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Interaction of Qur'anic Metaphors and Modern Cognition: A Conceptual Metaphor Theory Approach

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Abstract
This article aims to analyze the interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and modern cognition through the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) approach. The study is based on the assumption that metaphors in the Qur'an function not merely as rhetorical devices, but also reflect underlying cognitive structures that shape human understanding of abstract reality. The research employs a qualitative-descriptive method with a conceptual analysis approach, involving the identification, classification, and mapping of conceptual metaphors in Qur'anic verses into source domains and target domains as formulated in CMT. The discussion focuses on how Qur'anic metaphors—such as light, path, heart, and scale—resonate with universal cognitive mechanisms that are also recognized in contemporary cognitive linguistic studies. The findings indicate that Qur'anic metaphors exhibit strong conceptual correspondence with human cognitive patterns, while simultaneously enriching and extending modern conceptual metaphor frameworks through transcendental and ethical dimensions. In conclusion, the CMT approach enables a deeper understanding of Qur'anic metaphors as cognitive-religious constructs that remain relevant across time, and it opens an epistemological dialogue between Qur'anic studies and contemporary cognitive linguistics.

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INTRODUCTION

The understanding of metaphors in the Qur'an is ideally expected not to be confined merely to stylistic and rhetorical aspects, but rather to be capable of revealing the cognitive dimensions underlying how human beings comprehend abstract concepts such as faith, guidance, truth, and misguidance. In this context, Qur'anic metaphors have the potential to function as an epistemological bridge between divine revelation and the universal structure of human cognition.[1] This expectation aligns with the development of modern cognitive linguistics, which regards metaphor as a fundamental mechanism in thought processes rather than merely a linguistic ornament. However, in reality, studies of Qur'anic metaphors are still predominantly dominated

[1] Massimo Campanini, "Qur'an and Science: A Hermeneutical Approach," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 48–63, https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2005.7.1.48.

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by classical exegetical approaches and Arabic literary studies that emphasize aspects of *balāghah* (rhetoric), linguistic beauty, and lexical meaning.[2] Although this approach is important, it often does not fully explore how these metaphors operate within the human cognitive framework and their relevance to contemporary linguistic theory.[3] As a result, the dialogue between Qur'anic studies and modern cognitive science remains limited and fragmented.

A number of previous studies have examined metaphors in the Qur'an from various perspectives. Studies in Qur'anic rhetoric (*balāghah*) have highlighted the use of metaphors as a means of reinforcing meaning and strengthening moral messages. Meanwhile, research within the field of cognitive linguistics has begun to apply Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to the analysis of religious texts, including sacred scriptures,[4] by emphasizing the mapping between source domains and target domains in conceptual metaphors. These studies indicate that religious language corresponds to universal patterns of conceptual metaphor.

Nevertheless, most CMT-based studies on Qur'anic metaphors remain partial and are limited to specific examples without a comprehensive conceptual framework.[5] Some studies have primarily focused on demonstrating the existence of universal conceptual metaphors; however, they have not yet thoroughly examined the interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and the transcendental dimension that distinguishes them from metaphors in secular discourse.[6] In addition, relatively few studies have systematically examined how Qur'anic metaphors not only reflect but also shape human religious cognition.

The research gap lies in the absence of a fully integrated application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the study of Qur'anic metaphors that simultaneously accounts for cognitive, theological, and ethical dimensions.[7] Existing studies tend to separate linguistic analysis from the contexts of faith and revelation, thereby preventing the potential of Qur'anic metaphors as cognitive-religious constructions from being fully explored. This situation indicates the need for an interdisciplinary approach capable of bridging Qur'anic studies and modern cognitive linguistics.

As a response to this gap, the present study proposes the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory as the primary analytical framework for examining Qur'anic metaphors from both conceptual and cognitive perspectives. This approach enables the mapping of Qur'anic metaphors onto human cognitive structures while simultaneously preserving the transcendental and

[2] Iman El-Zeiny, "Criteria for the Translation and Assessment of Qur'anic Metaphor: A Contrastive Analytic Approach," *Babel* 57, no. 3 (2011): 247–68, https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.57.3.01zei.
[3] Jun Zou et al., "The Interplay between Cultural Models and Metaphor Understanding: A Cross-Cultural Cognitive Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (June 2025), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1539784.
[4] Erin Prophet, "From Salvation to Evolution to Therapy: Metaphors, Conceptual Blending and New Theologies," *Religions* 16, no. 8 (2025): 1001, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16081001.
[5] Ali Beikian and Hajar Ghaffari, "Ideological and Cognitive Negotiation of Metonymy in Three English Qur'an Translations," *Translation and Interpreting Research* 2, no. 6 (2025): 55–70.
[6] Adil Guler, "Light, Ontology, and Analogy: A Non-Concordist Reading of Qur'an 24:35 in Dialogue with Philosophy and Physics," *Philosophies* 11, no. 1 (2026): 15, https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies11010015.
[7] Hamada S. A. Hassanein, "'Argument as War': A Synergy of Metadiscourse and Pragma-Dialectics in Exploring Qur'anic Argumentation," *Argumentation*, ahead of print, February 3, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-025-09685-w.

normative characteristics of the sacred text. Accordingly, Qur'anic metaphors can be understood not merely as linguistic phenomena, but also as instruments for the construction of meaning and religious consciousness.[8]

Based on this background, the aim of this study is to analyze the interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and modern cognition through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as well as to identify how these metaphors reflect and shape human cognitive structures. This research is expected to enrich the field of Qur'anic studies while also contributing theoretically to the development of cognitive linguistics within the context of religious discourse.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to examine Qur'anic metaphors within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The qualitative approach is selected because this research focuses on meaning-making processes, conceptual structures, and cognitive relations that cannot be quantified, but rather are understood through interpretative analysis of the Qur'anic text as a form of religious discourse.[9]

The primary data source of this study is the Qur'anic text in Arabic, with a focus on verses containing metaphorical expressions. To support the accuracy of the analysis, authoritative translations of the Qur'an and both classical and contemporary exegetical literature are also employed as secondary data sources. In addition, key works in cognitive linguistics—particularly those related to Conceptual Metaphor Theory—are utilized as the theoretical foundation for the analytical process.

Data collection was conducted using a documentation method, involving the stages of identification, selection, and classification of Qur'anic verses containing conceptual metaphors. Metaphor identification was carried out based on linguistic and semantic indicators, such as the use of concrete terms to represent abstract concepts. The identified verses were subsequently classified into categories of conceptual metaphors according to the correspondence between source domains and to get domains.[10]

Data analysis was conducted by applying the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, particularly the model of conceptual mapping between source domains and target domains as formulated by Lakoff and Johnson. Each Qur'anic metaphor was analyzed in order to uncover its underlying conceptual structure, as well as to examine how these metaphors represent human cognitive processes in understanding religious concepts. This analysis also took into account the

[8] Sultan Samah A. Almjlad, "Semantic Untranslatability in Quranic Discourse: Challenges and Contextual Remedies in English Translation," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2025): 2542336, https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2542336.

[9] Maryam Imani et al., "Investigating the Relationship between Attitudes towards Suicidal Patients and the Caring Behavior of Emergency and Intensive Care Nurses: A Descriptive-Analytical Study," *BMC Nursing* 24, no. 1 (2025): 1408, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-025-04032-6.

[10] Abhijnan Maji and Indrajit Ghosh, "A Systematic Review on Roundabout Safety Incorporating the Safety Assessment Methodologies, Data Collection Techniques, and Driver Behavior," *Safety Science* 181 (January 2025): 106661, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2024.106661.

contextual setting of the verses and their theological meanings to avoid reducing metaphors to a purely linguistic framework.

To ensure data validity and reliability, this study employed source and theory triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of metaphor analysis with interpretations derived from various authoritative exegetical (tafsir) works, while theoretical triangulation was conducted by relating the research findings to key concepts in cognitive linguistics and religious studies. These steps aim to ensure that the interpretation of Qur'anic metaphors remains within a defensible academic and theological framework.[11]

The results of the analysis were then presented using a descriptive-analytical approach, emphasizing the dominant patterns of conceptual metaphors as well as their implications for understanding religious cognition. Through this method, the study is expected to systematically explain the interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and modern cognition, while also providing a methodological contribution to the development of interdisciplinary studies between Qur'anic studies and cognitive linguistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Patterns of Conceptual Metaphors in the Qur'an

The results of the analysis indicate that Qur'anic metaphors consistently construct abstract concepts through concrete experiences that are closely aligned with human cognition. These metaphors do not appear randomly; rather, they form systematic conceptual patterns. This finding reinforces the central claim of Conceptual Metaphor Theory that metaphor constitutes a fundamental cognitive mechanism for understanding abstract reality, as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson.

In the context of the Qur'an, metaphors function not merely as linguistic devices but also as epistemological instruments that frame how humans comprehend faith, truth, misguidance, guidance, and moral responsibility. These metaphors demonstrate strong correspondences with structures of human experience, such as spatial orientation, perception of light, physical journeying, and balance.

This finding is consistent with previous studies in cognitive linguistics, which emphasize that religious language is not separate from general human cognitive mechanisms. However, unlike secular texts, Qur'anic metaphors possess a normative and transcendental dimension that provides moral and existential direction to these cognitive structures.[12]

Light and Darkness Metaphors as Epistemic Cognitive Structures

One of the main findings of this study is the dominance of the light (nūr) and darkness (ẓulumāt) metaphors in framing the concepts of knowledge, faith, and truth. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), these metaphors can be mapped as knowledge/faith is light and error/misguidance is darkness. The analysis shows that the light metaphor does not merely

[11] Emmanouil F. Papavasileiou and Irini Dimou, "Evidence of Construct Validity for Work Values Using Triangulation Analysis," *EuroMed Journal of Business* 20, no. 5 (2024): 98–115, https://doi.org/10.1108/EMJB-10-2023-0287.
[12] Jing Zhang et al., "Cognitive Bias in Generative AI Influences Religious Education," *Scientific Reports* 15, no. 1 (2025): 15720, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-99121-6.

represent knowledge in a general sense, but also signifies divine presence as a source of cognitive and spiritual illumination. This extends the understanding of epistemic metaphors in cognitive linguistics, which typically conceptualizes light as the ability to see or understand in a rational sense.[13] In contrast to previous studies that have positioned the light metaphor in the Qur'an merely as an aesthetic or theological symbol,[14] this study demonstrates that the metaphor functions as a cognitive structure that guides human thought processes toward normative truth. Accordingly, Qur'anic metaphors do not merely reflect human cognition but also actively shape it in an ethical manner.

Path and Orientation Metaphors as Representations of Life Dynamics

The subsequent finding indicates that the path metaphors (ṣirāṭ, sabīl) constitute one of the most central conceptual metaphors in the Qur'an. Within the CMT framework, these metaphors can be formulated as life is a journey and guidance is the straight path. The analysis shows that path metaphors do not merely depict the dynamic process of life, but also carry a strong evaluative dimension. The straight path is associated with salvation and moral order, whereas deviating paths represent cognitive and ethical failure. Previous studies in cognitive linguistics have widely discussed journey metaphors as universal metaphors. However, this study demonstrates that the Qur'an integrates these metaphors with a dimension of transcendental accountability, such that the journey of life is not neutral, but is always oriented toward an ultimate, eschatological end.

Heart Metaphors as the Center of Cognition and Morality

One significant finding that enriches the discourse of cognitive linguistics is the use of the heart (qalb) metaphor in the Qur'an as a center of cognition, perception, and moral evaluation. This metaphor can be mapped as thinking is an activity of the heart, which differs from the modern cognitive paradigm that locates thinking in the brain.

The analysis indicates that the heart metaphor reflects an integration of cognitive and affective dimensions in understanding reality. This challenges the reason–emotion dichotomy often found in modern epistemology. The finding aligns with several interdisciplinary studies that increasingly recognize the role of emotion and values in human cognitive processes.[15]

In contrast to classical exegetical studies that interpret the heart primarily in spiritual terms, this study demonstrates that the heart metaphor in the Qur'an also exhibits a consistent and systematic cognitive structure. Accordingly, Qur'anic metaphors offer an alternative model of cognition that is holistic in nature.

The Scale (*Mīzān*) as an Evaluative Framework: Beyond Eschatological Symbolism

[13] Valentina Cuccio, "Abduction and Analogical Reasoning in Human Cognition and Metaphorical Thought," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, ahead of print, March 10, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-026-00817-z.

[14] Habib Habib and Moh Habib, "Semiotic-Sufistic Interpretation of Imam Al-Ghazali: Case Study of 'Verses of Light' in the Holy Qur'an," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 7, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v7i2.7529; Hasanuddin Chaer et al., "Metaphorical Symbols in Qur'anic Discourse: A Cognitive-Linguistic Analysis," *Suhuf: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2025): 241–53, https://doi.org/10.23917/suhuf.v37i2.12081; Sardaraz Khan and Roslan Ali, "Dichotomy of Language & Thought in the Interpretation of Metaphor in the Quran," *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)* 6, no. 1 (2021): 95–117, https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol6iss1pp95-117.

[15] Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, "Artificial Intelligence and the Islamic Theology of Technology: From 'Means' to 'Meanings' and from 'Minds' to 'Hearts,'" *Religions* 16, no. 6 (2025): 796, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060796.

The metaphor of the scale (*mīzān*) emerges as a pivotal cognitive construct in the Qur'an, serving as the primary vehicle for conceptualizing justice and accountability. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), this phenomenon is identified through the mapping of JUSTICE IS BALANCE. However, the findings of this study suggest that this mapping operates far more complexly than a simple one-to-one symbolic representation. The *mīzān* is not merely a static object of the afterlife; it is a dynamic evaluative structure that governs the cognitive processing of morality in both social and spiritual dimensions.

In the Qur'anic corpus, the scale metaphor functions as a bridge between the physical domain (weight, equilibrium, and physical stability) and the abstract domain (social equity, legal justice, and moral rectitude). By utilizing the image-schema of BALANCE, the Qur'an enables human cognition to "measure" the weight of intangible actions. Unlike previous literature that frequently relegated the *mīzān* to a purely eschatological symbol—a tool used only at the end of time—this research demonstrates its role as a "living" cognitive framework. It guides moral judgment in daily life, compelling individuals to maintain equilibrium in trade, speech, and interpersonal relations.[16] This evaluative structure creates a sense of "moral gravity," where every action is perceived as having a weight that either preserves or disrupts the cosmic and social order. Thus, justice is not understood as a mere legalistic definition, but as a felt experience of stability and proportion rooted in the cognitive architecture of the human mind.

The Dialectical Interaction: Transforming Human Cognition through Revelation

The interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and modern cognition, as analyzed through CMT, reveals a convergence that is dialectical rather than identical. While the Qur'an employs universal conceptual metaphors—leveraging the innate cognitive structures shared by all humans—it does not merely replicate them. Instead, it engages in a "reconstructive" process, where secular or universal metaphors are repurposed and elevated within a framework of divine ethics. This study finds that the Qur'an often "borrows" a human cognitive path only to direct it toward a transcendent destination, thereby transforming the very way humans perceive reality.[17]

This finding significantly extends the scope of CMT. Traditionally, CMT has been applied to analyze how humans use the mundane to understand the abstract in secular discourse.[18] However, in the context of sacred text, the direction of influence is bi-directional. The Qur'an utilizes existing human image-schemas (such as PATH, LIGHT, or BALANCE) but imposes a

[16] Boxin Shang and Zhong He, "Al-Assisted Symbolic Healing for Digital Natives: A Jungian Perspective Based on the S-O-R and Fogg Behavior Models," *Acta Psychologica* 260 (October 2025): 105472, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105472.

[17] Manuel Moser, "A Triangle of Mary: Relating Religious Artefacts to Non-Religious Lorry Drivers," in *Magnification and Miniaturization in Religious Communication in Antiquity and Modernity* (Brepols Online, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1484/M.CS-EB.5.132976; Boumediene Hamzi, "Redefining Reality: An Islamic Metaphysical Critique of AI's Data-Centric Worldview," *Philosophies* 11, no. 1 (2026), https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies11010018.

[18] Mohammed Essa Alwan, "A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Conceptual Metaphors in the Farewell Sermon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)," *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 8, no. 3 (2025): 818–25, https://doi.org/10.34050/els-jish.v8i3.45555; Justin J. Bartlett and Sugunya Ruangjaroon, "A War of Words: Dissecting the Foundational Claims of CMT," *Axiomathes* 32, no. 2 (2022): 435–51, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-021-09612-0.

theological "constraint" that prevents these metaphors from being interpreted in a purely material or temporary sense. For instance, while the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor is universal, the Qur'an reconstructs it into LIFE IS A RETURN TO THE CREATOR, adding a layer of teleological accountability that is absent in secular versions.

This research, therefore, offers a more holistic integration of linguistic analysis with theological-ethical dimensions. By positioning Qur'anic metaphors as cognitive-religious constructs, this study opens an interdisciplinary dialogue between cognitive science, philosophy of religion, and cognitive linguistics. It asserts that revelation does not bypass human cognition; rather, it speaks *through* it, refining and recalibrating human mental models to align with a higher moral order. The academic implication is clear: Qur'anic studies can productively adopt cognitive linguistics to uncover how the text shapes the "mental landscape" of its believers, ensuring that sacred meanings remain resonant across different eras of human cognition, and providing a significant contribution to the broader understanding of how humans construct meaning.[19]

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and modern cognition through the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The findings indicate that Qur'anic metaphors function not merely as rhetorical devices, but as systematic conceptual constructions that frame human understanding of religious concepts such as faith, knowledge, morality, and justice. Metaphors of light and darkness, path, heart, and scale demonstrate strong correspondences with universal cognitive mechanisms, showing that the Qur'an draws upon concrete human experience as a basis for constructing abstract meaning.

Furthermore, the study reveals that Qur'anic metaphors do not simply reflect human cognition but also transform it through a distinctive transcendental and normative dimension. The interaction between Qur'anic metaphors and modern cognition is dialectical, in which universal conceptual metaphor structures are directed toward shaping ethical orientation and eschatological purpose. Theoretically, these findings confirm the relevance of CMT in Qur'anic studies while expanding the scope of cognitive linguistics into religious discourse, and they open further opportunities for interdisciplinary research between linguistics, cognition, and Qur'anic studies.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) utilized Gemini to assist with language editing, grammar correction, and improving readability. All outputs were subsequently reviewed and revised by the author(s), who assume full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

[19] Hamada S. A. Hassanein, "'Argument as War': A Synergy of Metadiscourse and Pragma-Dialectics in Exploring Qur'anic Argumentation," *Argumentation*, ahead of print, February 3, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-025-09685-w.

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