



Heaven and Hell: A cross-linguistic semantic template for supernatural places

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to devise a cross-linguistic semantic template for supernatural place terms. To achieve this objective, six supernatural place concepts were analysed, and an explication for each concept was built. Comparing the explications yielded a seven-part semantic template. The usefulness of this semantic template is threefold: First, it eases the task of explicating supernatural place concepts because the parts of the template can serve as guidelines to be followed while constructing the explications. Second, it makes it easier to compare related supernatural place concepts from different languages. Third, it unveils the devices embodied in the structure of supernatural place concepts and which enable people to use these complex concepts without difficulty.

KEYWORDS

Supernatural Place
Concepts;
Cross-linguistic
Semantic Template;
NSM

1. Introduction

Jeffery B. Russell (2006) remarks that the concept of *the afterlife* appears in most religions, but its greatest impact appears most prominently in the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The reason for this prominent influence, as Russell notes, is that these three religions deal with the problem that human beings live in a world which does not always reward the good and punish the evil. As a result, there is a necessity for an *afterlife* in which the good are rewarded and the bad are chastised.

Being central and significant to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, discussing the English concepts of *heaven* and *hell* and their Arabic and Hebrew near equivalents can be of interest, not only to anthropologists, theologians, and supporters of inter-religious dialogue, but also to linguists. Although much has been written about these concepts from a theological and anthropological viewpoint, very little has been written about them using a linguistic, and more specifically lexicographic, perspective. Nothing has been written about what these concepts have in common semantically, and no published work has dealt with a certain structural pattern that is shared by the definitions of these concepts. Unveiling such a pattern can be useful in defining

any supernatural place term, as the components of this pattern can work as guidelines that tell the linguist what to include in his or her definition of this term.

In defining the target concepts and attempting to find out the structural pattern mentioned above, the researcher needs a method that can ward off complexity and ambiguity. One method that has proved itself as an effective tool in semantic analysis is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage, or for short NSM.

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) is a semantic approach developed and employed by Anna Wierzbicka, Cliff Goddard, and colleagues over a period of about four decades (Wierzbicka 1972, 1985; Peeters 2006; Gladkova 2010; Habib 2011b; Levisen 2013; Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002, 2014). It is employed to explicate the meanings of words and concepts in a variety of fields and disciplines, such as sociology (Goddard 2000; Peeters 2004; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2007b), psychology (Travis 1998; Wierzbicka 1998a; Gladkova 2007, 2010), and religion (Wierzbicka 1993, 1998b, 1999, 2001; Habib 2014).

To clarify meaning, the NSM approach relies on three key concepts: ‘semantic primes’, ‘semantic molecules’, and ‘semantic templates’.

Semantic primes refer to meanings which cannot be defined in simpler terms. They have been identified in typologically and genetically different languages, which supports the hypothesis that these simple terms are universal. At present, the number of these primes stands at 65, as can be seen from Table 1.

If constructed using semantic primes only, the explications of some complex words could be very long. To overcome this problem, semantic molecules can be employed along with the semantic primes. Semantic molecules are words which are relatively simple but definable. Some of these semantic molecules can be explicated using semantic primes only, while others require both semantic primes and simpler semantic molecules in their explications (Goddard 2007b, 2010). For example, the explication of the word *blue* includes the semantic molecule *colour*, which can be explicated using semantic primes only (Wierzbicka 2008). When a semantic molecule is used in an explication, it is followed by an ‘m’ in square brackets.

The explications of words belonging to the same semantic class seem to have the same structure, which is called a *semantic template*. For example, the semantic template for non-human being terms is as follows: (1) CATEGORY, (2) EXISTENTIAL STATUS, (3) TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES, (4) NUMBER, (5) LOCATION, (6) NATURE, (7) HIERARCHY, (8) NON-HUMAN BEING VS. PEOPLE, (9) VISUAL REPRESENTATION, AND (10) RELATION WITH PEOPLE (Habib 2011c).

There are two main advantages in establishing a semantic template for a particular semantic class. First, explicating words can be made easier, simply because the parts of the semantic template serve as guidelines that can be followed while constructing the explication. Second, when the explications of words of a certain semantic class are constructed following a similar structure, comparing these explications becomes simpler than when these explications do not follow such a structure. Goddard and Wierzbicka’s (2007a, 2008) work on physical quality adjectives and physical activity verbs lends support to this view.

Semantic templates, as used in NSM, have been devised for a variety of concepts, such as artefact terms, natural kind terms, emotions, physical quality adjectives, physical activity verbs, and

TABLE 1: SEMANTIC PRIMES (ENGLISH EXPONENTS)(GODDARD & WIERZBICKA 2014)

I-ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING-THING, PEOPLE, BODY	Substantives
KIND, PARTS	Relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER-ELSE	Determiners
ONE, TWO, MUCH-MANY, LITTLE-FEW, SOME, ALL	Quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	Evaluators
BIG, SMALL	Descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	Mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	Speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	Actions, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), BE (SOMEONE)'S	Location, existence, specification, possession
LIVE, DIE	Life and death
WHEN-TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	Time
WHERE-PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	Space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	Logical concepts
VERY, MORE	Augmentor, intensifier
LIKE-AS-WAY	Similarity

- Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes)
- Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes or phrasemes
- They can be formally, i.e. morphologically, complex
- They can have combinatorial variants or allolexes (indicated with ~)
- Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

certain abstract nouns (Goddard 1998; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2007a; Wierzbicka 1985, 2009; Habib 2011c). However, no semantic template has yet been proposed for supernatural places. Hence, the aim of this paper is to devise such a template.

2. Research Instrument and Procedure

To achieve the aim of the present paper, six terms will be analysed and explicated using NSM. These six terms are English *heaven* and *hell*, Arabic *janna* and *jahannam*, and Hebrew *gan eden* and *geyhinom*. These six terms will be explicated based on how native English speakers, Muslim Arabs, and native Hebrew speakers use them in their everyday language.

A comment is in order for why the Arabic terms will be explicated based on how Muslim Arabs, rather than native Arabic speakers, understand them. Unlike the Anglo society, the Arab world appears to be much more religious, and religion seems to play a much stronger role in the life of Arabs, in general, than in the lives of native English speakers and native Hebrew speakers, the majority of whom are secular (Gellner 1992; Haynes 1998; Esposito 2000; Harrison 2001; Li 2002; Taylor 2007; Mendes 2009). This reality is reflected in the educational systems in the Arab world, which, contrary to their Anglo counterparts, expose pupils to religious material, not only in religious education classes, but also in Arabic language classes.¹ Because religion plays such an important role in the lives of Arabs, there is reason to believe that Arabs belonging to various religions could conceptualize the same religious term differently. Because the overwhelming majority of Arabs are Muslims, my analysis of the Arabic-language religious concepts will be based on how Muslim Arabs perceive these concepts.

The analysis of the six concepts will rely on corpus analysis, dictionary definitions, as well as the use of some of these concepts in the literature. As for corpus analysis, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (henceforth, COCA) will be used in the analysis of the English terms (Davies 2008).² ArabiCorpus and HebrewCorpus will be used the analysis of the Arabic and Hebrew terms, respectively. COCA includes about 560 million words of text, ArabiCorpus has about 173 million words, and HebrewCorpus has around 150 million words. These corpora present expressions in which the concepts in question occur. In addition, each corpus offers a list of words which collocate with each concept. Of course, not all the collocates help reveal the meaning of the target concept. Take, for example, the words *Clapton* and *heaven*. Both words appear in COCA as collocates. Upon checking the contexts they occur in, the researcher discovers that Clapton is the family name of the author of “Tears in Heaven.” Clearly, the collocation does not tell us anything about the meaning of *heaven*. Therefore, the researcher has to go through the list of collocates and weed out the irrelevant collocates.

From the expressions in which the concepts in question occur and from the words collocating

¹See the school curricula presented in the websites of the ministries of education in Egypt (<http://discoveryeducation.ekb.eg/curriculum/>), Jordan (<http://moe.gov.jo/MenuDetails.aspx?MenuID=91>), Bahrain (<http://www.education.gov.bh/pdf/daleel-masaqat.pdf>), UAE (<https://www.moe.gov.ae/ar/importantlinks/assessment/pages/curriculum.aspx>), and Kuwait (<http://www.moe.edu.kw/student/Pages/curriculum.aspx>), accessed December 8, 2017.

²The reader may wonder whether COCA reflects what native English speakers in general think or what only Americans think as they use the words and expressions discussed in this article. Wierzbicka (2010: 5) notes that American English and British English can profoundly differ both semantically and culturally. Drawing a comparison between these two varieties of English (let alone other varieties) is outside the scope of this article. Further research may be needed to confirm whether native speakers of the different varieties of English conceptualize the terms discussed here similarly or differently.

with each concept, inferences will be drawn regarding what the native speaker may think about the two concepts in his/her language. These inferences will be spelled out using semantic primes and semantic molecules, which constitute the components of the explication of the concept being analysed.

3. The afterlife

This section will analyze the religious meanings of six concepts: English *heaven* and *hell*, Arabic *aljanna* and *jahannam*, as well as Hebrew *gan eden* and *geyhinom*. In each pair, the two concepts exhibit a kind of complementarity, in the sense that mentioning one concept can trigger mentioning the other. To a certain extent, the two concepts in each pair can be thought of as lexical converses, much like the concepts of *black* and *white* or *light* and *darkness*. This is no surprise, as the two concepts in each pair are in alignment with the notions of reward and punishment.

3.1 English *heaven*

Although not all native English speakers believe in the existence of *heaven*, they appear to think of it as a place. It should be observed that there are people who speak of *heaven* as being a “state” rather than a “place” (Zaleski 2003), but one could argue that most native English speakers would tend to think otherwise. This can be supported by the co-occurrence of *gates* with *heaven*; the two appear together 50 times in COCA. Here are two examples:

- (1) *My son, embrace your father for me, for all of us, as he awaits you at the gates of **heaven**.*
- (2) *There is an error at the gates of **Heaven** and a certain engineer, who is supposed to be ushered into paradise, is instead consigned to hell.*

Whether the use of *gate* with *heaven* is figurative or not, it still demonstrates that people tend to imagine *heaven* as a place.

In addition, the word *where* collocates with *heaven* in 157 contexts in COCA; in all 116 contexts, *where* is used as a relative pronoun or a wh-pronoun that refers to *heaven*. The following example is illustrative:

- (3) **Heaven:** *where is it? How do we get there?*

The co-occurrence of *where* with *heaven* suggests that native English speakers view *heaven* as a place. More linguistic evidence comes from songs and other works of literature, in which *heaven* is described as such. Consider, for instance, the refrain of the Talking Heads song “Heaven,” which clearly refers to *heaven* as being a place.

Oh heaven, heaven is a place, a place where nothing, nothing ever happens.
Heaven is a place, a place where nothing, nothing ever happens.

Hence, the first components of the explication of *heaven* read:

English *heaven*

(1a) a place of one kind

 this place isn't like any place of any kind

(1b) some people think like this: "there isn't a place of this kind"

(1c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

Though the first component states that heaven is a place of one kind – implying that there are different kinds of places, of which heaven is but one of them – the subcomponent “this place isn't like any place of any kind” states that heaven, as a place, is very unique. This subcomponent ensures that the reader would not be misled into thinking that the explication is talking about a place that exists in our world. The second component notifies the reader of the contested ontological status of heaven, while the third component introduces the components that follow as depicting what native English speakers *can* say when describing heaven, irrespective of their belief or disbelief in its existence.

COCA data show that heaven is viewed as the ‘habitat’ of God, angels, and all those good people who pass away. The words *God* and *heaven* are found together in 307 contexts in COCA. In 138 out of the 307 contexts, *God* is described as being in *heaven*. Two of these 138 contexts are:

- (4) “*You're saying,*” *the angel said, “that he has generated us as characters in a book He is writing, and when it is finished, we will all be reabsorbed into Him?...“The world will end. All will be judged. The good will live in **Heaven**; the bad will go to Hell.*
- (5) *...those who believe in him will have eternal life up in **heaven** with God.*

In addition, heaven seems to be associated with eternal life, as can be seen from example (5) above. More evidence for this comes from COCA, where the words *eternal* and *heaven* occur together 19 times; on 15 out of these 19 occasions, *heaven* or life in *heaven* is described as being eternal.

Thus the relationship between God and good people, on the one hand, and heaven, on the other, can be represented as follows:

(1d) God [m] is in this place

(1e) after good people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m]
 wants this

Three comments are in order regarding these two components. First, while the word *God* is a semantic molecule (Goddard 2010), and thus can be included in the explication, the word *angel* is not. This means that for the concept of an *angel* to be mentioned in the explication, it would have to be explicated within the explication of *heaven*. Given the length and complexity of the explication of *angels* (see Habib 2011a), I will not include the concept of an *angel* in the present explication. Second, in component (1e), I used the prime AFTER and not WHEN because the latter implies that good people can live in heaven immediately after their death, a belief which is not shared by all English-speaking Christians (Olson 2004). Third, I use the semantic prime LIVE to describe the fate of deceased good people because the concept of the *afterlife* implies that there is life after death, and wherever there is life, different entities (people, animals, etc.) can be said to ‘live’; example (4) above is supportive of this notion.

Happiness appears to be an important feature of *heaven*, as can be seen from the following two examples, taken from COCA:

- (6) *And religion basically is, it says to us that the purpose of life is to come to the end of your life at peace with the Lord so that you may find an eternal happiness in **heaven**.*
- (7) *I have always wanted to go to **heaven**. Everyone in heaven is rich and happy.*

Also, consider The Pixies’ song “In Heaven,” whose short refrain reads “In Heaven/ Everything is fine.” In universal human concepts, this idea of heaven as a very happiness inducing place can be paraphrased as follows:

- (1f) when good people live in this place after these people die, these people can’t not feel something very good because of this

Heaven seems to be perceived as a place from which help and good things can come. The expression *manna from heaven*, which appears 82 times in COCA, supports this notion. On 41 occasions, this expression is used to refer to anything good that a person unexpectedly obtains when s/he needs it. Another expression that supports this view is *heaven-sent*, which describes something that is received or happens, usually unexpectedly, at the time it is needed (Walter 2005). This expression is found 60 times in COCA. The collocation *heaven help* lends more support to the notion that *heaven* is perceived as a source of help. This collocation is found 110 times in COCA, and it is used either to express sympathy for a person who is in a difficult situation or to show that the speaker will be angry with a person if this person does something. In both cases, the person who is in a difficult situation or the person whom the speaker will be angry with are/will be in need of help, and such help can come from heaven.

It can be claimed that *heaven*, in these expressions, is used as a euphemism for God. I would argue, however, that, at least, for English-speaking Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Anglo Catholics, and Anglicans, not only God but also angels and saints are in heaven, and it is believed that both angels and saints can give a hand to people. Therefore, the word *heaven* in the two

expressions mentioned above does not necessarily refer only to God. But whether this notion is part of the everyday concept or not is an open question. To go around this problem, I will paraphrase the idea that people can get help from *heaven* as follows:

(1g) good things can happen to people because someone in this place wants this

For those people who think that only God can help people, the word *someone* would refer to God. On the other hand, for those people who think that God, angels, and saints can assist human beings, *someone* would refer to any of these three beings.

Furthermore, it appears that someone in heaven is believed to be able to prevent something bad from happening. Evidence for this comes from such expressions as *heaven forbid* and *heaven forefend*, both of which appear 185 and 19 times in COCA, respectively. This idea can be captured as follows:

(1h) bad things can not happen to people because someone in this place wants this

In component (1h) above, the particle *not* should be read as if it were part of the verb *happen* and not of the modal *can*. In other words, the sentence should be read as ‘bad things can [not happen] to people because of this place’ and not ‘bad things [can not] happen to people because of this place.’

It also appears that heaven is thought of as a place which is above earth and very far from it. The excerpt below, taken from Geraldine McCaughrean’s (1987: 9) novel *A Little Lower than the Angels*, supports this notion:

The play was over. The devil had crawled, on his belly, back into the Mouth of Hell, with a lump of charcoal in his mouth. And the fat, billowing angel had gone up to heaven to sit beside God. The clouds had hidden them both from sight.

Corpus data also support this notion. Consider, for example, the collocation *stinks to high heaven*. This collocation is found 14 times in COCA. That heaven is above earth is also underpinned by the occurrence of the past tense verb *ascended* with the word *heaven*. These two words occur together 36 times in COCA. The present tense *ascend* and *ascends* appear with *heaven* 22 and 10 times, respectively, and the participle form *ascending* occurs with *heaven* 14 times. The occurrence of the verb *ascend* with *heaven* demonstrates that the average English speaker conceives of heaven as a place above earth. Thus the imagined location of heaven can be captured in NSM as follows:

(1i) when people think about this place, people can think like this:

(1j) this place is above the place where all people live

(1k) this place is very far from the place where all people live

(1l) before people die, people can’t see this place, people can’t be in this place

To recapitulate, English *heaven* refers to a supernatural place which seems to be perceived as the ‘habitat’ of God and deceased good people. It appears to be perceived as a place of ultimate happiness, and it seems to be imagined as being very far above earth. Also, it appears that someone in this place can do good things to people and prevent bad things from happening to them. The next subsection will explore the concept of *hell*.

3.2 English *hell*

Like heaven, hell seems to be viewed as a place. This idea is underpinned by the use of the relative pronoun *where* to refer to hell, as can be seen from the following two examples from COCA:

- (8) “*Now that your mother’s died? You do know she’s dead?*” “*Of course I do! Gone straight to **hell** where she belongs.*”
- (9) *Sophisticated satellite surveillance combined with highly accurate GPS data pinpointed Saddam Hussein’s location currently in hell where he belongs along with his thugs and cronies from 9/11.*

Therefore, the first three components of the explication of *hell* are:

English *hell*

(2a) a place of one kind

this place isn’t like any place of any kind

(2b) some people think like this: “there isn’t a place of this kind”

(2c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

It seems that hell is believed to be the place where bad people are sent after their death. As evidence, consider the following quotation from McCaughrean’s (1987: 8) *A Little Lower than the Angels*:

‘Bless you, child, it’s only a play,’ said a woman whose arm he had grabbed, pressing his dirty face into her dress. ‘That’s the Mouth of Hell that is, where all the damned souls go on the Day of Judgment for being wicked. Gobble, gobble! Ha-ha-ha!’

If a person is sent to hell, s/he will be suffering there forever. The following example from COCA supports this idea:

- (10) *No doubt while in this world you obstructed the good works of the believers. What do you want now? Do you think that we can save you from the flames of Hell? No, of course not.*

That hell is eternal is also evidenced by the fact that people associate it with eternity; the words *eternity* and *hell* appear together 34 times in COCA; the combination of these two words is used to refer to life in hell as being eternal.

(2d) after bad people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m] wants this

(2e) when bad people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very bad because of this

While heaven seems to be imagined as being above earth, hell seems to be imagined as being somewhere down inside or beneath the earth. The collocation *raise hell* lends support to such a view. This expression appears 77 times in COCA and is used to express anger about a certain situation. The fact that people use the verb *raise* in this expression suggests that they think of hell as a place which is beneath the place they live on. The following examples also support this notion:

(11) *You screw with me again and I'll send you straight down to **Hell** with your scumbag councilman.*

(12) *He dragged my daughter down to **Hell!** He was a criminal.*

As a formula, the location of *hell* can be expressed as follows:

(2f) when people think about this place, people can think like this:

(2g) this place is below the place where all people live

(2h) this place is very far from the place where all people live

(2i) before people die, people can't see it, people can't be in it

One may wonder about the need of the intensifier *very* in component (2h). I would argue that its necessity stems from the fact that hell is usually contrasted with heaven and the latter is normally described as being very far from earth (see component 1k above). In addition, the intensifier serves the purpose of stressing the idea that hell is unreachable to living human beings.

Hell appears to be associated with intense heat and/or fire. Evidence for this notion comes from such expressions as *hotter than hell* and *until hell freezes over*. *Hotter than hell* is found in 25 contexts in COCA, and it is used to describe a place or something which is very hot. *Hell freezes over* occurs 47 times in the same corpus. This expression is used to talk about a situation that will never take place. The only explanation for why this expression has this connotation is that people seem to perceive hell as a (very) hot place which would never freeze over. Thus:

(2j) there is fire [m] everywhere in this place

The fires of hell appear to be the source of suffering for deceased people who are sent there. The following example from COCA supports this idea:

- (13) *You will burn in **hell** for the acts you have committed. I just hope that day is an agonizingly long way away and that you have to suffer as much as we all have.*

Also, consider the following two stanzas from Squirrel Nut Zippers' song "Hell," in which hell is described as a place where fire is eternally applied to the "bodies" of the deceased people:

In the afterlife
 You could be headed for the serious strife
 Now you make the scene all day
 But tomorrow there'll be Hell to pay
 ...
 This is a place where eternally
 Fire is applied to the body
 Teeth are extruded and bones are ground
 Then baked into cakes which are passed around

Hence, I will add the following component:

- (2k) because of this, bad people feel something very bad after these people die

Note that components (2j) and (2k) are in fact subcomponents of component (2f). Therefore, their content is not to be taken literally.

In a nutshell, hell seems to be perceived as the place to which bad people are sent after they die in order to suffer for eternity. This place seems to be imagined as being very far beneath earth and as containing fire by means of which the deceased bad people are tortured. The next subsections will investigate the Arabic near equivalents of English *heaven* and *hell*.

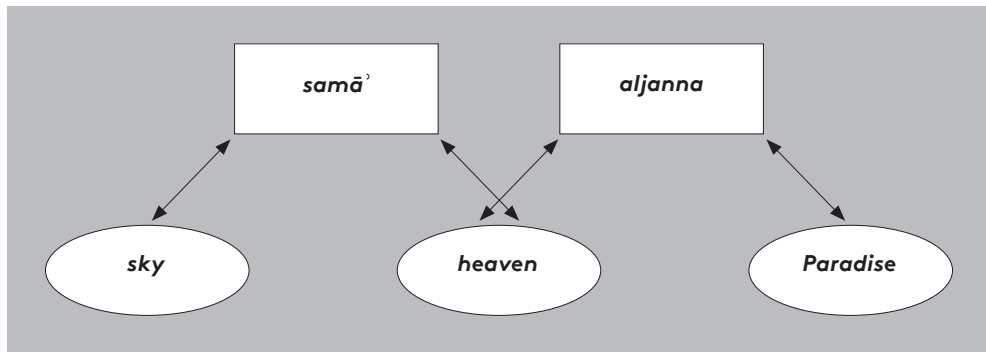
3.3 Arabic *aljanna*

When it comes to the Arabic near equivalent of English *heaven*, Arabic and English exhibit a case of 'incongruency in lexical gridding,' a phenomenon in which one word in a certain language can be represented by two or more words in another language (cf. Laufer 1990; Laufer-Dvorkin 1991). In the case of the Arabic near equivalent of English *heaven*, this phenomenon can be illustrated as shown in Fig. 1.

The Arabic word *samā'* can be used to translate the English words *sky* and *heaven*; similarly, *aljanna* can be used to translate English *heaven* and *Paradise*. Although *samā'* and *aljanna* are used as translational near equivalents of *heaven*, they do not refer to the same place. From a theological perspective, Muslim Arabs believe that there are seven *samāwāt* (pl. of *samā'*), and

that *aljanna*, where righteous people go after their death, is located in one of these *samāwāt* or above the seventh *samā'* (see, e.g., the Book of the Cow 2:35-36; Qurtubi 1993; Ibn Kathir 2002). Since I am concerned in this paper with *the afterlife*, I will focus on the concept of *aljanna*.

FIGURE 1. LEXICAL GRIDDING OF SAMĀ' AND ALJANNA



Akin to heaven, *aljanna* appears to be viewed as a place. I would even claim that the ‘placehood’ of *aljanna* is stronger than that of *heaven*, especially because *aljanna* is depicted in the Quran as a place (see, e.g. the Book of Muhammad 47/12), and the Quran is supposed to be taken literally and not figuratively. So, while some English speaking Christians may claim that heaven is not a place, Muslim Arabs would adhere to the teaching of the Quran and profess that *aljanna* is a place. The notion that *aljanna* is a place is further supported by linguistic evidence. The colloquial Arabic saying *maktūb ‘a bābi lĵanni elĥamāyi ‘umerhā ma ḥabbati lkinni* (‘it is written on the *aljanna*’s door that a mother-in-law never loved her daughter in law’) shows that the average Muslim Arab imagines *aljanna* as a place. Moreover, the singular and plural forms of the word *bāb* (‘door’) occur with the word *aljanna* 22 times in ArabiCorpus, and the word *bawāba* (‘gates’) collocates with *aljanna* in 13 contexts in the same corpus. This being so, the first component is:

Arabic *aljanna*

(3a) a place of one kind

 this place isn’t like any place of any kind

Like in the cases of English *heaven* and *hell*, I would add:

(3b) some people think like this: “there isn’t a place of this kind”

(3c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

Linguistic evidence indicates that *aljanna* is believed to be the place to which good people go after they die. Consider, for instance, the colloquial Arabic saying *ibin ādam lawlā zannu dakhali ljanni* ('a person would definitely enter *aljanna* if it were not for his doubts/bad intentions'). This saying is used to encourage people to trust each other and not cast doubt on what others say or do. The literal meaning of this saying implies that entering *aljanna* is dependent on the person's goodness and good intentions.

Life in *aljanna* appears to be everlasting, an idea which is evidenced by the collocation *janna-tu lkhuld* ('the *janna* of eternity'). This collocation appears in ArabiCorpus 20 times. The information about entering *aljanna* and living there forever can be formulated as follows:

- (3d) after good people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m]
wants this

Life in *aljanna* also seems to be perceived as ideal. The colloquial Arabic saying *iljanni bidūn nās mā btindās* ('*aljanna* without people is not worth entering') gives support to this view. This saying is used in order to encourage a person to be sociable. It is intended to convey that a person cannot or should not lead a lonely life even if s/he were to live, so to speak, in *aljanna*, i.e. to have every good thing one could imagine. More evidence for the idea that life in *aljanna* is ideal comes from the co-occurrence of the word *na'im* ('utmost entertainment') with *aljanna*. The two words are found together 46 times in ArabiCorpus. The happiness experienced in *aljanna* can be represented in NSM as follows:

- (3e) when good people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel
something very good because of this

Theologically speaking, Muslim Arabs believe that *aljanna* is above earth. This belief stems from the teaching of the Quran and Hadith. For example, the Quran teaches that Adam and Eve lived in *aljanna*. After Adam sinned, God ordered him and his wife to descend from *aljanna* to earth (Book of the Cow 2:35-38; Book of the Heights 7:19-25; Book of Taha 20:115-123; Qurtubi 1993; Ibn Kathir 2002). Linguistic evidence, such as in the example below, taken from ArabiCorpus, demonstrates that ordinary Muslim Arabs are familiar with this belief:

- (14) *famundhu an habaṭa ādam waḥawwā mina ljannati taḥawwalā ilā shā'irayni yabḥathāni an jannatihimā aḍḍa' i'ati.*
'Since Adam and Eve descended from *aljanna*, they have become poets seeking their lost paradise.'

Another example is the story of the prophet Muhammad's ascension to the seven *samāwāt* ('heavens'), above or in which *aljanna* is located (*Translation of Sahih Bukhari* 2016: Vol. 4, Book

54, No. 429). A reason to believe that the average Muslim Arab knows about this story is that the event is commemorated by Muslims every year and known as *al'isrā' walmi'rāj* (lit. 'the night journey and the ascension/ladder'). Thus the location of *aljanna* relative to earth can be captured as follows:

- (3f) this place is above the place where all people live
- (3g) this place is very far from the place where all people live
- (3h) before people die, people can't see this place, people can't be in this place

Unlike components (1j)-(1l) of the explication of *heaven*, components (3f)-(3h) above are not preceded by the sentence "when people think about this place, people can think like this." This is because these components attempt to capture what Muslim Arabs actually believe *aljanna* to be, and not what they imagine it to be.

Islam teaches that *aljanna* is divided into levels, the highest one of which is called *alfirdaws al'a'lā* ('the highest paradise') (see, e.g., *Translation of Sahih Bukhari* 2016: Vol. 4, Book 52, No. 48). Linguistic evidence from the corpus shows that Muslim Arabs are acquainted with this belief. The expression *alfirdaws al'a'lā* occurs 7 times in ArabiCorpus. The expression, as it appears in the corpus, is used in supplication for the dead, so that God will make them dwell in the highest, and thus the best, place in *aljanna*. The use of this expression suggests that Muslim Arabs may be aware of the idea that *aljanna* has different levels, and that each level is above another level and induces more happiness than the one below it. Thus:

- (3i) this place is a very big place, there are many places in this place, every place is above another place
- if people in one of these places feel something good, people in a place above this place feel something very good

Component (3i) above is not without problems. One problem pertains to the clause *every place is above another place*, which implies wrongly that any given place in *aljanna* is above another place. Clearly, this clause is not applicable to the lowest place in *aljanna*, which presumably does not have any other place (which is part of *aljanna*) beneath it. Another problem concerns the second subcomponent (i.e. the last two lines of component (3i)). This subcomponent attempts to explicate the idea that the higher the place to which the deceased person is admitted, the better s/he would feel. This subcomponent, however, does not fully capture this notion. One reason for this is that the use of comparatives (such as 'better than') is not canonical in NSM. Another reason is the use of *if*, which can imply that people in these different places do not necessarily

feel good all the time. Replacing *if* with *when* does not solve the problem, because *when* can also imply that deceased people do not always feel good in *aljanna*. Omitting *if* does not solve the problem either, since the sentence would be taken to mean that, out of all the places in *aljanna*, there are only two places, in one of which the deceased feel good, whereas in the other they feel better. These two problems remain unresolved.

Aljanna is described in the Quran and Hadith as a place which is similar to earth in various respects. It has gardens, fruit trees, rivers, and other worldly-like things (*Translation of Sahih Bukhari* 2016: Vol. 4, Book 54, No. 429). In addition, people eat and drink in it, and they live in houses built for them by God (*Translation of Sahih Bukhari* 2016: Vol. 4, Book 54, No. 465). Linguistic data from the corpus indicate that Muslim Arabs are familiar with this depiction. The words *fākiha* and *thimār*, both of which mean ‘fruit’, appear with *aljanna* 16 times in ArabiCorpus; the word *khamr* (‘wine’) co-occurs with *aljanna* 4 times, and the word *rā’iḥa* (‘smell/scent’) collocates with *aljanna* 15 times. Moreover, when Muslim Arabs want to describe a beautiful place, they can use the expression *rawḍun min riyaḍi l’janna* (‘one of *aljanna*’s gardens’), suggesting that Muslim Arabs think of *aljanna* as a place where there are many gardens.

Islam teaches that, in *aljanna*, there are (1) very handsome boys whose role is to render help to the people who go to *aljanna* (Book of the Mount 52: 24; Book of the Man 76: 19) and (2) very beautiful women whom God created so that righteous men can have sex with them after these men die (Book of Smoke 44:54; Book of the Beneficent 55:56). The boys are known by the name *ghilmān aljanna* (‘boys of *aljanna*’) or *alwildān almukhalladūn* (‘immortal boys’), while the women are known by the name *alḥūru l’ayn* (‘houris’). The word *ghilmān* appears 233 times in ArabiCorpus, but on only three occasions does it refer to the boys in *aljanna*. The word *wil-daān* occurs 586 times in the same corpus, but it refers to these boys in only 27 instances. The collocation *alḥūru l’ayn* appears 51 times in ArabiCorpus, and, on 15 occasions, it refers to the virgin women of *aljanna*. Hence:

- (3j) many things in this place are like many things in the place where all people live
 there are trees [m] in this place, there is much water [m] in this place, people can eat
 [m] many good things in this place, people can drink [m] many good things in this place
- (3k) there are boys [m] in this place, these boys [m] live there all the time
- (3l) when someone sees these boys [m], this someone can’t not feel something very good
 because of this
- (3m) when people live in this place, these boys [m] can do good things for them
- (3n) there are women [m] in this place, these women [m] live there all the time

- (3o) when someone sees these women [m], this someone can't not feel something very good because of this
- (3p) when good men [m] live in this place after these men [m] die, these men [m] can do something with the bodies of these women [m], like men [m] can do something with the bodies of women [m] when these men [m] want to feel something very good in the bodies of these men [m]

In summary, *aljanna*, like heaven, appears to refer to a happiness-inducing supernatural place to which deceased good people are sent. Contrary to heaven, *aljanna* does not seem to be conceived of as the place of 'inhabitation' of God. Also, it seems to be conceived of as being divided into levels, with each level radiating more happiness than the one below it. Another difference between heaven and *aljanna* is that the latter seems to be perceived as a sensual place where the deceased men can eat, drink, and even have sexual intercourse with a kind of heavenly beings. Yet another difference between the two is that *aljanna* appears to be perceived (not imagined) as being far above earth. The next subsection will throw light on the Arabic near-equivalent to English *hell*.

3.4 Arabic *jahannam*

English *hell* can be translated into Arabic via a number of words, the most frequent of which are: *jahannam*, *annār*, and *aljahīm*. *Annār* and *aljahīm*, among others, are regarded as variants of *jahannam*. As there does not seem to be any semantic difference between these words when they refer to the afterlife, I will explore in this subsection the meaning of only one of them, viz. *jahannam*.

Like *aljanna*, *jahannam* appears to be viewed as a place, as evidenced by the fact that the word *bāb* ('door') collocates with *jahannam* on 45 occasions in ArabiCorpus. This place, as ArabiCorpus data indicate, is a place that God prepared for the non believers. The word *kāfirīn* ('non-believers') appears with *jahannam* 6 times in ArabiCorpus. Further, the colloquial Arabic saying *zayy qbūri lkuffār min fōq jnēni wmin taḥet nār* ('like the non-believers' graves: a garden from above and fire from beneath') shows that Muslim Arabs associate not following God's will with suffering in the afterlife. The notion of suffering in *jahannam* can be also supported by the two sayings *illi ma'u flūs byākul bijhannam* ('he who has money can afford to eat even in *jahannam*') and *jhannam jōzī walā jannit abūya* ('I prefer my husband's *jahannam* to my father's *janna* ('heaven')'). The first saying is used to indicate that rich people can survive hard times due to their richness. The second is used to encourage women not to leave their husbands even if their husbands treat them badly. Both sayings indicate that Muslim Arabs conceive of *jahannam* as a place of suffering. More support comes from the co-occurrence of *adhāb* ('suffering') with

jahannam; the two words appear together 12 times in ArabiCorpus.

It appears that living and suffering in *jahannam* are eternal; as evidence, consider the 19 co-occurrences of the words *khālid* ('eternal') and *jahannam* in ArabiCorpus, with the meaning that those who enter *jahannam* stay there forever.

It also appears that Muslim Arabs have the idea that the (main) source of suffering in *jahannam* is fire. This is evidenced by the collocation *nār jahannam* ('*jahannam*'s fire') which is found in 48 contexts in ArabiCorpus. In fact, the word *nār* ('fire') can be used to mean *jahannam*. In ArabiCorpus, this word is used 107 times with this meaning. The idea that there is fire in *jahannam* is compatible with the Islamic teaching (Book of the Clatterer 101:11; Ibn Kathir 2002); thus, contrary to hell, *jahannam* is not imagined as being hot or having fire, but it is believed (from a religious viewpoint) to have real fire.

Hence, I propose the following explication:

Arabic *jahannam*

(4a) a place of one kind

 this place isn't like any place of any kind

(4b) some people think like this: "there isn't a place of this kind"

(4c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

(4d) after bad people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m]
 wants this

(4e) when bad people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel
 something very bad because of this

(4f) there is fire [m] everywhere in this place

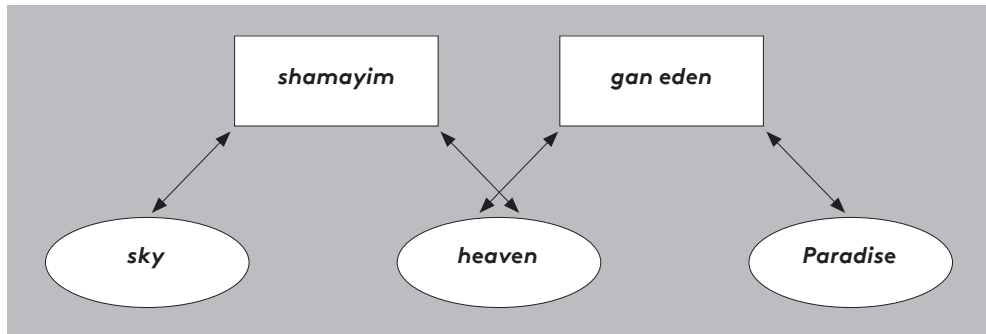
(4g) because of this, bad people feel something very bad after these people die

As can be seen, the concept of *jahannam* is very similar to that of *hell*. Both seem to be perceived as supernatural places to which deceased bad people are sent in order to suffer for eternity. The only two differences between the two concepts is that, first, the location of *jahannam* does not seem to be known, and second, unlike *hell*, *jahannam* is believed to have real fire by means of which deceased bad people are tormented. The next subsection will explore Hebrew *gan eden* 'the garden of Eden' or 'heaven.'

3.5 Hebrew *gan eden*

In the case of Hebrew *gan eden*, Hebrew and English exhibit a case of “incongruity in lexical gridding” (cf. Laufer 1990; Laufer Dvorkin 1991), which is reminiscent of the case of Arabic *aljanna*. This phenomenon can be illustrated as shown in Fig. 2.

FIGURE 2. LEXICAL GRIDDING OF *SHAMAYIM* AND *GAN EDEN*



The Hebrew word *shamayim* ‘heavens’ can be used to translate the English words *sky* and *heaven*; likewise, *gan eden* can be used to translate English *heaven* and *Paradise*. Although *shamayim* and *gan eden* are used as translational near equivalents of *heaven*, they do not refer to the same place. *Shamayim* refers to the place where God and *mal’akhim* (‘angels’) live. *Gan eden*, on the other hand, refers to a place where righteous people go after their death (Even-Shoshan 1993); HebrewCorpus evidence lends support to this notion as it demonstrates that *gan eden*, but not *shamayim*, collocates with *geyhinom* (‘hell’). Because the present paper discusses the afterlife, I will only focus on the concept of *gan eden*.

This concept can be spelled out as follows:

Hebrew *gan eden*

(5a) a place of one kind

 this place isn’t like any place of any kind

(5b) some people think like this: “there isn’t a place of this kind”

(5c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

(5d) after good people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m]
 wants this

- (5e) when good people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very good because of this
- (5f) when people think about this place, people can think like this:
- (5g) this place is above the place where all people live
- (5h) this place is very far from the place where all people live
- (5i) before people die, people can't see this place, people can't be in this place

Component (5a) embodies the claim that *gan eden* is perceived as a place. This claim can be supported by linguistic data, such as the following examples from HebrewCorpus:

- (15) *mishehu rotse lada'at mahu hahevdel beyn **gan eden** vegeyhinom, az mesadrim lo sham siyur.*
'Someone wants to know the difference between **gan eden** and *geyhinom* ('hell'); so, a trip is organized for him there.'
- (16) *hukhnu mekomot laneshamot...makom hamenukha nikra **gan eden**.*
'Places for souls were prepared...the place of rest is called **gan eden**.'

The fact that in example (15), the word *sham* ('there') is used to refer to *gan eden* shows that native Hebrew speakers conceive of *gan eden* as a place. Example (16) demonstrates in a clear way that *gan eden* is viewed as such.

Component (5d) proposes that good people go to *gan eden* after they die. Here are a few excerpts from HebrewCorpus that lend support to this notion:

- (17) *ani batuwakh holekhet **legan eden**...bizkhut ha'atar shelanu hitkaymu kvar 10,000 khatunot.*
'I am definitely going to go to **gan eden**...By virtue of our website, 10,000 weddings have taken place.'
- (18) *hashem yazke etkhem al hamitzvot sheta'asu be'iluy nishmatkhem **uvegan eden**.*
'The Lord will reward you for following [His] commandments by transcending your soul and [letting you get into] **gan eden**.'
- (19) *habakhorim hayekarim shenirtsekhu nimtsa'im ata bashamayim, **began eden**...*
'The dear young people who were murdered are now in *shamayim* ('heaven/sky'), in **gan eden**.'
- (20) *...sheharey mi she'ole **legan eden** hi haneshama.*
'...in fact, what ascends to **gan eden** is the soul.'

Examples (17) and (18) indicate that native Hebrew speakers believe that being good and doing good deeds are sufficient for a person to get into *gan eden*. Example (19) shows that people can

go to *gan eden* after they die. It also shows that native Hebrew speakers imagine or believe *gan eden* to be in *shamayim* ('heaven/sky'), viz. somewhere above earth; this 'somewhere' is very far from earth to the extent that no one can see it or be in it before this person dies. That *gan eden* is thought of as being above earth is also supported by example (20), which describes the soul as ascending to *gan eden*. This information about where *gan eden* is imagined to be is paraphrased in components (5f)-(5i).

Component (5e) indicates that *gan eden* is believed to be a place of eternal happiness. Example (21) lends support to this idea:

- (21) *shenishmatkha tihye **began eden** vekhayim hakhi tovim ba'olam haba.*
'May your soul be in **gan eden**, and may you have the best life in the world to come.'

As can be deduced from this example, *gan eden* is a place where the deceased can live joyfully.

To recapitulate, *gan eden* appears to be perceived as a happiness-inducing supernatural place and as being the ultimate reward for those who spend their lives on earth righteously. It seems to be imagined as being very far above earth. Comparing the explication of *gan eden* to the explications of its English and Arabic corresponding words, one can easily discover that *gan eden* is in fact closer to English *heaven* than to Arabic *aljanna*. The physicality and sensuality aspects found in *aljanna* are not found in *heaven* or in *gan eden*, and such a difference is a major one. One may claim that God's 'habitat', talked about in the explication of English *heaven*, is absent from that of Hebrew *gan eden* and that this constitutes a major difference. I would argue, however, that this difference does not compare with that regarding physicality and sensuality. Although God does not live in *gan eden*, he lives in *shamayim* ('heaven'), the place that includes *gan eden* (Even-Shoshan 1993). The next subsection will deal with the Hebrew near equivalent to English *hell*.

3.6 Hebrew *geyhinom*

As the explication below shows, the Hebrew concept of *geyhinom* seems to be very similar to its corresponding Arabic concept.

Hebrew *geyhinom*

- (6a) a place of one kind
this place isn't like any place of any kind
- (6b) some people think like this: "there is not a place of this kind"
- (6c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:
- (6d) after bad people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m] wants this

- (6e) when bad people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very bad because of this
- (6f) when people think about this place, people can think like this:
- (6g) there is fire [m] everywhere in this place
- (6h) because of this, bad people feel something very bad after these people die

Geyhinom appears to be conceived of as a place, as captured in (6a). Here are two examples from HebrewCorpus that support this idea:

- (22) ...*va'adayin par'o melekh mitsrayim khay, ve'omed al petakh geyhinom...*
'...and Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is still alive, and he is standing at the entrance to *geyhinom*...'
- (23) *miyad akhrey hakhatuna, niftekhu lo she'arey hageyhinom ba'olam haze.*
'Immediately after his marriage, the gates of *geyhinom* in this world opened for him.'

Component (6d) reveals that evil people are sent to *geyhinom* after they depart this life. In support of this claim, consider the following two examples from HebrewCorpus:

- (24) *halo day lanu shelo nihye meharesha'im hanidonim lageyhinom?*
'Is it not enough for us not to be evil people, who are doomed to *geyhinom*?'
- (25) *ki yaduwa shegeyhinom hu makom shebo nimtsa'im haresha'im vegan eden hu makom hatsadikim.*
'...because it is known that *geyhinom* is the place for evil people and gan eden is the place for righteous people.'

In addition, the fact that (1) the concept of *geyhinom* collocates with *gan eden* in 277 contexts³ in HebrewCorpus, while (2) *gan eden* is portrayed as the place in which deceased righteous people live for eternity, indicates that native Hebrew speakers consider *geyhinom* as the place of eternal damnation for the evil.

Component (6e) shows that *geyhinom* is perceived as a place of suffering. As evidence of this claim, consider the following example:

- (26) *ani mukhrakh lomar shekol hadoktrina hazot, shel esh geyhinom betor onesh lekhet, hi doktrina akhzarit.*
'I have to say that all of this doctrine, i.e. the fire of *geyhinom* as a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty.'

Example (26), not only shows that *geyhinom* is a place where people suffer, but also tells us that

³In 171 of these 277 contexts, both concepts refer to the afterlife.

fire is (imagined to be) the means by which people are tortured. This leads us to component (6f).

Component (6f) suggests that *geyhinom* is associated with fire. The word *geyhinom* co-occurs with *esh* ('fire') 140 times in HebrewCorpus; 37 of these occurrences come from non-Hebrew contexts which talk about the near equivalent of Hebrew *geyhinom* in other cultures or from contexts which were translated into Hebrew from other languages, such as the following statement, which was said by a Palestinian leader about Israel:

- (27) *na'ale et ha'oyev hatsiyoni be'esh hageyhinom.*
 'We will burn the Zionist enemy with the fire of *geyhinom*.'

However, 18 out of the 140 examples come from Hebrew literature (as exemplified by (28)), and 65 contexts come from Jewish religious texts (see example (29)). In the rest of the contexts, the words *geyhinom* and *esh* ('fire') are used with non-religious meanings (example (30); see also Section 7.3).

- (28) *alfey mal'akhim nora'im...nos'im al kitfeyhem yeladim une'arim khot'im lehashlikham el ha'esh hagdola bema'amakey hageyhinom.*
 'Thousands of horrible angels...carry on their shoulders kids and boys in order to throw them in the big fire of the depths of *geyhinom*.'
- (29) *hanekama geyhinom, shehu makom lohet esh.*
 'The punishment is *geyhinom*, an extremely hot place [or a place of blazing fire].'
- (30) *ha'esh habo'eret bi gdola mikol ha'eshim sheba'olam, vezohi esh shel geyhinom.*
 'My inner burning fire is greater than all the world fires; it is a fire of *geyhinom*.'

Example (28) is from a short story entitled *le'an* ('to where?'). Example (29) is taken from a Rabbi's interpretation on the afterlife. As for example (30), it clearly shows a non-religious use of the two words to indicate that the speaker is experiencing a very unpleasant situation.

In summary, *geyhinom*, like hell, appears to be conceived of as a supernatural place to which evil people are sent after their death. It also appears to be portrayed as having fire by means of which the deceased are tortured. Like Arabic *jahannam* and in contrast to English hell, the location of *geyhinom* does not seem to be known.

4. Discussion

This section is divided into two main subsections. The first subsection will present and explain the semantic template for supernatural places. The second subsection will compare and contrast the explications in order to underscore the similarities and differences between English *heaven* and its Arabic and Hebrew near equivalents and also between English *hell* and its Arabic and Hebrew counterparts. Note that similar components between each two or three explications are underlined.

4.1 Devising a semantic template for supernatural places

Having spent a long time working and re-working the explications developed in this paper, I propose the following semantic template for them: (1) *CATEGORY*, (2) *EXISTENTIAL STATUS*, (3), *TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES* (4) *INHABITANTS*, (5) *NATURE OF THE PLACE*, (6) *LOCATION*, and (7) *GENERAL DESCRIPTION*.

The first three parts of the semantic template for supernatural place terms are the same as those of the semantic template for non-human being terms (see Habib 2011c), mentioned in the introduction. *CATEGORY* comes first in order for the explications to satisfy the ‘substitutability’ condition, according to which an explication has to make sense when it substitutes for the word being defined (Goddard 2007a).

CATEGORY is followed by *EXISTENTIAL STATUS* in order to indicate that the average person is well aware that a number of people do not believe in the existence of the place in question. This part has to directly follow the *CATEGORY* part for two reasons. First, the components of this part show people’s attitude concerning the existence of these places. Second, without these components, the reader might think that the existence of the places in question is unquestionable, much like the existence of any place in our universe.

This second part is followed by *TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES*, which notifies the reader that the rest of the components depict what people can say when they talk about the supernatural place in question. This part consists of four subparts: *INHABITANTS*, *NATURE OF THE PLACE*, *LOCATION*, and *GENERAL DESCRIPTION*. In each explication, the heading of each subpart is preceded by a hyphen to show that it is in fact a subpart of the *TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES* part.

The first subpart is *INHABITANTS*, which indicates who lives in each place. This part follows *TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES* due to its importance. As will be shown, it is this part that clearly distinguishes between *heaven* and *hell*, between *aljanna* and *jahannam*, as well as between *gan eden* and *geyhinom*.

The *INHABITANTS* subpart is followed by information about how the inhabitants of each of the six places feel while being in these places; thus, I have labeled this second subpart as *NATURE OF THE PLACE*. *INHABITANTS* and *NATURE OF THE PLACE* are interrelated. As has been discussed, being good or bad in this world brings about reward or punishment after death, and these are manifested in the good or bad feelings that the dead will have.

Since we are dealing with places, the explications will need to offer information about where these places are, or are imagined to be; hence the need for the subpart *LOCATION*. Following this part is a general description of some of the six places in question.

Below are the explications with the parts and subparts of the devised semantic template appearing to the right. The underlined components are those that are similar between each two or three explications.

English *heaven*

CATEGORY

(1a) a place of one kind

this place isn't like any place of any kind

EXISTENTIAL STATUS

(1b) some people think like this: "there isn't a place of this kind"

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES

(1c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

-INHABITANTS

(1d) God [m] is in this place

(1e) after good people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m] wants this

-NATURE OF THE PLACE

(1f) when good people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very good because of this

(1g) good things can happen to people because someone in this place wants this

(1h) bad things can not happen to people because someone in this place wants this

-LOCATION

(1i) when people think about this place, people can think like this:

(1j) this place is above the place where all people live

(1k) this place is very far from the place where all people live

(1l) before people die, people can't see this place, people can't be in this place

Arabic *aljanna*

CATEGORY

(3a) a place of one kind

this place isn't like any place of any kind

EXISTENTIAL STATUS

(3b) some people think like this: "there isn't a place of this kind"

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES

(3c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

-INHABITANTS

(3d) after good people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m]
wants this

-NATURE OF THE PLACE

(3e) when good people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel
something very good because of this

-LOCATION

(3f) this place is above the place where all people live

(3g) this place is very far from the place where all people live

(3h) before people die, people can't see this place, people can't be in this place

-GENERAL DESCRIPTION

(3i) this place is a very big place, there are many places in this place, every place is above

another place

if people in one of these places feel something good, people in a place above this place feel something very good

- (3j) many things in this place are like many things in the place where all people live
there are trees [m] in this place, there is much water [m] in this place, people can eat [m] many good things in this place, people can drink [m] many good things in this place
- (3k) there are boys [m] in this place, these boys [m] live there all the time
- (3l) when someone sees these boys [m], this someone can't not feel something very good because of this
- (3m) when people live in this place, these boys [m] can do good things for them
- (3n) there are women [m] in this place, these women [m] live there all the time
- (3o) when someone sees these women [m], this someone can't not feel something very good because of this
- (3p) when good men [m] live in this place after these men [m] die, these men [m] can do something with the bodies of these women [m], like men [m] can do something with the bodies of women [m] when these men [m] want to feel something very good in the bodies of these men

Hebrew *gan eden*

CATEGORY

- (5a) a place of one kind
this place isn't like any place of any kind

EXISTENTIAL STATUS

(5b) some people think like this: “there isn’t a place of this kind”

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES

(5c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

–INHABITANTS

(5d) after good people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m]
wants this

–NATURE OF THE PLACE

(5e) when good people live in this place after these people die, these people can’t not feel
something very good because of this

–LOCATION

(5f) when people think about this place, people can think like this:

(5g) this place is above the place where all people live

(5h) this place is very far from the place where all people live

(5i) before people die, people can’t see this place, people can’t be in this place

English *hell***CATEGORY**

(2a) a place of one kind

this place isn’t like any place of any kind

EXISTENTIAL STATUS

(2b) some people think like this: “there isn’t a place of this kind”

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES

(2c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

-INHABITANTS

(2d) after bad people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m] wants this

-NATURE OF THE PLACE

(2e) when bad people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very bad because of this

-LOCATION

(2f) when people think about this place, people can think like this:

(2g) this place is below the place where all people live

(2h) this place is very far from the place where all people live

(2i) before people die, people can't see this place, people can't be in this place

-GENERAL DESCRIPTION

(2j) there is fire [m] everywhere in this place

(2k) because of this, bad people feel something very bad after these people die

Arabic jahannam

CATEGORY

(4a) a place of one kind

this place isn't like any place of any kind

EXISTENTIAL STATUS

(4b) some people think like this: "there isn't a place of this kind"

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES

(4c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

–INHABITANTS

(4d) after bad people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m] wants this

–NATURE OF THE PLACE

(4e) when bad people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very bad because of this

–GENERAL DESCRIPTION

(4f) there is fire [m] everywhere in this place

(4g) because of this, bad people feel something very bad after these people die

Hebrew *geyhinom***CATEGORY**

(6a) a place of one kind

this place isn't like any place of any kind

EXISTENTIAL STATUS

(6b) some people think like this: "there is not a place of this kind"

TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES

(6c) when people think about this place, people can say things like these:

–INHABITANTS

(6d) after bad people die, these people live in this place all the time, because God [m] wants this

–NATURE OF THE PLACE

- (6e) when bad people live in this place after these people die, these people can't not feel something very bad because of this

–GENERAL DESCRIPTION

- (6f) when people think about this place, people can think like this:
- (6g) there is fire [m] everywhere in this place
- (6h) because of this, bad people feel something very bad after these people die

4.2 Comparing and contrasting the explications

The explications of the religious meanings of the target concepts exhibit a number of similarities and differences. I will discuss the similarities first, present the explications in full, and then discuss the differences.

The six concepts share the same categorization, that is, they seem to be classified as places. They also share the same ontological status, i.e. not all people believe in the existence of these places. Heaven, *aljanna*, and *gan eden* appear to be viewed as God's reward to good people, whilst hell, *jahannam*, and *geyhinom* as God's punishment to bad people. It appears that joy reigns in heaven, *aljanna*, and in *gan eden*, whereas suffering awaits those who enter hell, *jahannam*, and *geyhinom*. Besides, heaven, *aljanna*, and *gan eden* seem to be imagined as being above earth. The similarities between English heaven and its Arabic and Hebrew near equivalents are underlined in the explications above.

In respect of the differences, heaven, *aljanna*, and *gan eden* vary in four aspects. First, heaven and *gan eden* seems to be imagined as one place, whilst *aljanna* is one place divided into many other places; each place is above another place, and the higher the place, the more happiness it radiates.⁴ Second, heaven and *gan eden* do not seem to be viewed as sensual places whereas *aljanna* does; unlike in *aljanna*, in heaven and *gan eden* people do not eat, drink, or have sexual intercourse. Third, heaven (through God, angels, and/or saints) seems to be thought of as being able to assist people and prevent bad things from happening to them, whereas *aljanna* and *gan eden* do not seem to be perceived as such. Fourth, God seems to be perceived as being in heaven, but not in *aljanna* or *gan eden*. Muslim Arabs believe that God's place of inhabitation is actually above *aljanna* (*Translation of Sahih Bukhari* 2016: Vol. 4, Book 52, No. 48), and native Hebrew speakers appear to have the idea that He is in *shamayim* ('heaven'), of which *gan eden* is a part (Even-Shoshan 1993).

⁴The English word *heavens* implies that there is more than one *heaven*. This word can refer to either the afterlife or to the sky. It is worth observing that this word is much less frequent than the singular form *heaven*. In COCA, *heavens* appears 2,297 times whilst *heaven* occurs 10,229 times; in other words, the singular form is about 4.5 times more frequent than the plural form. Whether native English speakers think of *heavens* as referring to many places that exist in the afterlife requires further quantitative research.

Regarding hell, there are two differences between the words *jahannam* and *geyhinom*. The first difference is their connection to the notion of *fire*. Native English speakers and native Hebrew speakers associate hell and *geyhinom* with fire. This does not, of course, mean that they believe that there is a real fire in these two places. Muslim Arabs, on the other hand, believe that there is a real fire in *jahannam*, and this fire is the means by which bad dead people are tortured. This difference results from the fact that the Quran mentions that there is a fire in *jahannam*. The Bible also mentions that there is a fire in hell; however, unlike the Bible, the Quran is supposed to be taken literally and not symbolically. The second difference is that hell seems to be imagined as being deep down under earth, but this is not so with *jahannam* and *geyhinom*. ArabiCorpus does not present any context that directly or indirectly describes the location of *jahannam*. HebrewCorpus presents 56 contexts in which deceased people are described as *yordim* ('descending to') *geyhinom*. These contexts, however, come from religious sources; thus it is uncertain whether the average native Hebrew speaker is familiar with this depiction or not.

5. Conclusion

This paper has cast light on the English folk concepts of *heaven* and *hell* and their Arabic and Hebrew near-equivalents. The analysis can be of interest to, among others, anthropologists who investigate beliefs about supernatural places. The paper has presented a seven-part semantic template for supernatural place terms; two of the advantages of establishing such a semantic template are that it facilitates the construction of, and comparison between, explications of supernatural place terms.

Additionally, the analysis of these concepts can contribute to interfaith dialogue, as it shows how ordinary native English speakers, Muslim Arabs, and native Hebrew speakers conceptualize life after death. It is hoped that the similarities between these concepts can promote understanding between participants in interfaith dialogue or any inter-religious group discussion, such that the differences may be respected.

Finally, I should observe that the present work has left two issues unresolved. First, the plural form *heavens* has not been investigated, and it is not clear whether native English speakers think of many places or of one place when they encounter this word. Second, I noted that there was no strong linguistic evidence in the corpora that shows where Muslim Arabs and native Hebrew speakers, respectively, think that *jahannam* ('hell') and *geyhinom* ('hell') are located. It remains to be seen whether or not the absence of such strong evidence is due to the relatively small size of the corpora searched.

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Appendix

Editor's comment on the 'seven heavens' and other numerical puzzles of the afterlife:

Whereas Jesus promised '*gan eden*' to the 'good robber' on the cross (St Luke 23:43), St Paul, in 2Col. 12:4 mentions a 'man in Christ' (meaning himself?): "and this man was caught up to the third heaven" (*ve haish hahu 'alah leraqiyat hashelishi*). Elsewhere, St. Paul (in the same chapter 12 of 2Cor., vs 4), tells us how this man "was taken up to paradise" (*ve eltokh hapardes 'alah*) – so Paradise should be located above the third of the [seven, or maybe unknown, number of] heavens?

In any case, there must be more than one 'heaven', cf. the Islamic count of '7'... so maybe that's why we talk about 'heavens'? But the Iranian loan '*pardes*', the 'separate territory' (*para-desha*) of the Persian kings, tops even the Arabic heavens or the Hebrew *shamayim*. (But why does Dante have all of nine circles of 'Hell')

As to *gan eden*, this has always been a more concrete notion than *shamayim* as 'God's habitat'; over the centuries it probably has lost some of its Scriptural ascendancy.

I recall how the van of the kindergarten 'Gan Eden' used to pick up its young students at eight a.m. in front of my apartment building in Haifa – a reference to 'shamayim' here would certainly give an entirely wrong impression!

- Jacob Mey