

B-3: Figurative Analogy

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Discussion

Read

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

Definition

Tamthīl is when an entire idea, sentence, or situation is used figuratively to represent another situation that is conceptually similar. Tamthīl is based on the analogy between two complete propositions, not individual words. The two situations are not compared by way of single attributes (as in [simile](#) or [metaphor](#)), but through a shared logic, structure, or moral insight. The communicator invites the listener to draw an inference from one domain and apply it to another, often indirectly.^[1] Sometimes, tamthīl is used ironically or fallaciously, creating a "mock analogy" to provoke, entertain, or critique as it relies on flawed or exaggerated reasoning. This is known as al-tamthīl al-mukhtala‘.

Example 1

إن كنت فوق الناس، وأنت منهم، فالـمِسْكُ بعضُ دم الغزال.

If you are above all men, though one of them – well, musk is part of the blood of the gazelle.

- Al-Mutanabbī

Explanation

Al-Mutanabbī compares a prince to musk and the people to gazelle’s blood. The analogy is not based on surface attributes but on a structural logic: something rare and valuable (musk / the prince) can originate from a common source (gazelle / people), yet be incomparable in worth.

Example 2

ألم تضعني في يمينك؟ فلا تضعني بعد ذلك في شمالك!

Had you not placed me into your right hand? So do not place me after that into your left!

- Ibn Mayyāda

Explanation

Ibn Mayyāda uses the metaphor of right and left hands to illustrate the shift from honour to disgrace. The analogy rests not on the body parts themselves, but on their symbolic and cultural values.

References

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W. P. Heinrichs, 'Rhetorical Figures', in [Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature](#), ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 661, [ISBN 0415068088](#). DOI: [10.4324/9780203020425](#)

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Permanent page link: <https://doi.org/10.64393/balagha.Q58>



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