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A Cognitive-Linguistic Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Selected Folk Poetry of Nangarhar

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ABSTRACT

Pashto folk poetry is an important part of Afghanistan's intangible cultural heritage, preserving collective experiences, beliefs, emotions, and cultural values. This study examines conceptual metaphors in a purposively selected corpus of Nangarhar folk poetry using Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). A qualitative descriptive-interpretive design was employed, drawing on published collections, literary and research sources, and selected oral materials. Examples were coded by source domain, target domain, mapping, metaphor type, and cultural interpretation. The findings identify orientational, ontological, and personification patterns, including container structures and metaphors in blessings and curses. Abstract concepts such as honor, suffering, knowledge, love, moral transformation, and social evaluation are conceptualized through spatial relations, bodily experience, objects, substances, and human agency. The findings suggest that these mappings are cognitively motivated and culturally situated. While not representative of all Nangarhar folk poetry, the corpus reveals recurring relationships among metaphor, cognition, and Pashtun cultural experience, contributing to cognitive linguistics, Pashto literary studies, and folklore research.

KEYWORDS: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cognitive Linguistics, Pashto Folk Poetry, Nangarhar, Cultural Cognition.*

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of human cognition, culture, and collective experience. Among the linguistic devices that shape human thought, metaphor plays a fundamental role in conceptualizing abstract ideas through concrete experiences. Since Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), metaphor has been understood as a cognitive mechanism rather than merely a rhetorical device. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphor is viewed as a systematic mapping between a concrete source domain and an abstract target domain, enabling individuals to interpret and communicate complex experiences.

Pashto folk poetry represents an important component of Afghanistan's oral heritage and serves as a repository of the historical experiences, social values, emotions, and cultural beliefs of the Pashtun community. Its figurative language reflects the cognitive patterns through which speakers perceive and interpret their world. Therefore, examining conceptual metaphors in this poetic tradition provides valuable insights into the interaction between language, cognition, and culture.

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Although conceptual metaphor has been widely studied across languages and literary traditions, research on Pashto folk poetry remains limited. Previous studies have primarily emphasized literary, historical, and cultural aspects of Pashto folklore, while the cognitive structures underlying metaphorical expressions have received little attention. In particular, no comprehensive study has systematically investigated conceptual metaphors in the folk poetry of Nangarhar from a cognitive linguistic perspective.

Although conceptual metaphor has been widely studied across languages and literary traditions, research on Pashto folk poetry remains limited from a cognitive-linguistic perspective. Previous studies have emphasized literary, historical, and cultural dimensions of Pashto folklore, while the underlying conceptual mappings of metaphorical expressions have received less systematic attention. In particular, the present review did not identify a focused study that systematically applies CMT to selected folk poetry from Nangarhar and examines orientational, ontological, and personification patterns together with metaphorical expressions occurring in blessings and curses.

Literature Review

This study addresses this gap by analyzing selected Nangarhar folk poems through Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It uses a qualitative descriptive-interpretive approach to identify metaphorical linguistic expressions, reconstruct their source–target domain mappings, examine the cognitive motivation of those mappings, and interpret their cultural significance. The study therefore makes a focused contribution rather than claiming exhaustive coverage of Nangarhar folk poetry.

Contemporary studies have extended CMT by emphasizing the cognitive, cultural, and contextual dimensions of metaphor. Rather than treating metaphor solely as a linguistic phenomenon, recent scholarship demonstrates that metaphor is grounded in embodied experience and shaped by cultural knowledge, enabling people to conceptualize emotions, morality, identity, and other abstract concepts through everyday experience. These developments have broadened the application of CMT to literary, cultural, and multimodal discourse.

Within literary studies, poetry has become a major focus of cognitive linguistic research because it provides rich evidence of conceptual metaphor. Empirical studies indicate that readers interpret poetic language by activating underlying conceptual mappings, suggesting that literary creativity relies on the same cognitive processes used in everyday thinking. Similarly, research on folklore shows that conceptual metaphors preserve collective knowledge, cultural values, and social experience while reflecting both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific worldviews.

Contemporary developments in CMT have also emphasized embodiment, context, and culture. Conceptual metaphors are not simply decorative substitutions between words; they are systematic correspondences between conceptual domains that allow speakers to structure one kind of experience in terms of another. In literary and folkloric discourse, the same underlying mappings may be realized through different metaphorical linguistic expressions, while particular cultural contexts can strengthen, elaborate, or constrain the interpretation of a mapping. This distinction between a conceptual metaphor and an individual metaphorical expression is important for the present analysis.

Within literary studies, poetry provides rich evidence for investigating how conceptual mappings are activated and extended. Folk poetry is especially useful because recurring expressions can preserve shared cultural knowledge, social values, and embodied experience. At the same time, a

poetic expression should not automatically be classified as a conceptual metaphor simply because it is figurative. The present study therefore treats an expression as evidence for a conceptual metaphor only when a systematic source–target relation can be identified from the textual and cultural context.

Research Gap

Previous studies on Pashto folk poetry have primarily examined its literary, historical, and cultural dimensions, with limited attention to the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphorical expressions. While these studies have explored themes, aesthetics, and folklore, they have rarely applied Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to explain how metaphor structures thought and meaning in Pashto oral literature. In particular, no comprehensive study has systematically investigated conceptual metaphors in the folk poetry of Nangarhar.

Moreover, the metaphorical conceptualization of abstract notions such as emotions, social values, morality, blessings, and curses through embodied source domains remains largely unexplored. Consequently, the relationship between metaphor, cognition, and cultural worldview in Pashto folk poetry has not been adequately addressed.

Moreover, the conceptualization of emotions, social values, morality, blessings, and curses through embodied source domains remains insufficiently documented in Nangarhar folk poetry. The present study therefore focuses on a manageable, purposively selected corpus and asks how recurring metaphorical mappings organize meaning. Its contribution lies not in statistical generalization to every Nangarhar poem, but in providing a transparent qualitative account of patterns that are visible in the selected corpus.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What conceptual metaphors are found in selected folk poems of Nangarhar?
2. How are orientational, ontological, and personification metaphors represented in Pashto folk poetry?
3. How do conceptual metaphors express abstract concepts, emotions, and cultural values, particularly in blessings and curses?
4. How do these metaphors reflect the relationship between language, cognition, and Pashtun cultural experience?

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine conceptual metaphors in selected folk poems of Nangarhar from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective and explore their role in meaning construction and cultural expression.

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify and classify conceptual metaphors in Nangarhar folk poetry.
2. To analyze the functions of orientational, ontological, and personification metaphors.
3. To examine how abstract concepts are expressed through embodied experience.

4. To investigate the metaphorical structures of blessings and curses and their cultural significance.
5. To demonstrate metaphor as a cognitive and cultural mechanism rather than merely a rhetorical device.

Significance of the Study

This study provides a cognitive linguistic analysis of Nangarhar folk poetry by examining the role of conceptual metaphors in meaning construction, cultural representation, and human cognition. Unlike traditional literary approaches that treat metaphor primarily as a rhetorical device, it demonstrates that metaphor is a fundamental cognitive mechanism for understanding abstract experiences, emotions, social relations, and cultural values.

The study contributes to Pashto literary and linguistic scholarship by applying **Conceptual Metaphor Theory** to the analysis of folk poetry. Through the examination of orientational, ontological, and personification metaphors, it explains how embodied experiences and concrete domains are used to conceptualize abstract ideas, including dignity, suffering, morality, love, conflict, blessings, and curses.

In addition, the research highlights the relationship between language, cognition, and culture in Pashtun society, showing how metaphorical expressions reflect collective beliefs, emotional experiences, social norms, and traditional worldviews. By extending Pashto folklore studies beyond thematic and aesthetic analysis to a cognitive perspective, this study also provides a foundation for future interdisciplinary research in cognitive linguistics, literary studies, and cultural analysis.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-interpretive research design within Cognitive Linguistics and Folklore Studies. The design was selected because the research questions concern the identification, classification, interpretation, and cultural contextualization of metaphorical meanings rather than numerical measurement. The unit of analysis is the metaphorical linguistic expression as it occurs in a poetic line or passage; the analytical target, however, is the conceptual mapping that the expression instantiates.

This study employs a qualitative and descriptive-analytical research methodology within the interdisciplinary framework of Cognitive Linguistics and Folklore Studies. The primary purpose of this approach is to examine how conceptual metaphors are constructed, represented, and interpreted in selected folk poems of Nangarhar.

The research corpus was purposively selected from published collections of Pashto folk poetry, academic and literary sources, and selected oral material. Selection followed three substantive criteria: (1) the poem or expression had to be attributable to Nangarhar or its folk-poetry tradition; (2) the passage had to contain an interpretable metaphorical expression relevant to the study; and (3) the example had to provide sufficient contextual information for identifying a plausible source domain, target domain, and mapping. Examples were selected for analytical relevance, not for statistical representativeness. The corpus therefore should be understood as a focused qualitative sample rather than an exhaustive inventory of all Nangarhar folk poetry.

The data for this research have been collected from various sources, including published collections of Pashto folk poetry, academic books, research articles, literary works, and oral sources. Selected folk poems from Nangarhar were carefully chosen based on their richness in metaphorical expressions and their relevance to the objectives of the study. In addition, examples related to prayers and curses were selected to explore the relationship between metaphorical language and cultural meaning.

The theoretical framework is primarily Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). CMT distinguishes between a conceptual metaphor, such as a systematic relation between two conceptual domains, and the individual linguistic expressions through which that relation is realized. In the present study, the source domain is the relatively concrete or experientially grounded domain used to structure another domain, while the target domain is the concept being understood through that source. For example, spatial experience may structure social evaluation, while a bounded physical space may structure an abstract state. This domain-based distinction prevents the analysis from treating every figurative word or image as a separate conceptual metaphor.

The study is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, primarily developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their influential work Metaphors We Live By. According to this theory, metaphor is not limited to poetic language but represents a fundamental process of human cognition through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of concrete experiences.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, potentially metaphorical expressions were identified in the selected poems. Second, each expression was interpreted in its immediate poetic context and, where necessary, in relation to the cultural meaning indicated by the source material. Third, the source domain and target domain were identified and the principal cross-domain mapping was formulated. Fourth, each example was assigned to the dominant CMT category used in this study orientational, ontological, or personification—with container structures treated as a subtype of ontological metaphor and with overlapping cases classified according to their dominant mapping. Fifth, the cognitive motivation and cultural significance of each mapping were explained. This procedure was applied consistently across the examples rather than assigning categories solely on the basis of isolated words.

The collected poetic data were analyzed through qualitative textual analysis. The selected verses were examined to identify different conceptual metaphor structures and their cognitive and cultural implications. The analysis focused mainly on three major categories of conceptual metaphors:

1. Orientational Metaphors:
   These metaphors were analyzed to explore how spatial experiences such as up/down, high/low, forward/backward, and inside/outside are used to conceptualize abstract ideas such as social position, success, failure, honor, and suffering.
2. Ontological Metaphors:
   These metaphors were examined to investigate how abstract concepts, emotions, and experiences are represented as concrete entities, substances, objects, or containers.
3. Personification Metaphors:
   These metaphors were analyzed to identify cases where non-human entities, objects, and

abstract concepts are assigned human characteristics such as speech, emotion, intention, and action.

Additionally, metaphorical expressions related to blessings and curses were analyzed to determine how cultural beliefs, emotional states, and social relationships are linguistically represented through metaphor.

The research follows a descriptive-interpretive design and does not make frequency-based or population-level claims. The credibility of the interpretation rests on contextual reading, explicit source–target mapping, repeated comparison of examples, and close alignment between the evidence and the claims made from it. Because the corpus is purposive and qualitative, the findings are analytically transferable to comparable cases rather than statistically generalizable to all Nangarhar folk poetry. This limitation is stated explicitly to avoid overstating the scope of the findings.

Analytical Coding Framework

For transparency, the study used the following coding logic for each analytical example: metaphorical expression → immediate contextual meaning → source domain → target domain → principal mapping → CMT category → cognitive motivation → cultural interpretation. The following examples summarize the coding framework applied in the analysis.

Cultural interpretation	Cognitive motivation	Category	Mapping	Target domain	Source domain	Poetic expression / image
Social honor and status are conceptualized through vertical position.	Vertical bodily experience structures social evaluation	Orientational	LOW → HUMILIATION / LOW STATUS	Humiliation and low social status	DOWN / low position	خوار / دادا شی خوار
Knowledge is framed as rising above ignorance.	Elevation is associated with advancement	Orientational	UP → KNOWLEDGE / PROGRESS	Knowledge, progress, development	UP / sky	علم خپل په ...ته آسمان
The heart is culturally salient as the locus of love and feeling.	Bodily space provides a bounded location for an abstract emotion	Ontological–container	LOVE IS IN A CONTAINER	Love	CONTAINER / heart	نه زړه د وباسي عشق
Moral awakening is represented as emerging from darkness.	A bounded space makes an abstract state enterable and escapable	Ontological–container	IGNORANCE / MORAL ERROR IS A CONTAINER	Ignorance and moral state	CONTAINER / darkness	ناپوهی او تباهی د تور تم
Objects become social actors through a culturally familiar moral dialogue.	Human agency provides intention, speech, and emotion	Personification	OBJECTS ARE PEOPLE	Inanimate objects	HUMAN AGENT	خبری ... لونګین او هیکل / جنګ

The analysis of the selected corpus identified recurring conceptual mappings in three principal categories: orientational, ontological, and personification metaphors. Container structures occurred within the ontological category, while some examples showed overlap between spatial and ontological organization. The findings below are therefore reported as qualitative patterns supported by specific textual examples, not as quantitative frequencies for the whole tradition.

Orientational metaphors map bodily and spatial experience onto abstract evaluation. In the selected poems, UP/HIGH is associated with knowledge, progress, dignity, and elevated status, while

DOWN/LOW is associated with humiliation, weakness, or decline. These mappings are visible in expressions involving "khwar" (خـوار), rising toward the sky through knowledge, and other spatial contrasts. The pattern supports the interpretation that vertical orientation provides a recurring cognitive structure for social and moral evaluation in the selected corpus.

Ontological metaphors make abstract experiences more readily conceptualized as entities, substances, or bounded spaces. The selected examples include the heart as a container for love, darkness and ignorance as a bounded state from which the poet can emerge, and moral experience as something that can be submerged. These cases demonstrate that the analysis is based on identifiable mappings rather than on figurative vocabulary alone.

Personification is especially visible in "Hikal and Longin," where non-human entities are given speech, intention, emotion, conflict, movement, and the capacity to seek resolution. Because personification is conventionally treated as a subtype of ontological metaphor, these examples are reported separately for analytical clarity while remaining theoretically nested within the ontological category.

The selected blessings and curses provide an additional culturally salient set of metaphorical expressions. "May your face become black" maps physical discoloration onto social disgrace, while "dust on your head" maps a concrete physical image onto ruin, deprivation, and loss of dignity. These expressions illustrate how embodied experience and culturally shared evaluation interact in metaphorical meaning. They are not treated as a separate fourth CMT category; rather, they are analyzed according to the underlying orientational or ontological mapping they instantiate.

Ontological metaphors represent abstract concepts as concrete entities or containers. Emotions, morality, ignorance, and spiritual states are expressed through physical objects and spatial images, enabling intangible experiences to be understood in concrete terms.

Personification metaphors are also widespread, assigning human qualities such as speech, emotion, and intention to non-human entities. The folk poem **"Hikal and Longin"** illustrates how inanimate objects become symbolic participants in dialogue, expressing values such as honesty, conflict, and morality.

The analysis further shows that blessings and curses rely on conventional conceptual metaphors. Expressions such as *"may your face become black"* metaphorically represent disgrace and suffering, while blessings symbolize prosperity, protection, and well-being.

The findings support the central claim of Conceptual Metaphor Theory that metaphorical language can reflect systematic conceptual mappings rather than functioning only as ornamental rhetoric. In the selected Nangarhar corpus, recurring expressions connect spatial orientation, bodily experience, physical objects, containers, and human agency with abstract domains such as knowledge, social status, emotion, moral condition, and social evaluation. The evidence therefore supports a relationship among language, embodied experience, cognition, and culture, while the purposive nature of the corpus limits the scope of generalization.

Orientational metaphors reveal that spatial experience provides a recurring framework for understanding abstract evaluation. UP/HIGH is associated in the selected examples with knowledge, progress, dignity, and elevated status, whereas DOWN/LOW is associated with humiliation, weakness,

and decline. These associations may have an embodied basis, but the specific social meanings observed in the poems are also culturally mediated. The analysis therefore distinguishes the cognitive motivation of the mapping from the culturally specific interpretation attached to it.

Ontological metaphors show how abstract concepts are structured as entities, substances, or bounded spaces. The heart as a container for love and darkness as a state from which the speaker can emerge demonstrate that bodily and spatial experience supplies a concrete structure for otherwise intangible experiences. These mappings make emotional and moral states describable in terms of location, containment, movement, and change.

Personification demonstrates a further extension of ontological mapping by transferring human agency to non-human entities. In "Hikal and Longin," speech, intention, conflict, emotion, and movement transform objects into social participants. The moral force of the poem is strengthened because abstract social values are dramatized through a human-like interaction between non-human figures. This is evidence for personification as a productive cognitive and poetic strategy, not merely as a stylistic label.

The analysis of blessings and curses further shows how culturally familiar bodily images can communicate social and moral evaluation. "Black face" is mapped onto disgrace, while dust on the head is mapped onto ruin and deprivation. These examples demonstrate that conventional metaphorical meanings are shaped by shared cultural knowledge. At the same time, the study does not assume that all curses are metaphorical; each expression is examined for an identifiable source–target relationship.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the selected Nangarhar folk poems provide useful evidence for studying the interaction of metaphor, embodied experience, and cultural meaning. The study's contribution is therefore qualitative and interpretive: it documents and explains recurring conceptual mappings in an underrepresented Pashto corpus. Because the sample is purposive, the findings should be extended to other Nangarhar folk poetry only through further corpus-based research.

The analysis of prayers and curses further highlights the close relationship between metaphor, language, and culture. In Pashtun society, blessings and curses function not only as linguistic expressions but also as reflections of emotional, moral, and social values. Metaphorical images such as darkness, blackness, destruction, and dust symbolize dishonor, suffering, and social exclusion, confirming that metaphor serves as a cultural model for interpreting human experience.

Overall, this study extends previous research on Pashto folk literature by showing that cognitive linguistic analysis offers deeper insight into the relationship between poetic language, cultural identity, and collective cognition. Nangarhar folk poetry should therefore be understood not only as a literary tradition but also as a reflection of the cognitive and cultural worldview of the Pashtun community.

Types of Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual metaphors are generally classified into three major categories: orientational, ontological, and personification metaphors. The following examples from Nangarhar folk poetry illustrate how these metaphorical structures function within the cognitive and cultural framework of Pashto folk literature.

Orientational Metaphors

In this verse, "khwar" (خوار) denotes humiliation, weakness, and low social standing. The curse "khwar shé dada" therefore maps LOW/LOW STATUS onto HUMILIATION and POWERLESSNESS. The contrast with "khani" (خاني), which denotes elevated social status, reinforces the vertical evaluative schema. The underlying conceptual mapping can be represented as SOCIAL STATUS IS VERTICAL POSITION: HIGH is associated with honor and elevated status, while LOW is associated with humiliation and weakness.

خوار شې دادا
خواره دې کړم ور دې کمه خوار ته - زه
ورکړې به دې زه وای چېرته زوی د خان سردار ته - زه
(Bakhtani, 2012, p. 1895)

The expression "I will throw you into the fire" is better interpreted primarily through a forceful spatial/physical image of movement toward a harmful state than as simple "downward movement." In the context of the poem, being thrown into fire structures suffering and hardship as an imposed physical experience. The example therefore supports an embodied mapping in which HARM/SUFFERING IS PHYSICAL EXPOSURE TO A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE, with the spatial movement reinforcing the image.

ناسته وم همزولو کې کول به مې سیلونه
زه وم نازولې نه به وو دا منتونه
ما کړی دی کوم کار چې اوس کوې په ما کارونه
تا له خپله لاسه ورګوزاره کړم انګار ته - زه
(Bakhtani, 2012, p. 1895)

In the final hemistich, the expression "I will throw you into the fire" employs a downward movement to conceptualize suffering and hardship. The poet uses spatial orientation to express emotional experience, illustrating the orientational metaphor in which DOWN is associated with suffering and decline.

In this poem, movement upward toward the sky through knowledge provides a clear orientational mapping: UP/ELEVATION IS KNOWLEDGE AND PROGRESS, while SLEEP/INACTIVITY IS IGNORANCE OR STAGNATION. The mapping is supported by the contrast between people who move in the "sky" of knowledge and those who remain asleep. The example therefore links bodily orientation and states of wakefulness to intellectual and social development.

خلک ګرځي د آسمان په کنارو کې دا زمور دپاره څومره لوی پېغور دی
هغوی ناست دي د عرفان په منارو کې هر یو ګوره د هنر په براق سور دی
مور ویده یو لا پخپله بسترو کې د وطن سترګې کړې زمور په لور دي
نه جوړېږي جهالت د پښتون شان ته
په جاهل باندې د خدای لغنت ورېږي
(Malang Jan, 1335, p. 100)

The phrase "نه زړه د وباسي عشــق" conceptualizes the heart as a bounded bodily container from which love can be removed. The mapping can be formulated as THE HEART IS A CONTAINER FOR LOVE. This is an ontological container metaphor because an abstract emotional experience is structured as an entity located within a bounded bodily space.

عقل کله هومره نر دی چې عشق وباسي د زړه نه
عقل کله هومره نر دی چې عشق وباسي له زړه نه
تخت و تاج يې صدقه کړو مجنون ځکه تر چلتاره
که د يار د درگاه سپی وي او په ما منلگ جان پېښ شي
په ادب به ورته وايم چې په خير راغلې باداره
(Malang Jan, 1335, p. 100)

The heart is conceptualized as a container from which love can be removed. This spatial representation illustrates a container metaphor, allowing emotional experience to be understood through bodily and spatial experience.

Ontological Metaphors

Before discussing ontological metaphors, consider the following examples:

These examples illustrate a central feature of ontological metaphor: an abstract concept is structured as an entity, substance, object, or container so that it can be described in terms of boundaries, movement, possession, or physical interaction (Khakolay, 1401, p. 191). The present study applies this principle to the poetic examples below.

My mind is not functioning properly.

The expression about acquiring wings "کړې پيدا دې وزرې په شــان د مېږي" uses a concrete bodily image—wings—to conceptualize capability or power. The subsequent threat to cut them off gives the imagined power a physical form that can be removed. The dominant mapping is therefore POWER/ABILITY IS A PHYSICAL POSSESSION THAT CAN BE ACQUIRED AND REMOVED. The example is treated as ontological because an abstract capacity is conceptualized as a concrete entity or possession.

د مېږي په شان وزرې دې پيدا کړې
يو ځل بيا يې درنه غوځوم مرد ميدان يم
(Zahir, personal interview, 2025, October 26)

The expression "giving wings like an ant" gives concrete form to the enemy's power, symbolizing its eventual destruction. Likewise, "the battlefield" is treated as an active entity, illustrating how abstract concepts are represented as concrete realities through ontological metaphor.

In the verse "يم اســمان سر په ســتا زه يې ځمکه چې ته" earth and sky organize a contrast in relative position and authority. The primary mapping is SOCIAL/POWER STATUS IS VERTICAL POSITION: one party is placed "below" as earth, while the speaker is positioned "above" as sky. Because the mapping depends strongly on vertical orientation, this example is more precisely classified as orientational rather than simply ontological.

ستا په چل او په فریب باندې پوهېږم
ته چې ځمکه یې زه ستا په سر اسمان یم

The comparison of the opponent to a fox and the speaker to a lion gives concrete animal characteristics to abstract qualities such as cunning, courage, and strength. The animals function as source-domain images for human traits. Rather than treating every animal comparison as ontological metaphor automatically, the analysis identifies the specific mappings: CUNNING IS FOX-LIKE BEHAVIOR and COURAGE/STRENGTH IS LION-LIKE BEHAVIOR. These mappings are grounded in culturally recognizable animal characteristics.

غلی غلی د ګیدړ په شانې راغلې
لکه شېر درته ولاړ په هر میدان یم

The expression "زما روح په تن کې چلي" attributes physical movement to the soul. The abstract or non-physical entity "soul" is therefore conceptualized as a movable entity located within the body. The dominant mapping is THE SOUL IS A MOVABLE ENTITY WITHIN A CONTAINER (THE BODY), which makes the example an ontological/container structure.

زهیر وایي چې مې روح په تن کې چلي
یم ګویان پاک ګویان یم

The expression **"My soul moves within my body"** attributes physical movement to the soul, illustrating an ontological metaphor. Overall, these metaphors present concepts such as freedom, courage, struggle, and resistance in vivid and concrete terms.

Types of Ontological Metaphor

Ontological metaphors are commonly classified into three types:

For the purposes of this study, personification and container metaphors are treated as subtypes or realizations of ontological metaphor rather than as entirely independent theoretical categories. This distinction is important because the main CMT taxonomy used here is threefold—orientational, ontological, and structural patterns where applicable—while personification is conventionally understood as a special case of ontological metaphor. The present study reports personification separately only when the assignment of human agency is the principal analytical feature.

Personification metaphors

Container metaphors (Torabi, 1403, p. 93)

For example, abstract concepts such as peace, war, justice, love, hatred, and time are frequently conceptualized as concrete entities. Similarly, Pashto poet Saud employs this type of metaphor in the following verse:

ژوند رانه بېحده پورته شوی دی
قد ورته سعوده زما نه رسي

Ontological metaphors also function through container schemas, in which abstract experiences are understood as bounded spaces that people can enter, leave, or become immersed in.

لوبه

شکر چې د فسق او د فجوره په امان شوم
اوس پوره انسان شوم

پروت وم په تور تم د تباهۍ او ناپوهۍ کې زه
ویښ شوم د عفلت د خوبه بدو نه پښیمان شوم
اوس پوره انسان شوم

هېڅ نه پوهېدلم دین دنیا مې کړه لاهو په سین
پوه په محققو کمزوریو د خپل خان شوم
اوس پوره انسان شوم

(Bina, 1391, p. 888)

In this poem, "تور تم" (darkness), "تباهي" (destruction), and "ناپوهي" (ignorance) are represented as a bounded state in which the speaker can remain and from which he can awaken or emerge. The mapping is IGNORANCE/MORAL ERROR IS A CONTAINER and MORAL AWAKENING IS EXITING THE CONTAINER. The interpretation is supported by the movement from being "in" darkness to becoming awake and remorseful.

In this poem, darkness, destruction, and ignorance are conceptualized as a container within which the poet is enclosed. Emerging from this container symbolizes moral awakening and spiritual transformation, illustrating a clear container-based ontological metaphor.

In this verse, "دین دنیا مې کړه لاهو په سین" represents religion and worldly life through the physical image of submergence in a river. The dominant structure is MORAL/RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IS A SUBSTANCE OR ENTITY THAT CAN BE SUBMERGED. The river supplies a concrete source domain for conceptualizing loss, confusion, or immersion in an abstract moral condition.

In this verse, religion and worldly life are treated as objects that can be submerged in a river, which functions as a metaphorical container. This transforms an abstract moral experience into a concrete spatial image, exemplifying an ontological container metaphor.

Personification in the folk poem "Hikal and Longin" provides a particularly clear case of ontological metaphor. The poem represents non-human entities as social actors that can speak, argue, become angry, experience emotion, move, and seek adjudication. The analytical focus here is not simply that the poem is imaginative; it is that HUMAN AGENCY IS MAPPED ONTO NON-HUMAN ENTITIES, allowing objects to participate in a human social scenario.

Personified Metaphors in Folk Poetry

Traces of Personified Metaphors in Folk Poetry of Nangarhar ,The traces of personified (ontological) metaphors can also be observed in the folk poem "Hikal and Longin." This poem presents a beautiful image of the intellectual and artistic imagination of the Pashtun society. In this composition, the poet introduces a humorous and symbolic confrontation between two non-human entities, "Hikal and

Longin". Both characters appear to regard themselves as superior to the other; however, this rivalry symbolically represents human material pride and external appearance.

Through this narrative, the poet conveys the message that, instead of outward beauty and material value, greater importance should be given to sincerity, honesty, and spiritual worth. In the central verses of the poem, the verbal conflict between the two figures intensifies. Hikal considers himself superior in comparison to gold and jewels, whereas Longin defends his inherent and natural value. The repeated expression "we go to Sharia" indicates that any disagreement between individuals should ultimately be resolved through truth, justice, and the principles of Sharia.

Here, the poet invites a spiritual and ethical reflection, highlighting the value of spirituality over materialism. In the final verses, Hikal is blamed for his arrogance and lowers his head in shame, which symbolizes the end of material pride. In contrast, Longin represents simplicity, authenticity, and sincerity.

Ultimately, the poet conveys the message that true value lies in heart, intention, and action, not in outward appearance or wealth. This folk poem carries a deep moral and spiritual message, reflecting the intellectual consciousness of the Pashtun society. Below, some selected verses of the poem are presented, each of which will be briefly analyzed.

قوت ته دې وګوره

خبره مه کړه نوره

نه يې زما د زوره

وهم دې هر ساعتې د ګونګرو په تازيانه

جنګ جوړ که په سينه

***

وهم دې هر ساعتې

چې ماته ملامت يې

نور مه وهه لغتې

ډډ بلې به يې بيا پروت که يوه دوه خاخکي باران شو

شريعت ته چې روان شو

Both Hikal and Longin are non-human entities, yet the poem gives them voice, intention, agency, and interpersonal relations. This is a direct realization of the conceptual mapping NON-HUMAN ENTITIES ARE HUMAN AGENTS. Because personification is an ontological metaphor, the example is included within the broader ontological category while being discussed separately because agency is the defining feature.

The poem also attributes action and interaction to other non-human elements. The analytical criterion is therefore not the mere presence of an object such as gold, a gemstone, rain, or a bell, but the transfer of specifically human capacities—speech, intention, conflict, emotional response, or

deliberate action—to those entities. Where such transfer occurs, the expression provides evidence for personification.

However, both of these entities are inanimate and lifeless objects, yet the poet gives them voice and agency. As previously mentioned, personification (ontological) metaphor refers to a process in which a non-living entity is endowed with human characteristics. In the folk poem titled "Hikal and Longin," a large number of personified metaphors (Personification Metaphors) are employed, where many lifeless and motionless objects are given human-like qualities.

In this poem, elements such as "gold, gemstone, long, Hikal, rain, and bell" are all used as personified metaphors, as the poet attributes to them the ability to speak, act, and engage in conflict.

هیکل او لونګین

جنګ جوړ کړه په سینه

In this passage, Hikal and Longin are portrayed as capable of conflict and of moving toward "Sharia" for resolution. The mapping can be represented as NON-HUMAN ENTITIES ARE SOCIAL PERSONS. Their movement toward a place of judgment extends the personification by assigning them human social behavior, intention, and participation in a normative institution.

شریعیت ته چې روان شو

In the above passage, the poet attributes human-like qualities to "Hikal and Longin", portraying them as capable not only of conflict but also of reconciliation. Thus, concepts such as "Hikal, Longin, war, peace, and emotions" are all treated as if they were living beings with agency and intentionality, even though they are non-living and abstract in nature. This clearly illustrates the use of "personification (ontological) metaphors".

Furthermore, in the same passage, the poet presents "Hikal and Longin" as if they were human beings walking along a path, as expressed in the line: "Together they both set out, but then they became estranged over an issue when they went toward Sharia." This implies that both figures are depicted as if they are physically moving like humans, heading toward a judge or a court for resolution. In this way, abstract entities and symbolic concepts are given human form, movement, and intention, which is the essence of personification metaphor.

هیکل ویل لونګین ته

ختلی یې جبین ته

The dialogue between Hikal and Longin further strengthens the personification mapping. Hikal speaks directly to Longin, warns him, and refers to emotional consequences. Speech, intention, and emotional capacity are all human characteristics transferred to non-human entities. These features provide stronger evidence for personification than the mere use of an animate comparison.

هیکل او لونګین

In another section of the poem, the poet brings "Hikal" into speech and presents a dialogue and debate between "Hikal and Longin". Although neither "Hikal nor Longin" possesses the ability to

speak, the poet, through his artistic creativity, endows them with the qualities of living beings and makes them engage in conversation.

Hikal tells Longin not to fight with him, otherwise he will become deeply sorrowful and distressed. This implies that if "Hikal and Longin"engage in conflict, both will experience sadness and emotional suffering. However, in reality, neither "Hikal nor Longin" is capable of feeling emotions such as sadness or grief, nor do they possess the ability to speak. By granting them speech and emotional capacity, the poet creates a clear instance of "personification (ontological) metaphor".

Overall, the poem repeatedly maps human agency, emotion, and social interaction onto non-human entities. The repeated pattern supports the conclusion that personification is not an isolated decorative feature in this example; it is a productive way of organizing the moral conflict of the poem by turning objects into participants in a human social drama.

In another verse, "You are happy during the day, but at night you lie on the ground," an inanimate object is depicted as if it experiences human-like daily states, capable of activity during the day and rest at night. Similarly, in the line "You lie at the foot of the bed while I sleep on the cushion," jewelry is attributed with human actions such as sleeping, resting, and occupying a physical position. Lying on the ground or on a bed is a distinctly human characteristic, yet the poet transfers this feature to an inanimate object, thereby constructing a personified metaphor.

In summary, through his poetic skill, the poet assigns human qualities to lifeless and non-sentient objects that are incapable of speech or movement. When such objects are given consciousness, emotion, and human-like behavior, this process is known as "personification (ontological) metaphor".

Prayers and curses are culturally salient speech practices and may contain conventional figurative expressions. In the present study, they are not treated as a separate category of conceptual metaphor. Instead, selected curses are examined to determine what underlying source–target mappings organize their meaning and how those mappings are culturally interpreted. This distinction is necessary because the social function of a curse and its conceptual metaphorical structure are related but analytically different questions.

Curses in the Folk Poetry of Nangarhar through the Lens of Conceptual Metaphor

Prayers and curses hold distinct values in every society, and each religion also has its own place for the use and expression of supplications and imprecations. Islam likewise contains both prayers and curses, each carrying its own religious significance. In the article "Pashto Curses and Prayers from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor," published in Wazhma Magazine (Issue 129, Year 1403), the author states: "Curses and prayers exist in various forms across different languages and cultures, and through them one can study the psychological and emotional states of people in each society. Here, we first introduce the source element and then consider its counterpart as its conceptual reflection."

Curses are often expressed in symbolic and figurative language. At times they may also be stated in plain language; however, direct expressions usually have less impact on the (addressee). For example, instead of directly saying "May you die," people tend to use expressions such as "May you turn pale," "May you be hit by a vehicle," or "May God take you," in order to intensify the emotional effect on the listener. The author of "Pashto Curses and Prayers from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor," citing Matiullah Rohyal, presents Muhammad Masoom Hotak's view on curses as follows:

"Curses are directly dependent on the creativity of the person who utters them. Initially, a curse is created by an individual, and later it becomes widespread in society. Over time, it gains cultural acceptance and its scope of use expands." (Tarabi, 1403: p. 94)

According to Lal Paacha Azmon in his book "Pashto Folklore Literature", prayers and curses are divided into two types: religious (Islamic) prayers and curses, and traditional or rural (folk) prayers and curses (Azmoon, 1399: p. 232).

As previously noted, curses represent the opposite semantic direction of prayers. In other words, while curses embody wishes for destruction or harm to the addressee, prayers express wishes for prosperity, peace, and well-being. Since prayers and curses constitute an important theme in the folk poetry of Nangarhar, this section will present selected poetic examples in which traces of prayers and curses are evident. Each example will be briefly analyzed in order to clarify the subject more effectively.

خدای دې ځوانیمرګ کړه جینکو را ته پیغور وکړ

مات دې کړه هلکه په سینه دې زما زور وکړ

***

د ناز په خوب ویده وم هیڅ خبر نه وم په ځان

د پوزې نه مې وتی و د سرو زرو پیزوان

وخت د صبایې و چې مولا وکړ اذان

راغلې چې سینې له زرزري ګونګرو مې شور وکړ

مات دې که هلکه په سینه دې زما زور وکړ

(Goshtwal, 1391, p. 23)

The expression "May God make you die young" is a direct wish for premature death rather than, by itself, sufficient evidence of a conceptual metaphor. The relevant metaphorical interpretation emerges where youth is conceptualized as a state or possession that can be prematurely ended or destroyed. Accordingly, the example is treated cautiously: its primary meaning is a curse for premature death, while the metaphorical analysis concerns the conceptualization of YOUTH/LIFE AS A DURABLE STATE THAT CAN BE TERMINATED. This avoids overstating the metaphorical status of the expression.

"In the above folk poem, the poet says in the first verse:"

The curse "May God make you die young" (Khuda de jwanimargh kra) is widely used in Pashtun society and is often uttered by parents toward their children. In Pashtun culture, curses have deep historical roots, and it is commonly believed that a curse emerges from deep emotional pain, grief, and the violation of one's rights. There is a popular belief that "the curse of the oppressed does not require the gates of heaven," meaning that the curse of an oppressed person is readily accepted and not rejected.

From a conceptual-metaphor perspective, the phrase can be interpreted as conceptualizing youth/life as a bounded or continuable state whose duration can be shortened. The mapping is LIFE/YOUTH IS A DURABLE RESOURCE OR STATE WITH A DURATION THAT CAN BE TERMINATED. Because the literal wish for death is explicit, the metaphorical analysis is limited to this conceptual structure rather than treating the entire curse as metaphorical.

In Islamic teachings, the act of cursing is generally discouraged, and it is advised not to curse fellow Muslims, as if such a curse is accepted, it may bring harm to families and society.

From the perspective of conceptual metaphor, this curse is expressed metaphorically as the loss or destruction of youth itself. In other words, "youth" is conceptualized as something that can be consumed, destroyed, or prematurely (ended), implying early death or a calamity that weakens and shortens one's youthful life.

مخ يې تور شه

په ګلشن کې د بلبلو شور ماشور دی

غمازان چې غمازي کړي مخ يې تور دی

***

د دنيا له عيشه وتي سراسر دي

چې بل شوی د هغو د مينې اور دی

سر دې نه پورته کوي د غم له ټاله

(Hashimi, 1391, p. 100)

The curse "May your face become black" is a conventional expression associated with disgrace and loss of social respect. Its conceptual structure is clearer than a literal reading suggests: PHYSICAL BLACKNESS IS SOCIAL DISGRACE. The face, a visible part of the body, serves as the source image through which an abstract social evaluation is communicated. The cultural interpretation is especially salient because honor and public reputation carry strong social significance in Pashtun contexts.

In the first section of the above folk poem, the poet employs a common Pashto curse: "May your face become black" (makh de tor sha). This expression is well known in Pashto folk literature and cultural tradition, and it signifies the loss of a person's honor, dignity, and social respect.

The expression is not a literal prediction that the face will become physically black. Instead, physical discoloration provides the source domain for the target concept of social disgrace: BLACKNESS → DISGRACE / LOSS OF HONOR. This mapping demonstrates how a visible bodily image can structure an abstract social judgment.

The curse "may your face become black" is typically uttered in situations of betrayal, deception, insult, or emotional distress. From an Islamic perspective, such forms of cursing are discouraged. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands other Muslims are safe." Therefore, wishing disgrace or humiliation upon others is considered an inappropriate act in Islamic ethics.

From the perspective of conceptual metaphor, "blackening of the face" is metaphorically structured as if a person's face is physically covered or stained with black color. However, in actual usage, it does not refer to literal blackness; rather, it symbolizes "social disgrace, loss of honor, and public humiliation".

خاورې دې په سر باد شه

د مازیګر اوبو له ځې ښه پټه دار لري

شین کمیس ګلدار لري

بل پروت په غاړه کې د لکو روپو هار لري

ښه سینه ګلزار لري

ګل احمد ناست دی بادوي خاورې په سر باندې

(Olfat, 1342, p. 772)

The expression "شه باد سر په دې خاورې" ("may dust be blown over your head") invokes a concrete physical image of dust covering the head. In the context of the curse, that image is extended to represent ruin, deprivation, and loss. The dominant mapping can be formulated as DUST/COVERING → RUIN AND DEPRIVATION, with the head serving as a salient bodily location. The interpretation is supported by the poem's context, in which the speaker expresses severe emotional and material loss.

In the above section, the poet refers to the expression "to have dust thrown over one's head" (khawre de pa sar bad she). In Pashtun society, when someone wishes total destruction or ruin upon another, this curse is commonly used. It implies the loss of everything a person possesses wealth, children, family, and livelihood leaving the individual in a state of complete deprivation, similar to a destitute or wandering beggar, exposed to dust and unable to protect themselves from it.

The phrase is grounded in an embodied and observable physical experience, but the analysis does not assume that every cultural association with dust is metaphorical. The metaphorical extension occurs when the concrete image of dust covering the head is used to conceptualize the abstract condition of devastation and loss. Thus, the mapping is CONCRETE COVERING/DEBRIS → SOCIAL OR MATERIAL RUIN, illustrating how embodied experience can support culturally conventional metaphorical meaning.

Various curses and prayers are widely used in Pashtun culture, each carrying its own contextual and emotional significance. Through the lens of conceptual metaphor, the expression "throwing dust over one's head" is grounded in a concrete and observable physical experience. For instance, children playing in sand or soil often throw dust over themselves, leaving their faces covered in dirt, which is immediately cleaned by their mothers upon returning home.

Thus, the phrase is derived from such embodied, sensory experiences and is metaphorically extended to represent abstract notions of destruction and ruin. In this sense, "dust on the head" symbolically represents complete loss, devastation, and being stripped of all possessions and dignity.

Conclusion

This study examined conceptual metaphors in a purposively selected corpus of Nangarhar folk poetry within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. The analysis demonstrates that metaphorical expressions in the selected corpus organize meaning through recurring mappings between embodied source domains and abstract target domains. The principal patterns identified are orientational, ontological, and personification metaphors, with container structures treated as a subtype of ontological metaphor.

The analysis shows that orientational mappings structure concepts such as honor, social status, knowledge, progress, and suffering through vertical and spatial relations. Ontological mappings transform abstract experiences into entities, substances, or bounded spaces, while personification transfers human agency, emotion, and social interaction to non-human entities. The analysis of "Hikal and Longin" provides particularly clear evidence for personification, whereas the examples involving the heart, darkness, and submergence illustrate container and entity structures.

The selected prayers and curses also demonstrate the cultural dimension of metaphor. Expressions such as "may your face become black" and "may dust be blown over your head" use concrete bodily and physical images to communicate abstract social evaluations such as disgrace, ruin, and deprivation. These findings indicate that metaphorical meaning is shaped jointly by embodied experience and culturally shared knowledge.

The study has two principal limitations. First, the corpus is purposively selected and is not statistically representative of all Nangarhar folk poetry. Second, qualitative interpretation of metaphor may involve contextual judgment. To address the latter, the study makes the analytical procedure explicit by identifying the source domain, target domain, mapping, dominant category, and cultural interpretation for each major example. Future research could expand the corpus, compare poets or districts, and use larger annotated datasets to investigate the distribution of these mappings. Within its stated scope, the study contributes a transparent cognitive-linguistic account of selected Nangarhar folk poetry and demonstrates the value of Pashto oral literature for metaphor research.

Moreover, the analysis of prayers and curses revealed that metaphorical expressions reflect the emotional, social, and cultural values of Pashtun society. These expressions preserve collective beliefs and provide insight into how people conceptualize happiness, suffering, justice, dignity, and social relationships.

In conclusion, Nangarhar folk poetry represents a valuable source for cognitive linguistic research because it reflects not only artistic creativity but also patterns of human thought and cultural understanding. The study contributes to Pashto literary scholarship by demonstrating that metaphor is not merely a poetic ornament but a fundamental mechanism through which individuals interpret and communicate their experiences.

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