REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT OF 'CHILDHOOD' IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LINGUOCULTURES

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Abstract: This article explores the role of metaphor as a cognitive tool in Khaled Hosseini's novel The Kite Runner. Drawing on Cognitive Metaphor Theory developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the study examines how metaphors shape characters' perceptions, emotions, and moral development. The analysis demonstrates that Hosseini employs metaphor not merely as a stylistic device but as a means of conceptualizing guilt, redemption, friendship, and personal transformation. Through recurring images such as kite flying, scars, and journeys, the novel enables readers to understand complex psychological experiences. The findings reveal that metaphors function as cognitive frameworks that facilitate both character development and readers' interpretation of the narrative.

Keywords: cognitive metaphor, conceptual metaphor, Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner, literary analysis, cognition.

INTRODUCTION

Literature often relies on metaphor to convey abstract ideas and emotional experiences. Traditionally regarded as a rhetorical ornament, metaphor has gained renewed significance through Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), which views metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of human thought. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), people understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences. Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner (2003) presents a rich field for examining cognitive metaphors. The novel narrates Amir's journey from childhood betrayal to moral redemption against the backdrop of Afghanistan's turbulent history.

Throughout the narrative, metaphors serve as cognitive instruments that help characters and readers conceptualize guilt, suffering, memory, and reconciliation.

This study investigates how metaphor operates as a cognitive tool in The Kite Runner, focusing on major metaphorical patterns and their contribution to meaning construction. In traditional literary criticism, metaphors were long viewed as mere stylistic ornaments used to embellish poetic language. However, the advent of cognitive linguistics in the late 20th century revolutionized this perspective. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, **metaphor is primarily a tool of thought**. Human thought processes are largely metaphorical; we understand abstract, complex target domains (like love, time, or guilt) by mapping them onto concrete, physically experienced source domains.

In Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, this cognitive mechanism is central to the storytelling. The novel deals with deeply complex psychological and sociological realities: the trauma of war, ethnic discrimination, deep-seated guilt, and the agonizing journey toward redemption. Hosseini uses extended metaphors as cognitive bridges, enabling the reader to mentally organize and feel the weight of these abstract concepts through concrete physical objects and events.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COGNITIVE METAPHOR

Concept of Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics

Metaphor has traditionally been viewed as a stylistic and rhetorical device used to embellish language and create expressive effects in communication. Classical scholars such as Aristotle considered metaphor a figure of speech that transfers meaning from one object or concept to another based on similarity. However, the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics in the late twentieth century significantly

transformed the understanding of metaphor. Within Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor is no longer regarded merely as a linguistic ornament but as a fundamental mechanism of human thought and conceptualization. Cognitive linguists argue that people understand abstract concepts through more concrete experiences derived from their interaction with the physical and social world. Thus, metaphor becomes a cognitive process that structures human perception, reasoning, and communication.

According to this perspective, metaphor involves a mapping between two conceptual domains: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain consists of familiar, concrete experiences, while the target domain represents more abstract concepts. Through this mapping process, characteristics of the source domain are projected onto the target domain, allowing individuals to comprehend complex or abstract ideas more effectively.

For example, the conceptual metaphor “Life is a Journey” enables people to understand life in terms of movement, destinations, obstacles, and goals. Expressions such as “He is at a crossroads in life” or “She has reached her destination” illustrate how everyday language reflects underlying conceptual metaphors.

Cognitive Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson

The modern study of cognitive metaphor is largely based on the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, particularly their influential book Metaphors We Live By (1980). Their Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) challenged traditional linguistic approaches by proposing that metaphor is primarily conceptual rather than purely linguistic.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. People constantly use metaphorical thinking to understand

abstract concepts such as time, emotions, morality, relationships, and identity. These metaphors are not consciously created but form part of everyday cognition.

The theory introduces the concept of conceptual metaphors, which are systematic correspondences between a source domain and a target domain. **Examples include:**

- ARGUMENT IS WAR
- TIME IS MONEY
- LIFE IS A JOURNEY
- LOVE IS A JOURNEY
- KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT

These conceptual metaphors influence both language and thought. For instance, the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR is reflected in expressions such as “defend an argument,” “attack a position,” and “win a debate.” Such expressions reveal how people conceptualize arguments in terms of conflict and competition.

Lakoff and Johnson identify several types of conceptual metaphors:

Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors occur when one concept is understood through the structure of another concept. For example, LIFE IS A JOURNEY provides a complete framework for understanding life experiences through travel-related concepts.

Orientational Metaphors

Orientational metaphors organize concepts according to spatial orientations such as up-down, in-out, and front-back. Examples include:

- HAPPY IS UP
- SAD IS DOWN

Expressions such as “I am feeling up today” and “He fell into depression” illustrate this type of metaphor.

Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors allow abstract entities to be perceived as concrete objects, substances, or containers. For example, emotions are often conceptualized as physical objects that can be controlled, hidden, or released.

Cognitive Metaphor Theory has become one of the most influential approaches in linguistics, psychology, discourse analysis, and literary studies because it explains how metaphor structures human understanding and meaning-making processes.

Functions of Metaphor in Literary Discourse

Metaphor performs multiple functions in literary discourse beyond its aesthetic role. From a cognitive perspective, metaphor helps readers understand complex emotions, psychological states, and social realities through familiar conceptual frameworks.

One important function of metaphor is conceptualization. Literary authors use metaphors to represent abstract experiences such as love, fear, guilt, trauma, and redemption in concrete and accessible ways. Through metaphorical language, readers can better understand characters' internal experiences and emotional struggles.

Another significant function is characterization. Metaphors contribute to the

construction of character identity by revealing how characters perceive themselves and the world around them. The metaphorical patterns associated with a character often reflect their beliefs, emotions, and personal development throughout the narrative.

Metaphor also serves an interpretative function. It guides readers toward particular meanings and encourages deeper engagement with the text. Through recurring metaphorical images and symbols, authors establish thematic connections that unify different parts of the narrative.

Furthermore, metaphors play a crucial role in representing cultural and social values. Literary discourse frequently draws upon culturally specific metaphors that reflect collective beliefs, traditions, and historical experiences. As a result, metaphors become a bridge between individual cognition and broader cultural understanding.

In contemporary literary studies, metaphor is viewed not merely as a decorative linguistic feature but as a powerful cognitive and communicative tool. It enables authors to construct rich fictional worlds while allowing readers to interpret abstract ideas through concrete experiences. Consequently, metaphor contributes significantly to meaning creation, emotional engagement, and thematic development in literary texts.

SYMBOLIC AND COGNITIVE METAPHORS IN THE KITE RUNNER

Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner is rich in symbolic and cognitive metaphors that contribute significantly to the novel's thematic depth and emotional impact. Through recurring images and symbols, Hosseini constructs conceptual frameworks that help readers understand complex issues such as identity, guilt, betrayal, redemption, and national trauma. From a cognitive perspective, these metaphors enable abstract experiences to be interpreted through concrete and

culturally familiar images. Among the most important metaphorical elements in the novel are the kite, scars, and the representation of Afghanistan itself. These symbols function not only as literary devices but also as cognitive tools that shape readers' understanding of the narrative and its characters.

The Kite as a Symbol of Freedom and Conflict

The kite is undoubtedly the central symbol of The Kite Runner. Throughout the novel, kite flying serves as a powerful metaphorical structure through which themes of freedom, ambition, competition, guilt, and redemption are explored.

At the beginning of the narrative, kite flying represents childhood innocence and happiness. For Amir and Hassan, the annual kite tournament symbolizes joy, friendship, and cultural tradition. The image of a kite soaring freely in the sky evokes a sense of liberation and possibility. From a cognitive perspective, the conceptual metaphor FREEDOM IS FLIGHT is reflected in the kite's movement through open space. The higher the kite rises, the stronger the association with freedom, dreams, and aspirations.

However, the kite also becomes a symbol of conflict and moral struggle. Amir's desire to win the kite tournament is motivated by his longing for Baba's approval. Consequently, the kite transforms into a representation of personal ambition and social recognition. Winning the tournament signifies success, acceptance, and achievement.

The famous kite-running scene marks a turning point in the novel. After Hassan retrieves the final kite for Amir, he becomes the victim of a violent assault. Although Amir witnesses the event, he chooses not to intervene. At this moment, the kite becomes associated with betrayal and guilt. What initially symbolized joy and

friendship is transformed into a painful reminder of moral failure.

As the narrative progresses, the symbolic meaning of the kite evolves once again. During Amir's return to Afghanistan and his efforts to rescue Sohrab, the kite becomes linked to redemption and healing. The final kite-flying scene suggests reconciliation and emotional renewal. Thus, the kite functions as a dynamic metaphor whose meaning changes alongside Amir's psychological development.

From a cognitive perspective, the kite enables readers to conceptualize abstract emotional experiences through a concrete visual image. It serves as a symbolic bridge connecting childhood innocence, moral conflict, and eventual redemption.

Scars as Metaphors of Memory

Another significant metaphorical element in The Kite Runner is the recurring image of scars. Throughout the novel, physical scars symbolize emotional wounds, traumatic memories, and personal transformation.

Cognitive Metaphor Theory suggests that people often understand psychological experiences through bodily experiences. In this context, the conceptual metaphor EMOTIONAL PAIN IS PHYSICAL INJURY plays a central role in the narrative. Hosseini repeatedly connects psychological suffering with visible bodily marks.

One of the most important examples is Amir's facial scar. During his confrontation with Assef, Amir is severely injured, leaving a permanent scar on his face. This physical mark mirrors Hassan's cleft lip, creating a symbolic connection between the two characters. For many years, Amir carried invisible emotional scars caused by guilt and betrayal. The physical scar externalizes these internal wounds and

serves as a visible reminder of his past actions.

Unlike earlier periods of his life when Amir attempted to suppress his guilt, the scar represents acceptance and responsibility. It symbolizes his willingness to confront painful memories rather than escape them. Through this transformation, the scar becomes a sign of moral growth and redemption.

Scars also function as metaphors for the lasting effects of trauma. Both individuals and societies carry scars resulting from violence, loss, and injustice. Just as physical scars remain long after a wound has healed, emotional scars continue to shape identity and memory.

For readers, the metaphor of scars provides a concrete framework for understanding abstract psychological experiences. Through visible bodily marks, Hosseini illustrates the enduring impact of guilt, suffering, and personal transformation.

Afghanistan as a Metaphorical Space

Beyond individual symbols, Hosseini uses Afghanistan itself as an extended metaphorical space. The country's political and social transformation parallels the emotional and moral journey of the novel's protagonist.

At the beginning of the novel, Afghanistan is depicted as a place of beauty, cultural richness, and relative stability. Amir's childhood memories are closely associated with feelings of security and belonging. This idealized image of Afghanistan represents innocence and harmony.

However, the Soviet invasion, civil war, and Taliban regime dramatically alter the country's landscape. Streets, buildings, and communities are destroyed, reflecting the collapse of social order and collective identity. From a cognitive

perspective, the conceptual metaphor THE NATION IS A HUMAN BODY can be observed throughout the narrative. Just as individuals can experience pain, injury, and healing, the nation undergoes suffering and transformation.

The destruction of Afghanistan parallels Amir's internal conflict. Both the country and the protagonist are marked by loss, guilt, and fragmentation. Amir's emotional exile mirrors Afghanistan's political devastation. Consequently, the novel establishes a strong connection between personal and national trauma.

When Amir returns to Afghanistan after many years, his journey symbolizes more than physical travel. It represents a confrontation with the past and an attempt to repair what has been broken. Similarly, the possibility of rebuilding Afghanistan reflects the possibility of personal redemption and healing.

Afghanistan therefore functions as a metaphorical landscape that embodies themes of memory, identity, displacement, and recovery. The country's history becomes intertwined with Amir's psychological development, creating a complex narrative relationship between individual and collective experience.

Through this metaphorical representation, Hosseini demonstrates that personal stories cannot be separated from broader historical and cultural realities. Afghanistan becomes not merely a setting but an active symbolic force that shapes the novel's meaning and emotional resonance.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the theoretical foundations of cognitive metaphor and its application in Khaled Hosseini’s The Kite Runner. The analysis demonstrates that metaphor is not merely a decorative linguistic device but a fundamental cognitive

mechanism through which individuals understand abstract experiences and construct meaning. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's Cognitive Metaphor Theory, the research highlights how metaphors function as conceptual tools that shape perception, interpretation, and emotional understanding.

The investigation of symbolic and cognitive metaphors in The Kite Runner reveals that Hosseini employs metaphorical structures to explore complex themes such as identity, guilt, memory, conflict, and redemption. The kite emerges as a powerful symbol representing both freedom and personal struggle, reflecting Amir's desire for acceptance and his journey toward self-redemption. Similarly, scars function as cognitive metaphors of memory, symbolizing the lasting impact of past experiences and the process of psychological transformation. Furthermore, Afghanistan serves as a metaphorical space where national trauma and personal suffering intersect, creating a strong connection between the protagonist's inner development and the historical realities of his homeland.

The findings suggest that cognitive metaphors play a crucial role in shaping the narrative structure and thematic depth of the novel. Through metaphorical representations, abstract emotions and moral dilemmas become more accessible and meaningful to readers. As a result, metaphor contributes not only to literary aesthetics but also to the cognitive and emotional engagement of the audience.

In conclusion, The Kite Runner demonstrates how metaphor operates as an effective cognitive tool in literary discourse. Hosseini's use of symbolic and conceptual metaphors enriches the novel's exploration of human experience, enabling readers to understand complex psychological and social realities through familiar conceptual frameworks. This study confirms the significance of Cognitive Metaphor Theory as a valuable approach for analyzing literary texts and uncovering deeper

layers of meaning within contemporary fiction.

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