



## Facing Finality: Cognitive and Cultural Studies on Death and Dying “Arabic Culture”

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### Abstract

Semantics is a study of human beings cultural background, has from its beginning as a field of study been concerned with the study of humans understanding of culture. Understanding the meaning of *death* has been of great importance to many of the central theoretical developments in this field, especially as it imposes on studies of social life. However, each society characterizes and consequently treats death and dying in its own individual way that differ obviously. In other words, human question about death is a universal thing, but the answer to that question differs among cultures.

This paper focuses on death understanding in the Arabic culture and how Arabic thinking terms are shaped by cognitive metaphors and their subsequent discourses in death and dying, especially from religious and cultural perspectives.

**Keywords:** Semantics, Arabic culture, Cognitive metaphor, Religious and human life understanding of death

### 1. Introduction:

#### 1.1 *Understanding the Meaning of Death in the Arabic Culture*

Despite the fact that Islam is not the only religion practiced in Arabic countries, it is indisputably the most dominant and its belief and practices affect the other religions that are touched by it. Because Islam Arab deals very faithfully with the final fate of man. Life, death and dying instructions were set down in the Qur'an, in addition to a religious work like, the "Book of the Soul" written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the Hanbali theologian Muhammad in Abi-Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah. According to the Qur'an, and other explanations about life and death, Allah creates human beings, determines their life span and causes them to die. It is written the concept of fate is fundamental. The term Islam itself, meaning "surrender," implies an absolute submission to the will of God. (Shokr 2006).

As Muslim belief, when a person dies the Angel of Death (malak al-maut) arrives, sits at the head of the dead person and deal with each soul according to its known works. Evil souls are instructed "to go to the wrath of God," and good souls are instructed "to go to the mercy of God." Both souls are finally returned to their bodies and experience eternal salvation, whichever is applicable.

Another explanation is that death in Islam as an obligatory transitional event in between the 'life before death' and 'life after death'. So the definition of death for a Muslim would be the absolute disappearance of the functions for the time period in between the two lives – one before death and another after death. As a result it ends the eternal and permanent concept or belief of life to the concept of death with the help of the concept of the life after death (Samir 2008).

In our daily life death is related with the biggest stresses due to the knowledge – death ends. But when the question of religion comes, specifically Islam, this knowledge changes for a religious person. So it can be easily assumed that death becomes a less stressful event for a Muslim, (Time has come) when he truly believes in Islam.

In the Arabic culture, one finds much more diversity in thinking of death. Death in the Arabic culture has many meanings. It may mean that one is to stay in heaven or hell. To some, death is a transitory state until the day of al-hesaab, (the day human meet Allah). To others, death is a sleep or rest of life. To the above mentioned explanations, the concentration of this work will be largely on the search for a cognitive metaphorical understanding of death in the

Arabic culture based on the Arabic religion influence. Like other words, how Arabic thinking terms are shaped by cognitive metaphors and their belief in death and dying, especially from cognitive religious perspectives.

### 1.2 The Metaphorical Concept of Death

The theoretical assumptions on which the present work is based are derived from the cognitive model of the conceptual metaphor theory. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), cognitive hypothesis which indicate the existence of a set of metaphorical concepts around which we can conceptualize the world or our worldviews. They emphasized that metaphor is rather a matter of experience or everyday life than merely a matter of language: "Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically... it is irreplaceable: metaphor allows us to understand our selves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can."

Shokr (2006), Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 6), state that part of "the human conceptual model is metaphorically structured and defined." Therefore, certain parts of our life are conceptualized metaphorically in a systematic way. In the meantime, Lakoff and Johnson offer a wide range of metaphors covering basic aspects of life and death by structuring metaphorically one aspect in terms of another. In addition, the concept of the religious should be largely dependent on metaphorical conceptualization. This realization is due to the fact that it is not only a highly abstract domain quite removed from physical experience, but also its central issues of (God, the soul, the life after, and the freedom of moral choice) have traditionally been regarded as the metaphysical ideas or concepts. The conceptualization of metaphysical ideas through metaphor has been observed by Bible commentators such as Platzner (1996) who asserts that "even the most intricate of metaphoric constructions cannot bridge the cognitive distance between language and divine reality." Thus, religious discourse should abound with metaphorical expressions.

The current work used the concept of cognitive religious metaphor rather than imaginative metaphor or any type of metaphor. The former metaphor is closely related to life and death while the second is divided into life and novel. The Arab death and dying concept is one of the parts commonly used of the metaphorical concept, for instance "the life after" and therefore it is an example of death conventional metaphor. Dead metaphors are concepts which became common meanings such as (time flies). According to (Kövecses 2002), dead metaphors that may have been alive and dynamic at some point out have become so typical and usual with constant use that by now they have lost their dynamism.

## 2. Death and Dying Conceptual Terms

### 2.1 The Term Life after Death (A Journey to Heaven or Hell)

The concept of life after death in Arabic culture tells us that a human being not only has a body, but also has a 'spirit' given to him or her by God. The spirit is the seed from which a higher form of life grows within man, higher than physical life, just as the body has developed from a small 'seed'. Just as in the world around us higher forms of life evolve from lower ones, similarly from the life of the individual in this world is evolved his higher 'spiritual' life. During life, man's work shapes his spirit, for better or worse, according to his work. When a person dies, the physical body is finished, but the spirit remains, as he or she had molded it by their work when alive. That is the life after death (Mirza 1996).

"We have ordained death among you, and we are not to be overcome, so that we may change your state and make you grow into what you know not." (The Holy Quran 56:60-61).

In the metaphor which responds to this conceptual meaning, the act of dying corresponds to the act of leaving and, consequently, the dead is obviously the person who goes into life after death which is known as a journey to either heaven or to hell.

"And thus have We, by Our Command, sent inspiration to thee: thou knewest not (before) what was Revelation, and what was Faith; but We have made the (Qur'an) a Light, wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will; and verily thou dost guide (men) to the Straight Way, The Way of Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the Heavens and whatever is on earth. Behold (how) all affairs tend towards Allah! (surah 42: verses 52-53) .

"It (hell) is the fire kindled by Allah which rises over the hearts." (104:5-6).

Therefore, metaphorically, the term journey is seen as a result of man's life action, the two cases mentioned in the examples above can be said to convoy good work benefit the spirit and evil work harm it. This effect upon the spirit is what constitutes the journey of reward or punishment for one's work. In the metaphor, heaven and hell are not actual places somewhere in the universe, but really our conceptual correspondence of the condition of the spirit journey resulting from our works. Heaven and hell begin in this life within a person's cognition. Both, feelings of bliss and contentment at doing good, and the guilt, shame and greed are felt by the heaven and the hell in one's metaphorical concept. After death, the heaven or hell that developed in the mind and heart is unfolded before us and becomes the world in which we live, and we live in it not with the physical body of this life but the 'spiritual' body made from our acts.

## 2.2 The Term Death is The End

The concept of the end in the Arabic culture is accepted and understood. It is part of Arab faith in God. When reading the Quran, understanding the end is definitely obvious by the Muslim. Death is not conceptualized as the final stage of our life time but also as the start of the next life. The role of the current life is to determine the next life (Mirza 1996).

The metaphor of the end is conceptually known as what happens after death and the events at the end of time. In the example that follows, death is viewed as the end of the process of human life and the beginning of the next life but we have no knowledge about it.

"We will raise you into a form of which you have not the slightest knowledge". Surah Al-Waqiah (Ch. 56: V.62).

"Your first creation and your second creation will be identical". Surah Luqman (Ch. 31: V.29).

The death is the end metaphor has the cognitive implication that death is seen as the final of our existence in our earthly life; From time to time we can feel this effect, but only very faintly and vaguely. After death, when only the spirit is left, and rebirth bearing all the impressions of actions done throughout life, the effects of those actions will be felt clearly and vividly. It is this which is the reward for good work and suffering for evil works at the end.

## 2.3 The Term Death is Rest and Harm

This term has both positive and negative metonymic meanings \*Antonio (2003); the term death is a rest is metaphorically understood as a relief or peace for the dying person from the endures or the suffering that he or she spent life.

"O soul who is at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him). So enter among my servants, and enter my garden."(89:27-30).

This positive metonymic meaning is closely related to the concept of temporal rest or sleep until the Day of Judgment or 'al hesaab". On opposing, the metaphor of death is understood as the meaning of harm of loss. This cognitive meaning has a metonymic basis which focuses on the negative results of death. In the examples that follow death harming metaphor is viewed as people typical grief reactions of losing their lovers, one of their families, friends etc. in other words, the dying person is absent in the conceptualization, given the fact that the concept of harming or suffering emphasized of the survivors rather than focusing on the person that dies.

### • Shock/Disbelieve

The metonymical meaning of death is conceptualized as a shocked sense that the death has not really happened, not really occurred. This reaction can be intensified and complicated if the death is sudden, violent, or unanticipated. The person mind may be telling him or her "there must be some mistake," or "this can't be true."

### • Anger

The negative metonymic concept of anger may be conceptualized as anger at people's family members for not rallying together or even anger at ourselves or the person who died and "left" the world or earthly life.

### • Metonymy

Which means thing or concept is not called by its own name, but by the name of something intimately associated with that thing or concept. it could be up or down, negative or positive concept.etc. Antonio (2003).

### • Sadness

The negative metaphorical sense of sadness may conceptualize to people experience a deep sense of loss. There may be moments when people find themselves at a loss for words, weeping, or bursting uncontrollably into tears.

### • Fear and Depression

There may be worry or panic; fears about carrying on, fears about the future. If the person who died was an adult (partner, sibling, parent), it may bring up negative fears or depression about people own sense of mortality or sense of being left behind or people may lose interest in their usual activities, or feel helpless or hopeless.

## 3. Conclusion

The present paper put forward by the Cognitive religious understanding of death Metaphor, where it has shown how the Qur'an is structured around the term life and death process and how every term of death has influenced by the Arabic culture. The idea of death conceived in terms of life after death (a journey to heaven or hell), death is the end and death is rest and harm. The use of such metaphor terms makes the reader clarify and define the relationship between real and image, physical and spiritual (Lakoff and Turner1989). Meanwhile, this paper has the following results:

a. The Arabic culture is not death and dying culture. In fact Death is accepted and understood in the Arabic culture. It is part of their faith in God.

- b. The “journey” metaphor in the religious context of the Qur’an is conceptualized as two kinds of life after death: the good spiritual life (heaven) and bad life (hell). The term journey is seen as a result of man’s life action.
- c. Death is not only conceptualized as the end of our life time but also as the start of the next life.
- d. Death has both positive and negative metonymic effects. The positive, conceptualized as the rest of man’s suffering and pain during life. And the negative effect is conceptualized the harming or suffering of the survivors rather than focusing on the person that dies.

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