

An Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors of Natural Phenomena and Animals in Nezami's *Layla and Majnun* Based on Conceptual Blending Theory

Hajreh Rigi¹ -  Farideh Okati² -  Ahmad Mojozi³ 

1. PhD student, Department of General Linguistics, Zabol Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran.
2. Assistant Professor, Department of General Linguistics, Zabol Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran. (Corresponding author) Email: farideh.okati@uoaz.ac.ir
3. Assistant Professor, Department of General Linguistics, Zabol Branch, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran.

Article Info (115-137)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research
Article

Article

history:

Receive:

۰۱/۰۱/۲۰۲۵

Accepte:

۲۶/۰۵/۲۰۲۵

Keyword:

Leyli and

Majnun

Natural

phenomena

Animals

Conceptual

blend

This study examines conceptual metaphors in the Mathnawi of Layli and Majnoon Nezami, focusing on the two domains of “natural phenomena” and “animals”, based on the conceptual blend theory of Fauconnier and Turner (1998-2002). In this theory, metaphors are analyzed using mental spaces (two input spaces, a general space, and a mixed space). The findings show that among the 1,100 identified metaphors, the domains of “natural phenomena” with a frequency of 213 (19.36%) and “animals” with a frequency of 152 (13.9%) were the most used. The chi-square test (with a value of 2.2e-16) confirmed that the difference between the frequencies of these metaphors is significant ($p < 0.05$).

The results indicate that Nezami used these conceptual domains to reflect the tangible world and abstract concepts and created a deep connection between nature, animals, and human experiences. The high frequency of these metaphors also indicates the poet's special attention to objective life and human interaction with the environment. This study emphasizes the richness of Nezami's

Citation: Rigi, Hajreh; Okati, Farideh; Mojozi, Ahmad (2025). A study of conceptual metaphors in the Masnavi of Layla and Majnun about natural phenomena and animals based on the theory of conceptual mixture. *Modern Literary Studies*, 4(2) 115-137



Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature

© The Author (s).

DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1404.4.2.4.4](https://doi.org/10.28211/413.1404.4.2.4.4)

Introduction

Metaphor in classical Persian literature extends beyond decorative rhetoric, serving as a fundamental cognitive mechanism for conceptualizing complex human emotions, philosophical ideas, and mystical experiences. While traditional rhetoric views metaphor as an ornamental trope or compressed simile, cognitive linguistics—pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and subsequently advanced through Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Blending Theory (1998, 2002)—posits that metaphor reflects the dynamic architectural operations of human thought. In Nezami Ganjavi's masterwork *Layla and Majnun*, elements of the natural world and animal imagery are ubiquitous. This study examines how Nezami constructs metaphors derived from natural phenomena and animals by projecting multiple mental spaces (Input Space 1, Input Space 2, Generic Space, and the Blended Space) to create novel, emergent conceptual meanings that transcend conventional two-domain mappings.

Method

The study employs a descriptive-analytical and quantitative-qualitative corpus methodology within the theoretical framework of Conceptual Blending Theory. The corpus comprises the complete text of Nezami's *Layla and Majnun* (containing approximately 4,700 verses). From this dataset, 1,100 conceptual metaphors were extracted and systematically categorized based on source input elements, target concepts, generic spaces (such as entities/beings [*Hastar*] or actions [*Kanesh*]), and resulting emergent blended structures. To evaluate the statistical significance of the distribution across distinct conceptual domains, a Chi-Square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit test was conducted at a significance threshold of $\alpha=0.05$.

Results

The qualitative and quantitative analyses yielded the following key findings:

- **Dominance of Natural Phenomena:** Metaphors grounded in natural phenomena (e.g., celestial spheres, sun, moon, storms, earth, floods) constituted 213 instances, accounting for **19.36%** of

all identified metaphors (mean = 16.36). The Chi-Square test confirmed that the high frequency of this domain is statistically significant ($\chi^2=6.998, df=1, p=0.005 < 0.05$), demonstrating Nezami's deliberate cognitive reliance on cosmological and physical elements to conceptualize human existential states, destiny, and emotional turmoil.

- **Prominence of Animal Imagery:** Metaphors involving animals (e.g., snakes, nightingales, dogs, camels, birds, horses, dragons) accounted for 153 instances, representing **13.90%** of the total metaphors (mean = 10.90). The statistical test showed high significance for this domain as well ($\chi^2=8.234, df=1, p=0.005 < 0.05$). Animals serve as vivid input spaces to project socio-cultural traits, emotional vulnerability, oppression, and physical prowess onto human agents.
- **Mechanisms of Conceptual Integration:** The analysis revealed that Nezami's metaphors cannot be adequately explained by simple two-domain mappings alone; rather, they operate through multidimensional networks where the *Generic Space* provides structural schemata (predominantly object/entity schemas) and the *Blended Space* generates emergent meaning—such as integrating celestial bodies with royal or spiritual presence, or animal behavior with moral and romantic dilemmas.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Conceptual Blending Theory provides a robust explanatory model for decoding the multi-layered imagery of classical Persian poetry. The empirical findings indicate that natural phenomena and animals serve as the two most pervasive conceptual source spaces in *Layla and Majnun*, collectively constituting over 33% of the poetic metaphors. Through systematic mental space integration, Nezami anchors abstract metaphysical, romantic, and psychological concepts in concrete sensory experiences. This interdisciplinary approach not only illuminates the cognitive architecture underlying classical Persian narrative poetry but also underscores the enduring interplay between human cognitive processing, cultural models, and poetic creativity.