

# **TIME AS A MOVING ENTITY in English and in Arabic: A Comparative Cognitive Analysis**

**Sondes Hamdi, Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines au Kef**  
(sondeshamdi@yahoo.fr)

## **Abstract**

Since the emergence of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (the CMT henceforth) in the 1980s, many studies have been carried out on conceptual metaphors. However, so far no single study has provided a systematic comparative analysis of time metaphors in English and in Arabic. The present paper aims at filling up this gap, at least partially, by conducting a comparative analysis of the conceptual metaphors for time in these unrelated languages. The current analysis is based on the theoretical framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as proposed by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980), and Kövecses (2002). The purpose of the current research is to find out how the abstract concept of *TIME* is conceptualized in terms of a more concrete one, i.e. *A MOVING ENTITY*, in both languages.

Seit Aufkommen der Kognitiven Metaphertheorie in den 1980er Jahren sind zahlreiche Studien zu Konzeptuellen Metaphern erstellt worden. Keine Studie allerdings hat sich bislang systematisch mit den Metaphorisierungen von 'Zeit' im Englischen und Arabischen auseinandergesetzt. Der vorliegende Beitrag soll diese Lücke schließen, dadurch dass er eine vergleichende Analyse der konzeptuellen Metaphern für 'Zeit' in diesen beiden, nicht miteinander verwandten Sprachen durchführt. Die Analyse stützt sich auf den theoretischen Rahmen der Kognitiven Metaphertheorie, wie sie von Lakoff/Johnson (1980) und Kövecses (2002) entwickelt worden ist. Ziel des vorliegenden Beitrags ist es herauszufinden, wie der abstrakte Gegenstandsbereich 'Zeit' durch konkretere Bereiche (z.B. als Bewegung) in beiden Sprachen konzeptualisiert wird.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the 1980s, cognitive linguistics has witnessed an upsurge of comparative studies on conceptual metaphors. However, so far no single study has furnished a systematic comparative analysis of time metaphors in English and in Arabic. The present paper purports to bridge this gap, at least partially, by carrying out a comparative analysis of the conceptual metaphors for time in these unrelated languages. The main sources of conventional expressions of time considered in this paper are: dictionaries, newspapers, and literary prose texts. Given that dictionaries are records of the lexicon of a language compiled by expert lexicographers, they constitute a reliable and rich source of conventional expressions. Newspapers and literary texts, on the other hand, allow for the collection of naturally-occurring written data in the two languages. The choice of these particular text sources is motivated by two

factors: (1) the need to ensure a very close equivalence of text between the two languages; and (2) the need to have balanced data containing different registers. The current analysis is based on the theoretical and practical framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as proposed by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980), and Kövecses (2002). This paper comprises four main sections. The first section outlines the basic tenets of the study's theoretical framework, i.e. the CMT. The second and third sections highlight the importance of the concept of time and of cross-linguistic corpus-based analyses. The fourth section gives an insight into similarities in the conceptualization of time as a moving entity between the two linguistic communities.

## 2. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory

What makes the CMT an interesting theoretical framework for metaphor analyses is the distinction it draws between *conceptual metaphor*, on the one hand, and *linguistic metaphors*, on the other hand (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). What native speakers say and what belongs to the language or the lexicon of concrete domains are linguistic metaphors. Conceptual metaphor, on the other hand, refers to a mental representation that describes how two words or expressions from apparently different domains may be associated at the underlying level. As such, conceptual metaphor is an abstract notion revealed through linguistic metaphors. For instance, English linguistic metaphors used when talking about time, such as *I am wasting my time* and *Use your time wisely*, are some of the linguistic realizations of the underlying conceptual metaphor TIME AS A LIMITED RESOURCE.

The CMT argues that the essence of a conceptual metaphor consists in the comprehension of one concept in terms of another. It is understood in terms of the systematic set of mappings that characterize the transfer from one concept to another. For instance, in the conceptual metaphor TIME AS AN OBJECT, the elements of the source domain, *OBJECT*, map onto elements in the target domain, *TIME*. Thus, the possession of an object corresponds to the possession of time, taking an object corresponds to taking time, qualifying an object corresponds to qualifying time, etc.

## 2.1 The Importance of the Concept of Time

Time is one of the important aspects of human experience. Since pre-Socratic times, philosophers and researchers have studied the nature and structure of time (Evans, 2004). In *La Psychologie du Temps* (1956), Fraisse explains the importance of time in human life, observing that from birth to death, the human body undergoes several changes under the impact of time. He states that our existential conditions vary constantly and modify us in different ways because our existence is structured and shaped by the rhythms of nights and days (283).

This study is an attempt to shed light on the concept of time from a linguistic perspective. It investigates, on the basis of language data, the ways time is mentally represented in two different languages.

## 2.2 The Importance of Cross-linguistic Corpus-Based Analyses

Several linguists (Steen 1999; Semino et al. 2004) contend that a corpus-based methodology has much to offer in metaphor research, particularly in the process of extrapolation of conceptual metaphors from linguistic metaphors. Thus, this study is based on language data and inspired by the assumption of corpus linguistics that a „corpus-based empiricism must not lose touch with the theoretical linguistic tradition [...]” (Mair 2002: 109).

Also, comparative studies concerning two genetically unrelated languages, such as English and Arabic, are badly needed to furnish new evidence-unobtainable from research carried out from a monolingual perspective- for the cognitive status of metaphors. For instance, the fact that English speakers use the domain of *MONEY* to refer to time, by using expressions peculiar to handling money, such as „spend” and „save,” does not mean that a cognitive mapping between *MONEY* and *TIME* is universal. However, if the Arabic words for „save” and „spend” also map onto the domain of *TIME*, it would be a strong indication that these seemingly different expressions arise from common cognitive mappings between two unrelated domains, i.e., *TIME* and *MONEY*, and that the conceptual metaphor is not coincidental in two unrelated languages.

## Results

Both languages conceptualize time as a moving entity as reflected in the following examples:

- (1) safir firansa da'aa lihudur hafl ...wa dhalika duhr yawm 'al-xamis 'al-muqbil fi 14 yuliyu 'al-haaly.  
Ambassador French invite for-presence party, and this day Thursday coming in 14 July current.  
*„French ambassador called for a show **the coming Thursday** afternoon 14th July”* (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat: 27)
- (2) tantaliq 'al-dawra 'al-'idhaa'aya 'al-jadida 'al-'usbu' 'al-qaadim  
Start session radio new week coming.  
*„The new radio session will start **the coming week**”* (Axbar Al-Riyadha 2005: 2).
- (3) lam yaa'ti 'al-zawaal hata kaana qad tahasala 'ala nasib min 'al-samak yakfi lisadi masaarif dhalika 'al-yawm.  
And not-come noon until he obtain portion of fish suffice to cover expenses of-that day.  
*„**The noon had not yet come** when he secured a sufficient portion of fish to meet the expenditures of that day”* (Hafdhi 1984: 14).
- (4) ayqana 'ana saa'atahu qad haanat wa 'ana hayaatahu la tusaawi 'ila 'isaara min 'al-malik  
He was sure that hour-his approach and that life-his NEG-worth only gesture of king.  
*„He got sure that his hour had approached and his life was worth no more than a gesture from the king”* (Hafdhi 1984: 56).
- (5) wal 'aana ha hiya 'al-saa'a qad danat wa 'arisi 'al-mawt qad jaa'a ba'da hijraanihi.  
And now here is hour approach and groom-my death come after desertion.  
*„And now the hour has approached and death, my promised groom, came after desertion”* (Gibran 1985: 34).
- (6) Jaa'a 'id 'al-fish  
Come Feast Easter.  
*„Easter has come”* (Gibran 1985: 53).
- (7) mataa ya'ti 'al-sabaah? 'indama ya'inu 'awaanuhu

When come morning? When approach time-its.

„When will the morning come up? Just when its time approaches” (Souf 1984: 77).

- (8) *The arrival of the Computer Revolution and the founding of the Computer Age have been announced many times* (Postman 2001: 326).
- (9) *Never think of the future, it comes soon enough* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 244).
- (10) *The moment of truth for most German children comes* at the end of Grade 4 (Maclean’s 1992: 16).
- (11) *The time is approaching when we must think about buying a new house* (Oxford Advanced Dictionary 1989: 48).

In examples (1)-(11), events in the future (Thursday, dawn, night, Easter, the computer revolution, the moment of truth, the future) are understood as displacing themselves from where they were at first to where the observer is. In other words, the use of the deictic verbs of motion with nominal expressions referring to time implies that these events are conceptualized as coming toward, i.e. moving, from the front in the observer’s direction.

Time, as is typical of moving entities, is conceptualized as facing its direction of motion. Thus, future events are facing the observer, who is located at the present moment. This fact is reflected in the verbs and expressions that express face-to-face locations:

- (12) *istiqbaal ‘al-mawt xayr min ‘istidbaarihi*  
Facing death better than ignoring-it.

„Facing death is better than ignoring it”.

- (13) *I can see the face of things to come* (Lakoff 1999: 143).

In (12), the use of the noun *استقبال* , (/‘istiqbaal/) which means „welcoming, receiving, facing” implies that the observer meets the time of death by facing it. In (13), the future is coming towards the observer (verb *come*), facing him, allowing the observer to see its metaphorical face (*see the face*).

### **Time Brings Something with it**

The time not only moves towards the observer, but brings something with it, making an impact on the observer by whom it passes, as in the following examples, where future is described as prosperous and time is seen as a person who brings things the receiver expects to get:

- (14) fi 'al-muqaabil, kaana mutafaa'ilan bimustaqbal baasim limumathilaatina

In return, he was optimistic of future prosperous for actresses-our.

„*In return, he was optimistic about a prosperous future for our actresses*” (Al-Sarih 2005: 5).

- (15) *Time brings everything to those who can wait for it* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs, 1992: 598).

The closer the expected moment of time is, the more it affects the observer, who, as such, is not indifferent to its arrival, as in examples (16) where wife and fisherman expect the arrival of the baby:

- (16) marat 'al-suhur wal-ayaam wa 'al-sayaad wa zawjatuhu yantadiraan 'al-haaditha 'al-sa'id bifaarighi 'al-sabr

Pass by months and days and fisherman and wife-his wait event happy eagerly until knock hour and approach time.

„*The months and days passed, the fisherman and his wife were impatiently expecting the happy event until the time came up*” (Hafdhi 1984: 8).

- (17) saara yataraqab ma'aaty 'al-daqaq'iq

He wait coming of minutes.

„*He was waiting for the advent of minutes*” (Gibran 1985: 82).

- (18) 'is haadhihi 'al-ayaam 'al-ma'duda wantadir 'al-yawm 'al-maw'ud

Live these days a few and wait day promised.

„*Just live these few days and wait for the promised day*” (Souf 1984: 61).

- (19) tatamaalak baqiyat 'al-fatayaat wa 'al-niswa 'anfusahuma 'ala 'al-raqs fandafa'na wa ka'anama kuna bintidaar lahdati 'al-'intilaaq

They not-control the rest of girls and women themselves on dance they rushed as if they wait moment of-launching.

„*Other girls and women could not resist the desire to dance and they rushed as if they were waiting for the moment of launching*” (Al-Jabri 1989: 78).

- (20) *You are just looking forward dreamily to the week end* (Roberts 2001: 154).

In examples (14)-(20), the observer is eagerly waiting for the coming moments of time because he holds high expectations as to what the time will bring him. Time brings him hope and pleasure. The observer's eagerness is reflected by the use of words such as „rush to dance,” „promised day,” „looking forward”

and the adverb „dreamily” since we would usually look dreamily to something that we are eager to see.

The observer can be upset at the coming time because it can bring bad or unpredictable events, as illustrated in examples (21)-(23):

(21) wa jalasa ‘al-waalid yufakir fi ma‘aal ‘ibnihi ‘abdalah ‘aladhi yuhadiduhu ‘al-mawt fi kuli lahda

And sit father thinking of fate of son-his Abdallah that threat en-him death in every moment.

*„The father was thinking about the fate of his son Abdallah who was threatened by death at any moment” (Al-Mitwi 1984: 208).*

(22) *One can never tell what the future will bring (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 244).*

(23) *Fear not the future, weep not for the past (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 244).*

In (21), the coming time, the moment of death, frightens the observer because it can take his son away with it into the past. Thus, the coming time is viewed as a frightening force for the observer and for those who surround him. In (22), the observer fears the future because he cannot see what it encloses until it gets to him. As one cannot guess what the future hides for us, the observer has no choice other than wait for the future to come to where he is, to see what it has in stock for him. In (23), the observer might weep over the past for when the present time left him, it took away things that were precious to him, such as youth and happy „past” moments. These things cannot be back once they are gone with time.

Examples (14)-(23) show that in both languages the time passing the observer by raises different emotions in the observer: from joy to sadness and despair. So, the passing of time has the potential to affect the observer emotionally. Or more precisely, things that could happen in future time can considerably have an impact on the observer’s emotional state.

### **Coming of Time Imposes Duties on the Observer**

Examples (24)-(27) show that the subject, who is the observer, does or should do something to receive and greet the coming time:

(24) min dur ‘al-‘azyaa‘ kaanat munhamikatan xilaala ‘al ‘asaabi’ ‘al-‘axira bi ‘i’daadi maa ladayha lisitaa ‘al-muqbil

A number of houses fashion were busy through weeks last preparation of what they have for winter coming.

„A number of fashion houses were busy during the last weeks preparing their next winter collections” (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat 2005: 28).

(25) laqad jaa‘a laka ‘al-mawt yaa taarik ‘al-salaat

Come to you death you who do not- pray.

„Death is coming to those who neglect their prayers.”

(26) istiqaal ‘al-mawt xayr min ‘istidbaarihi

Meeting death better than ignoring-it.

„Meeting death is better than ignoring it”.

(27) *While you glory in the past, be busy in the present lest you should be caught unprepared in the future* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 451).

In (24), the subject, the fashion houses, is busy preparing for the coming winter. In (25), the observer, the subject *you*, is warned that he should not neglect his prayers. In (26), the observer, any person, should go and meet the coming time head on, since ignoring the moment of death is not an advisable policy. The observer should prepare for the moment of death rather than pretending it is not going to come. In (27), which is a proverb, so it has to teach us a lesson, the observer is advised to work hard in the present to be prepared for the future.

### The Future Becoming the Present

Examples (28) and (29) show that the future moving towards the observer changes into the present. Once the future time arrives where the observer is, it becomes the present.

(28) wa ‘al ‘aana haahiya ‘al-saa‘a qad danat wa ‘arisi ‘al-mawt qad jaa‘a ba‘da hijraanihi

And now here is hour came and groom-my death came after desertion.

„And now the hour has come and death, my promised groom, came after desertion” (Gibran 1985: 34).

(29) *Winter is almost here.*

In examples (28) and (29), the present time (the hour of death and the winter time) are at the same location as the stationary observer, which is illustrated by the use of the place deictic adverb, *here* and ها (/haa/ „here”), to refer to now. In these examples, the use of the adverbs „here” and ها (/haa/ „here”)



respectively indicates that the observer sees the time of death and the time of winter as inevitably becoming the present moment.

### **The Present Becoming the Past**

In both languages, past events are expressed as being in motion, as shown in the following examples:

- (30) wa kasafat sahifa ‘amarikiya ‘al-jumu’a ‘al-maadi ‘anahu ‘amada ‘ila ‘axthi ‘al-nush min ‘adati ‘asxaas

And reveal newspaper American Friday preceding that he-sought to take advice from many people.

„*An American newspaper revealed, **last Friday**, that he sought advice from many people*” (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat 2005: 30).

- (31) raaha ‘al-zaman ‘al-ladhi kaana yusmahu liman laysa lahu ‘aya sahaada ‘al-‘amal

Leave time that allow to whom not-has to him degree work.

„***The time**, when any one without a degree was authorized to work, **has passed***” (Souf 1984: 10).

- (32) madat sana lam tu‘adi fiha ‘ijaara ‘al-bayt

Leave one year not-pay in-it rent house.

„***One year passed** and you had not yet paid the house rent*” (Souf 1984: 9).

- (33) dhahaba ‘ams bima fihi

Go away yesterday with what in-it.

„***Let bygones be bygones***” (Proverb Collection 1987: 3).

- (34) ***Gone are the days** when the doors of the system could be slammed shut on large numbers of students who failed to respond to the traditional „skin or swim”* (The Globe and Mail 1995: 12).

In examples (30)-(34), the moments of the past time (Friday, time, year, yesterday, day) are seen as those that have passed the observer by. In these examples, the events are understood as having gone away from where the observer is.

### **Pace of Time in Motion**

Time moves at different speed and pace; it can go slow or fast. This characteristic of time motion is reflected by the following examples from the corpus:

- (35) *Little by little time goes by, short if you sing, long if you sigh* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 595).
- (36) *Time goes slow for those who watch it* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 597).
- (37) *Time passes quickly* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 599).
- (38) 'ina kula tilka 'al-saa'aat marat katurfati 'ayn  
All these hours pass by like a glance of eye.  
„*All those hours have passed like a glance*” (Al-Mitwi 1984: 138).

The motion of time into the past is experienced subjectively by the observer. In (35) and (36), time is experienced as going slowly when you spend it unsatisfied complaining about things, and fast, if you spend it having fun as in example (37). In (36), time goes slow for those who want to finish quickly what they are doing. Evans (2004) stresses this idea stating that a given duration of time is experienced as lasting longer or shorter depending on the observer's state of awareness. He observes that in our human experience of time, the duration of time in situations of suffering and danger is experienced as long, while in situations of routine activities or when we are enjoying ourselves, time appears to pass more quickly.

### The Manner of Time Motion

Both languages pay attention to the manner in which time metaphorically moves by using motion verbs encoding manner, such as „fly,” „march on,” „roll down,” „rotate,” as in the following examples:

- (39) kaana 'al-layl yataqadamu wa lakinahu lam ya'ti bisay'  
Night march on but-it not-bring anything.  
„*The night marched on, but it brought nothing with it*” (Hafdhi 1984: 8).
- (40) wa taduru 'al-ayaam  
And rotate days.  
„*And the days rotate*” (Al-Mitwi 1984: 138).
- (41) *Time flies like an arrow, and time lost never returns* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 597).
- (42) *All the Christmases roll down the hill towards the Welsh-speaking sea* (Thomas 2001: 33).
- (43) *Time marches on* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 599).

In examples (39)-(43), time is shown to move into the past in different manners: it rolls down like a ball in (42), it walks with regular and firm steps as soldiers do in (43) and (39). Time can move by rotating as in (40) or can fly through the air as arrows do, as in (41).

### **The Impact of the Motion of Time on Things and on the Observer**

Since time is conceptualized as an entity moving towards and past the observer, it necessarily makes an impact on the observer and on the observer's environment as it passes by. The impact of time is illustrated through the following examples:

- (44) wa bimurur 'al-ayaam tadaraba 'ala 'al-xitaab wa muwaajahat 'al-naas  
And with passage of time he-trained on discourse and facing of people.  
„*With the passage of time, he got trained in discourse and facing the public*”  
(Al-Jabri 1989: 53).
- (45) wa bimurur 'al-ayaam wa tawaafur 'al-sinin ta'adala mizaaj 'al-'um  
And with passage of time and density of years stabilized mood of-mother.  
„*With the passage of time and the accumulation of years, the mother's mood became steady*” (Al-Jabri 1989: 82).
- (46) *Time has not been nice to her looks* (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 1989: 1343).
- (47) *Time changes the oak into a coffin* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 598).
- (48) wa lam yabqa fi tilka 'al-buq'a ghayr talal baal yu'idu li-dhaakirat 'asbaah 'al-ams fayu'limuha wa yurji'u li-nafs sadan fayuhzinuha  
And not-remains of that place except a ruin bring back to memory ghosts of-yesterday so-sadden-them and bring back soul exaltations of glory old.  
„*Nothing remained in that place only a ruin that brings back the memory of yesterday's silhouettes and makes them sore and brings back to soul the exaltations of old glory and saddens it*” (Gibran 1985: 82).
- (49) *An hour may destroy what was an age of building* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 594).
- (50) *Time devours all things* (A Dictionary of American Proverbs 1992: 597).

Examples (46)-(52) show that, in both languages, time is conceptualized as capable of changing things, of exerting power on the observer and on the

environment, and of causing damage so bad that things no longer exist. Time can transform people's mood as in (47), bodies as in (48) and (49), and social abilities as in (46); it can also destroy the environment in its passage as in (50) and (51). These kinds of acts typically require agents with particular skills. Devouring, for instance, as in (52) evokes an image of a ferocious beast.

### **3. Conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to show how the conceptual metaphor TIME AS A MOVING ENTITY exists in two unrelated language: English and Arabic. The results of the analysis suggest that in both languages, time is viewed as bringing something with it and the coming of time as imposing duties on the observer. Both languages pay attention to the manner in which time metaphorically moves by using motion verbs encoding manner, such as „fly,” „roll down,” دار (/daara/ „rotate”), تقدم (/taqadama/ „march on”). In the two languages, time is conceptualized as a moving entity which makes an impact on the observer and on the environment as it passes by. Thus, time is conceptualized in both languages as capable of changing things, of exerting power on the observer and on the observer's environment, and of causing damage so bad that things no longer exist.

The results of this study have some theoretical implications. Lakoff (1993: 205) holds that as soon as one gets away from concrete physical experiences and starts talking about abstractions, „metaphorical understanding is the norm.” Lakoff suggests that the question „as to whether all abstract human reasoning is a metaphorical version of imagistic reasoning” should be „a major question for future research in cognitive linguistics” (39). This study is a response to this concern, as it has shown that evidence from English and Arabic empirically supports this claim in the domain of time. Metaphor is very pervasive in the conceptualization and the expression of the abstract concept of time in two unrelated languages. In short, this study corroborates the CMT claim that „metaphor is not merely a linguistic mode of expression;” and that „it is a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind” (Johnson 1987: xiv).

The study of metaphor should move from theory to practice by proposing ways of teaching time metaphors in class. For instance, since metaphors are

patterns of thought, EFL teachers should develop semantic exercises on time metaphors to help students learn them efficiently. Teachers are encouraged to draw the learners' attention to the distinction between linguistic metaphors, i.e., what is used in language, and conceptual metaphors, i.e., the mental representation underlying linguistic metaphors. They might have learners extrapolate the conceptual metaphors underlying the linguistic metaphors in a given text. Learners can be given conceptual metaphors and be asked to find out the linguistic metaphors underlying these conceptual metaphors. These exercises would help them to better understand and generate metaphors.

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