

Conceptual Metaphor in Ahmed Muter's Poem; 'The Possible and Impossible

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الاستعارة التصويرية في قصيدة أحمد مطر (الممكن والمحال)

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ABSTRACT

Metaphor is a type of figurative meaning which seeks to investigate similarities between two entities. In cognitive linguistics, however, conceptual metaphor theory is a new paradigm of metaphor that has been recently developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). This study discusses conceptual metaphor in *The Possible and Impossible*, a poem by the Iraqi poet Ahmed Muter. The study aims at (1) identifying how conceptual metaphors are expressed in Ahmed Muter's poem *The Possible and Impossible*, and (2) exploring the function of metaphor in delivering meaning indirectly in the selected poem. The researcher adopts George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's cognitive linguistic approach to conceptual metaphor theory (1980). A qualitative descriptive method is used in this study. It describes some phases in which metaphor is used in the selected data. The consequences of the current study show that the poem of *The Possible and Impossible* conveys complex impressions and conceptions to the readers by the use of conceptual metaphor as it usually expresses the comparisons more effectively between two entities that seem dissimilar but share some features.

Keywords: Metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory, master trope, source domain, target domain.

المستخلص:

الاستعارة هي نوع من المعنى المجازي الذي يسعى الى التحقيق في أوجه التشابه بين كيانين. نظرية الاستعارة التصورية في علم اللغة الادراكي هي نموذج جديد من الاستعارة طورت حديثاً من قبل جورج لاكوف و مارك جونسون (١٩٨٠).

تناقش الدراسة الاستعارة التصورية في قصيدة (الممكن والمحال) للشاعر العراقي احمد مطر. تهدف الدراسة الى (١) تحديد الاستعارة التصورية وكيف تم التعبير عنها في قصيدة احمد مطر (الممكن والمستحيل); (٢) الكشف عن كيفية توظيف الاستعارة في اصال المعنى بصورة غير مباشرة في هذه القصيدة. يتبنى الباحث منهج جورج لاكوف و مارك جونسون اللغوي المعرفي لنظرية الاستعارة التصورية (١٩٨٠). يتم استخدام الطريقة الوصفية النوعية في هذه الدراسة لتوضيح بعض الابيات التي تستخدم فيها الاستعارة في القصيدة قيد البحث. خلصت الدراسة الحالية الى ان قصيدة (الممكن والمستحيل) قد وظفت الاستعارة التصورية في نقل مفاهيم وانطباعات معقدة الى القراء بالمقارنة بين كيانين والتي تبدو غير متشابهة ظاهرياً لكنها تشترك ببعض السمات. الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعارة، نظرية الاستعارة التصورية، المجاز، المجال المصدر، المجال الهدف.

Introduction:

Classical theories of language tended to consider metaphor as an issue of language not of thought. Moreover, metaphorical expressions use were thought to be contradictory with ordinary everyday language; everyday language use had no metaphor, and metaphor usually uses techniques lies outside the fields of everyday conventional language. Over a long period of time, people took these classical theories for granted and not only taken to be true, but came to be as definitional. However, in cognitive tradition, linguists stated that these classical theories became untrue since the generalizations organizing poetic metaphorical expressions are in thought not in language. There is a wide spread agreement that metaphor is a novel or poetic linguistic expression in which a word (or more) stands for a concept is used outside its conventional meaning to express another concept.

Conceptual domains have general mappings across each other. In addition, the lack of the formula of conceptual mappings in general principles, is apply to both novel poetic

expressions and ordinary everyday language. Consequently, the conceptualization of one mental domain in terms of another is the place of metaphor not in language at all, therefore, in conceptual metaphor theory, abstract concepts such as states, time, change, and purpose are metaphorical in nature⁽¹⁾.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics arose in the 1970s as a reaction towards the **objectivist world-view** in philosophy that was adopted by the Anglo-American tradition and the approach of **truth-conditional semantics** assumed within formal linguistics. According to Evans & Green(2006), cognitive semantics is "an enterprise to the study of mind and its connection with embodied experience and culture". In which language accounts as a key methodological device that serves to reveal the conceptual organization and structure⁽²⁾.

Cognitive semantics investigates the meaning of the sentence by seeking beyond the truth-conditions of the sentence. It concentrates on the conceptual level of the sentence and how it is affected by the surrounding context. The semantic structure is defined as conceptual structure. Cognitive semantics considers that conceptual structure is illustrated by linguistic meaning. Conceptual structure constitutes the substance of the rich and multiple mental representation. This is an essential property in cognitive semantics that makes it a distinguishable approach to linguistic meaning. Moreover, Leonard Tamly (1972), one of the leading figures in cognitive linguistics, states that research in cognitive semantics "intends to investigate the nature of conceptual content and its organization in language"⁽³⁾.

Cognitive semantics is defined as a semantic theory that deals with meaning conceptualization and mental experiences. The theory emphasizes the role of bodily experience in conceptualization. To put it another way, cognitive semantics studies the ability of human cognition, and can describe the world as people visualize it while semantics

studies linguistic meaning, Therefore, it can be concluded that conceptual world differs from the real world⁽⁴⁾. It is worth noting that Cognitive semantics represents part of the cognitive linguistics framework.

As argued by Evans (2007) , cognitive semantics is" an area which investigates the relationship between experience, the conceptual system and the semantic structure encoded by language"⁽⁵⁾ . In other words, linguists who are concerned with cognitive semantics try to examine knowledge representation(conceptual structure) and meaning construction(conceptualization)⁽⁵⁾. However, cognitive semantics is one of the significant branches of cognitive linguistic school since it is considered as the science of meaning.

1.2 Metaphor

According to The Encyclopedia Britannica, metaphor is "a figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signaled by the words 'like' or 'as' ". Hence, metaphor unlike simile includes an implicit comparison between two things by saying that one thing is the other, as in *she is an angel*. Likewise, Kovecses (2010)⁽⁶⁾ illustrates that the word 'lion' in "Achilles was a lion in the fight" is a metaphor. In order to achieve some artistic and rhetorical effect, the speaker speak and write metaphorically to communicate eloquently that's to impress others with "beautiful," esthetic words, or to express his deep emotions. Kovecses also describes that the metaphorical identify of Achilles with a lion is possible since the two entities (Achilles and lions) share some features: namely, their strength and bravery.

For over 2000 years, metaphor was studied within a discipline called **rhetoric** established in ancient Greece. Metaphor was used in terms of rhetorical devices and was called **master trope**. It was first identified since the time of Aristotle with implicit comparison as an instrument for practical teaching. To sum up, what makes simile in contrast with metaphor

is that **simile** includes a marked explicit comparison by the use of certain words such as *like* and *as* while **metaphor** is built on the comparison between two categories but the comparison is not explicitly marked. Therefore, metaphor requires the comparison between two entities; a vehicle and a target. Moreover, metaphor involves an interaction of two domains which are inferred from different regions of sense, and through the processes of blending and correspondence, the content of the vehicle domain becomes a component of the construed target domain. Metaphor is a basic mean for the poetic imagination and for flourishing the rhetoric in a language. It is an issue of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Metaphor is a matter of words alone not of thought and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980⁽⁷⁾; Croft & Cruse, 2004⁽⁸⁾). Different theories of metaphor have appeared since Aristotle especially in the second half of the previous century. They worked in various scopes of language and from various perspectives.

The most common classification is the Max Black's (1962) three types of theories: "**substitution views**", "**comparison views**", and "**interaction views**". Thus, metaphor in the "substitution views" takes the form of a replacement of a proper or literal term. Second, in the "comparison views", metaphor is treated as abbreviated similes, and gives meanings similar to corresponding comparison. The "interaction views", on the other hand, stands on changing the meaning of one term of a metaphor that cannot be appositely paraphrased, and in this way metaphor is a process of an interaction between two terms⁽⁹⁾.

1.3 Conceptual Metaphor

In cognitive linguistics, **metaphor** emerges from cognitive processes such as reasoning in analogies or the ability to see one thing as another rather than from similarities between two entities nor from descriptive information. In such cases, the interpreter's mental and conceptual capabilities are demanded to understand the metaphorical expression⁽²⁾.

Conceptual metaphor includes the relationship between the **source domain** and **target domain**. The first represents the source of the verbatim meaning of the metaphorical expression and the latter represents the domain of the experience which is described by the metaphor. Moreover, the target domain involves a topic or concept which is described through the metaphor whereas the source domain indicates a concept on which a metaphorical expression is constructed. Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson(1980)⁽⁷⁾ draw attention to the significance of source and target domains. They suggested that: "Because so many of the concepts that are important to us either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by other concepts that we understand in clearer terms"⁽⁷⁾

In his formula TIME IS MONEY, Lakoff explains that to *waste time* is to waste money by comparing the target domain (TIME) to the source domain (MONEY). Time is interpreted as a valuable thing that is owned by people and is 'used' in the same way that money is. On the other hand, when a metaphor is chosen to depict a situation in a specific domain, it explains the structure of that domain in a different way that depends on the metaphor chosen. To illustrate this, in *stock market crash* the metaphor refers to the low level of the market as abnormal, while a rising (or high) market is normal. On the contrary, in *stock market correction* the metaphor refers to the low level of the market as the correct level, while a rising (or high) one is abnormal. It is worth mentioning that within cognitive linguistics, the exact relation between the source domain and target domain in a metaphorical expression is controversial⁽⁸⁾.

The theory of conceptual metaphor(CMT) was developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980)⁽⁷⁾. It is characterized as the notion of a comparison between two things which are not alike. According to this theory, metaphor influences people's life, thought, and how they conceptualize things. Moreover, it has changed the conventional thought of metaphor

as simply seeing A as B and as a rhetorical aesthetic tool to a new dimension of metaphor in linguistic studies which conceptualize a certain domain of knowledge as another domain. The theory was influential and later was adopted by many linguists,. (Lakoff, 1987⁽¹⁰⁾ ; Lakoff & Turner, 1989⁽¹¹⁾; Lakoff & Johnson,1999⁽¹²⁾). CMT assumes that metaphorical thought and language emerges from and constrained by human embodiment. Many conceptual metaphors have source domains which are originated in common patterns of bodily experience. For example, in the sentence LIFE IS A JOURNEY, life is seen, depicted in terms of a journey. That is, the way people conceptualize life as journey, refers to people's embodied experience of a journey which include: people moving from a starting point, on a path, to reach some destination. Likewise, expressions such as “*We are just starting off our marriage*” and “*I am at a crossroad in my care*” points out the conceptual mapping and embodied experience underlie people's use and understanding of these expressions.

In Kövecses's (2010)⁽⁶⁾ argument, he states that people use common conceptual metaphors in order to understand metaphorical expression of everyday life, such as, ‘Love is a Journey’ which is used to grasp the meaning of ‘we'll just have to go our separate ways'. Here, Kövecses suggests that LOVE is comprehended and highly conventional through the well-known conceptual metaphor: ‘Love is a Journey’, since it appeared in the Anglo-American period and the old ages of Western cultures (Kövecses,2010)⁽⁶⁾. Thus, In the same manner, Lakoff (1992)⁽¹⁾ asserts that in terms of love relationships people are able to comprehend knowledge about travel (Lakoff,1992)⁽¹⁾. Similarly, he proposes an identical conceptual metaphor: ‘Our relationship has hit a dead-end street’. To sum up, with the meaning that the relationship come to an end and the lovers are not the same as they were before. It is obvious that the speaker conceptualized love as a journey,

2. Methodology of the Study

The present study uses a descriptive qualitative method in analyzing the data. It describes how conceptual metaphors are expressed in the poem 'Possible and Impossible' و "الممكن والمستحيل". The data that will be adopted here are related to the Iraqi poet Ahmed Muter . The model that has been adopted in this study depends on Lakoff and Johnson's book "Metaphors We Live by" (1980). The poem has been translated by the researcher himself since he has not found any source for translating this poem. The researcher analyzes seven lines of the poem that contain conceptual metaphors (the first six lines and the last line of the poem).

الممكن والمستحيل لأحمد مطر

لو سقط الثقب من الإبرة!

لو هوت الحفرة في حفرة!

لو سكرت قنينة خمره!

لو مات الضحك من الحسرة!

لو قص الغيم أظافره

لو أنجبت النسمة صخرة!

فسأؤمن في صحة هذا

و اقر و ابصم بالعشرة

لكن.. لن أومن بالمرّة

ان بأوطاني اوطانا

و ان بحاكمها املا

ان يصبح يوما انسانا

او ان بها ادنى فرق

ما بين الكلمة و العورة

او ان الشعب بها حر

او ان الحرية...حرة

If the eyelet fell down from the needle'

If the hole fell down in a hole'

If the vial was drunk'

If the laugh died from the heartbreak'

If the cloud mowed its nails'

If the breeze gave birth to a rock'

Or Liberty is free...

3. Data Analysis

If the eyelet fell down from the needle'

If the hole fell down in a hole'

If the vial was drunk'

If the laugh died from the heartbreak'

If the cloud mowed its nails'

If the breeze gave birth to a rock'

Or Liberty is free...

The first six lines of this poem are comprised of conceptual metaphors. Thus, the poet uses conceptual metaphors here to express that these actions are impossible to be done. The poet employs conceptual metaphor in these six lines since he compares and describes inanimate things to animate beings. The poet images these inanimate things as if they are animate beings can die, fell down, be drunk, mowed, and give birth. The things that are being described represent the target domains while the animate beings are the source domains. The source domains are implicit here in contrast to the target domains which are explicitly indicated. Conceptual metaphor is involved in the last line also in the same manner of the above lines.

1. 'If the eyelet fell down from the needle'

لو سقط الثقب من الإبرة!

In this line, the term 'the eyelet' is expressed metaphorically because the needle cannot be a needle without an eyelet. So, the eyelet is impossible to fall down from the needle. Here, 'the eyelet' is compared to someone who fell down from a mountain for instance. Therefore, the poet here employs conceptual metaphor since he compares and describes the eyelet to an animate being. Thus, the eyelet here is the target domain, while the animate being is the source domain. The target domain is being described in terms of the source domain.

2. 'If the hole fell down in a hole'

لو هوت الحفرة في حفرة!

In the second line, the poet describes the hole as if it is somebody fell down to a hole. Therefore, the conceptual metaphor involves in the relationship between the source domain, someone, and the target domain, the hole. Thus, the hole is the target domain which is

described in terms of someone who fell down in a hole, which is the source domain that is implicitly indicated.

3. 'If the vial was drunk'

لو سكرت قنينة خمره

In this line, the poet also conceptualizes the vial or the bottle as if it is a drunk person. The bottle or the vial is the target domain, while the person is the source domain. The conceptual metaphor involves that the bottle is something being described and compared to a person. The vial, the target domain here, is the domain of the experience which the metaphor describes. Therefore, the source domain refers to the concept that poet draws upon so as to create the metaphorical meanings while the vial is the topic or concept that he wants to describe through the metaphor.

4. 'If the laugh died from the heartbreak'

لو مات الضحك من الحسرة

The poet also uses conceptual metaphor in the fourth line. He compares the laugh to humans because only human beings can die. The laugh is being described in terms of a dead person. Laugh cannot die actually since it is an abstract state. It is an activity done by human beings. Death is something related to animate beings also. So, laugh cannot die. Laugh is a target domain being described and compared to human beings, the source domain.

5. 'If the cloud mowed its nails'

لو قص الغيم أظافره

The same matter with the previous lines, the poet compares and describes the cloud to someone who mowed his nails. This is impossible of course. The source domain is somebody, while the target domain is represented by nails. The source domain is implicit and it intends to describe the target domain.

6. 'If the breeze gave birth to a rock'

لو أنجبت النسمة صخرة!

The poet compares an inanimate thing to an animate being. The breeze cannot give birth since it is something inanimate. The poet here not only compares the breeze to animate beings but compares the softness, beauty, sweetness, and loveliness of the breeze to the roughness of the rock in an ironic way. The breeze cannot give birth, and if they give birth, they would never give birth to a rock. So, the target domain here is represented by the breeze, while the source domain is represented by any animate being. The rock is also cannot be born as it is an inanimate object. The rock is also compared as if it is a baby. So, there is another conceptual metaphor that is involved in this line. The source domain is the baby, while the target domain is the rock that is being described in terms of a baby.

7. Or Liberty is free

أو أن الحرية حرة

The last line of the poem comprises conceptual metaphor expressed by using the sentence liberty is free. Liberty is an abstract state, it is not a creature, but it is conceptualized here as if it is a person who seeks for freedom. The adjective *free* is used to describe animate beings, but the poet tends to use it to for the description of *liberty*. So, the term *Liberty* here is the target domain that is conventionally described and structured in terms of a human being who seeks for freedom. The use of this description is of course impossible because Liberty is free in itself. Liberty is the freedom itself, so how it would become free! The poet uses this type of descriptions to show that it is something impossible to have a peaceful home.

4. Conclusion

Thought is basically metaphorical in nature and Metaphor is not a stylistic feature of language is the main hypothesis on which conceptual metaphor theory stands. Metaphor is widely used in literature and especially in poetry. Thus, complex images and feelings are

meant to be communicated to readers through poems, and metaphor often states the comparisons more sentimentally. However, in Ahmed Muter's poem 'The Possible and Impossible', conceptual metaphor makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparisons between two things which are unrelated but they share some characteristics as inanimate things such as laugh, rock, bottle, etc. are compared to different concepts of animate beings. The poet deliberately does such metaphors in order to criticize the government at that time and in every time. He attempts to emphasize the fact that if all these impossible things can be possible, the good ruler is something impossible. The poet has successfully conveyed the image of satire and irony in his poem.

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