
**The Role of Conceptual Metaphors
in Constructing Euphemistic Expressions of Death
in English and Arabic**

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor, Culture, Death

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Abstract

This study aims at examining the interaction between conceptual metaphors (CMs) and euphemistic expressions (EEs) and exploring the influence of culture on them. The study is limited to the domain of death. To achieve the aims of the study, a set of death CMs and a set of death EEs in English and Arabic are selected from certain dictionaries and books. The interaction between CMs and EEs is investigated using Lakoff & Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980/2003), taking into consideration Warren's model (1992) regarding metaphor as one of the semantic innovations for constructing euphemisms. It is found that English and Arabic share the same source domains *departure* and *an end* for the target domain *death*, in addition to culture-specific source domains in English and Arabic. The study provides insight into a significant need for using linguistic metaphors in EEs, which are not used randomly, but rather they are based on certain CMs structured in the mind. Some of these CMs are mentioned in the selected books and others are inferred by the researcher.

1. Introduction

People try to communicate politely and respectfully without causing pain or embarrassment to each other. There are certain taboos in all languages and cultures, including the topics of disease, death, sex, among others. People avoid using painful or unaccepted words with each other. Therefore, they try to use figurative devices, namely, metaphors and euphemisms to mitigate some of the negative aspects of taboos.

Metaphors and euphemisms exist in English and Arabic. Both are associated with figurative language and used by people to express and convey meanings that are different from the literal meanings. They characterize "high style" in a polite society and figurative literature (Allan and Burrige, 2006, p. 88). In this study, a theoretical insight into metaphor and euphemism is presented taking into consideration Warren's view of regarding metaphor as one of the semantic innovations for constructing euphemisms. This study is different from euphemism and metaphor – related studies in that its data are selected from dictionaries and books rather than by using a questionnaire and participants.

The linguistic metaphors that are used in the selected death EEs in English and Arabic will be analyzed in terms of conceptual source domains, considering

death as the target domain. However, the study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1 To what extent are EEs in English and Arabic based on CMs?
- 2 What are the shared CMs in both languages concerning death as the target domain?
- 3 What are the culture-specific CMs that distinguish English and Arabic?
- 4 How does culture influence CMs and EEs?

2. Theoretical Background

This section takes account of metaphor including linguistic metaphors and conceptual metaphors. It also sheds light on euphemism taking into consideration its construction and definitions from different points of view .

2.1 Conceptual Metaphors

To start with, Aristotle defines metaphor as "the application to one thing of a name belonging to another" (cited in Aitchison, 1999, pp. 141-142). Knowles and Moon (2006, p. 2) define metaphor as "the use of language to refer to something other than what it was originally applied to, or what it 'literally' means, in order to make a connection between the two things ". Knowles and Moon consider metaphor as an important feature of language and it is pervasive in language, thought, and everyday life.

Many meanings of multi-meaning words can be used metaphorically (Knowles and Moon pp. 3-4). For example, the meaning of *field* in the following example has a metaphorical meaning:

1. She has published many papers in the *field* of linguistics.

Trask (2007, p. 169) distinguishes between linguistic metaphor and conceptual metaphor. Linguistic metaphor is the non-literal use of a linguistic form that is intended to draw attention to a perceived similarity, whereas conceptual metaphor is a "mental mapping between two domains: a source domain of familiar meanings and a target domain of the new meaning in focus".

Lakoff & Johnson introduced Conceptual Metaphor Theory in 1980 and they revised it in 2003. According to Lakoff & Johnson, CMs are structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. They have the structure X is Y. The metaphorical mappings have partial nature due to their properties of highlighting, hiding, and utilization. The source domain concentrates on one or some aspect(s) of the target domain. The metaphor highlights the aspect(s) in focus and hides the others (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 10). Some aspects of the source are conceptually utilized to understand the target domain (Kövecses, 2010, p. 93). This correspondence between the source and target domains makes cognitive conceptualization achieve its euphemistic function. Therefore, the source domain is used to understand and mitigate the target domain (Crespo-Fernández, 2006, p. 107). The mitigating capacity of metaphors is used as an effective factor for expressing EEs of death. For example, *death* and *sleep* share the action of closing eyes, the state of inactivity, and being temporary (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, pp. 18-19 and Turner, 2000, p. 157). Therefore, *death* is conceptualized as *sleep* in:

DEATH IS SLEEP

2. He closed his eyes. = He died

Andriessen (2008, p. 7) emphasizes that metaphors highlight and hide some characteristics in a way that people are not aware of. The properties of highlighting, hiding, and utilization of DEATH AS SLEEP metaphor are shown in figure (1):

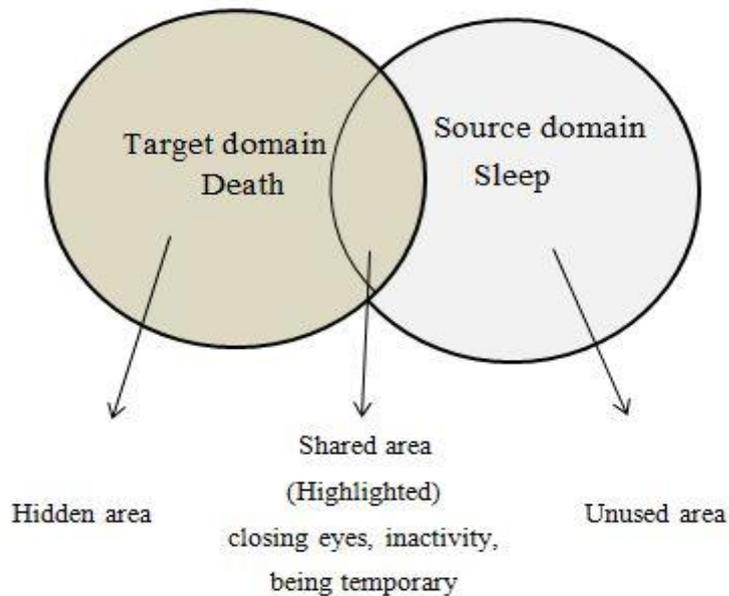


Figure 1. Adapted from Andriessen (2008)

DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor

This figure shows the shared area between the target domain *death* and the source domain *sleep*. They share the properties of closing eyes, inactivity, and being temporary.

Leech (1981, pp. 214-215) asserts that "the principle of partial productivity" may operate in semantic transfer of which metaphor is an important type. He gives the following examples of animal names that are applied metaphorically to human beings:

Pig, rat, mouse, and hawk

When the suffix -y is added to these nouns, the following adjectives are produced:

Piggy, ratty, mousy, hawky

The function of the suffix (-y) is quasi-metaphorical. Consider the following examples:

3. Sam is a pig.

4. Sam is piggy.

Leech (1981, p. 2017) distinguishes between the literal meaning and the figurative meaning of the metaphorical expressions. For example, the phrase "a doughnut of mud" referring to a piece of mud that is similar to "a doughnut" in being "round, soft, and sticky". The literal meaning of the phrase is basic and considerable referring to a piece of mud. There is no fusion of "doughnutness"

and "muddiness." Cruse (2006, p. 106) considers metaphor as a variety of figurative use of language. The relation between the figurative meaning and the literal meaning of a metaphorical expression involves resemblance that is not explicitly expressed.

Concerning the universality and variation in metaphor, Lakoff (1993, p. 245) points out that some metaphorical mappings are universal and others seem to be "culture – specific." According to Kövecses (2005, p. 3), variation and universality in metaphor are important and common. He adds cross-cultural variation and within-culture variation. Both of them deal with social and cultural divisions that may result in metaphor variation because of people's different experiences in cultural and social life (Kövecses (2005, p. 89).

CMs serve as a powerful device for death EEs to avoid mentioning death directly and to reduce the painful effects of someone's death. Death imagery usually comes from certain concepts such as passing, moving, resting, stopping, departing, crossover, transition, and sleeping. Renton (1990, p 38-39) in his dictionary *Metaphorically Speaking* mentions the different grammatical forms of linguistic metaphors. Metaphors in English can be expressed by the following structures:

1. Verb phrases
2. Noun phrases
3. Adjectival phrases
4. Adverbial phrases

Renton points out that 70 % of the metaphorical expressions listed in the dictionary begin with a verb.

2.2 Euphemism

EEs are used as a powerful device that helps people to communicate politely and respectfully. Euphemism means in Greek "well-speaking" and it is the linguistic equivalent of disinfectant (Leech, 1981, p 45). Allan and Burridge (1991, p. 11) mention the reason behind using euphemism. It is used as an alternative to an unpleasant and a dispreferred expression to avoid a possible loss of face.

Cruse (2006, p. 57) defines euphemism as "an expression that refers to something that people hesitate to mention lest it causes offence, but which lessens the offensiveness by referring indirectly in some way."

Leech (1981, pp. 45-46) discusses euphemisms from a semantic point of view. He says that euphemism refers to something offensive or unpleasant in a way that makes it seem more pleasant and acceptable. He adds that the unpleasant and undesirable connotations of a word are "not the fault of the word itself, but of what it refers to." So, when the euphemistic expression that is used to replace the original word "gets tarred with the same brush" i.e. it acquires the same negative traits of the original word, another euphemistic expression is used. For this reason, there are many EEs for taboo words. In English, for example, there are many EEs for lavatory: WC (water closet), privy, toilet, cloakroom, restroom, comfort room, and loo. In using euphemistic expressions, one tries to "purge the subject of its damaging affective associations". Therefore,

euphemism has an inevitable effect on unpleasant and unavoidable associations in dealing with subjects like death, disease, and other taboos.

Along the same line, Palmer (1981, p. 92) emphasizes the same view. He asserts that the process of changing taboo words is unending because it is basically the object and not the word that is avoidable and unpleasant. Lyons (1995, pp. 132-133) attributes the acceptability and meaningfulness of certain utterances in some societies to socio-cultural reasons. For example, the word *die* is considered a taboo in a certain society with regard to "members of the speaker's or hearer's immediate family". For example, the use of *die* in (5) is fully grammatical, meaningful, and acceptable

5. His father *died* last night.

The same verb in (6) is not equally grammatical, meaningful, and acceptable, so the euphemistic expression *pass a way* is more acceptable:

6. My father *died* last night.

7. My father *passed away* last night.

Warren (1992) introduces two basic types of innovations for constructing euphemisms with sub-divisions:

1. Formal innovations: including word formation, phonemic modification, and loan words.
2. Semantic innovations: including particularizations, implications, metaphors, metonyms, reversals, understatements, and overstatements.

It is noted that metaphor is one of the semantic innovations for constructing euphemisms. Warren's model (1992) is shown in figure (2):

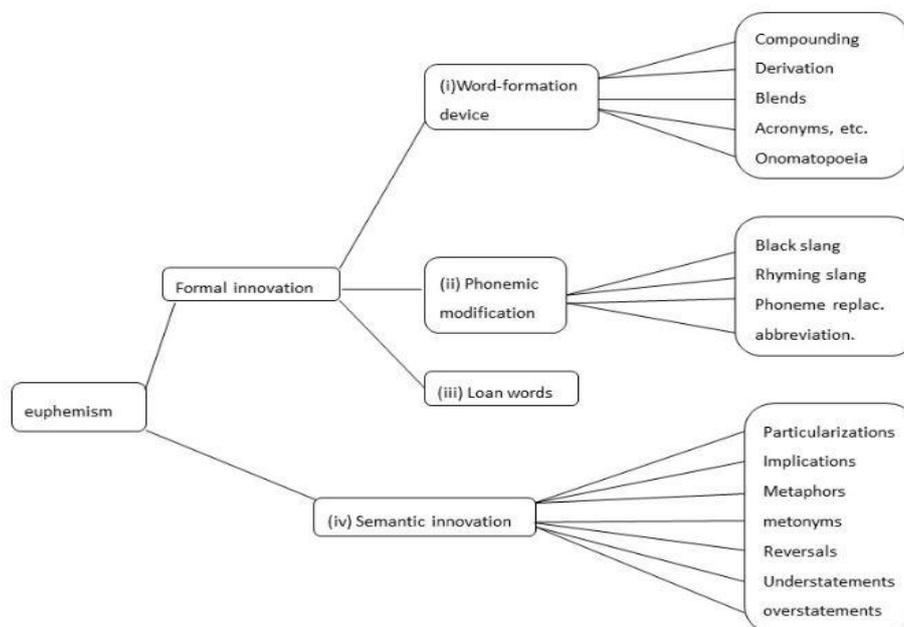


Figure 2. Warren's model of euphemism (1992)

Turner in his book *Death is the Mother of Beauty* (2000, pp. 23, 25, 58) uses the structure *xyz* metaphor to form kinship metaphors. He presents seven basic

metaphors; among them, the following metaphors from which metaphors of *death* can be derived:

ABSTRACT PROPERTY IS THE PARENT OF SOMETHING HAVING THAT PROPERTY

MEMBERS OF A NATURAL GROUP ARE SIBLINGS

Metaphors of *death* are:

DEATH IS THE BROTHER OF SLEEP

NIGHT, SISTER OF HEAVY DEATH

DEATH IS THE MOTHER OF BEAUTY

It can be noticed that *death* is conceptualized as a male in:

DEATH IS THE BROTHER OF SLEEP

and a female in:

DEATH IS THE MOTHER OF BEAUTY

Many studies have investigated the interaction between metaphor and EEs of taboos and unacceptable topics. The up-to-date one is entitled "*COVID-19 Pandemic: Euphemism and Dysphemism in Jordanian Arabic*", which investigates "the use of euphemism and dysphemism in the Jordanian society for dealing with COVID-19" by Olimat (2020). COVID-19 is conceptualized as TEST, A CHALLENGE, PANDEMIC, among others.

The domain of this study is *death*. Allen and Burridge (2006, p. 222) describe *death* as a fear-based taboo because there is "fear of the loss of loved ones; fear of the corruption and disintegration of the body; fear of the very finality of death; fear of what follows the end of life...; fear of malevolent spirits, or of the souls of the dead."

3. Methodology

This section presents the model of analysis, data collection, procedures of analysis, analysis of English data, analysis of Arabic data, and results and discussions.

3.1 Model of analysis

The main idea behind using the following model of analysis is to show the interaction between EEs and CMs. The model of analysis is based on Warren's view of metaphor as one of the semantic innovations for constructing euphemisms, and Lakoff & Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Linguistic metaphors refer to EEs adopted in this study. They are based on CMs that are structured in the mind. The following figure shows the model of analysis:

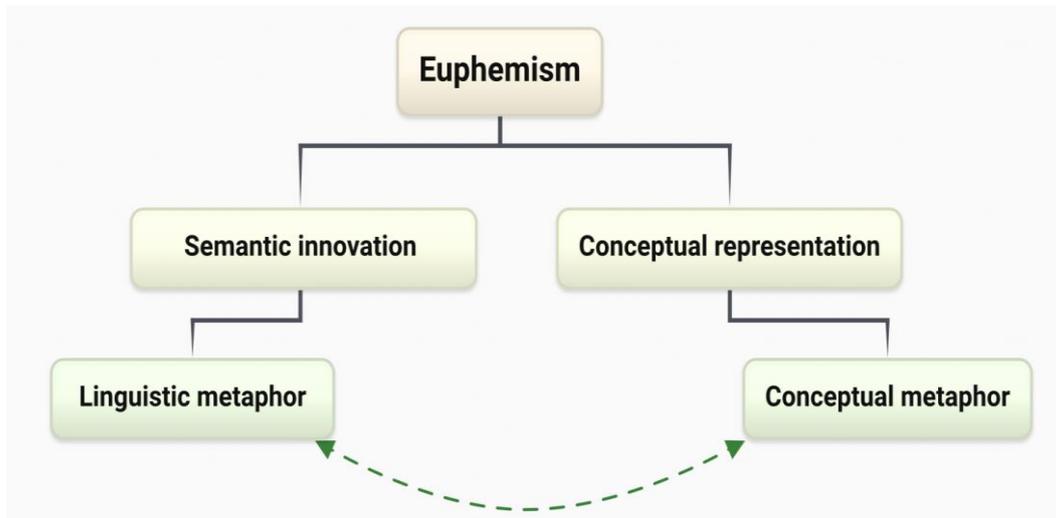


Figure 3. Model of analysis

3.2 Data Collection and Procedures of Analysis

To achieve the goal of the study, a set of death CMs are selected from Lakoff and Turner's *More than cool reason* (1989), Kövecses' *Metaphor* (2010), and Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we live* (1980/2003). Concerning EEs in English, a set of death EEs in English containing metaphorical expressions are selected from Rawson's *dictionary of euphemisms & other doubletalk* (1981) and Holder's *How not to say what you mean: A dictionary of euphemisms* (2002). A set of EEs of death in Arabic containing metaphorical expressions, on the other hand, are selected from two Arabic collections that concentrate on the rhetoric aspects of Arabic: *المنتخب من الجرجاني* (1908) and *التهالبي for الكناية والتعريض* (1998).

The linguistic metaphors that are expressed in the selected death EEs begin with a verb. They will be analyzed in terms of conceptual source domains, considering *death* as the target domain. This may help to show how *death* is perceived and accepted. The following CMs are adopted to serve the analysis of the death EEs in English and Arabic. The first five metaphors are selected from Lakoff and Turner's *More than cool reason* (1989), Kövecses' *Metaphor* (2010), and Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors we live* (1980/2003), whereas the last five are inferred by the researcher depending on some EEs mentioned in the study:

DEATH IS DEPARTURE
 DEATH IS SLEEP
 DEATH IS REST
 DEATH IS THE AN END
 DEATH IS DOWN
 DEATH IS UP
 DEATH IS HAPPINESS
 DEATH IS DEBT

DEATH IS A VOW IN DEDICATION TO ALLAH

DEATH IS CESSATION OF BODILY FUNCTIONS

3.3 Analysis of English Data

The target domain *death* in English has the following source domains and euphemistic expressions:

1. DEATH IS DEPARTURE

Death is conceptualized as *departure* and other similar concepts such as, *movement*, *passing*, *crossing*, and *going to a better place*. Therefore, *death* is the target domain that is expressed in terms of the source domain *departure* and the similar concepts. It is to be mentioned that one of the source domains is based on a religious belief referring to the departure out of this world and going to a better world. The metaphorical expressions used to express death EEs in English are the following:

Cross over

Pass away

Go west

Go to a better world

2. DEATH IS SLEEP

In English, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *sleep*. The metaphorical expressions used to express death EEs are the following:

Close eyes

Conk out

Go to sleep

Fall asleep

3. DEATH IS REST

In English, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *rest*. The metaphorical expressions used to express death EEs are the following:

Go to rest

Laid to rest

Come to your resting place

4. DEATH IS AN END

In English, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *an end*. The metaphorical expression used to express death EEs is the following:

Expire

5. DEATH IS CESSATION OF BODILY FUNCTIONS

In English, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *cessation of bodily functions*. The metaphorical expressions used to express death EEs are the following:

Cease breathing

Breathe your last

Bring your heart to its final pause

6. DEATH AS DOWN

In English, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *down*. The metaphorical expression used to express death euphemistic expression is the following :

Fall down

The source domains and EEs of death in English are explained in table (1):

Table 1. Source Domains and their EEs in English

3.4 Analysis of Arabic Data

The target domain *death* in Arabic has the following source domains and euphemistic expressions:

1. DEATH IS DEPARTURE

In Arabic, *death* is conceptualized as *departure* and other similar concepts such as *movement*, *passing*, and *moving to the place of righteous*. It is expressed in terms of the source domain *departure* and the similar concepts. It can be observed from the following EEs that religion plays a significant and considerable role in the formation of these expressions that are based on DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor. The EEs used to express death in Arabic are the following:

نقله الله إلى دار رضوانه ومحل غفرانه
 اختار الله له النقلة من دار البوار إلى محل الأبرار
 لحق فلان باللطيف الخبير
 مضى لسبيله
 نقله الله إلى جواره

2. DEATH IS HAPPINESS

Source	Euphemistic expressions
Departure	Pass away, go west , go to a better place , cross over
Sleep	Close eyes, Conk out, Go to sleep, Fall asleep
Rest	Go to rest, Laid to rest, Come to your resting place
End	Expire (come to an end, breathe your last breath)
Cessation of bodily functions	Cease breathing , breathe your last , bring your heart to its Final pause
Down	Fall down

In Arabic, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *happiness*. The metaphorical expressions used to express death EEs are the following, which are highly influenced by Islamic belief in considering death as happiness:

اسعده الله بجواره
كتبت له سعادة المحتضر

3. DEATH IS AN END

In Arabic, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *an end*. This metaphor is also common in English. The metaphorical expressions used to express death EEs are the following:

قد استكمل فلان حد الانسان
لعق فلان اصبعه
استوفى اكله

4. DEATH IS A DEBT

In Arabic, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain a *debt*. The metaphorical verb used to express death EEs is the following:

رماه الله بدينه

5. DEATH IS A VOW IN DEDICATION TO ALLAH

In Arabic, the target domain death is expressed in terms of the source domain a vow in dedication to Allah. The metaphorical verb used to express death EEs is the following:

قضى نحبه

6. DEATH IS UP

In Arabic, the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of the source domain *UP*. This metaphor is influenced by the Islamic belief that death has a positive aspect. The euphemistic expressions used to express death are the following:

شالت نعامته
رفعه الله اليه
طار من ماله الثمين
حلقت به العنقاء

The source domains and EEs of death in Arabic are explained in table (2):

Table 2. Source Domains and their EEs in Arabic

Source	Euphemistic metaphorical
Departure	نقله الله إلى دار رضوانه ومحل غفرانه اختار الله له النقلة من دار البوار إلى محل الأبرار لحق فلان باللطيف الخبير مضى لسبيله نقله الله إلى جواره
Happiness	اسعده الله بجواره كتبت له سعادة المحتضر
End	لعق فلان إصبعه استوفى أكله

	قد استكمل فلان حد الإنسان
Debt	رماه الله بدينه
Vow	قضى نحبه
Up	شالت نعمته رفعه الله اليه طار من ماله الثمين حلقت به العنقاء

3.5 Results and Discussions

The present study has investigated CMs and EEs in English and Arabic . It can be noted that both languages have EEs and CMs for mitigating the negative aspects of death. This result indicates that the fear of death is instilled The analysis shows that the English euphemistic expressions of death are based on CMs that are structured in the mind. The target domain DEATH in English is conceptualized as DEPARTURE, SLEEP, REST, AN END, CESSATION OF BODILY FUNCTIONS, and DOWN. In Arabic, on the other hand, DEATH is conceptualized as DEPARTURE, HAPPINESS, AN END, DEBT, VOW, and UP.

The following tables and figures show information about the analysis of English and Arabic EEs including the frequencies and percentages of the source domains for death.

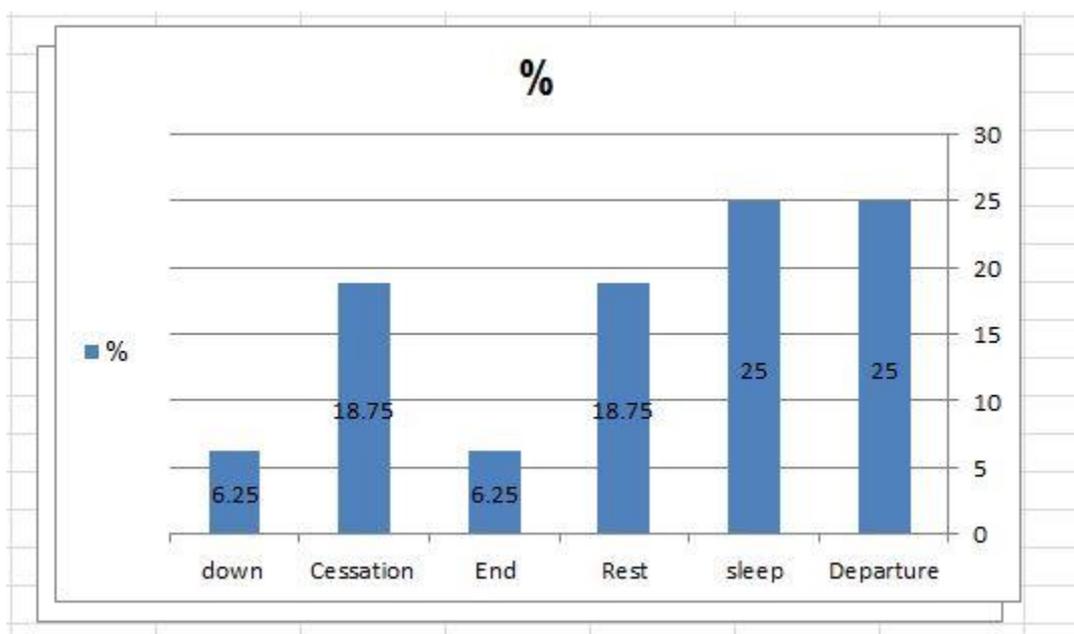


Figure 3. Percentages of Source Domains in English

Table 3. Frequencies and Percentages of Source Domains in English

Kind	Departure	Sleep	Rest	End	Cessation	Down	Total
Frequency	4	4	3	1	3	1	16
Percentage	25%	25%	18.75%	6.25%	18.75%	6.25%	100

In English, the results of analysis show that the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of *departure*, *passing*, and *movement* (25%), *sleep* (25%), *rest* (18.75%), *an end* (6.25%), *cessation of bodily functions* (18.75%), and it is expressed as *down* (6.25%). The results indicate that the highest frequent source domains are *departure* and *sleep* followed by *cessation* and *rest*. The least frequent source domains are *an end* and *down*.

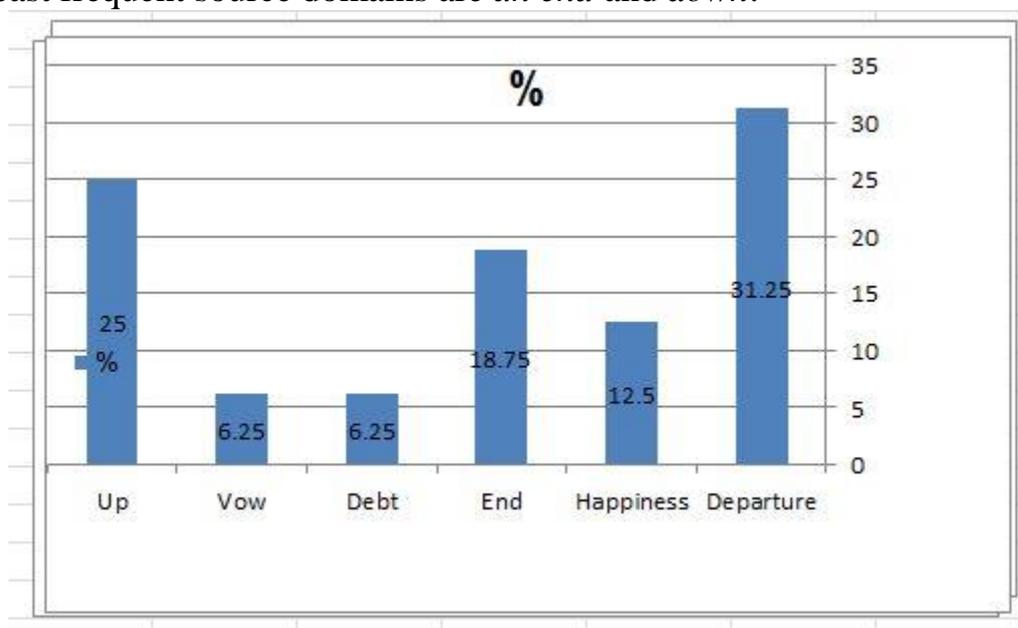


Figure 4. Percentages of Source Domains in Arabic

Table 4. Frequencies and Percentages of source domains in Arabic

Kind	Departure	Happiness	End	Debt	Vow	Up	Total
Frequency	5	2	3	1	1	4	16
Percentage	31.25%	12.50%	18.75%	6.25%	6.25%	25%	100

In Arabic, the results of analysis show that the target domain *death* is expressed in terms of *departure* (31.25%), *happiness* (12.50%), *an end* (18.75%), *debt* (6.25%), *vow* (6.25%), and it is expressed as *up* (25%).

The results indicate that the highest frequent source concept is *departure* followed by *up*, *an end*, and *happiness*. The least frequent source concepts are *debt* and *vow*.

It is clear that both English and Arabic share the CMs:

DEATH IS DEPARTURE

DEATH IS AN END

It is true that *death* is departure because the dead person no longer exists. This is a universal fact. *Death* is also the end of life because life is conceptualized as a journey and death is the end of the journey. It is to be mentioned that one of the EEs that is based on the source domain DEATH IS DEPARTURE is based on a religious belief referring to the departure out of this world and going to a better world

Some CMs appear only in English. They have culture-specific source domains, which are *sleep*, *rest*, *cessation of bodily functions*, and *down*. These CMs and the related EEs show the English and American attitude towards death. It is one of denial (Jalland, 2014, p.8: <http://ernestbecker.org/lecture-6-denial>):

DEATH IS SLEEP

DEATH IS REST

DEATH IS CESSATION OF BODILY FUNCTIONS

DEATH IS DOWN

The culture –specific source domains in Arabic are *up*, *happiness*, *debt*, and *vow in dedication to Allah*. These CMs and the related EEs indicate the importance of the Islamic belief. Considering the EEs that are based on these source domains, it can be noted that religion plays a significant and considerable role in the formation of these expressions:

DEATH IS UP

DEATH IS HAPPINESS

DEATH IS DEBT

DEATH IS A VOW IN DEDICATION TO ALLAH

There is a religious belief in Islam concerning death, which is that the dead will be in a better place after death. Therefore, death is conceptualized in Arabic as *happiness* and *up*.

Conclusions

According to the results of the analysis, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. CMs have an effective impact on constructing the EEs of death due to the properties of hiding and highlighting.
2. Metaphor is the optimal device that is used basically for mitigating and softening the unpleasant aspects of death.
3. The culture of societies helps to constitute the EEs of death.
4. There are some similarities and differences in the conceptualization of death in English and Arabic.
5. English and Arabic share some universal EEs based on the same CMs.

6. Some EEs in English and Arabic are culture – specific reflecting the different background of people.
7. Metaphor and euphemism are two related concepts that are essential to our understanding of how English and Arabic metaphorical euphemisms can be effectively used to mitigate some unacceptable aspects of certain taboos.

أثر الاستعارات المفهومية في تركيب

تعبير التلطيف الخاصة بالموت باللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعارة المفهومية ، الثقافة ، الموت ، تعبير التلطيف

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة العلاقة بين الاستعارات المفهومية وعبارات التلطيف ومدى تأثير الثقافة عليها. تقتصر الدراسة على الاستعارات المفهومية وتعبير التلطيف الخاصة بموضوع الموت. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة ، تم اختيار مجموعة من الاستعارات المفهومية ومجموعة من تعبير التلطيف الخاصة بالموت باللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية من بعض القواميس والكتب. لمعرفة العلاقة بين الاستعارات المفهومية وتعبير التلطيف تم استخدام نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية التي قدمها لاكوف وجونسون (١٩٨٠ / ٢٠٠٣) ، مع الأخذ بنظر الاعتبار نموذج ورن (١٩٩٢) الذي اعتبر الاستعارة أحد الوسائل الدلالية لتركيب تعبير التلطيف. لقد تبين من نتائج البحث أن اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية تشتركان في بعض الاستعارات المفهومية منها إن الموت مغادرة ونهاية ، فضلا عن بعض الاستعارات المفهومية الأخرى الخاصة بالثقافتين الإنكليزية والعربية. تؤكد هذه الدراسة على أهمية استخدام الاستعارات اللغوية في تعبير التلطيف وان هذه التعبيرات لا تستعمل بشكل عشوائي وإنما تعتمد على الاستعارات المفهومية الموجودة في العقل، بعض هذه الاستعارات موجودة في الكتب المختارة وبعضها الآخر تم استنتاجها من قبل الباحث.

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Appendix

1. English euphemistic expressions:

Breathe your last

Bring your heart to its final pause

Cease breathing

Close eyes

Come to your resting place

Conk out = fall asleep, and go to sleep

Cross over

Expire

Fall asleep

Go to a better world

Go to rest

Go to sleep

Go west

Laid to rest

Pass away

Pass out

2. Arabic euphemistic expressions

اختار الله له النقلة من دار البوار الى محل الابرار

استوفي اكله

اسعده الله بجواره
حلقت به العنقاء
خلي مكانه
رفعه الله اليه
رماه الله بدينه
طار من ماله
قد استكمل فلان حد الانسان
قضى نحبه
كتبت له سعادة المحتضر
لحق فلان باللطيف الخبير
لعق فلان اصبعه
مضى لسبيله
نقله الله الى جواره
نقله الله الى دار رضوانه ومحل غفرانه