



Embodied Metaphors of Death in the Verses of the Qur'an and Hadiths of Imam Ali (AS)

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Abstract

Human understanding of divine knowledge, particularly abstract and intangible concepts such as death, significantly influences human behavior and ultimate destiny. Consequently, the concept of death in verses and hadiths, especially in the words of Imam Ali (AS), has been depicted in a tangible manner. A descriptive-analytical study of "Death" with a focus on conceptual metaphors within the cognitive semantics framework has transformed tangible spaces into unfamiliar ones and opened up new perspectives on religious knowledge about death. Based on Verses of the Qur'an and the words of Imam Ali (AS)

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in the context of embodied conceptual metaphor, the concrete concepts of humans, animals, and plants are mapped onto death: 1) Death is portrayed as a human who preaches, comes, and meets one's soul; or as a human who pursues another, waiting to seize them like an officer with a judicial order, or a thief and hunter who takes advantage of one's negligence and steals or hunts all their possessions (life and soul); 2) Another image for death is that of a ferocious animal with sharp claws, directly targeting a person's soul; 3) The third embodied conceptualization presents death as a plant with a pleasant scent or as autumn, symbolizing the end of life. In some of these tangible depictions, pleasure, comfort, and tranquility are the focal points, while in most cases, the certainty and imminence of death, its harsh and terrifying nature, the transience of life, the inevitability of death, and the feelings of loss and regret are emphasized.

Keywords: Cognitive Semantics, Conceptual Metaphor, Embodiment of Death, Personification of Death, Animalization of Death, Vegetalization of Death.

Introduction

"Death" is a significant issue that has been recommended to be remembered in the Quran and hadiths, while negligence of it has been condemned. This is because one's approach and perspective towards death determine the course of their life and destiny. Consequently, the Quran and hadiths have extensively discussed death in various expressions, rendering the abstract concept of death tangible,

46 perceptible, and comprehensible for every individual.

1. Statement of the Problem

One of the most significant and widely used methods for concretizing abstract concepts in religious teachings is conceptual metaphor. This approach, in addition to its appeal, serves as an effective medium for accurately and tangibly conveying an abstract concept such as death to the audience, making this critical notion more credible and comprehensible. As Lakoff and Johnson have demonstrated in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, conceptual metaphors are deeply rooted in the human mind and operate subconsciously in everyday life, with numerous examples. For instance, "Reasoning" is one of the fundamental concepts frequently employed in expressions such as: "He attacked the weaknesses of my argument," "He targeted my reasoning," or "Your claims are indefensible." In these cases, the conceptual metaphor "Argument is war" underpins and reflects the discourse, as the terms used (e.g., attack, target, indefensible) are associated with warfare. This means that the concept of reasoning is understood through the source domain of war. Therefore, metaphor is referred to as a conceptual or cognitive metaphor because it is grounded in understanding abstract matters through tangible and conceptual elements, visualizing mental concepts.

The foundational premise of this study is the pivotal role of conceptual metaphor in understanding the meanings of religious texts; delving into various types of conceptual metaphors, especially with a focus on religious themes, can open significant avenues of knowledge to humanity. This is because the multilayered texts of the Quran and traditions have extensively employed this metaphorical nature,

establishing connections between various domains on many topics, to conceptualize abstract domains through multiple source domains, thereby shaping a correct worldview and enhancing comprehensibility. In the cognitive approach, this type of metaphor transcends the boundaries of mere rhetoric and extends to encompass language, thought, and everyday life, offering a broader framework. It facilitates human comprehension, particularly in abstract theological concepts, making them more accessible and understandable.

One of the beautiful and impactful examples of the conceptual metaphor of death in the verses and words of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, especially the Hadith of Imam Ali (AS), is the embodied conceptual metaphor. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory, this metaphorical nature gives human, animal, or plant qualities to various realms of the Quranic worldview regarding death, recreating a tangible image for the audience. Therefore, this research, using a descriptive-analytical method, examines the embodied conceptual metaphors of death in the verses and words of Imam Ali (AS), except in a few cases where the enlightening words of other infallibles are used for explanation and completion, to gain a higher understanding of the reality of death and to prepare humans more deeply for the hereafter by remembering it.

2. Background

"Metaphor" is one of the familiar and ancient concepts in literary discussions, and its exploration, along with figurative language and its various types, has long been a subject of interest among Muslim

scholars in Qur'anic and narrative studies. It has a history spanning over 2500 years in philosophy and literature (Qaeminiya, 2021 AD/1401 SH: 20 and 38). Since the time of Aristotle, the analysis of the nature of metaphor has held particular significance within a rhetorical framework, viewing it as a linguistic art of persuasion achieved through the substitution of words (ibid: 47; Qaeminiya, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 68). The tradition of studying metaphor among Western scholars also traces back to Aristotle, who believed that metaphor is specific to literary language and should be examined among the arts and literary techniques. This classical perspective on metaphor remains prevalent today (Safavi, 2010 AD/1390 SH: 368).

The second viewpoint, which can be traced, in a general sense, in the studies of earlier scholars (Qaeminiya, 2021 AD/1401 SH: 36), is the Romantic approach to metaphor, which dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this view, metaphor is not confined to literary language; rather, it is considered an essential element of language and thought for expressing the external world (Safavi, 2010 AD/1390 SH: 368). For the first time, in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson presented a cognitive analysis of "Metaphor," which became known as the "Conceptual Theory of Metaphor" or "Conceptual Metaphor." They introduced its theoretical framework in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (Qaeminiya, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 68 and 647).

Regarding the research background, it is noteworthy that no direct studies have been conducted on the conceptual metaphors of death in the verses and hadith of Imam Ali (AS). However, studies that are

relatively close to the research topic, either in terms of methodology (conceptual metaphor and cognitive semantics) or content (death and the afterlife due to their complexity and significance), have been conducted. Examples of such research include: "Life Afterlife Nomenclature in the Quran in the Light of Conceptual Metaphor Theory" by Zeynab Feyzi and others, "Analysis and Evaluation of Conceptual Metaphors in Verses Related to the Day of Judgment" by Morteza Abdi and Fatemeh Hedayati, "Quranic Origins of Conceptual Metaphors of Death in the Masnavi of Rumi" by Alireza Shabanlou; and the thesis "A Study of the Conceptual Metaphor of Death in the Persian Language from a Cognitive Linguistic Perspective" by Fatemeh Tahmasebi. However, among the reviewed studies, no research was found that systematically identified embodied metaphors of death in verses and hadiths. Only an English article by Fardous Aghaghazizadeh and Shirin Pour Ibrahim titled "Death Metaphor in Religious Texts: A Cognitive Semantics Approach" conceptualized the abstract concept of death in the language of the Quran and Nahj al-Balāghah, but not with the system that exists in this research, as it did not specifically and extensively address embodied metaphors in this context.

3. Necessity and Objectives

Given the abundance of the topic of death, especially with the focus on embodied conceptual metaphors, in religious texts, it is necessary to address it to strengthen the divine worldview regarding this topic. Consequently, the belief in the important issue of death becomes more solid and tangible within individuals. Moreover, this directly or

indirectly clarifies the role of embodied conceptual metaphors in better understanding abstract concepts like death.

4. Research Method

This research is based on a qualitative method and a type of cognitive semantic method. In this method, rather than discovering linguistic metaphors, the focus is on discovering semantic metaphors present in the mind and meaning of the text, primarily the verses of the Quran and the words of Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. The goal is to discover conceptual metaphors. This is a library-based research with a descriptive-analytical method, extracting data from verses and hadiths based on the theory of conceptual metaphor to select and discover the system of embodied metaphors and to map (source and target and conceptualizations) in verses and hadiths about death based on a structured and organized metaphorical framework and display it in a table.

In this method, by using library resources, after extracting verses and hadiths related to death based on its keywords, and selecting prominent and frequently repeated cases, the data is analyzed based on the theory of conceptual metaphor (embodiment) to clarify how the embodiment imagery for death is reflected in rich religious texts.

5. Concepts

A better understanding of the conceptual metaphor of "Death" requires familiarity with the following concepts:

5-1. Conceptual Metaphor

Cognitive semantics is based on the relationship between language

and mind; therefore, conceptual metaphor, which is one of its main areas, is not a feature exclusive to language, but rather, since it encompasses all aspects of daily life, it covers the realm from language to thought and action. This conceptual system plays a fundamental role in defining daily realities; the way we think, our experiences, and our daily actions are very much related to metaphor, even if we are not aware of it. There is much linguistic evidence for the metaphorical nature of most of our everyday conceptual system (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 3).

Unlike traditional metaphor, the focus of conceptual metaphor is on the concept rather than the words. This type of metaphor is called conceptual or perceptual metaphor because it is based on the understanding of abstract matters based on concrete and conceptual matters and by visualizing mental concepts (ibid: 272). For example, the abstract concept of "Argument" can be understood with the sensory and experiential concept of "War." (ibid: 3-5)

Lakoff and Johnson present a three-fold division of metaphor: 1) Orientation; 2) Structural; and 3) Ontological, which itself is divided into two types: Embodiment and personification. Given the subject of this paper, only the personification metaphor will be defined and explained.

Personification is one of the most important types of ontological metaphor, as it organizes the mind and thought that is manifested in language. It assigns properties of living beings to an object, the most prominent of which are humans, animals, or plants. Therefore, it can be found in three types (ibid: 21-25):

5-1-1. Personification

This is a type of metaphor in which human qualities and characteristics are used to express a non-human phenomenon, such as "Life deceived me," and abstract realities like desires, emotions, and social phenomena are treated like a person (ibid:29-33); for example, attributing the human quality of "Coming" to death.

5-1-2. Animalization

This is a type of metaphor in which animal characteristics are used to express a phenomenon that does not have life; for example, the concept of the "Claws of death" indicates that death is imagined as an animal.

5-1-3. Vegetalization

In this type of metaphor, the qualities and characteristics of plants and plant life are used to express a phenomenon that does not have life; for example, the concept of the "Autumn of Life" indicates that life is recreated as a plant.

5-2. Death

In verses and hadiths, words like "Mawt, AjaI, Liqā'allāh, Raḥīl, Rujū', and others refer to death, each with a specific connotation. In general, "Mawt" means the absence of life; however, death and life are relative to each thing (Muṣṭafawī, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 11, 213). In the following, by explaining conceptual metaphors, a tangible meaning of death will be clarified.

6. Types of Embodied Metaphors of Death in the Verses and Hadiths of Imam Ali (AS)

The verses and hadiths of Imam Ali (AS), by employing numerous conceptual metaphors about death, depict it from various perspectives. Paying attention to the interconnected network of different types of conceptual metaphors and their primary and secondary distinctions opens up new doors to the systematic structure of this Quranic concept. One of these depictions in the verses and hadiths of Imam Ali (AS) is the embodied conceptualization of death, which manifests in three types: personification, animalization, and vegetalization. To express the abstract phenomenon of death, human, animal, or plant characteristics have been used, and death has been given life like a human, animal, or plant, in order to organize a correct and objective worldview of death with tangible images in the mind and thought.

6-1. Personification of Death

Verses and hadiths, in order to make death tangible and perceptible, have recreated images with human characteristics such as coming and going, understanding, precedence, and so on, and have personified death. Some of these human characteristics attributed to death include:

6-1-1. The Coming of Death

In many expressions in religious texts, verbs such as "Came," "Comes," and so on are attributed to death and destiny. Coming is typically a mental concept that is imagined for a human being with free will, as if the concept of the realization of death is mapped onto

the coming of a human. Examples of such verses include: "Whoever hopes for the meeting with Allah, indeed, the appointed time of Allah will surely come, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing" (al-‘Ankabūt/5); "He will swallow it with difficulty and scarcely be able to swallow it, and death comes to him from every place..." (Ibrahim/17); "And Allah will not delay anyone when his time comes, and Allah is Aware of what you do" (al-Munāfiqūn/11); "And death shall come to you." (Qāf/19)

These are metaphors for a presence that is a property of a body and especially of a human (Qūnawī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 18, 174).

6-1-2. The Presence of Death

In other verses and hadiths, presence is attributed to death, as if it is depicted that death is a human being who is present in the presence of another human: "It has been prescribed for you, when death approaches any of you..." (al-Baqarah/180)

6-1-3. Death as a Visitor

In these verses, God explains the reason for the certainty and inevitability of death by saying that death, like a human, will surely meet a person: "Say: Indeed, that which you flee from, death, will surely meet you" (al-Jumu‘ah/8) (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 19, 268). This is a two-way meeting, as Imam Ali (AS) says: "O! Servants of God, indeed, death is not something to escape from... if you stand still, it will take you, and if you flee from it, it will catch you" (Sermon: 149) (Qummī, 1943 AD/1363 AH: 2, 367). Humans are constantly fleeing from death and striving to protect themselves from

it. However, since it is inescapable, they inevitably encounter it even as they attempt to escape. During their time in the corporeal body, they are driven toward the ultimate destination set for them (death). Every effort they make—such as movement, treatment, and other measures to evade death—inevitably consumes the moments of their lifespan, hastening the arrival of death and the inevitable meeting with it (Baḥrānī, n.d.: 3, 208-209).

6-1-4. Death as a Preacher

Another human concept attributed to death is that of a preacher; death is like a caring human who admonishes a person when they make a mistake or sin. Imam Ali (AS) says in this regard: "Therefore, remember death frequently when your souls urge you towards desires, and death is sufficient as a preacher." (Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 28) Such metaphors are also evident in common, everyday concepts, such as the "Lessons of time," where the passage of days is personified as a human offering advice and counsel for reflection.

In explaining the instructive nature of death, it has been stated that merely witnessing the daily occurrences, such as the passing of friends and acquaintances and the news of the deaths of those who were alive just yesterday, should suffice for individuals to contemplate their own eventual fate (Makarem Shirazi, 2011-2012 AD/1390-1391 SH: 13, 24).

6-1-5. Death as a Perceiver (Perceiver, Runner)

In Surah *al-Nisā'*, it is stated: "Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you are in fortified towers..." (*al-Nisā'*/78) Such verses serve as a warning, emphasizing that death is an undeniable

reality, and the term "*Yudrikkum*" reminds us that attempting to escape this inevitable reality of the universe is futile. The meaning of the root "*Yudrikkum*" suggests that when someone tries to escape something, it follows after them (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 4, 19; cf. Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 84).

In the verse "...Whoever leaves his house emigrating towards Allah and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward has already been assured by Allah..." (al-Nisā'/100) the term "*Idrāk al-Mawt*" is also a metaphor that indicates the natural or sudden arrival of death. The literal sense of *Idrāk* implies that a person who lags behind runs to catch up with the one ahead of them, but in the case of death, no one is left behind for it to catch up with; hence, the literal meaning is not intended (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 5, 53). The metaphor of the "Perception of death" suggests that death is envisioned as a person chasing after another, trying to catch them while the second person attempts to escape (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 5, 84).

This Qur'anic expression regarding death is repeated several times in the words of Imam Ali (AS), such as when he said: "O! Servants of Allah, indeed death is not an escape from. If you remain in place, it will come to you, and if you flee from it, it will overtake you..." (Letter: 27) (Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 27)

He further emphasized: "Indeed, there is no escape from death. It will come to you, whether you stay where you are or try to run away from it." The Imam stresses that there is no escaping the inevitable encounter with death. This encounter is swift, as if two moving

entities approach each other from opposite directions. Just as two vehicles traveling towards one another at high speed inevitably meet, so too will the inevitable meeting with death occur (Makarem Shirazi, 2011-2012 AD/1390-1391 SH: 12, 182).

A) Death as a Competitor

From the previous discussions about the perception of death, a mental image is recreated where death is like a human who wants to outpace a person and their life, and the person, on the other side of the competition, is running away from death so that it does not catch up to them; while a person should, through their actions, get ahead of death and outpace it. In the hadiths, it is said: "... Hasten to the Hereafter and race against the appointed time, for people are about to lose hope, and death will overtake them, and the door of repentance will be closed to them." (Sermon: 183)

"May God have mercy on a person... that seizes the opportunity and hastens to death and provisions him with good deeds." (Sermon: 76)

Death constantly approaches a person and seeks them out. This expression implies that a person, through good deeds, should outpace it and always keep this rival in sight (Hashemi Khoei, 2020 AD/1400 AH: 21, 45-46; *ibid*: 5, 241).

B) Death as a Waiter

Death, like a swift person, comes towards a person, so one should be waiting for it and prepare for its arrival. The source domain of a waiting person is mapped onto the target domain of preparedness for death and welcoming it. In the words of Imam Ali (AS), it is said:

"Whoever watches for his death will seize his opportunities." *Ajl* (destiny or appointed time) here can mean death, meaning whoever guards their death, that is, waits for it and thinks about it and is not negligent of it, will seize the opportunity and do whatever they can before it, for fear that death may not give them another opportunity (Khansari, 1987 AD/1366 SH: 5, 295); as Imam Ali (AS) has said in another statement: "Whoever anticipates death, hastens to good deeds." (ibid: 327)

6-1-6. Death as a Wakil (Agent) and Ma'mūr

In the metaphor "Death is a wakil and a Ma'mūr," death is considered a terrifying human being who is sent by God to carry out divine commands towards a person (Shabanlou, 218 AD/1398 SH: 3, 53). Imam Ali (AS) has said: "Whoever death is assigned to, it will uproot him and destroy him." (Tamīmī Āmudī, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 2, 1379)

Based on this, death has a mandate for each person, a decree from God that is inevitable and certain. Therefore, in some hadiths of Imam Ali (AS), death is called "*Himam*" (fever) (Qarashī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 3, 137; Hashimi Khoei, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 5, 412), because the *Himam* is a fever that turns the face black, and few people escape from it (cf. Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 135; Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 3, 33): "And who pledged to himself that no form he has infused with spirit shall move, without death being its end, and destruction its goal!" (Sermon: 165)

In other words of the Imam, he says: "And for every soul, there is a *Himam*." This means that every soul cannot escape death, like a divine

decree, so one should always be prepared for it (Khansari, 1988 AD/1366 SH: 5, 12). "Whoever is neglectful of the events of time, the *Himam* will awaken him." The purpose of these metaphors is to encourage awareness and preparation for the events of time and not to be negligent about them, because if one is negligent, they will awaken when they are already in ruin and have no choice (ibid: 457).

6-1-7. Death as a Guardian

Another human concept attributed to death is that of a guardian; similar to a human being who has a guardian, death also acts as a guardian over a person and their actions. Imam Ali (AS) states in this regard: "Therefore, remember death frequently when your souls urge you towards desires, and death is sufficient as a preacher. And the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) often advised his companions to remember death, and he would say: Remember death frequently, for it is the destroyer of pleasures and a barrier between you and your desires." (Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 28)

In another statement, it is explicitly stated that "Death is sufficient as a guardian." (Wisdom 306) Based on these profound words, a tangible image is created from the sensory source of a guardian and observer, and it is mapped onto the abstract destination of death, to portray death and the attention to it as a factor in distancing oneself from desires, or to depict it as a guardian of a person from any incident, because until life ends, no incident can defeat them

6-1-8. Death as a Thief

When a thief suddenly steals everything from a person, the person feels a sense of loss, regret, and bankruptcy. Imam Ali (AS) has depicted death as a thief in the sensory realm to evoke this feeling and understanding, motivating immediate action: "And hasten to good deeds before old age hinders you, or sickness prevents you, or death takes everything away from you"; the term "*Khālis*" means to steal something with deceit. The comparison of death to a thief is based on the fact that death stealthily takes everything away from a person suddenly, causing regret and loss (Makarem Shirazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 8, 489-490).

6-1-9. Death as a Hunter

Another image that has been conceptualized for death in the hadiths is that of a skilled hunter whose aim never misses. Imam Ali (AS) said: "O! Servants of God, indeed, death is not something to escape from, so fear it before it comes, and prepare for it; for indeed, you are the prey of death. If you stand still, it will take you, and if you flee from it, it will catch you." (Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 27)

The expression "*Antum Ṭuradā'u al-Mawti*" (you are the prey of death) (Letter 27) in another phrase of Imam Ali (AS) means that death is like a skilled hunter chasing its prey. This implies that death, like a skilled hunter, will catch its prey (humans), whether they stand still or run away (Makarem Shirazi, 2011-2012 AD/1390-1391 SH: 9, 358). Imam Ali (AS) uses the word "*Ṭuradā'u*" for humans who are being pursued by death to show that they are like prey and death is

like a skilled hunter seeking them (Baḥrānī, n.d.: 3, 208-209).

This hunter knows the ways of hunting well: From taking hostages and ambushing to using various tools to hunt its target:

A) Death as a Kidnapper

In a statement by Imam Ali (AS), humans are described as hostages of death: "And indeed, he has been taken hostage in the place of the dead, and alone in the narrowness of the grave." (Sermon 83)

This kidnapping is due to the fact that death is a formidable hunter. It takes hostages from humans (based on their actions (Jafari, n.d.: 12, 48) who are powerless and doomed to be its prey. This imagery, rooted in the experiential concept of a hostage, paints a harsh and terrifying picture of death and its inevitability, serving as a reminder to all.

B) Death as a Swift Pursuer

The hunter chases its prey to capture it; similarly, death is like a hunter that pursues a person to take their soul. As Imam Ali (AS) stated in his will to Imam Ḥasan (AS): (Letter 31). "You are like prey fleeing from the hunter, which is death, but no fugitive can escape this hunter, and inevitably, you will be overtaken by it. So, beware of death finding you in a state of sin, while you had been telling yourself you would repent, and it prevents you from repenting. In such a situation, you will have ruined yourself."

The term "*Ṭarīd*" used for a person being pursued or hunted emphasizes that from the beginning of life, the hunter of death is pursuing humans. Whether in childhood, youth, or old age, no one can escape this hunter, not even the wealthy, the powerful, or even

prophets and saints, as the Quran says: "Say: Your fleeing will not benefit you if you flee from death or killing" (al-Aḥzāb/16) (Makarem Shirazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 9, 61).

Imam Ali (AS) uses the term "*Tālibu Ḥathīth*" for death, meaning that death is a swift pursuer who will not miss its target, whether it is someone who remains stationary or someone who flees (Sermon 123).

C) Death as a Lier-in-Wait

A hunter lies in wait for its prey, catching it off guard. Similarly, death, like a human hunter, lies in wait for humans, closing off any path of escape. Imam Ali (AS) said: "O! People, everyone will encounter what they flee from; for death is the destination of the soul, and escape from it is a meeting with it." (Sermon 149)

"*Masāq*" is a noun or place name derived from the root "*Sawq*" and refers to a destination that a person reaches or the end of a journey (Makarem Shirazi, 2011-2012 AD/1390-1391 SH: 5, 703). This is the very trap from which a person, in their own assumption, tries to escape, yet it is where they ultimately end up (death).

D) Death as a Hunter with Tools

In the hadiths, tools like ropes, traps, and arrows are attributed to death as a hunter, used to capture human life. "Indeed, death is the destroyer of your pleasures, the darkener of your desires, and the distant one from your worldly goals. It is an unwelcome visitor, an unconquered enemy, and an unwanted pursuer. It has cast its ropes upon you, its snares have enveloped you, and its arrows have targeted you. Its wrath is great and its enmity is relentless, and its aim is

seldom missed... It is as if death has suddenly struck you, silencing your companions, dispersing your gatherings, erasing your traces, and emptying your homes, and has roused your heirs to gather and divide your inheritance among a close friend who has not benefited you, a sorrowful relative who has not prevented it, and a gloating enemy who has not grieved." (Sermon 230)

"Indeed, death... is an unstoppable criminal." The word "Water" means an archer or criminal, derived from the root "Water" meaning "Bowstring." (Makarem, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 8, 490)

Imam Ali (AS) said: "O! People, you are all targets in this world, waiting for death's arrows." (Sermon 145) "*Gharaḍ*" means a target that is shot at, and "*Tantadilu*" means to overcome in a struggle. Man is that target, and the causes of death are the arrows thrown at him. How can a person have peace when enemies from all sides are aiming at him?" (Makarem Shirazi, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 13, 192)

Imam Ali (AS) also stated: "Indeed, Allah has placed a strong shield over me, but when my day comes, it will part from me and surrender me to death. At that time, no arrow will miss its mark, and no wound will heal." (Sermon 62)

If a person truly understands this, they will no longer fear worldly events and will prepare themselves for death. While it's true that there is no shield against death itself, they will recognize that until their predetermined lifespan ends, they will not leave this world. In fact, the predetermined lifespan can be seen as a strong shield against worldly events, as the Imam says, "Indeed, the appointed time (of death) is a strong shield" (Wisdom

E) Death as a Target

If death is an arrow, then the life of man is its target, as stated in the saying: "O! People, you are all targets in this world, waiting for death's arrows." (Sermon 145) And in another saying, Imam Ali (AS) stated: "If anyone could find a ladder to eternity or a way to repel death, it would certainly be Solomon, the son of David, to whom the dominion of the jinn and mankind was subjected, with the position of prophethood and great proximity to God; but when he had completed his provision and his term of life was complete, the bows of annihilation shot the arrows of death at him..." What a powerful metaphor! The Imam compares the law of mortality to bows, and the arrows to death. These bows are aimed at everyone, waiting for the last morsel of sustenance to be consumed and the last moment of life to end; immediately, the arrows are released and hit their targets, whether it be a fly or Solomon" (Sermon 182) (Makarem Shirazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 7, 61).

6-1-10. Summary of the Conceptual Metaphor of Personification for Death

Understanding the conceptual metaphor of personification, in which death is depicted as a human being with human qualities, as shown in Table 1, provides a tangible and concrete understanding of the certainty of death, deterring humans from wrongdoing and preparing them for the afterlife. It's as if humans see death approaching them as a person, coming to meet them, and in this situation, when a person faces such an entity, there is no escape. This image of death evokes another image, as if death is a preacher warning people to be mindful

of their actions and to be prepared for its arrival, because this world is a racecourse and death is a competitor who should not be ignored. By remembering death, one can prepare for its arrival, knowing that it will come sooner or later, like an officer with a final judgment to take a person's life.

Another aspect of death is that it acts as a guardian, protecting humans from desires, sins, and the vicissitudes of life until the end of their lives. This is a more favorable image of death for most people. However, since most people are unaware of the certainty of death and unprepared to meet it, in order to arouse their fear and awaken them, the narratives recreate another image of death, personifying it as a hunter who is pursuing and hunting human lives, swiftly and secretly, taking advantage of their unawareness and firing their arrows at their targets (human lives). The arrow released from the bow never misses its target, and there is no escape for the prey. This hunting scene is very shocking and awakening. Paying attention to such a scenario makes the moment of death and its difficult events more tangible, making the abstract reality of death more understandable and opening the way for people to prepare for it and correct their actions.

Row	Embedded metaphor	Focal point of the metaphor	Source domain	Target domain	Cited verse or narration
1	Death is certain to come	The imminence and certainty of death	The tangible sense of arrival	The occurrence of death	Idhā Jā'a Ajaluhā
2	Death is something that presents to humans	The certainty of death	The tangible presence	The occurrence of death	Idhā Ḥaḍara Aḥadikum al-Mawtu
3	Death is a visitor	The certainty of death	A human encounter with another human	The arrival of death	Inna al-Mawta... Fa'innahū Mulāqīkum

Row	Embedded metaphor	Focal point of the metaphor	Source domain	Target domain	Cited verse or narration	
4	Death is a preacher	Deterrence	The One Who Preaches	Guarding humans from error	Kafā Bil Mawti Wā'izan	
5	Death is the pursuer (runner)	It is someone who competes in a race	Having no way of escape, To overtake	The racer in a hurry	The realization of death and surpassing the human	Thumma Yudrikuhu al-Mawtu
		It is someone who is awaited	Expectation and readiness	Expectation and readiness	The one who is awaited	Man Rāghaba Ajalahū Ightanama Muhalahu
6	Death is an agent	The certainty of death and the futility of fleeing from or fearing it	The appointed judge with a definite decree	The definite command from God	falammā Qaḍaynā 'alayhi al-Mawt	
7	Death is a barrier and a protector	Deterrence Fearlessness of events	Protective human	Protecting humans from error/ Protection from death in accidents	Hā'ilun Baynakum wa Bayna al-Shahawāt	
8	Death is a thief	Loss and regret	The thief	Death and the stealing of everything from a human	Mawtan Khāliṣan	
9	Death is a hunter	It is a kidnapper	There is no escaping from him	Hostage	The deceased are his hostages	Qad Qūdira fī Maḥallihi al-Amwātu Rāhīnan
		It is a kidnapper	There is no escaping from him	Hostage	The deceased are his hostages	"Innaka Ṭurīdu al-Mawti Alladhī Lā Yanjū Minhu Ḥāribuhu wa lā Yafūtuḥu Ṭālibuhu wa lā Budda Annahu Mudrikuḥu
		It is lying in ambush	There is no escaping from his grasp	An inevitable prey	The certainty of taking a life	A body that death lies in wait for

Row	Embedded metaphor	Focal point of the metaphor	Source domain	Target domain	Cited verse or narration
	He has hunting tools	There is no escape from his grasp	Rope Arrow	Taking and intending the life of a person	Qad A'laqatukum Ḥabā'iluhu wa Aqṣadatukum Ma'ābiluhu lā Ya'īshu al-Sahm
	It has a target and a goal	To reach the goal	Hunt	Human soul	Ramathu Qusiya al-Fanā'i Binibāli al-Mawti

Table no. 1. Mappings in the Conceptual Metaphor of Personification for Death

6-2. Animal Metaphors

One of the most commonly used and spontaneously formed metaphors in everyday language is the metaphor of animals and their attributes for various things. "Death is an animal" is another primary conceptual metaphor found in verses and narrations, from which many sub-metaphors arise, creating a terrifying image of death, especially for disbelievers, a fear that is alluded to in some verses:

"...And when fear came, you looked at Him, and your eyes rolled about as if one swooning from death..." (al-Aḥzāb/19)

"...Have you not seen those who left their homes in their thousands, fearing death? But Allah said to them, 'Die,' then He gave them life..." (al-Baqarah/243; see also al-Jumu'ah/8)

In some narrations, death is likened to specific animals due to its horror and severity: "Death for a disbeliever is like the sting of a viper or a scorpion, or even worse." (Shaykh Ṣadūq, 1958 AD/1378 AH: 1, 274) Or because claws and other attributes of wild animals are

associated with it, death has been called a wild and ferocious animal (Sermon 84).

6-2-1. The Ferocious Nature of Death Due to Its Claws

The idea of escaping death arises from the terrifying image of death as a ferocious and dangerous animal that has been formed in people's minds. However, this escape is futile, and the ferocious animal of death tears apart the lives of disbelievers.

In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, there is a metaphor: "It is as if the claws of death have been hooked onto you" (Sermon: 84); "And know that the gaze of death is constantly upon you, as if its claws have been embedded in you." (Sermon 195)

"*Aliqat*" from the root "*Alaq*" originally means a strong connection or attachment to something. This word is used for a wild animal that bites the throat of its prey and sucks its blood or tears it with its claws. Death is compared to such a wild animal, as "*Makhālibu*" also means the claws of animals and comes from the root "*Khalb*" meaning to tear the skin (Makarem Shirazi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 3, 495).

In the two sentences above, death is depicted as a wild animal attacking and assaulting human lives, and to exaggerate, claws are imagined with which the wild animal tears the lives of other creatures. What a horrifying scene, when a person imagines it, they feel the difficulty and terror of the moment of death deep within themselves.

6-2-2. The Ambush of Death

Imam Ali (AS) depicts the ambush of death, which aligns with the metaphorical imagery of death as a predatory beast, as follows: this

predatory creature is ever watchful, ensuring that its prey cannot escape, eventually launching its attack: "Indeed, your situation and that of this world are like travelers who have embarked on a path as if they have already traversed it, and they aim for a destination as if they have reached it. How long can a runner expect to continue until they reach their goal? How long can one who has an appointed day, which cannot be surpassed, hope to remain? Meanwhile, an urgent pursuer—the death—is hastening toward them." (Sermon 99)

The term "*Hathīth*" denotes urgency, pursuit, and swiftly engaging in an action (Makarem Shirazi, 2011-2012 AD/1390-1391 SH: 4, 340–344). In this statement, "The Swift Pursuer" refers to death, which is portrayed as a swift seeker. The terms "Seeker" (*Ṭālib*) and "Urging" (*Hadw*) are metaphorically attributed to death. The word "*Hadw*" symbolizes the factors and causes that inevitably drive human beings toward death (Baḥrānī, n.d: 3, 4; Hashimi Khoei, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 7, 149).

6-2-3. The Sudden and Aggressive Attack of Death

A predatory animal surprises its prey, launching an unexpected attack: "Thus, a servant fears their Lord...because their appointed time of death is hidden from them, and their aspirations deceive them...until their death attacks them suddenly when they are most heedless of it." (Sermon 64)

Elsewhere, Imam Ali (AS) advises his son: "My son! Remember death often, and its sudden and aggressive nature, so that when it comes, you are fully prepared. You must remain girded and ready, expecting its arrival, rather than being caught off guard and overcome

by it." (Letter 31)

Imam further warns: "Hasten toward righteous deeds and fear the sudden arrival of death!" (Sermon 114)

Through this imagery of death as a sudden and aggressive attack—akin to a predatory animal ambushing its prey—fear grips the human soul, prompting one to align their actions in a way that ensures readiness and vigilance, avoiding being caught unprepared.

All these statements illustrate the abruptness of death's attack, emphasizing the lack of preparedness humans typically have in that moment (Makarem Shirazi, 2011-2012 AD/1390-1391 SH: 3, 57).

6-2-4. Death as the Destroyer of Pleasures

A predatory animal, with its sudden attack, obliterates all the pleasures and hopes of its prey. Similarly, death is described by Imam Ali (AS) with loathsome attributes, such as the destruction of worldly pleasures. He states: "Indeed, remember the destroyer of pleasures, the disruptor of desires, and the severer of aspirations, when you are tempted by disgraceful actions." (Sermon 99)

This depiction of death as a force that eradicates human delights and aspirations evokes a deep sense of detachment from the fleeting nature of worldly indulgences (Baḥrānī, n.d.: 4, 103; Hashimi Khoei, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 7, 153).

6-2-5. Death as the Seeker of Prey

Imam Ali (AS) has said: "For every creature, there is sustenance... **71**

and you are the sustenance of death." (Majlisi, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 68, 263) Here, Imam likens death to a living being whose nourishment is human life itself. This metaphor of death as a predatory animal vividly illustrates its relentless pursuit of its prey—human souls—which cannot escape its grasp; as the Imam states: "Indeed, death is an urgent pursuer; it cannot be eluded by those who remain stationary, nor can it be outpaced by those who flee." (Sermon 123)

This imagery underscores the inevitability and inescapability of death, emphasizing its relentless and unyielding nature in claiming its prey.

6-2-6. Summary and Conclusion of Life-Granting Metaphors of Death as an Animal

Table 2 provides a vivid depiction of death personified as a predatory animal; this ferocious creature, constantly seeking prey such as humans, lies in ambush, and ready to surprise its victim. It suddenly attacks, sinking its sharp claws into its prey to tear it apart. At that moment, everything becomes dark and hopeless for the individual. This predatory death, with its sudden onslaught, not only inflicts pain, suffering, and torment but also obliterates the pleasures and aspirations of its victim, leaving no escape or refuge. This metaphorical representation of the abstract concept of death instills fear, compelling individuals to reflect on preparing themselves for the moment of death and the life that follows. By doing so, they may encounter a different, less terrifying face of death and avoid being caught off guard.

Row	Embedded metaphor	Focal point of the metaphor	Source domain	Target domain	Cited verse or narration
1	Death is a predator with claws	The frightening nature and futility of escape, difficulty	Ferocity and attacking	aking a person's life, the difficulty of dying	-Faka'anna qad 'Aliqatukum Makhālību al-Munīyah - Ka'annakum Bimakhālībihā wa qad Nashībat fikum
2	Death is lurking	Waiting for the right moment and ambushing	Attack at the right moment	The sudden and unexpected arrival of death	Man lahu Yawmun lā Ya'udūhu Wa Ṭālibun Ḥathīthun min al-Mawti Yaḥdūhū
3	Death is a sudden, overwhelming attack	Sudden assault	Animal attack	The sudden arrival of death	Dhikr al-Mawti wa Dhikr mā Tahajjam 'alayhi, ...laātika Baghtatuhū fa Yubhiruka
4	Death is the destroyer of pleasures	The pain and despair	The painfulness of the attack	The destruction of pleasures by death	Hādima al-Ladhdhāt wa Munaghghīṣa al-Shahawāt wa Qāṭi'a al-Umnīyyāt
5	Death is a predator seeking its prey	The predator's desire for prey/ The prey's inability to escape	Animal prey	Human soul	Inna al-Mawta Ṭālibun Ḥathīthun lā Yafūtuhū al-Muqīmu wa lā Yu'jizuhū al-Hārib Anta Qūtu al-Mawt

Table no. 2. Mappings in the Conceptual Metaphor of Animating Death: "Death is an Animal"

6-3. Metaphors of Death as a Plant

In certain verses and narrations, death is conceptualized as a plant with attributes such as fragrance and autumnal decay. This imagery provides a tangible representation of death, reconstructing its concept in the human mind.

6-3-1. The Fragrance of Death

A narration states: "Death is the fragrant flower for the believer." (Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 79, 168) In another account, Imam *Riḍā* (AS) conveys the comparison of death to a fragrant flower, as narrated by his father, Imam *Kāzīm* (AS): "When Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) was asked to describe death, he said: For the believer, it is like the most pleasant fragrance they could smell. Its sweetness causes them to drift into a peaceful slumber, freeing them from all fatigue and pain..." (Shaykh *Ṣadūq*, 1958 AD/1378 AH: 1, 274)

6-3-2. The Autumn of Death

In common parlance, approaching death during old age is likened to the "Autumn of Life." This metaphor is based on the conceptual metaphor "Human as a Plant," where human death is mapped onto autumn. Autumn signifies dryness and loss, often evoking regret for the fleeting nature of life.

The comparison between the drying of leaves in autumn and winter and their rejuvenation and regrowth in spring creates a beautiful conceptualization of human death and resurrection. The schema of plant withering and autumn as a metaphor for human death is reflected in verses such as: "And what Allah sends down from the sky of water by which He gives life to the earth after its death," (al-Baqarah/164) and "The example of worldly life is like water We send down from the sky, which mingles with the vegetation of the earth from which people and animals eat, until the earth takes on its adornment and is beautified, and its people think they have mastery over it. Our

command comes to it by night or day, and We make it as if it had not flourished the day before. Thus, We explain the signs for a people who reflect." (Yūnus/24)

6-3-3 Summary and Conclusion of Metaphors of Death as a Plant

Two sub-metaphors, the fragrant flower and autumn, emerge as focal points in the overarching metaphor of death as a plant. These sub-metaphors convey contrasting dimensions of death: one as a source of tranquility and delight, and the other as a symbol of ending and regret. Table 3 summarizes these metaphors. These dual aspects of death as a plant reflect the varied experiences of human death, encouraging faith and contemplation.

Row	Embedded metaphor	Focal point of the metaphor	Source domain	Target domain	Cited verse or narration
1	Death has a scent	Peace and pleasure/ Relief from fatigue and pain	Fragrant flower	The pleasurable and calming nature of death	al-Mawtu Rayḥānat al-Mu'min
2	Death is autumn	The drying up and the end of regret	Drying the plan	The end of worldly life and human lifespan	..Mā'un fa Ahyā bīhil Arḍa Ba'da Mawtiḥā Faja'alnāhā Ḥaṣīdan Ka'anna lam Taghna bil-Amsi

Table no. 3. Mappings in the Conceptual Metaphor of Death as a Plant

Conclusion

The abstract concept of death becomes more comprehensible for humans through the various dimensions of personification metaphors

presented in the Quranic verses, prophetic traditions, and especially the words of Imam Ali (AS). These metaphors depict death in tangible imagery drawn from human life, focusing attention on two distinct types of life and death. The first pertains to worldly life, where the transition, particularly for believers, is likened to a fragrant flower, symbolizing ease and tranquility. The second pertains to a worldly life that ends in hardship, regret, fear, and a sense of loss with no escape, a state reserved for those heedless of death and the hereafter.

The personification of death enables a concrete and perceptible understanding of it, reconstructing the concept of death in such a way that it can deter individuals from wrongdoing and inspire them to prepare for death and the afterlife. Death is portrayed as a visitor, like a human being, coming unavoidably to meet the individual. This metaphor serves as a wake-up call, particularly for those negligent of their mortal reality. Death emerges as a preacher, repeatedly reminding humans that life is a competitive race, with death as one of the contestants, a constant presence demanding readiness for its eventual arrival. Metaphorically, death is also likened to an agent or envoy with a definitive mandate from the ultimate judge (God) to claim the soul of the individual. Moreover, death is depicted as a vigilant protector, shielding humans from desires and worldly dangers until their appointed time of demise. However, once this time arrives, death assumes the form of a swift and relentless pursuer, akin to a hunter lying in wait to seize its target unawares, releasing the fatal blow. Alternatively, death is illustrated as a ravenous predator lying in ambush for its prey, human beings. It suddenly attacks with its sharp

claws, leaving no room for hope or escape, filling the individual with pain and despair, and obliterating all worldly aspirations.

These vivid depictions of the abstract notion of death instill a profound sense of fear, urging individuals to prepare for the moment of death and the life thereafter. Such preparation ensures that death does not strike unexpectedly, catching the individual off guard. This practical application of conceptual metaphors of personification, with their intricate schemas, transforms the abstract reality of death into a more believable and relatable phenomenon, paving the way for readiness and acceptance.

Suggestions

The following topics related to cognitive linguistics and death are proposed for further research:

Exploring additional dimensions of conceptual metaphors of death in religious texts, with a focus on their educational and moral implications;

Conducting a detailed analysis of one specific conceptual metaphor of death in Quranic verses and prophetic traditions.

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