



Metaphors for advice messages in online sermons delivered by global Islamic preachers

ABSTRACT - Research on metaphor in religious discourse is essential, particularly in practical contexts such as preaching, where metaphor serves as a key vehicle for conveying abstract spiritual experiences and moral guidance. Despite its importance, metaphor use in religious settings remains underexplored, especially in digitally mediated forms of religious communication. This study investigates the use of metaphorical language in twenty Islamic online sermons focused on the theme of family. A balanced corpus was compiled, comprising sermons from ten male and ten female Islamic preachers, with the aim of analyzing the metaphors embedded in advice-oriented discourse. The inclusion of both genders allows for a comparative examination of potential differences in metaphorical expression between male and female preachers. The findings reveal that female preachers employ metaphors more frequently than their male counterparts. Furthermore, structural metaphors drawing on source domains related to future benefits—such as building, finance, and plants—are prominently used by both groups when conveying advice. These results suggest that while gender may influence the frequency of metaphor use, certain conceptual metaphors are shared across genders in the context of Islamic family-oriented preaching. The study contributes to the growing field of metaphor studies in religious discourse and highlights the need for further research on gender and metaphorical framing in digital religious settings.

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1. Introduction

Language has played a significant role in shaping religious understanding and guiding believers' attitudes and behavior. Prayer, sermons, confession, understanding a canon through reading, reciting, and commenting, and other religious activities require language (van Noppen, 2015; Hobbs, 2021). The various aspects of language in religious practices are examined by a linguistic discipline known as theolinguistics (Crystal, 2018). Crystal (2008) defines theolinguistics studies on how language affects religious thought and practice, such as ritual, sacred texts, sermons, doctrinal pronouncements, and private affirmations.

Islamic sermons are basically aimed at building and deepening Muslims' faith and assisting them in living their daily lives in accordance with Islamic teachings (Meuleman, 2011, p. 263). According to Islamic doctrine, sermons (*khutbah*, *tausiyah*, or *da'wah discourse*) serve not just as media for imparting religious knowledge, but also as persuasive communication events designed to impact moral contemplation, spiritual awareness, and social conduct (Ali-Agan, 2016; Samuri & Hopkin, 2017; Mahmood & Kasim, 2019). Within such discourse, linguistic strategies are carefully employed to convey complex theological ideas in ways that resonate with audiences. One of the most powerful rhetorical and cognitive strategies used in religious communication is metaphor.

Metaphor has long been recognized as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition and communication. According to conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010; Littlemore, 2001), metaphors facilitate the comprehension of abstract concepts by relating them to more tangible experiential contexts. Hobbs (2021) highlights that features of religious language are religious vocabulary, archaic language, parallelism, metaphor and intertextuality. In religious discourse, metaphors play a vital role as many theological notions (Dorst & Klop, 2017; Richardson et al., 2021; Prophet, 2025), including God, faith, sin, divine guidance, and the afterlife, are fundamentally abstract and transcendent. These abstract transcendental ideas become easier for people to understand, more emotionally engaging, and more cognitively relevant when they are expressed in metaphors. The study of metaphor in religious discourse has attracted increasing attention within the linguistics area.

Recent cognitive linguistics studies show that metaphor is essential to conceptualizing and communicating abstract entities. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) views metaphors as systematic mappings between source and target domains that structure reasoning, perception, and conversation. Recent research across disciplines confirms the metaphor's importance in social meaning (Agbede & Mheta, 2022; Don et al., 2026). Metaphor is important for comprehending emotion as well as political communication. Cross-cultural research comparing Thai and Korean emotional expressions indicates that emotions like fear and grief are organized through embodied metaphorical domains originating from body sensations, movement, and natural forces (Rodsap et al., 2025). The embodied basis of metaphor is further supported by complementary experimental research, which demonstrates how people cognitively link emotional states to physical events like water movement (Xiong et al., 2026).

Metaphor is a crucial discursive and cognitive tool in spiritual and institutional settings. Metaphors assist meditators visualize mental states and provide discourse structure and guide

listeners through communication events (Rundquist, 2025; Navarro & Silvestre-López, 2025). Metaphors influence institutional narratives and collective identities within business communication. Pomeroy and Pilbeam (2026) demonstrate that corporate safety discourse uses metaphors such as safety is a journey and safety is a battle to represent safety management as an active and collaborative effort.

Despite these advances, metaphor in religious discourse, particularly online sermons and in different gender contexts, has received little attention. Given the expanding importance of online religious communication and its role in molding contemporary religious experience, conceptual metaphors in online sermons offer a new perspective on how spiritual meanings are produced and conveyed online. Integrating cognitive linguistic analysis with digital religious discourse helps broaden metaphor studies. This research aims to investigate the metaphors used in delivering advice by male and female Islamic global preachers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptual metaphor

In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded not merely as a verbal embellishment, but it is a fundamental mechanism by which individuals conceptualise abstract experiences. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) describe metaphor as comprehending one entity through the lens of another, highlighting the cognitive process underlying metaphorical reasoning. Similarly, Kövecses (2010) defines metaphor as the methodical mapping of two conceptual realms in which the source domain offers a more concrete structure for comprehending the target domain. These two conceptual domains are not different mental categories; instead, both are related ideas, or "bundles" (Dancygier, 2017), that let meaning move from one domain to another. Metaphor is a tool that enables people to change the way they think, talk, and organise knowledge about the world.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has shown the significance of metaphor in human cognition; however, it has also been subjected to criticism. The introspective methodology of CMT studies is a significant limitation, as it was based on the intuitions of the researchers rather than empirical facts (Steen, 2011). CMT also has faced criticism for its tendency toward overgeneralization and schematic abstraction, often proposing extensive conceptual mappings (e.g., life is a journey) that may neglect nuanced linguistic variety and context-specific meanings in real discourse (Deignan, 2005). Despite its weaknesses, CMT is a fundamental theory that has greatly enhanced our comprehension of how people comprehend and transmit complex phenomena. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that metaphor relates to the process of the transfer of elements from a more concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain. They categorise conceptual metaphors into several types, including structural metaphor, conduit metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor. Argument is war is a famous structural metaphor that shows how the way people think about conflict affects how they understand and talk about arguments. This kind of metaphor uses the source domain to organise the target domain so that people can understand one idea through the lens of another (Kövecses, 2010).

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), the conduit metaphor is a mechanism in which the speaker encapsulates concepts (objects) within words (containers) and communicates them (long conduits) to the listener, who then recovers the concepts (objects) from the words/containers. The conduit metaphor describes communication as the transmission of ideas and meanings through a conduit, like physical objects through a channel. "I gave you that idea" or "It is difficult to put my ideas into words" are two examples of phrases using conduit metaphors.

An orientational metaphor, as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), involves spatial orientation, encompassing dimensions such as up-down, in-out, front-back, and on-off. These metaphorical orientations are not arbitrary; they are based on physical and cultural experiences. For instance, the expression "I'm feeling up and my spirit rises" is indicative of the fact that happiness is elevated.

Ontological metaphors create abstract concepts more concrete, such as substance, container, or personhood. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), the noun "inflation" can be used in entity and substance metaphors to describe increasing prices; for instance, "We need to combat inflation" uses inflation as an entity. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) assert that personification constitutes an ontological metaphor in which nonhuman phenomena are interpreted through the framework of human motivations, characteristics, and behaviours. For example, inflation is eating up our profits.

The conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (2003) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of metaphors in linguistics and cognitive analysis. The categorisation of metaphors, which encompasses ontological, conduit, structural, and orientation metaphors, has had a special impact on how we communicate and understand abstract ideas.

2.2. Previous study on metaphors

Metaphor research has been conducted extensively in a variety of disciplines, including education, health, economy, politics, and religion. For instance, metaphors in the educational setting have been the subject of numerous studies (Cameron, 2003; Littlemore, 2001; Littlemore et al., 2014; Wan & Turner, 2018). Metaphors have become more common in the educational setting to help students grasp literacy instruction (Wan and Turner, 2018). In a healthcare setting, metaphors can be employed to communicate and intensify negative emotions experienced by patients, while simultaneously serving to empower them (Semino et al., 2017). In contemporary English, the metaphorical use of cancer generally reveals what are regarded as evils and threats (Potts & Semino, 2019).

In a political context, experimental research has demonstrated that people identify higher spatial position metaphors with more powerful social groupings (Winter et al., 2020). According to Charteris-Black (2004, 2012), metaphor is a figure of speech that is frequently utilized in political contexts for the purpose of persuasion. Metaphor is an effective tool in achieving the speaker's purpose of convincing the listener and influencing their behaviour (Charteris-Black, 2004). Research in Nigerian political campaign speeches by Buhari indicates that conceptual

metaphors intentionally influence political actors and policy (Agbede & Mheta, 2022). They identified metaphors such as corruption is a killer, good government is a solid foundation, and good government is a bridge. The metaphors reinforced the speaker's political objective and degraded opponents. Similarly, Don et al. (2026) found that religious metaphors helped political leaders explain economic policies using moral and ideological frameworks, calling neoliberal approaches "economic dogmatism." Metaphors give political discourse power to influence public opinion and legitimize political ideologies.

In terms of gender, research on metaphors has been influenced by many factors, such as cognitive, social, and contextual factors. Hegstrom (2002) found that some gendered patterns exist in metaphorical descriptions; for example, women are associated with affective and aesthetic qualities ("flower," "sun"), and men are associated with strength-related attributes. Similarly, Hussey and Katz (2006) demonstrate that gender affects metaphor use in interactions, mediated by relational context; for example, women utilize more metaphors in conversations with friends, while male participants exhibit constant metaphor use irrespective of familiarity. From a cognitive and corpus-based perspective, Ahrens et al. (2024) have provided evidence that metaphor can encode gender stereotypes through the selection of source domains, for example, domains such as war and competition perceived as masculine, and journey and plant as feminine. However, more recent research challenges the assumption of stable gender differences. For example, Fattahi and Nushi's research (2021) shows that gender does not significantly affect metaphor use in Iranian EFL learners' writing, with proficiency emerging as a more influential factor. Metaphor is acknowledged in religious contexts as a fundamental component of spirituality and religious discourse. Studies of guided meditation discourse show that metaphor plays an essential role in shaping how practitioners conceptualize internal mental processes (Rundquist, 2025; Navarro i Ferrando & Silvestre-López, 2025). These findings show that metaphors in spiritual discourse are not just descriptive; they also serve educational and experiential purposes, helping people understand abstract mental states and internal sensations. In terms of sacred texts, both the Bible and the Quran contain metaphors that assist believers in obtaining a better knowledge of the divine (Dorst & Klop, 2017). These religious metaphors help believers understand the divine by applying aspects of earthly conceptions to it.

Previous studies in a religious context have explored how Dutch Muslim teenagers use metaphors to express their faith and how these metaphors compare to biblical ones (Dorst & Klop, 2017). In the Bible, God has revealed Himself through five principal metaphors: God as a king, master, judge, father and husband. The results show that two of the five selected biblical metaphors were used in the unprompted descriptions: "God is a judge" and "God is a master". The Muslim teenagers did not use "God is a father" or "God is a husband" (Dorst & Klop, 2017). Charteris-Black (2004) investigates common conceptual metaphors in both the Bible and the Quran, such as spiritual knowledge is light and divine anger is fire, emphasizing shared metaphorical structures. This study shows that the major source domains for metaphor in the Bible are people as animals, Jesus as the light, the spiritual as the natural, and humans as plants (Charteris-Black, 2004). Charteris-Black (2004) found that metaphors of journey, fire, light, and weather are important in both the Bible and the Quran, and that they are based on conceptual

metaphors such as spiritual knowledge is light, good is light, divine anger is fire, and divine punishment is a hostile weather condition. Richardson (2021) finds that Christian-specific metaphors like “God is Father” serve as sectarian markers. However, there is very little research on metaphor in religious teaching, particularly in preaching.

While metaphor is crucial for expressing spiritual experiences and making abstract divine concepts more accessible, research on metaphor in religious discourse, especially in practical contexts such as preaching, remains limited. Previous studies on religious metaphors, unfortunately, have not accounted for gender. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the utilisation of metaphors by male and female Islamic global preachers in giving advice on parenting and marriage within religious sermons.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This research uses a qualitative, interpretative design, employing conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), to analyse sermon transcripts from male and female Islamic preachers worldwide. The steps of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) by Pragglejaz Group (2007) are used for identifying a potential metaphor. This discourse-analytical approach examines how Islamic preachers use metaphors to build persuasive messages on family, marriage, and parenting.

3.2. Data selection and corpus construction

The data I have collected comes from Islamic online sermons on YouTube delivered by Islamic preachers from around the world. The subject of family is the focus of these sermons. The subject of family was chosen for its importance in Islamic societies and its increasing prominence in recent years. The global Islamic preachers in this data delivered their sermons in mosques, auditoriums, and halls. The sermon videos were uploaded to YouTube, and these recordings are accessible to the public.

A total of 20 Islamic sermon videos were purposively selected to serve as the primary data set for this study. The sermon videos were chosen based on the topic of family, delivered in English, and had a high number of views (popular videos); the sermons were delivered in mosques, auditoriums, and halls and were balanced in gender between male and female speakers. Twenty male and female global Islamic preachers were equally represented in these video transcripts; the tables below show the information of twenty global Islamic preachers in this study.

Table 1

The list of male Islamic global preachers’ sermons.

Male Islamic preachers	Word count
Abdelrahman Murphy	5,367
Bilal Philips	3,354
Khalid Latif	5,108

Mokhatar Maghraoui	3,032
Mufti Menk	13,769
Nouman Ali Khan	6,552
Suhaib Webb	7,093
Waleed Basyouni	5,119
Wisam Sharieff	5,136
Yasir Qadhi	6,814

Table 2

The list of female Islamic global preachers' videos.

Female Islamic preachers	Word count
Dunia Shuaib	2,476
Haleh Banani	3,889
Hujrah Wahhaj	2,445
Lisa Killinger	5,225
Shireen Ahmed	1,986
Umm Jamaal ud-Din	4,650
Yasmin Mogahed	3,991
Zainab Alawani	3,303
Zaynab Ansari	2,563
Suzy Ismail	3,551

The data in the two tables above show twenty sermon transcripts from global Islamic preachers on YouTube on family, parenting and marriage. As we can see in Table 1, Mufti Menk's sermon, "Keys to A Happy Home," is the most extensive among the ten male preachers, with a word count of 13,769. Other notable contributors include Nouman Ali Khan (6,552 words), Suhaib Webb (7,093 words), and Yasir Qadhi (6,814 words), all of whom provide substantial reflections on family dynamics, parental roles, and ethical actions.

On the other hand, although female preachers are typically shorter in duration, they seem to provide incisive, thoughtful, and emotionally resonant insights on similar topics. Lisa Killinger's sermon "Men Are from Marwa, Women Are from Safa" is the longest, with 5,225 words, followed by Umm Jamaal ud-Din (4,650 words) and Yasmin Mogahed (3,991 words), whose work often blends spiritual reflection with practical family wisdom. Shireen Ahmed delivers the shortest sermon, totaling 1,986 words, while remaining a rich message of parenting.

The disparity in sermon length between male and female preachers may indicate variations in rhetorical style, audience expectations, or platform limitations; nonetheless, both groups significantly contribute to the discourse on family in contemporary Islamic preaching.

3.3. Data analysis procedure

The methodology proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) was employed to identify metaphors and their conceptual mappings in the metaphor analysis. The steps included:

1. Watching, transcribing and data familiarization of the sermon data

Watching and transcribing the sermon videos in the initial step of this study. The discourse context was initially understood by constantly reading sermon transcripts and watching sermon videos. The researcher thoroughly examined the texts to identify sermon themes, rhetorical patterns, and linguistic structures.

2. Reading and advice identification

A comprehensive reading of the sermon scripts was done in order to acquire knowledge of advice-giving concerning family, marriage, and parenting.

3. Metaphor identification through Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) follows these steps:

- a. Lexical units in advice messages were examined within their context.
- b. The basic and contextual meanings of advice messages were contrasted.
- c. If a difference was found and its meaning could be determined by comparison, the unit was marked as a metaphor.

4. Categorization of metaphor domains

According to Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the target domain is the abstract idea being comprehended, while the source domain is the more concrete idea utilised to structure how that thought is perceived. Both the source domain and the target domain were used to categorize the identified metaphors (e.g., *marriage is a garden*, *parenting is a building*).

5. Conceptual mapping

Analysis carried out to map the connections that exist between metaphorical expressions and more general societal narratives (e.g., gendered expectations, Islamic values, authority structures). The identified conceptual metaphors were then classified according to the metaphor types proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), which include: structural metaphor, conduit metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor

6. Gender-based comparison

A comparative analysis was conducted to investigate the differences in metaphor usage between male and female preachers, focusing on variations in authoritative, nurturing, and moralistic metaphorical frameworks.

3.4. Research reliability

The reliability of research in metaphor identification was a significant challenge. The writer consulted the subject expert on metaphors for evaluating the metaphor identification outcomes, which were used to advise on the sermons data. The subject expert on metaphors subsequently analysed the advice data and the outcomes of identified metaphors employing the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) as outlined by the Pragglejaz Group in 2007. Recommendations from the subject-matter expert, along with further discussion, were used to enhance the study's reliability.

3.5. Ethical considerations

All sermon materials used in this study were publicly available on YouTube and contained no confidential or personal data. Despite extensive debate over the ethical implications of using online content for research, it is widely agreed that public texts may be used without consent, whereas private texts require consent (Pihlaja, 2018). YouTubers can post videos privately or publicly on their channels and manage viewer comments. Bruckman (2002) claims that researchers can quote and analyse online content without consent if the data is publicly archived, does not require passwords, has no site policy against it, and is not sensitive. Islamic sermons on YouTube do not require informed consent because the data is public and the topic of family is not highly sensitive. It has been ensured that the names of preachers are appropriately credited throughout the analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

An in-depth analysis of the use of metaphors as strategies for advice-giving in Islamic sermons on YouTube identified 13 distinct classifications of source-domain metaphors (See Table 3). An interesting gender-based pattern shows that female preachers used metaphors more frequently than their male counterparts, with 73 occasions (compared to 61 instances by males). This seems to be a significant difference. This study undermines the conventional consensus in metaphor studies, which repeatedly reports that males use more metaphors (Charteris-Black, 2004: 200; Hussey & Katz, 2006: 86; Charteris-Black, 2012: 207). The fact that female preachers tend to use more metaphorical utterances when delivering advice might be influenced by the type of sermon, how preachers interact with people, or how individuals typically speak in Islamic sermons. These findings show how important it is to examine metaphors in their proper context, adding a more complex dimension to current theories of gender and language.

Table 3

Types and source domain of metaphors.

Types of metaphors	Source domains	Male preachers	Female preachers
Structural Metaphors	Buildings, Finance, Plants, Animals, Households, Light, Cleanliness, Study	33	44
Orientalional metaphors	Humans' movement activities, visual activities. and the movement of nature	11	18
Conduit metaphor	Parts of the human body	6	8
Ontological metaphors	Personifications (Islam, Quran, Hadith, heart, phone are humans)	11	3
Total		61	73

In accordance with Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory (2003), the metaphorical expressions used by ten male and ten female Islamic preachers in their sermons indicate distinct cognitive patterns shaped by their choice of source domains. A total of 134 metaphorical expressions in terms of advice-giving were identified across both genders, with 61 metaphors in sermons delivered by male preachers and 73 in sermons delivered by female preachers, indicating that female preachers used metaphors more frequently in their sermons.

Both male and female Islamic preachers in the Islamic sermons data drew heavily from the source domain of buildings (e.g., *foundation, home, doors, shelter*), this fact indicates a shared metaphor of *family as a structure*. It is interesting that the Islamic female preachers more frequently used metaphors from the source domain of finance (e.g., *invest, spend, buy*), with 12 occurrences, compared to 7 among males. This suggests that, in a metaphorical framing of emotional exchange as an economic transaction, *love is an investment*.

The source domain of plants (e.g., *planting, growing, seeds*) was used more extensively by the female Islamic preachers in my data (7 instances), compared to only 2 among male preachers, reflecting a nurturing, growth-oriented framing of family life (*children are plants, raising a family is gardening*). On the other hand, the male Islamic preachers frequently used the source domain of animals (7 instances), which were almost absent in the sermons delivered by female preachers (1 instance), possibly reflecting a metaphorical mapping of *human behavior as animal behavior*, often tied to instinct, discipline, or control.

The source domain household (e.g., *chores, cleaning, home routines*) was strikingly more prevalent in sermons delivered by the female preachers (8) than in sermons delivered by the male preachers (1), reinforcing domestic familiarity and daily life metaphors as vehicles for conveying religious values. Movement metaphors based on human actions (e.g., *fall, shove, swallow*) were widely employed by both genders, with 10 female and 6 male instances, illustrating shared conceptualizations of life events or moral decisions as physical movements.

Regarding ontological metaphors (personification), where abstract entities like *Islam, the Quran, the heart, or the phone* are endowed with human-like qualities, the male Islamic preachers used significantly more (11) instances in the sermons compared to female preachers (3 instances), suggesting that male discourse may lean more toward anthropomorphizing abstract spiritual concepts.

Overall, this pattern illustrates both overlapping and divergent metaphorical mappings in male and female Islamic sermons. While both genders employ embodied experiences (movement, sensory perception, structure) as cognitive frames for complex moral and spiritual concepts, the female Islamic preachers tend to be more relational, growth-centered, and domestic in their metaphors, whereas the male preachers tend to use more abstract, personification, and behavioral control metaphors.

As demonstrated in Table 3, both male and female preachers utilize prominent and well-known source domains, including buildings, finance, human anatomy, and human activities. Subsequently, I present a comprehensive analysis of those source domains.

4.1. Structural metaphors

As mentioned earlier, a structural metaphor allows speakers to comprehend the target domain A through the source domain B (Kövecses, 2010, p. 37). As we can see in Table 3, the structural metaphors used by the preachers are related to the source domains of buildings, finance, plants, households, and animals.

4.1.1. Source domains related to buildings

The source domain of building is primarily employed in sermons delivered by the male preachers to provide advice on parenting. For example, Bilal Philips says parents must understand that a child's personality develops in accordance with their environment, especially in the early years, by saying: "Personality is built according to the child's ecologies..... personality is built from those early years". (Bilal Philips)

Bilal Philips also advises parents to keep children at home until they have reached a suitable developmental stage and have established "a good foundation." He uses parenting as a metaphor to encourage muslim parents to actively take part in their children's education and personality development. The preacher uses the source domain of building to illustrate that parenting duties are long-term, and they need hard work, patience, and a heart full of love.

On the other hand, the source domain building is employed extensively by the female preachers, pertaining to fostering robust marriages. For example, Yasmin Mogahed refers to the Quran of *Surah Ar-Rum* (Romans), and she mentions two important aspects, "love and mercy" as "the foundation" of marriage.

We have to know what ideal is, what does Allah *subhana wa ta'ala* say should this relationship be based on. And so, I want to make a couple of reflections about this *ayah* because it gives us that foundation of what this relationship should be based on (Yasmin Mogahed)

Similarly, Lisa Killinger advises that a spouse in their marriage should be "comforted and adored" and she states that comfort and adoration are "common ground from which marriage is built".

The desire to be loved, the desire to have companionship is certainly common ground the desire to be respected.....this is our common ground from which marriage is built (Lisa Killinger)

It is likely that both female preachers employ marriage as a theme and inspire the audience to actively establish a harmonious marriage that will benefit them.

4.1.2. Source domain of finance

As we can see in Table 3, the source domain of finance becomes the popular source domain metaphor in both genders. The source domain "investment" is popular (parenting is an investment, and marriage is an investment). The source domain "invest" is frequently used by

male preachers to encourage their audience to devote time, effort, resources, and energy to raising children. For example:

The Quran shows us that we should be so invested as fathers in our children... We should spend time with our children. You know studies show that children do better in school they do better in life when fathers are active participants in their lives (Suheib Webb)

Suheib Webb utilizes the conceptual metaphor parenting is an investment to advise parents to dedicate time to their children. Similarly, Mufti Menk urges the audience to "spend quality time with family" and emphasises that "limits on spending time with their family indicate a failure" in order to emphasise the importance of communication and spending time with spouses and family. Both male preachers advise parents through the conceptual metaphors of time as a valuable resource; they inspire parents on the importance of spending their time with children and family. It is important to note that two female preachers use the conceptual metaphor marriage is an investment, as we can see in the following samples: "This idea that investing in your marriage is being selfish needs to be removed, that people need to go back to investing in their relationship". (Yasmin Mogahed)

Yasmin Mogahed uses the metaphor 'marriage is an investment' to encourage spouses to actively work to save their marriage for future benefits. Similarly, Umm Jamaal ud-Din also states a similar message as we can see in the following utterance: "You need to keep investing in the marriage. You know it's not something you can just do in the early days and forget all about it". (Umm Jamaal ud-Din)

It is predictable that the source domain of finance is popular for delivering advice about parenting and marriage. This aligns with Kövércsés (2010), who asserts that individuals in human cultures have historically participated in diverse economic transactions.

4.1.3. Source domain plants

The conceptual metaphor "children are plants" motivates the audience to engage actively in the care, protection, and nurture of children. For example, Wisam Sharief uses repetitive conceptual metaphors of plants. "Mothers treat their children like plants, you try to watch them grow. Have you ever watched grass grow? It's very boring". (Wisam Sharief).

Wisam Sharief employs the conceptual metaphor that children are plants to advocate for mothers to nurture their children like plants, fostering their physical and mental development. He recommends that moms exercise patience with their children's unfavourable views, which pertains to the concept of "grass grows." Likewise, Shireen Ahmed uses the idea that children are plants to tell parents to give lessons to their children. "These are seeds that parents are planting, and that they will see, they will bear those fruits later on," Shireen Ahmed. She recommends that parents teach their children moral lessons that will be beneficial to them in the future at some point in their lives.

The conceptual metaphor root is an essential aspect employed to provide marital guidance. Umm Jamaal ud-Din employs the source domain of root to denote the fundamental

components of marriage. “That we will find the root cause of most of our marriage problems is that both spouses can't feel cared for, they don't care for each other, *Subhanallah*” (Umm Jamaal ud-Din). She states that the basis of marriage struggles is that spouses do not care for one another. The conceptual metaphor 'root is an essential aspect' is utilized to remind the audience that 'taking care of their wives' is critical to a successful, harmonious marriage.

4.1.4. Source domain of households and light

It is noted that female preachers use metaphors on the source domain of households more frequently than male preachers in the sermons data. The source domain of mirrors is the most frequent source domain of households. For example, Zainab Anshari uses the conceptual metaphor 'a mirror is a reflection of humans' behaviour' when she says, 'Marriage presents a unique opportunity to really mirror ourselves.' Similarly, in terms of parenting, Abdel Rahman Murphy advises parents by quoting the prominent Islamic scholar Imam Al-Ghazali by saying:

Imam Al-Ghazali, when he talks about communal change or family change or any kind of change. He always says, “go and look at the mirror”, go and look at yourself. You see your child being a certain way, ask yourself, “What I am doing and how can I change this in myself?”. (Abdel Rahman Murphy)

The preacher inspires parents to reflect and evaluate themselves when looking at their children's misbehaviour. Three male preachers employ the conceptual metaphor that good is light, knowledge is light, and guidance is light. For example, Suhaib Webb makes the claim that "the light in a family is provided by the father...brighter the father's light, the brighter the family". Abdurrahman Murphy says that “Luqman is described as a lighthouse that gives us guidance about parenting and the best way for parents to communicate with their offspring”. This finding is in line with the concept of light being used traditionally as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom. For example, hope, spiritual knowledge, faith and good are all associated with light (Charteris-Black, 2004).

4.1.5. Source domain of animals

The conceptual metaphor parents are shepherds is popular for giving advice about parenting in sermons delivered by the preachers. Bilal Philips, Waleed Basyouni, and Suzy Ismail relate the conceptual metaphor that parents are shepherds and children are sheep. Bilal Philips quotes the Prophet Muhammad, who said, “*Kullukum ra'in wa kullukum mas'ulun 'an ra'iyatih*”, then the preacher translates that Arabic quotation, “Each and every one of you is a shepherd responsible for his or her flock.” Then he reminds the audience to consider their children's education as the primary responsibility.

Bilal Philips, Waleed Basyouni, and Suzy Ismail conceptualise children as sheep in that they need protection, help and guidance. The conceptual metaphors parents are shepherds and children are sheep are used to encourage parents to play an active role in teaching, protecting and guiding their children. This finding is consistent with Charteris-Black (2004), who states

that throughout the Bible, the core concept of people are animals appears in various conceptual metaphors, such as Jesus is shepherd and Christians are sheep.

4.2. *Orientational metaphors (Source domain of human activities)*

As noted, an orientational metaphor is a metaphor that involves spatial orientation (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In the online sermons data, both genders use human activities as an orientational metaphor for advising the audience. In the domain of human movement, preachers use the metaphor of 'falling' or 'sliding' to describe abstract concepts such as errors, sins, or mistakes. For instance, Suhaib Webb uses this metaphor to illustrate the behaviour of young children by saying, "children will make mistakes, they're going to fall, they're going to slip".

Similarly, Umm Jamaal ud-Din uses the conceptual metaphor fall is loss of control, as we can see the data below:

We start to expect our spouse ... We just expect them to keep loving us the same and put up with us just the same, and this is probably one of the biggest mistakes that we all tend to make. We all easily fall into this mistake. (Umm Jamaal ud-Din)

The metaphor of "fall," followed by "mistakes" and "errors," is used by both preachers to engage in undesirable behavior, and people may not have full control over their actions. The conceptual metaphor "fall is loss of control" is also in line with the metaphor "control is up and loss of control is down" (Ritchie, 2013). The use of the conceptual metaphor 'fall is loss of control' reminds the audience that making mistakes and sinning is part of human nature and encourages them to repent.

The preachers use the source domain of human activities related to nature in their sermons. For example, Mokhatar Maghraoui uses the conceptual metaphor of swimming in the river to advise parents:

We cannot achieve this legacy without *shabar*, without enduring patience. Because it is easy to let the children do what everybody does, to let the children go with the flow of the river, and to let myself go with the flow of things. That's easy to do, it is difficult to go against the current. It is difficult to swim against the current, it is difficult to want to be special in this world. (Mokhatar Maghraoui)

Mokhatar Maghraoui characterizes parents who do not instill religious norms and values in their children as akin to swimmers who merely follow the flow of the current. Nonetheless, parents who impart religious values to their children may be perceived as going against the prevailing trend.

4.3. *Conduit metaphor (the source domain of heart)*

As noted previously, the conduit metaphor describes communication as the transmission of ideas and meanings through a conduit, like physical objects through a channel (Lakoff &

Johnson, 2003). In the sermons data, the source domain of the heart as a conduit metaphor is used by both genders. For example, Abdurahman Murphy uses the heart as a container of love that needs to be brought by parents when giving their children a piece of advice. Abdurahman Murphy encourages parents to approach their children with love by “bringing soft and positive words”. So, the words of advice from parents to youngsters will become softer, and their children will be able to listen and receive it more easily.

Umm Jamaal ud-Din regularly uses the concept of the heart as a central theme in her sermons, for example, she says, “You know doing even the smallest acts of kindness, doing even the smallest acts of *ihsan*, bringing happiness to the heart of those around you. This is from the things that bring you closer to Allah *subhana wa ta'ala*”.

As mentioned above, Islamic preachers use the conduit metaphor by employing the phrase, “the smallest acts of *ihsan* bringing happiness” to “the source domain of the heart”. She likely wants to advise their audience to do an act of *ihsan* because it will bring happiness to others. The preachers are likely to emphasize that parenting and marriage should be built on the heart and bring this heart of love into actions that make their families comfortable and happy.

4.4. *Ontological metaphor (personifications)*

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003) ontological metaphors represent the process of abstract concepts becoming more concrete, taking the form of substances, containers or people. Personification is an ontological metaphor in which inanimate objects are attributed to human motivations, characteristics, and activities. Findings from Islamic online sermons show that personification is used more frequently by male than by female preachers. The use of personifications such as Islam, the Quran, and the hadith as persons illustrates how the authoritative texts in Islam can teach and guide individuals on their journey to becoming better people. This metaphor facilitates understanding of theological concepts in sacred texts in human terms, enhances emotional engagement, and strengthens the persuasive impact of discourse. This finding, the popularity of the use of personification in the sermon context, aligns with previous research indicating that male leaders employ personifications more frequently than female leaders in their political speeches (Charteris-Black, 2005, p 200).

Both male and female Islamic preachers regularly use the source domain of Islam, which describes Islam as a person who can speak and perform physical activities. For example, Khalid Latif says, “Islam does not say to you as a mother or a father that you are fully entitled to do what you will with your child's life”. Similarly, Suhaib Webb says to parents that “Islam does not ask us to be perfect, but Islam asks us to be honest”. Female preachers, on the other hand, employ Islam as a person to deliver messages about marriage. For example, Lisa Killinger regularly mentions, “Islam encourages” Muslims remaining within the boundaries of marriage. Zainab Alawani employs this type of metaphor to convey a general counsel on family, stating, “Islam presents a comprehensive model of the family.” The preachers employ the concept of Islam as a person endowed with the power and authority to instruct individuals on actions they should undertake or avoid, seemingly motivating the audience to comply.

Men preachers in the sermon data have a preference to use the conceptual metaphor 'THE quran is a person', whereas women preachers prefer to use the metaphor 'hadith is a person'. For example, Waleed Basyouni states that 'many verses in the Quran speak about the importance of taking care of your family'. In a message regarding marriage, Umm Jamaal ud-Din states that "the Hadith teaches Muslims" that the victor in an argument is not the individual who utters the final word; rather, it is the person who can humble themselves and set aside their pride.

5. Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that, in the context of online Islamic sermons on family-related themes, female preachers employ metaphors more frequently than their male counterparts when offering advice. Both genders, however, utilize metaphors as persuasive discursive strategies to encourage audience engagement in child-rearing and family development, underscoring the rhetorical efficacy of metaphorical framing in religious communication.

A notable divergence emerges in the pragmatic orientation of metaphorical usage: male preachers tend to deploy metaphors aimed at shaping parental attitudes toward child-rearing, whereas female preachers more frequently employ metaphors designed to promote spousal collaboration in strengthening marital bonds. These findings suggest that metaphorical choices are not merely stylistic but are modulated by social identity, communicative objectives, and interactional norms prevalent among globally situated Islamic preachers.

Structurally, both male and female preachers consistently rely on metaphorical source domains associated with future-oriented benefits—notably building, finance, and plant growth—in conveying advice. These structural metaphors frame parenting and marital cultivation as processes requiring sustained investment of resources and effort, with long-term rewards contingent upon consistent dedication. This conceptual alignment reinforces an ethical framework in which familial well-being is constructed as a developmental, incremental achievement.

Additionally, ontological metaphors in the form of personifications are employed by preachers to inspire improved parental and spousal conduct. These are instantiated through the overarching conceptual metaphor of Islam, the quran, and the hadith as a person, which anthropomorphizes authoritative sacred texts, thereby rendering them as relatable agents capable of guiding, admonishing, or accompanying believers in their familial roles.

Finally, the strategic deployment of metaphors derived from concrete, experientially accessible source domains—such as buildings, plants, human bodies, households, and animals—serves to translate abstract concepts of parenting and marriage into tangible cognitive representations. This grounding in familiar experiential domains enhances audience comprehension and facilitates long-term message retention, thereby amplifying the didactic efficacy of online religious discourse.

Declaration on the use of AI

The authors acknowledge the use of the Grammarly AI to support language refinement, grammar checking, and drafting assistance. All content generated with AI was carefully reviewed, edited, and verified by the authors to ensure accuracy, originality, and compliance with academic and ethical standards. The authors take full responsibility for the final content of this article, including all interpretations, conclusions, and references.

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