



Seeking Justice through Metaphors: A Semantic Analysis of Ahmet Altan's Trial Defense in 2018

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the metaphors found in Ahmet Altan's 2018 courtroom defense speech through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory from a semantic perspective. Altan's defense is considered not merely as a legal statement but as a literary text, a language of conscience, and a construction of justice. The metaphors in the text create a narrative world in which abstract concepts such as justice, law, freedom, and conscience are represented through concrete imagery. The study classifies these metaphors based on source domain–target domain mappings and explores how literature, particularly in authoritarian political contexts, contributes to the realization of justice. The findings indicate that Altan's defense, through metaphor, constructs both an individual form of resistance and a public imagination of justice on an aesthetic level.

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor; Semantics; Law and Literature; Ahmet Altan*

1. Introduction

Literature is not only an aesthetic and individual form of expression, but is also the carrier of social memory, critical thought, and conscience. Literature and law do not only obtain the same color under similar influence, but also affect one another. Law sometimes provides a topic for literature, and, in turn, literature attempts to modify some articles of law" (Topuzkanamış, 2014, p. 8). Literature is connected to many disciplines in this respect. This connection of literature is not only limited to social sciences but also steadfast in science. An astrophysicist conveys a scientific reality s/he has discovered to the world of science through words and sentences, and often employs narrative and fictional methods of literature during the process of transferring it. This can be noticed in the example of the relativity of time perception attributed to Albert Einstein: "If you sit with a beautiful girl for an hour, it feels like a minute to you. If you sit on a hot stove for a minute, it feels like an hour." (Kozmik Anafor, 2023). This statement highlights how time can vary according to subjective experiences.

People resort to language, the founding tool of literature, to make sense of abstract realities and give meaning to the world they live in. Social and natural events move towards facts through narrative with the use of certain special forms of language within the framework of certain rules. Literature is a platform where language is demonstrated in the most intense and layered manner. Metaphors appear before us as the building blocks of cognitive and cultural experiences in this platform. “The Conceptual Metaphor Theory”, put forward by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (2005) in their study called *Metaphors*, positions metaphors as the main factors of mental processes and contends that individuals associate abstract concepts with concrete experiences. Therefore, metaphors are structural parts of both thought and language.

The metaphors that Ahmet Altan used in his 2018 court defense text are significant in terms of demonstrating what he understands from the abstract field of law and how he exemplifies injustices through metaphors. The language of the defense text in question is not only a tool that depicts lawlessness, but also provides concrete testimony for abstract concepts like the judiciary, freedom, conscience, and justice. The text is a concrete proof of how literature can be functional as a base of resistance against lawlessness, bearing witness to the functioning of Turkey’s recent political and judicial atmosphere. In his defense, Altan highlights his envision of justice that prioritizes conscientious intuitions rather than legal norms; and he achieves this largely through metaphors (Açık Radyo, 2023).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the areas of intent of the metaphors used in Ahmet Altan's defense text, one or more areas (Punter, 2024, p. 57), in the light of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Through this analysis, it is aimed to make visible the role that literature can play in the reconstruction of some facts in the field of law and the establishment of justice.

In times when the law remained silent, the judiciary became instrumentalized, and situations were manipulated through the law, literary texts served as concrete examples for becoming the voice of conscience, the witness of truth, and the spokesperson of the search for justice. In this context, Neşe Kızıl (2022) shared Vincenzo Ruggiero's approach to literature as follows: "The way to examine and think in depth, free from human prejudices and rote learning, is through literature." In his work entitled *Crime in Literature*, Vincenzo Ruggiero (2003) criticized and even condemned social scientists who underestimated literature and separated it from science, and, with connotative expressions, declared that literature had a spirit and depth that made law meaningful (p. 2).

Literary texts can undertake the function of justice that laws cannot fulfill institutionally, from a human perspective, on an aesthetic and ethical level. A. Camus’s *The Stranger*, V. Hugo’s *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*, L. N. Tolstoy’s *The Resurrection*, Y. M. Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* are concrete examples of this. In this context, Ahmet Altan’s defense, too, is one of the solid examples of literature’s contribution to society’s vision of justice. Defense is not only an individual’s search for rights, but it can also be regarded as a literary call to the public conscience.

This study attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the prominent metaphors for justice in Ahmet Altan's defense text?
- Which conceptual areas do these metaphors correspond to?
- Can such texts that were constructed with rich metaphors be an epistemological expansion tool for justice in describing, analyzing, and overcoming the injustice experienced? Conducted within the framework of these questions above, the study aimed to reveal the discursive typologies of metaphors, which are the constituent components of the defense text, as well as their possible contributions to legal processes through their denotations. Additionally, the study underlined how literature and law become interdisciplinary through metaphors.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Relationship between Literature and Law

2.1.1. Making and Interpreting Laws

It was identified that there was a direct relationship between literature and law, as law is a written text and is concerned with the interpretation of laws. Yazıcı, Şkop, and Aydın (2017) illustrated the relationship between law and literature as follows: “Why should law and literature be associated with one another? Because literature contains important findings concerning the ability to interpret and develop arguments. When considering a judicial text, such as laws, indictment, defense, summary of judgment, etc., lawyers should assume the role of a literary critic. They should develop strategies regarding the interpretation of the text, know how to analyze its deeper meanings, and apply their acquired knowledge” (Kornstein, 1998, p. 117). Therefore, the orientation of legal interpretation in this direction can be considered as a manifestation of literature in law. Literature has various tools that strengthen the narrative. It also improves understanding and interpreting texts (p. 351).

Literature also plays a decisive role in the correct interpretation of the law, especially by the legal experts who pass judgment and distribute justice, and in the formal, clear, and concise disposition of the decisions that legal experts dictate. It can be claimed that the abundance of associations and the power of expression they acquire by reading literary works are effective in the decisions that legal experts make. Whether they are judges, prosecutors, or defense attorneys, a legal expert must know people very well in every situation. The accuracy of legal decisions built on understanding and interpretation is also related to the ability to imagine people in an individual and socially comprehensive manner that compels people to act. Therefore, it is quite clear that literature, which is about the relationship between people and people and society, things, and God since the very beginning of its existence, will guide legal experts in becoming acquainted with people. As it will enrich their imaginations on human states, it has widely been observed, especially in the 20th century, for legal experts refer to literary texts during the formation process. Necip Fazıl's work, *Reis Bey*, is the most tangible example of this. Through literary texts and language that is the tool for their production, legal experts also acquire the ability to empathize more deeply with those who demand justice. Whether it is literature or law, both use humans as a base, they appeal to human emotions and thoughts, and deal with the depths of human conscience (Kızıllı, 2015, p. 6).

2.2. Creating Consciousness for Justice

The relationship between law and literature is not limited to a narrow perspective that can be evaluated solely through linguistic structures, openness to interpretation, or the effect of language and literature on the formal construction of judicial decisions. The intersection of these two disciplines can also be approached on a deeper plane that contributes to the manifestation of justice at the social level. Literature emerges as a sub-discipline that indirectly helps law by making human experience, conflicts, injustices, and quests for rights visible through narrative, and by ensuring the development of a sense of justice in the individual and society.

In this context, the most fundamental contribution of literature to law lies in its function of forming and strengthening consciousness for social justice. In addition, literature has functioned throughout history as a kind of platform for conscientious resistance against injustice and has become a medium that keeps the demand for justice alive in the social memory instead of legal systems that have lost their voice in the face of authoritarian structures. In this respect, it has also built a collective consciousness and a foundation for struggle against injustice. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* can be read not only as a psychological analysis of an individual crime but also as a philosophical inquiry into the meaning of justice, conscience, and punishment. Raskolnikov's internal conflict represents a much deeper conscientious reckoning than the formal structure of law. Such literary examples reveal how

effective the empathy, sensitivity, and conscientious awareness opportunities that art, especially literature, can offer in order for the abstract normative structure of law to connect with society and be internalized. Therefore, literature plays both a supportive and transformative role in the construction of a social order and a democratic state structure based on the rule of law, and emerges as an important cultural platform that develops the capacity for resistance against injustice.

There is a consensus that using literature in legal education will be effective in making correct and conscientious decisions. Legal issues, illegalities, and criticisms towards members of the judiciary that can be the subject of literary works, prepare the ground for the formation of public opinion against illegalities. When literature questions the nature and function of law, power, and justice, law and literature grow closer (Şahin, 2024, pp. 225–229). The contribution of literature to both the formation of legal awareness in the public and the sensitivity of legal people in establishing justice while applying the law is an undeniable truth.

2.2.1. The Instrumental Role of Literature in Giving Voice to Conscience and Justice

Literature does not merely offer an aesthetic representation of social events but also provides an ethical arena of witnessing. Literary texts, especially in authoritarian and political processes, are the symbolic expressions of injustices, contradictions, and forms of resistance that cannot be directly articulated. Narrative genres, such as novels, short stories, and plays, offer readers insight into the background of events, the conscience of the offender, and an intuitive analysis of extralegal processes. In this context, literature becomes the voice of conscience and justice in cases where laws are not applied or are manipulated. One historical example of this functionality is Émile Zola's open letter titled "*J'Accuse...!*", addressed to French President Félix Faure and published in the newspaper *L'Aurore* on January 13, 1898. With this text, Zola chose to be the voice of conscience rather than the law, demonstrating how literature could serve as a tool for intervention against social injustice. Similarly, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in his work *The Gulag Archipelago*, presented the systematic oppression and illegal practices in the Soviet Union, transforming literature into a space for historical witnessing and moral confrontation. These examples demonstrate that literature can be not only an aesthetic pursuit but also an ethical and political form of action. Throughout history, literature has served as a domain of conscientious resistance against injustice, keeping the demand for justice alive in the collective memory when legal systems have lost their voice in the face of authoritarian structures.

According to Can Şahin (2024), law relies on abstraction, whereas literature leans on individualization; this enables literature to provide a complementary foundation for law (p. 227). Therefore, while literature facilitates the social contextualization of law's abstract normative structure, at the same time, it also undertakes a transformative role in constructing the human-centered and conscientious dimensions of justice. "In his work entitled *Condemned Man*, Victor Hugo succeeded in stirring compassion and mercy in the hearts of readers... Thus, many literary works blossomed around the theme of capital punishment" (Topuzkanamış, 2014, p. 9).

2.3. Metaphor and Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The word *metaphor* "originated from the combination of the Greek words 'meta' and 'phrein', referring to mental/linguistic processes related to transferring or carrying certain aspects of one thing to another" (Cebeci 2019, p. 10). In Turkish, *metaphor* is expressed in its most straightforward form with the indicators "eğretileme" and "iğretileme." For authors who perceive metaphor as "transferring knowledge from a familiar domain to a less familiar one by relying on one entity to understand another" (Yazıcı 2022, p. 625), nature offers an almost infinite range of possibilities. Through metaphors of nature and animals, literature has made human psychological and social aspects more concrete (Устуньер 2004). These concretizations have been the main source in the elucidation of human nature and in creating conceptual metaphors.

Metaphors, which were previously studied using classical methods, began to be examined from a cognitive perspective with the metaphor theories of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In the introduction part of their work called *Metaphor*, these two authors argued that the human conceptual system is largely metaphorical, and that the way of thinking, the things experienced, and the actions taken are all essentially matters of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2005, p. 25).

In the aforementioned work, Lakoff and Johnson argued that conceptual metaphors are not merely elements of literary embellishments but also basic cognitive tools used by the human mind to make sense of abstract concepts. According to this theory, people conceptualize abstract concepts (e.g., justice, freedom, morality) through concrete domains (balance, light, load, road, etc.). In this process, metaphors are structured with source area-target area mappings. In expressions like “adalet terazisi bozuldu (the scales of justice are broken),” “terazi (scales)” represents the source area, and “adalet (justice)” represents the target area. Metaphors shape both the individual world of thought and cultural/social memories. In this sense, metaphors possess not only linguistic but also ideological and critical functions.

Metaphors used in the representation of justice have appeared in various forms in different societies throughout history. In Ancient Greece, the figures of Themis and Dike symbolized the principles of moderation, balance, and impartiality in justice. These concepts were made visible by the symbols of the “blindfolded woman”, the “scales,” and the “sword” (Küçüktaşdemir, 2016, p. 107).

In medieval Islamic thought, justice was conveyed through the metaphor of “mizan (scales)”. This concept, which represents God’s absolute justice, was regarded as the measure of social order. In the works of Mevlânâ (Rumi), while justice was understood as “putting everything in its rightful place,” this idea was metaphorically illustrated through the example of a gardener watering a tree -that is, distributing water fairly according to the needs of each plant. According to Mevlana, societal disorder is also explained through this metaphorical perspective. If a society is in a state of decay, it is because people commit crimes and do not seek justice. Therefore, God grants them what they deserve, namely, a corrupt social order (Mevlana, 2003, p. 2/2822).

Similar metaphorical patterns are also noteworthy in modern legal discourse. The phrase “the shield of the law” represents the legal protection that safeguards the individual; “the scales of justice” symbolize equality and impartial judgment; and “the sword of justice” stands for the punitive power of the law. In the commonly used expression “the wheels of justice turn slowly but provide the right decision,” justice is conveyed through a machine metaphor, referencing the systematic and deliberate nature of the legal process.

As seen in all these examples, metaphors related to justice do not merely provide conceptual convenience; they also shape the mental framework that establishes trust in the legal system, social order, and critical awareness. Thanks to metaphors, justice ceases to be an abstract ideal and takes on a concrete and guiding form in the collective memory. Thus, metaphors become not only a means of expression but also a powerful cognitive and cultural mechanism that contributes to the establishment, questioning, and reimagining of justice.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research is structured with a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is an interpretive approach that allows an in-depth examination of the individual's world of meaning and social reality in its natural environment. In this method, events and phenomena are addressed within the

framework of the meanings individuals attribute to them. Through data collection techniques such as observation, interview, document, and discourse analysis, the research topic is evaluated within its context and from a holistic perspective. (Baltacı, 2019, p. 370).

3.2. Population and Sampling

The universe of the research consists of the works of Ahmet Altan. His defense statement, which he read in court during his imprisonment in 2018, was selected as the sample of the study using the Monographic Sampling Method, one of the non-probability sampling methods. According to this method, to select a sample, "typical representatives are taken from the categories that constitute the universe to be examined. Although it contains certain challenges, this method is used as a preliminary research tool to shed light on specific issues" (Ergin 1994: 91-102).

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data of the study consisted of the metaphors related to justice in the defense statement in question. The identification, collection, and analysis of the data were carried out in three stages: (1) identifying metaphors, (2) determining conceptual domain mappings in these metaphors, and (3) comparative interpretation of semantic structures.

Metaphors were classified under three headings: structural, ontological, and orientational. The conceptual structure represented by each metaphor was subjected to content analysis. Content analysis has become a powerful qualitative research technique. It systematically analyzes the content of written, visual, or auditory documents. This method is among the qualitative research methods and allows researchers to gain in-depth information about a specific topic or issue (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 78).

4. Findings And Discussions

4.1. "This text, which is alleged to be an indictment, lacks intelligence and law, and is too feeble to bear the weight of a formidable sentence such as aggravated life imprisonment, does not in any way deserve a serious defense."¹

Metaphorical expression: "Lacking intelligence and law"

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor

Source Domain: Human (a cognitive and ethical being)

Target Domain: Indictment (legal text)

Semantic Connection: In this metaphor, the indictment is no longer treated as an abstract document but is rather conceived as "human". Concepts such as "intelligence" and "law" are generally associated with reason, judgment, and ethical values. Here, by stating that the indictment lacked these qualities, it was implied that it was deficient both cognitively (intellectually) and morally. Thus, a personality was attributed to the document, but it lacked reason and justice.

Metaphorical expression: A sentence as formidable as aggravated life imprisonment.

Metaphor Type: Structural Metaphor

¹ Quotations from Ahmet Altan's defense statement made in court were accessed from the following address: Açık Radyo. <https://apacikradyo.com.tr/makale-yorum-analiz/ahmet-altanin-savunmasinin-tam-metni>. Accessed October 5, 2023).

Source Domain: Physical Weight, Massive Size

Target Domain: Punishment (an abstract legal sanction)

Semantic Connection: Here, the punishment was conceptualized as a “burden” or a “mass”. The adjective “formidable” describes the size, effect, and weight of the punishment through a physical object. The abstract concept of “punishment” was virtually portrayed as a crushing, difficult-to-bear weight. This pattern suggested that the legal sanctions were perceived not only as material elements but also as psychological and symbolic pressures. From the perspective of the defense statement, the indictment appeared extremely weak and insubstantial when compared to the magnitude of the requested punishment.

Metaphorical expression: This feeble text, lacking the strength to bear the weight of the punishment

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Orientational Metaphor

Source Domain: Weak Human Body, Act of Carrying

Target Domain: Indictment (legal document)

Semantic Connection: Here, the indictment was likened to a “feeble”, that is, a weak and powerless body. The verb “to bear” functioned as an orientational metaphor, related to lifting and carrying a burden. In other words, the indictment was too feeble to carry the heavy punishment imposed upon it. This was a critical reference to both the inadequacy of the content and the disproportionality of the trial. At the same time, it described the insufficiency of a legal text, which formed the foundation of the justice system through physical incapacity.

When these three metaphors come together, they form a multi-layered narrative that reveals the invalidity of the indictment not only on a legal level but also on ethical and cognitive levels. Through these metaphors, Altan implied that the judicial process has ceased to be a ground for reasoning and has instead turned into a structural theater of injustice. In this respect, the defense statement becomes both an act of personal resistance and an aesthetic critique of the legal system that appeals to the public conscience.

4.2 “But When I Saw the Lies Told About Me, I Came to Understand More Clearly What Kind of a Judicial Massacre the Thousands of People Imprisoned after July 15 Had Fallen Victim to.”

Metaphorical expression: Victim of a judicial massacre

Metaphor Type: Structural Metaphor, Ontological Metaphor

Source Domain: Massacre (physical act involving violence and death), victim (defenseless, harmed living being)

Target Domain: Legal system / judicial processes

Concepts: Law, Violent perpetrator / Victimized individual, Victim, Judicial process / Instrument of physical and collective destruction

Semantic Connection: Here, the expression “judicial massacre” suggests that the judicial system has ceased to be a structure that establishes justice, but instead has become a tool that systematically targets and harms individuals. The concept of “massacre,” typically associated with physical violence, collective harm, and irreversible destruction, is metaphorically applied to an abstract notion such as law. Thus, “law” is framed as a force of destruction. The term “victim” positions

individuals as passive, defenseless, and trapped, with no means of escape. This metaphor draws attention to the oppressive and cruel nature of the system by transforming individual victimization into an example of collective injustice.

4.2. “Since I Can't Be the Only Person Lies Have Been Told About, We Have to Accept That Such Indictments Filled with Lies Are Like Poison Ivy, Entangling the Judiciary and Choking It.”

Metaphorical Expression: Entangling the judiciary like poison ivy and choking it

Metaphor Type: Structural Metaphor, Ontological Metaphor, Partially Orientational Metaphor

Source Domain: Poison ivy / Choking plant / Physical suffocation

Target Domain: Judicial institution (judicial system)

Concepts: Indictments / Poison ivy (harmful, invasive, pervasive), Judiciary / A living organism (a body that can be suffocated)

Semantic Connection: Here, the metaphor of “poison ivy” symbolizes how indictments full of lies envelop the judicial system and render it dysfunctional. Ivy is a plant that grows silently over time, wrapping itself tightly around its host. The qualifier “poisonous” emphasizes that it is not only entangling but also lethal. The phrase “entangling the judiciary” functions as an orientational metaphor, implying a form of threat that spreads from the outside to the inside. The verb “suffocate” symbolizes a physical pressure that prevents the judiciary from breathing. Here, the judiciary is conceived as a living organism, while the indictments are portrayed as a toxic threat that renders it dysfunctional.

Metaphorical expression: Courthouse / legal slaughterhouse

Metaphor Type: Structural Metaphor, Ontological Metaphor

Source Domain: Slaughterhouse (a place where animals are systematically slaughtered) / Forceful suppression, destruction, bloody intervention

Target Domain: Courthouse / judicial system/court buildings

Concept: Justice system/place of violence / destructive structure

Semantic Connection: The courthouse is traditionally seen as a place where justice is served—an institution that inspires trust and holds symbolic sanctity. However, Altan here redefines this space as a legal slaughterhouse. This transformation shows the desecration of institutional sanctity on a conceptual level and the reduction of the justice system to a mechanism of violence. A “slaughterhouse” is a place of death where living beings are slaughtered, where escape is not possible, and where the outcome is predetermined. In this context, a “legal slaughterhouse” is a place where individuals’ rights are systematically violated and where destruction, not justice, is produced. This is a metaphor for systemic collapse. The stark contrast between the institution’s name and its perceived reality is ironically emphasized, increasing critical power.

4.3. “Mehmet Altan Has a Favorite Saying He Loves: 'When You Look at a Single Drop of Blood, You See All the Illnesses in the Body,' He Says. Now, When We Examine This Indictment as If It Were That Drop of Blood, We Will See, Along with the Whole World, That the Legal System Has Caught Leprosy and Its Flesh Is Falling Off in Pieces.”

Metaphorical Expression: The legal system has caught leprosy, its flesh is falling off in pieces

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor

Source Domain: Body / Organic structure, Medicine / Diseases (blood, leprosy, tissue decay)

Target Domain: Legal system, Judicial structure, Indictment

Concepts: Indictment / A drop of blood (diagnostic tool), Legal system / Human body, leprosy / institutional collapse, flesh falling off / systematic disintegration, destruction

Semantic Connection: In this metaphor, the indictment is depicted as a sample used to diagnose the entire system, just like a drop of blood examined in a laboratory environment. Just like the diseases hidden in blood, the indictment also exposes the structural deterioration of the legal system. The metaphor of “catching leprosy” represents not only moral and legal decay, but also social exclusion and irreparable decay. Here, the legal system is portrayed as an organism—one that has become dysfunctional and is internally falling apart piece by piece. The image of “flesh falling off”, on the other hand, suggests that the system is too weak to stand, fragmented and collapsed in front of the public. This metaphor dramatically reflects a radical criticism of the legal system through images of organic disintegration. Through the horrifying connotations of leprosy, it reflects how society perceives the justice mechanism.

4.4. “But I Believe in the Proverb that Says, 'Law Sometimes Sleeps But Never Dies.' I Know That the Law, Which Has Been Shot, Wounded, Bleeding, and Put Into a Coma Today, Will One Day Recover and Return to Life.”

Metaphorical Expression: Law sometimes sleeps, but never dies. I know that the law, which has been shot, wounded, bleeding, and put into a coma today, will one day recover and return to life.

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor

Source Domain: Human body, Sleep/illness/trauma/coma, Medical recovery processes

Target Domain: Legal system, Justice mechanism

Concepts: Law / Human (a living, vulnerable, recoverable organism), Sleep / Temporary inactivity, Death / The absolute end of law (but not happening), Being shot/wounded / bleeding / Justice taking a hit, Coma / Dysfunction, paralysis, Regaining health / Justice becoming functional again

Semantic Connection: This series of metaphors portrays the law as a living, breathing being—one that can suffer pain and recover. The phrase “it sleeps but does not die” expresses the idea that the law may become dysfunctional from time to time, but it never truly ceases to exist. The subsequent metaphors, “being shot”, “bleeding”, and “falling into a coma,” express the traumas, attacks, and severe functional loss experienced by the justice system. However, expressions such as “recovering” and “returning to life” emphasize the system’s capacity for healing and hope for revival. In this narrative, the law is constructed as a living organism that has suffered physical traumas but has the potential to get back on its feet. Thus, both criticism of the present state and optimism about the future are combined within the same framework.

4.5. “Therefore, by Tearing Apart This So-Called Indictment - This Rootless and Baseless Text - I Will Narrate What I Have to Say as a Counter-Indictment, Leaving Behind a Record for the Day When Oppression Ends and the Rule of Law Returns...”

Metaphorical Expression: Rootless and baseless

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor

Source Domain: Nature / Botany (root), Architecture / Construction (foundation)

Target Domain: Legal text (indictment), Justice system / Judicial bodies of the state

Semantic Connection: Here, the “indictment” is not treated as an ordinary text, but rather as if it were a building or a living organism. A building cannot stand without a foundation; a tree cannot survive without roots. Similarly, this text has neither a legal background (root) nor a logical and legal infrastructure (foundation). Therefore, its existence is temporary, and its collapse is inevitable. This expression renders the text not merely incomplete but also ontologically “null and void”, turning it into an entity that will fall, collapse, or decay.

4.6. “I Seem to Remember Hearing about a Concept Called ‘Individual Criminal Responsibility.’ Did You Kill That Too When You Shot the Law?”

Metaphorical Expression: “Did you kill that too when you shot the law?”

Metaphor Type: Structural Metaphor, Ontological Metaphor

Source Domain: War / Murder / Physical Violence, Human life (to kill, to shoot)

Target Domain: Legal system, Fundamental principles of law (such as individual responsibility for crimes)

Semantic Connection: In this sentence, law is presented as a living being that has been shot, that is, subjected to a systematic and deliberate attack. However, what is even more striking is that an abstract principle, the concept of “individual criminal responsibility,” is also said to have been killed in this assault. Thus, law is destroyed not only as an institution but also with the very principles that sustain it. The metaphor used here proceeds through a powerful pairing established between physical violence and abstract concepts, as if a bullet has been fired into the heart of justice. Although the principle of “individual criminal responsibility” is one of the most fundamental cornerstones of legal history, it has been subjected to such reckless violence that it has become one of the first victims.

This style of expression is not only critical but also carries a dramatic and ethical weight. “Attacking the law” does not only mean a collapse of the system, but also the burial of conscience and civilization.

4.7. “This Accusation Seems to Have Escaped from Another Indictment and Hid in My Indictment for a While.”

Metaphorical Expression: “The accusation seems to have escaped and hidden.”

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor: The accusation is treated as a living and strong-willed entity. Structural Metaphor: The accusation, which is a legal concept, is structured with physical acts of escaping and hiding.

Personification: The accusation is presented as a perpetrator capable of independent action and strategy.

Source Domain: Criminal law / Prison (escape), Hiding / Concealment, Guilt psychology

Target Domain: Legal accusation, Indictment text, The functioning of justice

Semantic Domain: In this metaphor, the accusation is depicted as a prisoner who has escaped from prison. The word "escape" here indicates that the accusation has escaped from its legitimate grounds and taken refuge in another indictment where it does not belong. In other words, this accusation does not truly belong there; it is simply "hiding." This implies that the accusation has lost its legal consistency, contextual validity, and relationship to justice.

4.8. "It Is Dragging the Entire Country into the Terrifying Darkness of Death..."

Metaphorical expression: "It is dragging the entire country into the terrifying darkness of death."

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor, Orientational Metaphor

Source Domain: Physical spaces (darkness, inside), Natural events (night, shadow), Sense of death / Psychological breakdown

Target Domain: Socio-political state of the country, Social mood, Atmosphere of mourning and fear

Conceptual Match: Darkness of death/Hopelessness, oppression, human rights violations

Dragging the country into a place/imposing a collective emotional condition on society, Frightening / darkness, Repressive regime, lack of future, climate of fear

Semantic Connection: In this sentence, "death" is not merely treated as a physical end, but as a social collapse, and a collective state of collapse. The "darkness" of death metaphorically represents elements such as hopelessness, loss of truth, fear, and the absence of freedom of expression. With the use of the verb "to drag," the country is depicted as being forcibly pushed into this darkness, like an organism removed from light and hope.

4.9. "Tyranny Is Weakness with a Weapon In Hand. the More Tyranny Grows, the More Weakness Grows With It. In the End, Tyranny Is Defeated, and Justice Prevails."

Metaphorical Expression: Tyranny is weakness with a weapon in hand.

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor

Source Domain: Military vehicles / Weapon, Psychological states (weakness, fear), War and struggle metaphors

Target Domain: Authoritarian regimes, Repressive governments / Lawless structures, Fear and helplessness behind tyranny

Conceptual Match: Weapon / Physical or structural power (use of force, oppression), Weakness / Moral baselessness, lack of legitimacy, Law / Victorious power (light, truth), Tyranny / Coward with a weapon in hand (helpless structure)

Semantic Connection: At first glance, tyranny seems strong because it has a weapon in its hand, but this power is merely a camouflage. In reality, what lies behind tyranny is not power, but fear. In this respect, tyranny is presented as a weakness that attacks to protect itself, and each new act of violence signals the growth of that weakness. The expression in the last sentence, "tyranny is defeated, justice prevails," represents a moral stance that justice will ultimately triumph, even if it is late.

4.10. "As You Increase Oppression and Strangle the Law, the Country's Credibility Will Be Destroyed. In Lawless and Unreliable Countries, Domestic and Foreign Investments Come to a Halt. The Economy Collapses. Inflation and Unemployment Rise Rapidly."

Metaphorical Expression: Strangling the law, the Economy collapses, Inflation and unemployment rise rapidly

Metaphor Type: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor, Violence Metaphor

Source Domain: Human body / Strangulation, Construction / Collapse, Physical explosion

Target Domain: Functioning of the legal system, Economic credibility of the state, Indicators of macroeconomic crisis

Conceptual Match: Strangling the law / Destruction of the rule of law, Country's credibility disappears / State's loss of legitimacy in the eyes of investors, Economy collapses / Systemic economic crisis, Inflation/unemployment rise / Sudden, devastating social impacts

Semantic Connection: The law is presented as a living being capable of being strangled. Its strangulation cuts off not only justice but also the vital veins of the country's credibility. The economy collapses like a building because its foundation rests on trust. Investment is a matter of trust; if there is law, investment comes. Otherwise, inflation and unemployment rise rapidly, engulfing society like seismic destruction.

4.11. "And Thus, He Finally Takes Off His Mask And Spills the Beans. After Pages of Talk and Nonsense, This Prosecutor Finally Says What He Wants to Say In This Last Paragraph I Read."

Metaphorical Expressions: Taking off the mask and spilling the beans. Word salad and nonsense

Metaphor Types: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor, Spatial Metaphor,

Source Domain: Stage / Masked theater, Meal / Food, Body language / Dialect, and expression

Target Domain: Prosecutor's true intentions, Ideological orientation in the indictment, Manipulation of the legal process

Conceptual Match: Removing the mask / Revealing hidden intentions, Spilling the beans / Explicitly stating the real target, Word salad / Incoherent and Meaningless parts of the indictment, Nonsense / Subjective and invalid legal claims

Semantic Connection: The metaphors in the paragraph present the prosecutor's text as a kind of theatrical stage. The intention hidden in the pages of verbiage and confusion is finally made clear at the end of the text. The act of taking off the mask and spilling the beans depicts not only an exposure but also a moral decline.

4.12. "I'm Not Someone Who Would Cowardly Throw Away Decades Behind Me for Just a Few Years Ahead."

Metaphorical Expression: Throwing away the decades behind me for a few years ahead

Metaphor Types: Ontological Metaphor, Structural Metaphor

Source Domain: Spatial orientation (front/back), Material value / Object (throwing away), Fear and courage

Target Domain: Past experience and personal labor, Moral decisions about the future, Integrity, and cowardice

Conceptual Match: The few years ahead / The near future, The decades behind me / Past accumulation of experience and labor, Throwing away / Devaluation, denial, Cowardice / Yielding to pressure, betrayal of personal principles

Semantic Connection: This metaphor presents life as a walking path. The past is the treasure that a person carries behind, while the future is the unknown that lies ahead. However, with this sentence, the author emphasizes that they will not deny their past or 'throw it away' for the sake of short-term fears. Here, the garbage symbolizes a loss of value, an erasure of identity, and a betrayal of personal history.

4.13. "And I Wrote, '...I Suppose We're Watching the Final Act of a Bad Play. The Cost Is a Bit Heavy, But It's Still Good to Know That It Will End.'"

Metaphorical Expression: Watching the final act of a bad play

Metaphor Types: Structural Metaphor, Ontological Metaphor, Time Metaphor

Source Domain: Theatre art (play, stage, curtain), Being a spectator, Psychological resilience (paying the price)

Target Domain: Political/Social processes, Individual or collective pain, Hope and belief in an eventual end

Conceptual Match: Bad play / poor governance, oppressive regime, Final act / The process nearing its end, the final stage, Watching / Individual's role, witnessing, The price is high / The pain suffered, the losses suffered, Knowing that it will end / Hope, patience, psychological resistance

Semantic Connection: The sentence compares the difficult process to a theater play. This play is a bad one, full of lies, fear, and oppression. However, the audience, that is, the individual, endures it knowing that this process will eventually come to an end. Hope is the light that shines at the end of the tunnel.

4.14. "It Is a Shame for This Country and Its Judicial System to Imprison And Put Us on Trial Just Because of Our Ideas and Criticism."

Metaphorical Expression: Being imprisoned for ideas and criticism / The disgrace of the judicial system

Metaphor Types: Structural Metaphor, Ontological Metaphor

Source Domain: Human psychology (shame), Freedom of thought and expression, Imprisonment/judging action

Target Domain: Turkey's judicial system, Democratic legitimacy, Conflict between freedom of expression and judicial practice

Conceptual Match: Shame / Moral failure, injustice, Imprisonment / Punishment of thought, Idea and criticism / Non-criminal intellectual activity, Prosecution/ Abuse of a system that should be legitimate

Semantic Connection: The sentence emphasizes that the crime of thought is shameful for both the individual and the system. The judicial system is portrayed as an organism that can feel ashamed,

and it is implied that the moral legitimacy of the state collapses when it loses its ethical foundation.

5. Conclusion

Through the examination of Ahmet Altan's defense statement that he read in court in 2018 in terms of *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, an attempt was made to reveal how a legal text turned into a literary instrument of testimony and resistance. The study sought answers to four fundamental questions:

First, the study identifies the prominent metaphors in Altan's defense statement and the conceptual domains to which they correspond. In the analyses, metaphors such as "the legal system contracting leprosy", "the courthouse turning into a slaughterhouse", "the indictment as a rootless tree", and "the law falling into a coma" attracted attention. These metaphors, drawn from different source domains such as body, disease, death, space, nature, theater, formed conceptual structures that redefine the relationship between law, justice, the judiciary, and the individual. The majority of these metaphors are ontological and structural metaphors, depicting the law as a living but wounded entity and the judiciary as a systematic instrument of oppression.

Second, the study explored what kind of understanding of justice, judiciary, and freedom was constructed through these metaphors. The perception of justice constructed in Altan's text was that law was not only a set of normative texts but also a moral and conscientious order. The judiciary was not depicted as an impartial arbiter, but rather as an arbitrary and ideological instrument. Freedom, in this context, was not presented as a possession of the individual but as the final space of resistance built through words, at a time when even the system itself was deprived of its own language. In this respect, the metaphors not only make visible the collapse of justice but also offer an implicit call for its reconstruction.

Third, the study evaluated how the text positions itself as a space of literary testimony and resistance through conceptual metaphors. The defense text was a narrative that encompassed literary, aesthetic, and political elements rather than a conventional legal statement. The trial itself was reconstructed as a stage, the legal text as a body, and the defense as a weapon of narration. In this respect, the text represented not only an individual's defense; it is also a powerful testimony addressed to the conscience, collective memory, and future visions of justice.

Finally, the study discussed how literature, through such texts, contributed to the manifestation of justice. Here, literature was not merely a space that exposed injustice, but also a site of resistance with the potential to generate an alternative language of justice. Altan's text pierced the silence of the law through words and transformed into a universal call for justice that resonated within collective memory.

In this context, the overall conclusion of the study was that literature, especially in oppressive political contexts, intervened in legal discourse by making conscience, intuition, and ethical stance visible through metaphors. In this sense, Altan's text became not only the voice of an individual but also the expression of a collective sense of justice; it has carried the boundaries between law and literature to a permeable and constitutive foundation through metaphors.

As a recommendation, literature should be used more actively in legal education, not only as an aesthetic element but also as a tool that fosters empathy, intuition, and critical thinking. Integrating conceptual metaphor analyses into legal pedagogy would encourage legal professionals to think not only in terms of norms but also in terms of human conditions. Furthermore, examining different defense texts or literary works with the theme of justice with similar methods would both enrich the literature-law relationship and strengthen the public and ethical dimension of the sense of justice.

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