

Metaphor and Persuasion in Arabic Da'wah Discourse: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

Al-Isti'ārah wa al-Iqnā' fī Khiṭāb al-Da'wah al-'Arabiyyah: Muqārabah Lughawiyyah Ma'rifiyyah

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Abstract

This study examines metaphor as a persuasive cognitive mechanism in contemporary Arabic da'wah discourse, focusing on digital *khutbah* delivered through online platforms. Unlike previous studies that primarily rely on classical rhetorical analysis (balāghah), this research adopts a cognitive linguistic perspective to explore how metaphor structures religious meaning and influences audience interpretation. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory the study analyzes a corpus of 30 *khutbah* texts collected from YouTube and official religious platforms published between 2020 and 2025. Data were examined using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to identify conceptual metaphors and analyze their persuasive functions. The findings indicate that dominant metaphors such as نور الإيمان (faith is light), مرض الذنوب (sin is disease), and الحياة رحلة (life is a journey) play a significant role in framing religious understanding, evoking emotional engagement, and guiding moral behavior. This study contributes to cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis by providing an empirical and contemporary account of metaphor in Arabic da'wah discourse, demonstrating that metaphor functions not only as a rhetorical device but as a cognitive and persuasive strategy in digital religious communication.

Keywords: Metaphor, Persuasion, Cognitive Linguistics, Arabic Da'wah Discourse, *Khutbah*.

ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستعارة بوصفها آلية معرفية إقناعية في خطاب الدعوة العربية المعاصرة، مع التركيز على الخطب الرقمية المقدمة عبر المنصات الإلكترونية. وعلى خلاف الدراسات السابقة التي اعتمدت أساساً على التحليل البلاغي التقليدي، تتبنى هذه الدراسة منظوراً لسائياً معرفياً لاستكشاف كيفية إسهام الاستعارة في بناء المعنى الديني وتأثيرها في تفسير المتلقين. وانطلاقاً من نظرية الاستعارة التصويرية، تحلل الدراسة مدونة تتكون من 30 نصاً من الخطب جُمعت من موقع يوتيوب ومنصات دينية رسمية، نُشرت خلال الفترة ما بين 2020 و2025. وقد تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام إجراء تحديد الاستعارة (MIP) للكشف عن الاستعارات التصويرية وتحليل وظائفها الإقناعية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الاستعارات المهيمنة مثل: الإيمان نور، والذنوب مرض، والحياة رحلة، تؤدي دوراً مهماً في تأطير الفهم الديني، وإثارة التفاعل العاطفي، وتوجيه السلوك الأخلاقي. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في مجالي اللسانيات المعرفية وتحليل الخطاب من خلال تقديم معالجة معاصرة قائمة على البيانات لدور الاستعارة في خطاب الدعوة

العربية، مبيّنةً أن الاستعارة لا تعمل بوصفها أداة بلاغية فحسب، بل باعتبارها استراتيجية معرفية وإقناعية في التواصل الديني الرقمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعارة، الإقناع، اللسانيات المعرفية، خطاب الدعوة العربية، الخطبة.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic da'wah discourse represents a distinctive form of religious communication in which language is strategically employed to influence belief, emotion, and behavior. In contemporary contexts, particularly through digital *khutbah* disseminated via online platforms such as YouTube and institutional religious websites, da'wah has evolved into a global communicative practice that engages diverse audiences across geographical and cultural boundaries.¹ Within this evolving communicative landscape, linguistic strategies play a crucial role in shaping how religious messages are constructed, interpreted, and received.

One of the most salient linguistic features in Arabic da'wah discourse is metaphor. Classical Arabic scholarship, particularly within the framework of *balāghah*, has long recognized metaphor (*isti'ārah*) as an important rhetorical device used to enhance eloquence and aesthetic expression. However, these traditional approaches tend to emphasize stylistic and rhetorical aspects, often overlooking the cognitive and functional dimensions of metaphor in shaping meaning and influencing audience interpretation.

In contrast, contemporary linguistic research conceptualizes metaphor as a fundamental cognitive mechanism rather than merely a rhetorical ornament. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as developed by Lakoff and Johnson² and further elaborated in recent studies³ posits that metaphor structures human thought by mapping abstract concepts onto more concrete experiential domains. In Arabic da'wah discourse, metaphors such as نور الإيمان (faith is light) and الحياة رحلة (life is a journey) illustrate how complex theological ideas are communicated through familiar experiential schemas, enabling audiences to understand and internalize religious teachings more effectively.

A growing body of research has demonstrated the importance of metaphor in discourse, particularly in political, media, and public communication contexts⁴. These studies show that metaphor plays a central role in framing issues, shaping ideologies, and influencing audience perception. However, despite these advances, research on metaphor in religious discourse—especially within contemporary Arabic da'wah contexts—remains relatively limited and fragmented. Existing studies tend to focus on scriptural texts, such as

¹ H. A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. (Routledge., 2013).

² M. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

³ Z. Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108859121>.

⁴ J. Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Demmen, "An Integrated Approach to Metaphor and Framing," *Applied Linguistics* 39, no. 5 (2018): 625–645, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw028>.

Qur'anic discourse or prophetic traditions,⁵ with fewer studies examining metaphor in live, contemporary da'wah communication.

The rise of digital media has further transformed the nature of da'wah discourse, shifting it from traditional mosque-based settings to online platforms that reach wider and more heterogeneous audiences. This transformation requires preachers to adopt more effective communicative strategies to ensure clarity, engagement, and persuasive impact. In this context, metaphor becomes increasingly important as it allows speakers to simplify abstract religious concepts, evoke emotional responses, and frame moral values in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of systematic linguistic analysis that examines how metaphor functions within this digital and contemporary da'wah environment.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates metaphor as a cognitive and persuasive mechanism in contemporary Arabic da'wah discourse. Unlike previous studies that primarily rely on rhetorical or theological analysis, this research adopts a cognitive linguistic and discourse-analytic approach to examine how metaphor operates within authentic *khutbah* data. Specifically, the study analyzes a corpus of contemporary *khutbah* (2020–2025) collected from digital platforms to identify dominant conceptual metaphors and explore their persuasive functions in shaping audience understanding and religious attitudes.

This study offers a novel contribution by shifting the analytical focus from classical rhetorical description (*balāghah*-based analysis of metaphor) to a cognitive-discursive perspective grounded in empirical data. By integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory with discourse analysis, the research demonstrates how metaphor functions not only as a linguistic feature but as a cognitive and persuasive strategy in modern Arabic da'wah communication. In doing so, it expands the scope of metaphor studies into the domain of contemporary religious discourse and provides new insights into the role of language in shaping belief and communication in the digital age.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a discourse-analytic approach to investigate metaphor as a cognitive and persuasive mechanism in contemporary Arabic da'wah discourse. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meaning, identifying patterns in discourse, and analyzing linguistic phenomena within their natural communicative context.⁶ Unlike purely theoretical or literature-based studies, this research is grounded in empirical data derived from authentic religious discourse, allowing for a more context-sensitive and analytically rigorous investigation.

⁵ A. El-Sharif, "Conceptual Metaphor in Islamic Discourse: A Corpus-Based Analysis," *Journal of Pragmatics*, no. 146 (2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.03.012>.

⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Sage Publications, 2013).

The primary data of this study consist of thirty (30) *khutbah* texts collected from digital platforms, particularly YouTube channels and official religious websites, published between 2020 and 2025. The selection of these data reflects the transformation of da'wah discourse into a contemporary digital practice that reaches broader and more diverse audiences. The *khutbah* were selected based on specific criteria, including the credibility of the speakers (such as recognized scholars or institutional preachers), the relevance of the content to da'wah themes, and the presence of metaphorical expressions within the discourse. In addition to primary data, secondary data were obtained from relevant academic sources, including books, journal articles, and previous studies in cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and metaphor studies, which provide the theoretical foundation for this research.⁷

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques, involving the processes of identifying, selecting, downloading, and transcribing *khutbah* recordings. The transcription process followed a verbatim approach, preserving the original lexical and syntactic structures of the speakers' utterances to ensure the authenticity of the linguistic data. However, non-linguistic features such as pauses, hesitations, and prosodic elements were not included, as the analysis focuses specifically on lexical metaphor rather than phonological or paralinguistic aspects of speech.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach combined with the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group. The analysis involved several steps, including close reading of the texts, identification of lexical units, determination of contextual meanings, comparison with their more basic meanings, and identification of metaphorical expressions where a contrast between meanings was observed. Since MIP was originally developed for English, the procedure was adapted to Arabic by taking into account the specific characteristics of the language, particularly its root-based morphology (الجذر الثلاثي), derivational patterns, and contextual semantic variation. This adaptation ensures that metaphor identification remains valid and reliable within the Arabic linguistic system.

Following the identification process, metaphorical expressions were categorized into conceptual metaphors based on source and target domains in accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory.⁸ The analysis then focused on examining the persuasive functions of these metaphors, including their role in framing religious concepts, evoking emotional responses, and influencing audience cognition and moral interpretation. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employs theoretical triangulation by integrating cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and persuasion theory, thereby providing a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding metaphor in Arabic da'wah discourse.

This study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which conceptualizes metaphor as a cognitive mechanism that structures human understanding through

⁷ L. J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019).

⁸ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

systematic mappings between source and target domains.⁹ Within this framework, abstract religious concepts in Arabic da'wah discourse such as faith, sin, and repentance—are understood through more concrete experiential domains. For instance, expressions such as الإيمان نور (faith is light) reflect how metaphor functions as a conceptual tool that shapes interpretation and meaning construction rather than merely serving as a stylistic feature.

In addition, this study adopts a discourse-analytic perspective, which views language as a form of social practice embedded within communicative contexts.¹⁰ From this perspective, metaphor is not only a cognitive structure but also a discourse strategy that operates within *khutbah* communication to organize meaning, guide audience interpretation, and construct religious messages in context. This approach enables the analysis to move beyond isolated lexical items and examine how metaphor functions within the broader structure of da'wah discourse.

Furthermore, the study integrates insights from persuasion theory, particularly in relation to metaphorical framing. Metaphor is understood as a persuasive device that shapes audience cognition by framing abstract concepts in evaluative and emotionally engaging ways.¹¹ In the context of Arabic da'wah discourse, metaphor not only facilitates comprehension but also influences attitudes, emotions, and moral orientation.

By combining Conceptual Metaphor Theory, discourse analysis, and persuasion theory, this framework provides a comprehensive analytical lens for examining how metaphor operates as a cognitive, discursive, and persuasive mechanism in contemporary Arabic da'wah discourse.

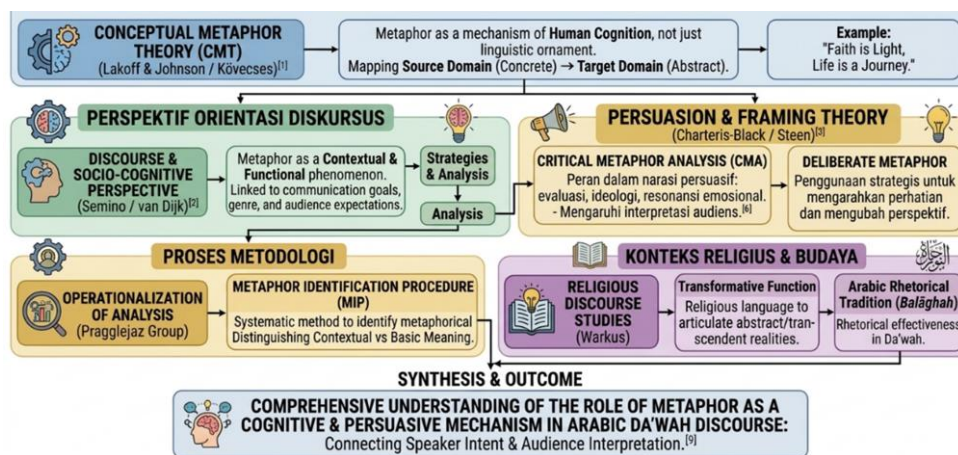


Figure 1. Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

This research adopts a multidimensional approach to metaphor, beginning with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as proposed by Lakoff, Johnson, and Kövecses, which identifies metaphor not as a mere linguistic ornament but as a fundamental cognitive

⁹ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

¹⁰ T. A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Context* (Cambridge University Press., 2008).

¹¹ Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Demmen, "An Integrated Approach to Metaphor and Framing."

mechanism that maps concrete Source Domains onto abstract Target Domains (e.g., "Faith is Light"). This cognitive foundation is expanded through a Discourse Orientation Perspective, drawing on the work of Semino and van Dijk to analyze metaphor as a contextual and functional phenomenon shaped by communicative goals and audience expectations. By incorporating Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and Deliberate Metaphor Theory, the framework examines how metaphors serve as instruments of persuasion and framing, leveraging emotional resonance and ideology to direct attention and influence interpretation. Methodologically, the study ensures empirical rigor through the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group, which systematically distinguishes contextual meanings from basic lexical roots. This synthesis is further enriched by grounding it in Religious Discourse Studies and the Arabic Rhetorical Tradition (*Balāghah*), highlighting the transformative function of language in articulating transcendent realities within Da'wah discourse. Ultimately, this integrated model provides a comprehensive understanding of metaphor as both a cognitive bridge and a strategic rhetorical tool, effectively connecting the speaker's intent with the audience's socio-cultural interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual Metaphors in Arabic Da'wah Discourse

The analysis of the *khutbah* corpus (n = 30) reveals that metaphor constitutes a central linguistic strategy in Arabic da'wah discourse. Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a total of 87 metaphorical expressions were identified and categorized into recurring conceptual patterns. These findings support previous studies that highlight metaphor as a fundamental mechanism in structuring discourse and meaning.¹²

However, unlike earlier research that predominantly focuses on political and media discourse,¹³ this study demonstrates that metaphor plays an equally significant role in religious discourse, particularly in contemporary Arabic da'wah contexts.

Table 1. Dominant Conceptual Metaphors in Arabic Da'wah Discourse

المجازات المفاهيمية في اللغة العربية: خريطة الدلالة CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN ARABIC: A SEMANTIC MAP				
الرقم NO.	التعبير المجازي (العربية) METAPHORICAL EXPRESSION (ARABIC)	دائرة المصدر (السباق الفيزيائي) SOURCE DOMAIN (PHYSICAL CONTEXT)	دائرة الهدف (المفهوم المجرد) TARGET DOMAIN (ABSTRACT CONCEPT)	المجاز المفاهيمي (اللغة الإنجليزية) CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR (ENGLISH)
1	الإيمان نور	Cahaya "Light"	Iman "Faith"	FAITH IS LIGHT
2	الدنوب مرض	Penyakit "Disease"	Dosa "Sin"	SIN IS DISEASE
3	الحياة رحلة	Perjalanan "Journey"	Hidup "Life"	LIFE IS A JOURNEY
4	القلب مظلم	Kegelapan "Darkness"	Hati/Spiritualitas "Heart/Spirituality"	HEART IS SPACE (DARK SPACE)
5	التوبة طريق	Jalan/Lintasan "Path"	Taubat "Repentance"	REPENTANCE IS A PATH

¹² Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*.

¹³ J. Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor (2nd Ed.)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Metaphor as Cognitive Structuring Mechanism

The findings indicate that metaphor functions as a cognitive tool that enables speakers to structure abstract religious concepts into more concrete and accessible forms. This aligns with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which posits that human cognition is fundamentally metaphorical.¹⁴ For instance, in one *khutbah* text, the preacher states: " فَإِنَّ الْإِيمَانَ نُورٌ يَهْدِي " "الْقُلُوبَ". This expression illustrates the conceptual metaphor *Faith Is Light*, where "light" is associated with guidance, clarity, and truth. Similar findings have been reported in previous discourse studies, where metaphor serves as a cognitive bridge between abstract and concrete domains.¹⁵

By embedding such metaphors within *khutbah* discourse, preachers facilitate audience comprehension and internalization of religious teachings. This supports the argument that metaphor is not merely linguistic decoration but a core mechanism of meaning-making.

Metaphor as Persuasive Framing Strategy

Beyond its cognitive function, metaphor also operates as a persuasive strategy by framing religious concepts in evaluative and emotionally engaging ways. This finding is consistent with research on metaphor and framing, which shows that metaphor shapes how audiences interpret and evaluate information.¹⁶ For example: "الذنوب مرض يحتاج إلى علاج". This metaphor frames sin as a harmful condition, thereby: (1) constructing moral urgency, (2) encouraging repentance, and (3) positioning religious practice as a form of healing.

Such framing mechanisms have been widely documented in political discourse,¹⁷ but this study extends these insights into religious communication, demonstrating that metaphor similarly guides moral reasoning in da'wah discourse.

Emotional and Affective Functions of Metaphor

The analysis further reveals that metaphor plays a crucial role in evoking emotional engagement, which is essential for persuasive communication. Metaphor is closely linked to emotional experience and can activate affective responses in audiences. For instance: "القلب مظلم إذا ابتعد عن الله". This metaphor evokes a sense of fear, loss, and spiritual emptiness, thereby reinforcing the importance of faith.

This finding aligns with previous studies showing that metaphor is an effective tool for emotional framing in discourse.¹⁸ However, unlike prior research that focuses on media

¹⁴ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

¹⁵ E Semino, *Metaphor in Discourse*. (Cambridge University Press., 2008).

¹⁶ Amber Boeynaems et al., "The Effects of Metaphorical Framing on Political Persuasion : A Systematic Literature Review The Effects of Metaphorical Framing on Political Persuasion :," *Metaphor and Symbol* 32, no. 2 (2017): 118–34, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2017.1297623>.

¹⁷ Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor (2nd Ed.)*.

¹⁸ Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Demmen, "An Integrated Approach to Metaphor and Framing."

narratives, this study demonstrates how emotional metaphor operates within religious خطاب, where emotional engagement is central to persuasion.

Metaphor and Moral Framing

Another key finding is the role of metaphor in structuring moral narratives. The metaphor: "التوبة طريق إلى النجاة" constructs a journey schema, where religious practice is framed as a process of movement toward a goal. This supports previous research on journey metaphors, which are widely used to structure narratives of transformation and progress¹⁹. In the context of da'wah discourse, such metaphors: (1) provide directionality (2) reinforce moral progression, (3) encourage sustained behavioral change. Thus, metaphor functions not only as a cognitive tool but also as a moral framing device.

Integrating Cognitive, Discourse, and Persuasive Dimensions

Taken together, the findings suggest that metaphor in Arabic da'wah discourse operates across three interconnected dimensions: First, Cognitive → structuring abstract meaning . Second, Discourse → organizing sermonic خطاب. Third, Persuasive → influencing attitudes and behaviour. Rather than “confirming” existing theory, this study extends previous research by demonstrating how these functions interact within contemporary religious discourse. While earlier studies have emphasized metaphor in political or media contexts²⁰, this study shows that similar mechanisms operate in Arabic da'wah discourse, albeit with distinct religious and moral dimensions.



Figure 2. Conceptual Mapping of “Faith is Light”

¹⁹ Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor (2nd Ed.)*.

²⁰ Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Demmen, “An Integrated Approach to Metaphor and Framing.”

This study contributes to the literature in several ways: first, It extends metaphor research into Arabic da'wah discourse, a relatively underexplored domain. Second, It integrates cognitive linguistics with discourse analysis in an empirical context.²¹ Third, It demonstrates that metaphor functions as a cognitive-persuasive mechanism, not merely a rhetorical device. By moving beyond traditional *balāghah*-based analysis, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of metaphor in contemporary Arabic religious communication.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that metaphor plays a fundamental role in Arabic da'wah discourse, functioning not merely as a stylistic feature but as a cognitive and persuasive mechanism. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and discourse analysis, the findings reveal that metaphors such as faith is light, sin is disease, and life is a journey systematically structure religious understanding by mapping abstract spiritual concepts onto concrete experiential domains. These mappings enable audiences to comprehend complex theological ideas in more accessible and meaningful ways. Furthermore, the study confirms that metaphor operates simultaneously at cognitive, discursive, and persuasive levels. At the cognitive level, metaphor shapes how individuals conceptualize religious beliefs; at the discourse level, it organizes meaning within sermonic structures; and at the persuasive level, it influences emotions, attitudes, and moral behavior. This multi-layered function highlights the centrality of metaphor in effective da'wah communication. Importantly, this research moves beyond traditional approaches rooted in *balāghah* by adopting a contemporary linguistic framework that emphasizes empirical analysis and cognitive interpretation. In doing so, it provides new insights into how language functions in modern Arabic religious discourse, particularly in the context of digital and global communication.

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²¹ Zulkifli Paputungan, "Desain Pengembangan Media Pembelajaran Mahāratu Al-Kalām Berbasis Articulane Story Line," *'A Jamiy: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab* 10, no. 2 (2021): 46–59.

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