

Aesthetics of Metaphorical Imagery in Nahj al-Balaghah - Chapter of Wisdom and Sermons as an Example

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ABSTRACT

This study represents an attempt to explore the function of metaphor in achieving semantic displacement, with the sayings of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib as the practical focus. Metaphor was both a concealed and explicit carrier of meaning, and therefore the study focused on eliciting the lexicographic meaning that presents the original meaning that the term was created for. The study then moved on to uncover the hidden semantic meaning behind the lexicographic one, which retains a high degree of significance that is suitable for carrying the two meanings. In this way, metaphor becomes an effective tool in unlocking the secrets of discourse and revealing its hidden meanings.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Metaphorical Imagery, Nahj al-Balaghah, Wisdom and Sermons, Arabic Literature.

Introduction

The term metaphor or what is called "istia'ra" in Arabic refers to a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. The Al-Muajam Al-Waseet dictionary defines it as "requesting something from someone to be given to him nakedly (without compensation), and it is said that he borrowed it from him" (1). The terms "al-'ariyah" and "al-'arah" refer to the things that people exchange between themselves. The act of borrowing and exchanging is typically done between two people who know the reason behind the borrowing (2). This principle also applies to linguistic borrowing, where two words share a common meaning and are used to convey a specific message. This is similar to the understanding between two people in the exchange of borrowed items. This concept is known among rhetoricians as "al-ta'aruf al-ma'ni" or "the moral agreement" (3). Therefore, the technical meaning of the term "istia'ra" is based on its linguistic meaning, as the origin of metaphorical borrowing is derived from the real act of borrowing, which is a type of transaction between two people (4).

In an attempt to define the rhetorical and terminological meaning of isti'arah, the judge al-Jurjani states: "Isti'arah is only what is satisfied

with the substituted name for the origin, and the phrase is transferred to another place. Its essence is to approximate similarity, the appropriateness of the substituted to the original, and the fusion of the word with the meaning, so that there is no discord between them and there is no indication of aversion in one of them towards the other" (5). This is a similar relationship, but it differs from metaphor by eliminating one of its two elements. As Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani states: "Isti'arah is to intend to compare something with something else, then to let go of the comparison and reveal it, and come to the name of what is compared, then give it the meaning of what is compared and use it for it. You want to say: 'I saw a man who is like a lion in his courage and strength of his grip,' so you leave that and say: 'I saw a lion' (6).

Thus, the relationship between the two parts of a metaphor is figurative, claiming that the compared object is like the comparator itself. Based on this, Al-Sakkaki defines metaphor as follows: "It is to mention one part of the comparison and intend the other part, claiming the entrance of the compared object into the genus of the comparator, indicating that by proving to the compared object what pertains to the comparator" (7).

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Abu Hilal Al-Askari also defined metaphor and its purposes by stating: "Metaphor is the transfer of a phrase from its original usage to another for a purpose, and that purpose can be to explain the meaning and clarify it, or to emphasize and exaggerate it, or to refer to it with few words, or to improve the subject in which it appears. These characteristics are present in the defective metaphor. If it were not for the fact that the defective metaphor includes what reality does not include, it would have been more appropriate to use the reality" (8).

Based on these purposes, we can say that recognizing the aesthetic value of figurative language in literary works requires understanding the semantic fields and symbols in every aspect of material, intellectual, and psychological life. When this awareness of a particular semantic field or symbol that has been embraced by the figure of speech is achieved, the element of surprise and unexpectedness is realized in a way that breaks the monotony and familiarity of the usual sequence of meanings within the context. Thus, through figurative language, a convergence occurs between two different semantic contexts. The figurative word, derived from a distant semantic field, does not completely lose its original meaning but retains its shadows (9).

In conclusion, figurative language among the ancients was the use of a word in a meaning other than the meaning it was originally known for, transferring it from its real meaning to its figurative meaning, with a companion that prevents the intended meaning from being the original meaning. The aesthetics of this figurative language in the words of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) form the focus of the following paragraphs, based on what Abdul Qahir Al-Jurjani mentioned in his discussion of useful figurative language, as will be discussed later.

Metaphor between Expansion and Intensification

Metaphor is based on the property of semantic expansion, where the meanings of a single word are multiplied. Abdul Qahir Al-Jurjani, when describing the merits of useful metaphor, stated that "it is a vast field, most captivating, flowing, beautifully excellent, and furthest in depth" (10). This semantic expansion is linked to the property of intensification. As one of its qualities, which is indicative of its excellence, it provides numerous

meanings with few words. It can extract several gems from a single shell and various fruits from one branch (10).

Upon close examination of Imam Ali's (peace be upon him) statement, "Whoever sharpens the teeth of anger for Allah, is powerful enough to slay the most stubborn falsehood" (11), we can observe the use of figurative language that creates semantic expansiveness, turning the image into a field for the exchange of meanings. The Imam (peace be upon him) compares anger for Allah to a spear, but he omits the item being compared and leaves the accompanying element (teeth), which is the spearhead without its handle. This emphasizes the active part of the spear, or rather the part that penetrates the enemies' chests and kills them. The image becomes even more expansive when the spearhead is associated with sharpening, which means that anger for Allah requires intensity and unity, just as the spearhead needs sharpening to be able to perform its function efficiently. The function that the Imam (peace be upon him) seeks to achieve through anger for Allah is to conquer the people of falsehood. Since the people of falsehood targeted here are the most stubborn, anger for Allah must be intense. Therefore, this simile has a strong impact on the reader's psyche, as it conveys the feeling of anger from the realm of spiritual abstraction to the sensory realm of matter. The resulting emotion grows in the reader who recalls the atmosphere of real battles and then virtually projects it onto the battle between the people of truth and the people of falsehood in this world. This realization ultimately leads to the understanding that preparation for this battle requires sharpening one's determination and anger for Allah, which is the guarantee of one's ability to conquer even the most stubborn falsehood.

The beauty in this metaphor lies in the mental association it creates between the sensual image of the sharpened spear and the moral concept of anger towards God. This connection expands to encompass the image of the spear being wielded against the most vehement opponents of truth, while the sharpness of the spear gives potency to the anger, transforming it into a force capable of confronting them as they deserve. Additionally, the beauty of the metaphor stems from the multiplicity of meanings, powers, and strengths that arise from evoking the absent element in the metaphor (the spear) and linking it semantically to the present

element (anger towards God) through the connotation of the "serrated" (the teeth) which also enters into an additional syntactic relationship with this anger, accompanied by its sharpness. This creates a semantic surprise for the reader or listener by highlighting the difference between the two elements at the literal level, while simultaneously linking them metaphorically to produce the intended meaning of "aiming to confront the opponents of truth" indirectly, through a condensed and suggestive verbal expression that expands semantically.

The Imam (peace be upon him) has said, "The fruit of laxity is remorse, and the fruit of determination is safety" (11). The Imam used the metaphor of a tree to illustrate the concept of laxity and determination. The metaphorical fruit in the first comparison represents remorse, while in the second comparison, it represents safety. The use of the metaphor prompts the reader's imagination, as the absence of the object being compared encourages mental activity. The first metaphor implies the time distance between laxity and remorse, as one may not feel remorse immediately after being lax, but it is an inevitable consequence of it (12). This idea is analogous to a tree that takes time to bear fruit. The same idea applies to the second metaphor, which moves between determination and safety. The Imam distinguishes between the two fruits (remorse and safety) based on the differences between the two trees (laxity and determination), providing a logical comparison in the sermon through a beautiful metaphorical language. This motivates us to observe the consequences of laxity and determination through two sensory images belonging to the same semantic field, but they leave different impacts on the psyche. The original context, with its rich semantic content, provides a logical path towards a new context.

One of the elements that comprise the aesthetic activity of metaphor is the context in which it operates. Metaphorical words have their roots in new contexts that differ from their original ones, and thus they have the ability to suggest a wide range of meanings that are imposed by these new contexts. This is where the aesthetic expansion of the metaphor lies. In addition, intensification serves a poetic function by charging words with a wide spectrum of connotations that go beyond the situational and into the figurative rhetoric. This is particularly common in the sayings of Imam Ali

(peace be upon him), as in his statement, "The eye is the well of the soul" (11).

This condensed statement involves a fascinating metaphor, as "sah" is compared linguistically to human weakness and vulnerability, represented by a container or vessel. The seeing eye, on the other hand, is the "wakefulness" (al-wakaa') for this vessel, meaning the thread or rope that is tied around the container or vessel to preserve its contents. Thus, "al-wakaa'" is a companion to the omitted metaphorical referent, the vessel or container. The eye serves as a symbol for vigilance that protects humans from being caught off guard by unexpected events. This verbal intensification implies multiple connotations that lead to the following interpretation:

The comparison between weakness and a container is made because when a person is safe from behind, they are less likely to be attacked from the front. Therefore, the back of the person becomes the container of their safety. The eye is the wakefulness of this container, which means its protector, as it perceives what might approach it. This alerts the person to the potential danger, and they take measures to avoid it. If the wakefulness of the container is removed, the container will not be protected. That is, if a person neglects to look after their safety, they will be exposed to harm resulting from their neglect. Here, the vigilant eye serves as the wakefulness of the container, preserving the person's back by being attentive and watchful.

This intensive metaphor has played an important role in highlighting the aesthetics of the underlying sermon, through the semantic interaction between the components of this metaphor, and pushing the reader or listener to engage in this interaction based on the discourse or borrowing. This enables them to examine the connotations of situational and contextual words, and then to compose them together in an effort to understand. This understanding is based on logical inference, accompanied by an aesthetic dimension that solidifies it in the mind.

One example of figurative condensation in Imam Ali's (peace be upon him) speech is his statement: "Disagreement destroys the opinion" (11). This statement compares opinion to a building and disagreement to a tool that demolishes this building. Thus, the verbal analogy (destroys) becomes a semantic nucleus that links the absent visible reality with the present figurative metaphor

in a rhetorical way. It also connects the two metaphors aesthetically to indicate the preaching purpose of this condensed saying. The following is a detailed explanation:

The comparison between opinion and building is based on a proportional relationship. A building consists of a set of pillars that hold it up, and the building cannot stand without them. Similarly, an opinion is the result of an agreement among a group of people about a certain matter, and this agreement can be challenged if disagreement arises among these people. The listener can imagine a building standing while being destroyed and relate it to an opinion that is established but penetrated by disagreement, thus undermining it. Therefore, the imagined image becomes a means of understanding the lesson that invites, in an implicit way, to consultation and agreement in opinion and rejecting disagreements that undermine this agreement.

This sermon employs the techniques of concision and figurative language to express multiple meanings in few words and evoke sensory elements that are absent from the text, such as "building," "supports," and "destructive tool," in order to reinforce the moral idea contained in the sermon. Moreover, the sermon does not use a direct command or prohibition, but rather employs figurative allusions to the purpose of the opinion that is undermined by discord. This approach elevates the sermon to an aesthetic level that connects cause and effect through a set of connotations and implications that borrow meanings from one another.

Metaphor between novelty and implication

The metaphor and allusion are intricately linked in creating new relationships between words in a creative manner that attracts attention to meaning. According to Abdulqahir al-Jurjani in "Al-Isti'ara al-Mufida", the beauty of the metaphor lies in presenting a statement in a new form that enhances its nobility and adds to its merits (4). The metaphor penetrates the common and familiar use of language, transforming it into an innovative linguistic structure through artistic expression that elevates speech to a level of aesthetic wonder that seeks to evoke an emotional response from the receiver.

Then comes the suggestion, as an inevitable result of this ingenuity, where the new relationships

between words imply special meanings that the recipient approaches from the site of emotional response to the beauty of the analogy. The suggestion is the spiritual energy generated by the artistic structure of the metaphorical image, and this energy works to expand the shadows in which the depicted meanings swim, in addition to the sound units and musical rhythms that accompany the effect of the suggestive energy in preparing the recipient emotionally to respond to the hints of those images, and to receive them in a way that facilitates their awareness of containing the shadows of the secondary meanings (13).

The Imam (peace be upon him) has utilized the rhetorical feature of metaphor in creating images that are characterized by gravity and suggestion, incorporating it into his words, such as in his supplication for rain, "O Allah, give us the humble clouds without the lofty ones" (11). The Imam (peace be upon him) creates a metaphorical image that is based on two elements that belong to two different natures, and the source of gravity lies in the semantic relationship that connects the clouds of the sky with the camels of the earth. He compares the former to the latter, then removes the latter while leaving the descriptive qualities of the camels as indications (humility, difficulty). These qualities hint at underlying connotations that are revealed by the external context that is familiar to the reader, and then shift towards a new context that is charged with suggestion. Al-Sharif al-Radi has noticed this and commented on this metaphor by saying, "This is a remarkable statement of eloquence, in that the Imam (peace be upon him) compared the clouds with their thunder, lightning, wind, and bolts to the camels that are difficult to control and hard to ride, and he compared the clouds that lack these marvels to the humble camels that are tame and gentle."

Thus, the intended meaning conveyed by the context is that the Imam seeks a gentle and generous cloud that bestows its rain without difficulty, while excluding from his supplication the obstinate and resistant cloud that contains terrifying elements such as thunder and lightning without any rain. He achieves this through a metaphorical image that embodies both seriousness and allusion, and the emotions and aesthetic responses that it evokes in the listener based on the metaphor of the camel's attributes to the cloud (14).

Therefore, the metaphor is a process of creating something new in language, a language within a language, through which new relationships between words are established. In it, there is a melting of elements of reality, and a reassembling of them anew. In this new composition, it is as if homogeneity is bestowed upon it, something it had lacked before. Thus, life is breathed into the life we know with its routine patterns, and a new existence is added, meaning that the existence we know is increased. This existence is created by the relationships between words through linguistic formations by means of a new representation of it (15).

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was able to create new relationships between words, with the metaphorical figure of speech as its foundation and semantic suggestion as its consequence. This is evident in much of his speech, as in his saying: "Indeed, these hearts become tired just as bodies become tired, so seek for them the subtleties of wisdom."

The Imam (peace be upon him) does not present his abstract ideas directly, but rather utilizes imaginative metaphors that indirectly suggest meaning. He borrows the concept of boredom for the hearts, which conveys an allusion. The Imam (peace be upon him) characterizes the hearts with a human quality, boredom, to imply their constriction and weariness. He then combines this with logical argumentation by linking this metaphorical image to another (boredom of the bodies), calling for seeking the subtleties of wisdom as a remedy for boredom. Although this speech is not devoid of reportage, it simultaneously transports the reader to worlds where imagination and reality intertwine, and where abstract ideas manifest tangibly, engraving this metaphor deep into the reader's aesthetic consciousness and driving them to pursue its vast connotations in its multiple structures. Thus, adopting these ideas becomes associated with an aesthetic dimension, which the Imam (peace be upon him) adopts as an ideal means to convey his ideas.

The evidence for this is also found in the words of Imam Ali (peace be upon him), when he said: "Envy of a friend is a disease of love," and also when he said: "Whoever fights against the truth, the truth will fight against him." The first statement contains indirect advice to avoid envy among friends and links this envy to the weakness of love between

them. The metaphor of "disease of love" suggests the condition of weakness and frailty that love experiences as a result of envy, similar to how a sick body weakens when it experiences a health problem. As for the second statement, it evokes the atmosphere of battle through the verbs "fights" and "fought against," portraying the truth as an opponent that cannot be defeated. The result of the struggle with truth is predetermined in favor of it, as truth always prevails. The use of the verb "fought against" emphasizes this result, and the rhetorical metaphor used conveys a sense of novelty and implication.

The structure of a metaphorical image, or its linguistic formation that represents a specific expressive way that language takes in its accomplished action, reflects the strongest potentials and capabilities of language, because it supports itself with shades of insinuation, and the colors of movement and vitality that replace the gestures and movements accompanying direct speech. In addition, it reveals psychological dimensions so that the text achieves its aesthetic eloquence in the concept that talks about the necessity of taking the context into account. Based on this, the aesthetic of metaphorical language, based on seriousness and implication, becomes a means of influencing thought and emotions, and activating the intellectual and psychological response to solidify the purposes and goals that the words of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) aim for.

Conclusion

Metaphor is no longer just a transfer of specific words but has become an interactive process between a set of contexts that have contributed to its crystallization. This idea is embodied in the interactive theory of metaphor. Metaphor appeared as a prominent feature in the sayings and sermons of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, and it was imbued with both figurative and diagnostic hues. Through the use of figurative language, abstract meanings were given concrete form, creating beautiful and impactful images. By using diagnostic language, human images were given to things that took shape in the recipient's mind as a complete multi-dimensional representation of the intended meaning. In this study, we focused on highlighting the relationship between original meanings and semantic meanings.

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Conflict of Interest

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