

## **Are Poetic Similes Cognitively Constrained? A Case of Malay Poetic Similes**

**Mohd Kasim, Z.**

*Department of English Language, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the application of Cognitive Constraint Theory (CCT) to Malay poetic similes. Based on this theory, poetic structures like simile, zeugma and synaesthesia are in fact, governed by certain cognitive principles. These principles or “cognitive constraints”, as they are better known within this approach, ensure the interpretability of the poetic structures on the part of the reader. In this study, a corpus of 587 Malay similes from twentieth century poems were analysed using the methodological framework introduced by Yeshayahu Shen, the proponent of CCT. The study showed that while Cognitive Constraint Theory works at a high level of generality, a more detailed analysis considers the effects of culture, history and specific linguistic choices.

*Keywords:* Cognitive constraints, conceptual mapping, conceptual metaphor, Malay, poetic similes

### **INTRODUCTION**

The study of literature has a long and venerable tradition, dating back to classical times (e.g. Aristotle’s *Poetics*). In recent decades, there has been a growing and fruitful interaction between literary studies and cognitive science whereby, insights from the study of human cognition have been applied to the investigation of the

relationship between literary texts and readers’ interpretations (e.g., Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Tsur, 1992; Steen, 1994). This has resulted in the birth of an interdisciplinary field known as cognitive stylistics (e.g., Semino & Culpeper, 2002), or cognitive poetics (e.g., Stockwell, 2002; Gavins, & Steen, 2003; Tsur, 1992, 2003). These studies have investigated the role played by the human cognitive system in the processing of poetic language. There have been several major approaches developed over the years that pertain to the structure and processing of poetic language.

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*E-mail address:*

zalina\_mk@upm.edu.my (Mohd Kasim, Z.)

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian Formalists made an influential claim that poetry ‘violates’ or ‘deviates’ from the norms of ordinary language in order to produce aesthetic and poetic effects (Mukařovský, 1970). Shklovsky, for example, claimed that the goal of poetic discourse is “to make the object ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Shklovsky, 1965, p. 12, quoted in Shen, 2002, p. 212). Such view of poetic language has influenced much subsequent work in the stylistics tradition (Leech, 1969).

### COGNITIVE CONSTRAINT THEORY

More recently, Shen has proposed a different view (Shen, 2002; 1997b; 1995; 2008), which claims that the deviations or violations of poetic language are in fact “constrained or regulated” (Shen, 1995, p. 257). According to Shen, although poetry essentially needs to be novel and creative (which is reflected in the violation of the normal patterns of language), it also needs to be comprehensible for readers. In other words, at some level, poetic texts have to “conform to certain communicative, and in particular cognitive (as well as linguistic) principles” (Shen, 2002, p. 213) in order to ensure the interpretability of poetic language.

In a series of ground-breaking studies, Shen (2002) developed a theory known as *Cognitive Constraints Theory*, which

attempts to account for regularities in the construction of poetic structures. The theory focuses particularly on traditional “figures of speech” and makes two complementary claims:

[1] *Some types of figures of speech ... used in poetic discourse exhibit general definable regularities regarding their linguistic structure across poetic contexts... certain structural options ... are used more frequently in poetic discourse than others, regardless of the specific context (poem, poet, school of poets, historical period, or even language).*

[2] *From a cognitive perspective, the more frequently used structural options represent more “basic” (e.g., simpler, more natural, easier to comprehend and recall) than their less frequently used counterparts.*

(Shen, 2002, p. 214)

In the first claim, Shen states that some typically poetic figures such as zeugma, synaesthesia and simile actually exhibit certain regularities pertaining to their linguistic structure. These regularities, according to Shen, are not due to “contextual factors”, such as the specific text from which the poetic forms are taken, i.e. the characteristics of the school of poets which produced them and the literary period to which the producer belongs (Shen, 1997b, p. 34). Instead, Shen argues, they result from

underlying cognitive principles, as spelt out in claim [2].

The second claim of the Cognitive Constraint Theory states that the more frequently used structures are considered more “basic” than the less frequently used. The notion on “basic” has been described in detail by Shen (1995, 1997b).

In providing evidence for his claim [1], Shen carried out a series of studies (Shen, 1987; 1989; 1992a; 1995; 1997a; 1997b; 1998), which examined four poetic figures, namely, simile, synaesthesia, oxymoron and zeugma. His analyses mainly involved data taken from a corpus of Hebrew poetry, though in some studies Shen also included English poetic data. The question now is whether the claims made by Cognitive Constraint Theory are also supported by poetic figures in other languages. While Hebrew is from the Afro-Asiatic language family, Malay is a member of the Malayo-Polynesian language family, which is a branch of the Austronesian language family. It is spoken by the Malay people who live in the Malay Peninsula, parts of the coast of Borneo, southern Thailand, Singapore, central eastern Sumatra and the Riau islands.

Shen mentions “language” as one of the contextual factors that do not influence the selective use of options in the poetic structure (Shen, 2002, p. 214). Therefore, this theory should be applicable to Malay poetic figures of speech. Taking into account the origins of Hebrew and Malay, the theory, as propounded by Shen, would predict that figures of speech in Malay poetry would exhibit the same regularities

that were found in Hebrew (and in Shen’s English data). Thus, it is the objective of this study to examine if the claims in Cognitive Constraint Theory can be applied to figurative expressions in Malay. In this case, the focus of the analysis will be on similes taken from Malay poems.

## THE DATA

The similes analysed in this study were taken from 20<sup>th</sup> century Malay poems. A total of 587 similes were collected from 2,346 poems. The analysis of the poetic similes involved comparing the trends in similes based on different contextual factors. If the results are found to be consistent despite the different contextual factors, then a stronger case can be made for the underlying cognitive constraints as the factor that influences the tendencies in the similes. Shen mentions “text, poet, school or period” as some of the contextual factors that may influence the mappings in similes (Shen, 1997b, p. 35). The poems are written by different poets who have different educational backgrounds, and who uphold different poetic manifestoes. These characteristics are important as they could have some implications on the way the results of the analysis are interpreted.

Two contextual factors will be examined and discussed in this paper, namely, ‘historical periods’ and ‘individual poets’.

The poetic similes analysed in this study are all taken from 20<sup>th</sup> century Malay poems. A total of 2346 poems were collected. These poems come from the following anthologies and collections of poems:

- a. Kamaruzzaman A. Kadir. (ed.). (1989). *Puisi Sepanjang Zaman* (Poems of All Eras). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- b. Usman Awang. (1987). *Puisi-puisi pilihan sasterawan negara Usman Awang* (Selected Poems of Usman Awang, the National Laureate). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- c. Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar. (ed.). (1987). *Puisi-puisi Kebangsaan; 1913-1957* (National Poems: 1913-1957). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- d. Muhammad Haji Salleh. (1995). *Beyond the Archipelago: Monographs in International Studies*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- e. Chulan Chin & Talib Samat. (eds.). (1993). *Taman Bahasa Ibunda* (The Garden of Native Language). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- f. Ahmad Kamal Abdullah & Mohd. Hanafi Ibrahim. (eds.). (1989). *Puisi-puisi Melayu Berunsur Islam: 1933-1986* (Malay Islamic Poems: 1933-1986). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- g. Ahmad Kamal Abdullah & Ahmad Razali Haji Yusof. (eds.). (1990). *Puisi Baharu Melayu: 1961-1986* (Malay Contemporary Poems: 1961-1986). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- h. Masuri S.N. (1989). *Puisi-puisi Pilihan* (Selected Poems). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- i. Hasni Abas & Shamsuddin Jaafar. (eds.). (1995). *Puisi-puisi Kunjungan* (Poems by Travellers). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- j. Siti Zainon Ismail. (1984). *Puisi Putih Sang Kekasih* (The White Poetry of a Lover). Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- k. Matlin Dullah. (1988). *Siapakah Antara Kita* (Who is Among Us). Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.
- l. T. Alias Taib. (1990). *Piramid*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.

Most of the books are anthologies and the reason for this is because they comprise of poems that have been written over the years, i.e. from the period before independence to the period after independence. They also consist of poems written by different poets who have different educational backgrounds and uphold different poetic manifestoes.

The collected data can be categorised into two main historical periods, as follows:

1. Pre-independence period (1900-1957)  
These are the similes taken from the poems written prior to the Independence of Malaya, which came into effect on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1957. A total of 961 poems written in the pre-independence period were gathered for the analysis.
2. Post-independence period  
These are the similes taken from the poems written during the period after Independence, i.e. from 1<sup>st</sup> September 1957 until the present day. In total, 1385

poems written in the post-independence period were gathered for the analysis.

A closer examination of the data revealed that the difference between pre- and post-independence poems involves a number of factors such as the poets' goals, common themes and literary movements, which can be linked to distinctive poetic styles. The pre-independence period is generally associated with poetic structures that are much more accessible to readers while, the post-independence poems are much more creative and challenging (Mohd Kasim, 1997). The differences in the two periods may have some implications in the way similes are created, and this in some ways, makes a good testing ground for the application of CCT. The similes in the pre-independence period may tend to exhibit stronger tendencies for standard directionality because based on Shen's claim (1995), the standard ones are those that are cognitively basic and easier to understand (e.g., *Dalam cerahan udara pagi/ di sawang sinaran matahari timur/ 'Semangat Asia' timbul di Malai/ seperti bintang menghambur nur*; In the light of the morning air/ Under the web of the eastern sun/ The 'Asian Spirit' emerged from Malai/ Like a star). In these examples, the concept of star is used to describe the notion of 'Asian Spirit'. In contrast, the post-independence similes tend to have more non-standard structures given that there should be more innovative use of poetic language by the poets (e.g., *Belum juga lambaian tangan terbeku di tegak terik/ Menjadi abadi seperti tugu kelengangan*

*kasih*; Under the hot sun the wave is not yet frozen/ It is eternal like the monument of deserted love) (Masuri S.N. *Pisah*, Separation, 1965-1975).

The "individual poet" is the other contextual factor that is considered in the analysis of Malay poetic similes. The variations in the poetic styles between the poets could have some implications on the way the similes are created by each of the poets. If there are general cognitive principles regulating the patterns in the use of similes, then even the poets' individual differences will not significantly influence the general tendencies in the structure of the similes. For the purpose of this study, 5 poets with the highest number of poems in the data were identified: Usman Awang (75), Muhammad Haji Salleh (89), Kemala (64), Masuri S.N. (121) and T. Alias Taib (81)<sup>1</sup>.

The approach used in Shen's studies was adopted in the analysis of Malay poetic similes. Following Shen (1995, 1997b), two types of analysis were conducted:

1. Textual analyses of poetic similes – these are relevant to the claim regarding the presence of regularities in the structure of poetic figures, including similes.
2. Analysis of contextual factors – this analysis examines if the tendencies exhibited in the poetic similes are influenced by any contextual factors (e.g., historical periods, school of thoughts, individual poets).

<sup>1</sup>The numbers in brackets are the number of poems by each poet that are included in the data.

The textual analysis involved identifying the patterns of directionalities (both in terms of abstraction and in terms of salience) in Malay poetic similes. Where the level of abstraction is concerned, the main criterion for determining the concreteness of concepts was based on the extent to which the concept evoked by a given linguistic expression, i.e. the source or target, can be visualised or is generally perceivable through the senses (Shen, 1997b; Mohd Kasim, 2007). The analysis for the salience of concepts is carried out only on the similes, where the source and target concepts are either both concrete or both abstract. The analysis was done only on the 'closed' similes (i.e., the similes with an explicit ground<sup>2</sup> of comparison). The ground, in this case, provides the 'category' on the basis of which the salience of source and target is determined.

Shen (1995) noted that there are four types of mappings in similes (see Table 1).

Shen further classified the mappings listed in the table above into "standard" and "non-standard directionality". The distinction between the standard and non-standard can be linked to the second claim of the Cognitive Constraint Theory, which states that the more frequently used structures are considered as more "basic" than the less frequently used ones (Shen 1997b). The non-standard directionality comprises two types of violation: first degree and second degree violation. The

<sup>2</sup>The ground of comparison can be observed in closed similes (e.g., "John is brave like a lion"). In this case, "brave" is the ground of the comparison.

mappings in the former "deviate from the standard directionality, without, however, totally inverting it" (Shen, 1995, p. 265) and include the A-A mapping [scale of abstraction] and the NS-NS mapping [scale of salience]. The latter consists of mappings that are totally inverted compared to the standard directionality, and includes the A-C mapping [scale of abstraction] and the NS-S mapping [scale of salience].

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Analysis in Terms of Abstraction and Salience*

Table 2 shows the overall results of the analysis of all the similes on the basis of abstraction.

A very large proportion of similes in the Malay poetic data exhibit standard directionality (88.9 per cent,  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, only 5.5 per cent of the similes represent first-degree violation and 5.6 per cent second-degree violation. These findings seem to support the claim in Cognitive Constraint Theory about the preference for a particular tendency in poetic figures. The results also support Shen's claim about the preference for standard directionality in similes.

From the total sample of poetic data, 213 similes were analysed for salience. Table 3 gives the overall results of the analysis in terms of salience.

The overall summary shows an extensive use of standard directionality (78 per cent,  $p < 0.001$ ) in the Malay poetic similes compared to the non-standard ones. This result conforms to the claim made in

TABLE 1  
Four different types of mapping in similes in relation to the scales\* of abstraction and scales of salience (Shen 1995)

Scales of abstraction		Scales of salience	
concrete to abstract	(C-A)	salient to non-salient	(S-NS)
concrete to concrete	(C-C)	salient to salient	(S-S)
abstract to concrete	(A-C)	non-salient to salient	(NS-S)
abstract to abstract	(A-A)	non-salient to non-salient	(NS-NS)

\*In investigating the kind of directionality exhibited in the similes, Shen treats both abstraction and salience as graded phenomena, via what he calls the “scale of abstraction” and “scale of salience”.

TABLE 2  
Overall summary of simile analysis in terms of abstraction and types of directionality (standard order, first-degree and second-degree violation)

Directionalities	N	%
Standard directionality (C-A), (C-C)	522	88.9
First-degree violation (A-A)	32	5.5
Second-degree violation (A-C)	33	5.6
Total	587	100.0

TABLE 3  
Overall summary of the simile analysis in terms of salience and types of directionality (standard order, first-degree and second-degree violation)

Directionalities	N	%
Standard directionality (S-NS), (S-S)	167	78.4
First-degree violation (NS-NS)	39	18.3
Second-degree violation (NS-S)	7	3.3
Total	213	100.0

the Cognitive Constraint Theory regarding the prominence of standard directionality in poetic figures.

*Analysis Based on Contextual Factors*

The two main historical periods that were identified in the data are the pre-independence period, which is before 1957, and the post-independence period, i.e. from 1958 onwards.

Out of 587 similes analysed, 131 similes (22.3 per cent) are from pre-independence

poems, while the remaining 456 similes (77.7 per cent) are from post-independence poems. The disproportionate number of poems collected from different historical periods has largely to do with the fact that there are fewer poems written in the period prior to independence.

Table 4 presents the overall summary of similes analysed in terms of abstraction in the two historical periods.

The overall results show that there is a significant preference for standard

directionality in both pre ( $p < 0.001$ )<sup>3</sup> and post-independence ( $p < 0.001$ )<sup>4</sup> similes. A closer look at the results however, reveals that there are some differences between the similes of the two periods. Similes with standard directionality are employed more frequently in the pre-independence poems than in the post-independence poems ( $p < 0.01$ )<sup>5</sup>. In contrast, similes with non-standard directionality appear to be used more frequently in the post-independence poems compared to the pre-independence ones.

To some extent, these discrepancies can be related to the different goals of poems and also poetic manifestoes in the two periods. The pre-independence poems were generally written with the purpose to raise awareness and patriotism among the people. They generally carry political messages, and therefore, it was pertinent at the time that the poems should be accessible to the general public. This might explain the preference for standard directionality in the pre-independence period.

After independence, poems are treated more as a form of expression; this can be observed in the growing of the "Obscure Poets" that upheld the slogan "Arts for art's sake" at the end of 1950's. Poets were able to be innovative and creative in their poems without having to worry if their works were interpreted differently by different readers (Annas Haji Ahmad, 1988). This might explain the increase in the use of

non-standard structures i.e. similes with the first-degree and second-degree violation, in the post-independence similes.

As far as the standard directionality is concerned, the results show a slight discrepancy between the pre-and post-independence similes (see Table 5).

There seems to be a relatively extensive use of the C-A mapping in pre-independence similes. In contrast, the C-C mapping is used slightly more frequently than C-A ( $p < 0.05$ )<sup>6</sup> in post-independence similes. This difference may be related once again to the different poetic goals and also the themes that are commonly featured in the poems of the two periods. Pre-independence poems were generally written to make people aware of their predicament and to evoke patriotism. There was therefore a greater tendency to address issues relating to nationalism, the situation of the society, colonial policy and religion, which generally dealt with abstract ideas. In order to make sure people understand the message that they tried to convey, poets tended to rely more on concrete terms when talking about abstract concepts, hence the frequent use of similes with abstract target and concrete source in pre-independence poems.

Table 6 illustrates the results of analysis pertaining to the historical periods on the scale of salience.

The majority of the similes from both periods tend to follow the standard directionality. In contrast, there is no case of second-degree violation at all in pre-independence similes, and only 4 per cent of

<sup>3</sup>  $\chi^2 = 238.595$ ,  $df = 2$

<sup>4</sup>  $\chi^2 = 582.750$ ,  $df = 2$

<sup>5</sup>  $\chi^2 = 11.015$ ,  $df = 1$

<sup>6</sup>  $\chi^2 = 4.256$ ,  $df = 1$



TABLE 4

Overall summary of the analysis in terms of abstraction and types of directionality (standard order, first- and second- degree violation) according to historical periods

Directionalities	Pre-Independence		Post-Independence	
	n	%	n	%
Standard directionality (C-A), (C-C)	127	96.9	395	86.6
First-degree violation (A-A)	3	2.3	29	6.4
Second-degree violation (A-C)	1	0.8	32	7.0
Total	131	100.0	456	100.0

TABLE 5

The comparison of mappings of similes analysed in terms of abstraction according to historical periods

Mapping	Pre-Independence		Post-Independence	
	n	%	n	%
C – A	90	68.7	177	38.8
C – C	37	28.2	218	47.8
A – A	3	2.3	29	6.4
A – C	1	0.8	32	7.0
Total	131	100.0	456	100.0

TABLE 6

Overall summary of the analysis in terms of salience and types of directionality (standard order, 1st- and 2nd- degree violation) according to historical periods

Directionalities	Pre-Independence		Post-Independence	
	n	%	n	%
Standard directionality (S-NS), (S-S)	34	89.5	133	76.0
First-degree violation (NS-NS)	4	10.5	35	20.0
Second-degree violation (NS-S)	-	-	7	4.0
Total	38	100.0	175	100.0

the post-independence similes are accounted for by this directionality.

Despite the similar patterns of preference in both periods, there are in fact slight differences between the results. There is a greater tendency for standard directionality in pre-independence similes (89.5 per cent) compared to post-independence similes (76 per cent). In contrast, there is a greater tendency for the non-standard directionalities in post-independence similes

compared to the pre-independence ones. The tendencies in the directionalities in terms of salience can also be linked to the poetic goals at the time the similes were written. The preference for standard directionality in the similes from the pre-independence period appears to be consistent with the general view at the time that poems should be comprehensible to readers. Standard structures, which are cognitively natural, make it easier for the similes to be

interpreted and less likely to be ambiguous. After independence, when poems were appreciated more for their aestheticism and creativity, poets began to be more innovative in their poetic techniques. This explains the higher use of the first and second-degree violation of similes involving mapping of salience in the post-independence similes. Table 7 presents more detailed results of the analysis in terms of salience.

Similes with the S-NS mapping appeared to be used more frequently in the pre-independence period (84.2 per cent) compared to those in the post-independence period (57.7 per cent). In contrast, only 5.3 per cent of the pre-independence similes are accounted for by the S-S mapping, while 18.3 per cent of the post-independence similes are found with the same mapping.

In some ways, this discrepancy can be associated with the different goals of poems in the two periods. Pre-independence poems were generally used as the medium to raise people's awareness about their situation, and also to evoke patriotism. As far as the similes are concerned, in order to achieve such effect on readers, the sources should not only be familiar, but also contain strong connotations, which would potentially

construct better depictions and contribute more vivid interpretations of the target of similes. In other words, the source should be a better or more salient instance of the characteristics that is highlighted in the simile compared to the target. This could explain the more frequent use of S-NS in the pre-independence similes in the data.

After independence, poems are appreciated more as artistic expressions. Compared to the pre-independence similes, there appear to be more similes involving mapping of visual images in post-independence similes and in cases like this, usually both the target and sources are equally salient, hence the higher use of S-S in the post-independence similes.

Overall, it appears that it is the pre-independence data that mostly account for the differences between the overall findings in this research and that of Shen's.

#### *Analysis Based on Individual Poets*

The similes by five different poets were analysed in this study. Each poet came from different academic backgrounds; some received only secondary school education (e.g., Usman Awang, Masuri), while others

TABLE 7  
Scale of salience according to historical periods

Directionality	Pre-independence		Post-independence	
	n	%	n	%
S – NS	32	84.2	101	57.7
S – S	2	5.3	32	18.3
NS – NS	4	10.5	35	20.0
NS – S	-	-	7	4.0
Total	38	100	175	100

attended universities (e.g., Muhammad Haji Salleh, Kemala). These poets have also been active in different time periods (i.e., pre- vs. post-independence periods). Taking into account these factors, plus personal techniques and preferences in writing, it is very likely that each poet exhibits an individual poetic style which may have potentially affected the way in which similes are created in their works.

As far as the analysis in terms of abstraction is concerned, standard directionality is the most frequently used directionality among all the five poets (see Table 8). More than 80 per cent of the similes in each case are accounted for by this directionality. In contrast, similes with reversed directionality or second-degree violation are rarely used by the poets. In fact, one of the poets (i.e. Alias) does not have any simile with second-degree violation.

Note that one of the poets (i.e. Masuri) shows a rather outstanding pattern of results compared to the others. There appears to be a rather frequent use of first-degree violation in Masuri’s similes. In particular, 14.8 per cent of his similes analysed in this study are accounted for by the first-degree violation whereas less than 10 per cent of the similes by other poets are found to be accounted for

by the same directionality.

Table 9 presents the results of each of the mapping of the similes by the five poets. Note that there is a similarity between Masuri’s standard and non-standard directionalities; both exhibit the same pattern where similes with abstract target concepts are used more frequently than the ones with concrete targets. An example of such a simile is shown below:

*Tuhan – kalau boleh aku memanggil-  
Mu*

*dengan hati dan deru sehalus  
bisikan wahyu*

Lord– if I could call You

with my heart and roar that are as  
fine as the whisper of the revelation

(Masuri S. N, *Tuhanku*, ‘My Lord’,  
1962)

In Table 10, C-A appears to be used more frequently in the similes by Kemala and Masuri, while C-C appears to be used more frequently in the similes by Usman, MHS and Alias. On the one hand, it is logical to attribute these tendencies to individual poetic styles. However, they could also be related to other factors such

TABLE 8  
Overall result of analysis based on different poets (for the similes analysed on the scale of abstraction)

	Usman		MHS		Kemala		Masuri		Alias	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Standard directionality	23	92.0	44	89.8	13	86.6	22	81.5	19	95.0
First-degree violation	1	4.0	3	6.1	1	6.7	4	14.8	1	5.0
Second-degree violation	1	4.0	2	4.1	1	6.7	1	3.7	-	-
Total	25	100.0	49	100.0	15	100.0	27	100.0	20	100.0

TABLE 9  
Scale of abstraction based on different poets

Mapping	Usman		MHS		Kemala		Masuri		Alias	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
C – A	9	36.0	6	12.2	11	73.3	17	63.0	4	20.0
C – C	14	56.0	38	77.6	2	13.3	5	18.5	15	75.0
A – A	1	4.0	3	6.1	1	6.7	4	14.8	1	5.0
A – C	1	4.0	2	4.1	1	6.7	1	3.7	-	-
Total	25	100.0	49	100.0	15	100.0	27	100.0	20	100.0

TABLE 10  
Overall result of the analysis based on different poets (for similes analysed on the scale of salience)

	Usman		MHS		Masuri		Alias	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Standard directionality	9	75	22	66.7	4	50.0	13	86.7
First-degree violation	3	25	10	30.3	4	50.0	1	6.7
Second-degree violation	-	-	1	3.0	-	-	1	6.7
Total	12	100.0	33	100.0	8	100.0	15	100.0

as the time when the poets were actively writing and also the themes and issues that the poets were particularly interested in. In Kemala's case, the observed tendency could be associated with his deep interest on the subject of Islamic mysticism (Mana Sikana, 1983, p. 65)<sup>7</sup>. Most of his poems in the data are about religion, and the frequent use of C-A mapping could partly be explained by the use of similes by Kemala in talking about abstract concepts from the RELIGION domain such as God, sins, conscience, faith and belief.

<sup>7</sup>Kemala is particularly renowned for his collection of Islamic poems. All of his poems are bound with spiritual elements and draw from the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad. Often in his poems, Kemala addresses issues that are complex and philosophical, and makes readers reflect again about the fundamentals of life in a quest for a much more meaningful and functional life (Mana Sikana, 1983, p. 65).

Both MHS and Alias show a higher percentage of C-C mappings than the C-A mapping and in some ways, this can be related to the themes of their poems in the corpus. A large proportion of MHS's poems in the corpus are parts of an anthology of "ceritera"<sup>8</sup> (folklores), and in the poems, there are a lot of descriptions of the characters and descriptions which set the scenarios in the story. Often this is done via similes which usually involve mappings between concrete concepts, hence the frequent use of similes with C-C mapping such as *gugur bunga seungu pagi/ semerah tebing seputih awan dan seperang batang* (morning flowers fall/ as red as cliffs, as white as clouds, as brown as trunks) (Muhammad Haji Salleh, *Hari Terakhir Sebuah Hutan, The Final Days of a Forest*, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>There are 32 of them in total and they are based on local tales.

TABLE 11  
Scale of salience based on different poets

Mapping	Usman		MHS		Masuri		Alias	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
S – NS	7	58.3	22	66.7	4	50.0	10	66.7
S – S	2	16.7	-	-	-	-	3	20.0
NS - NS	3	25.0	10	30.3	4	50.0	1	6.7
NS – S	-	-	1	3.0	-	-	1	6.7
Total	12	100.0	33	100.0	6	100.0	15	100.0

As for Alias, his writing was influenced by Williams Carlos Williams, one of the principal poets of the Imagist movement (Khoo, 2005). Some of the elements of imagism (which mainly involve concrete concepts) can be observed in his work; most of his poems in the data tend to revolve around people and ordinary objects<sup>9</sup>. This, in some ways, explains the frequent use of C-C than C-A mapping in the analysis of Alias's work).

Overall, as shown in Table 10, there seems to be convergence among all the four poets as far as the preference for directionality in terms of salience is concerned. The majority of the similes conform to standard directionality and very few similes display second-degree violation. In fact, two of the poets (Usman and Masuri) do not employ similes with second-degree violation in the data.

In Table 11, the results of mappings in terms of salience are further broken down into different mappings.

Notice that as far as standard directionalities are concerned, the S-S

<sup>9</sup>This can be observed from the titles of his poems such as: *Busur dan Panah* ('Bows and Arrows'), *Lumut* ('Moss'), *Genting* ('Mountain Pass'), *Lesung* ('Rice Mortar') (Alias, 1990).

mapping is less frequently used than the S-NS mapping in all the four poets' work. In fact, two of them (MHS and Masuri) do not employ this mapping in their similes.

Overall, the findings from this analysis show consistency across the contextual factors (historical periods and individual poets) in both analyses in terms of abstraction and analysis in terms of salience. More specifically, it appears that the preferences for certain directionalities are not affected by the different historical periods or by the different individual poets. So, the Malay data generally provides support for the claims made in CCT regarding the contextual factors.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis show that there are indeed preferences towards particular directionalities both in terms of abstraction and in terms of salience in the Malay poetic similes in the data. The preferences in these similes adhere to what Shen regards as standard and basic, and are generally not affected by the identified contextual factors. In other words, the preference for standard directionality and the lack of preference for the non-standard are found to be generally

consistent across historical periods as well as across the individual poets. These findings in many ways are important because they rule out two contextual factors that could potentially influence the tendencies in the Malay poetic data and thus, lend further support for Shen's claim about the role of cognitive constraints in the construction of poetic similes.

However, a closer scrutiny of the results shows that there are in fact small variations across the contextual factors. In the analysis based on historical periods for example, a particular directionality is used more frequently in one of the periods compared to the other. By taking into account the sub-factors that are related to the historical periods (i.e., literary movements, poetic manifestoes, themes employed in the poems), we can see how the discrepancies could occur across the time periods. There is also a slight discrepancy in the results of the individual poets, which could be attributed to their personal styles of writing.

These latter findings in many ways are important because they show an aspect of Cognitive Constraint Theory that Shen has not noted in his studies (Shen, 1995, 1997b). More specifically, the results in this study have shown that although contextual factors like historical periods and individual poets do not influence patterns of preference in poetic similes, they do affect the extent to which the cognitive constraints apply.

To conclude, the results of the findings confirm the claims made in CCT regarding regularities in figures of speech regardless of contexts such as historical periods,

language and individual poets. However, the abstraction/ salience analysis is carried out at a very high level of generality. It ignores cultural differences, the distinction between novelty and conventionality of the simile, and any elements related to the background of the data (e.g., history) and others. These issues need to be considered for a better understanding of the data and also as variables, that may affect how "natural" or comprehensible a particular simile actually is.

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