journal of
**Linguistic and Rhetorical Studies**

Semnan University

# A Cognitive Analysis of the Role of Conceptual Mechanisms in Metaphorical Creativity of Sohrāb Sepehri's Poetry

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**Abstract:** Metaphorical creativity and cognitive poetics are key topics in cognitive linguistic theories, particularly in the frameworks proposed by Lakoff and Turner (1989). From a cognitive perspective, metaphorical creativity in poetry is the result of the poet's skillful use of conceptual mechanisms such as questioning, elaboration, combination and extension. The primary aim of this study is to investigate metaphorical creativity in Sohrāb Sepehri's poetry through a cognitive analysis of the application of these conceptual devices. To this end, a corpus of 200 samples from Sepehri's poems, drawn from his eight poetry collections, was compiled, categorized, and selected as the basis for analysis. The research method is qualitative and grounded in content analysis. In the first phase, selected poems were analyzed with a focus on the targeted conceptual mechanisms, and conceptual metaphors were identified. These metaphors were then examined and categorized in terms of structure and variety in metaphorical creativity. The findings indicate that Sepehri employs the aforementioned conceptual devices creatively and skillfully in the construction of metaphors. Based on the data analysis, combination showed the highest frequency in Sepehri's metaphorical creativity, followed by elaboration and extension with moderate frequency, while questioning appeared with the lowest frequency. The results also suggest that Sepehri used these devices both independently and, in some cases, in combination to generate novel and original metaphors.
**Keywords**: combination, cognitive poetics, elaboration, metaphorical creativity, Sohrāb Sepehri.

## 1. Introduction

This study explores metaphorical creativity in the poetry of Sohrāb Sepehri, a seminal figure in modern Persian literature, within the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics. Moving beyond traditional views that treat metaphor as a mere rhetorical ornament, the research adopts the cognitive linguistic perspective that considers metaphor a fundamental structure of human cognition shaping thought, perception, and cultural interpretation. The study investigates how Sepehri employs four key conceptual mechanisms combination, extension, elaboration, and questioning to generate innovative metaphors that combine universal cognitive patterns with culturally specific Persian motifs. Through this analysis, the research aims to reveal how Sepehri's metaphorical constructions transform abstract concepts such as existence, mortality, transcendence, and nature into vivid and sensorial expressions that deepen both meaning and aesthetic impact. The study addresses the following main questions: How can the aforementioned conceptual tools be used to analyze metaphorical creativity in Sepehri's poetry? And to what extent can these conceptual mechanisms reveal the semantic layers and dimensions in his poetry? This research also seeks to find suitable answers to questions such as: *How do the conceptual mechanisms of extension, elaboration, combination, and questioning lead to metaphorical creativity in Sepehri's poetry*? Secondly, *what concepts do metaphors in Sepehri's poetry convey based on these conceptual tools*? And thirdly, *how do conceptual metaphors shape the meaning and structure of his poetry?*

## 2. Literature Review

Extensive research has been conducted on applying conceptual metaphor theory to literary analysis, particularly poetry. Foundational non-Iranian studies by scholars such as Lakoff and Turner (1989), Kövecses (2009), and Fauconnier and Turner (2002) emphasize that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but a cognitive mechanism underpinning thought and poetic creativity. These researchers introduced conceptual tools such as blending/combination, extension, elaboration, and questioning, thus providing a framework for analyzing metaphorical creativity in poetry. In Iranian scholarship, these frameworks have been applied to both classical and contemporary Persian poets, including Hāfez, Nezāmi, Forūgh Farrokhzād, and Fereydūn Moshīri. Studies by Sharifimoghadam et al. (2021), Pourebrahim and Ghayathian (2013), and Aghabozorgian et al. (2022) demonstrate that using these cognitive tools effectively reveals the semantic depth and intellectual architecture of poets. Despite these contributions, a significant research gap exists regarding the systematic analysis of Sohrāb Sepehri's poetry through this cognitive framework. The

present study seeks to address this gap through a qualitative analysis of metaphors in *Hasht Ketāb* (*The Eight Books*) using the aforementioned conceptual mechanisms.

## 3. Research Methodology

Employing a qualitative, descriptive–analytical method based on content analysis, this study examines a purposefully selected corpus of 200 poetic extracts from Sohrāb Sepehri's *Hasht Ketāb* (*The Eight Books*), representing the full range of his poetic development. The analysis systematically identifies and classifies conceptual metaphors, evaluating their cognitive-poetic functions through the four principal mechanisms combination, extension, elaboration, and questioning outlined by Lakoff and Turner (1989). In accordance with Kövecses's (2009) contextualist approach, special attention is given to the influence of extra-linguistic and cultural factors on metaphorical expression. Beyond assessing the frequency of each mechanism, the study explores the semantic depth and innovative potential of Sepehri's metaphors, demonstrating through close reading how he transforms conventional mappings and creatively integrates distant conceptual domains to produce novel meanings and aesthetic effects.

## 4. Results and Finding

The analysis reveals several salient patterns in Sepehri's use of conceptual mechanisms. Foremost is the predominant use of combination or blending, which emerges as the most frequently employed cognitive strategy. This mechanism enables the fusion of conceptually distant domains such as natural phenomena and metaphysical reflection creating innovative and resonant imagery that transcends conventional semantic boundaries. A moderate yet functionally significant use of elaboration and extension was also observed. In this category, established conceptual metaphors (e.g., *LIFE AS A JOURNEY*, *DEATH AS SLEEP*) are systematically expanded through subtle and sometimes unexpected attributes, enriching interpretive frameworks and broadening the semantic range of conventional mappings. The mechanism of questioning, though least frequent, plays a distinctive role in shaping the philosophical and reflective tenor of Sepehri's poetry. It often appears in interrogative or meditative contexts, functioning not to assert but to invite epistemic engagement and open-ended interpretation. Furthermore, these mechanisms often interact synergistically rather than functioning independently. The concurrent use of multiple strategies such as blending combined with complexity creates multilayered, cognitively complex metaphors that enhance both the conceptual depth and affective resonance of Sepehri's poetic discourse.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study demonstrates that Sohrāb Sepehri's metaphorical creativity represents a systematic cognitive process rather than a mere stylistic embellishment. Through the deliberate application of combination, extension, elaboration, and questioning, Sepehri transforms abstract philosophical notions into sensorially rich and culturally grounded imagery. His fusion of natural elements with spiritual dimensions exemplifies the innovative reconfiguration of conventional metaphors to produce new semantic and experiential possibilities. His poetry thus synthesizes Persian literary traditions with contemporary cognitive insights, illustrating how universal cognitive mechanisms adapt to specific cultural contexts. The synergistic interplay of these mechanisms enables Sepehri to challenge established conceptualizations and engage readers in participatory meaning-making. These findings confirm the cognitive linguistic principle that metaphor is a fundamental process of thought. The study highlights the value of cognitive approaches in revealing how poetic language shapes philosophical reflection and cultural expression, situating Sepehri's work as a vital bridge between classical Persian aesthetics and modern cognitive poetics.