

Kennings in English and Arabic: A Comparative Study

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Abstract—This study presents a comparative analysis of kennings in English and Arabic. It compares the structural, functional, and cultural aspects of kennings in English literature and kennings-like constructs in Arabic, particularly the metonymy of a modified object. Although such a figurative substitution is used to enhance poetic language in both languages, their forms and objectives are different. In contrast to Arabic kennings, which prioritize social refinement and Qur'anic eloquence, English kennings are recursive, two-part compounds with deep roots in mythical and oral memory traditions. Both cultures' historical emergence of these terms suggests distinct literary inspirations. Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature's poetic tradition is the source of English kennings, which are frequently used to enhance narrative through abstraction and multi-layered meaning. The present study attempts to shed light on the metonymical wordplay employed by English and Arabic to promote cognitive playfulness. Such use of language necessitates active interpretation by the readers, depending not only on their linguistic but also cultural knowledge, for decoding several hidden meanings. The study demonstrates that kennings are culture-bound expressions shaped by sociocultural norms. The main objective of this study is to advance language studies by demonstrating how kennings and metonymy reflect cultural thinking patterns and by offering a framework for examining figurative language across diverse linguistic traditions. The findings show that although English and Arabic kennings share indirect figurative expression and similar poetic functions, they differ sharply in structure, substitution patterns, and cultural-religious foundations.

Index Terms—comparison, culture, figurative substitution, kennings, metonymy

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a reflection of a culture's imagination, worldview, and poetic sensibility, and it is also a means of communication. Kennings are a particularly vivid and evocative form among the various stylistic methods that enhance poetic language (Bestilleiro Álvarez, 2016). Kennings, as a poetic device, were first employed in Old Norse and Old English literature to substitute a more direct noun (Krause, 1930). For instance, "whale-road" might signify sea (Heaney, 2000, p. 3). In addition to demonstrating linguistic creativity, kennings also highlight cultural values and symbolic connections embedded in the community from which they originate (Lombardi, 2023).

Although kennings are most frequently associated with early Germanic poetry, particularly in English works such as *Beowulf*, comparable expressions are also present in Arabic and other linguistic and literary traditions. Arabic poetry, with a rich history dating back to the pre-Islamic period, is also rich in imagery and creativity. It frequently uses figurative terms that work similarly to kennings (Tamim'dari, 2002).

The purpose of the study is to compare the structure, function, and thematic relevance of kennings in English and Arabic within their respective traditions. The research aims to demonstrate how these different language and cultural systems make use of such poetic devices to improve their poetic expression by examining similarities and differences. By doing this, this study hopes to advance readers' awareness of the use of poetic methods, especially those in English and Arabic, as well as of the innate human tendency toward figurative language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Etymologically, the term of kennings was brought to English in the nineteenth century from medieval Icelandic poetic treatises, notably "the Prose Edda" by Snorri Sturluson. It comes from the Old Norse word *kenna*, having the meaning of "know", "recognize", "perceive", "feel", "show", "teach", and so on. It can be found in expressions like "*kenna við*", which means to name after; to express one thing in terms of another (Baer, 2013, p. 28).

Kennings are one of the distinguishing features of Skaldic diction. According to Kemp Malone, as cited in Gardner (1972), this poetic device is one of the "stereotypes" that define Old Germanic poetic diction.

Sturluson (1987) defines kennings as poetic periphrases or descriptive terms crafted so that, when referring to Odin, Thor, Tyr, or any other *Æsir* or elves (Gods in Norse mythology), their names are accompanied by a reference to another

deity or an aspect of their deeds. In this construction, the designation applies to the figure who aligns with the entire phrase rather than the one explicitly named.

Meissner (1921) proposes an approach to apply the term of kennings for dealing with Skaldic diction. He states that kennings are any two-membered nouns that serve as substitutes. Meissner emphasizes that kennings are viewed as replacements and have universal, typical, and changeable characters.

While demonstrating the analogy between kennings and riddles, Lindow (1975) provided a more recent definition of kennings as nominal compounds that are expandable in multiple ways. Lindow also reminds us that this poetic form must have been written for a highly intelligent audience capable of unraveling and comprehending its complexities.

Frank (1978) describes kennings as appellations, which are synonyms that use more “elevated” expressions than those commonly used to describe a person or object. This style was one of the poetic techniques frequently employed in Skaldic poetry.

Lombardi (2023) describes kennings in the light of their innovative and symbolic nature as they are often drawn from natural elements, mythology, or cultural imagery, and using personification or analogy (e.g., trees as warriors, ships as animals) to convey specific qualities such as strength, mobility, or power. They reflect a highly creative and structured linguistic practice, in which objects or concepts are described by associating them with beings or entities that embody their desired attributes.

Fidjestøl (1974; as cited in Holland, 2005, pp. 128-129) suggests a descriptive account of kennings divided into six parts:

1. “*Circumlocution*”: Kennings can be used in place of regular nouns.
2. “*Two components*”: A kenning consists of a determinant and a base word, where the determinant is in the genitive or as part of a compound, and the base word is in the appropriate grammatical case.
3. “*Semantic incongruity*”: The meaning of the replacement noun is not explicitly expressed by either the determinant or the base word.
4. “*Domain limitation*”: Although there are numerous concepts that kennings can potentially express, the majority only fit into a small group of about twenty.
5. “*Kennings variation*”: The determinant and the base word are both members of open word classes, which permit change.
6. *Rekit*: It is possible to create extended metaphorical frameworks by substituting another kenning for the determinant itself.

In Arabic literature, kennings are utilized as a poetic technique in the descriptive structure of Arabic prose. According to Tamīm'dārī (2002), in *Kalila and Demna*, the use of kennings reflects the broader influence of classical Arabic literary aesthetics, in which figurative language, allegory, and indirect expression play a significant role in enhancing the depth and elegance of the text.

Arabic rhetoricians generally regard kennings as a form of metonymy. Wahba (1968) and Hadidi (2001) assert that kennings in Arabic are considered a form of metonymy, specifically a modified object. In *Al-Bayan Journal* (1978) kennings are defined as a special kind of *iṭnāb* (*elaboration*), in which the described item is depicted by its qualities rather than by name. Ship, for example, may be called “steed of the sea”. This poetic device is consistent with the more general idea of metonymy, which is the use of related features to make indirect reference.

Several classical scholars emphasize the inferential nature of metonymy. Al-Sakakī (1987) notes that metonymy conveys meaning by inference rather than by a clear statement and reveals only when necessary. He states that metonymy and indirectness do not impact the mind as explicitly and openness do. He considers metonymy one of the rhetorical styles required by certain situations. Similarly, Al-Jurjānī (1992) expands the concept of metonymy to include replacing the real term with another expression that carries a similar meaning, rather than using the original term. An illustrative example of metonymy can be seen in the expression نَوْمُ الضَّحَى (na'um aldhuha), which refers to a person who oversleeps or a late sleeper. In classical Arabic, it often serves as a metonymy for a woman who lives a life of luxury and comfort, as she has the leisure to oversleep without the need to engage in early work or labor.

Ibn Al-Athir (1939) defines metonymy as an expression that carries two meanings and may be understood either figuratively or literally. In a similar vein, Al-‘Alawi (1980) defines metonymy as expressions that possess both literal and figurative meanings, yet do not contain any explicit indicators or metaphorical vehicles. Al-‘Alawi (1980) further explains that the purpose of this restriction is to avoid combining metonymy with other figures of speech. This two- meanings structure means that the expression itself is semantically plausible in its literal sense, but the context pushes the listener to understand the deeper, figurative meaning. The absence of an explicit indicator is what distinguishes it from other figures.

From a comparative perspective, Bauer (2010) draws a parallel between kennings in Old Norse poetry and metonymical structures in early Arabic poetry, viewing both as stylistic devices rooted in indirect reference and semantic substitution. or more specifically, Bauer (2010) draws a parallel between kennings in Old Norse poetry and metonymical structures in early Arabic poetry, viewing both as stylistic devices rooted in indirect reference and semantic substitution. In pre-Abbasid Arabic poetry, objects of focus—such as camels, swords, or onagers—were not referred to by their common names. Instead, poets employed modified metonymy, entirely replacing standard terms with expressions that conveyed a defining

characteristic or habitual action of the object. This indirect, evocative use of language reflects a stylistic approach akin to kennings in Old Norse poetry.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study examines kennings in English and Arabic literary traditions using a qualitative, descriptive-comparative methodology. It identifies the structural, functional, and cultural aspects of kennings in English poetry, mainly from Old English and Old Norse sources like *Beowulf*, and contrasts them with metonymical expressions in classical Arabic poetry and rhetoric, specifically, the metonymy of a modified object, which is the main goal of this study. In addition to contemporary scholarly interpretations, information was gathered from a variety of literary works, Qur'anic examples, and rhetorical treatises written by scholars such as Al-Jurjānī and Al-Sakakī.

The analysis comprises three phases: structural (examining forms such as compound and genitive constructions), functional (exploring aesthetic and cognitive roles), and cultural (examining the mythological and sociocultural foundations of figurative expressions).

To examine how both languages use indirect expressions to convey abstract concepts, comparative examples are chosen based on thematic similarities, particularly images associated with battle. Based on these methodological considerations, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the morpho-syntactic constraints of Old English kennings, specifically their fixed, compound nature, contrast with the syntactic fluidity of Arabic metonymy (metonymy of a modified object) in the construction of figurative meaning?
2. In what ways do these figures of speech fulfill divergent aesthetic functions—serving narrative abstraction in the English tradition versus social refinement and moral eloquence in the Arabic rhetorical tradition—while acting as parallel devices for cognitive engagement?
3. To what extent do the distinct historical origins—Northern European mythological oral traditions versus Arabic rhetorical and philosophical foundations—dictate the thematic domains and referents used in the battle imagery of each language?

To answer these questions, the study methodically examines a few English and Arabic examples using the three analytical stages outlined above. Together, these phases allow for a thorough comparison of the two languages and show how each linguistic system uses indirect expression to create meaning.

IV. DISCUSSION

The present section provides a detailed analysis of the figurative expressions collected for this study from English and Arabic literary sources. It examines their structural patterns, Characteristics and functions, especially within the semantic field of battle.

A. English Kennings

(a). The Structure of English Kennings

According to Meissner (1921), kennings in English are typically two-element substitutive periphrases made up of a base-word (B) and a determinant (D) in a genitival syntactic relationship; this binary structure replaces the referent (R) of the kenning. This definition is based on structural and systemic considerations rather than semantic or cognitive ones.

e.g.: “Bone-house” (Heaney, 2000, p. 168)

Base Word (B): house → denoting a container or structure.

Determinant (D): bone → describing the substance or distinguishing feature of the structure.

bone (B) + house (D) = body (R)

Ross (2007) examines Meissner's description of kennings' structure, explaining that kennings can take two primary forms: compound words or genitive phrases. A compound kenning, such as “*sea steed*” (a ship), consists of a base word and a determinant, where the first element (the determinant) is a noun used without suffixes. In contrast, a genitive kenning, such as “*wave's horse*” (a ship), features a determinant in the genitive case that either precedes or follows the base word, sometimes with another word in between.

Faulkes (1997) further notes that not all kennings rely on genitives. In some cases, the first element of a compound word functions as a determinant, effectively replacing a genitive. This allows for greater structural flexibility, contributing to the variety and richness of kenning formation.

When the scop (the early Germanic poets) first began using kennings, they were relatively simple, typically consisting of two words that expressed a single concept. These “simple kennings” include terms like “*hildenaedre*” (the “battle-serpent” for arrow), “*merehengest*” (the “horse of the sea” for ship), and “*solarborð*” (the “sky”) (p. 17).

(b). The Characteristics of English Kennings

One of the most intriguing aspects of kennings is their ability to expand through recursion or embedding. This process allows the output of one kenning formation to serve as the input for another, leading to increasingly intricate expressions. The fundamental kenning structure (B+D=R) can be recursively applied to produce extended kennings, sometimes

referred to as "rekit" (Patria, 2020, p. 26). For example, if "whale-road" represents the sea and "sea-stallion" refers to a ship, a recursive kenning such as "stallion of the whale-road" emerges, compounding meaning and poetic complexity (Simpson, 1979, p. 1).

Another defining characteristic of kennings is their tendency to merge multiple elements into a single, elaborate expression. As noted by Lindow (1975), kennings are multiply expanding nominal compounds that often incorporate a ludic element. This complexity was intended for an audience well-versed in the poetic tradition, capable of decoding the verse's layered meanings.

In addition to recursion and merging, lexical variation plays an important role in the kenning system. This characteristic, also known as "paradigmatic substitution," allows poets to swap lexical components within a set framework called the "kenning-pattern" or "kenning-type" (Patria, 2020, p. 26). This variation is often achieved through the use of "heiti" (poetic synonyms), which substitute for standard terms while maintaining the kenning's formal structure (p. 26).

(c). *Functions of English Kennings*

Beyond decoration, English kennings are closely related to dominant themes, introducing irony or parody, and creating associative links within compositions. Their unique ability to enrich, obscure, and elevate poetry ensures their lasting significance in literary history. For instance, in *Beowulf*, kennings contribute to the poem's vivid imagery, making complex ideas more accessible and engaging. By painting rich, dynamic pictures, they help the audience visualize the story while also carrying deeper symbolic meanings that enhance the thematic depth of the narrative (Alisoy, 2025).

Kennings, originally used as synonyms in Old Norse poetry, played an important role in facilitating alliterative verse. Since alliteration required at least two words to begin with the same sound, poets needed alternative expressions for certain words, leading to the development of kennings. Over time, these figurative expressions became an integral part of poetic diction, enriching both style and meaning (Simpson, 1979).

Davis-Secord (2016) illustrates that kennings as compound words have a significant effect on the relationship among syntax, style, and culture. Kennings engage fundamental grammatical and semantic processes by combining two words, while also serving as a distinctive stylistic feature of Old English literature. Their function extends beyond mere ornamentation, generating meaning in culturally specific ways. Sturluson (1987), in *Snorra Edda*, identifies two main functions of kennings: expanding poetic vocabulary and enabling obscure or elevated speech. This stylistic complexity reflects the aesthetic nature of poetic language, as Skalds viewed their compositions as carefully crafted gifts. Additionally, the riddling nature of kennings engaged intellectual curiosity, reinforcing the link between poetry and wisdom (Sturluson, 1987).

The memory value of kennings in oral cultures is further contextualized by Ong's (1982) views on orality. According to Ong, these "outsize" numbers and pictures were intentionally created to be memorable, helping preserve collective knowledge. In a time when memory was the main source of cultural and historical tales, this "mnemonic serviceability" was crucial. Alisoy (2025) highlights how kennings serve to glorify heroic figures, while their deeper symbolic meanings also fulfill important social and honorific roles. Kennings were commonly used to praise rulers, warriors, and gods, enhancing heroic ideals and social hierarchy. Bestilleiro Álvarez (2016) also argues that an important function of kennings is in constructing heroic identities, especially in the epic poem *Beowulf*, where they are used to highlight the bravery and leadership of the main protagonist. The king, for example, is called "beaga bryttan", or the "dispenser of treasure" in modern English, indicating his role as a kind leader who rewards his soldiers while maintaining his prestigious standing in society. Titles such as "Geatish hero" highlight *Beowulf*'s noble lineage and loyalty, central virtues of Anglo-Saxon society (Alisoy, 2025).

(d). *Battle Kennings in English Literature*

Kennings are typically used to refer to concrete objects and are drawn from a limited set of traditional themes, such as gods, men, women, war, the sea, ships, the earth, fire, ice, swords, shields, etc. In this section, however, we deal exclusively with kennings related to battle.

Abram (2019) discusses sword kennings in Old English literature, for example: "the adders of battle", the mighty war snake, and the serpent of strife. Similarly, Brunning (2015) explores the imagery in sword kennings, such as the swinger or the serpent of wounds, showing how these puzzling expressions convey both their symbolic connotations and their physical characteristics. Swords are compared by Kennings to things like ice, suggesting coldness and hardness; light or lightning, suggesting brightness and sharpness; and serpents, emphasizing their sleek, patterned look. These representations capture the weapon's aesthetic qualities and its cultural importance in Viking culture (p. 66). In a similar vein, Mitchell and Robinson (1998, p. 26) highlight examples of sword-related kennings in *Beowulf*, such as "war-friend" and "battle-light".

In her analysis of kennings in Skaldic poetry, particularly with *dróttkvætt* poems, Patria (2020) explores a wide array of kennings that convey the imagery and experience of battle. She discusses kennings such as "talk of swords", "meeting for weapons", "storm of the sword", and "strong wind of arrows", which figuratively represent combat as a means of communication between weapons and frame battle as natural weather phenomena. Patria also emphasizes kennings that describe warriors through using references to the natural world, for example, "battle-wolves" (p. 55) and "battle-birches" (pp. 207-209). These analogies link the human fighter to the wild and resilient powers of nature in addition to representing martial skill. Furthermore, she investigates kennings for blood that evoke the idea of blood as a beverage drunk amid the

fervor of war, the battlefield as being covered in the blood of the dead, for instance, “battle -draught” (p. 165) and “carrion-pool” (p. 92). She further explores object-based and spatial kennings. She adds, the kennings “the sky of the rim” (p. 210) and “war-cloud” (p. 210) allude to the shield, presenting it as a protective component that looms over the warrior like the sky does over the earth.

B. Arabic Kennings

(a). The Structure of Arabic Kennings

According to classical Arabic scholars, Arabic kennings correspond directly to the rhetorical mechanism of metonymy. Linguistically, Arabic metonymy is an indirect reference to an object or idea, by mentioning something that implies it, rather than stating it explicitly. It can also mean giving a man a title or nickname, often by using a reference such as “Abu” (Father of) followed by a significant word, thus bestowing a name that symbolizes something about him (Ibn Manẓūr, 2010). Although Arabic rhetoric discusses various forms of metonymy, only one type of metonymy, especially the metonymy of a modified, is structurally and functionally similar to English kennings.

Abdul-Raof (2006) classifies metonymy into three major types: metonymy of an attribute, metonymy of a modified, and metonymy of affinity. Among these, the metonymy of a modified is the most relevant to the present study because it replaces the referent entirely with an attributive or descriptive expression. In a manner analogous to the substitutive structure of the English kennings.

In metonymy of a modified, an attribute and description are stated without disclosing the entity being described. The metonymic word or phrase in this type needs a context to be recognized. A clear example occurs in the following verse from the Glorious Qur'an:

"وَحَمَلْنَاهُ عَلَى ذَاتِ أَلْوَاحٍ وَدُسُرٍ" Surat al-Qamar (54:13)

And we carried him upon a sailing ship.

In this verse, a ship is metonymically represented by “الواح ودسر” (alwah wa dusar), which means the planks and nails (Al Hayyani, 2014). By referencing one of the basic concepts that can frequently co-occur with it, the relationship between the object described and the planks and nails, which is the ship, can be linked to the bearer of this attribute (p. 313). Based on this example, the kenning of ship functions as a form of metonymy, employing indirect descriptions that underline fundamental attributes or associated imagery. This aligns with Mohammed and Al-Qazaz’s (2024) study, which highlights the need for analyzing intertextual elements like religious references while taking into account the cultural background of the intended audience.

Al-Hashimi (2019) further explains that metonymy of a modified may rely on either a single identifying attribute or a group of attributes, as in the saying of Ibrahim (2018):

"وَبُنَاةُ الْأَهْرَامِ فِي سَالِفِ الدَّهْرِ رَكْفُونِي الْكَلَامَ عِنْدَ النَّحْدِيِّ"

The builders of the pyramids in past ages have spared me the need for speaking during a challenge (translation by the authors).

Ibrahim’s statement “بناة الازهرام” (bunat alahramat), which means builders of the pyramids, is a metonymy for the ancient Egyptians, who built the famous pyramids. The poet uses a single characteristic that exemplifies those who possess it.

A structurally layered description resembling extended kennings is produced by combining multiple qualities to collectively conjure the referent (Al Hashimi, 2019). As in:

"حَيٌّ مُسْتَوِي الْقَامَةِ يَمْشِي عَلَى رِجْلَيْنِ عَرِيضِ الْأَطْفَارِ."

A man who is shaped with balance and intention. (translation by the authors).

In Arabic, other forms of metonymy—like metonymy of an attribute or metonymy of affinity—remain rhetorically significant, but they differ structurally from kennings in that they usually maintain the referent or rely on relational inference rather than total substitution. Because of this, they are not primarily included in the current comparative study.

(b). The Characteristics and Functions of Arabic Kennings

Arabic kennings, which are represented by the metonymy of a modified, possess specific attributes that serve as defining characteristics and stylistic functions, as noted by Al-Mubarrad (1956). Economical use of words is one of the aesthetic functions of kennings. To represent the intended idea, a single word or a statement is employed rather than one or more sentences. According to Farid (1998), the phrase naqi althwb (نقي الثوب), in the following example, represents a type of kenning and has a variety of non-allegorical meanings, including virtue, chastity, purity, and abstinence from sin (p. 51).

"فلان نقي الثوب" (Farid, 1998, p. 51)

A man in a clean dress. (translation by the authors)

Kennings are used to convey socially or culturally unacceptable concepts in a refined and acceptable manner. This rhetorical device is extensively employed in the Qur'an and classical Arabic literature. For instance, due to their profound sense of honor, they would metonymically refer to a woman using terms such as the egg or the sheep (Al-Hashimi, 2019). Furthermore, one of the key functions of metonymy, according to Ibn Abi al-Iṣḥā‘ (1963), is to express an unpleasant or indecent meaning through a more delicate or indirect phrase. By employing metonymy, poets and writers convey their intended message while maintaining politeness and sensitivity. The term (biyḍ almtābikh (بيض المطايخ), meaning white

kitchens, as used in the example below, is a metonymy for the quality of frugality. The poet suggests that people eat dry bread and do not cook or wash in order to condemn them.

"بيض المطابخ لا تشكو إمائهم طبخ القدور ولا غسل المناديل" (Al-Hashimi, 2019, p. 350)

The kitchens of the noble are clean, their maidservants never complain of cooking the pots or washing the napkins.
(translation by the authors).

(c). Battle Kennings in Arabic Literature

In Arabic literature, descriptions of battle are not just factual accounts of violence or military encounters. Rather, they are intricately woven into a rich tapestry of rhetorical devices that transform the experience of warfare into a symbolic, almost mythic, realm (Aldekhan & O'Neill, 2024). According to the analysis of metonymical examples, metonymy's literal meaning typically shifts from its intended usage, making the literal interpretation ineffective in conveying the intended meaning. According to Arab scholars, establishing a metonymical reference has significant advantages and inherent value that goes beyond a straightforward statement (Aldekhan & O'Neill, 2024).

Examples of metonymic substitutes that invoke the wider semantic area of battle include the phrase يوم الهياج (yawm al-Hiyaj) the day of tumult. This altered expression conveys the mood, ferocity, and ethical aspects of fighting without explicitly referring to it. Consider the following lines by Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1989, p. 87):

"أصلبها نار السيف فأصبحت بردا على كبد الهدى وسلاما
وقدمت في يوم الهياج بفتية لم تدر إلا البطش والإقدام"

You burned it with the fire of your swords, and it turned into coolness and tranquility in the heart of guidance. You advanced on the day of the upheaval, and together with young guys who knew nothing but bravery and striking.
(translation by the authors)

And among the other evidence is the saying of Amr ibn Ma'dikarib al-Zubaydi:

"الضاربين بكل أبيض مخذم والطاعنين مجامع الأضغان" (Al-Taftazani, 1899, p. 248)

Those who strike with every sharp white sword and pierce the gathering places of grudges. (translation by the authors)

The expression ابيض مخذم (abyaḍ mkhdhdm), sharp white sword, refers to a gleaming, well-forged sword (often described as "white" in Arabic poetry due to its polished blade). It emphasizes the warriors' skill and strength in battle (Al-Taftazani, 1899, p. 248).

Another example is the saying of Al-Ma'arri:

"سليل النار ذق ورق حنئ كان أباه أوزته السلا لا" (Al-Safadi, 2013, p. 196)

The descendant of fire struck and shattered as if his father had bestowed him the tuberculous. (translation by the authors)

The phrase سليل النار (slylu alnāri), the descendant of fire, is a metonym of a modified object, where "سليل النار" refers not to a literal descendant of fire but to a sword.

Classical Arabic poetry uses the phrase بيض الصفائح (Bayḍ al-ṣafa'ih), white blades, as in the saying of the Arab poet Abo Tammam:

"بيض الصفائح لا سود الصحائف في متونهن جلاء الشك والريب" (Al-Shantemari, 2004, p. 130)

White blades, with clear records in their bodies, lie the clearance of doubt and suspicion. (translation by the authors)

The phrase "بيض الصفائح" (white blades, i.e., swords) conveys meanings of assurance, lightness, goodness, benefit, and good news. Similarly, (Al-Andalusi, 1886) uses the phrase (shihab Harb), meteor of war, as in the line:

"لله أي شهاب حرب واقدا" (<https://www.aldiwan.net/poem69064.html>)

By God, what a blazing meteor of war. (translation by the authors)

Here, the sword is shown as a flaming meteor, evoking the same sensation of martial devastation and brilliant brightness.

Blood metonymy is a sophisticated and multidimensional device that may serve as a shorthand for honor, retribution, sacrifice, lineage, and the community's capacity for regeneration. Because of the strong social, emotional, and ceremonial links that poets establish through these metonymic applications, blood is a prominent and enduring image in the Arabic poetic imagination (Stetkevych, 1986). For example, the term الطلاء (alṭila'), the paint, is used to refer to blood spilled on the battlefield, as if it were a layer of red covering the area or the body (Lababidi, 1893). The shield has frequently been referred to by Arab poets using metonymy, as seen in Al-Ma'arri's writings. For instance, the term "القميص" (al-Qamīs), the shirt, can be used figuratively in Arabic poetry to refer to armor or a combat outfit (Al-Bakri, 2017, p. 145).

"رهننت قميصي عنده وهو فضلة من المزن يُعلى ماؤها برماذ"

I mortgaged him my armor, which is a residue of the clouds, its water exalted by ashes. (translation by the authors)

It is now possible to compare kennings in English and Arabic to demonstrate the points of similarity and difference, as explained in Table 1:

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF ENGLISH KENNINGS AND ARABIC METONYMY

No.	Similarity	Difference
1	Figurative and Indirect Language	Structural Form
	Both English and Arabic kennings serve as a form of indirect expression which replaces literal terms with figurative or associative references. The process of interpreting these expressions requires mental analysis and reconstruction because the suggested meaning is the listener's responsibility.	English kennings are fixed, two - part compounds which consist of a base word and a determinate, whereas Arabic kennings (metonymy of a modified) are more flexible and can be a single word or a phrase, for example "بيض الصفائح" (white blades) for a sword.
2	Semantic Domain	Lexical Substitution
	The two languages share the same semantic domain of battle, including weapons, warriors, shield and blood.	English kennings require noun compounds or genitive phrases. On the other hand, Arabic metonymies can be adjectival, verbal, or gestural, and they are more flexible, implied and contextual.
3	Poetic and Mnemonic Function	Primary Reference
	In oral traditions, both are used as mnemonic techniques, creating vivid imagery to help with remembering. They improve poetic diction and give language a more artistic and culturally relevant quality.	English kennings are substituted for concrete objects, such as sword and shield. In contrast, Arabic kennings refer to abstract concepts and often rely on cultural associations, conveying implied attributes. For example, the phrase "يوم الهياج" (the day of tumult).
4	Heroic and Mythological Relationships	Cultural and Religious Context
	English kennings frequently allude to nature, gods, and valiant actions (for example, "battle- wolves" for warriors). Arabic metonymy relates to cultural values (for example, the phrases "بيض الصفائح" (white blades) and "سليل النار" (the descendant of fire) for a sword).	English kennings strongly tied to pagan and Christian mythology. In contrast, Arabic kennings often linked to Islamic values function as euphemisms for sacred and taboo topics. Concerning battle kennings, English focuses on physical combat; on the other hand, Arabic emphasizes the spiritual and moral aspects of warfare.
5	Creativity and Context	Natural Imagery
	Both promote creativity, cultural context, and communicative depth while strengthening language with new dimensions of meaning.	English kennings are strongly linked to weather metonymies, for instance "the storm of swords", while Arabic kennings are related to celestial imagery, for example "شهاب حرب" (meteor of war).

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the structural, functional, and cultural aspects of English kennings and Arabic metonymy. Significant insights into how two different language traditions use indirect expression to transmit meaning within the semantic domain of battle have been obtained from the qualitative descriptive-comparative research.

Based on the comparative data presented, three key conclusions have emerged:

1. Both English and Arabic differ in structure (Morphology vs. Syntax): The analysis reveals a basic language difference: The fixed, two-part compound structure (Base + Determinant) that characterizes Germanic languages (such as battle-sweat) provides the basis for English kennings. Arabic metonymy, on the other hand, depends on syntactic flexibility and uses a variety of context-dependent phrasal constructs, such as genitive, verbal, and adjectival. Arabic metonymy is a discursive technique, whereas English kenning is a lexical unit.
2. Both English kennings and Arabic metonymy operate as "riddles" that improve aesthetic perception through active decoding, so engaging the listener intellectually. However, they serve different societal purposes: metonymy conforms to social refinement and politeness by avoiding the explicit mention of forbidden issues, whereas kennings reduce repetition in oral storytelling.
3. Battle imagery is influenced by cultural determinism; Arabic tradition stresses heavenly and spiritual themes from the desert environment, presenting combat as a moral or spiritual conflict, whereas English tradition focuses on physical and environmental features from a severe Northern climate.

These findings lead to the following recommendations for further study and educational implementation:

1. Pedagogical Application: To improve cultural competency and teach students to interpret culturally embedded terminology beyond their literal definitions, translation programs should use comparative figurative analysis.
2. Expansion of Scope: To find more extensive societal similarities between the two faiths, future studies should use this comparison paradigm to other semantic areas, such as death, charity, or women.
3. Cognitive Analysis: To bridge the gap between historical philology and contemporary linguistics, future research should examine how ancient figures of speech fit with contemporary cognitive mappings by applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to these classical texts.

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