Identifying Conceptual Metaphors in Imam Ali's Description of the World and the Hereafter

Assist. Lect. Sajjad Abed Ali Shareef

University of Waist/ College of Education / Department of English

Abstract

This work investigates the use of conceptual metaphor in Imam Ali's selected sayings. More specifically, it focuses on his description of the world and the hereafter. The world and the hereafter are the most contrastive and prevailing notions in Islamic traditions. Like any orator or political leader, Imam Ali resorts to some rhetorical devices in order to convey his ideas to his audience effectively. Among these rhetorical devices, metaphor is the most efficient. However, this study is not totally concerned with the linguistic metaphor. Instead, it is based on what Lakoff and Johnson (١٩٨٠) called "Conceptual Metaphor". This type of metaphor is based on relating a certain idea with what people conceptually perceive it in their life. Accordingly, this study sets out to identify the conceptual metaphors used in Imam Ali's description of the world and the hereafter. Also, it aims at showing the most common image according to which the world and the hereafter are conceptually embodied. The present study attempts to draw a comparison between Imam Ali's description of the earthly life and the common conceptual metaphor of life as a journey.

Key words: Metaphor, Conceptual, religious texts, Ali bin Abi Talib.

التعرف على الاستعارات المفاهيمية في وصف الإمام علي للدنيا والآخرة

المدرس المساعد :سجاد عبد علي شريف

جامعة واسط /كلية التربية /قسم اللغة الانكليزية

الخلاصة

يستقصي هذا البحث استخدام الاستعارة المفاهيمية في أقوال مختارة للامام علي. وبصورة أكثر تحديدا، فإنه يركز على وصفه للدنيا والآخرة. إن الدنيا والآخرة هي من أكثر المواضيع تباينا وشيوعا في المفاهيم الإسلامية. كأيِّ خطيب او قائد سياسي، يلجا الإمام علي إلى استخدام بعض الادوات البلاغية من أجل نقل أفكاره إلى جمهوره على نحو فعال. من بين هذه الادوات البلاغية، تعد الاستعارة الأكثر فعالية. ولكن هذه الدراسة ليست مكرسة كليا بالاستعارة اللغوية. بدلا من ذلك، هذه الدراسة تعتمد على ما لاكوف وجونسون (١٩٨٠) اسموه بـ"الاستعارة المفاهيمية". ويستند هذا النوع من الاستعارة على ربط فكرة معينة مع ما يفهمه الناس مفاهيميا في حياتهم. وتبعا لذلك، تنطلق هذه الدراسة للتعرف على الاستعارات المفاهيمية المستخدمة في وصف الإمام علي للدنيا والآخرة. كذلك، تهدف إلى إظهار الصورة الأكثر شيوعا التي جسدت الدنيا والآخرة مفاهيميا. تحاول الدراسة الحالية إجراء مقارنة بين وصف الإمام علي للحياة الدنيوية والاستعارة المفاهيمية الشائعة للحياة كرحلة.

١. Definitions

According to the dictionary of the literary terms, metaphor can be defined as a form of figurative language in which one thing is described in terms of another (Cuddon, ١٩٩٨: ٥٠٧).

Cruse (١٩٨٦: ٤١) regards metaphor as a way of making "the hearer (or reader) to view a thing state of affairs or whatever as being like something else by applying to the former linguistic expression which are normally employed in reference to the later". Cruse gives an example of metaphor by comparing the huge locomotive to a gigantic animal in the sentence: "the huge locomotive snorted and belched its way across the plain".

In terms of substitution, Martin and Ringhm (٢٠٠٠: ٨٤) state that metaphor refers to "the procedure by which a given unit is substituted for another there by transforming its original semantic charge".

Richard (١٩٣٦, as cited in Malmkjær, ٢٠٠٢: ٣٥٢) introduces the terminology of metaphor. He terms the subject of metaphor as the tenor or topic and the terms in which tenor was being portrayed as the vehicle. For example, in the sentence: "my love is a red red rose", the topic or the tenor is *my love* and the vehicle is *a red red rose*.

Finch (٢٠٠٥:١٦١-١٦٢) points out that there are two traditional approaches that show the role of metaphor in language. The first approach, which can be traced back to Aristotle, is the classical view that regards metaphor as a kind of decorative addition to the ordinary language. Metaphor is considered to be out of the normal language. The second approach is often called the romantic approach which considers metaphor as an integral part of language. This approach claims that there is no distinction between literal and non-literal meaning and that all languages are metaphorical.

Saeed (١٩٩٧: ٣٠٥-٣٠٧) outlines a number of features for the identification of metaphor. The first feature is the conventionality that arises the way of novelty of the metaphor. For example, the metaphor: "the girl is a shining star" is less novel than metaphor: "the scientists ask giant computers". The second feature is the systematicity in which the feature of the tenor and vehicle are combined so that the metaphor may be extended. For example, death is seen as a departure, as in: "she passed away this morning". The third feature is the asymmetry that provokes the listener to transfer feature from the source to the target. For example, "life is a journey" is an asymmetrical metaphor because we do not conventionally portray journey in terms of life. The final feature is the abstraction which is associated with asymmetry. Here the metaphor uses a more concrete object to describe a more abstract vehicle. For example, the

metaphor: "life is a journey" shows this feature because the daily experience of physically moving about earth is compared to the abstract processes of death and earth.

٢. Functions of Metaphor

The first fundamental function of metaphor is to employ language in such a way that allows portraying entities (objects or persons), events, qualities, concepts or states of mind in a more comprehensive, succinct, obvious, multifaceted, complex manner than employing language literally. Metaphor can be served aesthetically as a means of satisfaction, entertainment, amusement in order to clarify and direct attention to more serious topics (to 'humanize' matter), usually in a conceptual way. It is used to identify a similarity or closeness between two more or less different objects. However, this is more likely the process and procedure instead of the purpose of metaphor (Paprotte & Driven, ١٩٨٥: ٢٩٥).

Metaphors can serve as an effective means in science and education since it contributes to establish models and theories and to clarify concepts to students. For instance, physics teachers can teach students theories for light by employing two metaphors that visualize it either as wave or particle. In the same way, it is more preferable to teach secondary school students electricity by shaping it as water flows in a river (Goalty, ٢٠٠٠: ١٣٢).

Another common function of metaphor is its employment for the sake of ideological purposes. To exemplify, one can see this function in a discussion which is full of words that carry race and offence. Women can be devalued ideologically to objects for pleasing men's desires by employing metaphors of food for women, cookie, honey, tart. Similarly, once writers compare economic growth in mature economies to cancer, and property to theft, they are ideologically attempting to make their readers to adopt a totally new attitude. In this case, metaphor can be considered as a productive force for changing people's views and their awareness of the world (Goatly and Hiradhar, ٢٠١٦: ١٣٠).

Metaphor is often used for social purposes. This is because it intensifies intimate relationships among people. It shows one's own views and beliefs implicitly and links the views and beliefs of others. In this way, it can effectively serve as a means for hedging or repudiating charge or blame for something by helping the speaker to refer to something implicitly instead of speaking directly or explicitly. It enables the speaker to talk about emotional and problematic topics; for example euphemistic metaphor in: *seeing a man about a dog* (Denroche, ٢٠١٥: ٥٠). It expresses formality or informality, hostility, membership to a group. It evades distasteful emotions (as in hospital slang, e.g. *beached whale*, *apple bobbing*, *a Betty Crocker*) (ibid: ٥٠).

However, metaphor can play a reverse role in dividing society into two groups on account of some people's approval of these restructuring metaphors as part of their literal language, whereas others will refuse them. On the other hand, metaphor can be seen as a dividing means since some people can understand allusions that it makes, while others will not be able to make sense of it. Some people are able to understand the metaphor, such as *Myanmar is the Algeria of South-East Asia*, since they have knowledge of the tragic historical events in Algeria and Burma (Goalty, ٢٠٠٠: ١٣٢).

Metaphor is also important to make what speakers say easy to be remembered for a long time since it creates indelible effect on readers or hearers. It textually makes texts more concentrated and informative, e.g. *He moved to a private bar upstairs and trouble erupted.* Also, metaphor functions as an expressive means of one's point of view. It is a means for carrying the points of view (Hunston and Thompson, ٢٠٠٠: ١١).

Ultimately, metaphor can effectively function persuasively since "it mediate between conscious and unconscious means of persuasion-cognition and emotion". An example of this is when politicians manipulate a metaphor so as to persuade their audience of their ideas (Fløttum, ٢٠١٣: ١٥٥).

٣. Metaphors in Religious Texts

Religious language is normally characterized by complexity and vagueness since it deals with non-concrete and spiritual arguments like the presence of God, the origin of the universe, the purpose of our existence, beyond death and the other life. These arguments are not simply understandable since they are beyond of our normal mental and physical facilities (Winquist, ١٩٧٢: ١) .

Metaphor inevitably plays a vital role in religious discourse. Soskice is the first linguist who focused on the metaphorical role in religious language in. Soskice points out that religious language should be approached from a metaphorical perspective rather than a literal perspective. In her study, Soskice finds that the study of metaphor in religious language helps to shows how the religious men address God, and helps to show that the employment of metaphors in religious language results in accelerating our comprehension of it (Soskice, ١٩٨٥: ٦٦).

Soskice concentrates on the role of metaphors in producing novel views so as to enable the readers to grasp religious concepts easily. In the case of the failure of other types of linguistic expressions to describe these concepts, metaphors become the last shelter and the more effective means for describing such concepts on account of its extension of people's descriptive powers by creating novel images (ibid: ٦٦). Most importantly, she states that metaphors in religious excerpts imply an "evocative" function. That is, they arouse the series of ties in order to inform the reader of

the religious excerpts more about the metaphorical religious concepts, specifically once the religious concepts are very abstract and incomprehensible without the metaphor. For instance, in the case of observing the metaphor "God is a father", people will be engaged with different involved schemes that this metaphor conveys like 'if God is people's father, He will see them when they need him; if God is people's father, people will trust in him since they are his children; if God is people's father, he will never leave them hungry and he will supply them with food' (ibid: ١١٢).

Jakel (٢٠٠٢: ٢٣) conducts a significant study about the function of the conceptual metaphors in religious excerpts so as to know to which extent the conceptual metaphors are frequent, their incidences and roles in religious texts. What he asserted is that the more abstract this type of language is, the more probable that it will greatly rely on conceptualizing metaphorically ideas and views which are out of our mental facilities.

٤. Conceptual metaphor

Conceptual metaphor is a theory which is introduced and developed by Lakoff and Johnson in their book entitled *Metaphor We Live By*. This theory causes a great revolt in cognitive linguistics since it turns the traditional role of metaphor from a rhetorical device used particular in literary works to a common device in our daily life and thought. Traditionally, metaphor was understood as something which is only confined to words. That is, metaphor is only a linguistic matter. It was taken as a device used aesthically and stylistically in literature only. It was reduced to a literary device. It was based on the similarity between two things. It was though that metaphor should be used consciously and intentionally (Kovecses, ٢٠١٠: xi-١٤).

Conversely, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, metaphor becomes the comprehension of one domain in the light of another domain conceptually. For example, people often conceptualize love in relation with food (*I hunger for you*); madness (*they are crazy about one another*); lifecycle of plants (*their love is in full bloom*); or a journey (*we will just have to go our separate ways*) (Benczes, ٢٠٠٦: ٤٧). Other examples of conceptual metaphor are: *time is money* (*You're wasting time, How do you spend your time these days?*), *argument is war* (*I shot down his arguments, He attacked everyweak point I had*), *the mind is a container (Kay spilled the beans)*, and *anger is heated fluid in a container* (*John is just blowing off steam, Phil hit the ceiling*) (Carroll, ٢٠٠٨: ١٤٦) .

Conceptual Metaphor plays a significant role in enabling people to comprehending novel, sophisticated, or abstract things of their daily life and experience ('domains') by depending on more approachable domains, which are comprehended in their own ways. For example, the abstract domain of life is normally taken as a journey along a path (e.g. *He's at a crossroads [in life]*) (Strazny, ٢٠٠٥: ٦٧٧).

In its simplest form, the conceptual metaphor is composed of two domains: a source domain (vehicle, or the known, sometimes labeled the B-referent) and a target domain (tenor or topic, or the abstract element, sometimes called the A-referent). For instance, in the conceptual metaphor, such as PEOPLE ARE PREDATORS, *people* represents the target domain (or the topic itself), whereas *predator* is the source domain, or the vehicle that bears the metaphorical sense to the hearer. Consequently, the conceptual metaphor is established by the process of mapping one domain on another (Nuessel, ٢٠٠٦: ٢٣٥). What this metaphor requires is that the two conceptual domains are systematically linked. That is, one conceptual domain must correspond to another conceptual domain. For instance, people can often conceptualize the concept of quantity in relation with the concept of vertical elevation, such as: *She got a really high mark in the test*. In this example, a good mark is associated with physical height conceptually and systematically (Evans, ٢٠٠٧: ١٣٥). Usually, a source domain is the domain most concrete and familiar in an utterance, whereas a target domain is usually more abstract or less structured. Then, these domains must have ontological correspondences (involving entities in the two domains) and epistemic correspondences (involving relations of knowledge about the entities). This can be illustrated by using Lakoff's example of the metaphor which he expresses as ANGER IS HEAT OF FLUID IN CONTAINER, (Cruse, ٢٠٠٠: ٢٠٥-٦).

٥. Ali bin Abi Talib

Among the well-known Arab writers and speakers that have famous productions, Ali bin Abi Talib's productions are the most prominent. This can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, many Arab writers, who read Ali bin Abi Talib's productions (sayings and oratories), explicitly show their approval of his productions:

- جبران points out that "Ali bin Abi Talib is one of the senior men of thought, spirit, and eloquence in every time and place".
- For ميخائيل نعيمة, "Imam's heroism was not only restricted to the fields of war, he was also a hero in the clarity of his vision, the purity of his conscience and his charming eloquence"(جرداق, ٢٠١٠: ٢٤).
- According to الزيات (١٩١٧: ٩٠):

> After the Messenger of Allah, we do not know a man from predecessors and successors who is more eloquent in logic and more rhetorical in oratory than Ali. He was a wise man and his wisdom was erupting from his eloquence. He was an orator and rhetoric was flowing in his tongue. He was a preacher with a long argument.

- طاهر درويش (٣٩٢ :١٩٦٧) states that "Imam Ali was an example for his eloquence and his rhetorical faculties".

Ali bin Abi Talib's speech has further special importance since it is one of the sources of Arabic. Sayings and poems have been collected here and there by ordinary people, and cited in the dictionaries, grammar books, and the like. This makes it clear that how Ali bin Abi Talib's sayings are valuable and important. The honorary status of the producer reflects his honorary output. For example the Messenger of Allah's speech is higher than any speech because of his honorary status. The same is said about Ali bin Abi Talib's speech. Ali bin Abi Talib's speech has been cited by senior linguists and grammatists likes : بن عباد (٣٢١ :١٩٩٤) ; بن زكريا الهجري (٢٧١،١٩٨٠) ; الأنصاري المصري) ١٩٦٤:١٩٥).

There is no doubt that Ali bin Abi Talib's skilful literary production encompasses within it the beautiful rhetorical arts in terms of words, invaluable images, meaning. This makes his speech of great importance. Moreover, Ali bin Abi Talib's speech encompassed many aspects: he has sayings in religion, politics, economics, jihad and living matters. This makes his literary production so comprehensive and perfect that it is very rare to find like it in the Arab history. The construction of composition, which is characterized by the quality of meaning, eloquence, pronunciation, synthesizing beauty and skilful style, has been present since the beginning of the first century Ah, and it has many representatives from that century. However, we do not mistake if we notice that Ali ibn Abi Talib and Omar bin Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with them) have the widest experience in that field and they are the most productive and effective (البصير, ١٩٨٧ :٤٥) .

Ali bin Abi Talib's speech is of particular importance in the field of citation on the linguistic and grammatical issues because of its good style, eloquence, abundance of sense, and rhetorical images. Critics point out that Imam Ali's style and his literary production have features like eloquence, pronunciation, civility and beauty of expression. These features are considered the finest features in style.

(البصير, ١٩٨٧ :٥١)

٦. Data Analysis

The present section is dedicated to the empirical part of the study. It is intended to accomplish some goals. Firstly, this chapter aims at identifying and analysing the selected data. Of course, each saying in Arabic is translated and there is an explanation for each saying in order to clarify the significance and the image used in each conceptual metaphor:

١. **"Definitely, this world is a house in which no one can live in peacefully, nor enjoy anything of it. People are plagued by its distress: what they took from it would be soon taken from them and they would be punished for that".**

"ألا إن الدنيا دار لا يسلم منها إلا فيها (بالزهد) ، ولا ينجى بشيء كان لها ، ابتلي الناس بها فتنة فما أخذوه منها لها اخرجوا منه وحوسبوا عليه" .

In this conceptual metaphor, Ali describes the world as an unsafe and dangerous home because it is a home of disasters and calamities . The distress of this world lies in the fact that people would be asked about what they get from this world and how they get it: illegally or legally .

٢. **"The world is a house for the hypocrites and not for the righteous".**

"الدنيا دار المنافقين وليست بدار المتقين"

In this conceptual metaphor, Ali also portrays the world as a home. However, in this saying he directs the attention to the inhabitants of this world. It is only inhabited by hypocrites (bad people). Therefore, there is no place in this world for the pious because it is not their home.

٣. **"The world is just like a net that wraps around those who like living in it and avoids those who dislike it, do not incline to it with your heart and your face in order not to be caught in her net".**

"إن الدنيا كالشبكة تلتف على من رغب فيها وتتحرز عمن أعرض عنها، فلا تمل إليها بقلبك ولا تقبل عليها بوجهك فتوقعك في شبكته"

This is one of the most remarkable conceptual metaphors. Here Ali draws an image of net and fish. The world is described as the net that catches the fish. The fish is certainly represented by those who are attracted by it

٤. **"The world is a passage and the hereafter is the Home that will last".**

"الدنيا دار ممر والاخرة دار مقر"

Here, both the world and the hereafter are conceptually shown as a home . However, the world as a home is only a passage according to which people transport to the eternal home that of the hereafter. To put it simply, the world is only temporary stage for the permanent home which is the hereafter

٥. **"The best winners who bought the world for the hereafter"**

"اربح الناس من اشترى الدنيا بالأخرة"

Here, the world and the hereafter as a commodity that can be bought and sold. In this transaction, Ali refers to the winners. They are those who use what they got in the world as so to buy the hereafter. That is, the winners are those who give up the world for the sake of the hereafter.

٦. **"The world and the Hereafter are two different opponents, and two different paths. Those who love the world detest the Hereafter. They are like east and west: the closer they are to one another the further they become, and they are two fellow wives".**

"إنّ الدّنيا والآخرة عدوّان متفاوتان، وسبيلان مختلفان، فمن أحبّ الدّنيا وتولّاها أبغض الآخرة وعاداها. وهما بمنزلة المشرق والمغرب، وماش بينهما، كلّما قرب من واحد بعد من الآخر، وهما بعد ضرّتان"

This conceptual metaphor reveals how the world and the hereafter are different. They are the opposite for each other: the love of one of them entails the dislike of the other. In order to show the distance between them, Ali likens the distance between them to that between the west and east. They are two fellow wives; that is, no one can satisfy them together.

٧. **"The likeness of those who experienced the world is as travelers informed of an infertile home, and they headed for a home that was infertile and terrible. And they tolerated the hardship of the way, the separation of the friend, the roughness of travel and the unpleasant food to come to the house of their everlasting living".**

"إنّما مثل من خبر الدّنيا كمثل قوم سفر نبا بهم منزل جديب، فأمّوا منزلا خصيبا وجنابا مريعا. فاحتملوا وعثاء (أي مشقة) الطّريق، وفراق الصّديق. وخشونة السّفر، وجشوبة المطعم ليأتوا سعة دارهم، ومنزل قرارهم".

In this conceptual metaphor, the world and the hereafter are described as a home. The existence of people in the world is similar to their existence in a destructive home. The life in this home is extremely insufferable. However, they must bear the difficulties of this world in order to travel peacefully to their real home: the home of eternity.

٨. **"The likeness of the world is a snake: its skin is soft, but its venom is lethal. The stupid hurries up to its attraction and the clever avoids it".**

"مثل الدنيا كمثل الحية، لين مسها والسم القاتل في جوفها، يهوي إليها الغر الجاهل ويحذرها اللبيب العاقل"

This conceptual metaphor is a representation of the world in its worst image. The image of snake divulges the evilness and the brutality of this world. The temporary pleasure of this world is the soft skin of this snake that seduces those who accept this world at the cost of their hereafter.Only those,who know the reality of this mortal world,realize that getting closer to her is a suicide.

٩. **"The world, like a ghoul, tempts those who obey it and destroys those who believe in it. It fades away hastily and it is about to move away".**

"إن الدنيا كالغول تغوي من أطاعها وتهلك من أجابها، وإنها لسريعة الزوال وشيكة الانتقال"

This conceptual metaphor shows the deceiving side of this world. In the traditional Arabian folklore, ghoul is a goblin that appears to people in the desert in different shapes and colours to draw people out of the right way. This world is, as this ghoul, deceives and kills those who submit to it.

١٠. **"The world is a ferryboat for the hereafter".** "الدنيا معبرة الاخرة"

This conceptual metaphor describes the world as a big boat that carries people to their eternal journey in the hereafter .

١١. **"Hurry up, may God have mercy on you, to your homes which you have been ordered to live in, and which you have desired and called to ... for tomorrow is near today. How fast the hours of the day! , How fast the days of the month! , How fast the months of the year!, and How fast the years in life!".**

"فسابقوا رحمكم الله إلى منازلكم الّتي أمرتم أن تعمروها، والّتي رغبتم فيها ودعيتم إليها... فإنّ غدا من اليوم قريب.   ما أسرع السّاعات في اليوم، وأسرع الأيّام في الشّهر، وأسرع الشّهور في السّنة، وأسرع السّنين في العمر".

In this conceptual metaphor, Ali urges people to prepare themselves for their eternal homes in the hereafter. Ali reminds people of how short this world is. So they must be ready in any moment to leave this world.

٧. Conclusion

The study has arrived at the following findings:

١. A simple glimpse at Imam Ali's sayings divulges its fertility in metaphorical language.

٢. The analysis of Imam Ali's metaphors proves that understanding examples of metaphor in religious discourse requires more cognitive process on the part of readers than understanding these metaphors as divergent linguistic expressions.

٣. The analysis of Imam Ali's sayings reveals that he metaphorically relates abstract notions with physical notions. The effort of expressing new abstract ideas explicitly to people requires Ali's metaphorical language relies on human experience and knowledge of the real world.

٤. Imam Ali's metaphors are used to portray the world and the hereafter positively or negatively. Generally, metaphors of "snake", "ghoul", and "net" are commonly used negatively to show the world in terms of the idea of its lower status and its dangers. The reverse is truer for the hereafter.

٥. Imam Ali's metaphors have explanatory and ontological purposes. A lot of images are employed to introduce the world as something bad, to escape from it, to warn believers against being involved in this world, and to describe the inhabitants of this world. The inhabitants of this world are shown by the most negative images, while the inhabitants of the hereafter are constantly embodied by positive images.

٦. Despite the fact that the earthly world and the hereafter are two opposite ideas, Ali Bin Abu Talib, in most of his speech and sermons, presents them as a home. This is probably because the image of home makes it easy for people to conceptualize metaphorically the earthly world and the hereafter. However, the home of the earthly world is completely different from that of the hereafter.

٧. The reason behind the excessive use of metaphors in Imam Ali's sayings can be attributed to fact that metaphor is one of the most powerful means of persuasion. Imam Ali resorts to this device in order to persuade his audience of his ideas. He attempts to conceptualize metaphorically two opposite Islamic ideas in the light of many images that are emotionally accepted. The variety of images which provokes positive and negative emotional feelings plays a role in raising messages of encouragement or warning. This way educationally contributes to stimulate the listeners by telling them the values of following the hereafter and warning of the losses that are caused by clinging to this immortal world.

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