Metaphorical Conceptualisation of Women in Arabic and English

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Abstract

This study aimed at presenting a comparative analysis of some metaphorical expressions used for conceptualizing women in English and Arabic. It adopted a qualitative research model. A set of English and Arabic expressions conventionally used when describing women were collected and grouped according to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) into three general source domains: ANIMALS, PLANTS, and OBJECTS. Then a cross-cultural comparison was made by adopting Barcelona's (2001) framework. Data analysis revealed that the two languages share several basic (universal) metaphors in conceptualizing women. However, some differences between Arabic and English have been detected when conceptualizing women metaphorically. The differences might be due to the different sociocultural interpretations of the source and target domains in each language. In sum, this area of study must be a subject of further research by Arab scholars since Arabic involves a great number of metaphorical exploitations, which needs to be investigated from different perspectives.

Keywords: metaphor, women, conceptual metaphor theory, Arabic, English

1. Introduction

There is no agreement about the significance of using metaphorical language. Some authors, like Aristotle, consider it to be decorative, and using it will not add any additional information to the discourse (Gibbs, 1994). Others consider metaphor as a matter of special extraordinary language and see it as a set of deviant linguistic expressions whose meaning is reducible to some set of literal propositions (Salingerland, 2004). On the other hand, new approaches consider metaphor as a major and essential phenomenon in both language and thought, they argue that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life and their pervasiveness can be observed in language, thought, and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, these contradictory views have resulted in conducting many pieces of research to tackle this issue. This piece of research is one of them; it explores the use of metaphor and its significance in the conceptualization of women in Arabic.

Metaphors are used constantly in everyday communication, politics, education, science, and media. Most universal and basic concepts in our world are realized by using some metaphorical expressions. For example, the conceptual metaphor "more is up "mirrors a mapping process, where quantity as a concept is associated with concrete observation that implies a vertical movement as in "prices are high" or "I'm feeling up". This conception of metaphor highlights its cognitive function to comprehend and structure experience. In this regard, the basic ideas of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have been proposed as the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.23).

Lakoff (1993) defines metaphor by using the term cross-domain mapping i.e., he considers metaphors as "devices that allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another". That is, metaphor is a cross-domain mapping from a source (or giver) domain of experience onto a target (or recipient) domain, and the target domain is understood in terms of the source domain (p.203).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), known as Cognitive Metaphor Theory, was first introduced in 1980 by Lakoff and Johnson. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphors are viewed as a cognitive process, where a link between two conceptual domains, namely the source and target domains is established via partial mappings. For instance, when saying, "The price of peace is rising", the quantity is understood in terms of directionality. Source domains provide frameworks for target domains. They determine how we think and talk about the entities and activities to which the target domains refer (p.272).

2. Literature Review

Research on this type of metaphor is scarce. In the context of gender studies, for instance, Takada et al. (2000)

investigate the metaphorical conceptualization of women in Japanese involving socio-cultural values in their mapping and interpretation. She analyses metaphorical expressions collected through a questionnaire survey that conceptualize women as plants or animals. The results suggest that interpretations and usage of some metaphorical expressions have undergone certain changes over the years. She concludes her study by suggesting further research in sociocultural metaphors in Japanese and other languages.

In the same vein, Lopez (2009) studies animal metaphors for women in Spanish and English and finds that speakers of English and Spanish often understand gender differences in terms of animal imagery. In addition, it is quite common in both languages to come across metaphors presenting women in the guise of chickens, bitches, or vixens. Whether in the form of pets, livestock, or wild animals, women tend to be seen as inferior and subordinated to men.

However, Rouhi (2011) argues that women metaphors in English are formed based on the physical appearance or certain features of an animal, plant, or object. In such metaphors, not all the properties of animals, objects, and plants are mapped. The metaphor makes sense when only culturally accepted features for animals, plants, or objects exhibited are picked leaving out irrelevant features. Therefore, metaphors are described as selective since they highlight particular features of the source and target domains. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the woman metaphor could be analyzed as "A WOMAN IS AN ANIMAL, A WOMAN IS AN OBJECT, A WOMAN IS A PLANT or A WOMAN IS HER BEHAVIOR".

As demonstrated above, the conceptualization of women has been explored in languages such as Japanese by Takada (2005), Spanish and English by Lopez (2009), and English by Rouhi (2011). However, it has not been yet examined in Arabic. Thus, this piece of research will add new findings to this literature by exploring the conceptualization of women in Arabic and English through conceptual metaphors.

3. Aim of the study

Since none of the previous studies has examined the metaphorical conceptualization of women in Arabic, this piece of research aims at investigating the Arabic and English conceptualization of women through conceptual metaphors.

4. Research questions

To fulfill the aim of the study, the following two research questions have been formulated:

1. To what extent do Arabic and English speakers use conceptual metaphors to conceptualize women?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the conceptualization of women in Arabic and English?

5. Significance of the Study

Many studies have been conducted on the conceptualization of women through metaphors, but to the best knowledge, nothing much has been written about their conceptualization in Arabic. This piece of research lies in its focus on the metaphorical conceptualization of women from a wider theoretical paradigm that includes two frameworks, namely the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Barcelona's (2001) framework about cross-cultural differences. Therefore, the novelty of this study is that it aims to elaborate on this topic of women's conceptualization through metaphors in Arabic and English, looking if there are similarities and differences between them. Detecting the similarities and differences would advance our understanding of the existence of both universal metaphors and culture-specific metaphors.

6. Methodology

This research paper adopted a qualitative research model. It aimed at presenting a comparative analysis of women's metaphors in English and Arabic. It was also devoted to questioning the claim that all humans share primary metaphors.21 metaphorical expressions used in conceptualizing women in English and Arabic are collected; the English data was extracted from literature, poetry, proverbs, and sayings and the Metaphors Dictionary (1995).In addition, the Arabic data was extracted from written literature, poetry, proverbs, and sayings. The criterion for identifying expressions as metaphorical is when their surface meaning does not reflect their intended meaning.

To analyze this sample, the conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) was adopted. The collected expressions were first grouped into three general source domains (ANIMALS, PLANTS, and OBJECTS). Then, to compare and contrast metaphors in these two languages, the methodology proposed by Barcelona (2001) regarding the identification and description of the conceptual metaphor was adopted. This methodology involves the following two parameters:

1. Existence or absence of metaphorical projection: Barcelona (2001) defines it as "the same metaphor may be said to exist in both languages if approximately the same conceptual source and the target can be metaphorically

associated in the two languages "(p.137).

2. Degree of conceptual elaboration: this is the second type of contrast that could be held to compare conceptual metaphors in two or more languages. According to Barcelona (2001), it is the "differences between both languages owing to the existence of a version of the metaphor in one language and its absence, or limited use, in the other "(p.137).

7. Data Analysis

7.1 Women Are Animals

Metaphorical expressions that use animal names as their source domain are applied to women in both English and Arabic; some of them will be presented in this section.

A. Metaphors exist in both languages with the same conceptual source and target domains.

➢ Animals

The analogy of a woman with a beautiful shape and appearance is associated with the *hind* and *doe* animals in both English and Arabic, and they both imply positive connotations.

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
1) A lovely *hind*, a graceful *doe*!	2.ابكي اذا غدت *الظباء* فلم أرَّ زينة الأتراب في السرب Lit. I would cry if the does' squadron passed, and I could not see the most beautiful one.

The poet compares a group of women or girls (his beloved's friends) to a does' squadron. Moreover, he says that he becomes very sad if they pass by him, and his girl, whom he describes as the most beautiful one, is not with them and he is not able to see her.

In addition, the conceptualization of women with *mare* and *filly* is used in both English and Arabic.

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor	
3) a cheeky mare	سليلة أفراس تحللها بغل	4.وماهند إلا مهرة عربية

In Arabic, women's conceptualization as *mares* stands out for their beauty and splendor (Al Amiri, 2014). It reflects positive connotations and emotions. In this example, the poet is describing herself as a thoroughbred Arabian *filly*, boasting and priding her ancestors and family, and says that her husband is just a mule who does not deserve her. This analogy is particularly related to the status of horses in the Arab culture.

However, in English, women's conceptualization as *mares* has a negative connotation. It is considered offensive and coarse. For example, the expression "*a cheeky mare"* is used to describe a woman who insults people and describing a woman as "*a lucky mare"* is not very polite; it implies that this woman is "easy" in some way.

➢ Birds

Bird names are used also to describe women, such as *chicken* and *hen*. As in the following examples:

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
5)Hen party -Ain't nobody here but us "*chickens*"	6. عيش يوم ديك ولا مئة يوم دجاج. Lit. Live a day as a rooster and not a hundred days as a chicken.

In English, a hen party is a party for a woman who is going to get married soon, to which only her female friends are invited. However, the Arabic metaphor is explained as "be a man, live as a man, not as a woman". In this regard, Lopez (2009) argues that these birds as chickens are connected to women because of their small size. In addition, they constitute a common source of nourishment.

B. Metaphors that exist in one language and are absent or limited in the other.

Some animal metaphors are found in English but not in Arabic and vice versa. For example, an attractive young woman is described as a *fox* or *vixen* in English. This metaphorical conceptualization implies that women are preys that men hunt (Kövecses, 2000). It also means an ill-tempered woman or a mean woman (web.vocabulary.com).

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
6. I am a ***vixen*** because I am a bright young woman.	————

A common animal metaphor that exists in Arabic but not in English is *a camel*.

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
————	7.الناقة ناقة ولو هدرت Lit. A *camel* is a *camel* even if it bellowed.

A female remains a female, even if she has a strong personality, she will not become a man. In the Arab culture, a camel is not just an animal. Arabs sanctify camels; a female camel represents fertility, prodigality, and bestowal (Tawalbeh & Bani Yasseen, 2016).

7.2 Women Are Objects

Some metaphors are formed based on the physical appearance or features of an object.

    A.   Metaphors that exist in both languages with the same conceptual source and target domains

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
8) You ought to remember that the women are the weaker *vessel*, hang her, let her.	9.رفقا بالقوارير.

In both languages, women are conceptualized as ***vessels***. Vessels symbolize that women are weak, and superfine and need to be treated very carefully, in order not to be broken or hurt. In addition, women are conceptualized as diamonds to symbolize purity and innocence of love and fidelity and embrace the strength of character, ethics, and faithfulness to oneself, and others as shown below:

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
10) A *Diamond* daughter	11.البنت المربية درَّة مخبية. Lit. A well-raised daughter is a hidden diamond or jewel.

More specifically, a well-raised daughter who has good morals and manners will help others, e.g., people who are in bad circumstances or in need of help.

B. Metaphors that exist in one language and are absent or limited in the other.

There are different unshared object metaphors in English and Arabic. Here are some examples:

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
12) The wife is the *key* to the house.	————

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
————	13.بالوجه مرآة و بالقفا مذراه Lit. A mirror face to face and behind you is a grader fork.

The Arabic saying is used when talking about women who flatter people in their presence, vituperate or vilify them when they are absent.

7.3 Women Are Plants

A. Metaphors that exist in both languages with the same conceptual source and target domains

In both English and Arabic women are referred to as tree, flower, or rose.

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
14) May she become *a flourishing hidden tree*.	15.الشجرة الي ما بتثمر حلال قطعها. Lit. A tree that does not fruit must be cut down.

In the above Arabic saying, a woman who does not bring babies has to be left or divorced.

In the following two examples, a woman is conceptualized as a tree though the metaphor is used differently.

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
16) A *red flower*	17.وخدٌ بهوردٌ و ساقٌ خدلج. Lit. Her cheeks have flowers. 18.جوا الدار قردة و برا الدار فُلَّة. Lit. Inside the home is a monkey, and outside is a flower or rose.

In example (17), a woman is described as having beautiful cheeks. However, the saying (18) describes the woman who decorates herself outside her house, so she looks very beautiful, but does not take care of her appearance inside the home. This implies that conceptualizing women as flowers is a universal metaphor.

Further, women are conceptualized as fruits (which are types of plants) in both languages.

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
19) O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers.	20.ياالبرتقالة يالبرتقالة Lit. O orange, O orange

The Arabic saying reflects that men perceive women as edible sweet fruits.

B. Metaphors that exist in one language and are absent or limited in the other.

One of the tree metaphors that exist in Arabic not in English and used to describe women refers to the palm tree. The reason is that the palm tree has a special status in the Arab culture; it has an important role in their life. Therefore, Arab poets, when praising or describing women, use the metaphor of palm trees as shown below:

English metaphor	Arabic metaphor
————	21.يانخلة الوادي أبى من رطبكي لكني ما أبغى ضرب الأحساد يدرون Lit. O palm of the valley I want some of your dates, but I do not want the envies to know.

In this verse, the poet is talking to his beloved calling her "O palm of the valley ", he is telling her that he wants to see her have a nice time together, but he does not want the envies to know. This metaphor is not used in English may be because the palm tree does not grow in the West, and it is not part of their culture.

8. Discussion

The previous section shows that in both Arabic and English, women are mainly conceptualized by the figurative device known as a conceptual metaphor. To analyze the above data, two parameters were adopted. The first parameter investigates metaphors that exist in the two languages (Arabic and English) with the same source and target domain. It revealed that English and Arabic have similar metaphors representing women in terms of the three source domains, namely ANIMALS, PLANTS, and OBJECTS as illustrated in the above examples (1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 15). However, others are used differently; they have the same source and target domains but with different connotations as in the examples (3, 4, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20). These examples reflect the universality of some metaphors, which are common between English and Arabic. Therefore, universal metaphors seem to result from certain commonalities in human experience. In this regard, Kovecses (2002) states that these commonalities constitute a universal embodiment on which many conceptual metaphors are based.

Regarding the second parameter, it states that the differences between both languages are demonstrated through the existence of a version of the metaphor in one language and its absence, or limited use, in the other. This parameter revealed that the majority of metaphors are not shared between Arabic and English. This reflects that the source and the target domains are socio-culturally determined and the mapping between them is motivated by the cultural interpretation between the source and the target concepts. The differences were found in several examples as demonstrated above (6, 7, 12, 13, and 21).

9. Conclusion

This piece of research explored the metaphorical conceptualization of women in Arabic and English by adopting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). A cross-cultural comparison was also made to analyze the obtained metaphorical expressions by adopting Barcelona's (2001) framework. The analysis of data revealed that women are conceptualized in both Arabic and English mainly through conceptual metaphors. Both similarities and differences

between Arabic and English in the conceptualization of women were revealed.

The similarities involve the universal metaphors that seem to result from certain commonalities in human experience. However, the differences in such conceptualization might be related to cultural beliefs that are not shared universally. That is, they might be due to the different sociocultural interpretations of the source and target domains in each language. Although this study has explored the metaphorical conceptualization of women in both English and Arabic, further research is recommended to examine this subject from other different perspectives (e.g., pragmatic conceptualization) since Arabic involves a great number of metaphorical exploitations.

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