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THE COGNITIVE BRIDGE: HOW COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS ENHANCES THE COMPREHENSION OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN SACRED TEXTS

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Abstract

This article examines the utility of Cognitive Linguistics as a tool for enhancing the hermeneutic depth and reader comprehension of conceptual metaphors within sacred discourse. While traditional philology focuses on the historical and lexical meaning of religious language, Cognitive Linguistics offers a window into the mental architecture that allows finite humans to process infinite concepts. By applying the Great Chain of Being metaphor and the theory of Grounded Cognition, this study explores how the brain recruits sensory-motor experiences to decode divine attributes. The research concludes that Cognitive Linguistics provides a systematic methodology for identifying cognitive equivalence in translation, thereby ensuring that the sacred text maintains its transformative power across linguistic boundaries.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Sacred Texts, Conceptual Metaphor, Comprehension, Grounded Cognition, Hermeneutics.

The Foundational Role of Cognitive Linguistics in Sacred Hermeneutics

The comprehension of sacred texts often presents a fundamental paradox: the subjects addressed, such as the nature of the Divine, the mechanics of eternity, and the parameters of moral perfection, are, by definition, beyond the immediate scope of human sensory experience. Traditionally, theologians and translators have relied on apophasis, or describing what the divine is not, to resolve this tension. However, Cognitive Linguistics provides a third path by treating metaphors not as decorative tropes but as essential mappings of understanding. This field explains how the human mind bridges the gap between the known and the unknowable through systematic conceptual proeksiyalash.

Metaphor, in this light, is not a linguistic ornament but a cognitive necessity. This article argues that Cognitive Linguistics enhances comprehension by identifying the specific sensory-motor inputs that drive theological outputs. By analyzing the mental structures used to process sacred language, we can better understand how spiritual truths are grounded in physical reality. This shift in perspective moves the study of sacred texts from a purely philological exercise to a psychological and cognitive investigation into the very nature of religious belief and its linguistic expression.

Grounded Cognition and the Mapping of the Divine Hierarchy

Comprehension is significantly enhanced when we realize that sacred metaphors are not arbitrary linguistic choices but are deeply rooted in the theory of grounded cognition. This theory suggests that all mental processes, no matter how abstract, are intrinsically linked to bodily states and physical interactions. Sacred texts frequently utilize the Great Chain of Being metaphor, a vertical

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hierarchy that maps properties from lower levels, such as inanimate objects, plants, and animals, onto higher levels like humanity and the divine.

When a sacred text employs a metaphor such as the rock of salvation or the light of the world, the mind is not performing a simple literal comparison. Instead, it is performing a sophisticated attribute mapping. We map the stability and immovability of the rock onto the target domain of divine reliability. Cognitive Linguistics enhances our comprehension by allowing us to see these mappings as logical, predictable structures. This approach clarifies that religious language is not a collection of mysterious riddles but a systematic application of human conceptual tools to describe the transcendent. It provides a bridge between the material world we inhabit and the spiritual world the text seeks to reveal.

Image Schemas and the Spatial Scaffolding of Spiritual Narratives

A major contribution of Cognitive Linguistics to the study of sacred texts is the identification of image schemas. These are the pre-conceptual skeletons that organize our perception of reality and our movement through space. For example, the source-path-goal schema is the primary tool for comprehending the spiritual journey. In English translations of the Quran, the concept of the straight path provides a clear example of this structure.

To a reader, straightness is not just a geometric quality; it is a cognitive mapping of ease of navigation and moral integrity. By identifying these schemas, the researcher can understand why certain translations are more cognitively resonant than others. A path that is straight is cognitively easier to follow than one that is winding or obscured, which maps onto the difficulty of avoiding sin or moral error. This schema allows the abstract concept of a righteous life to be processed with the same clarity as physical movement toward a destination. This spatial scaffolding ensures that the moral instructions of the text are not just understood intellectually but felt as a physical direction.

The Resolution of Paradox through Mental Spaces and Blending

One of the greatest hurdles in comprehending sacred texts is the presence of paradoxes, such as a deity being both immanent and transcendent. Traditional linguistics often struggles with such contradictions, labeling them as purely symbolic or illogical. However, mental space theory enhances comprehension by showing that the mind creates separate files or spaces for different aspects of a concept. Through the process of conceptual blending, these disparate mental spaces are integrated into a new, emergent structure.

The reader does not see the paradox as a logical error but as a sophisticated integration of meaning. The blend allows the mind to hold the concepts of divine closeness and divine distance simultaneously. This creates a theological understanding that is more than the sum of its parts, allowing the believer to navigate complex dogmas without abandoning cognitive coherence. This mechanism explains how sacred texts can present the Infinite in terms that a finite mind can grasp without reducing the Divine to mere human proportions.

Achieving Cognitive Equivalence in the Act of Translation

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For the translator, Cognitive Linguistics enhances comprehension by moving the goalpost from lexical accuracy to cognitive equivalence. A literal translation of an Arabic metaphor may fail in English if it does not trigger the same image schema in the mind of the target reader. For instance, if a source metaphor relies on a desert schema where water represents life and grace, the translator must ensure the English reader understands the mapping that vitality is water. If the reader lacks the physical experience of water scarcity, the comprehension of the metaphor may be diminished.

Cognitive Linguistics provides the tools to adjust these mappings to ensure the spiritual impact remains intact across different cultural and environmental contexts. It allows for a more nuanced approach where the translator acts as a cognitive bridge, ensuring that the metaphorical logic of the original text is successfully reconstructed in the target language. This honors the complexity of how we engage with sacred language, focusing on the interface between the human mind and the sacred word to ensure it remains persuasively powerful across ancient and modern conceptual frameworks.

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