

An Explanation for Metaphorical Oppositions in Conceptualizing 'Death' Based on the Theory of Iconicity

Azadeh Sharifi Moghaddam ¹

Associate Professor in Linguistics, Shahid Bahonar University, Kerman, Iran

Received: 22 October 2018 Accepted: 22 October 2019

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

In cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor refers to understanding one idea or a conceptual domain in terms of another. A conceptual domain can be mentally organized out of human experiences which are useful for understanding complex ideas in simple terms. A conceptual metaphor consists of two main roles: the target domain is the abstract concept that we try to understand and the source domain which is the concrete concept from which we draw the metaphorical expressions, for example, in "argument is war", 'argument' is the target and 'war' is the source domain. The way the source domain is related to the target domain is referred to as mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

In most conceptual metaphors, the relationship between the target domain and its source domains are often fixed and stable. For example, 'happiness is always up' and 'sadness is always down'. However, the concept 'death' as the target domain is related to different or even contradictory domains such as 'death is sometimes up and sometimes down', 'death is sometimes light and sometimes dark' and 'death is sometimes the beginning and sometimes the end'. The present study aims to identify the metaphorical contradictions in the conceptual domain of death in Persian, as well as to explain them by the theory of iconicity. The questions this research seeks to answer are the following:

- A) What are the source domains used for the conceptualization of death?
- B) Are they semantically in conformity with each other or not?
- C) Is there any iconic relationship between contradictions in language and out of language?

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In semiotics, iconicity is defined as a kind of relationship of similarity, resemblance or conformity between the two aspects of a sign (linguistic or otherwise), that is, the signifier and the signified. In an iconic sign, the structure of the form in language may resemble the structure of the signified in or out of language (Haiman, 1985). Onomatopoeic words are the simplest form of iconicity in language. Also, the structure of language may be in iconic relation with the structure of the external world such as the conformity between the order of verbs in a report and the order of events happened in the external world.

¹ Corresponding Author: Email: asharifi@uk.ac.ir

More over, cognitive linguistics was introduced by the publication of the book “Metaphors we live by” by Lakoff and Johnson in the 80s. This approach made fundamental changes in the study and analysis of metaphor that remained unchanged since Aristotle. The new approach quickly replaced the classic one and it soon attracted many researchers toward this method of analysis. The term ‘conceptual metaphor’ is well known among Iranian researchers and a significant number of works can be found in this area among which we can name Fallah (2008), Moradi and Forouzani (2008), Kakaie and Jabareh (2014), and Hesampoor, et al. (2015).

3. Method

The present research is descriptive in type. To find the way, the target domain ‘death’ is conceptualized as well as to find the contradictions in the source domains, approximately 349 samples were extracted from different Persian literary and folklore texts. The literary samples were gathered from the selection of the following poets: Moulana, Ferdowsi, Sepehri, Tavalloli, Aminpoor, Shmloo and Farrokhzad. The folklore samples were extracted from Persian proverbs, tombstones, ad funeral messages. First, the source domains were identified and then metaphorical oppositions were tried to be explained based on the extralinguistic knowledge people believe in.

4. Results and Discussion

Analyzing the data, the source domains used for conceptualizing ‘death’ are as follows:

- A) Death is up/ down: death is both conceptualized as an upward movement (lexicalized by words like flight, heavenly bodies, crown, etc.) and as a downward movement (words like pouring down, falling in a valley, tumbling down, and melting).
- B) Death is path: death is conceptualized as both the end of the road of life as well as the beginning of a better and new life.
- C) Death is near by/ far away: death is both the means to reach God and rest in heaven and also the reason for separation from loved ones.
- D) Death is light/ dark: the data shows that the two poles of lightness/ darkness scale are used as the source domains for death.
- E) Death is open/closed: death is metaphorically depicted as being enclosed in a tight place such as in a prison. It is also a symbol of freedom and liberation
- F) Death is an animate: death as an inevitable event is conceptualized as a powerful being such as a human or a wild animal.
- G) Death is health/illness: both concepts of ‘health’ having positive semantic load and ‘disease’ with negative semantic load were observed in the data.
- H) Death is food: death is conceptualized as both sweet vs. nauseating food. It may also be a guar vs. bitter drink.
- I) Death is hot/cold: the source domains ‘heat’ and ‘cold’, the former having positive meaning and the latter being negative in meaning are used for the target domain of death.

- J) Death is the beginning/ the end: the two other opposite conceptual metaphors attributed to death are 'existence vs. inexistence/ nothingless' rooted in the belief in afterlife.

5. Conclusion

Data analysis reveals two opposing perspectives on death; one is based on a physical and material approach to death and the other is spiritual and it is rooted in religious beliefs; According to human experience, death is the end of one's life. Here, death is conceptualized by negative concepts like 'down', 'darkness' and 'absence'. On the other hand, belief in the afterlife conceptualizes death by positive concepts like 'up', 'health', 'light' and 'heat'. Therefore, there is a kind of conformity or iconic relationship between the opposing conceptual metaphors inside the language and the opposing perspectives toward this concept out of language.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphors, Iconicity, Source Domains, Target Domains, Death

References (In Persian)

1. Aminpoor, Gh. (1984). *در کوچه آفتاب* [In the sunny alley]. Tehran, Iran: Barg.
2. Aminpoor, Gh. (1989). *تنفس صبح* [Breathing in the morning]. Tehran, Iran: Soroush.
3. Aminpoor, Gh. (1993). *آینه های ناگهان* [Sudden mirrors]. Tehran, Iran: Ofogh.
4. Aminpoor, Gh. (2009). *به قول پرستو* [As the swallows say]. Tehran, Iran: Ofogh.
5. Anjomruz, B. (2004). *حیات مرگ در شریان های ادبیات* [Life in the arteries of literature]. *Journal of Research in Narrative Literature*, 80, 54-75.
6. Fallah, M. (2008). *سه نگاه به مرگ در ادبیات فارسی* [Three views on death in Persian literature] *Research in Persian Language and Literature*, 1(11), 223-254.
7. Farrokhzad, F. (2004). *مجموعه اشعار* [A collection of poems]. Tehran, Iran: Shadan.
8. Ferdowsi, A. (2007). *شاهنامه* [Shahnameh]. Tehran, Iran: Ghatreh.
9. Hesampoor, S., Nabavi, S., & Hosseyni, A. (2015). *مرگ و مرگ اندیشی در اشعار اخوان ثالث، شاملو و فروغ فرخزاد*. [Death and deadly thoughts in the poems of Akhavan Sales, Shamloo and Forough Farrokhzad]. *Journal of Lyrical Literature Researches*, 124(10), 77-96.
10. Kakaie, Gh., & Jabareh, M. (2014). *بررسی تطبیقی مرگ اندیشی از دیدگاه خیام و عطار*. [A comparative study of the death - thinking from the viewpoints of Attar and Khayyam] *Journal of Religious Thought*, 14(52), 113-136.
11. Meghyasi, H. & Moghaddesinya, M. (2011). *مقایسه ای میان مکانیزم های استعاره ای زبان عربی در تبیین مفهوم مرگ و شهادت*. [A comparison between the metaphorical mechanisms of Arabic language in explaining the concepts of death and

- martyrdom]. *National Conference on Culture of Sacrifice and Testimony*. Qom, Iran. <https://www.civilica.Com/Papers>.
12. Mirzaee, F., Sharifyan, M., & Parvaneh, A. (2010). مرگ‌اندیشی خیامی در آثار دو شاعر: صلاح عبدالمنصور و نادر نادرپور [Khayyam's attitude toward death in the works of two Persian and Arabic poets: Salah Abdul Mansour and Nader Naderpour]. *Comparative Literature Research*, 1(1), 159-177.
13. Mohseni, M. & Fahim Kalam, F. (2012). تأمل در مرگ و نظام هستی در شعر گورستان پل [Thinking about death and the system of being in the poem 'cemetery' by Paul Valery and Rubaiyat Khayyam]. *Comparative Literature Research*, 3(11), 157-173.
14. Moradi, S. & Forouzani, F. (2008). سایه روشن مرگ در شعر؛ بررسی روانشناختی مفهوم مرگ [The shadow of death in poetry; A psychological study of the concept of death in poetry by Akhavan Sales and Sepehri]. *Conference on Psychology and its Application in Society*. Marvdasht Iran. Retrieved from [https://www.sid.ir/Fa/Seminar/View paper](https://www.sid.ir/Fa/Seminar/View%20paper).
15. Moulana, A. (2007). کلیات شمس تبریزی [Shams Tabrizi] (Vol. 1). Tehran, Iran: Talayeh.
16. Nouroozi Davoodkhani, N. (2012). معانی، تصاویر و تعابیر مرگ در اشعار سهراب سپهری و فریدون توللی [The comparison and analysis of images and interpretations of death in poems of Sohrab Sepehri and Fereidoon Tavalloli]. *Journal of Lyrical Literature Researches*, 10(18), 185-198.
17. Roushanfekr, K., & Zolfaghari, K. (2011). بررسی تطبیقی ژرف‌اندیشی در شعر محمود درویش و قیصر امین‌پور. [A comparative study of deep thinking in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Kaiser Aminpoor]. *Research Letter of Comparative Literature*, 1(2), 99-130.
18. Sepehri, S. (1995). هشت کتاب [Eight books]. Tehran, Iran: Tahoori.
19. Shamloo, A. (1993). مرثیه‌های خاک [Soil elegies]. Tehran, Iran: Zamaneh.
20. Shamloo, A. (2003). ابراهیم در آتش [Ebrahim in the fire]. Tehran, Iran: Negah.
21. Tavalloli, F. (1990). بازگشت [Comming]. Shiraz, Iran: Navid.
22. Tavalloli, F. (1991). شگرف [Wonderful]. Tehran, Iran: Javidan.
23. Vojdani, F. (2011). سیمای مرگ در شعر فردوسی و ناصر خسرو [Image of death in the poems of Ferdowsi and Naserkhorow]. *Journal of Lyrical Literature Researches*, 9(16), 175-196.
24. Zoorvarz, M., Afrashi, A., & Asi, M. (2014). استعاره‌های مفهومی شادی در زبان فارسی: یک تحلیل پیکره‌مدار. [Happiness conceptual metaphors in Persian: A cognitive corpus-driven approach]. *Journal of Linguistics and Khorasan Dialect*, 6(12), 49-72.

References (In English)

1. Agha Golzadeh, F. & Pourebrahim, Sh. (2013). Death metaphor in religious texts: A cognitive semantic approach. *International Journal of Humanities*, 20(4), 61-78.
2. Anderson, E. R. (1998). *A grammar of iconism* (2nd ed.). London, England: Associated University Presses.
3. Deignan, A. (2005). *Metaphor and corpus linguistics: Converging evidence in language and communication research*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
4. Grady, C. (2007). Metaphor. In D. Geeraerts, & H. Cuykens (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics* (pp. 335-347). Oxford, Oxford University Press.
5. Haiman, J. (1985). *Iconicity in syntax*. Amsterdam, John Benjamin Publication Company.
6. Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford, Oxford University Press.
7. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M (1980/2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago press.