have been collected from two different corpora, the BNC for the English sentences and SBK for the Swedish sentences.

*to step into someone’s shoes - English*

Lesser lords would be only too eager *to step into his shoes.*
The old earl had died very soon after the coup on which he had staked so much, leaving this new Archibald Douglas to step into his shoes.

She was the agent for the then-MP, Mr Ian Wrigglesworth, and she was more than willing to step into his shoes.

It was about this time that he started telling Lewis [that] Wyvis Hall would be his one day. He also informed Lewis’s parents, who got into the habit of saying things like, ‘when all this is yours’, and ‘when you come into your property’. Uncle Hilbert, however, was only just sixty, very hale and hearty, still very much in practice as a solicitor, and Lewis could not imagine stepping into his shoes.

The GLC introduced a new vogue for councils to take a far more active role in their investment decisions. Now, just as the GLC had been abolished, NoS was going to step into its shoes and teach other councils how to use their pension funds to back risk ventures.

att axla någons mantel (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) - Swedish

Vid Per Albin Hanssons död 1946 tippade alla att den välkände socialministern Gustav Möller skulle axla hans mantel. (When Per Albin Hansson died in 1946, Gustav Möller, the well-known Minister for Health and Social Affairs, was tipped by all to step into his shoes (shoulder his mantle [lit.]) [own translation].)

När programledaren Hans Rosenfeldt, som lett Parlamentet under sju säsonger, tackade ja till Sveriges televisions erbjudande om att bli ny underhållningschef för SVT Fiktion från årsskiftet, gällde det att hitta någon tillräckligt verbal för att axla hans mantel. (When Hans Rosenfeldt, the presenter of the programme Parlamentet for seven seasons, accepted the offer from Sveriges Television to become the new entertainment manager for SVT Fiktion at the turn of the year, it was time to find someone eloquent enough to step into his shoes (to shoulder his mantle [lit.]) [own translation].)

John-Olle Persson avgick överraskande som ledare för socialdemokraterna i Stockholms stadshus och Mats Hulth fick snabbt axla hans mantel. (John-Olle Persson unexpectedly resigned as leader for the Social Democrats in Stockholm City Hall, and Mats Hulth had to quickly step into his shoes (shoulder his mantle [lit.]) [own translation].)
Efter henne har Sveriges röst internationellt tystnat, det finns ingen som har kunnat axla hennes mantel. (After her, Sweden's voice has grown quiet internationally, because no one has been able to step into her shoes (shouldering her mantle [lit.]) [own translation].)

Det visade sig snabbt att det inte fanns någon som var mogen uppgiften att axla hennes mantel. (It soon became apparent that no one was ready for the task of stepping into her shoes (shouldering her mantle [lit.]) [own translation].)

5.2 Metaphorical Structure

If it is the case, as more traditional views of idioms claim, that “the overall meaning of [idioms] cannot be predicted from the meanings of the constituent words” (Kövecses, 2010, p. 231), then it seems an odd chance that two different expressions would end up meaning the same thing. If, however, the cognitive linguistic view of idioms is correct in claiming that idioms are a conceptual matter, then it should not only be possible but also expected that two different idioms could end up meaning the same thing if they are related to the same conceptual domain. The question then becomes: are there any conceptual similarities between the two idioms to step into someone’s shoes and att axla någons mantel (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.])?

The observant reader will most likely have noticed already, probably instinctively, that there are indeed conceptual similarities between the two idiomatic expressions. Both are concerned with the conceptual domain of CLOTHES, and to be even more specific, the action of taking clothes on. The items of clothing are not the same (shoes/mantel (mantle)), and the acts connected with these items are consequently not the same either (step into/axla (shoulder)), but conceptually both idioms express actions that are closely connected to the domain of donning a piece of clothing. If we turn to the idiomatic meaning of these expressions, “to take over someone else’s responsibility”, it appears that the act of taking on clothes idiomatically represents taking on responsibility. This seems to suggest an underlying metaphor behind the two idioms, namely RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES. If this truly is a conceptual metaphor that represents how people cognitively view their world, then we should find evidence for it in the form of metaphorical linguistic expressions with RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES as
the underlying conceptual metaphor. This, as it turns out, is indeed the case, as the sentences below will make clear.

RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES - English
In the early twentieth century it was not uncommon for retired men to take on more responsibility at home, as many do today. Don’t take on too much work: the extra cash isn’t worth it. Gradually, however, she had grown into her role as wisewoman and witch. I felt the job was tailor-made for me. The Maternal Health in Africa project fits so perfectly with my interests.

RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES - Swedish
Lönerna ska, självklart, bidra till att understödja de anställdas vilja att lära sig mer och ta på sig mer ansvar. (The wages should obviously help the employees to want to learn more and take on more responsibility [own translation].) Bättre att sätta upp realistiska mål än att ta på sig för mycket. (It is better to set realistic goals than to take on too much [own translation].) Petter börjar definitivt växa in i sin roll som offensiv mittfältare. (Petter is definitely starting to grow into his role as an attacking midfielder [own translation].) Frilansjobbet var som skräddarsytt för Ulla. (The freelance job was tailor-made for Ulla [own translation].) Människorna var spännande och arbetet passade Linda fint. (The people were exciting and the work fit Linda nicely [own translation].) Det är ett svårt och krävande yrke, men ändå, det vore som klippt och skuret för mig. (It is a difficult and demanding occupation, but still, it would be perfect for me (cut and trimmed for me [lit.] [own translation].)

Even though all of these metaphorical linguistic expressions are somewhat different, they are all related in various ways to our everyday experiences of clothes. The expressions above talk about putting on clothes (take on, ta på sig (take on)), the amount of clothes (take on too much, ta på sig för mycket (take on too much)), the size and growth of the person (grown into, växa in i (grow into)), the making of clothes
(tailor-made, skräddarsytt (tailor-made), klippt och skuret (cut and trimmed [lit.]), and the size of the clothes (fits, passade (fit)). None of the words in the phrases use the word clothes, but all the words come from the same conceptual domain, namely that of CLOTHES. This suggests that the cognitive linguistic view of idioms is correct in that it is not the individual words themselves, but the conceptual domain from which they come, that participates in creating idiomatic expressions (Kövecses, 2010, p. 233). As in the case of all metaphors, these linguistic expressions simply refer to different kinds of constituent elements of the source concept (here CLOTHES) which are being mapped onto corresponding elements of the target concept (here RESPONSIBILITY). These metaphorical mappings can be listed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: CLOTHES</th>
<th>Target: RESPONSIBILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) the clothes</td>
<td>the responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) the owner of the clothes</td>
<td>the person with the responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) taking on clothes</td>
<td>assuming responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) the number of clothes</td>
<td>the amount or weight of the responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) the size of the clothes</td>
<td>the weight or nature of the responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) the size of the owner</td>
<td>the ability of the person to handle the responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these mappings are essential to our understanding of all the linguistic expressions related to the RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES metaphor. Even though each individual linguistic expression often focuses on one or a few of the mapped elements (e.g. växa in i sin roll (grow into his role) focuses on (e) and (f) above), all of the elements above are implied in our understanding of all of the metaphorical expressions. These essential core components make up the basis of the metaphor and are called constituent elements by Kövecses (2010, p. 121). He makes a distinction between these constituent elements and metaphorical entailments in his discussion of how knowledge about a source domain is mapped onto a target domain (Kövecses, 2010, p. 122). Metaphorical entailments are additional knowledge that is only mapped between the two domains in one or a few metaphorical expressions. This seems to be the case with the two idioms under discussion in this essay. In our everyday experience of clothes, we
know that it is possible to wear or take over other people’s clothes. This knowledge is mapped onto the target domain to mean that someone takes over or assumes someone else’s responsibility. Since this knowledge is not implied in all the linguistic expressions related to the RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES metaphor, this then seems to be a case of a metaphorical entailment. This entailment could be expressed as a more detailed metaphor of its own which quite well captures the meaning of both to step into someone’s shoes and att axla någons mantel (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]):

TAKING ON SOMEONE ELSE’S CLOTHES IS TAKING OVER THEIR RESPONSIBILITY.

So far it has been shown that the two idioms are conceptually motivated by the underlying metaphor RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES. The core constituent elements that are mapped from the source domain to the target domain have been presented, as well as some additional knowledge that is mapped in the specific case of these idioms. This has finally allowed us to formulate a more detailed metaphor that captures the meaning inherent in the two idioms. But the search for how these idioms have been cognitively motivated does not end here. Is it mere chance that the English idiom happened to pick shoes and the Swedish idiom mantel (mantle) as their chosen items of clothing? Or is it possible to find cognitive motivations for these choices as well?

5.3 Conceptual motivations

The choice to use clothes to represent responsibility has been shown to be conceptually motivated by the metaphor RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES. This, then, explains why the two idioms, although different in choice of words, mean the same thing. Now the question remains to see why the two languages ended up using different types of clothes to represent responsibility. Discussing “the motivation for the occurrence of particular words” in idioms, Kövecses (2010) explains that “the kinds of mechanisms that seem to be especially relevant in the case of idioms are metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge” (p. 233). As we will see, a combination of all of these conceptual motivations has been at work in the motivation for the occurrence of these specific clothes, but the motivations differ here between the two idioms. But this should not come as a surprise since the choice of clothes is different between them.
5.3.1 Shoes

With the idiom to step into someone’s shoes, a four-step process will be suggested, in which a combination of metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge will work together to motivate the choice of letting shoes represent responsibility. Each step will be described and discussed in what follows.

Conventional knowledge: responsibility entails work. People know and assume that taking on responsibilities requires work. By assuming a responsibility, a person is required to do something, and doing something involves work. If the work is not done, the person with the responsibility will be blamed. It seems impossible to imagine someone successfully carrying out a responsibility without actually doing any type of work. In the definition section above, it was even briefly discussed that words such as work and job were somewhat synonymous with responsibility.

Conceptual metaphor: WORK IS A JOURNEY. There are many linguistic expressions that reveal how people see work as a journey. The sentences below will serve as evidence that WORK IS A JOURNEY is a conceptual metaphor in both English and Swedish.

WORK IS A JOURNEY - English
Former window fitter Thomas Carter is off to a flying start in his new career.
Mia Farrow’s career took off the moment she swam into Woody Allen’s myopia.
He was concerned that they were getting stuck in a rut and that he was not getting much creative thinking, though his company needed innovation for survival.
Work slowed to a halt until Donald Steuart clattered up on his cart and began to lift down hefty canvas bags from the tailboard.
Changing the subject quickly, I wondered how great an inspiration she had been to all those women out there in their 40s who lacked her drive to embark on a new career.

WORK IS A JOURNEY - Swedish
Fadern hjälpte henne emellertid att få arbete vid Helsingborgs-Posten, där hon som så ofta senare i livet gjorde en rivstart. (However, her father helped her get a job at
Helsingborgs-Posten, where she, as she often did later in life, got off to a flying start [own translation].

Men det var först under förra våren som arbetet tog fart. (But it wasn't until last spring that the work began to progress more quickly (the work took speed [lit.]) [own translation].)

Jag känner mig ibland kvävd, inlåst och fast i gamla hjulspår på min arbetsplats. (I sometimes feel suffocated, locked up and stuck in a rut (stuck in old wheel tracks [lit.]) where I work [own translation].)

För att förhindra att arbetet stannade upp anlitade kommunen en annan konsult. (In order to prevent the work from coming to a halt, the municipality hired another consultant [own translation].)

Hennes konstnärskap tog en ny riktning. (Her artistry went in a new direction [own translation].)

*Conventional knowledge*: shoes are used on a journey. When someone leaves home to go out on a journey, they always take on a pair of shoes. Putting on a pair of shoes is so strongly connected to the concept of journey that it is hard to imagine someone not using shoes when leaving home. The only piece of clothing that might compete with shoes is the jacket, but the jacket might not always be used depending on the weather. It is probably also the case that people feel a stronger connection with shoes in particular when it comes to journeys, since it is so bodily connected with the act of walking. But embodied motivation will be discussed further in the next section.

*Conceptual metonymy*: INSTRUMENT USED IN AN ACTIVITY FOR THE ACTIVITY. Sometimes speakers use the most salient instrument involved in an activity to represent the whole activity. This metonymy - INSTRUMENT USED IN AN ACTIVITY FOR THE ACTIVITY – is illustrated in a few examples below. As will be made clear in these examples, the instrument used often takes the form a verb in many everyday linguistic expressions. In the idiom under discussion, the shoes are used to represent a journey on which shoes are typically worn.

**INSTRUMENT USED IN AN ACTIVITY FOR THE ACTIVITY - English**

Last night, two Catholics were gunned down at a shop on the Stewartstown Road.
Can you hand me a sausage roll?
He was loudly booed by the 10,000 crowd as he walked in to bat and prepared to face his first ball.

**INSTRUMENT USED IN AN ACTIVITY FOR THE ACTIVITY - Swedish**

Jag knäade honom, sparkade och bet honom. (I kneed him, kicked and bit him [own translation].)

Richard fick armbåga sig fram till den stora grillen. (Richard had to elbow his way to the big barbecue grill [own translation].)

Om två veckor är det dags att ratta husbilen mot Smögen. (In two weeks it is time to drive the camper [to wheel the camper [lit.]) to Smögen [own translation].)

To summarise this conceptual process: Responsibility entails work and work is seen as a journey, and since shoes are typically used on journeys, shoes can be used to represent the journey, or in this case the responsibility.

### 5.3.2 Mantel (mantle)

With the idiom att axla någons mantel (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]), a two-step process will be suggested, involving conventional knowledge and conceptual metonymy which work together to motivate the choice of a mantle to represent responsibility. Additionally, another two-step process involving two conceptual metonymies will be suggested as a possible alternative for the metonymy used in the first process. Each step will be described and discussed below.

**Conventional knowledge:** Mantles were used as symbols of responsibility. At least historically, mantles have been worn and used as a symbol for authority and responsibility. A lot of people probably think about Romans and Greeks in high positions wearing these mantles to show their authority. This is such common knowledge that even English dictionaries include this symbolic meaning for the word mantle. One of the definitions for mantle in OALD is “the role and responsibilities of an important person or job, especially when they are passed on from one person to another”. This definition clearly fits very well with the idiom att axla någons mantel (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]), and both the English definition and the Swedish idiom are most likely motivated by this conventional knowledge.
Conceptual metonymy: SYMBOL FOR THE (THING BEING) SYMBOLISED. This metonymy is inherently at work with any symbols being used, because the intrinsic purpose of symbols is not to point to the symbol itself but to the thing that is being symbolised. A few examples are mentioned below.

SYMBOL FOR THE (THING BEING) SYMBOLISED - English
Now with new life we can be blessed when we come to the cross.
The Crown remains the supreme executive authority, although not the sole one.
Uncle Sam is paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to 11 Native American tribes.

SYMBOL FOR THE (THING BEING) SYMBOLISED - Swedish
Av sitt folk fordrar han ett återvändande till korset, vilket allena bär på kraft till frälsning. (He demands of his people that they return to the cross, which alone has the power of salvation [own translation].)
Henriks regering kom att bidra betydligt till kronans makt och monarkens autokrata ställning. (Henry's reign contributed considerably to the power of the crown and the autocratic position of the monarch [own translation].)
Han är en vänlig själ med stort hjärta och mycket omtanke! (He is a kind soul with a big heart and much consideration! [own translation])

To summarise thus far: Mantles are used as symbols of authority and responsibility, and the SYMBOL FOR THE (THING BEING) SYMBOLISED metonymy allows speakers to talk about the mantles while actually referring to responsibility. As mentioned previously, there are two other metonymies that together could possibly explain the use of a mantle as responsibility just as well as the SYMBOL FOR THE (THING BEING) SYMBOLISED metaphor. In this two-step process, the mantle first refers to the person wearing the mantle, and then the person refers to role of the person. This process will be explained in more detail in what follows.

Conceptual metonymy: OBJECT USED FOR THE USER. In the first step, the mantle refers to the person wearing the mantle through the metonymy OBJECT USED FOR THE USER. Other examples of the usage of this metonymy are found below.
Tenor sax and guitar played well together in their many solos.

The car turned on to the A45 heading towards Wellingborough.

We need a better glove at third base (Kövecses 172).

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Sångaren sjöng sig inte hes, han härmade heshet från första tonen, och gitarren spelade sig inte upp till en topp av ljudförvrängt delirium. (The singer didn't sing himself hoarse, he imitated hoarseness from the first note, and the guitar didn't play into a climax of distorted delirium [own translation].)

Vi har hunnit med lite shopping och pizza hut innan bilen styrde hem. (We had time for some shopping and Pizza Hut before the car steered home [own translation].)

Olyckan inträffade vid avfarten mot Edsås och Ingared när lastbilen bromsade in för ett djur som sprang över vägen. (The accident occurred at the exit towards Edsås and Ingared as the lorry braked because of an animal running across the road [own translation].)

Conceptual metonymy: PERSON FOR THE ROLE OF THE PERSON. In the second step, the person wearing the mantle refers to the responsibility or role of the person. It is quite common that we talk about the person who is currently holding a certain position when we are in reality speaking about the role or the responsibilities of the person.

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George Bush took the opportunity to forgive an additional $800m of Poland’s debt to America.

Clement Attlee became deputy prime minister to Churchill.

Larry Hagman has urged Lady Thatcher to reject a job offer from Marlboro cigarette firm Philip Morris.

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Fredrik Reinfeldt är nya Göran Persson. (Fredrik Reinfeldt is the new Göran Persson [own translation].)
Conventional knowledge concerning the use of mantles as symbols of responsibility lies at the heart of the motivation for the use of mantle in the idiom *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]). With this knowledge we can speak of mantles while actually referring to the responsibility which it symbolises. It has also been shown that this process could be explained as a two-step process in which the mantle first refers to its wearer and then to the role of the wearer.

It has been shown that conventional knowledge and conceptual metaphors and metonymies serve quite well to explain the motivations for the choice of words in idioms, just as Kövecses claimed. There is, however, another type of motivation that is often discussed in cognitive linguistics, namely that of embodiment. A brief discussion on the possible embodied motivations for the two idioms will conclude the results and analysis section of this essay.

**5.4 Embodied motivations**

According to Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012), embodied motivations play “a major role in how conceptual metaphors emerge” (p. 269). It should therefore not be surprising if bodily experiences exist which could have been a factor in the formation of our two idioms which are based upon the *RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES* metaphor. This paper will not delve deeply into this specific area, but will only suggest possible embodied motivations for the use of the two words *shoes* and *mantel* (mantle) in the two idioms. As will be made clear, there are indeed everyday bodily experiences that definitely could have played a part in the formation of the two metaphorical expressions.

In the discussion on the idiom *to step into someone’s shoes*, it was shown that responsibility always entails work and that work is seen as a journey. In this context, *shoes* become the most clearly embodied piece of clothing to represent this working
journey. Whenever a person leaves home to go on any type of journey, whether it is taking a short trip to the supermarket, travelling to work, or going on a longer journey during one’s vacation, one must always take on a pair of shoes. Even though other items of clothing might also be used frequently on journeys, such as jackets, hats or gloves, people probably feel a stronger connection with shoes when it comes to journeys, since it is so bodily connected with the act of walking. When on a journey, a person must always walk around a lot, because walking is, in a sense, our most basic and essential form of transportation. And to be able to walk anywhere, people always take on a pair of shoes.

The idiom *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) has strong bodily connections to the shoulders, which is not surprising since responsibility always entails work, and heavy work is often seen as a burden on a person’s shoulders. A mantle is worn on the shoulders, and the verb *axla* (shoulder) brings an even stronger connection to the shoulders. In both English and Swedish, when one talks about shouldering something, one often refers to some sort of burden, both in the literal and figurative sense. People have bodily experiences from carrying heavy burdens (bags, rucksacks, etc.), and this is often done by using the shoulders. The image of a yoke might also spring to mind when talking about shouldering a burden. With these embodied experiences in mind, a mantle becomes a piece of clothing that symbolises that one has shouldered the burden that comes with taking on a certain responsibility.

In conclusion, when the two idioms were formed, the *Responsibility is Clothes* metaphor mandated that a piece of clothing would be used to represent responsibility. Both English and Swedish took for granted that responsibility entails work, but here the motivations took different routes. In English, the *Work is a Journey* metaphor led to the use of *shoes* to represent responsibility since shoes have a strong bodily connection with walking and journeys. In Swedish, however, the work that comes with responsibility is seen as a burden that must be carried on one’s shoulders, and a *mantle* becomes the piece of clothing that embodies the shouldering of that responsibility.
6 Discussion

The present investigation of the idioms *to step into someone’s shoes* and *att axla någons mantel* (to shoulder someone’s mantle [lit.]) suggests that there are clear cognitive reasons as to why the two lexically different idioms can be semantically equivalent as a whole. Both idioms have been conceptually structured on the basis of the same underlying conceptual metaphor, namely RESPONSIBILITY IS CLOTHES. As a result, even though the two idioms speak of different items of clothing and different actions related to those items, the underlying conceptual structure allows the two expressions to metaphorically refer to, and therefore mean, the same thing. This, then, seems to confirm the cognitive linguistic view set forth by researchers such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kövecses (2010). People do indeed seem to conceptualize certain aspects of their lives through other domains, and this can be seen in language in the form of several different metaphorical linguistic expressions, all based on the same conceptual metaphor.

Even though the basic underlying conceptual metaphor explains why the two idioms use clothes to metaphorically refer to responsibility, the metaphor cannot explain why the two languages picked the specific items of clothing. However, this choice does not appear to be random; it seems, instead, that language users want to use a particularly salient piece of clothing to represent responsibility. Here the conceptual structures differ between the two idioms, but for each idiom, a combination of conventional knowledge, conceptual metaphors and conceptual metonymies have motivated why that particular piece of clothing is especially apt to represent the target domain in the underlying metaphor. Clear conceptual links have thus been established between the specific words in the idioms and the domain of responsibility. This seems to confirm Kövecses’ (2010) claim that most, if not all, word choices in idioms are conceptually motivated.

The brief investigation into possible embodied motivations behind the two idioms showed that there does seem to be links between people’s bodily experiences of the specific items of clothing on the one hand and of responsibility on the other. Even though this part of the research was very brief and is in need of more empirical support, it at least indicates agreement with the cognitive linguistic view in this area. These results appear to confirm both the claim by Johansson Falck and Gibbs (2012) that
embodiment plays a crucial part in the motivation of meanings, and also the claim by Kacinik (2014) that embodiment is especially prominent in idiom comprehension. This research is admittedly quite narrow in its scope since it only studies one specific idiom pair, but it at least gives a clear indication that the meaning and formation of idioms are strongly motivated by cognitive mechanisms. Further research into the conceptual structures and bodily experiences that motivate the meanings of idioms would greatly deepen our understanding of the cognitive aspects of language use. In particular, additional studies into the cognitive relationships between idioms in different languages could be considerably beneficial in second language learning, as both Kövecses (2010) and Bortfeld (1997) have indicated. Realising that an idiom in another language is not as randomly different as it first appears to be, but actually has clear conceptual links with idioms in one’s own language, might greatly benefit both idiom comprehension and memorisation.
7 References


