

The Metaphorical Structure in the Literary Text: A Cognitive Approach

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Abstract:

The theme of metaphor is among the most important themes in rhetoric dealing with similarity; it is one of the subjects that has received a great deal of study by thinkers, rhetoricians, and critics across different eras. The evolution in linguistics following the emergence of cognitive sciences, or the so-called "cognitive revolution," changed the concept of metaphor from a linguistic phenomenon linked to poetic image and rhetorical decoration—and from mere words of decoration and improvement of style—to a cognitive phenomenon and a tool of thinking present in all fields of daily life, forming a major basis of our conceptual systems. This is what we seek to highlight in this scientific paper by embodying the new concept of metaphor in two literary texts: one a poem and the other prose.

Keywords: The metaphorical structure, Conceptual metaphor, Literary text, Cognitive approach.

Preamble

The new concept of metaphor within cognitive sciences has contributed to building new conceptualizations that changed the notions long dominating the traditional view. Metaphor in its new concept is a mental mechanism closely linked to the mind and centered in human cognition. It is conceptual before being linguistic, and inherently essential for acquiring meaning, creating new significations, and constructing new realities. Under this concept, it contradicts the traditional view that regards metaphor as a linguistic property centered on words and tied to poetic imagination and rhetorical ornament.

The engagement of modern linguists with various studies of meaning directed their attention toward metaphor. They attempted to establish a new project wherein metaphor serves as a tool to revolt against old conceptions that dominated linguistic studies for a long time, making it dominant over our thinking and daily activities.

What fostered our desire to study conceptual metaphor theory and draw attention to its intellectual origins, foundations, and manifestations is "the neglect by ancient and contemporary Arabic studies, as well as structuralist rhetorical and stylistic studies, of similarity patterns used by ordinary people—that is, those belonging to ordinary language not driven by aesthetic motives. These mentioned studies focused on the creative aspect of similarity: ancient Arabs tried to investigate poets' brilliance in similes and metaphors and made efforts to collect Arab proverbs as proof of their language's honor and the summary of their life experience. Western rhetoricians and stylicians, meanwhile, elevated metaphor to a status they dubbed the queen of tropes" (1). They failed to notice that metaphor is a cognitive tool operating at the heart of the human mind according to meaningful concepts that organize

surrounding entities and objects, representing the focal point of both ordinary and creative language use.

From here stems the primary research problem of this study, articulated through the following questions: What is the new concept formulated by conceptual metaphor for the new rhetoric? To what can its historical roots and theoretical frameworks be traced? And how does it manifest in the literary text?

1. Concept of Conceptual Metaphor :

The concept of conceptual metaphor became clear with the publication of the joint book by George Lakoff (3) and Mark Johnson in 1980 titled *Metaphors We Live By*. This theory came as "a designation for a set of ideas and principles drawn from multiple streams within cognitive linguistics (4) (...) related to the nature of thought in general, and metaphor/trope in particular (...) Metaphor is a dominant central phenomenon in everyday speech semantics and a part of thought insofar as it represents a tool for conceptualizing the world and things in all their aspects. It is part of the cognitive system, which is why it was called conceptual metaphor, as metaphor acts as a conceptualizing, representing, and imaging tool encompassing all aspects of thought, including abstract concepts" (5).

Zoltán Kövecses formulated a precise definition of conceptual metaphor, stating: "If we understand one Conceptual Domain through another Conceptual Domain, we are dealing with a conceptual metaphor" (6). In another definition: conceptual metaphor "is a process of understanding a Conceptual Domain through another Conceptual Domain, which can be summarized as follows: Conceptual Domain (A) is Conceptual Domain (B)—such as understanding life through a journey, argument through war, and love through fire. The first domain is called the Target Domain, and the second domain is called the Source Domain" (7). This means that the concept of conceptual metaphor is linked to two domains: the Source Domain and the Target Domain. Understanding the target domain occurs through understanding the source domain, about which we usually have prior knowledge.

The following example further clarifies this concept: "For instance, in the metaphor 'LOVE IS A JOURNEY', we deal with love as a journey that has a path, places, stations, a beginning, and an end. This means we use the schema of the source domain (journey) to understand the target domain (love). The experience of love begins, moves along a path, encounters difficulties, arrives at a crossroads, and reaches an end... As for the relationship between these conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors, the latter are merely surface manifestations of the former. We express them linguistically in various ways, such as:

- My heart burns with passion.
- The heat of your love torments me.
- I melt with heat for this love.
- Your passion burned me" (8).

In the metaphor "LOVE IS A JOURNEY", "love" is the target domain and "journey" is the source domain. We project the schemas of the source domain onto the conceptual correspondences of the target domain. Our understanding of the target domain (love) required recalling all information and concepts related to the source domain (journey)—beginning, end, stations, places, structures, roads, etc.—and mapping them onto the target domain, given that

love also has a start, a progression of the relationship between lovers, problems/barriers, and a final point represented by marriage or separation. As for linguistic metaphors, they are surface realizations of conceptual metaphors—or expressions of them—as embodied in the aforementioned set of linguistic expressions.

In the metaphor "ARGUMENT IS WAR", the source domain is (war) and the target domain is (argument). War—with its underlying meanings of attack, defense, defeat, and victory—structures our conceptualization of argument, because "the person with whom we argue is considered an opponent. We attack their positions, defend our own, win or lose ground, and design and execute strategies. If we find ourselves in a weak position, we may abandon it and adopt a new defensive line... In this sense, the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR is among the metaphors existing in our culture by which we live: it structures the activities we perform when we argue" (9).

We may use linguistic expressions in various ways to express this metaphor, such as:

- You cannot defend your claims.
- He attacked every strong point in my reasoning.
- His criticisms hit the target.
- I demolished his argument.
- I have never won an argument against him (10).

2. Historical Roots of Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Western philosophers, critics, and rhetoricians never ceased excavating their rhetorical heritage through revision and transcendence until the "Contemporary Theory of Metaphor" emerged, marking a turning point in the history of Western rhetoric. Its early seeds trace back to the efforts of Ivor Armstrong Richards, who noted in his book *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* the inadequacy of substitution theory, criticizing Aristotle's view and those who followed him, and calling for a new theory to explain metaphor (11).

Aristotle relied in his definition of metaphor on the process of substitution and transfer—that is, replacing one linguistic word with another and transferring meaning from one expression to another. Aristotle's confinement of metaphor to this notion prevented it from "achieving the required explanatory adequacy for the metaphorical phenomenon; it failed to answer the new questions posed by Richards, such as: How does a word mean? Or how does an idea (mental image) mean what it means? ... Answering these questions led him to research at the mental level of language, focusing on metaphor as representing par excellence the heart of this issue" (12). Language is metaphorical by nature, and thought is fundamentally metaphorical.

This proposition contributed to the emergence of what was later termed the "Interactive Theory," based on the hypothesis of mental interaction between ideas, which Max Black expanded with modifications by introducing the concepts of *focus* and *frame* to distinguish between metaphorical components. However, despite its relatively sound premises, this theory did not achieve sufficient explanatory capacity due to a lack of precision and comprehensive explanation. Although it recognized some features of conceptual metaphor, it could not demonstrate them in a manner yielding broad generalizations. This opened the door for reviewing its hypotheses through refutation and modification, giving rise to another theory

built on its ruins termed the "Cognitive Metaphor Theory" (i.e., Conceptual Metaphor Theory) (13).

3. Metaphor Between Ancient Arabic Perspective and Contemporary Western Perspective

Contemporary metaphor theory differs from traditional theory. "Despite the centrality of trope in Arabic thought and history, interest in it waned like a flame fading within the body of Arabic life and thought. In the West, however, metaphor occupied the minds of thinkers across disciplines (...) leading to a vast accumulation of scientific studies addressing every aspect of metaphor" (14).

Many Arabic critics and thinkers treated metaphor as a major axis in rhetorical studies. Their treatment was "largely influenced by the original linguistic meaning of the verb *is-ta'āra* (to borrow), meaning requesting a loan. This implies that metaphorical expression is a manifestation of a 'loan' taking place between words sharing similar meanings. Since metaphor is a type of borrowing, Arab critics projected aspects of human relations onto words: borrowing only occurs between two people who know each other, and similarly, metaphor only occurs between two words that share a 'reason for acquaintance'" (15).

Despite variations among Arab critics, rhetoricians, and thinkers in defining metaphor, its nature, and classifications, the concepts of *transfer* (نقل) and *claim* (ادعاء) remained central to explaining it, as seen in Al-Jurjani, Al-Sakkaki, and others. Thus, metaphor in Arabic thought was a linguistic phenomenon based on similarity between word meanings.

In Western thought, however, this traditional concept shifted and developed significantly. Metaphor engaged Western thinkers and critics, especially with contemporary theories like Conceptual Metaphor Theory. This theory views metaphor as "a decisive factor in human understanding and a central mechanism for creating new meanings and a new reality in our lives. Metaphor is not only understood, but it also produces meaning (...) implying that understanding results from our interactions with the environment and others, and that humans are part of their natural and cultural environment" (16).

Despite numerous Western studies on metaphor that "demonstrated the centrality of metaphorical thinking across all life domains, it is unfortunate that this theory found no significant place in contemporary Arabic thought despite more than two decades passing since its emergence in the West" (17).

To summarize the difference between classical and modern theories of metaphor: "Metaphor—in classical theory—is a new linguistic or poetic expression wherein one or more words are used outside their customary meaning to express a similar meaning. In modern theory, it is a cross-domain mapping within the conceptual system, where the metaphorical expression is merely a surface realization of conceptual mapping operations occurring in the mind" (18).

To embody conceptual metaphor in linguistic domains (as it also manifests in non-linguistic domains (19)), we selected two literary texts: one prose and one poetic.

4. Conceptual Metaphor in the Literary Text

4.1 Conceptual Metaphor in the Text "The Trap of the Israeli and the Bird"

Conceptual metaphor appears in many prose texts, including "The Trap of the Israeli and the Bird," drawn from *Anecdotes from Arabic Heritage* by Abdel-Amir Ali Muhanna. The text states:

"Yahya ibn Abd al-Aziz reported on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih: A man from the Children of Israel set a trap, and a small bird came and perched upon it. The bird said: Why do I see you bent over? He said: From much prayer, I am bent. She said: Why do I see your bones protruding? He said: From much fasting, my bones appear. She said: Why do I see this wool upon you? He said: Out of asceticism in the world, I wear wool. She said: What is this stick beside you? He said: I lean upon it and fulfill my needs. She said: What is this grain in your hand? He said: An offering; if a poor one passes by, I give it to him. She said: Indeed, I am poor. He said: Take it. She grabbed the grain, and the trap caught her neck, and she began calling out: *Qi'i! Qi'i!*" (20)

In this text, the bird was deceived by the Israeli who set a trap while posing as a devout hermit (bending in prayer, frequent fasting, wearing wool, leaning on a staff, offering) until catching the bird.

The Source Domain in this text's metaphor is (The Devout Hermit) and the Target Domain is (The Trap). The conceptual mappings correspond between the two domains: bending the back in prayer corresponds to the curve of the trap jaw; protruding bones from fasting correspond to thin metal trap wires; wool clothing corresponds to concealment; the staff corresponds to the trap latch; and the offering/food corresponds to the grain/bait.

The following table details these correspondences:

Source Elements	Domain Features Functions	/ Target Domain Elements
The Hermit	Human, devout, pious	Inanimate, manufactured tool, hunting \rightarrow The Trap
The Back	Curved column	spinal \rightarrow Curved metal wire \rightarrow The Trap Jaw
Worship	Prayer	Hunting \rightarrow Trap Mechanism
Bones	Protruding, thin	Fine metal wire \rightarrow The Wires
Fasting	Thin appearance	Concealment \rightarrow The Wires
Garment	Made of wool	Camouflage \rightarrow The Cover / Camouflage
Asceticism	Wearing wool	Camouflage \rightarrow The Cover / Camouflage
Staff	Long, wooden	Long, wood/metal \rightarrow The Latch / Release
Leaning	Support	Holding bait \rightarrow The Latch / Release
Food	Cooked/wrapped food	Wrapped plant \rightarrow The Grain (Bait)
Offering	Sacrificial gift	Bait / Food \rightarrow The Grain (Bait)

The Poor (Human)	Object of charity	Object of hunting \rightarrow The Poor (Animal / Bird)
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Taking the Grain (Offering)	Feeding	Hunting \rightarrow Taking the Grain (Bait)
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The Hermit Trap

Based on this table, we can outline the conceptual mapping network for the metaphor "THE TRAP IS A HERMIT":

\text{Source Domain} \rightarrow \text{Target Domain}

- Curved back \rightarrow Curved metal wire
- Protruding bones \rightarrow Fine wires
- Wool garment \rightarrow Concealment (Camouflage)
- Staff \rightarrow Latch / Release
- Offering \rightarrow Bait (Temptation)
- The Poor \rightarrow Animal (Bird)
- Hermit \rightarrow Trap

Conceptual Metaphor: "THE TRAP IS A HERMIT"

4.2 Conceptual Metaphor in the Poem "The Last Words of Spartacus" (22)

Conceptual metaphor also manifests in poetic texts. We selected an excerpt from the *Complete Poetic Works* by Egyptian poet Amal Dunqul, who excelled in transforming poems into major metaphors. In "The Last Words of Spartacus", the speaker is Spartacus recounting his final words while crucified or on the gallows (23):

"Suspended am I on the gallows of morning And my forehead—bowed by death— Because I did not bow it... while alive!" (24)

Through these lines, he asserts that he never bowed his head during his life except to death—a testament to his defiance of injustice and rebellion against slavery. He then addresses his fellow slave rebels:

"O my brothers passing through the square with heads down Descending at day's end On Alexander the Great Street: Do not be ashamed... raise your eyes to me For you are suspended beside me... on Caesar's gallows So raise your eyes to me Perhaps... if your eyes meet death in mine: Annihilation within me will smile... because you raised your head... once (...) And if you see my child, whom I left in her arms armless Then teach him to bow! Teach him to bow! God did not forgive the sin of Satan when he said NO! And the meek and gentle... Are those who inherit the earth at the end of time. Because they are not hanged! So teach him to bow (...) For behind every dying Caesar: a new Caesar! And behind every dying rebel: futile griefs... And a tear in vain!" (25)

Spartacus urges his brothers to raise their heads without shame or submission. Yet "the poem ends on a pessimistic note regarding those for whom he sacrificed (...) telling them that if they see his child, to teach him to bow so he may live like them and avoid Caesar's gallows" (26).

The conceptual metaphor expressed here is: "SPARTACUS IS THE FREEDOM FIGHTER". The Source Domain is (Spartacus) and the Target Domain is (The Freedom Fighter / Militant):

Source Domain

Target Domain

- | | |
|--|---|
| - Spartacus did not accept slavery | - The militant does not accept submission. |
| - Spartacus revolted against Caesar | - The militant revolted against unjust rule. |
| - Spartacus revolted for freedom | - The militant revolted for freedom. |
| - Spartacus wanted to free his comrades | - The militant wanted to free his society. |
| - Spartacus received his punishment by hanging | - The militant is killed by the tyrant ruler. |
| - Spartacus remained a living symbol | - The militant lives forever despite death. |

Conceptual Metaphor: "SPARTACUS IS THE FREEDOM FIGHTER"

Conclusion

Conceptual metaphor theory is a cognitive theory that has contributed significantly to linguistic studies. It asserts that metaphor is centered in human cognition, serving as a conceptualizing tool for our representations of things and the world. It is closely linked to our life experiences and forms a major part of our conceptual systems.

In its new understanding, metaphor is no longer exclusive to literature or poets; it is a cognitive tool representing the core of language use—both ordinary and creative. It is a shared phenomenon among all people, practiced by rural and urban dwellers, the educated and uneducated, scholars and laymen, and even young children. Conceptual metaphor has reshaped not only our view of metaphor itself, but also our understanding of human relationships with entities, language, culture, and the entire world.

References & Footnotes :

- (1) Abdel-Ilah Salim: *Structures of Similarity in the Arabic Language: A Cognitive Approach*, Toubkal Publishing House, Morocco, 1st ed., 2001, p. 7.
- (2) Both terms were used as translations for "Conceptual Metaphor", as "Concept" was rendered by some as *Taşawwur* (conception) and by others as *Mafhūm* (concept).
- (3) Professor of Linguistics at UC Berkeley, author of *Moral Politics, Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987), *Metaphors We Live By* (with Mark Johnson, 1980), and *Philosophy in the Flesh* (with Mark Johnson, 1999).
- (4) Cognitive Linguistics is a branch of linguistics proposing that language faculties are closely linked to general cognitive faculties such as perception and conceptualization.
- (5) Atia Sulaiman Ahmad: *Quranic Metaphor and Cognitive Theory*, author's edition, p. 63.
- (6) Khalid Milad: *Semantics: Theories and Applications*, Tunisian Publishing Company, Tunis, 1st ed., 2015, p. 482.
- (7) Mohamed El Saleh Bouamrani: *Theoretical and Applied Studies in Cognitive Semantics*, Alaeddine Library, Tunis, 1st ed., 2009, pp. 124–125.
- (8) Ibid., p. 125.
- (9) George Lakoff & Mark Johnson: *Metaphors We Live By*, trans. Abdel-Majid Jahfa, Toubkal Publishing House, Morocco, 2nd ed., 2009, p. 22.
- (10) Ibid., p. 22.
- (11) Abdallah Ourici: *The Metaphorical Structure in the Novel "Houba and the Journey to Find the Awaited Mahdi" by Azzeddine Djalaoudji*, Master's Thesis, Mouloud Mammeri University, Tizi Ouzou, supervised by Dr. Boudjemaa Chetouane, Jan 2016, p. 15.
- (12) Ibid., p. 15.

- (13) Ibid., pp. 15–16.
- (14) Abdallah Al-Harrasi: *Studies in Conceptual Metaphor*, Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising, Oman, 3rd ed., April 2002, p. 7.
- (15) Ibid., p. 13.
- (16) Hassan El Bahi: *Language and Logic*, Dar Al-Aman, Rabat, Morocco, 1st ed., 2000, p. 126.
- (17) Abdallah Al-Harrasi: *Studies in Conceptual Metaphor*, op. cit., p. 8.
- (18) Azhar Zennad: *Cognitive Linguistic Theories*, Arab Scientific Publishers, Beirut, June 2009, p. 143.
- (19) Such as mythology, dream interpretation, cartoons, TV series, advertisements, political speeches, etc.
- (20) Abdel-Amir Ali Muhanna: *Anecdotes from Arabic Heritage*, Dar El-Fikr El-Lubnani, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 1990, p. 324.
- (21) Azhar Zennad: *Text and Discourse: Cognitive Linguistic Studies*, Mohamed Ali Publishing House, Sfax, Tunisia, 1st ed., 2011, p. 247.
- (22) A leader of the slave uprising in the Third Servile War against the Roman Empire, symbolizing the struggle of the oppressed for freedom.
- (23) Mohamed El Saleh Bouamrani: *Cognitive Semiotics: The Metaphorical and the Cultural*, Centre de Publication Universitaire, Tunis, 2015, p. 227.
- (24) Amal Dunqul: *The Complete Poetic Works*, Madbouly Bookshop, Cairo, 3rd ed., 1987, p. 110.
- (25) Ibid., pp. 110–112.
- (26) Mohamed El Saleh Bouamrani: *Cognitive Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 228.
- (27) Ibid., p. 229.