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Cognitive Linguistics and Religious Language An Introduction

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Cognitive Linguistics and Religious Language an IntroductionGabriel Díaz

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Since the emergence of modern humans, religion has become one of the basic human frameworks to determine the position of humanity in the world (Rossano, 2006). There are many ways to investigate religious behavior and thought. One of them is using language as the key approach because it is the center of religious behavior in terms of interaction with supernatural agents, theological rationalization, normative discourse, or rituals (Downes, 2011). For example, the verse on light taken from the Qur'an (24:35), describes a Muslim's experience of divinity, which may be difficult to articulate. But with the right language, this can be an intermediary for humans to understand it. Language is the most detailed window that can be used to know how people think. However, sometimes individuals cannot explain the mental models and cognitive patterns of the language they use, so there is a sub-field in language called Cognitive Linguistics to describe it. This book is intended to serve as an introduction to the current research of cognitive linguistics in religious languages as well as to explain how cognitive linguistic approaches are being used in the study of modern religious languages.

There are nine chapters in this book, where each chapter is based on ideas from the previous chapters. However, each can be read on its own. All chapter follows a similar pattern of introducing essential words and studies on the subject before delving into how the subject and frameworks might be applied to specific texts and dialogue. Starting with chapter 1, introduction, besides the authors explaining the overview of the book, they also managed to clearly introduce the sometimes-confusing meaning of religion (explaining differences in religion and cultural rituals) as well as the important role of language in religion and what it has to do with cognitive linguistics. This makes it easier for readers to understand and makes them interested in reading this book.

The second chapter outlines discussion of cognitive models, embodied cognition, frames, and domains. Discussions regarding how the authors categorize the world around them by building idealized cognitive models with clear prototype effects are among them, to interact with entities more effectively and respond to events around them. The authors also elucidate categories in cognitive science, but the explanation is not directly accompanied by examples that are applied in religious linguistics. Even so, they explain in detail about the Elements of Idealized Cognitive Models, Religious Language and the Theory of Lexical Concepts, Cognitive Models and Meaning Construction.

Extending on these themes, chapter 3 focuses on conceptual metaphors. Several themes are discussed in this chapter (i.e., Defining and Identifying Conceptual Metaphors, Identifying Metaphors, The Function of Metaphors in Religious Language, and Examples of Metaphors in Religious Language). The authors carefully presented the steps for identifying metaphors with the Metaphor

Identification Procedure (MIP) which was developed in collaboration with leading metaphor experts (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Although this chapter exchanges views on metaphors, both from the stages of identifying metaphors and examples of metaphors in religious language, it is still not enough to lead the reader to identify a metaphor in religious language, especially Islam because there are still several other sciences such as *Balaghoh* (rhetoric) and *Manthiq* (logic) which are not explained in this book as a tool for reviewing metaphor in the Islamic religion.
Metonymy is introduced in Chapter 4 as a mechanism that differs from metaphor in that it utilizes a single domain rather than a two-domain mapping. Following that, a metonymy identification process is explored, as well as practical concerns linked to its use. After that, the use of metonymy in religious language is addressed, as well as a review of major studies on its use in Christian and Buddhist writings. The assumption that metonymy is at the root of many metaphorical mappings is then investigated. This chapter was successfully closed by the authors with an examination of a dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian in which both metaphor and metonymy are used.

Chapter 5 looks at agency and how different scholars have described the supernatural or divine's agency in regard to humanity. The significance of language agency is first examined in terms of social power and control. Following that, many metaphorical and literal portrayals of agency are studied, particularly in respect to how the divine's action in the physical world might be understood literally. Eventually, different levels of agency in regard to religious language are examined, with a focus on how the framing of human and supernatural activities reveals key parts of belief and doctrine.

Force dynamics is discussed in Chapter 6 as an investigation of how distinct kinds of language are frequently based on a relationship between two opposing force inclinations. It demonstrates how religious figurative language can be investigated in terms of competing forces and patterns of agency, such as the relationship between believers and the divine, nonbelievers and the divine, the divine and other supernatural beings, and finally competing forces perceived within individual minds. The divine's presence in everyday life is frequently depicted and regarded as a physical force by religious people (see Chapter 5). However, in religious discourse, agency is frequently more complicated than just X doing something to person Y. REFINEMENT, for example, is often used to describe situations in which the divine being acts on believers in a way that is originally perceived as difficult or unpleasant. This is due to resistance during the formative periods of spiritual development, which is thought to be addressed to some extent later on. Any serious research of this type of resistance to resolution sequences would have to go beyond agency and look into the situation's underlying force dynamics.

The idea that some expressions or claims rely on the integration of two or

more independent clusters of concepts is explored in Chapter 7. Beginning with the representation of two conceptual clusters as independent mental input spaces, which are then integrated into a single blended space, the structure and mechanisms underpinning such blends are discussed. It also goes into how "running" a blend creates emergent components that aren't present in the input areas. The authors can provide clear examples of how blends are used to transmit complicated religious ideas, such as doctrinal developments, and how elaborate multimodal blends are formed in ritual. The popularity of various types of conceptual mixing in cognitive linguistic studies of religious discourse is next investigated.

By first explaining the principles of complex systems and how the theory has been employed in applied linguistics in general and metaphor research in particular, Chapter 8 focuses on the application of Complex Systems Theory to religious language. The concept of emergence is discussed in terms of how different components in a system interact to produce stable states over timescales that vary. The discourse dynamics approach is then presented with relation to interaction around religious concerns, underlining the benefits of analyzing discourse as a dynamic system, based on principles from complex systems. Complex systems theory, which came to linguistic analysis via biology, has had a significant impact on both cognitive sciences and applied linguistics. Unfortunately, in this chapter the authors focus on a subsequent model of discourse analysis, the discourse-dynamics approach, which was built from the ground up around the discoveries from this theory.

In chapter 9, the authors carefully summarize the various themes of the book and ties them to a larger discussion of the benefit of using Cognitive Linguistics to study religious discourse. The chapter then summarizes significant themes while noting additional theoretical and methodological frameworks that can be used to investigate religious language within Cognitive Linguistics. Finally, with reference to known research gaps, some future routes for study are offered.

This book has looked at texts and discussions from a variety of religious traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, and others. The older animistic religions and modern religious groups such as Scientology, on the other hand, are conspicuously absent. The relative rarity of religious texts adhering to animism is one reason for the lack of involvement with them. There are some notable exceptions, such as Shinto in Japan, whose supporters have published several publications and have sparked a lively debate. Because of their major impact on modern society, new religious groupings and recent offshoots of established religions are equally deserving of attention.

Religious language, like any other area of human interaction, is constantly expanding and evolving, with sacred texts being read and reread in new situations. The way humans see and understand the world varies by culture and over time, allowing an almost infinite amount of work to be done. The researcher's perspective

also affects the questions that are asked of data and how they are perceived, so various eyes on the same data are likely to provide different results. This introductory book has presented a small sampling of the work that can be done, but it is hoped that it has piqued the interest of new scholars to continue testing and applying these ideas critically. As a coordinated effort to explain some of the most basic and fundamental existential issues regarding human purpose, religions are always fascinating. The cognitive linguistic approaches covered in this book are supposed to shed light on how humans speak and think as they achieve this goal.

References

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