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## **HUMAN BODY PARTS AND THEIR METAPHORIC MEANINGS IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC**

***Abstract:** english and Arabic are two different languages with their own cultural backgrounds. In these two languages, there are metaphors that perceive objects, animate or inanimate. In using metaphors in general and body metaphors in particular English and Arabic intercalants create mysterious meanings which require deep thinking on both sides to understand the real meaning. Consequently, understanding body part metaphors can increase comprehension between these two languages and make conversations more natural. As such, the present study aims at providing necessary information, which can be with benefit in the fields of translation and cross-cultural communication.*

***Keywords:** metaphor, human body, socio-cultural variation, cognitive linguistics.*

***Аннотация:** английский и арабский два разных языка со своим собственным культурным наследием. В этих двух языках есть метафоры, которые передают объекты, живое и неживое. При использовании метафор в целом и метафор, обозначающих тело в частности, английский и арабский создают загадочные значения, которые требуют глубокого осмысления с обеих сторон для понимания истинного смысла. Следовательно, часть метафор, обозначающих тела могут увеличить понимание между этими двумя языками и сделать беседы более естественным. Данное исследование направлено на предоставление необходимой информации, которая может быть полезной в области перевода и межкультурной коммуникации.*

***Ключевые слова:** метафора, человеческое тело, социально-культурные различия, когнитивная лингвистика.*

## 1. Introduction

In modern society, it seems that human body is often used as a measure for non-human world. The cultures of all times and places have always been vitally concerned with the body. The rapid development of high technology in recent years has caused enormous changes in modern society. This development has coincided with the increase of interest in notions of embodiment (see Gibbs 1999, and kovecses 2002).

Human body parts are used metaphorically to modify our environment. The whole body is structured to perform activities in order to reach information from our natural and cultural environment. Widespread use of body metaphors probably results from the fact that human beings give central importance to their bodies, especially in modern society (see Skara 2004).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call this type of metaphors personification metaphors. They state that «there are well-known expressions like the *foot of the mountain*, a *head of the cabbage*, *the leg of a table*, etc. that are used in different contexts and registers to refer to objects and concepts other than those that are actually being perceived to fall within their literal scope» (ibid:117). Human body metaphors are very fascinating in human experiences, and scholars in the field agree that human body is fortunately designed for suitable metaphors crafting to demonstrate and show the prominence systems of thinking other physique representations (See Lakoff and Johnson 2001, and Skara 2004).The fundamental components to use human body metaphors are experience and interactive exercise in everyday life: health, power, right, thought, peace and security, socio-cultural practices and events at different levels. For example, the very common metaphors: «*rule of thumb*», «*the heart of the matter*», «*he broke my heart*», «*she's laid back*» and «*one foot in the grave*» can convey deeper meaning, then the users are communicating much more than at just a surface level. In fact, they communicate with one's powerful and unconscious mind. As such, each culture and society produces extensional meanings for metaphors which are due to socio-economic, cultural, educational and political experiences of the people (see Way 1991).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Cognitive researchers such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Turner (1989), and Lakoff (1993) do not adopt the traditional view of metaphor as a literary device used only in the poetic language or literary works. They see it as a conceptual process output. It can help human being to understand one domain in terms of another. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) state that «... *metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature*». Lakoff and Turner (1989:10) show that metaphors are the cognitive tools through which we understand ourselves and the world. *The present paper will follow the cognitive linguistic concept in analyzing metaphors.*

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have extensively presented linguistic data demonstrating that metaphors are not limited to rhetoric and poetic language, but that they are manifested much more frequently than previously thought also in everyday language, forming coherent systems by which all humans conceptualize world experiences. Such expressions as «*your arguments are indefensible*», «*he attacked every weak point in my argument*» are part of a metaphoric scenario that gives rise to a basic metaphor in people's conceptual system (see Frank 1999; Steen 1994).

The theoretical assumptions on which the present paper is based are derived from the conceptual theory of metaphor initially developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). In its broadest sense, the cognitive approach claims that metaphors are far from being poetic and figures of speech but are pervasive in conventional language and thought. Metaphor is a device with the capacity to structure our conceptual system, providing, at the same time, a particular understanding of the world and a way to make sense of our experience. From this standpoint, metaphor is defined by Lakoff and Nunez (2004:5) as «*the mechanism by which the abstract is comprehended in terms of the concrete*» It is a good device people use to provide information on how they understand things.

### *3.What is meant by human body metaphors?*

Human body metaphors are found in all languages. They are used to refer to objects which have either physical or functional similarity to the human body parts or to the state of the body in general. A large number of idiomatic expressions also use words which refer to the human body as either metaphors or metonymies. (see Frank, 1999).

Body metaphors occur in several varieties. One type of body metaphors uses body parts and body organs to describe things such as communication, complex things like teams and groups, cities, nations, or technological facilities (see Goschler 2005). The following examples are good evidence to what has mentioned above:

*The life span of the server.*

*You want to inform yourself about the state health of Windows.*

(Way 1991:33)

*We saw the process of reunification at work most vividly, in heart of Europe*  
(Musolf 2004:63).

*Thrust something down someone's throat.*

*Chew the fat.*

*Eat one's words / Poke one's nose into something.*

*Waste one's breath/ Pat on the back.*

(Pauwel&Simon-Vandenberggen 1995: 36–37)

*The arm of a chair.*

*The leg of a table.*

*The foot of the mountain.*

*The neck of the bottle.*

*The eye of the needle.*

*An ear of corn.*

*The heart of a lettuce.*

*The face of a watch.*

*A banana skin.*

(Skara 2004:184)

## *English and Arabic 4A Contrastive Analysis of Body*

Eventhough English and Arabic are two different languages with different cultural backgrounds, human beings have similar process of thought. Talking about language and body metaphors in particular, we can recognize a great deal of equivalence between the two languages body metaphors, namely in image and implied messages, as it is obvious in the following:

### *1. Arm*

English language uses the word «*arm*» metaphorically to describe things that have no arms:

*Cradled in the arms of the tide*

in Arabic is attributed also to things having no arm **جناح** The word

«واخفض لهما جناح الذل من الرحمة»

(الاسراء: 24)

### *2. Artery*

In English, this word (*artery*) is used metaphorically to represent a source or channel of vitality in anything:

*The awful curse of the papal excommunication ... seemed to freeze up all the arteries of life.*

*Arteries of traffic* (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 1974)

In Arabic has the same sense as that in English: **شريان** the word.

فمصر الرياض وسودانها..... عيون الرياض وخلصانها

وما هو ماء ولكنه..... وريد الحياة وشريانها

(شوقي, 1: 256)

### *3. Back*

English language uses the word (*back*) with the following metaphorical indications:

1. He largest portion of a thing.

*The back of the fire was broken at noon.*

Advanced Learners DictionayOxford1974 (y Oxford)

2. Support or protection:

*He knows that he has the head of the Department at his back.*

*Back a friend in an argument or quarrel.*

(ibid)

3. Work (too) strenuously:

*Break one's back.*

(ibid)

4. Behave as if one were unimportant: humble oneself.

*Take a back seat.*

(ibid)

(متن, ظهر) However, Arabic language has various metaphors of the word.

It refers to the denotative meaning of any expression:

(أنزل القرآن على سبعة أحرف لكل آية ظهر وبطن)

(الشريف الرضي, 49:1937)

Like English, it also means men supporting (an) others

ظهر الرجل أنصاره

(ibid)

in Arabic means ظهر which is equivalent to the word متن The word

the most of anything

سار متن النهار

(ibid)

4. Eye

The English eye metaphors connote meanings related to the physiological observations of the eye. Examples such as, *her blue eyes lit up like a blowtorch; eyes like burnt holes in a blanket; I've seen nicer eyes on a potato; the young girl's eyes were silent tongues of love*, etc connote the appreciative nature of the eye related to love and beauty. On the other hand, the metaphors: *the detectives' eyes were as hard as splintered concrete struck with a pick-axe; he was so shocked that his eyeballs were on the end of knitting needles; eyes that read you like a newsreader's autocue*, etc. have a semiotic meaning of investigations in forensics due to the physiological changes of

the eye for stimuli. Likewise, the red and weak looking eyes may show jealousy, fatigue or tiredness. When someone says: *he gazed at us with his diagonal bearing red eyes; her eyes were like narrow stab wounds loaded with blood*; the intended meaning is jealousy or meanness. But when it is said: *after the four hour-exam, she comes out with her eyes red out swollen*; it is intentional to mean the fatigue and tiredness.

Is attributed to wisdom and to emphasize the thing itself عين In Arabic the word.

«ثم لترونها عين اليقين»

(التكاثر:7)

It sometimes means to be eager for something:

«ولاتمدن عينيك الى مامتعا به أزواجا منهم زهرة الحياة الدنيا لنفتنهم فيه»

(طه:131)

It also means the thing itself:

لا تطلب أثرا بعد عين

(اللسان:عين)

Means to be highly estimated *فلان على عيني في الإكرام*The expression

(ibid)

## 5. Face

In English, face metaphors are again linked with the following:

to beauty evaluations of either type 1.

*Her face is her fortune; her face was fresh in color.*

1. Are about meanings related to emotion, e.g.: *his face swells up and turns purple like the rear end of an amorous baboon; Steve has the contorted face of a bank robber without the aid of a nylon stocking mask on his head; Emma was making faces at me through the window*. Such and so face metaphors can be used in crime investigations and feeling analysis at advanced levels.

2. To show the age and hardship people have passed through days, years, and centuries, e.g.: *his face bore the marks of ancient battles; a shriveled face like a collapsed lung; a man's face in his autobiography; the villains' face was textured like a gnarled bone; his emotions were written all over his face.*

3. To mean a person:

*There are a few faces in class.*

2007 (antonyms Oxford dictionary of Synonyms and

In Arabic the word ..... is attributed to things to mean the thing itself. Notice specifically the example below:

«كل شئ هالك إلا وجهه»

(القصص:88)

It can metaphorically be used to refer to the first part or beginning:

«وقالت طائفة من أهل الكتاب آمنوا بالذي انزل على الذين آمنوا وجه النهار وأكفروا آخره»

(آل عمران:72)

It also means the part representative of the essential features of a thing

(لكل شئ وجه, ووجه دينكم الصلاة)

(الشريف الرضي 1937:158)

6. *Hand*

This part of body has the following metaphorical indications in English:

1. Help:

*Can you give me a hand to lift this?*

2. Control:

*The demonstration was getting out of hand.*

is used metaphorically to mean control as in يد In Arabic the word.

(الفتح 10) «يد الله فوق ايديهم

6. *Heart*

In English, the word (*heart*) is used metaphorically to mean:

1. The innermost or central part of anything:

*I got into the heart of city life.*

(Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms,2007).

2. The part of anytime or season in which it becomes most intense.

*To send me away in the heart of severe winter* (ibid).

3. The vital, essential or efficacious part:

*The church of a monastery was the heart of the place.*



4. Strength, fertility, or capacity of land to produce.

*In 1787, the heart of the land was so improved that Coke began to sow wheat (ibid).*

5. The seat of one's inmost thoughts and secret feelings; one's inmost being; the depths of the soul; the soul, the spirit.

*I like you to speak out of your heart freshly what you think (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 1974).*

6. The seat of love and courage

*me.) Lady Caroline will quite lose her heart to you. You put heart into (ibid).*

*A broken heart (or heartbreak) is a common metaphor for the intense emotional pain or suffering one feels after losing a loved one, whether through death, divorce, breakup, physical separation, betrayal, or romantic rejection.*

To mean metaphorically the following... قلب Arabic uses the word

1. The vital or essential part of anything:

*قلب الذريعة/ قلب الشتاء*

2. The part of any time in which it becomes most intense:

*ينطفئ سراجة في قلب الظلام ( مجمع الامثال 20:20)*

3. A person considered as the most representative of his tribe or group:

*فلان قلب في بني فلان (الشريف الرضي, 22:1937)*

4. The seat of thoughts and understanding:

*«إن في ذلك لذكرى لمن كان له قلب»*

(ق:37)

5. The seat of secrets:

*«يحذر المنافقون أن تنزل عليهم سورة تنبئهم بما في قلوبهم» (التوبة: 64/)*

*5. Cross-cultural difference between Arabic and English concerning body metaphors*

Language is always a result of social, cultural, historical and political values. Despite the universal features, there still be distinct features that differentiate one culture from another. Beside the similarities, there are a lot of expressions that exist in English but not in Arabic and vice versa. Therefore, some body parts metaphors exist

only in Arabic not in English and vice versa. To make it clear, let us consider the following:

*5.1. Some Body Metaphors Used Only in English.*

1. *Finger* is the thing itself.

*On whose mute brown Lips Nature seemed to have laid the finger of silence.*

2. *Front* is the first part.

*Placing social aims at the head and front of his life.*

3. *Hair* is applied to the rays or 'tresses' of the sun, the tail of a comet, etc.

*New fire ...shook its portentous hair beneath Heaven's frown. (Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms 2007).*

4. *Jaw* is the seizing action or capacity of any devouring agency, as death, time, etc.

*Into the jaws of Death, into the mouth of hell rode the six hundred (ibid).*

5. *Lung* is an open space within or adjacent to a city.

*We can with perfect safety use these old burial grounds as lungs for the overcrowded city (ibid).*

6. *Mouth* is the means of receiving spiritual advice.

*Christians are spiritual men; faith is their mouth, and wisdom their food (ibid).*

7. *Nerves* are the things, parts, or elements constituting the very strength of something.

*Good laws are the nerves of the common weal (ibid).*

8. *Palm* is poetically applied to leaves.

*The leaves above their sunny palms outspread (ibid).*

9. *Womb* is a place or medium of conception and development, or a place of origin and growth.

*The fulfillment of her destiny in the womb of time (ibid).*

*5.2. Body Metaphors used only in Arabic*

الكعب 1. Ankle

.....is a glory and good reputation

ذهب كعب القوم

## 2. *Armpit* الأباط

.....are the broad parts of a place, such as a desert.

## ضرب آباط المفازة

## 3. *Buttock* عجز

عجز (إعجاز): (is (are)

1. The ending aspect of a thing.

لاتدبروا أعجاز أمور قد ولت صدورها

(الهمذاني 1911:163)

2. A group of people being late.

ويقطع الناس من اثارهم حتى بقيت عجز من الناس عظيمة

(الشريف الرضي 1937:72)

## 4. *Nape* قفا

... is the end of a matter of thing

(لأفعله قفا الدهر)

(اللسان:قفا)

## 5. *Nose* انف

انف is

1. The beginning of something

(لكل شئ انف وانف الصلاة التكبير)

(الشريف الرضي 1937:158)

2.a group of important people

وانتم لها ميم العرب والأنف المقدم

(مجمع الامثال:768)

## 6. *Rib* ضلع

is a group of men forming a force against (an) other(s) ضلع

هم علي ضلع

(ibid)

## 7. *Thigh* فخذ

is a part of a tribe فخذ

## 8. *Tongue* لسان

لسان is an expressive situation or circumstance that does not need any other means of description

كلامه بيان وصمته لسان

(اللسان)

## 6. Conclusion

The present paper has come to the following conclusions:

1. The metaphorical extensions of body parts are semantically and pragmatically understood as unrelated to the real, natural or grammatical meanings expected to associate.

2. The extensional meanings of body metaphors are due to socio-economic, cultural, educational and political experiences of the people who have produced them in history of survival.

3. The extensional meanings of body metaphors are very easy to produce but difficult to interpret and understand. Hence, intercommunication becomes very problematic as they are embodied in the culture of the language being spoken.

4. In English and Arabic languages, human body parts are used metaphorically to modify our environment. The whole body is structured to perform activities in order to reach information from our natural and cultural environment.

5. Metaphors exist because of the incapacity of the human brain to store all words which refer to the infinite world. Since the brain is part of the human body and the body experiences are the ones the brain experiences first and keeps experiencing all the time, it is logical that the body takes center stage among the providers of conceptual metaphors. These body conceptual metaphors are found in all languages, although some senses may be used more predominantly in some cultures than others because of environmental and social factors as expected and predicted by different academic disciplines and theories.

6. In most of the Arabic-speaking world, metaphors are still seen as mere literary adornments, unlike in the West, where the cognitive and linguistic underpinnings of figurative language are being actively discussed.

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