

A Cognitive-Critical Discourse Analysis of Death Metaphors in Sinan Antoon's The Corpse Washer

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تحليل الخطاب المعرفي النقدي لاستعارات الموت في "وحدها شجرة الرمان" لسنان أنطون

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the metaphorical use of death in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* uses the cognitive-critical discourse analysis framework. The study is based on the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and critical metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) and it investigates the conceptual and linguistic construction of death through mappings in the novel. By using strictly qualitative descriptive-analytical design, the data were prototypical texts that were purposively selected. The analysis of the excerpts follows a three-stage methodological model (identification, interpretation, and explanation) that aims at identifying, interpreting, and explaining the conceptual metaphors, their source domains, and their ideologies. The results indicate that death is mostly conceptualized in a systematic structural and ontological manner, either as an active institutional force or as a procedural operation, both of which have emerged from The traumatic socio-political conditions of post-2003 Iraq. The metaphors carry two kinds of meaning: they are cognitive devices to understand abstract experiences, but They also carry ideological implications that are imbued with trauma, collective suffering and cultural memory. The study calls to the attention of readers the role of metaphor in the way they perceive mortality in works of literature during wartime, and in cognitive linguistics and critical discourse studies, the study shows how Qualitative literary analysis can reveal meaning-making in situations of systemic violence. **Keywords:** Death metaphors, Qualitative Analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Metaphor Analysis, *The Corpse Washer*, Iraqi literature.

المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في التمثيل الاستعاري للموت في رواية سنان أنطون "وحدها شجرة الرمان" ضمن إطار التحليل النقدي-الإدراكي للخطاب. واستناداً إلى نظرية الاستعارة التصويرية (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) والتحليل النقدي للاستعارة (Charteris-Black, 2004)، تتناول الدراسة كيفية بناء مفهوم الموت لغوياً وتصورياً في الرواية من خلال عمليات الإسقاط الاستعاري. وبتطبيق منهجية وصفية تحليلية نوعية (Qualitative) بشكلٍ صرف، تتكون بيانات الدراسة من مقتطفات نموذجية جرى اختيارها عمداً من النص. خضعت هذه المقتطفات للتحليل عبر نموذج منهجي ثلاثي المراحل (التحديد، التفسير، والشرح) بهدف الكشف عن الاستعارات التصويرية، ومجالات المصدر والهدف الكامنة وراءها، ووظائفها الأيديولوجية.

وتُظهر النتائج أن الموت يُتصوّر بصورة أساسية من خلال استعارات بنيوية وأنطولوجية، حيث يُؤطر كقوة مؤسسية نشطة أو كنظام إجرائي روتيني، مما يعكس الواقع المأساوي والسياسي للعراق ما بعد عام ٢٠٠٣. وتؤدي هذه الاستعارات وظائف لا تقتصر على كونها آليات معرفية لفهم الخبرات المجردة، بل تمتد لتكون أدوات أيديولوجية تُشفر الصدمة والمعاناة والذاكرة الثقافية الجماعية. وتُبرز الدراسة دور الاستعارة في تشكيل إدراك القارئ للموت في الأعمال الأدبية زمن الحرب، كما تُسهم في مجالي اللسانيات المعرفية ودراسات الخطاب النقدي من خلال توضيح كيفية بناء المعنى عبر التحليل الأدبي الكيفي في سياقات العنف الممنهج. الكلمات المفتاحية: استعارات الموت، التحليل الكيفي، نظرية الاستعارة التصويرية، التحليل النقدي للاستعارة، "وحدها شجرة الرمان"، الأدب العراقي

1. INTRODUCTION

١,١ Introduction

In recent years, Iraqi literature has become a potent tool for conveying the realities of war, trauma, disintegration, and loss in the context of the socio-political turmoil of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Iraq. The Corpse Washer (2013) by Sinan Antoon is an important post-2003 literary work investigates the psychological and cultural impact of death in Iraq.

Death is not just an isolated, one-off occurrence, but an ongoing, inevitable part of life and a determinant of identity, memory, and social relations. The novel is a highly symbolic portrayal of Iraqi society during war and violence, as the washing of the corpse and its confrontation with death, as well as the customs of the dead and The funeral serves as a symbol for the novel.

Metaphor is an important tool in creating meaning in The Corpse Washer, especially when it comes to death and its related experiences. Based on the Cognitive Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphor is not just a stylistic device, a simple rhetorical tool, but rather a process in which abstract and emotionally charged events are mapped onto more concrete domains.

Accordingly, this study adopts a Cognitive-Critical Discourse Analysis approach to examine how metaphors of death are constructed in The Corpse Washer and how These metaphorical mappings reflect both cognitive processes and ideological meanings. By evaluating purposively selected prototypical excerpts from the novel, the study aims to uncover the underlying conceptual structures that shape representations of death and to demonstrate how qualitative metaphor analysis contributes to meaning-making in contexts of war and trauma.

١,٢ The Problem of the Study

Despite the rich use of metaphor in representing death, ritual, and corporeality in post-2003 Iraqi war narratives, there is a lack of systematic linguistic studies that examine how these metaphorical structures operate at the cognitive and discursive levels. Most literary reviews approach the text from purely thematic or cultural perspectives, leaving the micro-linguistic and conceptual mechanisms under-explored. This study seeks to address this gap by answering the following questions through qualitative analysis:

- ١ What conceptual metaphors are used to represent death in The Corpse Washer?
- ٢ How do these metaphors function in constructing meanings related to death, suffering, and ritual practices?
- ٣ What ideological and cultural meanings are encoded through metaphorical representations of death in the novel?

١,٣ The Aims of the Study

The present study aims at:

- ١ Investigating and identifying the conceptual metaphorical patterns used to represent mortality in Sinan Antoon's The Corpse Washer within a Cognitive-Critical Discourse Analysis framework.
- ٢ Examining how key structural and ontological metaphors in the novel qualitatively construct representations of death, ritual, and post-war trauma.
- ٣ Analyzing the discursive and rhetorical functions of death metaphors in shaping readers' perception of collective loss in post-2003 Iraq.
- ٤ Revealing the ideological implications embedded in the metaphorical personification and institutionalization of death.

١,٤ The Hypotheses

The present study hypothesized that:

- ١ Death in The Corpse Washer is predominantly conceptualized through systematic structural and ontological metaphors, rather than simple orientational ones.
- ٢ The metaphors of death function as both cognitive mechanisms for processing trauma and ideological tools reflecting the normalization of violence.

٣ The representation of death is systematically linked with institutional and procedural source domains (e.g., employment, mail delivery) to mirror its pervasiveness.

٤ The qualitative metaphorical constructions in the novel reveal a profound tension between sacred religious rituals and the profane realities of mass violence.

١,٥ The Procedures of the Study

In this study, procedures that were followed include:

١.١ Studying related texts to understand Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris Black, 2004).

١.٢ Choosing The Corpse Washer by Sinan Antoon as the main source of qualitative data.

١.٣ Reading the novel, as a whole to explore the portrayal of death and mortality.

١.٤ Selecting representative, prototypical passages with care to highlight the prevailing conceptual connections that can be examined in depth.

١.٥ Classification of the identified metaphors as per the CMT principles, structural types and ontological types.

١.٦ Interpretation of the cognitive, discursive, and ideological functions of these expressions in the socio-political context of the text through Critical Metaphor Analysis.

١.٧ Synthesizing the qualitative results to come to conclusions about literary meaning-making in contexts of war.

١,٦ The Limits of the Study

In this study, a qualitative analysis of metaphorical representations of death was conducted in Sinan Antoon's The Corpse Washer; translated into English by William Maynard Hutchins in 2013. The analysis of the language is only theoretically limited by the theoretical synthesis of CMT and CMA and is restricted to metaphors where "Death" or "Corpse Handling" is the main target domain. Other features of style, syntax, or theme are omitted unless they relate directly to the metaphorical interpretations.

١,٧ The Significance of the Study

This study is a contribution to the fields of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis and Arabic literature in translation. It illustrates the usefulness of using a qualitative approach in integrating cognitive models (CMT) with critical sociolinguistic models (CMA) in studying complicated psychological domains such as trauma and death in literature. Moreover, it builds upon an intercultural empirical foundation that includes the study of an Iraqi author's translation of his cultural and religious experiences of war, washing rituals, and mourning as structured conceptual mappings.

٢ LITERATURE REVIEW

٢,١ Introduction to Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is a multi-disciplinary area that is interested in analysing language beyond the sentence level and how meaning is created in social, cultural, and ideological settings. Explores patterns of language use in spoken and written texts, and how the pattern is linked to understanding of the world. The field has undergone a number of changes since its inception and has embraced many linguistic, sociological, psychological, and anthropological theories, making it highly influential in modern language studies.

CDA is one of its most important methods because of its emphasis on the interplay of discourse, power, and ideology. CDA explores the nature of language's contribution to the creation, preservation, and contestation of social inequalities as well as dominant belief systems. Discourse analysis and CDA are useful tools to explore the social construction of realities and the ideological meanings of texts in literary studies. This is particularly important for the study of metaphors, which serve not just as stylistic tools, but as discursive tools for conceptualizing, evaluating, and/or understanding critical human experiences such as war, death, violence, identity, and power.

٢,٢ Metaphor

Metaphor is one of the most highly investigated concepts in the fields of language, philosophy and cognitive science, and has a long intellectual history, showing how the concept of language and meaning has evolved over time (Kövecses, 2010). The early studies of metaphor were concerned mainly with the rhetorical or linguistic properties of the metaphor, whereas the current research has given a new turn to the metaphor as it is considered as a cognitive phenomenon, and investigated its contribution to the structure of human thought and conceptualization, not only for the purpose of adornment.

Aristotle is the first to present a systematic description of metaphor, which is defined as a semantic transfer process through relations of similarity or analogy, in his Poetics. For Aristotle, metaphor is a process of substitution or transference, whereby a term from one sphere is transferred to another, on the basis of intuition of similarity

between the entities. In addition, he also saw metaphor as a reflection of intellectual creativity; that is, the ability to see similarity in difference.

Major changes in thinking about metaphor were made by Richards (1936), who did not accept the purely linguistic explanations, but stressed the cognitive interaction that gave rise to metaphorical meaning. He developed the idea of tenor and vehicle to explain that metaphor is not the substitution or exchange of one thought domain for another, but rather the "intermingling" of them. From this perspective, meaning does not exist, but is created dynamically as a result of conceptual interaction.

Based on this concept, Black's interaction theory (1954, 1962) extended the notion of metaphor's meaning-making process to include interaction between two conceptual systems. Metaphor is not a literal translation or a simplified translation, but the creation of a structure of associations that the "vehicle" carries to the "tenor," and then a new and emergent meaning which neither the tenor nor the vehicle alone can account for, Black says.

But Beardsley (1962) proposed the metaphor in terms of semantic tension, A metaphor can be understood as an interpretation that is achieved by adjusting one or more literal meanings to make them available in an appropriate way. It is this contrast between the literal and intended meanings that allows for metaphorical interpretation and sets it apart from the use of literal language.

Modern scholarship (Semino, 2008) defines some important characteristics of metaphor as follows: (1) Duality of reference, (2) Semantic tension, (3) Cognitive productivity, (4) Interpretive openness, and (5) Interactive meaning construction. These characteristics point to the fact that metaphor is not a linguistic relation, but a process of constructing meaning.

Theoretical advances in the field of metaphor research also clearly demarcate the difference between classic and cognitive approaches. The traditional rhetorical perspective of metaphor views it as a stylistic deviation and ornament, while the cognitive perspective, based on the work of Richards, Black, and then Lakoff and Johnson (1980), sees metaphor as a vital cognitive tool. Metaphor in this perspective is integral to how people organise their experience, abstract ideas, and make sense of reality.

٢,٣ The Role of Metaphor in Discourse

Metaphor is not just a rhetorical or aesthetic trick of language, but a basic cognitive and reasoning mechanism that influences the way things are understood, reasoned and ideologically interpreted (Charteris-Black, 2004). Metaphors play an important role in constructing the meaning of a discourse, as well as in shaping the reader's interpretation of complex social and experiential realities, especially in literary works.

Semino (2008) claims that there are several discourse functions in the use of metaphors, which are interrelated. They assist in organizing abstract/complex concepts into more familiar conceptual contexts, making abstract/complex concepts more accessible. Metaphors also create certain "ways of seeing" that direct the reader's interpretation, by accentuating some aspects of reality while obscuring others. They also improve the cohesion of text by making explicit the connections between ideas in longer passages in terms of shared metaphoric structures. In addition, metaphors have strong emotional impact as they call upon the connotations of the source domains to involve the readers emotionally. They also help to create the social and political worlds through the formation of common sense about events, identities, and experiences.

Kövecses (2010) also classifies the functions of metaphor according to the following: conceptualization, persuasion, evaluation, identification and concealment. In these functions, metaphors not only represent reality but have an impact on attitudes, beliefs and group identity.

In argumentative and political writing, metaphors can be used as rhetorical strategies to present issues in a particular manner that will bolster a particular perspective. Metaphors can seem natural or inevitable to the audience, evoke emotions, and constrain thinking, as Musolff (2004) describes. The Critical Metaphor Analysis of Charteris-Black (2004) connects metaphor and ideology by revealing how metaphors are used to reflect and reinforce power relations from a critical perspective. Likewise Goatly (2007) argues that metaphor is very much ideological and one concept in metaphor may reoccur repeatedly as a conceptual pattern, e.g. POWER IS HEIGHT or ACTIVITY IS WAR.

Metaphors are not a neutral language choice, however, in literary discourse, particularly in the context of wars. They are actively building out meanings of violence, suffering and identity, as well as readers' emotional and cognitive responses to representations of conflict.

٢,٤ Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

٢,٤,١ Origins and Foundations

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is based on the work of Lakoff and Johnson, specifically their 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By*. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

(CMT) is derived from the work of Lakoff and Johnson, who popularized the theory of "metaphors we live by" (1980). This change is in contrast to the traditional approach which considered metaphor as a rhetoric or decorative device and set up a cognitive approach that has strongly influenced linguistics, cognitive science, philosophy and literary studies.

One of the major tenets of CMT is that the process of thinking metaphorically is conceptual. It is not the language itself that is the focus of a metaphor, but rather, the manner in which one mental domain is conceptualized as another, as Lakoff and Johnson state "the place of metaphor is not in the language itself, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203). Linguistic metaphors are therefore the surface manifestations of conceptual mappings. In addition to this, CMT points out that there is a prevalence of metaphor in everyday life, and that the traditional definition of metaphor as "mainly a poetic or literary device" is incorrect. Furthermore, it suggests that metaphor is an important tool for abstract thinking, and is crucial in how humans think and reason about abstract concepts.

In this context, "conceptual metaphor" is the term used for the systematic cross-domain mappings in the conceptual system (e.g., LOVE IS A JOURNEY), while "metaphorical expressions" are the language realizations (OK LOVE IS A JOURNEY) found in the actual discourse. This difference underscores the fact that there may be several forms of the language used for a single conceptual metaphor. CMT also challenges some commonly held views in traditional linguistics such as the belief that ordinary language is basically literal, that meaning is best understood without metaphor, and that meaning is simply the conditions of truth for literal language.

٢,٤,٢ Core Principles of CMT

Theoretically, conceptual metaphor is a mechanism that structures human thinking, not only a linguistic phenomenon. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define conceptual metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5), meaning that it is involved in conceptualization.

٢,٤,٢,١ Metaphor and Thought

CMT believes that metaphor is integral to human reasoning. Linguistic patterns, inference systems, semantic change, and experimentation are all evidence of conceptual metaphors. One such example is the mapping of relationships in LOVE

IS A JOURNEY, such as lovers as travellers and life goals as destinations. The shared conceptual system allows for understanding such statements as "we're at a crossroads" or "the relationship is going nowhere". Lakoff (1993) also describes the Event Structure Metaphor, which involves abstract experiences as being understood in terms of spatial motion: states are places, change is motion, and purposes are places to go. This illustrates embodied experience as the basis of abstract thinking

٢,٤,٢,٢ Systematicity

Conceptual metaphors are organized (not random), hierarchical (not flat). For instance, LOVE IS A JOURNEY is a part of the A PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY, and the EVENT STRUCTURE METAPHOR. These mappings create metaphorical entailments that shape thinking, e.g., because "we are stuck" is mapped to lack of progress, this is a line of reasoning that is reinforced. The conceptual metaphor can yield multiple linguistic expressions all of which map the same conceptual relationship, such as "off track," "dead-end relationship" and "on the rocks." If two metaphors have similar structures, then they can be both used simultaneously.

٢,٤,٢,٣ Embodiment

CMT is grounded in bodily experience. Metaphors such as MORE IS UP arise from physical experience (e.g., rising levels), leading to expressions like "prices rose." Similarly, KNOWING IS SEEING is based on perception, producing expressions like "I see your point." Johnson (1987) introduces image schemas (e.g., CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE), which are basic patterns derived from bodily interaction with the world. Grady's (1997, 2005) primary metaphors (e.g., HAPPINESS IS UP, AFFECTION IS WARMTH) form the foundation of more complex conceptual metaphors.

٢,٤,٣ Source Domain and Target Domain

٢,٤,٣,١ Conceptual Mapping

A conceptual metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience (the target domain) in terms of a very different domain (the source domain). The mapping is the systematic set of correspondences between source and target domain elements. Source domains are more concrete and physical; whereas target domains are more abstract. For example, in LOVE IS A JOURNEY, the target domain (LOVE) is understood through the more concrete source domain (JOURNEY). Lakoff (1993) formulated the Invariance Principle: "Metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way

consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain" (p. 215). This means that for container schemas, interiors map to interiors, exteriors to exteriors, and boundaries to boundaries; for path schemas, sources map to sources, goals to goals, and trajectories to trajectories. Image-schematic structure is preserved insofar as it is compatible with the inherent structure of the target domain. This constraint, often referred to as the Target Domain Override, explains phenomena such as you can "give someone a kick" without them "having it" afterward (because actions don't persist like objects). The target domain's inherent structure constrains what can be projected from the source.

٢,٤,٣,٢ Cross-Domain Mapping

Mappings comprise ontological correspondences, between entities, as well as epistemic correspondences, between inferential structures in the source and target (mapping knowledge structures). In the stuck vehicle context, knowledge of stuck vehicles is transferred to the context of stalled relationships, and alternative actions (fix it, abandon it, stay and give up) are transferred from the context of travel to the context of love.

One of the basic assumptions behind the idea of unidirectionality: Mappings typically proceed from domains that have more experiential base to domains with less experiential base. We know TIME by SPACE, EMOTIONS by PHYSICAL SENSATIONS and ABSTRACT REASONING by SPATIAL REASONING.

This asymmetry can be based upon embodied cognition: "We have detectors for motion and detectors for objects/locations but no detectors for time" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 244).

٢,٥ Types of Conceptual Metaphors

Conceptual Metaphor Theory classifies metaphors into three main types: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

٢,٥,١ Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors involve understanding one concept in terms of the structure of another. In this type, complex and abstract domains are organized through richer, more clearly delineated source domains. A key example is ARGUMENT IS WAR,

where argument is conceptualized through war-related terms such as attacking, defending, and winning (e.g., "He attacked my argument"). Similarly, LIFE IS A JOURNEY structures life experiences in terms of movement toward goals. Structural metaphors are important because they both highlight and hide aspects of experience.

٢,٥,٢ Orientational Metaphors

Orientational metaphors organize concepts according to spatial relations such as up-down, in-out, and front-back. They are grounded in physical and bodily experience. Examples include HAPPY IS UP / SAD IS DOWN (e.g., "I feel down"), MORE IS UP / LESS IS DOWN, and HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP / SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN. These mappings reflect basic human experiences such as posture, gravity, and perception.

٢,٥,٣ Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors are used to make abstract phenomena appear as real as objects, substances, or containers, enabling people to think of intangible experiences as real objects.

This can be THE MIND IS A MACHINE or STATES ARE CONTAINERS (e.g.,

"He is in trouble"). A special form of personification is the form where abstract things are comprehended as human beings (e.g., Death took him). This kind of metaphor is significant in emotional, ideological and traumatic discourses.

٢,٦ Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA)

Charteris-Black (2004) developed an interdisciplinary model called Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) which investigates the role of metaphor in discourse by using the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), cognitive linguistics and corpus linguistics. It sees metaphor as a way of structuring thinking and a way of creating discursive representations and discursive constructions of meaning.

CMA is based on the CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and the CDA (Fairclough, 1995) that emphasizes the interplay between language, power and ideology. This integration offers a possibility to study metaphor as a social and politically motivated manifestation of languaging as well as a mental process. In terms of methodological aspects, CMA consists of three steps: identification (detection of expressions characterized by semantic tension), interpretation (identification of the conceptual

mappings which underlie the expressions), explanation (uncovering the reasons for the use of metaphors in a given situation, involving ideas and rhetoric.)

٢,٧ War Literature and Metaphorical Discourse

War literature is produced when there is a crisis which forces language to its limits; its writers try to capture the violence and human suffering that occurs at the extremes of conflict (McLoughlin, 2009). Difficulty of

representation is one of the hallmarks of war literature. The devastation, trauma and the omnipresence of death pose a challenge to traditional language. For this reason, narrators of war frequently use indirect means to express their experiences, such as metaphor. Analysing metaphor in war literature can be interpreted as a cognitive and discursive device that constructs complex realities of violence, loss and trauma, thus influencing the reader's emotional and cognitive response to the images of war.

٢,٨ Studies on The Corpse Washer

Mahmoud (2016) discusses the war trauma in 'The Corpse Washer' and how it can be considered a trauma fiction, focusing on whether it can be classified as such. This study aims to examine the role and the significance of the novel as a witness to the trauma experienced at the individual and collective level, with the theory of trauma as the main theory guiding the analysis of the novel, especially the theories of Cathy Caruth. The study adopts the assumption that the novel can be read as a "trauma novel," that is, it uncovers not just the physical force that is applied to the body in public places, but also the emotional and mental force that is applied to the mind, memory and emotions. Theoretically, the study is based on trauma theory model. The events in the narrative that are analyzed are specific instances of street violence, corpse washing and Jawad's internal turmoil – all of which may be viewed as aspects of trauma. The research findings show how Antoon's work redefines the trauma of war, and its effects on the minds of people, especially the importance of literature in preserving the memory in a war-torn country. The analysis of the novel is based on Western trauma theory, however, without considering the relevance of this theory to non-Western societies and the short length of the research (seven pages), the analysis of the novel is limited.

The study by Yebra (2018) focuses on the issue of how "The Corpse Washer" navigates global epistemological paradigms and, further, whether it can be considered an alternative discourse in relation to the Western discourse on the Iraq War. The study is focused on interpreting "The Corpse Washer" in light of Trans-modernity, as proposed by Ziauddin Sardar, while also considering the concepts of "the unthought" by Mohammad Arkoun and "grievability" by Judith Butler, in order to explore the Iraqi subjectivity and cultural production in the context of war and occupation. This study is informed by the hypothesis that the novel reveals the failure of the Transmodern paradigm in the context of contemporary Iraq, in which confrontation and fragmentation are more prevalent than connectivity and dialogue. The study is based on a comparative theoretical approach, informed by transmodern, postcolonial, and ethical philosophy, while close text interpretation is considered the main approach in this context. The data is represented by episodes of narrative in which the ritual of washing corpses, art and death, and Jawad's failed artistic ambitions are represented. The study reveals that the tension between ritual and industrialized mass death, as well as Jawad's failed artistic ambitions, is meant metaphorically, signifying cultural emasculation and the failure of dialogic modernity in Iraq. Nevertheless, despite its theoretical depth, the study is highly influenced by Western epistemological paradigms and fails to explore the self-translation dimension of the novel, as well as the context of Arabic literature.

٣. METHODOLOGY

٣,١ Research Design and Methodology

In this research, the design used is descriptive and analytical design with a qualitative approach in order to analyze the metaphorical discourse in the novel "The Corpse Washer" by Sinan Antoon. Qualitative research in metaphor studies is concerned with the interpretation of meaning, unpacking underlying structures of experience and with understanding how language choices give structure to reality in specific context of socio-politics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach differs from the quantitative and mixed-methods approaches that focus on frequency distributions, as the interpretive depth of this approach focuses on textual, cognitive, and/or ideological nuances of metaphor in literary discourse.

٣,٢ Data Collection and Selection Criteria

The analytical level of the study is the metaphorical expression in clause or sentence level. This study does not seek to determine the statistical mapping, but rather use purposive sampling (Purposive Selection) to get data from the novel that has been translated in English by Hutchins William Maynard (٢٠١٣).

The excerpts were selected using very rigorous criteria: the main target domain of the excerpts had to be Death or Corpse Handling and the amount of cross-domain mapping productivity in the excerpts had to be high. This way, prototypical samples

were chosen for deep critical analysis. The excerpts are analyzed as controlling and central metaphors (Prototypical Metaphors) which constitute the conceptual framework of the whole story and represent comprehensive case studies of the encoding of post-2003 trauma.

٣,٣ Model of Analysis

The methodological model of this study is a synthesis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004). As illustrated in the adopted theoretical framework represented in Figure 3.4 , the analysis is divided into two primary theoretical tracks unified under a Cognitive-Critical Approach:

١ The Cognitive Track (CMT): Decodes the text by identifying the Types of Conceptual Metaphors (Structural, Ontological, and Orientational), identifying the Conceptual Mappings between the concrete source domain and abstract target domain, and tracing the activated Image Schemas.

٢ The Critical Track (CMA): Executes the linguistic processing through three systematic stages:

Identification Stage: Detecting the metaphor based on semantic tension within its textual context.

Interpretation Stage: Mapping the systematic cognitive correspondences between domains.

Explanation Stage: Uncovering the ideological, social, and rhetorical reasons behind the metaphorical choices within post-2003 Iraqi conditions.

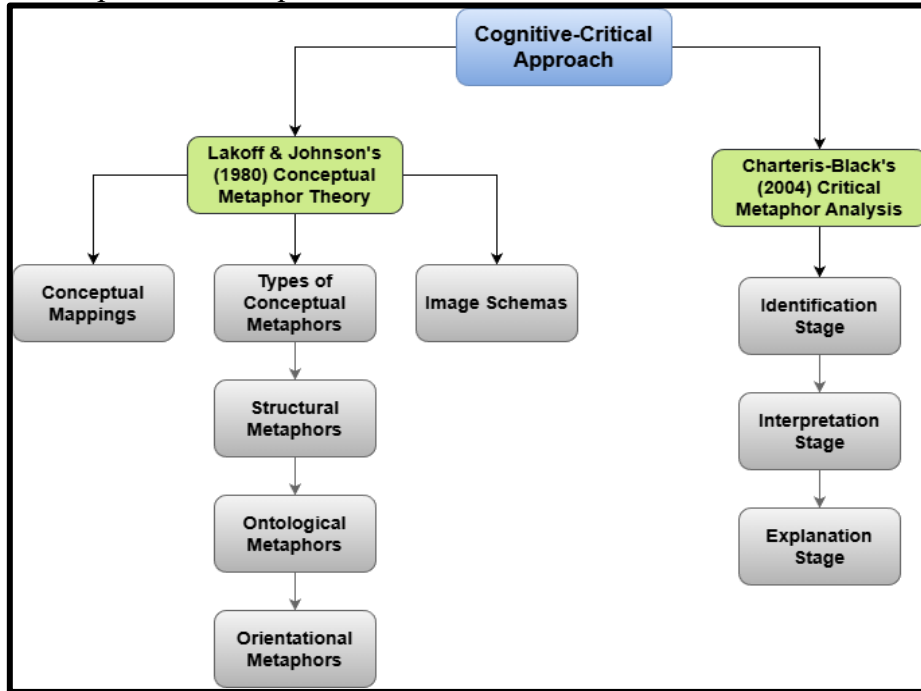


Figure 3.4 The Adopted Theoretical Framework of Data Analysis

١ DATA ANALYSIS

١,١ Introduction

This chapter presents a qualitative cognitive-critical discourse analysis of purposively selected excerpts from Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* (2013). Operating at the intersection of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), the analysis systematically decodes how the abstract experience of death and the cultural practice of corpse handling are structurally and ontologically mapped onto concrete source domains. By following Charteris-Black's (2004) three-stage methodological model (identification, interpretation, and explanation), this section uncovers the micro-linguistic mechanisms through which the narrative conceptualizes trauma, normalizes violence, and preserves collective memory within the socio-political context of post-2003 Iraq.

١,٢ Excerpt 1

"If death is a postman, then I receive his letters every day. I am the one who opens carefully the bloodied and torn envelopes. I am the one who washes them, who removes the stamps of death and dries and perfumes them, mumbling what I don't entirely believe in. Then I wrap them carefully in white so they may reach their final reader, the grave." (Antoon, 2013, p. 3)

١,٢,١ Identification Stage

This stage involves the identification of the metaphorical expressions used in the excerpt. The central metaphor is expressed in the phrase "death is a postman," where death is anthropomorphized by likening it to a postman's concrete social status. The metaphor operates as the controlling metaphor of the whole excerpt. Around it, there is a series of supporting metaphorical expressions like "his letters," "bloodied and torn envelopes," "stamps of death," and "the grave – their final reader."

Such terms clearly point to the idea that 'death' and the 'treatment of the body' are described through the language of mailing services. Indeed, in the present excerpt, the deceased are not viewed literally as corpses but rather as letters sent to others by death. Thus, the entire excerpt is based on a metaphorical description of funerary work using the vocabulary of mailing letters and parcels.

١,٢,٢ CMT Classification, Types, and Image Schemas

In accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the central conceptual metaphor underpinning this passage is DEATH / CORPSE HANDLING IS POSTAL DELIVERY, which is structurally reinforced by the explicit realization DEATH IS A POSTMAN. This macro-metaphor functions primarily as a structural metaphor, where the complex, highly organized domain of a postal delivery system is mapped onto the abstract experiences of mortality and funerary rituals to make them cognitively accessible.

Simultaneously, it contains an ontological aspect through personification, as the abstract process of death is materialized and given agency as a physical entity—a social worker or postman. No clear orientational metaphors (e.g., SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN) are illustrated here.

In terms of cognitive embodiment, the PATH schema is the most prominent and convincing image schema evoked. The deceased body is conceptualized as an object moving along a physical trajectory: originating from the sender (Death), passing through the mediator or processing point (the corpse washer), and reaching its final destination (the grave). While a secondary CONTAINER schema is implicitly activated by treating the body as an "envelope" enclosing a soul, the PATH schema maintains clear dominance due to the narrative's heavy focus on movement, processing, and final delivery.

١,٢,٣ Conceptual Mappings

The systematic cross-domain correspondences project structured knowledge from the concrete source domain (Post and Mailing) onto the abstract target domain (Death and Funerary Rituals) through a chain-like, coherent system:

- The Postman maps onto Death as the sovereign sender of messages.
- The Letters / Parcels map onto The Corpses being systematically delivered.
- The Bloodied and Torn Envelopes map onto The Mutilated or Injured Bodies of the deceased, highlighting the physical brutality inflicted upon the victims.
- The Stamps of Death map onto The Physical Wounds and Trauma left on the body, signifying its violent trajectory and mode of travel.
- Handling, Sorting, and Wrapping Mail map onto The Ritualistic Cleaning and Shrouding performed by the corpse washer.
- The Final Reader / Recipient maps onto The Grave as the ultimate destination of the physical body.

١,٢,٤ Interpretation Stage

At this stage of metaphor interpretation, it becomes essential to analyze the given metaphor within the context of the narrative as well as from the perspective of its textual meaning. Thus, in the metaphorical expression "I receive his letters every day," death is presented as something repetitive and every day in Jawad's life. In this case, death is depicted as a daily event arriving regularly.

Moreover, within this metaphorical structure, Jawad himself stands between the sender and the recipient of those letters. As can be seen, he is neither the sender nor the recipient; instead, he is responsible for receiving, opening, washing, drying, perfuming, and wrapping. In such a way, it is possible to emphasize that the role of this man is not just of a laborer who does some physical work, but the man performs his duties with respect and reverence towards the deceased.

In addition, in "mumbling what I don't entirely believe in," it becomes obvious that, although he keeps performing the ritual of the body washing, he does it under a great psychological burden. Hence, despite the repetition and everydayness of death, Jawad's attitude towards it becomes increasingly skeptical and indifferent.

An important issue that needs to be discussed concerns the partial domestication of the death in the metaphorical context of routine letter opening procedure. Nevertheless, even though this process is performed in an ordinary manner, the phrase "bloodied and torn" emphasizes the fact of violence

١,٢,٥ Explanation Stage

At the level of ideology and culture, the metaphor is linked to wider connotations. DEATH IS A POSTMAN means that death in Iraq after 2003 became part of ordinary life, arriving regularly and systematically, just as postmen send out correspondence on their usual route every day. In this case, the metaphor comments on the post-2003 reality of mass deaths in Iraq.

However, at the same time, dehumanization is avoided – dead bodies are not viewed as mere corpses that mean nothing, but are compared with letters, which means that the dead still preserve their identities, memories, and significance. Furthermore, the phrase "the grave" as the "final reader" refers to the fact that burial is not considered as simple disposal, but is a final stage of reception. This makes the function of Jawad very important from the moral point of view – his actions maintain the dignity of the dead amid violence.

Also, the use of the metaphor discloses the opposition between the two discourse systems. Firstly, corpse washing is related to the discourse of the sacred funeral ceremony. Secondly, the metaphor changes the discourse of corpse washing, placing it in a completely different setting: it is transferred to the administrative discourse of sorting letters and bringing them where they need to be delivered. Consequently, the war turns sacred acts into routine procedures, making the passage ideologically disclose the negative psychological and cultural effects of violence. This extract contains an extended metaphor wherein concepts such as death and corpse cleaning are understood metaphorically using the source domain of letter delivery. This paper has shown that the metaphor being used here is not only structural but has been further reinforced by personification and PATH schema. Additionally, it has been discovered that this metaphor also has greater ideological implications.

١,٣ Excerpt 2

"I got to the mghaysil, the washhouse. The door was ajar. I crossed the walkway and saw the Qur'anic verse 'Every soul shall taste death' in beautiful Diwani script hanging over the door. Death's traces, its scents and memories, were present in every inch of that place. As if death were the real owner and Father merely an employee working for it and not for God, as he liked to think." (Antoon, 2013, p. 11)

١,٣,١ Identification Stage

This stage involves the identification of the metaphorical expressions used in the excerpt. The central metaphors are expressed in the phrases "death's traces, its scents and memories, were present in every inch of that place" and "as if death were the real owner and Father merely an employee working for it." The first grants death the capacity to leave physical traces and to possess scents and memories, all attributes of a living, material presence. The second operates as the controlling metaphor of the whole excerpt, conceptualizing death as the proprietor of a business and the

father as a subordinate worker laboring under death's authority. Around these central metaphors, there is a supporting expression in the Qur'anic verse "Every soul shall taste death" hanging over the door, which functions as a threshold marker reinforcing death's authority over the space, and the phrase "not for God, as he liked to think," which introduces a competing religious framework that the ownership metaphor subverts.

Such terms clearly point to the idea that death and the activity of corpse washing are described through the language of material saturation and commercial ownership. Indeed, in the present excerpt, death is not viewed literally as an abstract phenomenon but rather as an entity that physically inhabits, owns, and governs the washhouse and those who work within it. Thus, the entire excerpt is based on a metaphorical construction of death as a dominant proprietor and of the washhouse as its enterprise.

١,٣,٢ CMT Classification, Types, and Image Schemas

The conceptual metaphors that underpin this passage are, according to CMT, that death is the owner and corpse washing is service to death. The term "death's traces, its scents and memories" serves as an ontological metaphor, as it is a deceptively literal way of describing a concept that is abstract, intangible, and physical.

The main building is a dominant structural metaphor, created as if death were the owner and Father an employee. Here the socio-economic sphere of business, business employment and labor strata is methodically laid over with the metaphysical bond between death and practitioner. The notion of CORPSE WASHING IS SERVICE TO GOD is an oppositional metaphor to another competing theological metaphor, which is also deliberately being subverted: THE PROSPECT OF GOD IS THE PROSPECT OF PROSPERITY.

This conceptualization is related to two other image schemas that are both important: the CONTAINER schema and the FORCE schema. The washhouse is not only built as a box but is also completely filled with death's materiality ("every inch"). At the same time, the FORCE schema determines death is an absolute, an institution which controls and dominates the worker, who is completely at the mercy of its sovereign administrative rule.

١,٣,٣ Conceptual Mappings

The systematic mappings in this excerpt project inferential structures from the source domain of Commercial Ownership and Employment onto the target domain of Death and Spatial Governance:

- The Sovereign Proprietor / Business Owner maps onto Death as the ultimate controller of the environment.
- The Subordinated Employee maps onto The Father (Corpse Washer), who labors under an external authority

- The Business Enterprise / Workplace maps onto The Washhouse (Mghaysil) as an owned commercialized property.
- The Material Traces and Scents map onto The Physical Evidence of Mass Mortality, emphasizing death's total takeover of daily life.
- The Insatiable Demands of a Master map onto The Non-stop Inflow of Casualties produced by sectarian warfare, disrupting the traditional religious framing of the craft

١,٣,٤ Interpretation Stage

At this stage of metaphor interpretation, it becomes essential to analyze the given metaphor within the context of the narrative as well as from the perspective of its textual meaning. Thus, in the metaphorical construction "as if death were the real owner and Father merely an employee working for it," the washhouse is presented not as a sacred space of religious duty but as a commercial enterprise governed predominantly under the authority of death.

Moreover, within this metaphorical structure, the construction of death as the "real owner" functions discursively to undermine the religious framework through which the father understands his vocation, introducing the narrator's sceptical perspective that death, rather than God, is the ultimate authority to whom the corpse washer must answer.

In addition, the Qur'anic verse "Every soul shall taste death" hanging over the door reinforces the washhouse as a threshold space in which sacred and secular understandings of death coexist in uneasy proximity, and where the authority of religious language is quietly but persistently challenged by the materialist logic of the death-as-owner metaphor.

As for the discursive conflict between the sacred dimension of having the body washed for the benefit of God and the materialist dimension inscribed in the metaphor of ownership, this is an important topic that must be addressed. This tension is at the heart of the novel's discussion of faith, doubt, and the significance of ritual amidst the overpowering violence and is a theme that will resonate throughout its unfolding questions of faith and doubt that will grow stronger as Jawad takes over his father's profession more and more.

١,٣,٥ Explanation Stage

The metaphor is connected, at the level of ideology, to wider connotations at the level of culture. The DEATH IS THE OWNER concept argues that in a society in which violence is permanent, the use of death becomes the determining economic and social power, the real boss who has to deal with the products of death; and a power to which the ordinary Iraqis are subject.

At the same time, however, the ideological criticism is not just anti-religious but also calls into question whether the old ways of thinking and belief will satisfy the modern situation of Iraq in terms of its scope and nature of violence. Moreover, death's "traces, scents and memories" ideology permeates the physical space of the lives of Iraqis, making the spaces of everyday life in Iraq permanently "marked by death" rather than just those of war.

Also, metaphor provides a way to make the opposition between the two discourse systems apparent. Firstly, corpse washing is embedded in the context of the sacred funeral rites, which are under religious duty and divinely ordained as supported by the verse at the entrance of the Qur'an. Secondly, the ownership metaphor moves the function of washing the corpse out into the employment and business ownership discourse, where the worker works for a master who never stops asking for more. The war has thus made religious activities commonplace business transactions and made the journey ideologically revealing of the destructive cultural and spiritual impact of mass violence on the most sacred and meaningful rituals of human life.

This extract contains an extended structural and ontological metaphor wherein death is understood as the real owner of the washhouse and corpse washing as labour performed in its service. This analysis has shown that the metaphor is not only structural but is further reinforced by ontological saturation and by CONTAINER and FORCE image schemas that construct the washhouse as a space of total dominion. Additionally, it has been discovered that this metaphor also has greater ideological implications concerning the displacement of divine authority by the sovereign force of death and the transformation of sacred ritual into administrative routine in post-2003 Iraqi society.

٢.٢ DISCUSSION

The qualitative integration of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) reveals that the conceptualization of death in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* undergoes a radical shift compared to classical or traditional literary treatments. Rather than relying on standard orientational

metaphors—such as LIFE IS UP / DEATH IS DOWN—which frame mortality as a passive, natural descent, the narrative relies heavily on complex structural and ontological mappings.

According to the theoretical framework presented in figure 3.4, the analysis of these controlling metaphors is qualitative, in which one can see the way in which the human mind organizes complex and intolerant experiences. The human mind has a difficult time imagining death as a biological process when there is extreme socio-political trauma and mass violence taking place. Rather, the discourse will be adapted by importing death into highly organized and mundane and institutional source domains like Postal Delivery and Socio-Economic Employment. From a critical point of view, these mappings do a double duty in the text, since they serve both as a sort of ideological consideration and as an indication of the ideological position of the author.

١. The Normalization of Trauma: They indicate how the geopolitical dynamics of war transform mass death into a “business as usual” aspect of administration and remove its shock value.

٢. The text is a qualitative defense against war's erasing power of individual humanity and reappropriation of human dignity by mapping corpses on “letters” that carry names, messages and identities.

Also there is a great conceptual conflict between the Sacred/Religious Discourse and the Profane/War Discourse. In the old Islamic belief system, washing the dead body is an act of devotion towards God. With the metaphorical mappings, however, death becomes its own “owner” and the ritual washer its “employee” for the benefit of the other, because of the sectarian warfare that took place after 2003. This cognitive tension illustrates the way in which the systems of culture can be disrupted by systemic violence, creating a need for language to develop other systems of thought to make sense of collective grief and historical trauma.

٣. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to conduct a qualitative Cognitive-Critical Discourse Analysis of death metaphors in Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer*, which aims to examine the construction and progressive ideologies of death in the text in terms of the use of death metaphors. Taking up the point of view of the integrated framework of CMT and CMA as presented in Figure 3.4, the analysis revealed that death in the novel is not considered an abstract biological matter but is a systematic, active institutional process with highly complicated structural and ontological metaphors.

This representation of death in the real world renders the story of violence as a concrete reality, as a part of the everyday life of post-2003 Baghdad through the mapping of death to the postal domain and commercial work. These metaphors also work to maintain the identity and dignity of the victims by using bodies as texts (letters) instead of numbers.

Finally, this study demonstrates that metaphor in war literature is more than a rhetorical flourish; it is an indispensable rhetorical and cognitive strategy for organizing trauma, for managing cultural memory, and for dealing with a collapse of social order. The findings of this study suggest that for further studies, A qualitative Cognitive-Critical approach could be extended to comparative studies of other novels translated from Iraq to other languages or cultures in order to enhance the understanding of the process of language in the trauma of war in different cultures and languages.

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