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Looking Awry at Language: A Brief Overview of Paradox from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract

The present study investigates paradox as a cognitive phenomenon within the framework of conceptual metaphor and metonymy, challenging its conventional classification as a rhetorical device. Focusing on Persian mystical literature, the research explores how paradox functions as a dynamic meaning-making mechanism in figurative language. The primary aim is to redefine paradox through cognitive linguistics, demonstrating its integration with metaphor (para-metaphor) and metonymy (para-metonymy) in restructuring perception. The study seeks to: 1) identify the cognitive models underlying paradox, 2) analyze its interaction with other conceptual processes, and 3) illustrate its role in non-linear thinking and knowledge organization. A descriptive-analytical approach is employed, with data purposively sampled from Persian literary texts. Theoretical frameworks include conceptual blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) and Ruiz de Mendoza's cognitive modeling, emphasizing high-level abstraction and mental space networks. Paradox emerges from metaphorical contradictions (e.g., "death is life") and metonymic expansions (e.g., "weeping with laughter"), resolving oppositions through conceptual blending. It operates as a matrix-like strategy, enabling reframing and emergent meanings. Persian mystical texts exemplify this capacity to transcend binary logic and evoke multilayered interpretations.

Keywords: Cognitive Paradox, Para-metaphor, Para-metonymy, Conceptual Blending.

1. Introduction

A review of previous studies in cognitive linguistics reveals that, unlike the relatively extensive research on metaphor and metonymy, other significant linguistic phenomena such as irony, humor, allusion, hyperbole, and paradox have not received adequate attention. Addressing this gap helps us achieve a clearer understanding of the cognitive and linguistic mechanisms, particularly those underlying figurative language. It also enables us to explain these mechanisms in terms of processing strategies, representation methods, cognitive models, conceptual mapping, and related processes.

Cognitive linguistics argues that, like other figurative language mechanisms, paradox should not merely be considered a rhetorical or stylistic device but rather a conceptual mechanism. From this perspective, cognitive paradox arises from the human mind's ability to merge conflicting and divergent concepts to describe events and experiences (Glaz, 2023).

Several decades ago, Albert Rothenberg described it as "Janusian thinking," or "the capacity to simultaneously conceive and use two or more opposing ideas, concepts, or images" (ibid). Paradox is one of the fundamental pillars of human conceptual understanding of reality. As Lyons (1977) notes, "The human mind is predisposed to think in contrast or to classify experiences based on binary oppositions". Some linguists believe that this tendency "underpins human conceptualization of the world and parallels metaphor" (Glaz, 2023).

The key question, therefore, is how paradox, in a broader cognitive framework, interacts with other conceptual forms like metaphor. To answer this, we must first establish a comprehensive definition of paradox before addressing the following three research questions:

- 1) How does paradox function as a conceptual (rather than purely rhetorical) mechanism within the framework of cognitive linguistics, particularly in its interaction with metaphor and metonymy?
- 2) Through what cognitive models (e.g., blending, mental spaces) do paradoxical resolve contradictions and generate emergent meanings?

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3) How does Persian literature leverage paradox as a tool for non-linear thinking and epistemic reframing?

The central hypothesis of the present study is that paradox, within an interactive cognitive model, integrates with other conceptual processes, particularly metaphor and metonymy, thereby expanding its conceptual scope. The human mind does not perceive these processes in isolation but rather in a clustered or matrix-like manner, which allows for reframing, new perspectives, and the interpretation of paradoxical expressions through "*looking awry*" at them.

Given the significance of paradox in literary texts—such as representing the complexities of life and reality, encouraging critical thinking beyond surface-level interpretations, creating multilayered meanings, and eliciting aesthetic and emotional experiences—this study has purposefully selected its examples from a broad corpus of Persian literary texts. As this research is the first of its kind in Persian to introduce the cognitive aspects of paradox, it serves as an introduction to the topic. Future studies may further investigate its proposed dimensions independently.

2. Literature Review

Although cognitive psychology theories have significantly contributed to understanding paradox, studies on paradox in cognitive linguistics remain scarce. Among the few English-language sources addressing cognitive paradox, [Gibbs \(1994\)](#) and [Gibbs and Kearney \(1994\)](#) have explored how different readers comprehend direct and indirect paradoxical statements. Their findings provide further evidence supporting the role of conceptual knowledge in theories of figurative language comprehension. [Mendoza \(2014\)](#) has extensively examined paradox, categorizing various cognitive processes involved and positioning it alongside conceptual (correlation) metaphors. He argues that paradox should be analyzed through cognitive models rather than truth conditions.

In Persian-language studies, paradox remains largely unexamined, despite research in other branches of cognitive poetics, such as metaphor and metonymy. Few studies, such as those by [Pordel et al. \(2017\)](#), have touched upon blending theory. Their work briefly discusses "reverse projection" in explaining an emergent paradox in a poem by Abdolmalekian, but does not delve deeper. Similarly, [Behnam \(2011\)](#) explores synesthesia from a cognitive perspective, linking it to metaphorical structure and selective cognition, aligning somewhat with this study. [Goli and Bafekr \(2016\)](#) analyze paradox from an aesthetic perspective, dividing it into interpretive and compositional categories, though they focus solely on rhetorical and linguistic aspects rather than its cognitive and conceptual significance.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method, with data collected purposefully from a corpus of Persian literary texts, particularly mystical literature. The theoretical framework is based on general cognitive linguistics principles, with examples drawn primarily from Persian literary contexts.

4. Theoretical Framework

The interplay between metaphor and metonymy in meaning construction can be insightfully analyzed through the lens of cognitive linguistics, particularly within the frameworks of Conceptual Blending Theory ([Fauconnier & Turner, 2002](#)) and the theory of metonymic and metaphorical expansion/reduction proposed by Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez ([Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 1997](#)). Within these paradigms, metaphor and metonymy are not merely rhetorical devices but are viewed as fundamental cognitive mechanisms for representing abstract concepts and structuring experience.

In Conceptual Blending Theory, meaning emerges from the integration of multiple mental spaces (input spaces) into a blended space where new, emergent structures take shape. Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002) demonstrate that metonymy typically plays a foundational role in activating and organizing input spaces, whereas metaphor is primarily involved in the projection of structural mappings across domains within the blending process. Metonymy thus functions as an initiator of conceptual structures, whereas metaphor facilitates the transfer of higher-order conceptual frameworks ([Coulson & Todd, 2003](#)).

Complementing this, Mendoza Ibáñez theorizes that metaphor and metonymy often appear on a cognitive continuum of conceptual interaction, where many linguistic structures are hybrid forms that display varying degrees of conceptual focus and domain expansion. According to this view, metonymy enables focused access to a conceptual element within a frame, while metaphor transfers the structure of an entire source frame to a target domain ([Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, 1997](#)).

One of the key innovations of this study is the introduction of the concepts of para-metaphor and para-metonymy. A para-metaphor involves a paradoxical or lexically inconsistent expression that becomes interpretable through a deeper metaphorical mapping. A para-metonymy similarly involves a paradoxical or incongruous expression that can be resolved through metonymic association. Examples such as "Death is life" or "Cry of Silence" represent such expressions, where only advanced cognitive mechanisms allow the paradox to yield coherent meaning.

In blending theory, such expressions are analyzed as instances of blending networks—systems in which multiple input spaces, often containing contradictory or incongruent conceptual structures, are integrated into a unified conceptual space ([Fauconnier & Turner, 2002](#)). These blended spaces preserve apparent semantic conflicts and resolve them through emergent meaning. Para-metaphor and para-metonymy act here as cognitive catalysts, enabling the integration of conflicting inputs into conceptually enriched outputs.

Furthermore, the analysis of these structures may be enriched through the use of a conceptual matrix or semantic clusters, as emphasized in cognitive semantics ([Langacker, 1987/2018](#)). Lexical items are mentally organized not in isolation but within conceptual clusters that share experiential or ontological domains. For example, the semantic cluster of "life" may include elements such as birth, growth, and vitality, whereas "death" includes stillness, silence, and decay. When a para-metaphor or para-metonymy, such as "weeping with laughter" or "cry of silence", is invoked, it simultaneously activates terms from opposing semantic clusters. The resulting conceptual dissonance—while paradoxical on the surface—is cognitively processed through metaphorical and metonymic mappings, rendering it intelligible.

The conceptual matrix model thus functions as a complementary framework to blending theory, rather than a replacement. It

focuses on the multidimensional interactions of metaphor, metonymy, and paradox by accounting for overlaps and tensions between semantic clusters. For instance, in the paradox “There is death in life,” both the metaphorical structure (A is B) and the metonymic expansion (death as a latent part of life) operate simultaneously. This multidimensionality is compatible with the principles of blending theory but highlights non-linear semantic convergence.

From a cognitive perspective, paradox is not simply a rhetorical or stylistic anomaly; rather, it signifies the simultaneous activation of conflicting conceptual frameworks. Para-metaphor and para-metonymy arise precisely under such conditions: they harness the semantic tension between lexical incongruities and reconcile them through cognitive integration. Take the example “Time stopped”—a semantically anomalous sentence, as time is inherently continuous. However, via the metaphor “Time is a moving entity,” the paradox becomes interpretable. Such structures function as semantic pressure points, stimulating imaginative thought, conceptual reorganization, and epistemological openness.

Ultimately, paradox, para-metaphor, and para-metonymy constitute the three vertices of a cognitive triangle wherein language is not merely a medium of representation, but a dynamic mechanism for reconstructing reality through contradiction, tension, and imaginative synthesis.

This study aims to examine how para-metaphor and para-metonymy—through the cognitive mechanisms of conceptual blending and semantic clustering—enable the resolution of lexical paradoxes and the construction of complex meanings in language.

5. Definition of Paradox

Paradox can be defined from various perspectives, including philosophy, logic, mysticism, art, and literature. In literary contexts, it is described as an image where “the two aspects of a composition negate each other conceptually” (Shafi'i-Kadkani, 1992). In mystical discourse, it is a contradictory statement “uttered by Sufis in moments of ecstasy and spiritual fervor, beyond the realm of Sharia” (Daad, 2006).

Unlike common definitions that consider paradox as the combination of two incompatible concepts or terms whose co-existence is logically impossible, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines paradox as “a combination of contradictory or incongruous words (such as ‘alone together’) or a single concept consisting of conflicting elements” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The first part of this definition pertains to the lexical level, while the second suggests that paradox can be a coherent conceptual unit. This distinction implies that paradox is not limited to lexical contradictions but can also function as a discourse-level phenomenon, creating meaningful conceptual integration.

This definition asserts that the ability to think paradoxically in humans involves more than merely perceiving alternative objects, people, or situations in which both cannot be understood simultaneously. Rather, it seems that we are capable of conceptually grasping two seemingly contradictory dimensions within a single instance, such as in the cases of: “*old-young*,” “*sober drunk*,” “*wise fool*” (Gibbs, 1994).

Now, if we accept that paradox involves at least two levels—lexical and discursive—according to the above definition, paradox can be defined and analyzed differently at each level. For instance, Gozzi, giving examples like “*the global village*,” argues that the former is paradoxical at the lexical level, but at the discursive level, it is considered a metaphor. The lexical inconsistency in this phrase leads to the creation of a coherent idea that can also be represented through metaphorical mappings. This is what Gozzi refers to as a “para-metaphor” (Glaz, 2023).

The most comprehensive definition of paradox, in the author’s view, is provided by Ruiz de Mendoza (2014, 2020). He categorizes various cognitive processes into two levels: formal and content-based, placing paradox under content-based processes of the “A is B” type. According to Ruiz de Mendoza, these processes, which follow a cognitive model of metaphor (specifically, a conceptual or correlation metaphor), include: correlation, similarity, echoing, strengthening, mitigating, and opposition. Among these, opposition occurs when B contrasts with some aspects of A, and A also includes B (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2020). For example, in “*the living dead*,” a person must die in one sense to live in another. In fact, death, when viewed from a certain perspective, is essentially a form of life.

I tested [and realized] that my death is in my life,

For when you are freed from this life, eternity you will live (Mowlavi, 2006a, p. 432).

However, what is noteworthy is that Ruiz de Mendoza (2014) places opposition under a broader process called “comparison”. He considers comparison to be a process used to understand similarities and differences between concepts. If the focus of the comparison is on the similarities between concepts, it is a comparison based on similarity. If the focus is on differences, it is a comparison based on opposition. He then concludes that comparison through opposition never enters the process of metaphor because metaphor, by its nature, is either formed based on experiential correlation or through similarities between two entities, but never based on differences. This statement by Mendoza contradicts what he later posits in another work (2020). There, he categorizes all content-based processes under two categories: the “A Is B” and “A For B” models, broadly classifying the first as metaphorical. He then, by listing devices such as metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, paradox, and irony under the first category, effectively considers paradox as part of metaphorical processes.

Ruiz de Mendoza (2014), in a chapter titled *Figurative Thought and Figurative Uses of Language*, initially points out the subtle differences between the two devices, paradox and oxymoron, in Western rhetoric, while considering them to belong to a single phenomenon despite their differences. According to him, in paradox, there is an apparent inconsistency between the description of two states or conditions of things, which can be resolved if viewed from a different perspective, as in the examples of the “*living dead*,” “*sane fools*,” “*sober drunkards*,” and so on.

He argues that the inclusion of “space-builders” in language can help resolve these formal inconsistencies. Space-builders are “linguistic units that either create a new mental space or lead the speaker to previous mental spaces, preparing the listener to construct a space beyond the current time and place” (Rasekh-Mahand, 2018). Prepositional, adverbial, conditional, complementary, verbal, and nominal groups are all considered space-builders. In the above verse from the *Masnavi*, the verb “*to test*” itself functions as a space-builder, which, on one hand, takes the listener to the mental spaces created in the previous verses, and on the other hand, prepares their

mind to create new mental spaces, thereby minimizing the inconsistency between “death” and “life”. In verse (3834) of *Masnavi*, Rumi speaks of different types of death (*for lovers, death is an ongoing process*) and various forms of life (*he has two hundred lives from his guidance*), and then, by introducing the verb "to test" in the verse, he directs the listener’s mind toward this prior claim, because the “dead” cannot test anything, and testing requires being alive. Through this method, Rumi unveils a new perspective for the listener, where every death promises a new life. In this perspective, “death” can no longer be understood as absolute non-existence or nothingness.

With this explanation, the phrase “*death is life*” can be regarded as a conceptual metaphor based on the "A Is B" model, which aligns with various lived experiences in mystical life and discourse:

- *Opposing carnal desires is death (Maut Ahmar; red death);*
- *Enduring hunger is death (Maut Abyadh: white death);*
- *Enduring the affliction of the people is death (Maut Aswad: black death), and so on... (In: Kashi, 1999).*

In these instances, the concept of death, through the process of abstraction, refers to the concept of enduring suffering and undesirable situations. That is:

- *Enduring suffering is death.*

This serves as a primary or foundational metaphor. Conversely, life is the absence of undesirable situations or suffering:

- *A life without suffering is real life.*

Then, the synthesis of these two metaphors in a mystical perspective appears as follows:

- *Life is death.* This can be interpreted as: for the aware person, a life devoid of pain and suffering is equivalent to death. *If a man has pain, it is good, thus, the pain of painlessness must be treated with burning.*

Ruiz de Mendoza (by citing Fauconnier) concludes that a paradox is meaningful only if it is placed within an appropriate mental space.

6. Expanding the Conceptual Scope of Paradox through Metaphor

After arriving at a relatively comprehensive definition of paradox, it is time to examine its relationship with metaphor within various cognitive models. In these models, paradox can be analyzed differently depending on its relation to each model. Using these models, paradox can be classified based on the level of generalization and the degree of abstract thinking that emerges from it. First, we define the three levels of cognitive models, and then the type of similarity in each will be discussed.

According to Mendoza (2007, 2014), cognitive models consist of three levels: primary cognitive models, low-level (specific) cognitive models, and high-level (general) cognitive models. The primary cognitive model is derived from Grady’s (1999) work on basic metaphors, which contrasts with compound metaphors. A primary metaphor is a basic metaphor based directly on sensory-motor experience and is capable of forming compound metaphors by combining with other basic metaphors. For example, the metaphor "*theories are buildings*" is a compound metaphor resulting from the combination of the primary metaphors "*organization is a physical structure*" and "*endurance is a steadfast pillar*" (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera Masegosa, 2014).

In addition to primary metaphors, all concepts that directly stem from our sensory experiences, such as binary oppositions like cold/warm, up/down, large/small; primary emotional concepts such as love, anger; or other basic concepts like size, weight, heat, quantity, and quality, as well as image schemas and frames derived from our encyclopedic knowledge, fall under the category of basic concepts.

Body interactions and pre-linguistic experiences form the structure of cognitive schemas, and the schema, in turn, leads to the creation of primary metaphors. These primary metaphors then give rise to compound metaphors. In fact, compound metaphors are built upon primary metaphors. For instance, states can be depicted as changes in location, as in the example: "*He is going from bad to worse*". States and changes of condition are general concepts, while location and changes in location [schema of container] are part of the basic concepts (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera Masegosa, 2014).

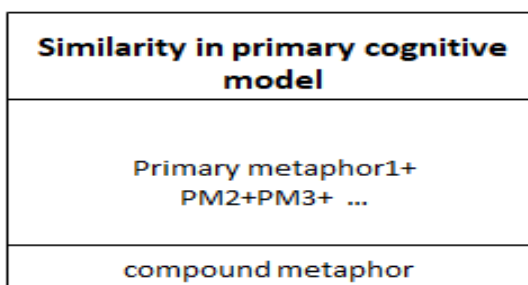


Figure 1. Cognitive Similarity in the Primary Level Pattern

General Cognitive patterns are formed through the process of generalization derived from the abstraction of common concepts with specific cognitive patterns. For instance, by observing events such as running, swimming, eating, drinking, etc., the general concept of "action" can be extracted. Similarities at the general level can be divided into two types: event metaphor and situational metaphor, both of which are subcategories of the metaphor of correlation, arising from the process of abstraction and generalization. A situational metaphor, for example, "*being trapped in the bed of illness*," refers to the situation of an individual being confined to a bed due to illness, drawing a parallel between the condition of being a prisoner and the state of being ill, where the possibility of enjoying life is

restricted due to the limitations imposed by the illness. An event metaphor, such as "*death steals life*," reflects the idea that death deprives us of our most valuable possession, which is life. Consequently, the concept of deprivation in the event of 'stealing' is abstracted and generalized to the event of 'death'.

Similarity in high-level (general) cognitive model	
B) situations	A) events
Correlation metaphor	

Figure 2. Cognitive Similarity in the General Level Pattern

The type of similarity in specific cognitive patterns differs from that in general cognitive patterns. In the latter, we encounter metaphors linked to everyday experiences, such as "*affection is warmth*," "*more is higher*," "*similarity is proximity*," and "*knowing is seeing*". In contrast, in the former, the similarity is based on an objective characteristic (property-based metaphor), as in similes or allegories, or on a structure or role (structure-based metaphor). The first type involves a simple, one-way mapping, such as comparing teeth to pearls. The second type is slightly more complex, involving a structure of the form "A is to B as C is to D," where the mapping requires a structural relationship between at least two pairs. For instance, the relationship of the heart to the circulatory system is analogous to the relationship of a pump to a hydraulic system.

Similarity in low-level (specific) cognitive model	
B) structure-based similarity	A) property-based Similarity

Figure 3. Cognitive Similarity in the Specific Level Pattern

While a correlated or conceptual metaphor such as "*knowing is seeing*"—unlike feature-based similarities that arise from the simple association of two items—requires a process of reasoning, inference, and abstract thinking (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2020). Now, the way to describe a paradox, according to the cognitive levels of similarity and the processes involved, can be illustrated with examples from literature.

A) "*I have not seen a light brighter than darkness/silence*" (Attar, 2010).

This example can be viewed from two perspectives. First, we might say that it involves a structural similarity in a specific cognitive pattern, where the relationship of silence (darkness) A to the heart (B) mirrors the relationship of a lamp (C) to a house (D):

$$\bullet \quad \frac{\text{silence}}{\text{heart}} = \frac{\text{lamp}}{\text{house}}$$

Second, the concept of awareness can be abstracted from the two concepts of silence and light. In this sense, the paradox could be viewed differently; through the process of correlation that evokes the metaphor "knowing is seeing". In this view, silence leads to better seeing, and seeing is the cause of knowing. Thus, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between silence, seeing, and knowing, which can be considered a more general cognitive level.

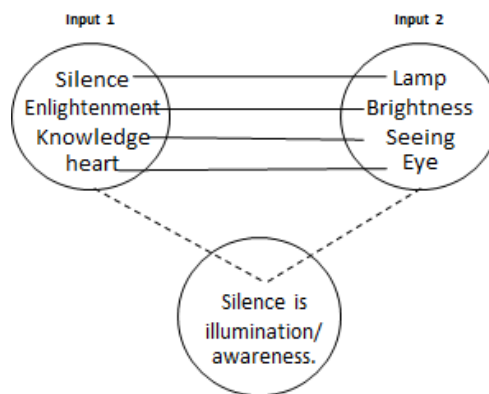


Figure 4. Diagram of the Para-metaphor "I Saw Nothing Brighter than Silence"

B) *Water that kindles fire, is love, Fire that consumes water, is love.*

As it is evident, the above verse of Sanai describes the concept of love. The metaphor "love is fire/water" can, from one perspective, be classified as a general-level similarity process. In this para-metaphorical construction, the poet, through a shift in the domain of love, moves toward opposition by expanding its conceptual domain. This is because "love is fire" is transformed into "love is water," thus altering the source domain of the primary metaphor "*emotions are heat*" (cf. Kovecses, 2010/2020).

The simultaneous presence of two opposing concepts in describing love leads to it being framed within different conceptual domains, or as Langacker (1987/2018) puts it, "Each expression invokes a set of cognitive domains as the basis for its meaning. This set of domains is called a matrix". Therefore, expressions are the result of a combination of domains known as a matrix or cluster patterns" (Langacker, 1987/2018). For example, the word "marriage" is profiled in contrast to a set of domains such as attention, love, physical union, and certain socio-cultural variables.

Water and fire, at the general cognitive level, refer to concepts such as purification, destruction, burning, illumination, life, and death. Furthermore, within the domain of fire, one can find the metaphor "*affection is warmth*," and within the domain of water, the metaphor "*life is movement*". However, beyond warmth in the fire and fluidity in the water, there are also potential and latent domains that can be evoked. For instance, moisture, coldness, seed, softness, brilliance, brightness, fragrance, and beauty for water, and sharpness, intensity, dryness, darkness, sacrifice, and violence for fire. Additionally, one must include metaphorical domains such as shame and modesty for water, and oppression, wrath, and sorrow for fire.

The simultaneous invocation of two opposing conceptual domains like water and fire, by activating these conceptual domains in a cluster-like pattern, facilitates the creation of a fresh perspective on love as a "transcendental signifier" that, amidst these contradictory signs and fluid, multifaceted conceptual clusters, continually undergoes "*différance*".

C) *"We are neither birds of the sky nor domestic fowl; Our grain is being without grain"* (Mowlavi, 2006b, p. 630).

In this verse, we are confronted with the imagery schema of wealth and poverty, which is linked to the high-level (general) pattern of similarity with metaphors such as "*value is fullness*," "*more is higher*," and "*less is lower*". Then, through the addition of further details—(without) leaves, (without) knowledge—we move from absolute abstraction (more/less) to relative abstraction, or in other words, from conceptual metaphor to linguistic metaphor. In fact, the wealth and poverty schema is completed each time in a specific and unique way, and the juxtaposition of two opposing frames leads to the transformation and challenge of our fixed mental schemas. The result is the reversal of thought flow through distorted perception, ultimately leading to a change in the aforementioned conceptual metaphors.

As we have seen so far, the underlying structure of the paradox is primarily—and not always—formed by metaphor, or generally by the process of comparison. The connection between metaphor and paradox here emphasizes the intricate cognitive processes involved in interpreting and comprehending them together.

7. Expanding the Conceptual Domain of Paradox through Metonymy

Except for metaphor, paradox can expand its source or target domain through integration with other cognitive processes, such as metonymy. The process of expansion refers to the expansion of a salient primary concept by linking a greater volume of concepts to it. In contrast, reduction involves highlighting a specific part of a primary concept in comparison to its other aspects (Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera Masegosa, 2014). These two processes are related to the part-whole relationship in metonymy—expansion corresponds to the part-to-whole relationship, while reduction corresponds to the whole-to-part relationship, which are respectively referred to as "source-in-target metonymy" and "target-in-source metonymy".

The metonymic expansion of the source or target domain of a metaphor allows the concepts within these domains to become part of a more complex conceptual framework. Through metonymic expansion, the speaker enables access to an entire situation. In this way, referring to a part of a frame or scenario facilitates access to its entirety. Once this scenario undergoes metonymic expansion, it serves as the source domain for a metaphorical mapping onto another domain, representing the situation about which the speaker intends to reason.

The relationship between metonymy and metaphor in general, and between metonymy and paradox in particular, can take two forms:

a) The metonymy [paradox] is embedded within the metaphor (integrated metonymy/paradox). b) The metonymy [paradox] emerges from the metaphor (cumulative metonymy/paradox) (Gład, 2023).

As an example of the second type, consider the following verse by Hamidi Shirazi:

He neither laughed nor wept, but wept with laughter; on the last day of the year, just as my heart cast its gaze.

In this example, although the paradoxical expression "weeping with laughter" is not embedded within a distinct metaphorical process, it emerges from a metaphor present in the second hemistich—namely, "life is a journey". The last day of the year is also a product of metonymic expansion through the part-whole relationship, as it connects the concept of "the last day of the year" to the more complex concept of "life" as a whole.

Moreover, the metaphor "life is a journey" helps to extend the paradoxical phrase "weeping with laughter" metonymically, as this latter, through the part-whole relationship, becomes linked to the broader conceptual domain of emotions (joy and sorrow). Laughter and weeping (as effects) are merely components of this broader emotional domain (as cause).

This type of metonymy, intertwined with paradox, is referred to as "para-metonymy".

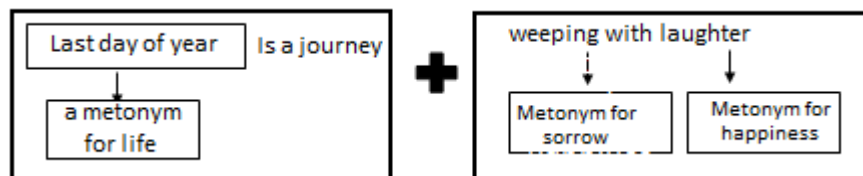


Figure 5. Diagram of Para-metonymy Cumulative with Metaphor

As an example of the first type (cumulative metonymy/paradox), the following verse by Hafez is cited as evidence:

"I was an angel, and Paradise was my abode; Adam cast me upon this monastery of ruin and grace" (Hafez, 2008).

The phrase "ruined road" serves as a metaphor for the world. However, the place is used for its inhabitants and their actions—that is, "monastery" stands for the deeds that either ruin or sustain it. In this case, we are dealing with a container-content metonymy, which exemplifies conceptual expansion, as it connects the conceptual domain of "place" (the source domain of the metaphor) to the broader conceptual domain of "action". This phrase can thus be interpreted as referring to human behaviors and actions that, while shaping and developing the world, simultaneously pave the way for its destruction. Such a paradox, in which lexical incongruity is resolved through metaphorical mapping, is referred to as a para-metaphor.

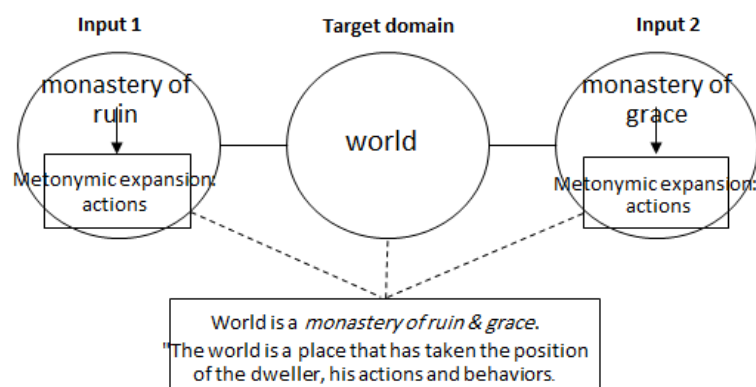


Figure 6. Diagram of Metonymy Integrated with Para-metaphor

Just as the study of conceptual processes, particularly the process of opposition in paradox, indicated, the mind does not perceive these processes in isolation but rather in a clustered or matrix-like manner, where they interact within various relations and contexts. This means that when processing one concept, the mind can easily retrieve and activate another related one.

In other words, the activation of one conceptual domain leads to the activation of adjacent conceptual domains. As observed in numerous examples, such as "brighter than silence," we have seen how the paradoxical expression "the lamp of silence" simultaneously triggers the abstraction of the concept of 'awareness' while, through conceptual metaphor correlation, also activating the "knowing is seeing" metaphorical mapping. The table below shows how metaphor and metonymy function as cognitive models and how they relate to paradox.

Table 1. The Interrelation of Conceptual Models of Metaphor and Metonymy to Paradox

Aspect	Metaphor	Metonymy
Cognitive Model	Paradox is often integrated within metaphorical models.	Paradox can emerge from metonymy (cumulative) or be integrated into it.
Types of Interaction	Para-metaphor is a paradox expressed through metaphorical mappings.	Para-metonymy is paradox expressed through metonymic processes.
Cognitive Level	Among three kinds of cognitive models (i.e., primary, general, and specific), paradox links to high-level (general) metaphoric cognitive models (requires more abstract thinking).	Metonymic expansion allows paradox to extend its conceptual domain.
Role in Paradox	Paradox emerges from metaphorical conflict (two contradictory ideas in one metaphor).	Paradox emerges from expansion/reduction of concepts via metonymy.
Example of Expression	"Living dead" (based on metaphor: " <i>Life is death</i> "). By "life" we intend a special mode of living).	"Weeping with laughter" (as a part-whole domain of emotions (joy and sorrow)).

8. Paradox and Conceptual Integration

The claim that paradox enables the simultaneous activation of multiple viewpoints is far from unfounded. By its very nature, paradox can engage diverse representational layers through both formal and semantic processes. Although other rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, and irony share this multidimensional potential, paradox stands apart in terms of its distinct cognitive profile.

The four-space conceptual integration model, developed by scholars like Fauconnier and Turner, Coulson, Mandelblit, Oakley, and Vaghalson (Turner, 1998), was introduced to enhance and extend earlier theories such as conceptual metaphor and mental spaces, which relied primarily on one-space or two-space configurations. In contrast, the four-space model conceptualizes human cognition as a (many-spaces) network, capturing the intricate nature of meaning construction through dynamic blending (Kovecses, 2010/2020).

One of the advantages of this model lies in its ability to offer a more nuanced explanation of how meaning is constructed—especially when compared to earlier theories that were limited to unidirectional mappings from source to target. More importantly, it allows for a more precise analysis of literary texts. As Rasekh-Mahand (2018) notes, "Fauconnier and Turner proposed this theory to account for creative linguistic constructions".

Firstly, the bi-directionality of domain mappings and the fusion of source and target domains give rise to a third conceptual domain that is not a mere sum of the inputs. This newly formed conceptual space—referred to as the blended space—draws selectively from both input domains and produces an emergent structure that possesses its own unique configuration.

Secondly, a shared abstract structure between the inputs is not always constructed through metaphor alone. Rather, mappings can occur between analogous, contrasting, or closely related concepts—without being constrained to metaphorical relations.

Thirdly, since blending is inherently imaginative (Kovecses, 2010/2020), it offers an open-ended capacity for the creation of novel and original structures, continually expanding the dimensions of meaning (Oraki et al., 2018). According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), much of human imagination and creativity arises from manipulating these structured experiential domains.

In what follows, we will examine how meaning is constructed in paradoxes based on the relationship between input spaces and the blended space.

A conceptual paradox involves two or more expressions that activate input spaces whose underlying conceptual structures are in conflict. To reconcile this contradiction, the mind employs two core processes: conceptual blending and alignment, thereby generating a projection space in which seemingly incompatible inputs can be integrated within a unified discourse frame.

Through this blended space, we can infer the contextual effects generated by the utterance. These effects refer to the implicit meanings and connotations that accompany a paradox and contribute to its interpretive richness.

Consider the statement: "Silence speaks volumes".

Input Spaces: Silence (absence of sound) and speech (production of sound);

Conceptual Structure: A conflict between communication and non-communication;

Opposition: How can silence convey a message?

Blending: Silence is conceptualized as a form of communicative act;

Alignment (adjustment): Our understanding of conversation is adjusted to include non-verbal cues;

Contextual Effects: The paradox emphasizes the power of silence to convey meanings that transcend spoken language.

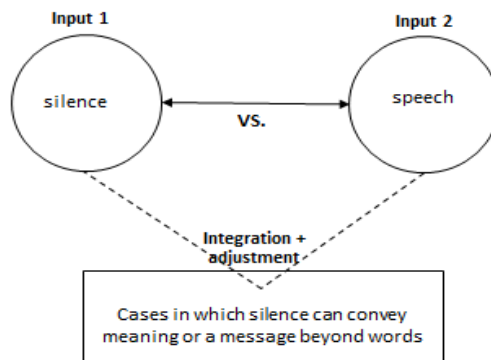


Figure 7. The Conceptual Blending Diagram of the “Expressive Silence” Paradox

As shown above, the “Expressive Silence” paradox does not denote the simultaneous coexistence of two contradictory dimensions—silence and expressiveness. Instead, it refers to instances where silence functions as a contextual facilitator for more effective communication. Although these two input spaces appear opposed, they are causally interconnected through a type of input-output dependency. Conversely, if we replace “Expressive Silence” with the term “The Cry of Silence,” we encounter a process of intensification within the auditory input domain, leading to exaggeration.

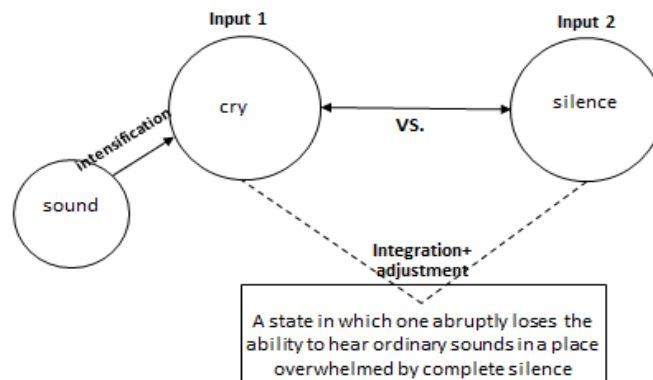


Figure 8. The Conceptual Blending Diagram of “The Cry of Silence”

Similarly, if we substitute the term “*The Cry of Silence*” with “*The Whisper of Silence*,” the process shifts toward attenuation.

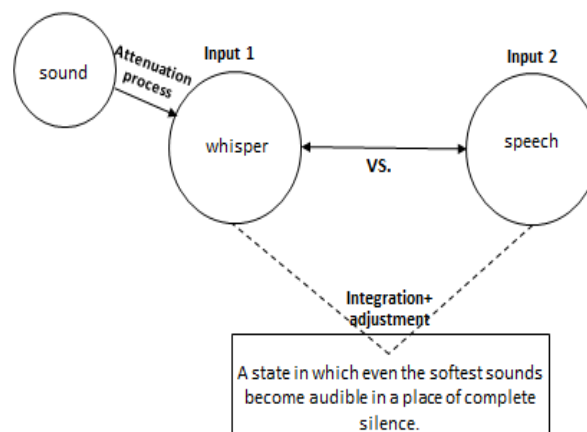


Figure 9. Conceptual Blending Diagram of the “Whisper of Silence”

In this context, the specific meaning of these expressions, depending on the context in which these expressions are interpreted, can delineate two distinct perspectives:

- a) In terms of intensity, the “Whisper of Silence” conveys extremely faint and relatively imperceptible sounds; b) Interpretively, it emphasizes the presence of subtle ambient sounds within a quiet setting (such as a library); c) Emotionally, due to its focus on delicate details, it evokes sensations of calmness, stillness, and secret awareness.

In contrast, the “Cry of Silence” paradox:

a) In terms of intensity, transmits a feeling of oppressive and shattering silence; b) Interpretively, it highlights the emotional impact of silence, which may manifest as a sensation of deafness or pressure caused by the sudden absence of expected sounds; c) Emotionally, depending on context, it can evoke feelings of loneliness, tension, anticipation, or fear—similar to when a bustling street falls into absolute silence due to a sudden power outage. In such instances, the absence of usual environmental sounds renders the atmosphere heavy and oppressive.

According to the Invariance Principle, the structure of the source domain must not contradict that of the target domain. In other words, only those elements of knowledge from the source domain that are compatible with the image-schematic properties of the target domain are projected in metaphorical mappings. Based on this principle, mappings that are inconsistent with the overall conceptual structure of the target should be avoided (Kövecses, 2010/2020).

However, as Kövecses also notes, the Invariance Principle alone cannot account for all instances of “illicit” transfers from source to target domains (2010/2020). These illicit mappings refer to cases in which a structural mismatch leads to tension or conflict between the two conceptual domains. In such cases, reframing becomes necessary.

In paradoxes, too, the apparent contradiction or structural conflict between the source and target domains is resolved through a process of reframing. Within an interactional model, reframing functions by establishing a reconciliation or dynamic interaction between the two input spaces, minimizing the conceptual tension, and thereby facilitating meaning construction and logical coherence between them.

8.1. Paradox and the Interactional Pattern in Conceptual Blending

As previously noted, paradox can co-occur with other conceptual mechanisms such as metonymy and metaphor. Therefore, when analyzing paradox within the framework of conceptual blending, it is essential to account for interactional patterns. These interactions emerge within one of the four types of integration networks identified by Fauconnier and Turner (2002): simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope blends. The following two examples aim to illustrate how the interactive pattern can be explained within the framework of one of these four blending types.

First, consider the expression: “*The drowning man’s hand is a silent scream*”. In this example, we are dealing with a mirror network at the macrostructural level of the couplet. “A mirror network is an integration network in which all spaces (inputs, generic and blend) share an organizing frame” (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

Given that some linguists consider synesthetic expressions to exemplify mirror networks, the couplet under discussion—characterized by synesthesia—likewise reflects this pattern. Here, the visual and auditory input spaces are conceptually integrated within a shared frame, enabling the metaphorical projection of one sensory modality onto another.

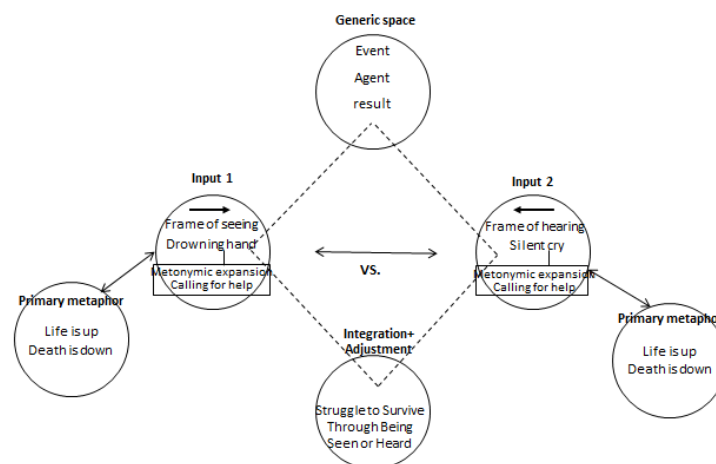


Figure 10. Mirror Network and Interactional Pattern in the Blending Diagram of “The Drowning Man’s Hand Is My Silent Scream”

In the above diagram, Input Space 1 pertains to the visual domain, while Input Space 2 belongs to the auditory domain. Moreover, both inputs are structurally parallel extensions of the metaphors “Life is up” and “Death is down”. From the conceptual domain of life, hand and scream are drawn respectively in Input Spaces 1 and 2; whereas from the domain of death, the elements drowning and silence are selected and projected.

In both input spaces, a process of metonymic extension unfolds in a symmetrical and mirror-like fashion. The shared conceptual frame of asking for help, which anchors the two inputs, is represented through part–whole metonymy: hand in Input Space 1 and scream in Input Space 2 each evoke the broader frame of a call for rescue. This metonymic elaboration, and its mirroring across domains, is visualized in the following diagram.

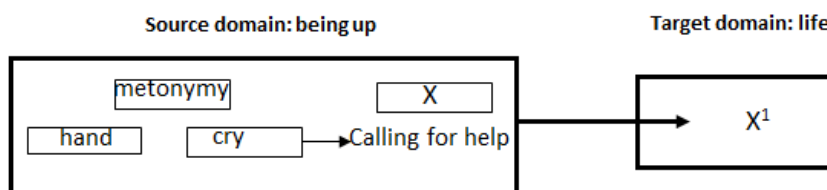


Figure 11. Diagram of Part-Whole Metonymic Extension

In the conceptual blending diagram of the aforementioned couplet, we clearly observe the interaction of various meaning-making processes—including metaphor, metonymy, and paradox—within an interactional framework and a blended space. It can be argued that the compound metaphor “Life is up” serves as the overarching conceptual frame, encompassing and enabling the interaction of all these processes. Without recognizing this underlying metaphor, interpreting the entire blend becomes virtually impossible.

It is also important to note that blended spaces themselves can function as input spaces for further blending and projection, indicating the recursive and dynamic nature of conceptual integration.

The second example, which can be analyzed within the framework of a multi-scope blend, is a couplet by Sana’i:

“Love is the water that kindles fire”.

“Love is the fire that consumes (ignites) water”.

The Blended Space emerges as a poetic domain where emotional and spiritual logic overrides the constraints of physical causality. Here, love is constructed as a dynamic, self-intensifying force that simultaneously violates and redefines natural laws: it is at once water-like and fire-like, a source of ignition and annihilation, a paradox that reveals the intensity, contradiction, and irrationality inherent in deep passion.

This type of integration, which can be considered the dominant pattern in most paradoxical conceptualizations, involves multiple framing spaces. In such a blend, two or more distinct conceptual domains are combined in a way that allows for either collision or connection between them, ultimately giving rise to a new framing space and a novel emergent meaning (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

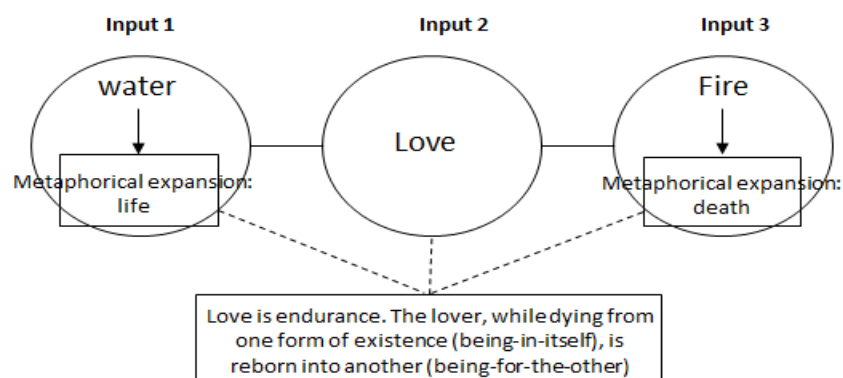


Figure 12. Multi-scope Conceptual Interactional Blending in: “The Water that Kindles Fire...”

Fire and water, as two paradoxical frames in opposition and tension with each other, undergo a process of conceptual projection through a causal virtual expansion. In this dynamic, love functions as the mediating frame, acquiring attributes from both the water and fire domains via mappings, and within the blended space, it creatively integrates these opposing qualities to generate a novel and emergent meaning.

Other similar examples—such as the phrase “laughing cry” in the following couplet—also exemplify this pattern.

“Once dead, I was revived; once in tears, I turned to laughter”.

“The reign of love arrived, and I became the bearer of enduring fortune”.

Here, the domain of love serves as the pivotal blending frame, facilitating the coexistence and reconciliation of contradictory experiences. The speaker’s identity and emotional state shift through this paradoxical synthesis, highlighting love’s power to transcend and redefine existential boundaries. Therefore, love acts as the central frame, weaving together these contradictions into a profound and enduring renewal of self.

Discussion of Results and Conclusions

This study has fundamentally reframed paradox as a dynamic cognitive mechanism rather than a static rhetorical device. By grounding the analysis in cognitive linguistics and Persian mystical literature, we have uncovered how paradox operates as a sophisticated conceptual strategy that both challenges and enriches human meaning-making processes. The research reveals three critical insights that advance our understanding of figurative language:

First, paradox emerges not through isolated contradictions but within an intricate conceptual matrix where it dynamically interacts with metaphor (para-metaphor) and metonymy (para-metonymy). This interaction enables the human mind to reconcile seemingly incompatible concepts—such as Rumi’s “death is life” or Sana’i’s “water that kindles fire”—by activating higher-order cognitive

mappings. These paradoxical constructs do not merely juxtapose opposites; they generate emergent meanings through conceptual blending, demonstrating the mind's capacity for abstract, non-linear reasoning.

Second, the study highlights paradox's unique cognitive profile. Unlike metaphor, which relies on similarity, or metonymy, which operates through contiguity, paradox thrives on productive tension between opposing frames. This tension serves a constructive purpose: it disrupts conventional categorization, compels reframing, and facilitates epistemic shifts—particularly evident in mystical texts where paradox acts as a vehicle for transcending literal interpretation.

Third, the research underscores the cultural and linguistic specificity of paradox while suggesting its universal cognitive underpinnings. The Persian literary examples illustrate how paradox functions as both an aesthetic device and a cognitive tool for navigating complex realities.

Theoretical implications the findings challenge traditional rhetorical classifications by positioning paradox as:

- 1) A meaning-generating mechanism (not just a stylistic ornament)
- 2) A blending-driven process dependent on mental space networks
- 3) A culture-sensitive phenomenon with shared cognitive foundations

In closing, by elucidating its interplay with metaphor and metonymy, this work contributes not only to linguistic theory but also to broader discussions about the creative potential of contradictory thinking.

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