A Comparative Study of English and Persian Proverbs on Basis of Cognitive Linguistics

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ABSTRACT: In cognitive linguistics Proverbs have important role in human cognition for expression of experiences about inner and outer world so they are actual representation of our ancestors. The present study research comparatively analyzed Persian and English based on Lakoff and Johnson approach. This research aimed to apply cognitive linguistic on Persian and English proverbs and investigate the type of metaphors and metonymy used in them. For this purpose 20 proverbs Persian and English proverbs were collected and put in 10 groups according to their meanings. In this regard the findings revealed that In general in analyzed Persian proverbs, animals are used more. In some of them the same animals are utilized. Proverbs in both languages have the same functions and underlying the same deep structure and meaning, just words are different, so in most of the cases they show the same mental mechanisms, metaphor and metonymy so, they are result of cultural, social and cognition values, And also they are comprehensible in relation to a background and presupposition values consequently, they are social is necessary for their interpretation because they provide a message indirectly. Children learn them through cultural transmission.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs as short, generally known sentence of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form, which are handed down from generation to generation and since they belong to the common knowledge of basically all native speakers they are indeed very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. The study of meaning cannot be studied independent of human cognition. Meaning must be surveyed in a way that human use and understand it. Semantic structures like other cognition domains represent mental categories that humans form them according to their experiences. Proverbs are not exception to it and they must be studied in relation to human cognitive system. The purpose of this study is the semantic analysis of Persian and English proverbs as a representation of our experiences are face in daily life on the basis of cognitive linguistics in order to find out what are the similarities and differences between them from human cognitive system.

In this work, I try to clarify the mental mechanisms that work in proverbs and I discuss my views on their specific/universal nature. After this I make a comparative analysis between English and Persian proverbs, which leads me to conclude that they are a conceptual universal phenomenon, with high communicative and instructive power. Even more, they constitute an interesting and informative source of folk knowledge.

The study of proverbs has been approached from many different points of view: personal, formal, religious, cultural, cognitive, etc. In this work I adopt a cognitive, a social and pragmatics view. On the one hand, the cognitive view permits to access the universal principles that underlie the cognition of proverbs. On the other, the social and pragmatic view allows us to look beyond the linguistic structure of proverbs in order to explore the reach amount of background knowledge and cultural beliefs they portray. Cognitively, proverbs are mentally economical, since from one particular situation presented in them we can understand many others. Besides, we can activate a whole scene about a certain event in our minds just through the allusion to a relevant fact or moment of this one. For instance, in the proverb Blind blames the ditch (Lakoff & Turner, 1989) we have a whole scenario in which a
blind person has fallen into a ditch and so he/she is blaming it for that fact, without realizing that his/her condition is what prevented him/her from not falling. In this paper 10 groups of English and Persian proverbs are presented and analyzed from cognitive point of view, at the end results of comparison will be presented.

Review of literature

For the interpretation of proverbs, according to Lakoff (1989) we have the Great Chain Metaphor. It is composed of the Generic Is Specific metaphor, which picks out from specific schemas common generic-level structure; the communicative maxim of Quantity (“Be as informative as is required and not more so”), which limits what can be understood in terms of what; and the interaction between the Great Chain and the Nature of Things.

Deriving from the Great Chain of Being we encounter the People Are Animals metaphor, which is also present in many proverbs. The Great Chain Metaphor’s power lies on its availability for a big variety of situations with the same generic-level structure. Thus, the proverb ‘Big thunder, little rain’ can apply to a barking dog and to a person or even to the weather itself, and the English proverb ‘All bark and no bite’ will apply to practically all similar situations, except to dogs, unless it is not metaphorical.

Pragmatically, proverbs are used for communicative purposes and we need pragmatic reasoning in order to understand them. That is, they are used with a certain communicative aim that transcends their linguistic form and meaning. Besides this, they reflect an implicit typology of patterns of reasoning or argument. For this and other reasons, proverbs are interesting to study, since through them we can extract many ideas on how we think, how we conceptualize and category the world, and how we transmit traditional folk knowledge from generation to generation.

Lakoff (1989) defines proverbs as metaphoric in nature, but recently there have been some studies that oppose to this view, and defend that they are metonymic. Metonymy is as much an important cognitive mechanism as metaphor: in both of them we find a mapping process, either from a source domain to a target domain or from a target domain to a source domain. According to Ruiz de Mendoza (1999b: 54), the limits between metaphor and metonymy are not very clear, since we can use metaphors predicatively or metonymies referentially, and we can give a potential metonymy a metaphoric trait, among other things. In fact, the only distinguishing criterion between metaphor and metonymy is that metonymic mappings are domain internal -they hold a domain inclusion relationship- while domain external mappings are proper of metaphors -that is, mapping takes place across domains. This explains why authors like Kövecses & Radden (1999) and Panther & Thornburg (1999) seem to defend the view that metonymy is essential for the interpretation of proverbs. In relation to this, Ruiz de Mendoza considers that the relationship between the two Idealized Cognitive Models(hereafter ICM’s) present in proverbs (specific and generic) are in a stand-for-relationship.

Then, instead of the Generic Is Specific metaphor we would have the Specific for Generic metonymy, applied to a particular situation through the Generic Is Specific mapping. Proverbs would therefore consist of a source-in-target metonymy involving domain Expansion.

The importance of the relationships which hold between ‘generic’ and ‘specific’ in the organization and processing of information was first noted by Lakoff and Turner (1989).

These authors, however, granted these relationships metaphorical status. More recent accounts(Kövecses and Radden, 1999; Panther and Thornburg, 1999) have convincingly argued that the generic/specific distinction is metonymic in nature, ‘specific’ being a sub-domain of ‘generic’. In addition to this observation, we note that the relationship between these two ICM’s is not and identifying one but rather of the ‘stand-for’ kind. Kövecses and Radden (1999: 34) have already hinted at the importance of these metonymies for the interpretation of proverbs (Ruiz de Mendoza 2001b). Therefore, proverbs make use of high-level metonymies, which are the ones that implement generic ICM’s (which are abstractions of non-generic ICM’s).

Goosens (1990) distinguishes four patterns of interaction between metaphor and metonymy, which Ruiz de Mendoza (1999b) summarises in two, as a result of the distinction he makes between source-in-target and target-in-source metonymies: “one, in which the output of a metaphoric mapping provides de source for a metonymy, and another, in which a metonymic mapping provides the source for a metaphor” (1999a). From all these patterns, the metonymic expansion of the source of a metaphor provide the relevant material for the construction of a metaphoric mapping which will produce a generic space. Therefore, these two patterns of interaction are relevant when we deal with proverbs, since they allow for the use of the Specific For Generic metonymy that constitute proverbs.

An example of it is: ‘Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion’. For the head of ado part, we have a metaphorical understanding of leaders as being the head of a body, in terms of the basic metaphor Control Is Up, so by virtue of this metaphoric understanding, we can map part of an animal that is physically up (the head) onto that of a person, which is physically, and in turn metaphorically up, and still preserve the generic-level structure.
Here, the Great Chain metaphor interacts with one basic metaphor: Control Is Up, and with a metonymy of the source-in-target kind, the Specific For Generic one, which involves domain expansion: head stands in a subdomain relation with person. In this case it stands for the person that has a leading role. The source domain of the People Are Animals metaphor is developed through a source-in-target metonymy.

This metonymy structures a mental space to make the mapping from a specific to any generic situation that will be the source domain – or part of it – of the metaphor. We have two input spaces, one created by the metonymy and the other derived from the specific situation to which the metonymy applies.

In my view, the source-in-target metonymy in proverbs dealing with many correspondence metaphors does not provide all the elements of conceptual structure needed to create a generic space which permits the metaphoric mapping, but it just highlights, as I have just said, what is relevant to understand such metaphoric mapping. The generic space is built upon a different basis from the input space created by that metonymy, which develops just one of the correspondences. Thus, the generic structure which shares such properties to make the relation between domains possible is taken from the source and from the target domains of the metaphor as a whole, from all the correspondences.

Related to all this, the Extended Invariance Principle formulated by Ruiz de Mendoza (1998a) gives systematicity to the cognitive processes which underlie such phenomena.

It says: “Metaphorical mappings preserve the generic-level structure of the source domain in away consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain.” Ruiz de Mendoza (1998a) redefines it in order for that principle to make the convergence of more than one cognitive domain possible without violating the generic-level structures of any of them: “All contextual effects motivated by a metaphoric mapping will preserve the generic-level structure of the source domain and of any other input space involved, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain.” Thus, we have the convergence of the Generic Is Specific metaphor and the People Are Animals one, together with any ICM, either abstract or not, which appears in metonymies.

What is universal about proverbs is the cognitive mechanisms speakers use in order to produce, understand and transmit them, which we have already explained from the Great Chain Metaphor Theory (GCMT) perspective. Now, if we let the cultural perspective interfere, we may state that The Great Chain metaphor is a cultural model which defines attributes and behavior applying to humans, animals, plants, complex objects, and natural physical things, as we have seen before.

Lakoff & Turner (1989) present different metaphorical schemas that show how we conceive animals, and how we apply this folk knowledge to the construction of metaphorical schemas. Thus, we can understand people in terms of lower-order forms of being or even understand these lower-order forms of being in terms of human attributes and behavior. According to totem, the domain of animal life is one of the most elaborate ones, which we use to understand the human domain. This is important for proverb analysis and interpretation. They present some common propositions that take place in schemas for animals:

(1) - Pigs are dirty, messy and rude. Lions are courageous and noble. Foxes are clever. Dogs are loyal, dependable and dependent. Cats are frickle and independent. Wolves are cruel and murderous. Gorillas are aggressive and violent.

These are metaphorical propositions within schemas [...]. Our folk understanding of what these animals are like is metaphorical [...] It is so natural for us to understand non-human attributes in terms of our own human character traits that we often have difficulty realizing that such characterizations of animals are metaphorical Lakoff & Turner (1989).

According to this quotation, Lakoff & Turner (1989) seem to assume that this folk knowledge that is behind proverbs is natural, and so universal. In my opinion, the fact that it is so overspread and so deeply rooted in a wide variety of cultures does not mean that it is natural. It is a convention, no matter how spread it is, and therefore, it is subject to possible changes. Then, these metaphorical propositions are not universal, but common to many societies. This is what makes many proverbs coincide, if not in the perspective or in the form, at least in the message along different cultures in the world. Hatch and Brown (1995) have convincingly argued that although we think proverbs are bound to culture, there are many with equivalents across cultures. But even if we do not have the same proverbs, we can interpret them if we encounter them for the first time, because of their universal underlying mental mechanisms.

We may say, in relation to this, that we have two types of proverbs (Orbaneja y Majada, 1998): those with a common, universal morality, guide for the practice of virtue, similar in all countries, if not in the form, at least in the
message; and those which are particular, born from a historical fact, a local custom or a specific event. They have their own identity signs which characterize the place or time of origin.

From my view, proverbs are always a result of social, cultural, political values, and the only difference between ones and others is their range of extension along countries and societies. This previous distinction is, in any case, useful for the sake of this work, since I intend to extract some similarities and differences form a corpus of English and Spanish proverbs, in order to arrive to some conclusions that show how proverbs reflect social values. Lakoff & Turner’s (1989) is quite catastrophic in this respect:

For whatever reason, perhaps because in our early cognitive development we inevitably form the model of the basic Great Chain as we interact with the world, it seems that the Great Chain is widespread and has a strong natural appeal. This is frightening. It implies that those social, political, and ecological evils induced by the Great Chain will not disappear quickly or easily or of their own accord.

Proverbs are understood in relation to a background of assumptions and values, so they are primarily a social phenomenon. Context is essential for their correct interpretation, because they provide a message in an indirect way. They are learned through social interaction and for social purposes, and they promote social values. I doubt whether proverbs reflect social values or transmit them, but in any case we can learn many things about a specific culture just by looking at them.

Estaji and Nakhavali (2012) in their paper analyze the Persian animal proverbs based on the semantic – cognitive frame. The main aim of their research is to determine if there is semantic derogation in Persian, and if there is, ascertain whether it applies equally to both sexes (male & female) terms. The analysis shows that sex and semantic derogation are not shown in Persian structures and proverbs as much as other languages, but in the cases with semantic derogation, the metaphorical meanings of the female proverbs connote worse qualities than those connoted by the male proverbs. Bilal (2012) in his article stylistically analyze the short story of “Thank You Mr” by applying the three Metafunctions of Halliday, to find out if this analysis helps in better understanding of the text or not? He concludes that the examination of linguistics features of a text not only helps in understanding the structure of the text but also the deep meaning of it. Zolfagari (2009) in his paper has studied Persian proverbs from lexical and syntactical approaches and satisfactorily tried to explain the parentage of borrowed, foreign and broken vocabularies in Persian proverbs and also the percentage of taboo vocabularies in those proverbs. In another section of his article he distinguishes the syntactic parts of proverbial sentences and their types like elimination in these sentences.

Meider (2004) defines proverbs as short, generally known sentence of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form, which are handed down from generation to generation and since they belong to the common knowledge of basically all native speakers they are indeed very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. According to Khoramshahi (2004) Persian and English proverbs based on their contrastive mood can be categorized into three groups:

a) SL proverbs which have an identical or similar equivalent with the same or almost the same meaning in TL language, i.e.

English: Carry coals to Newcastle.
Persian: (زیربکرمانبردن) (Carry caraway to Kerman)

b) Proverbs which are available in SL but their equivalent cannot be found in formal or folklore literature of TL language, i.e.

English: (to be) in the same boat.
Persian: (ساده(وارنچرگامگیریمیشند) (in the same boat).

Kolahduz and Nabifar(2012) surveyed 400 proverbs of English and Persian from functional grammar of Halliday’s point of view, first they selected equivalent proverbs of these languages and put them in 20 categories according to their meanings then identified their processes were used in them form ideational metafunction. The analysis of proverbs from experiential perspective of functional grammar shows that in addition to Ghazizadeh & Najafi (2010) findings about complete semantics correspondence of Persian and English proverbs about (93%), there also are similarities and differences between Persian and English proverbs in the use of
processes based on ideational meta-function and in this matter both of these languages have something in common.
1. For the similarities, the ratio of material, relational and mental processes are high in both Persian and English proverbs.
2. For the differences, the ratios of relational, behavioral, verbal processes in Persian proverbs are more than English ones.
3. Again For the differences, the ratios of material and existential processes in English proverbs are more than Persian ones.

Chilkuri (2012) compared studies related to proverbs of English and believe that From a brief historical review of English proverb literature from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century, it has been observed that even though research work has been carried out both in paremiography and paremiology, the depth of linguistic research in paremiology is not comparable to that of the collections. In spite of the research output, areas such as sociolinguistic variation, illocutionary logic, discourse analysis, Gricean pragmatics, proverbial approaches to the theory of culture are still not examined adequately to account for the broad characteristics of proverbs in English.

The same is the case with many other languages such as Telugu, Hindi, and Arabic.

A very important finding of this comparison is the evidence for a need to establish proverbial linguistics as a new branch within proverbiology to re-examine not only paremiology but also paremiography from a karımik linguistic perspective to provide a principled account of the properties in a unified theory as a result of the following conclusions drawn from the review

Lakoff (1980) claims that conceptual metaphors are pervasive; (2) metaphorical mapping is systematic, so there are some interrelated metaphorical expressions in the mapping of one metaphor; (3) sometimes, the compliment and interaction between conceptual metaphor and metonymy that play a more important role for the understanding of English proverbs; (4) life experience, knowledge and specific culture contribute much to the cognition of English.

Agish (forthcoming) compared Istanbuli Turkish and Judeo –Spanish proverbs and idioms in order to express specific emotion from a cognitive pragmatic perspective. He chose several proverbs and idioms from different dictionaries show negative and positive emotions via the uses of following sensory organs: (a) visual perceptual organs of eyes, (b) the auditory organs of ears, (c) the olfactory organ of nose, and (d) gustory organ of tongue. He used Lazarus (1991) classification. The negative emotions include: (1) disgust/hate, (2) fright/anxiety, (3) shame/guilt, (4) sadness, (5) jealousy/envy, and (6) anger, while the positive emotions include: (1) happiness/joy, (2) relief, (3) pride, and (4) love/affection. Statistical analyses show the following results: more Judeo–Spanish proverbs and idioms employ the eyes and ears to express disgust/hate, and only the eyes to show jealousy/envy and love/affection, while more Turkish proverbs and idioms employ the nose to express sadness. Anger, and pride, and the tongue to express disgust/hate and sadness for nose socio-cultural reasons. Some mental conceptualization, i.e., implicit implicit metaphors and metonymies, underline these proverbs and idioms/or some explicit metaphors and metonymies which are based on relational analogs rather than attributional analogies, are present in them. Besides, the statistically insignificant differences between the percentages of the proverbs and idioms of two languages whose number is higher than those statistically significant ones show similar conceptualization.

**METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

Knowing that 93% of Persian and English proverbs have complete semantics correspondence Ghazizadeh & Najafi (2010) findings has been used and proverbs were randomly categorized into ten groups (Advice, Chance, Criticism, Experience, Hope, Malevolent, Modesty, Participate), then for each group example proverbs in Persian which had the equivalent content meaning with their sub category were written and their equivalent in English were found as well (the data were collected from the comprehensive dictionary of proverbs by Gorjian and Molonia (2004) and (2008) which had no lexical but complete semantics correspondence were collected and analyzed based on cognitive linguistics. This article tests this null hypothesis:
1. There isn't any differences between Persian and English proverbs.
They were analyzed from cognitive point of view inorder to find out which kind of metaphors and metonymy were used and what are the similarities and differences between them?

**Data analysis**

In this part of paper, collected data are presented, their metaphors and metonymies will be identified and then will be compared and discussed. The selected proverbs are put in 10 categories according to their meanings.
1-Hope
1a) Bozaknamirbaharmiyahxombozebaxiyarmiyad
2b) While the grass grows, the cows stare

In Persian the small goat love cucumber instinctually, but the time this animal can eat it is spring not every time of year that it wants so it must wait for it until spring. Patience and waiting is human characteristics not animal so in this proverb we observe up to down movement of Great chain. Patience and waiting is a part of human being, therefore source in target metonymy was identified.

In both languages, there is the same metaphor and metonymy, just in Persian culture the small goat is used, but in English cow is used.

1c) Mâhiroharvaqtazabbegiritâeast
1d) It is never too late to mend
In this example, again upward to downward movement. Fish is an animal and in all cultures that Persian is included in them is valuable. And, source in target metonymy is used. English equivalent does not show similar structure, just according to cultural and semantic structure they are considered equivalent not on the basis of their syntactic structure.

Group 2 Malevolent
2a) čâhkanhamišetahečâhimmune
2b) He falls into the pit who leads another to it

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**Figure 6. SourceTarget**

Well digger — Molevolent person

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**Figure 7.**

Bottom of well — Experience unhappiness

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On bases of our experience of our world there are different sub-categories and sub-hierarchical well-digger is viewed as low level job therefore, down to upward movement is used. Also source in target metonymy is identified.

These two proverbs have different structure, but semantically, pragmatically and socio-culturally convey same function and aim.

2c) kluxeanădzařădăš sang ast
2d) He who throws a clod deserves to be hit with a stone

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**Figure 8. SourceTarget**

Clad thrower — Everyone who botheř others

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**Figure 9. Source Target**

Stone — Unhappy end

Both Persian and English the same meaning and words are used for the same purpose so down to upward movement is utilized.
Group 3 Advice
3a) Kušeš be in harfhābedehgānīst
3b) He turns deaf ear to these words

In mentioned proverb, both languages have same meaning and function. As it is clear mind is the most important part of our body, but it is abstract phenomenon, so ear is used instead of it. Source in target metonymy is used, so down to upward movement of Great Chain of being is used.
3c) Naravad mix āhāni bar sang
3d) An iron nail does not go in to a stone

As above Persian and English use the shared words and concept and down to upward movement of Great Chain of being is used. Source in target metonymy utilized.

Group 4 Experience
4a) Dahanešbuyeširemide
4b) He smells of mother's milk

In Persian and English the same structure, semantic and pragmatic construction is used, also source in metaphorical and metonymical construction are the same
In above proverb, there is source in target metonymy because bad or bothering experience is a part of all experiences that can be found in real or imaginary world. According to Great Chain of metaphor there is down to upward.

Group 5 modesty

5a) Da raxharče prbartarbašesar be zirtarast
5b) The boughs that bear most hands lows
In English and Persian the same plant and concepts are used for being modesty.
5c)pīyādešobāhāmerim
5d) Come off your high horse

In Persian the animal name is not mentioned, but in English horse is used. These proverbs show the same meaning and function and source in target metonymy is utilized. Down to upward movement is identified.

Group 6) Criticism
6a) Dīg be dīg mīgē rut siyā
6b) The pot calls the kettle black

As seen above English and Persian use the same proposition, and Upward to downward
movement is used and target in source metonymy is identified.

6c) Hičbaqālinemigeduqe man toršast
6d) No one cries stinking fish

Group 7) Sagacity
7a) Felfelnabinče rizebeškanbebinče tize
7b) little fellow are often great wit

Figure 23.

Figure 24.

Figure 25.

Figure 26.
As seen above Persian and English don not use the same words, but conceptually they are the same. Downward movement is observed.

7c) Murâazmâstmikešebirun
7d) He split hairs

In these languages hair is used in both of them and they have the same function.

Group 8) Chance
8a) xaremâazkoregídomnádášt
8b) I have no pretensions to being with
If we compare Persian and English proverb, we can realize that in Persian culture the Great Chain of being is applied not in English.

8c) Hamarobargimigiremāročerqenafti
8d) The unlucky person in any case is unlucky
In English and Persian the same words and meaning are used. And upward to downward movement is used.

9c) ąşpazkedotąşodąşyąşurmięşeyabinamak
9d) Too many cooks spoil the soup

10) Judgment
10a) Xaroazpálnenemíšenąsąd
11b) Do not judge a horse by its harness
A observed above English and Persian use the same words and concept. In both of them source in target metonymy is used.

DISCUSSION

In Persian and English, there are different types of proverb with respect to the metaphors used in them. All of them make use of the Generic is Specific metaphor, but we may find proverbs with animals as protagonist: therefore there are also the people Are Animals.

In general in analyzed Persian proverbs, animals are used more. In some of them the same animals are utilized. Proverbs in both languages have the same functions and underlying the same deep structure and meaning, just words are different, so in most of the cases they show the same mental mechanisms, metaphor and metonymy so, they are result of cultural, social and cognition values. And also they are comprehensible in relation to a background and presupposition values consequently, they are social is necessary for their interpretation because they provide a message indirectly. Children learn them through cultural transmission.

There are some similarities and differences between Persian and English proverbs and they reflect early cognitive development. As the data showed in the cultural model of the Great chain of metaphor, we have hierarchies that are used in them for better understanding of them. In these proverbs animals are prototypically characterized by their instinct behavior.

The differences that exist between Persian and English proverbs show different perspectives in metaphorical constructions and different scopes.
Proverbs are economical since they convey more than their syntactic structures as a result there is mismatch between their syntactic and semantic structure. History frozen proverbs that is, habits of language societies and cultural miscellaneous uses of language developed to closed and fixed patterns. They lack sentimental perspective because in the proverbs that variant sentimental form is used. Way to any foregrounding, opening or deep understanding is closed.

In proverbs, there is not any opening horizon in order to find two important elements of sentimental perspectives, namely locality and directness. These kind of language data lack renewal reduction, reconstruction and evolvement, consequently people cannot use their own perspective in them. So They a inescapable fence. Sentimental aspect in them cause an action or prevent listener from all kind of actions.

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