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A review of Nurulhusna Mohd-Jamal's Doctoral Dissertation

*Objectifying Thoughts and Feelings
An Intercultural Study on Conceptual
Metaphors in Malay and English Poetic Texts*
2019, Berlin; © Nurulhusna Mohd-Jamal

The main purpose of the dissertation is to comparatively explore the nature of metaphors in poetic texts in English and Malay (Austronesian language), two very distant languages. The major cognitive interpretation of metaphors in the few past decades has been based on English examples, or, at best, other Indoeuropean languages. One of the few exceptions has been Chinese (Sino-Tibetan language) with a number of publications in English (e.g. Chung and Yu 2008; Leung 2008, or Wang, Wang and Xing 2011). In addition to the choice of language from outside the Indoeuropean family, with only a handful, standard studies on Malay metaphors, Husna

Jamal has reached for the newest interpretations of the nature of metaphor, basing her study on the Objectification Hypothesis (Szwedek 2000; 2011; 2014) derived from Franz Brentano's empiricism and Kotarbiński's reism. The combination of the new, interesting language data with a new theory produced a fascinating and outstanding piece of scholarship.

Before discussing those substantive issues, I will traditionally present briefly the formal aspects of the dissertation. The 'first glance' impression is truly imposing. The language of the work is impeccable, showing total native-like control of language. But it is not only grammatically error-free form, but what struck me as worthy of special mention, are the remarkably rich and precise vocabulary (how very refreshing in the traditional academic style) and amazingly flowing style, showing the ease with which the Author uses the language discussing very difficult matters.

As to the overall structure of the dissertation, the Introduction lays out the aim of the work and its layout, outlining the issues to be discussed in each chapter. Such a clear, well-written introduction makes it easier to read the rest of the book. Chapter Two lays foundations to the Author's investigation and, as she herself writes, is "dense with diverse ideas, arguments and assumptions about metaphor from various theoretical and methodological camps". However, it is not a mere 'dense' presentation of those diverse positions which have flourished in the last two or three decades. Each position is critically reviewed, its merits and failures duly accounted for, followed by appropriate conclusions for the Author's own work.

Chapter Three is devoted to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, dominant in the last two or three decades, exposing its weaknesses, such as lack of falsifiability and predictive power, post-hoc explanations and circularity of arguments. It also addresses one of the most controversial aspects of the Cognitive Metaphor Theory, that is, its

notable failure to introduce a sharp distinction between the physical and metaphysical worlds, despite introduction of the embodiment hypothesis which should solve or at least illuminate the problem. It has been almost universal to use the terms “more concrete” and “more abstract” domains (see, for example, quite odd, unprofessional remarks made by Gibbs in his 1996 paper). This is a crucial issue. Concrete objects in this world can not be more or less physical (independent of the degree of their density), like a woman cannot be more or less pregnant. Husna Jamal proposed here an interesting and significant refinement of the Objectification hypothesis, adding yet more human aspect, basing on the embodiment theory and the different nature and function of senses in our cognition relative to language.

Chapter Four begins with a brief introduction on the Malay language and some cultural and historical notes on its people. In order to present the material clearly, a few paragraphs are devoted to the clarification of such vague traditional categories of metaphors as conventional and unconventional vs dead and novel (alive) metaphors. I fully agree with Husna Jamal's position that conventional and novel metaphors employ the same cognitive mechanisms and therefore, such distinctions are amiss and judgements subjective. It would mean that when a ‘novel’ metaphor is absorbed by the everyday language, it becomes dead, with the logical conclusion that it actually stops being a metaphor. From the point of view of the very nature of metaphor such a distinction makes no sense. This is a necessary terminological and material digression in view of some confusion still present in the literature. In the second part of that chapter, the Author deals with research preparation and research materials, including the native Malay speakers' judgment of metaphoricity, as part of the preliminary analysis of data.

Quantitative analysis and classifications of metaphors are presented in Chapter Five in support of the new typology proposed

by Objectification. The second part of the chapter discusses a qualitative presentation of the conceptual metaphors in poetry that the Author chose for analysis.

The next chapter provides a recapitulation of the results of the study and contains a crucial proposal of how the Author's findings can be integrated with the Conceptual Metaphor Theory modified so significantly by the Objectification Theory. The Author also ventures a few remarks as to the prospects of further research in that still evolving and expanding field, although, it seems with, only temporary, "short of breath" period in the theory of metaphor. Her work clearly shows how much has been done in discovering the nature of human thought and language, and yet, how little we still know about that relation.

Objectification and Husna Jamal's continuum

I wish to discuss the theses propounded in Chapter Three in more detail, as it contains an original, ingenious and significant modification of the Objectification Theory in terms of the relation between the various types of metaphor and the various natures of bodily senses in their experience of the world. This is particularly important in view of the fact that scholars have been very unclear about that relation. For example, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 19) wrote that: "We do not know very much about the experiential bases of metaphors. Because of our ignorance in this matter..." and Grady (1996, p. 179) admitted that "there is no clear understanding of what counts as experiential basis, nor what the typology of experiential bases might be." The Objectification theory, ontological in nature, answered the first part of the question – it is the world of physical objects that is the primeval and ultimate experiential basis. In brief, it proved that when based on density as the main feature of objects, a radical and clear distinction is made between the physical (material objects)

and metaphysical worlds (mental and emotional phenomena), and the most reliable test for that distinction is based on the sense of touch the earliest sense to develop in the prenatal period. The sense of touch is different in many respects, but simply speaking, its unique character can be described in the following way: we can 'switch off' sight by closing our eyes, we can "switch off" hearing by plugging our ears, and "switch off" smell by plugging our nose, but there is no way that we can switch off touch whether we stand, sit, lie or even levitate naked in the air. In that last case the surrounding air touches our skin, which results in various tactile sensations.

Husna Jamal answered in her dissertation the second part of the question, epistemological in nature, the question of typology of experiential bases in terms of a hierarchy of senses as translated onto metaphors. Following a certain hierarchy of senses based on their different characteristics, Jamal discovered that these different natures are correlated with different subtypes of metaphors. Not abandoning the crucial distinction introduced by Objectification Hypothesis, she characterizes the essence of each sense on the grounds of their different physical (biological) and experiential correlations. Thus, touch correlates with direct, one might say, intimate contact, taste is confined to a limited area and correlates with different sensations. The other senses are, what Pöppel and Edingshaus (1994) call telecommunicative/distal senses; smell, correlated with taste, requires a rather short distance between the experiencer and the experienced, sight needs a further distance between the experiencer and the object, and hearing does not require visibility. It has to be emphasized, however, that these distinctions are not clear cut, but rather interact with each other. For example, we understand spoken language easier when also seeing the movement of the lips and the facial expression of the speaker. On this basis, Jamal proposes a certain continuity of

metaphorical expressions. Such a decision is well justified on the grounds that our experience is multimodal and our sensory and perceptual systems clearly display interconnectivity (Chamberlain n.d.). Thus, as has been said above, touch can be regarded separately, though still interconnecting with the other senses, while the other, perceptual senses show some continuity which Husna Jamal arranged in the following sequence of perception: gustatory => olfactory => auditory => visual, corresponding to taste => smell => hearing => sight. Her hypothesis is soundly grounded in current research in biology and perception psychology, for example, Macpherson's (2008) idea that the differences between senses are more a matter of degree rather than of kind. On the basis of all those considerations and evidence from various disciplines, Jamal puts forward a very bold and interesting generalization of entities in this world correlating with various types of metaphors. Her final proposal is presented in Table 3 with four categories: Strictly concrete (tactile), loosely concrete (other senses), low abstract (imaginable) and highly abstract (mental). It is obvious to me that those categories would correspond to everyday human perception of categories in the world, which is what cognitive science is about.

The four categories of sensory experience, correlating with types of metaphors are:

- Strictly Concrete – including all physical objects (humans, animals, plant and inanimate things);
- Loosely concrete – with the source of experience coming from a physical object (taste of food, music from instrument, colour of an object, etc.);
- Low abstract – abstract entities with some concrete elements (argument, love, war, which cannot be touched, but contain physical objects, for example, discussants, lovers, weapons, etc.);

- Highly abstract – abstract entities to which no physical properties pertain (for example, mental entities and states like thought, joy, kindness, etc.).

It is obvious that, from the epistemological point of view, categories are fuzzy and we cannot expect clear-cut boundaries as Jamal's hierarchy clearly shows.

I will not discuss Chapter 4 and 5 in detail, as they are more technical, devoted to data collection, quantitative analyses and interpretations. But it needs to be emphasized that in comparison with many earlier studies, the Author has been particularly careful in avoiding the pitfalls of former studies such as the sources of metaphorical expressions, inconsistent methods, confusing terminology and overgeneralizations. The procedures adopted by the Author are meticulously balanced, the collected data fully sufficient, and their ratings presented clearly and completely in the form of tables. One of the interesting findings is that mapping patterns of metaphors in poems are more varied than those of metaphors in songs, which, as the Author correctly observes is due to a higher degree of 'novelty' feature in poetic metaphors.

Chapter 6 shows how all those views, findings, data and ratings interlock with each other, forming a coherent whole. In other words, the Author demonstrates the merit of the conceptual and procedural stances that she has taken in her research, namely the integration of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Objectification, resulting in her original proposal of a scalar model on the one hand, and metaphor identification procedure based on three mismatch principles, on the other hand.

In short, to the Objectification Theory, based on the analysis of selected data and resulting in a radical physical-metaphysical distinction, Husna Jamal added a more psychological element of human perception.

Chapter 7 summarizes the main contributions of the dissertation. One of them is a confirmation of the validity of the distinction between

concrete (physical) and abstract (metaphysical) concepts, which the Author buttresses successfully by interesting data from English and Malay. Another one is the introduction of the scalar model of sensory perception in conjunction with the above-mentioned distinction. It is this proposal that I particularly appreciate because, to the radical concrete-abstract distinction, it introduces the aspect of human non-radical identification of metaphor, which, disregarding a few vague mentions, has been largely ignored. The Author's original contribution is the introduction of three principles of metaphor identification: Value Mismatch, Empirical Mismatch and Contextual Mismatch concerning the structure of metaphors in terms of co-occurrence or contrast of concepts from two different domains.

At the cultural level, the Author's analyses exhibit an interesting difference between Malay and English. While in Malay the HUMANS/PERSONS domain is prevalent as the source domain, in English it is the domain of INORGANIC OBJECTS (cf. THOUGHT IS AN OBJECT metaphor).

However, one must remember that this interesting observation was made on a specific category of texts, poems and songs. The possible universality of this reflection is yet to be shown on other text types.

The dissertation closes with some suggestions for future research, some already in dynamic progress, such as metaphor perception by visually- and hearing-impaired persons, behavioural experiments and brain imaging.

In conclusion I wish to say that, without doubt, Husna Jamal's original work is the first holistic study of senses in the context of metaphorical mappings. It adds a new subtle, more human approach to metaphor interpretation and sheds new light on our understanding of the two worlds we live in, the world of abstract metaphorical thought and the world of embodied experience, bridging the gap between them. All those issues are discussed and presented in perfect linguistic

and structural form. Husna Jamal's work is a truly mature, excellent piece of scholarship.



 Discourses


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