# THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF LIFE IN NURSI'S *DAMASCUS SERMON*

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## ABSTRACT

Conceptual metaphor is a mapping of systematic correspondence between two conceptual domains which are target domain and source domain. It has been studied vastly ever since Lakoff and Johnson's ground breaking work of *Metaphors We Live By*. In this study, the conceptual metaphor utilised by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's (1877-1960) in his *Damascus Sermon* that relates to life is examined. The method of analysis is qualitative research through an explanatory case study which is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Based on this theory, conceptual metaphor is a cognitive mechanism that helps us structure our understanding of everyday experience. The findings revealed the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL as a predominant metaphor that underlines many metaphorical linguistic expressions in the *Sermon*. The findings also revealed the creative ways in which Nursi has used the conceptual metaphor to persuade his audience. This study provides some useful insights into how conceptual metaphor is used in sermons and other similar discourses. The findings can benefit orators, authors and public speakers about the importance of conceptualising metaphors to influence the audience for a lasting impression.

**Keywords:** *Conceptual Metaphor; Source Domain; Target Domain; Bediuzzaman Said Nursi; Damascus Sermon*

## INTRODUCTION

In personalized education where most of the time, learning takes place at a learner's own pace and choice with or without a teacher on the side, metaphors come as a great teacher. By using a metaphor in a personalized learning module or system, we can explain an unfamiliar situation or object with a known and familiar one. We use metaphors when we actually want to explain that two unalike or different things are the same. It means that in all metaphors a situation or object is compared with an actual one even though we know that situation is not indeed alike with the actual one.

The study of metaphor has revealed interesting characteristics since the ground-breaking work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and the shared metaphor entailments by Kövecses (2010). They have opened the door to the understanding of conceptual metaphor which hides and highlights the relevant conceptualisation of metaphorical linguistic expressions. "Metaphor is a solar eclipse. It hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its most salient and interesting characteristics when viewed through the right telescope"

(Paivio & Walsh, 1993, p. 307). The conceptualisation of life in metaphor has been researched in many ways over the past few years by Abdulmoneim (2006), Burke (2014), El-sharif (2011), Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Ong (1996). These studies indicate how individuals view life from their personal perspectives depending on their unique experiences but there are fewer studies on the conceptualisation of life in terms of school. Moreover, there are many studies investigating conceptual metaphors in literary and ordinary languages, but little attention has been paid to metaphors in religious texts (Golzadeh & Pourebrahim, 2013). Therefore, this study aims to explore the conceptualisation of life in Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's (1877-1960) *Damascus Sermon* based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) by eliciting his metaphorical linguistic expressions.

**Related Studies**
'LIFE IS A JOURNEY' is one of the main basic metaphors that Lakoff and Turner structure. It leads one to consider certain correspondences "as a mapping between two conceptual domains," the source domain JOURNEY and the target domain LIFE (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 3). They illustrate the conceptual correspondences as follows: a person as a traveller; purposes are destinations; to achieve purposes are routes; difficulties in life are impediments to travel; counselors are guides; progress is the distance travelled; things you gauge to progress; choices in life are crossroads; material resources and talents are provisions (p. 4).

Using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) CMT, Abdulmoneim (2006) demonstrates how the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY pervades in the Qur'an. His findings revealed the use of metaphor "LIFE IS A JOURNEY," where LIFE is the target domain and JOURNEY is the source domain. He revealed how this metaphor is used creatively through a dichotomy which covers a broader aspect of life, i.e., life after physical death. The conceptual metaphor reveals the metaphorical journey of good way is eternal life in Heaven whereas all evil ways end in eternal life also but in a totally different place which is Hell. The conventional conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is traditionally used to cover the concept "human life" from birth to death. Thus, the linguistic creativity of the Qur'an is extraordinary as such basic metaphors are based on a dichotomy where there are two kinds of life: the good, moral life on the one hand versus the bad, immoral life. Abdulmoneim has proved the linguistic creativity of the Qur'an through applying the theory to religious metaphor.

El-sharif (2011) analyses the use of the conceptual metaphor SPIRITUAL LIFE IS A JOURNEY in Prophet Muhammad's sayings that refer to the spiritual life of the individual in terms of a journey along a path. The findings revealed how the Prophet emphasises that the comparison of temporary worldly life to eternal future life is like a 'stranger' (*ɣaryb*) or a TRAVELLER 'passing through' who stops in a place temporarily before continuing his journey. For example, the Prophet says: "Be in the world as though you were a **stranger or one who is passing through**" (*Miškat*, 1604, p.334). The findings revealed the highlighted metaphorical linguistic expressions of the destination in the conceptual metaphor SPIRITUAL LIFE IS A JOURNEY which is creatively drawn from the different sayings of the Prophet within the conventional scheme LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Ong (1996) examines how the metaphorical concepts of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A DIVINE TRAIL hold together the Epistle of James through the metaphorical linguistic expressions related to "trail," "testing," "judge" and "law." His work provides a new view of the epistle by emphasising on a thorough and thought-provoking analysis. His findings revealed the clear chain of cause and consequences between testing of faith and keeping God's law. This biblical metaphoric criticism has revealed the concept of life in terms of a divine trail as one who is tested by various ordeals must take the hardship as a test of faith.

Burke (2014) mentioned about poetic language based on conceptualised conceptual metaphor appearing in daily expressions for example "As You Like It" which is a manifestation of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A PLAY. For example: "She always wants to be in the spotlight. What's your part in this? He saved the show" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 20). Burke restates Lakoff and Turner's (1989) illustration of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY with the following example: "Two roads diverged in the wood, and I took the one less travelled by. And that has made all the differences (Robert Frost); "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and LIFE IS A STORY by the "Life is a tale told by an idiot" from Shakespeare's Macbeth (Burke, 2014, p. 216). Kövecses (2010) mentioned how Elizabeth Riddle (2001) conceptualised life of the speakers of Hmong, a language spoken mainly in Laos and Thailand. The speakers view life in terms of a string which can be cut or even be broken. Riddle illustrated the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A STRING from social behaviour through the three Fates spinning, weaving, and cutting the thread of life. The existence of this metaphor is clearly present among this speakers' cultural sphere.

The conceptualised structures of the model of THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A SCHOOL in John Henry Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons* was defined by Kuczok (2014) through the lexical of "learns,"

"lessons," and many more that revealed metaphorical meanings in the human life experiences. According to Kuczok,  the metaphorical concepts for life were dealt by authors and they provided the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A TEST by Kövecses (2010) even though they did not mention the mapping of LIFE IS A SCHOOL. The concept of LIFE as a target domain is also commonly and primarily conceptualised as STRUGGLE, WAR, PRECIOUS POSSESSION, and  GAME among others ( Kövecses, 2006). Based on the previous researches that conceptualised the target domain of LIFE, the emphasis is towards how we perceive life and how we response to it according to our own perspectives. According to Kövecses (2015), it will only be possible to account for the emergence of metaphor  when there is seriously close dependence of metaphorical mind on the surrounding society or environment as it consists of situational and linguistic context. Thus, life is the area where we interact with our surroundings.

## METHODOLOGY

In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphor is defined as the essence of "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). They claim that conceptual metaphors are created differently because people have different experiences which make them structure their speeches, thoughts and activities in different ways. They also mentioned that our ordinary conceptual system in terms of our daily thought and action is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

Cognitive scientists view metaphor as "a pattern of conceptual association" (Grady, 2007, p. 188). Thus, "the locus of metaphor is not in language, but in the way we conceptualise one mental domain in terms of another" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 185). In CMT, domain refers to "a body of knowledge that organises related concepts" (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 190). The source domain in this case is more physical whereas the target domain is a more abstract kind of domain (Kövecses, 2006, p. 117). Although "metaphor highlights certain features while suppressing others" as mentioned by  Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 141), discovering metaphors can be interesting as they "provoke the listener to transfer features from the source to the target" (Saeed, 2003, p. 350). According to Fague (1982), metaphorical thinking is a way in which human beings think, move and discover in scientific, religious, social, poetic, political or personal areas. Metaphors can be considered as omnipresent tools which are used for reasoning, thinking, and suffusing people's thoughts (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Through his findings on a religious discourse, El-sharif (2011) revealed of conceptual metaphor as a persuasive tool that helps to identify and analyse the interrelationship that exists between spiritual, cultural and social domains.

### The Method of Analysing
The method of analysing the metaphorical linguistic expressions or words that express implied meaning that can be structured in a conceptual mapping in this study  is  based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) CMT through an explanatory case study. This analysing process was conducted in two stages; identification of linguistic metaphors that relate to life and identification of the underlying conceptual mapping of the expressions.

### Stage One: Identification of Linguistic Metaphors that Relate to Life.
The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) by Pragglejaz Group (2007) is used as an tool to analyse the linguistic metaphors or the metaphorical linguistic expressions that convey the concept of life. These expressions were identified and highlighted in bold. The MIP procedures starts with i) read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning. Afterwards is ii) determine the lexical units in the text–discourse and iii) (a) for each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit and then (b) for each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be either i) more concrete [what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste]; Related to bodily action; or ii) more precise (as opposed to vague); Historically older; Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit and finally in the third procedure, (c) if the lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it. Last but not least, iv) if yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical (Pragglejaz, Group,  2007, p.3).

Damascus Sermon was analysed using MIP to understand the function of each lexical units and establish the lexical units in the context in order to identify its relation in the situation evoked by the text. Each of the words from the Sermon was slashed in order to identify the basic meaning and the context meaning. The lexical units in the extract and the evoked words in the contextual meaning that contrasted with the basic meaning are marked as metaphorical. In order to support the clarification of the lexical units as metaphorical

the references that are used are as follows: Oxford Online Dictionaries for Advanced Learners and Thesaurus; Cambridge Online Dictionary; Collin Dictionaries and Thesaurus and The Free Dictionary by Farlex.

**Stage 2: The Identification of the Underlying Conceptual Mapping of the Expressions**
The metaphorical linguistic expressions identified in stage one were explored to discover the underlying conceptual mapping. In order to elicit the conceptual metaphor, the source and target domains were identified. The interpretations of the conceptual mapping including the metaphorical entailments are discussed in the following section.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed the conceptual metaphor of LIFE IS A SCHOOL. The metaphorical expressions for the source domain SCHOOL are conveyed through a systematic set of correspondence mapping to the target domain LIFE. Nursi refers to life as school through the conceptualisation of life in terms of school. He conveys his perception through his conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL using rich metaphorical entailments from the metaphorical mapping of the source domain to the target domain. Eventually, the conceptualisation of life in terms of school that resides in his metaphorical linguistic expressions is revealed throughout his *Sermon*.



Figure 1. The metaphorical mapping of LIFE IS A SCHOOL

The metaphorical mapping of LIFE IS A SCHOOL is displayed in Figure 1. The metaphorical linguistic expressions in the phrases of the *Sermons* were highlighted in bold and interpreted.

Nursi delivers his speech with his conceptualisation of life in terms of school at the initial stage of the *Sermon*. Nursi's expression in the phrase "…among whom are close on a hundred religious scholars, who goes to school in the morning and ***learns his lesson...***" (p. 26) signifies the acquired knowledge that he gained in the learning process in life. The area where he acquired the knowledge in the school is referred as life. He refers to lessons as the knowledge that he has acquired from the situations, events in life, learning resources and also from his experiences.

Nursi expresses that "I have **learnt a lesson** in the school of mankind's social life" (p. 26). The "**lessons**" refer to the knowledge he has learned based on the social interactions in the situation that happens in the community. He is referring to the condition his audience is facing as they are "arrested" and "kept" due to their weakening in spiritual, moral and material matters. This situation has led to the "six dire sicknesses." The lessons of life can create a sense of awareness. Nursi reveals his awareness through the expression in the phrase "As a consequence of **the lesson I have learnt** on my own account…" (p. 27). He is aware of the backwardness of the Muslims which leads to loss of hope and causes the "six dire sicknesses". Eventually, he becomes aware of the need to reclaim hope of God's mercy as a resolution.

Nursi expresses about the lessons when he says in the phrase "I shall explain, by means of six 'Words,' **the lesson I have learnt** from the pharmacy of the Qur'an, which is like a faculty of medicine" (p. 26). The lessons in life come from various sources and Nursi prescribes the lessons from the Scripture of God. The "faculty" is the area where the sources of the solutions are obtained to solve the problems in life. In this *Sermon*, Nursi prescribes the Scripture as a remedy to solve the problem of the "six dire sicknesses". Thus, the lessons from the Scripture provide the divine knowledge and entail insightful wisdom as the solution as Nursi says "This lesson constitutes the medicine to cure our social life of those six dire sicknesses" (p. 26). Nursi also appeals to his audience to perceive the lesson as he says "Take a lesson!" (p. 31).

Thus, through accepting the lessons in life can make us aware of our limitations and weaknesses and eventually make us learn from the lessons for a better life. Nursi considers himself and the audience as students through his expression "students of the Qur'an" (p. 32). Thus, Muslims as learners need to adhere to the lessons stated in the Quran, which is a Scripture of God as it entails the book of guidance. Hence, Muslims can be guided and nurtured through the 'Word' of God to the true path of life when they observe and practice the lessons from God in their lives.

Life teaches many lessons through the pleasant and unpleasant times. Nursi's expression "I have learned from the studies and researches… from my experience of the ups and downs of social life…." (p. 46). In the context of the *Sermon*, he refers to analysing and evaluating the rise and fall of humans' conditions that can increase the knowledge about bringing truthfulness and honesty to life in order to cure their spiritual sickness which is deceit. The quest for knowledge in life by being inquisitive while discovering through experiences can be challenging but rewarding as the direct learning process occurs through discovery when there is observation. Thus, through the methods and approaches of evaluating, analysing, reviewing of issues and solving problems in the learning process in life, man can learn the indispensable properties of moral values as lessons of life.

The lessons of love and enmity are also covered by Nursi when he views love as constructive and enmity as destructive. He says "…and have learnt from my life-time of study is the following: The thing most worthy of love is love, and that most deserving of enmity is enmity" (p. 49). His expression refers to the duration of the learning process of the lessons of love and enmity. The lessons of love relate to the positive attributes while the lessons of enmity are filled with the negative attributes. This entails love as being constructive while and enmity as being destructive.

Nursi also refers to the lesson that he has learnt from mutual consultation which is based on freedom according to the law. His expression "The *lesson I have learnt* from the mutual consultation enjoined by the Shari'a…" (p. 51) signifies the acquired knowledge in the school of life. Thus, Nursi reminds his audience in adhering to the laws and warns them of the consequences of abandoning the laws which can entail painful lessons. Eventually, he implies the call for a mutual consultation as a means of brotherhood and unity and the call to take refuge in religion and recognizing God as lessons that can be perceived to secure life in this world and the hereafter which proceeds from belief.

Nursi's expression "…man can continue his personal life only through the support and assistance proceeding from belief,.." (p. 58) indicates the encouragement in the learning process from the truths of belief based on sincerity. Nursi appeals to his audience again in the concluding part of the *Sermon* to consider the lessons of life from his experiences. He mentions about the true values of sincerity which entails the means of solidarity and consultation which set man free from the bondage of negative influences. Men can be free from the negative influences and all the six dire spiritual sicknesses when they adhere to the lessons of life that can save their belief. Thus, through the metaphorical linguistic expressions, the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL predominates in the *Sermon*.

In a nutshell, the metaphorical conceptualisation of a believer's life which proceeds from belief is emphasised by Nursi through his conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL in the *Sermon*. Conceptual metaphors bring two distant domains or concepts into correspondence with each other (Kövecses, 2003). In this study, the source domain of SCHOOL and the target domain of LIFE correspond through a well-structured mapping. Thus, it can be a model of the believer's LIFE IS A SCHOOL as the metaphorical linguistic expressions and the metaphorical entailments are based on religious reflections from the *Sermon*.

LIFE IS A SCHOOL that resonates in this *Sermon* can also be compared to the model of THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A SCHOOL in John Henry Newman's Parochial and Plain Sermons as defined by Kuczok (2014). Although there are similarities between Nursi's and Henry's conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL, as both of them make reference to the religious notions and spiritual domains that relate LIFE to the domain of SCHOOL, there are some differences that exist between their ways of conceptualisation. Henry is specifically referring to the Christian life and his experience is focused on Christian belief. As for Nursi, his expression refers to the students of the Quran. Therefore, it can be stated that Nursi is referring to life from the perspective of a Muslim believer. Thus, his metaphorical linguistic expressions in his conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL is reflected through his utterances and actions based on the lessons that he has learned from his experiences in life. Recognizing the different stages of the conceptual metaphors are crucial as they are based on the interlocutors, background and belief (El-sharif, 2011).

This study supports the claims of Jäkel (2002) as he mentions that the domain of the religious discourse should be largely dependent on metaphorical conceptualisation. It is because there are highly abstract domains that relate to central issues, for example of "God", "the soul", "the hereafter", and "the freedom of moral choice"

which have traditionally been regarded as the metaphysical ideas par excellence. These results also support the claims by Platzner (1996), a Bible commenter who asserts that "even the most intricate of metaphoric constructions cannot bridge the cognitive distance between language and divine reality" (p. 9). Thus, the conceptualisation of metaphysical ideas through metaphor in religious discourse should abound with metaphorical linguistic expressions.

Nursi was able to persuade his audience through his conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL as he appeals to them in the *Sermon*. Thus, this study supports the persuasive function of metaphor as mentioned by Charteris-black (2005) and also Sopory & Dillard (2006). Metaphors enhance persuasion as they enable orators as language users to express their message. The metaphorical linguistic expressions from the source domain relates to the learning environment that is derived from the religious concepts of learning from the Scripture, curing from spiritual illnesses through the remedies from the Scripture and being guided in the right path which is the true path that leads to salvation. Thus, the findings revealed the righteous lessons from the divine source which eventually support and enrich Lakoff and Turner's (1989) claim of religious and divine notions and concepts as being in the highest level of the hierarchy in their model of human attributes and behaviour. Moreover, based on the metaphorical linguistic expressions, the findings also support Harrison (2007) who mentions that religious language is principally metaphorical in nature rather than literal.

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals the metaphorical linguistic expressions in LIFE IS A SCHOOL in a sermon within the theoretical framework by Lakoff and Johnson's theory, where it has shown how Nursi structured around the idea of the life in terms of school. The analysis of the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SCHOOL which resonates throughout the *Damascus Sermon*, a classical heritage has managed to reveal the interesting facts of the conceptualisation of life. Lakoff and Johnson state that human conceptual system is heavily metaphorical in nature (Kövecses, 2015). Thus, the connected conceptual areas of the school and life through a set of correspondence portray the conceptualisation of LIFE IS A SCHOOL making the *Sermon* a living heritage through its metaphorical nature. This study is expected to benefit orators and authors who have the intention to persuade their audience. Besides that, it is expected to create awareness among the public speakers about the importance of conceptualising metaphors to influence the audience for a lasting impression. Further researches are recommended on similar sermons or any religious discourses that has the potential to reveal metaphorical linguistic expressions as persuasive tools used by the orators.

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