



Similes of Woman and Man in the Book of Song of Songs

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Abstract: The study aimed to identify the types of similes of woman and man in the Bible book, Song of Songs, and their underlying principal metaphor. While the Songs of Songs' figurative language is commonly analyzed through the lens of historical and pure literary approaches, the authors analyzed it using the cognitive linguistics framework. Qualitative content analysis was employed as the method. The findings showed that the similes of the woman (35) outnumbered similes of the man (12), and they grouped into 7 types, namely Architectural, Artefactual, Botanical, Celestial, Comestible, Topographic, and Zoomorphic. The similes are mostly zoomorphic (13) and botanical (12). The similes represented the woman mainly as A Protected City, while the man as A City Protector. It was argued that the underlying metaphor of all similes of woman and man in the Song of Songs is Love Is Protection. The findings may contribute as an alternative way of reading and understanding figurative language in the Song of Songs.

Keywords: *Cognitive linguistics; conceptual metaphor theory; simile; song of songs.*

Received: 06 December 2022

Article Info:
Accepted: 27 February 2023

Published: 28 February 2023

How to cite:

Toar, D. D & Bram, B. (2023). Similes of Woman and Man in the Book of Song of Songs. *Al-Lisan: Jurnal Bahasa (e-Journal)*, 8(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.30603/al.v8i1.3090>

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is created and developed by human beings to communicate with other human beings what they think, feel, or aspire to. Many definitions of language have been suggested. Mkandawire (2018) defined language as any system that utilizes organized codes, symbols, or signs for communicating and interacting orally or by writing. Language is expressed in the forms of writing, speech, or gestures. How humans speak, write, and display gestures might be a compelling subject to be investigated. Those aspects of human language are being studied in Linguistics.

Linguistics is the study of language, as a complex, social communication tool system (Shaykhislamov & Makhmudov, 2020). The study of language, however, had come to a road fork with the emergence of Cognitive linguistics in the 1970s. Cognitive Linguistics is a branch of linguistics that views language as an integral part of the human cognitive system (Nyord, 2015). It was born as the formal approach to languages, such as Generative Grammar and Formal Semantics, brought dissatisfaction. Ronald Langacker, George Lakoff, and Leonard Talmy are regarded as the first Cognitive linguists (Evans, 2019). Inspired by concepts and findings from the science of mind and cognitive psychology, Cognitive linguistics is an enterprise, not a single theory, which offers an approach to language and the mind (Evans, 2012). In the case of figurative language, for example, cognitive linguistics would examine how metaphors and metonymy are formulated as the product of human cognitive mechanisms (Nyord, 2015).

The Bible is one of the literary writings that contain figurative language, such as metaphors and similes. Bamidele (2021) underscored that the Bible often employs metaphors to deliver truths to the recipients. One of the most used metaphors in the Bible is the comparison of the faithful with plants. God's command to be fruitful, reference to just man as a tree planted by the river, and children as olive trees around their father's table are examples of biblical metaphors and similes. Weiss (2012) found that the metaphors in the bible function to 2 extents, namely rhetorical and theological. On the rhetorical leverage, the biblical metaphors provoke listeners' or readers' curiosity and attention as well as surprise and delight; while on the theological stage, they represent the complex relationship between God and human beings. Moreover, Barbiero (2011) suggested not an allegorical, but a metaphorical reading of the Song of Songs. Jindo (2018) argued that there are four types of biblical metaphors research: first, theory-oriented, exploring the theoretical issues of the biblical metaphors; second, metaphor-oriented, discussing specific metaphors throughout the Bible; third, method-oriented, evolving an exegetical method that promote the better understanding of the biblical metaphors; fourth, text-oriented, investigating various metaphors in a particular text. The present study tends to be text-oriented research since it limits itself to the exploration of the similes in the book Song of Songs.

There are several ways to group similes in the Bible. The present research will employ the categorization of Hunt. Hunt (2008) categorizes the similes in the Song of Songs into eight object types, namely *zoomorphic* (where the thing compared is animalized), *botanical* (where the thing compared is a plant, flower, tree or spice), *architectural* (where the thing compared is structuralized), *topographic* (where the thing compared is contextualized to a landscape), *artefactual* (where the thing compared is treasured as an object of wealth or status), *celestial* (where the thing compared is heavenly), *comestible* (where the thing compared is something edible), and *other*. Meanwhile, Watson, (1994) highlighted that similes may operate purposes of opening or closing parts or stanzas (structuring) and to sustain interest, emphasize motif, express vividness, emotive intent, and ornaments (non-structuring).

Biblical metaphors are commonly analyzed within exegetical frameworks, especially the historical or literary approach (Jindo, 2018). Lancaster (2021) stressed that although the book of Song of Songs is abundant with metaphors, it has not been the target of biblical metaphor studies. Similarly, Gault (2019) pinpointed that despite its particularity in the Bible, the metaphors in the Song of Songs have not been researched using the comparative approach. Here, the authors offer the cognitive perspective on understanding biblical metaphors such ones in the book Song of Songs. The metaphors, especially the similes, in the Song of Songs in this study are being investigated using the Cognitive linguistic approach, especially using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

The metaphor was traditionally considered a purely linguistic phenomenon that facilitates its rhetoric, but then on the rise of cognitive linguistics in the 1970s, it was recognized as a mechanism that allows the conception of abstract categories such as thoughts and emotion (van Loon, 2018). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal study entitled “Metaphor We Live By” (1980) coined the term ‘conceptual metaphor’. They argued that metaphors are conceptual, not literary. Whereas metaphor has often been treated as an ornament of literary writings, which evokes imagination, Lakoff and Johnson (2008) opined that metaphors are implemented in our daily conversations, and pioneered what is then known as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). They pinpointed that we not only speak in metaphor continuously, but we act by them.

Moreover, in the manner of CMT, we speak and act metaphorically because we think metaphorically as well. Metaphor is not only the figure of speech but also the figure of thought. Conforming to CMT, a metaphorical operation is a conceptualization of what is “concrete” (e.g. physical experience), named “source”. Therefore, it is called “conceptual metaphor”: metaphor produces a set of conceptual relationships, named “mapping”, between a conceptual component of the source and the conceptual component of the target. The celebrated example is the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. This metaphor is manifested in our everyday expressions, such as “He attacked every weak point in my argument”, “His criticisms were right on target”, “I demolished his argument”, “You disagree? Okay, shoot!” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The illustration of this mapping displayed in Figure 1 below.

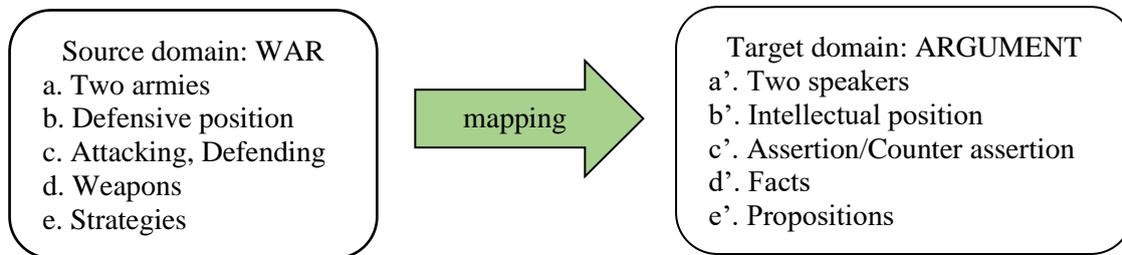


Figure 1. Mapping of ARGUMENT IS WAR

Lakoff and Johnson also started the practice of writing conceptual metaphors in small caps. The concepts in the source domain represent concepts in the target domain.

There is a body of research on the similes in the Song of songs (Gault, 2019; Hunt, 2008; James, 2017; Landy, 2020; Verde, 2018). Hunt (2008) underlined that the function of the similes in the Song of Songs is non-structural, which means that they were not intended to provide an opening or closing to poetry parts. The similes were to display motifs of virility and precious value; and vivacity in abundant imagery by human senses. Meanwhile, James (2017) highlighted that the motif of the metaphors on man and woman is to emphasize the imagery of woman as a city. Woman-as-a-fortified-city metaphor was also pinpointed by Verde (2018). In his analysis of Song of Songs chapter 4:4, Verde discovered that the simile of the woman’s neck as a weapon tower functions to depict the woman as possessing attractiveness and matching the man’s courtship. Moreover, Gault (2019), analyzing the Song of Songs’ body metaphors, concluded that the metaphors portrayed the forms and functions of the lovers’ bodies as well as the beauty concept in ancient Israel. Landy (2020) unearthed

the facts that the Song of Songs communicated the good looks of the lovers and their world via lovely language.

The authors of the present study found that the investigations applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory that focus on the similes of man and woman in the whole Songs of Songs are still scant. The previous studies on the Song of Songs have discussed the metaphors and similes in terms of other themes, like body imagery (Gault, 2019), sacred landscapes (Landy, 2020), of certain verses, like Songs 4,4 (Verde, 2016, 2018), or of its functions, like to display motif of virility (Hunt, 2008). The authors opted to explore deeply the similes of woman and man in the Song of Songs, as (Watson, 1994) pinpointed that similes represent most of the figurative language in Hebrew literature. The discussion of the similes in this study has two main contributions. First, it would contribute to the figurative language literature on how ancient people employed figurative language using the realities in their living environment, such as vineyards, gazelles fortified city, and so on. Second, the readers might have an overview on how the issues of equality and complementarity of woman and man were being addressed through the employment of similes in a single literary work. Hence, the authors propose the following research question:

1. What are the types of similes between woman and man in the Song of Songs?
2. What is the underlying metaphor being conveyed through the similes on man and woman in the Song of Songs?

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The present study administered a qualitative content analysis as its method. Krippendorff, (2018) stated that content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). It characterizes by openness and the comprehension of meaning (Kuckartz, 2019). In designing a qualitative approach, we should be reflective and consistent (Stasik & Gendźwiłł, 2018). Being reflective concerns realizing how, why, and what we conduct specific research. Meanwhile, being consistent means that in establishing the research problem and particular theoretical frameworks, we on decide the proper tools and data gathering and analysis techniques consistent with the purpose of the study.



The Bible translation version used in this research was the New International Version (NIV), which is arguably the most balanced English translation: not too literal, not too dynamic (Fields, 2018). Data was gathered by applying the observational method of the non-participatory type. In observing activity as a scientific undertaking, researchers watch, assess, infer, and make remarks on the object that is being observed (Ciesielska et al., 2018). Having determined a particular “area” to be observed, an observer finds out how to access the certain “area” to get the data.

The standard text of the Song of Songs was obtained virtually before the authors proceeded with data collection and data analysis. The authors read first the whole book of Song of Songs once, then in the second and third readings listed the similes on man and woman found throughout the Book. After that, the authors compartmentalized the similes found into eight categories of Hunt (2008). Subsequently, the authors decoded the similes of woman and man into two unifying themes. Lastly, the authors identified and explained the underlying metaphors of man and woman in the Song of song applying the Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Similes on woman and man in Song of Songs

The observation of the text results in the listing of the similes of man and woman in the whole book. The first glance the findings indicated that woman is highly illustrated in the Song through the similes compared to man.

Table 1. Similes of Man and Woman in the Song of Songs

No.	Man		Woman	
	Verses	Quantity	Verses	Quantity
1.	2:3	1	1:5	2
2.	2:9	1	1:7	1
3.	2:17	2	1:9	1
4.	5:12	2	2:2	1
5.	5:13	2	4:1	1
6.	5:14	1	4:2	1
7.	5:15	1	4:3	2
8.	8:14	2	4:4	1
9.	N/A	N/A	4:5	2
10.	N/A	N/A	6:4	3
11.	N/A	N/A	6:5	1
12.	N/A	N/A	6:6	1
13.	N/A	N/A	6:7	1
14.	N/A	N/A	6:10	4
15.	N/A	N/A	7:1	1



No.	Man		Woman	
	Verses	Quantity	Verses	Quantity
16.	N/A	N/A	7:3	2
17.	N/A	N/A	7:4	2
18.	N/A	N/A	7:5	2
19.	N/A	N/A	7:7	2
20.	N/A	N/A	7:8	2
21.	N/A	N/A	7:9	1
22.	N/A	N/A	8:10	1
Total		12	Total	35

Note: N/A means not applicable.

The authors observed an intention to put forward woman through the majority of similes. Her beauty, her bodily perfection, and her sturdiness indicated that the woman in the Song of Songs has strength in herself and is powerful enough to ‘conquer’ the man and even to ‘protect’ him. Her beautiful and strong appearance is attractive to men. Arbel (2000) declared that the woman in the Song audaciously proclaims her corporeal beauty. That is why there are so many similes on bodily charm, particularly as attraction and desire to augment the appreciation of beauty.

The authors classified the similes found according to Hunt's (2008) object category, as shown in Table 2 below. It can be seen that most of the woman and man similes were *zoomorphic* (13 times) and *botanical* (12 times). While the least similes found in the Song were *comestible* (4 times), that is food or something edible. The authors noticed that woman and man here were compared more to living creatures, which is animals and plants. It might represent the liveliness, dynamics and durability of the woman and man relationship and dialectic. The authors found the zoomorphic and botanical similes may symbolize the growth and vigor of woman and man as they communicate and intend for each other. These findings echoed the findings of Hunt (2008) who concluded that the similes in the Song were to present motifs, such as fertility and virility, and vividness displayed in rich body imagery.

Table 2. Types of the Similes of Man and Woman in the Song of Songs

Type	Quantity	Verses
<i>architectural</i>	5	1:5b, 4:4, 7:4a, 7:4b, 8:10
<i>artefactual</i>	7	1:5b, 4:3a, 7:1, 7:4a, 7:5, 8:6(2)
<i>botanical</i>	12	2:2, 2:3, 4:3b, 5:13(2), 5:14, 5:15, 6:7, 7:7(2), 7:8a, 7:8b
<i>celestial</i>	5	6:4, 6:10a, 6:10b(3)
<i>comestible</i>	4	4:11a, 7:8a, 7:8b, 7:9
<i>topographic</i>	7	4:1, 4:11b, 5:15, 6:4(2), 7:4, 7:5
<i>zoomorphic</i>	13	1:9, 2:9, 2:17(2), 4:1, 4:2, 4:5, 5:12, 6:5, 6:6, 7:3, 8:14(2)



The underlying metaphor of the woman and man similes in Song of Songs

Having analyzed the types and functions of woman and man similes, the authors proceed to find out the possible single metaphor that can encapsulate an integrated message of similes on woman and man. I opined that the woman was primarily portrayed as a walled city, while the man was depicted as a protector or conqueror of the city. Both concepts proofed by a cluster of verses as it is described in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Clusters of Woman and Man Similes and Underlying Metaphors

Similes Verses	4:4, 6:4, 7:4, 7:5, 8:9, 8:10	2:3, 2:9, 2:17, 5:13, 5:14, 5:15, 6:12, 8:14
Cluster of similes	WOMAN AS A PROTECTED CITY	MAN AS A PROTECTOR OF THE CITY
Underlying Metaphor	LOVE IS PROTECTION	

Woman was represented as “the tower of David, built with courses of stone” (4:4), “as Tirzah, my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem” (6:4). “Your neck is like an ivory tower” (7:4), “Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon” (7:5), “breasts are like towers” (8:10). The authors of the present study hold that the similes on the woman in the Songs illustrated mainly woman as a protected city, as a strong city as Tirzah and Jerusalem. She is a city with walls and towers that could provide safety to its inhabitants, but at the same as a city that is vulnerable to attack from the enemies. Thus, the woman also needs some protection. This finding was affirmative to the one of James (2017) who opined that the city in the Songs presented metaphorically female beauty and was imagined as a house for living together. She also stated that the comparison of the woman as a city recalled the twin themes of protection and the need to be protected (James, 2017).

Discussion

Hunt (2008) underscored that it was very scant in the Bible that physical beauty was lauded as something eternal through extravagant similes. The findings of this study also corroborated the study of Landy (2020) that woman in the Song was described as more active and dynamic than man. She further evidenced that the woman is the center of the poetry and the more commanding character. The book started with her aspiration (1:2) and ended with her dismissal of her lover. The woman has more utterances in the Song, she was the focus of effective. Although the man was portrayed as a king (1:4; 6:9-10),



he was vulnerable to captivity (7:5). Hence, Landy was assertive regarding the female authorship of the Song of Songs. She viewed this poetical composition as a breakthrough for it countered the patriarchal mentality of the time. (Nissinen, 2019) as well indicated that some authors proposed that a woman is the author of the Songs. Nissinen further confirmed the patriarchal setting of the Songs by highlighting the woman's brothers' authoritative roles twice. However, he asserted that the woman's voice is more dominant in the poem. Moreover, the superiority of the woman in the Song was also emphasized by Gault (2019). He notified that there were only seven verses to depict man's outlook (5:10-16), compared to three descriptive songs consigned to woman. Her physical appearance' portrait was central in the Songs and her dominant speech is noticeable (Gault, 2019).

Meanwhile, the man in the Song of Songs was compared to “an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade.” (2:3), “a gazelle or a young stag” (2:9), “a gazelle or like a young stag” (2:17). As for the man, the authors argued that the man was mainly represented as the protector of the city. Man is expected to conquer the city and thus, give a sense of security to the city as the city becomes a safer place after the conquest. He was imagined as an apple tree under which shade she would feel comfortable. He was also so unique among his peers in terms of his sturdy and attractive physical outlook. The descriptive song on the man (5: 10-16) affirmed this concept. She wanted the man as her leader in public (2:4). However, at the same time, it is the wall that city who can provide safety for the man after his wandering as a gazelle outside the city wall. His addressing her as Tirzah and Jerusalem (6:4), two strongholds of Israel, was assertive to the idea. This finding supported the similar findings of Verde (2020) who viewed the man who was supposed to be the conqueror was conquered by the woman. Verde (2020) declared that the man in the Song was metaphorically represented as the warrior who lost his dominance and whose power was restricted.

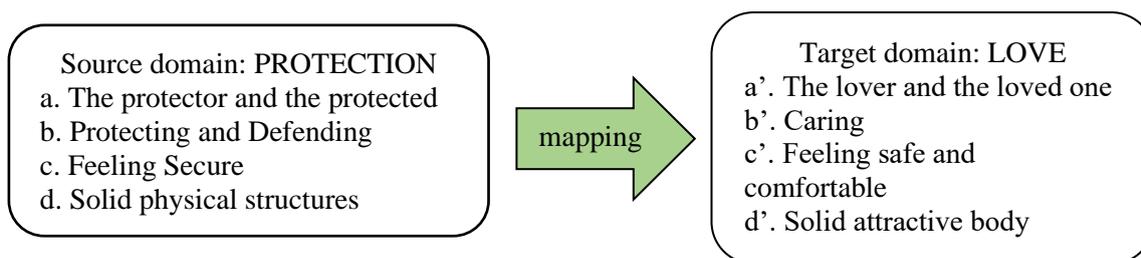


Figure 2. Mapping of LOVE IS PROTECTION

Figure 2 above illustrates the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS PROTECTION as it has been claimed by authors as the underlying metaphor of the similes of woman and man in the Songs. PROTECTION involves the protector and the protected, while LOVE presupposes the lover and the loved one. The action in the realm of PROTECTION is protecting and defending, while in the realm of LOVE is caring. Those actions produce the feeling of security for PROTECTION and the feeling of safety and comfort for LOVE. The undertaking of PROTECTION and LOVE was facilitated by the solid physical structures and solid attractive body respectively. In the Songs, the act of PROTECTION is reciprocal as the act of LOVE. The woman longs for protection and the chosen man provides it, but at the same time, the man longs to stay inside the city to enjoy a protected environment. The reciprocity implies the contradictory status of the woman and the man: each of them is the protector that needs to be protected at the same time. Love compels the act of caring for each other, each part needs the protective activity operated by the other.

D. CONCLUSION

The present study explores the similes in the Song of Songs from a cognitive linguistic point of view. This investigation is purposed to notice the kinds of similes between woman and man and their unifying metaphor. The results of qualitative content analysis yielded that most of the similes are zoomorphic and botanical ones. It was unearthed that the metaphor LOVE IS PROTECTION underlined the clusters of similes WOMAN AS PROTECTED CITY and MAN AS THE CITY PROTECTOR. Both woman and man were reciprocally protecting as the manifestation of their love. This study bridged the gap in the literature by offering another alternative manner of reading poetry, such as Song of Songs. The application of the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) in reading poetry might become a useful update in linguistics. It might be beneficial for EFL

teachers, EFL learners, the linguists to enrich their linguistic knowledge, especially on figurative language in the forms of similes and metaphors.

However, the present study bore some limitations. First, the discussion of the similes in the Song of Songs was limited to the identification and explanation of the similes using the English translation of the original text in Hebrew. The discussion did not include the explication of Hebrew words or expressions used in the similes. Second, the intertextuality or the parallelism with other books in the Bible or with other Ancient Near East Texts was not covered in the discussion. Hence, future researchers might want to explore and explain more similes and metaphors used in the Songs of Songs or other ancient literary works by exploring the meanings in their original languages such as Hebrew or Greek. The research in the future might also incorporate parallelism and intertextuality in the discussion of the figurative language of the text.

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