

A study of conceptual schemas of Quranic proverbs centered on "death" and "decay" based on Johnson's model.

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Introduction

Cognitive linguistics is a branch of linguistics that gained prominence in the 1970s and has since evolved into a distinct school of thought and a well-established field of inquiry. This theoretical framework posits that the understanding and expression of abstract concepts through more tangible, embodied experiences is fundamentally metaphorical. The rationale lies in the fact that human cognition is significantly shaped by the body's physical interactions with its environment, a process which in turn influences how abstract and mental concepts are communicated. Within this embodied approach to meaning, image schemas are of central importance. These are recurring, dynamic patterns derived from sensorimotor experience that structure conceptual understanding. As proposed by Johnson, image schemas emerge from perceptual interactions and bodily movements, providing coherence and structure to human experience. They possess inherent meaning grounded in experience and are pre-conceptual in nature—entering the mind through repeated physical motions, sensory interactions, and object manipulation. This cognitive framework can be traced across a wide range of texts, including the Qur'an. The Qur'an presents diverse examples of abstract moral and religious concepts, with one of its most stylistically powerful features being its use of parable-like expressions (*amthāl*). These metaphorical and didactic constructions are inherently based on conceptualization mechanisms. Since antiquity, proverbs have functioned as concise and effective vehicles of communication. Accordingly, Qur'anic parables lend themselves well to analysis through a cognitive-linguistic lens, particularly through the framework of image schemas. The present study focuses on Qur'anic parables involving the concepts of death and decay, examining them from a cognitive-semantic perspective.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the image schemas underlying Qur'anic parables centering on the notions of "death" and "decay," based on Johnson's cognitive model. Selected verses from the Qur'an were analyzed comparatively, first through brief exegetical commentary, followed by a cognitive interpretation grounded in image schema theory.

Discussion and Results

The research identified three principal image schemas—force, containment, and motion—in the examined verses. The following key insights emerged:

Image schemas play a fundamental and irrefutable role in embodied understanding of abstract phenomena. Analyzing Qur'anic parables through this lens deepens our grasp of how abstract concepts are concretized, ultimately enriching our cognitive appreciation of divine discourse. The diversity and range of image schemas in the Qur'an is significant. Rather than being limited to a single mode of conceptualization, the verses exhibit multiple overlapping schemas, facilitating more accessible and rapid understanding of abstract content by readers.

The construction of these metaphorical mappings is rooted in conceptual metaphor theory, whereby structures from the source domain (concrete and experiential) are projected onto the target domain (abstract and spiritual). The Qur'anic discourse treats its verses as conceptual containers or forceful movements, whereby meaning is encapsulated within linguistic forms, allowing for more effective reception by the audience. In some verses, such as Surah al-Nisa (4:78), all three image schemas—motion, containment, and force—coexist. This triadic schema structure offers multiple interpretive pathways, thereby enhancing comprehension. Such multilayered conceptual mapping is a hallmark of cognitive metaphor theory and serves to make abstract Qur'anic meanings more vivid and accessible.

Conclusion

Given the central role of image schemas in cognitive linguistics—and their foundation in embodied human experience—this study reveals the following key conclusions regarding Qur'anic parables focusing on death and decay:

The analysis identified image schemas within three main domains: containment, motion, and force. Among these, containment schemas appeared most frequently, while force schemas were the least common. This frequency distribution sheds light on divine communicative strategies and encourages deeper engagement with the Qur'anic text. Contemporary authors and rhetoricians draw on material metaphors in everyday language to convey broader dimensions of reality. For instance, containment schemas are used to depict emotions (normally abstract) via spatial and physical structures; force schemas reflect human interactions with resistance or obstacles; and motion schemas encapsulate everyday experiences of physical movement, thereby grounding abstract meaning in familiar patterns. This schema-based mapping enables the Qur'an to convey profound, non-empirical concepts in a cognitively embodied and semantically accessible way, reaffirming its rhetorical depth and conceptual sophistication.

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