

On the Motivations of Conceptual Metaphors: Comparing Arabic and English

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Abstract

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and later elaborated by others (e.g. Grady et al 1996; Lakoff & Kövecses 1987) provides a useful framework for describing metaphor in human language and cognition. Employing this framework, this article analyzes the emergence motivations for a number of conceptual metaphors in Arabic and English. Then, when they emerge, why do they seem to be crosslinguistically similar at times and different at others. According to some sources (e.g. Kövecses 2002) metaphors are either motivated physically (including biologically and physiologically), perceptually, culturally, or from image-schematic metaphors. The sources also maintain that metaphors are motivated by three major categories: correlations in experience, perceived resemblance, and the GENERIC-IS-SPECIFIC metaphor (Lakoff & Turner 1989; Grady 1999). In this article an attempt is made to distinguish and classify these different types of motivations, with the former category termed as “emergence motivations” and the latter category as “relational motivations”. Further, the article aims to give a sense of the universality as well as the specificity of metaphors crosslinguistically based on these different types of experiential motivations, taking English and Arabic as a case in point.

Keywords: cognitive linguistic; conceptual metaphor; crosslinguistic; experiential motivation; image-schema