



Original article

Metaphor and Identity in Season of Migration to the North: A Cognitive-Linguistic Reading

Ammar Kadhim Hadi 

The Open Educational College, Wasit Study Center, Al-Suwayrah Branch

*Correspondence author:
amhadi@uowasit.edu.iq

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the metaphorical construction of identity in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. By employing a qualitative research design, the study adopts an integrated framework that combines MIPVU, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) to treat metaphor as a conceptual organizer rather than a decorative linguistic device. The data consists of 43 identity-related metaphorical expressions extracted from the English translation. These expressions were cross-referenced with the original Arabic text. The findings reveal that identity is metaphorically constructed through six recurring conceptual domains: conflict, natural force, structure, fragmented self, space, and journey. Conflict and natural force are the most frequent, each accounting for 25.6% of the data. The study concludes that macro-mappings and micro-blends render identity in the novel both conceptually layered and culturally unstable. The present paper has demonstrated that its integrated framework offers a valuable methodology for cognitive-linguistic research.

Keywords: metaphor, identity, cognitive linguistics

الاستعارة والهوية في موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال: قراءة لسانية معرفية

م.م. عمار كاظم هادي

الكلية التربوية المفتوحة / مركز واسط الدراسي / فرع الصويرة

المُستخلص

تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية في البناء الاستعاري للهوية في رواية "موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال" للكاتب الطيب صالح. وبتطبيق منهجية البحث النوعي، تتبنى الدراسة إطاراً متكاملًا يدمج بين آلية "MIPVU" (لتحديد الاستعارة)، ونظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية (CMT)، ونظرية المزج المفاهيمي (CBT) للتعامل مع الاستعارة باعتبارها منظماً مفاهيمياً لا مجرد أداة لغوية بلاغية (تزيينية). تتكون البيانات من 43 تعبيراً استعارياً متعلقاً بالهوية تم استخراجها من الترجمة الإنجليزية، وجرى مقارنتها بالنص العربي الأصلي. وتكشف النتائج أن الهوية تُبنى استعارياً من خلال ستة مجالات مفاهيمية متكررة، وهي: الصراع، والقوة الطبيعية، والبنية، والذات المجزأة، والفضاء، والرحلة. ويعد "الصراع" و"القوة الطبيعية" الأكثر تكراراً، حيث يمثل كل منهما 25.6% من البيانات. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الإسقاطات الكلية (macro-mappings) والمزج الجزئي (micro-blends) تجعل الهوية في الرواية متعددة الطبقات مفاهيمياً وغير مستقرة ثقافياً. وقد أثبتت الورقة الحالية أن إطارها المتكامل يقدم منهجية قيمة للبحث اللغوي الإدراكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعارة، الهوية، اللسانيات المعرفية

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics, and especially metaphor studies, has shown an increased interest and shift. This is due to the effect of metaphor and how it shapes and organizes human thought. Metaphor is no longer only considered as a figure of speech but is a means of conceptualization (Santa Ana, 2002; Ortony, 1993; Lakoff, 1993). Lakoff and Johnson in their prominent work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) initiated this shift. They explained, in their work, that figurative language can also serve as a window into human cognition not just as a decorative device. Metaphor is a very special case of figurative language. It does not simply decorate pre-existing meanings, but it helps explain abstract human experiences through concepts we can understand (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Identity and metaphor are very suited to this sort of analysis since identity is abstract, relational, and unstable and cannot be reduced to a fixed psychological asset. It is, continuously, produced and reproduced through discourse then negotiated via social positioning, and finally maintained by symbolic representation. According to Hall (1996) identity is an ongoing process. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) view identity through the lens of how the self puts itself against the "other." De Fina (2019) and Taylor (2015) asserted that identity is not only reflected in language but is constructed by real-world linguistic practices.

Metaphor plays an important role in literary discourse because literary texts often construct and try to explain abstract concepts through concrete images, narrative patterns, and symbolic relations (Semino & Steen, 2008). Novels do not define identity using theoretical terms. Instead, they stage it through voice, memory, imagery, bodily sensations, spatial relationships, and narrative patterns. Textual, cognitive and ideological forms are seen to construct identity in literary works. When dealing with postcolonial fiction, questions about belonging, displacement, colonial memory, and cultural ambivalence are raised. In such contexts, metaphor often becomes the primary vehicle

through which a fractured or unsettled subjectivity is made visible to the reader (Ait Idir, 2019; Siddiq, 1978).

Tayeb Salih's masterpiece, *Season of Migration to the North*, could be considered as the perfect candidate for such an approach. The novel has long commanded a central place in Arabic and postcolonial literary studies. This is because of the power with which it dramatizes the collision between Sudan and Britain, village and city, self and other. The English edition that is used in this study frames the narrative around a deep preoccupation with colonial memory, cultural displacement, and the painful formation of postcolonial subjectivity (Salih, 2009). Critical scholarship has frequently examined the novel through classic postcolonial lenses. These studies focused on hybridity, narrative reversal, ambivalence, and the identity crisis (Ait Idir, 2019; Makdisi, 1992; Siddiq, 1978).

While this existing body of research has been invaluable in revealing the novel's political, historical, and psychological structure, traditional readings tend to focus on what identity means thematically or ideologically. Makdisi (1992), for example, saw the text as a counter-narrative to imperial discourse; Siddiq (1978) tracks the psychological bond between Mustafa Sa'eed and the narrator; and Ait Idir (2019) focuses on hybridity, mimicry, and the fragile boundary between self and other. Each study confirms that identity is a core concept in the text. Yet, less attention has been paid to the underlying cognitive mechanics that structure and organize identity in the human mind through metaphorical patterns or networks.

Recent postcolonial research underscores the fact that identity remains a dominant preoccupation in contemporary criticism, especially when regarding displacement and self/other dynamics. Hunaydi and Abd Al-Sattar (2026), for instance, show how contemporary Palestinian fiction captures identity through the tension between rootedness and hybridity. More specifically, reacting to colonial narratives that try to define the colonized subject from the outside. In a parallel postcolonial framework, Al-Hilfi (2023) reads Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a narrative of otherness, where identity is reshaped and restructured by cultural suspicion, Islamophobia, and the binary between East and West. These studies helped situate the present research within current critical conversations, yet they also revealed a gap. The latter is represented by the ongoing treatment of identity as an ideological or historical theme, rather than a metaphorically mapped conceptual domain.

The distinction between these two views is very important because identity in *Season of Migration to the North* is not treated as a settled matter. Instead, it flashes across the text through images of cold, roots, thirst, disease, war, deserts, hunting, bridges, phantoms, wounds, and drowning. These are not passing flourishes: they form a conceptual frame through which identity is actively thought out. For instance, the narrator's returning home is structured using metaphors of melting ice, lifting fog, roots, seeds, and river currents. Mustafa Sa'eed's identity, on the contrary, is defined by thirst, infections, predation, theatrical warfare, and fabricated selfhood. Patterns of this sort suggest that Salih's treatment of identity is cognitive and a thematic concept. Also, no previous study has systematically examined the metaphorical construction of identity through an integration of MIPVU, CMT, and CBT

The present study tries to fill this gap by tracing the metaphorical identity construction. To gain and achieve this aim, the study asks the following question: What are the cognitive linguistic bases of the metaphorical construction of identity in Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North*? The model that is employed in the paper is an integrated three-component cognitive-linguistic framework. MIPVU provides a rigorous, transparent methodology for identifying metaphor-related language in context (Steen et al., 2010). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) shows and explains the systematic mappings through which identity is structured (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Finally, Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) accounts for the complex instances where many domains melt together to create a new, emergent meanings (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, 2003).

By merging these tools and theories, the analysis moves from structural identification to conceptual categorization, and finally to linguistic and literary interpretation.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Identity as Discursive and Cognitive Construction

Stuart Hall (1996) asserted that identity is not a hidden core waiting to be discovered:- an ongoing process of positioning and representation which are constructed within, rather than outside, historical landscapes.

Language makes it possible for us to act out different identities. Via language, we introduce ourselves as presidents, university professors, lawyers, middle class workers, and more (Gee, 2025). Bucholtz and Hall (2005), from a sociocultural linguistics view, defined identity as the social positioning of self and other within live interaction. According to them, a person does not have a static identity and then reveal it. They explained that identity is negotiated through discourse and social recognition. Language, then, is not a neutral vehicle that is used to show identity.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, neither the narrator nor Mustafa Sa'eed possesses a transparent or settled self. Both are haunted and shaped by memory, repetition, symbolic doubling, and metaphorical displacement.

Because identity is an abstract concept, cognitive linguistics can explain how it is structured through language. Metaphor is considered the main vehicle to do that since it allows ideas like belonging and fragmentation to be understood through the use of concrete domains like space, physical force or motion (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For this reason, identity, in this research article, is treated as a discursive phenomenon and a cognitive structure.

2.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that metaphor is an everyday human way of thinking or conceptualizing abstract concepts and not just a form of a literary ornament (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It allows understanding and comprehending abstract target domains through familiar concrete source domains (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Alzamili and Algezzy (2022) stated that "Metaphor appears in language, thought, and action. CMT is interested in analyzing meaning whether it is written text or visual images" (p. 408).

Kövecses (2020, 2023) asserted that CMT is essential for a deep understanding because metaphors are shaped by culture, history, and specific narrative contexts, in addition to the universal bodily experiences.

CMT makes it possible to look beyond the decorative expressions and see the larger cognitive mapping between these expressions. To illustrate, when the narrator refuses the idea of being "a stone thrown into the water" and claims to be a "seed sown in a field," he is not just portraying a poetic picture. He is triggering or initiating a complex set of conceptual correspondences between selfhood, roots, growth, and historical continuity. On the other hand, when Mustafa Sa'eed declared, "I am the desert of thirst. I am no Othello. I am a lie" (Salih, 2009, p. 19), he was condensing multiple mappings simultaneously: self as landscape, desire as physical lack, identity as fiction, and colonial stereotype as an imposed theatrical script.

2.2.1 Types of Metaphor

Many scholars, such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Kövecses (2010), have classified metaphors according to their conventionality, nature, generality or according to their cognitive function. Metaphors, as cognitively function devices, can be:

- **Ontological Metaphors:** Those "allow us to view something abstract such as events, activities, emotions, etc., as something concrete, entities and substances" (Chen, 2018, p. 330). Consider, as an example, the expression of (Mustafa Sa'eed is a lie) which represents the conceptual metaphor IDENTITY IS FABRICATION.
- **Oriental Metaphors:** These metaphors "refer to metaphors which involve spatial orientation" (Chen, 2018, p. 329). Examine the expression (river pulling me down) which points to the CM DEATH IS DOWNWARD FORCE.
- **Structural Metaphors:** The situation where "the abstract intangible target domain is understood by means of the structure of the concrete tangible source domain. This kind of metaphor enables people to comprehend the target domain via the elaborate structure of the source domain" (Jabat et al., 2017, p. 92). For example, the linguistic expression of (bedroom as a theatre of war) is a representation of INTIMACY IS WAR.

2.3 Conceptual Blending Theory

In the past two decades, a new development in the cognitive sciences took place. The new development is the formation of Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). CBT is not confined to one science; however, it is mainly concern in cognitive linguistics. On the one hand, CMT explains direct, one-to-one mappings; however, it is still necessary to understand how new meanings emerging from the combination of multiple mental spaces. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) showed that blending involves taking selective projections from different input spaces and mixing them within a "blended space." The result of this blend is a completely new, emergent concept or idea that cannot be assigned to any of the input spaces alone. According to them, this operation is a basic and fundamental mental operation for human creativity, conceptual compression, and cognitive innovation (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003; Turner, 2014).

The employment of CBT along with CMT is vital since Salih's novel is dense in metaphors that cannot be explained by only single mapping for each metaphor alone; consider Mustafa's claim in the expression: "My bedroom became a theatre of war" (Salih, 2009, p. 19). This is a clear example of a metaphorical expression that does more than only mapping war onto intimacy. It combines sexual intimacy, theatrical performance, colonial invasion, masculine aggression, and historical revenge.

The ability of CBT to deal with the hybrid, fragmented identities that define postcolonial fiction is relied on in the analysis. In the novel, the colonized victim is Mustafa Sa'eed and, at the same time, he is the symbolic orientalist invader. The narrator is also a traditional villager and a western-educated person. In addition, the Nile is both a symbol of steady continuity and a violent, murderous current. CBT can explain how those paradoxes and domains mix together to form and create new concepts.

2.4 MIPVU and Metaphor Identification

Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) was pioneered by Steen et al. (2010). MIPVU offers a rigorous, step-by-step method for finding metaphor-related language in real contexts.

The main steps in MIPVU are finding and isolating distinct lexical units. The next step is to establish their contextual meaning and compare that meaning to its most basic, literal meaning. The final step is determining whether the contextual meaning can be understood through a clear contrast with that basic meaning (Steen et al., 2010).

Metaphors can easily be misidentified. Thus, using MIPVU as the basic filter is essential. In such a text as *Season of Migration to the North* that is full of metaphorical language, almost every image can feel evocative. However, it must be understood that not every image is actually constructing identity or related to it. MIPVU acts as a methodical sieve, ensuring that the research dataset includes only metaphorical expressions that directly construct, destabilize, or negotiate selfhood. This step is considered as the empirical baseline for our CMT and CBT analyses.

3. Methodology

This research paper adopts a qualitative research design supported by descriptive quantitative counts. The main goal is to interpret how identity is structured via the use of metaphor in *Season of Migration to the North*. Numbers and percentages are only used for a descriptive purpose and not for a quantitative analysis. The frequencies of metaphorical expressions and conceptual domains are mapped to establish a clear structural baseline that organizes the qualitative analysis. The corpus is based on Denys Johnson-Davies's English translation of the novel, which is introduced by Wail S. Hassan. In addition to the English version, the original Arabic text (Mawsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal) was consulted as a secondary semantic control (Salih, 2004). The main analyses and discussions are conducted relying on the English version whereas figurative shifts and lexical nuances are checked against the original Arabic version to ensure accuracy. This step is vital for the research since existing translation studies on Salih's masterpiece demonstrate that culture-bound terms and culturally specific idioms frequently undergo strategic shifts, semantic losses, or creative gains when translated into English (Alhaj, 2024; Dafaallah, Ali, & Hilal, 2023).

By close detailed reading of the novel and employment of MIPVU, a dataset of 43 identity-related metaphorical expressions was compiled. Two criteria were followed to decide whether an expression is identity related or not:

1. Its contextual meaning must rely on a clear comparison with a more basic, literal meaning.
2. The metaphor has to directly participate in constructing, destabilizing, or negotiating selfhood and others.

After identifying these metaphors, the 43 expressions were classified into their dominant source domains using CMT. Most importantly, these metaphorical expressions yielded six primary categories: conflict, natural force, structure, fragmented self, space, and journey/process. Frequency counts and percentages were then calculated for each domain to map their distribution across the narrative landscape. The final step was analyzing metaphors that resist one-to-one through the lens of CBT. This final step showed the emergent meanings generated when multiple mental spaces collide. This double approach allowed the study to operate at two levels: a macro and a micro level. The first level is to determine, through the lens of CMT, the conceptual architecture of the metaphors. Using CBT, at the second level, facilitates finding out the new concepts that emerged from the blend of some of these metaphors.

The validity of the study is supported by the use of MIPVU, which is a well-known systematic procedure for identifying metaphor-related words in any text. Metaphorical expressions are not selected impressionistically. CMT contributes to validity at the classification stage. After the metaphor identification step, the identified metaphors are grouped according to recurring relations between source and target domains. CBT strengthens the interpretive validity of the analysis where identity is constructed through the interaction of more than one conceptual domain.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis has revealed six main conceptual domains for identity metaphors in *Season of Migration to the North*. Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 provide a descriptive overview of the dataset before the qualitative analysis. Some of these domains are more dominant than others. These domains are discussed in detail in the next few sub-sections.

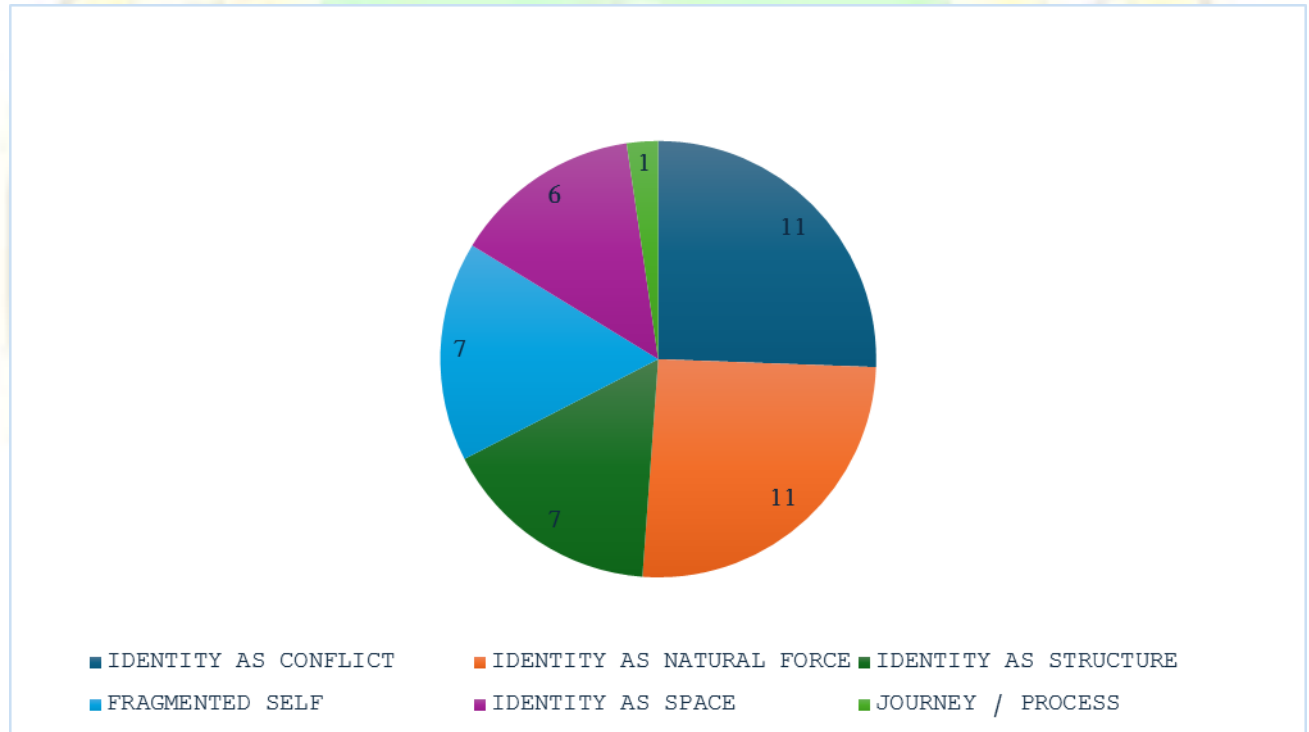
The 43 expressions (see the appendix for a detailed list of the linguistic expressions), by their dominant conceptual mappings, revealed an uneven distribution, as detailed in Table 1. Conflict and natural force dominated the dataset. The journey/process metaphor appeared only once. (See Table 1 for details)

Table 1

Category	Frequency	Percentage
IDENTITY AS CONFLICT	11	25.6%
IDENTITY AS NATURAL FORCE	11	25.6%
IDENTITY AS STRUCTURE	7	16.3%
FRAGMENTED SELF	7	16.3%
IDENTITY AS SPACE	6	14.0%
JOURNEY / PROCESS	1	2.3%
TOTAL	43	100%

While Table 1 provides the exact numbers of these categories, Figure 1 shows this relative frequency visually.

Figure 1



Frequency distribution of conceptual metaphors related to identity.

4.1 Identity as Conflict

One of the dominant conceptual domains in the collected data is conflict. Its percentage appeared to be of 25.6% of the identified metaphors. Expressions such as “My bedroom became a theatre of war” (Salih, 2009, p. 19), hunting and prey imagery, and justice as combat, revealed a recurring pattern in which identity is shaped through opposition, struggle, domination, and resistance.

Through the use of this metaphor, the self is not presented as a stable inner substance. It is formed in confrontation with others and in confrontation with itself.

If this metaphor is looked at through the lens of CMT, the mapping is clear. The relation between self and other is always organized as opposition. For example, social relation is pictured as struggle; desire becomes conquest; and ethical positioning is framed as combat. The use of this pattern is important. This is because identity in Mustafa Sa'eed's narrative is performed through aggression and counter-aggression. Women are shown as prey using hunting metaphors. These metaphors shape identity in an unequal relationship of chase and capture.

Let us turn now to shed the light of CBT on some metaphors that require more than just two domains' mappings. The expression of bedroom becomes a theatre of war, for example brings together three domains into a new blend: erotic intimacy, military violence, and theatrical performance. The result of this blend is that desire changes to be a strategy, the body becomes a battlefield, and identity becomes a role performed before a historical audience. Therefore, Mustafa's identity is produced as a violent performance shaped by the imperial logic he attempts to reverse.

4.2 Identity as Natural Force

Natural force counted for 25.6%, which is equal to conflict, of the identified metaphors in the data. Cold, warmth, thirst, desert, disease, infection, seed, river, and downward pull are all examples of this domain. This metaphor portrays identity as embodied, environmental, involuntary, and beyond rational control.

This can be seen very clearly in the opening pages. When the narrator returns to the village, he feels "as though a piece of ice were melting inside of me,". He connects this sensation to "that life warmth of the tribe" (Salih, 2009, p. 1). Identity here is felt physically and not argued, declared, or consciously chosen. Coldness denotes detachment. Warmth indicates community reintegration. As a result, belonging is translated into physiological sensation.

Stabilizing identity via the use of rootedness and growth is very clear. Looking at the palm tree, the narrator feels that he is "a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose" (Salih, 2009, p. 1). Then, he insists, "No, I am not a stone thrown into the water but seed sown in a field" (Salih, 2009, p. 3). A revealing contrast between stone and seed can be noticed here. The seed is positioned within a field of growth, whereas the stone is dislocated, lifeless, and devoid of an organic destiny.

It must be pointed out that Mustafa's natural-force metaphors move in a much darker direction. His declaration, "I am the desert of thirst" (Salih, 2009, p. 19), turns selfhood into dryness, lack, and unsatisfied desire. In other places, identity is framed as pathological transmission through the vocabulary of germs, deadly disease, infection, and wanderlust. Natural force does not create rootedness or restore belonging in these situations. It turns into internal disruption, corrosion, and compulsion. The self becomes a desert, desire turns into thirst, and identity turns into something contagious that is passed down through generations and bodies. The self is no longer grounded by nature, which reveals the forces that disturb it.

From a blending point of view, the disease metaphors are more complex than a simple DESIRE IS DISEASE mapping. The phrase "the germ of a fatal disease" (Salih, 2009, p. 20) combines self-

destruction, colonial contamination, bodily invasion, and desire. Identity emerges as something both antagonistic to and alive within the individual in the ensuing combination. This is essential to the way Mustafa is portrayed. The colonial past not only shatters his identity, but it also serves as a conduit for its destructive and intimate reproduction.

One of the most important metaphors is the river metaphor. The last river scene shifts the domain toward an existential choice while returning to natural force. The stream is "pulling me downwards," while the narrator is "half-way between north and south" (Salih, 2009, p. 97). For this reason, the river is more than just a location. It turns into a force field where choice, direction, identity, and death meet together.

4.3 Identity as Structure and Fragmentation

Structure and fragmentation together account for 32.6% of the 43 collected data. This shows that the novel imagines identity through two opposing situations. However, they are closely connected movements: They reveal a desire for coherence and the threat of collapse. The employment of structure metaphors presents identity as rooted, built, stored, or contained. Fragmentation metaphors, on the other hand, disturb stability by picturing identity as a lie, phantom, ashes, dream, nightmare, or divided self.

Mustafa's identity is repeatedly marked as constructed, theatrical, and false. His declaration that he is not Othello but "a lie" (Salih, 2009, p. 19) is one of the novel's most decisive statements about identity. The rejection of Othello refuses a colonial literary stereotype, yet the replacement of that stereotype with "a lie" does not recover an authentic self.

The narrator's crisis is also shaped by Fragmentation. When he stands "face-to-face with myself" (Salih, 2009, p. 78), the self is divided into observer and object. Identity becomes reflexive, estranged, and spatially split. This is not just a psychological reflection. It is a metaphorical scene in which the self is shown as another. In this sense, the fragmented-self domain relates the novel to discourse and identity theories that reject the unified subject and highlight the volatility of self-positioning (De Fina, 2019; Taylor, 2015).

Structure and fragmentation relationship can also be explained in the light of CBT. Because Mustafa's ghostly presence haunts the narrator's entrenched identity, it is never really secure. In turn, colonial schooling, literary tropes, sexual conquest, and historical resentment all contributed to Mustafa's fractured identity, which is not a straightforward pathology. As a result, rooted identity and fractured identity are not simply pitted against one another in the narrative. It unites them in a more unsettling concept in which systems that have the potential to collapse are used to establish identity.

4.4 Identity as Space

The collected 43 metaphors show that spatial metaphors are of 14.0%. Expressions such as bridge between north and south, and face-to-face positioning conceptualize identity through location, relation, boundary, and mediation. These metaphors do more than place characters within geographical settings. Identity is organized, through these metaphors, as a relation among cultural, historical, and symbolic coordinates.

As an example, the phrase “bridge between north and south” is very revealing at two levels (Salih, 2009, p. 41). On the first level, it suggests mediation between Sudan and Britain, Africa and Europe, colonised and coloniser. However, because the bridge is linked to a marriage that the story portrays as emotionally and morally tainted, it is also brittle. As a result, the metaphor does not, in any straightforward way glorify hybridity. It portrays mediation as something that is frequently harmed but also wanted and imagined.

Because the novel does not preserve clear divisions between self and other, Ait Idir’s (2019) discussion of hybridity and otherness is useful here. The narrator and Mustafa take on equal intermediate roles. The colonial other’s gaze shapes Mustafa’s identity, and Mustafa’s story unsettles the narrator’s sense of self. This instability is conceptualized through spatial metaphors. Being in the middle is only one aspect of being between the north and the south; the other aspect is living in a tense area where conflicting histories collide.

The spatial logic fills the final river scene. The narrator is physically located between north and south, and is unable to continue forward or return fully (Salih, 2009, p. 97). At this moment, spatial metaphor becomes existential. North and south are not only geographical directions; they become symbolic poles of identity. The narrator’s survival depends on refusing absorption into either pole. Thus, his cry for help is a claim to a self that cannot be reduced to the binary geometry of colonial space.

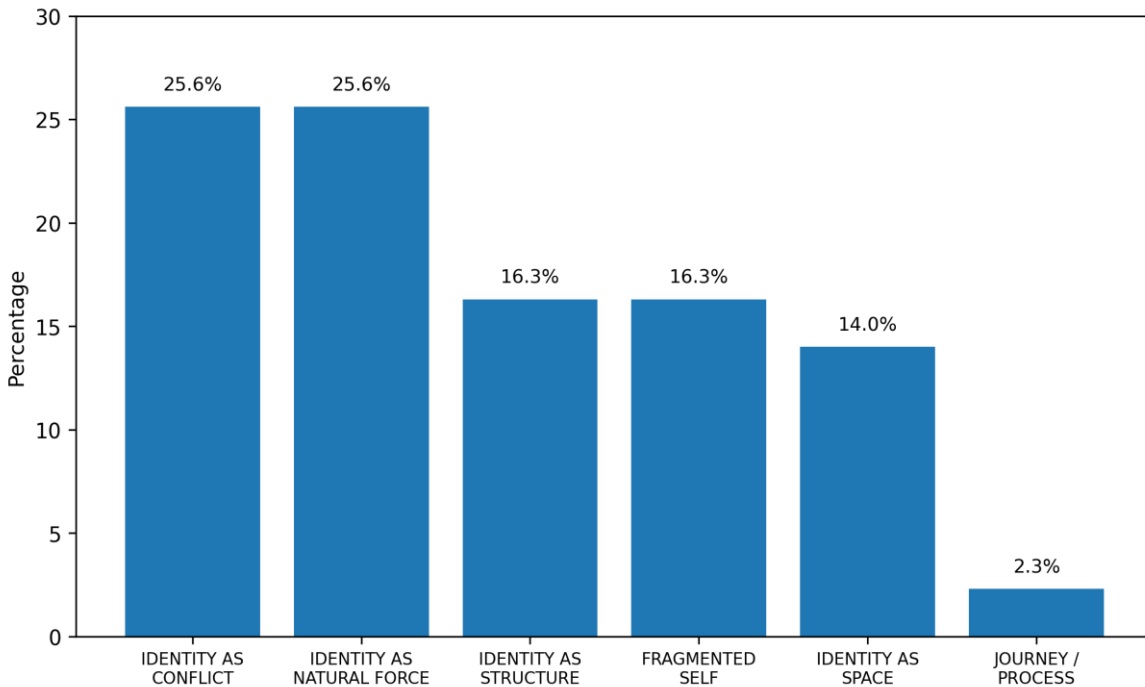
4.5 Identity as Journey and Process

The last, and least counted, domain that appeared in the data is journey/process accounting for only 2.3%. This low frequency is, by no means, meaningless. The novel does not primarily imagine identity as smooth development, linear progress, or uncomplicated movement. Migration, return, river flow, and drowning all involve movement, yet it is virtually always accompanied by conflict, force, and spatial suspension.

The most important journey metaphor is the river metaphor. It carries some of the novel’s deepest temporal and existential meanings. The river shows continuity, but it also suggests danger. Also, the use of this metaphor implies movement and a loss of control. The journey becomes a crisis in the last scene due to the narrator’s position in the water. He is not moving forward or returning. As a result, identity formation is portrayed as a struggle to survive against competing currents rather than a consistent path to completion.

A clear visible relationship between CMT and CBT can be seen here. On the one hand, CMT identifies LIFE/IDENTITY IS JOURNEY as the general mapping. CBT, on the other hand, shows how the scene of the river blends the conceptual spaces of journey, natural force, spatial in-betweenness, death, and decision. The resulting identity is not resolved, but reoriented. A final destination is not arrived at by the narrator and he chooses to continue.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of the conceptual categories and clarifies their relative weight and prominence before the broader interpretive synthesis.

Figure 2

Percentage distribution of conceptual metaphors representing identity construction.

4.6 Types of Metaphor in the Novel

As it was discussed in section 2.2.1, metaphors could be ontological, orientational or structural.

A distinction between the types of metaphor in the novel must be noted. This distinction clarifies how the identified metaphor categories operate throughout the novel.

First, ontological metaphors objectify identity as a thing, substance, mask, lie, wound, or fragmented entity; this is visible in expressions that ask about the reality or stability of one's self. Examples from the novel are: "he [Mustafa] is a lie" (Salih, 2009, p. 19), "a piece of ice" (Salih, 2009, p. 1), "a heap of ashes" (Salih, 2009, p. 19), "the germ of a deadly disease" (Salih, 2009, p. 19), and "a hard, cold feeling" (Salih, 2009, p. 16).

Secondly, orientational metaphors organize identity through spatial relations such as north/south and downward movement; these metaphors are central, and vital, to the narrator's experience of displacement and belonging. The following examples illustrate: "not below me" (Salih, 2009, p. 96), "[river] pulling me down" (Salih, 2009, p. 97), "half-way between north and south" (Salih, 2009, p. 97).

Thirdly, structural metaphors use larger and broader source domains such as conflict, natural force, journey, and physical structure to organize identity as a struggle, movement, or rootedness. Examine these examples: "theatre of war" (Salih, 2009, p. 19), "seed sown in a field" (Salih, 2009, p. 3), and "the city was transformed into an extraordinary woman" (Salih, 2009, p. 20).

4.7 Toward a Multidimensional Model of Identity

The preceding analysis proves that the distribution of these metaphorical domains proves that identity in *Season of Migration to the North* cannot be reduced to a single, monolithic metaphor.

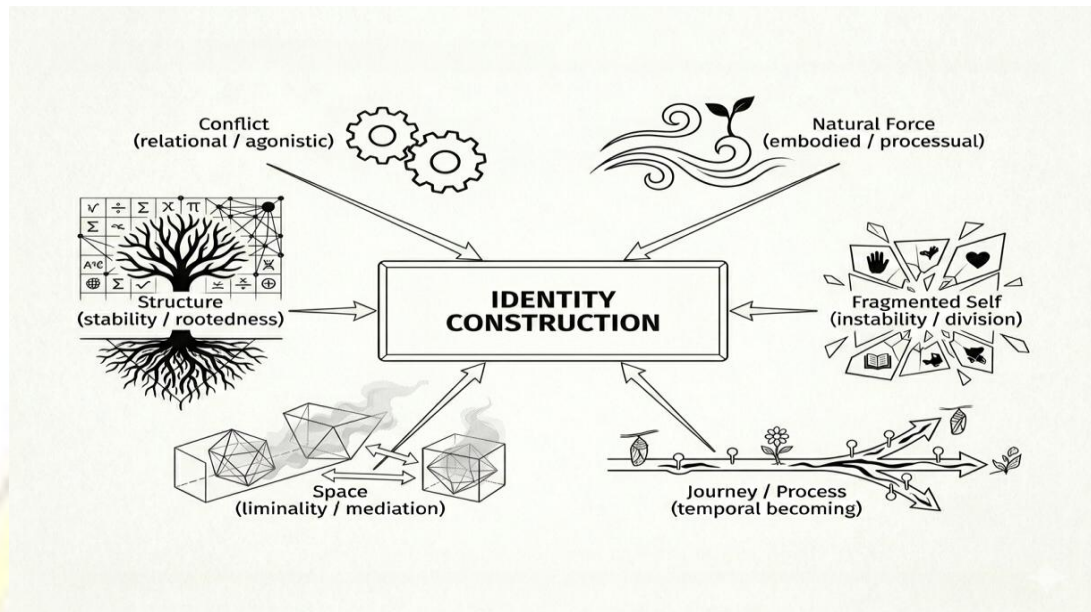
Instead, selfhood is sculpted by multiple, overlapping conceptual frames that interact and complicate one another. The relational, defensive, and agonistic shape of identity is structured by conflict. Natural force infuses it with a raw, embodied, and often involuntary pressure. A high-stakes psychological friction between internal coherence and structural collapse is generated through the use of structure and fragmentation metaphors. Space maps out this volatile selfhood across a demanding terrain of boundaries, borders, and liminal mediation, while journey/process injects a temporal dimension—though as a fragile, endangered survival act rather than a steady march toward enlightenment.

Tayeb Salih's masterpiece has sparked such an incredibly diverse body of linguistic studies and literary criticism due to this interesting multidimensional pattern. Postcolonial, psychoanalytic, sociolinguistic, and cultural frameworks do not only impose alien measures or pluck random motifs from the text. They are responding to a text that already has a complex metaphorical structure. Mustafa Sa'eed is not just a postcolonial subject, a sexual predator, a historical victim, a brilliant performer, or a fractured double but his identity is built and shown, cognitively, through conceptual blends that force these contradictions to overlap at the same time. The same appears to be the case with the narrator. He escapes any singular caricature. For him contradiction is his everyday situation. He is simultaneously rooted but also estranged, doubled and isolated, spatially suspended but violently pulled toward total psychological dissolution.

Through CMT and CBT, the analysis demonstrates that metaphor operates at two levels. At the macro level, recurrent source domains provide the broad cognitive tracks through which selfhood is visualized, organizing identity into the six core tracks identified in this study. At the micro-textual level, individual metaphorical expressions frequently pull multiple source domains into a shared space, generating rich, emergent linguistic and literary insights through conceptual blending. Identity in the novel is a cognitive formation that is structured through an interconnected metaphorical network not a recurring postcolonial theme.

Figure 3 maps these findings out as a cohesive, multidimensional matrix, demonstrating how these relational, embodied, structural, fragmented, spatial, and temporal dimensions dynamically interact to forge the postcolonial self.

Figure 3



A multidimensional model of identity construction in Season of Migration to the North. (By the author)

5. Answer to the research question:

The analysis shows that the cognitive linguistic bases for the metaphorical construction of identity in the novel are the interaction and blending of conceptual domains. The analysis demonstrates that identity is cognitively structured through six recurring, although unevenly distributed, conceptual domains. These domains are: conflict, natural force, structure, fragmented self, space, and journey/process. The mentioned six domains function as the primary source domains through which the abstract concept of identity is conceptualized.

6. Conclusions

Through an integrated cognitive-linguistic lens—combining and integrating MIPVU, CMT, and CBT to explore Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, this study maps out how identity operates as a core structural element of the text. The findings demonstrate that identity in the novel is never treated as a passive theme simply decorated with poetic language. To the contrary, the findings show that selfhood functions as a highly complex conceptual domain actively organized through systematic metaphorical paths and layered conceptual blends. The six identified source domains provide a structured blueprint of how the novel makes the volatile nature of postcolonial identity intelligible to the reader. Conflict and natural force (which account for more than half of the whole dataset) dominated these domains. This structural reality demonstrates that identity in Salih's postcolonial setting cannot be understood using concepts of peace, stability, or linear advancement. It is an identity forged under great, agonising pressure: the crushing weight of colonial history, sexual desire, ancestral memory, communal expectations, and explosive conflict between self and other. Conflict metaphors depict an identity that is relational, protective, and

intrinsically aggressive, whereas natural force metaphors portray it as visceral, infected, driven, and extremely vulnerable.

The integration of MIPVU, CMT, and CBT proves to be valuable as a cognitive-linguistic analytical and a cohesive interpretive framework. MIPVU injects the analysis with strict empirical discipline; CMT exposes the recurrent conceptual mappings; and CBT reveals emergent complexities of multiple conceptual domains interact where multiple domains blend together to create new meanings. The approach that is employed in the current study contributes to cognitive-linguistic research by demonstrating how metaphor actively organizes human selfhood at several levels through language. Future research could benefit from applying this cognitive-linguistic methodology to broader fields of different discourse types and textual genres.

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Appendix

Identity Metaphor Dataset

Note. The English entries in this appendix are analytical labels or shortened representative wordings. Direct quotations used in the body of the paper are cited there with page numbers from the English edition.

No.	Metaphor label / representative wording	Arabic wording	Character	Micro metaphor	Macro category
1	a piece of ice melting inside me	قطعة من الجليد تذوب في داخلي	Narrator	ALIENATION IS COLD	STRUCTURE
2	the warmth of the tribe	دفء الحياة في العشيرة	Narrator	COMMUNITY IS WARMTH	NATURAL FORCE
3	fog rose between them and me	ارتفع الضباب بيني وبينهم	Narrator	DISTANCE IS OBSCURED VISION	SPACE
4	with roots	له جذور	Narrator	IDENTITY IS ROOTEDNESS	STRUCTURE
5	seed sown in a field	بذرة زُرعت في حقل	Narrator	IDENTITY IS GROWTH	NATURAL FORCE
6	Mustafa Sa'eed is a lie	كذبة	Mustafa	IDENTITY IS FABRICATION	FRAGMENTED SELF
7	lifeless as ashes	ككومة من الرماد	Mustafa	SELF IS BURNT MATTER	FRAGMENTED SELF
8	bedroom a theatre of war	مسرحا للحرب	Mustafa	INTIMACY IS WAR	CONFLICT
9	city as a woman	المدينة امرأة	Mustafa	CITY IS WOMAN	CONFLICT
10	germ of a fatal disease	جرثومة	Mustafa	DESIRE IS DISEASE	NATURAL FORCE
11	store of phrases	مخزون	Mustafa	LANGUAGE IS RESOURCE	STRUCTURE
12	hunt / prey	مطاردة/ فريسة	Mustafa	SEDUCTION IS HUNTING	CONFLICT
13	I am a desert	أنا صحراء	Mustafa	SELF IS DESERT	NATURAL FORCE
14	bird in a snare	طائر في فخ	Mustafa	WOMAN IS PREY	CONFLICT
15	southern thirst	عطش	Mustafa	DESIRE IS THIRST	NATURAL FORCE
16	bridge between north and south	جسر	Mustafa	IDENTITY IS BRIDGE	SPACE
17	phantom / dream	شبح	Narrator	IDENTITY IS APPARITION	FRAGMENTED SELF
18	wanderlust disease	مرض	Mustafa	WANDERLUST IS DISEASE	NATURAL FORCE
19	call still rings	نداء	Mustafa	DESTINY IS CALL	NATURAL FORCE
20	infection germs	جراثيم	Mustafa	IDENTITY IS INFECTION	NATURAL FORCE
21	justice as combat	قتال	Mustafa	JUSTICE IS WAR	CONFLICT
22	curtain lowered	الستار	Narrator	LIFE IS PERFORMANCE	STRUCTURE
23	river journey	رحلة	Narrator	LIFE IS JOURNEY	JOURNEY
24	house extension of land	امتداد	Narrator	IDENTITY IS LAND	STRUCTURE

25	voice as bridge	جسر	Narrator	VOICE IS BRIDGE	SPACE
26	Othello is a lie	كذبة	Mustafa/Narrator	MODEL IS FICTION	FRAGMENTED SELF
27	tear disease by roots	نقتلع	Political	CORRUPTION IS DISEASE	CONFLICT
28	world gone crazy	جَنَ	Community	WORLD IS MAD	FRAGMENTED SELF
29	learned from nature	تعلموا	Narrator	NATURE IS TEACHER	NATURAL FORCE
30	wound in trunk	جرح	Narrator	SEPARATION IS WOUND	CONFLICT
31	adversary within	خصمي	Narrator	SELF IS ENEMY	CONFLICT
32	I became the world	العالم	Narrator	SELF IS WORLD	SPACE
33	face to face with myself	وجهاً	Narrator	SELF IS OTHER	FRAGMENTED SELF
34	imprisoned smell	مسجونة	Narrator	MEMORY IS CONTAINER	STRUCTURE
35	graveyard/prison	سجن	Narrator	PAST IS CONTAINER	STRUCTURE
36	invader from the South	غازي	Mustafa	SELF IS INVADER	CONFLICT
37	battlefield intimacy	معركة	Mustafa	INTIMACY IS WAR	CONFLICT
38	hunter becomes prey	طريدة	Mustafa	POWER REVERSAL IS HUNT	CONFLICT
39	woman is fate	قدري	Mustafa	WOMAN IS FATE	NATURAL FORCE
40	river pulling me down	يسحبني	Narrator	DEATH IS DPWNWARD FORCE	NATURAL FORCE
41	between north and south	بين	Narrator	IDENTITY IS SPACE	SPACE
42	nightmare awakening	كابوس	Narrator	CRISIS IS NIGHTMARE	FRAGMENTED SELF
43	not part of the water	لست جزءاً	Narrator	SELF VS ENVIRONMENT	SPACE