

A Study of Jordanian Proverbs Related to the Parts of the Body

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Abstract

The present study focuses on studying body-related proverbs in Jordan. The study uses a descriptive research design to examine the organization and construction of 45 Jordanian proverbs about bodily parts in order to come up with a set of conclusions. First, Jordanian proverbs and idioms about humans' bodily parts are divided into five categories: (i) Proverbs/ idioms concerning relative relationships and marriage advice, (ii) Proverbs/ idioms concerning friendships and strangers (iii) Proverbs/idioms expressing a person's traits, (iv) Imparting guidance, and satisfaction with life (v) Proverbs/ idioms related to body organs associated with food.

Keywords: proverbs, idioms, culture, Jordanian proverbs, human's body proverbs and idioms

1. Introduction

Proverbs are short and brief sayings that are delivered from ancient generations to new generations (Sameer, 2016). These sentences involve actual traditional views and wisdom in the form of memorable metaphors. In addition, these sentences are also considered practical devices for transferring knowledge and wisdom about the nature of the human. Norrick (1985) argues that proverbs have “standard proverbial interpretation”, while speakers easily understand the non-literal meaning (metaphorical meaning) of the proverbs due to conventional interpretation that connects between the proverbial and literal meaning of the proverbs. The connection between the two interpretation levels triggers the question that indicates why proverbs include metaphorical meaning. As well, what are the motives for the using figurative language in the proverbs?

The utilization of proverbs in various languages had motivated linguists to study them from different perspectives, and this study enriches the related literature to investigate this topic. However, the researchers were inspired to conduct a study on the body-related proverbs used by Jordanians because of the differences in their use in different speech contexts. Therefore, this study aims to investigate different perspectives of proverbs related to body parts such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics, syntax, and semantics.

The literal meaning of a proverb such as “Don’t cry over spilled milk” does make sense on its own, but it’s not until you apply this meaning to a broader set of situations that you understand the real point of the proverb. For example, “Don’t cry over spilled milk” means “Don’t get upset over something that has already been done. It’s too late to worry about it now, just get on with your life.”

As well as, languages involve various proverbs that express social and cultural aspects (Vulič and Zergollern-Miletič, 1998). In addition, sociolinguistic research has focused on analyzing proverbs as oral social, and traditional phrases (Ambu-Saidi, 2010). Moreover, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic analysis of proverbs indicates that proverbs hold specific meaning based on the speech situation in which they were utilized. Besides, proverbs are not only interpreted based on the context but also culturally bound expressions. Therefore, since proverbs have social and cultural perspectives, the researcher through this study aims to shed light on the importance and use of these proverbs in the Jordanian culture and society by answering the research question entitled “What body-related proverbs are used among Jordanians?”

2. Related Studies

Many studies have been conducted on proverbs. To start with, Sameer (2016) aims to analyze English proverbs related to specific kinds of animals and compare them with their Arabic equivalences. The study focuses on proverbs related to horses and dogs. The researcher built up a model based on three approaches, namely Hsieh (2006), Sperber and Wilson (1986), and Lakoff and Truner (1989), for recognizing the meaning of these proverbs and identifying their cultural background. Moreover, Samir (2016) explores the relevance theory of notion enrichment to derive the implicature of these proverbs in his work.. As well, the study tackled

conceptual and grammatical motivation. Furthermore, the study aimed to use cognitive linguistics to implement these proverbs to explore the metonymy and metaphors evident in these proverbs. The study sample consisted of 20 proverbs in English and Arabic. The Arabic proverbs were from Mojamah Al.Amthal book for the author Abu- Fadhel Al Meidani. The study relied on the qualitative approach. The study found that proverbs in both languages presented the same meaning, metaphor, mental mechanism, and metonymy. In addition, according to the study, proverbs with dog expressions signify bad things, while proverbs that include horse expressions represent noble and good things.

In this vein, Al-Azzam (2017) investigates the cultural constraints that translate Jordanian proverbs into English. The study stresses the folkloric, colloquial, and social use of proverbs. The study also addresses the cultural and social aspects of the proverbs and makes a relationship between socio-cultural values and the Jordanian proverbs. Al-Azzam indicated the historical background of the studied proverbs, their actual events, frequency, and utterance. Al-Azzam sample consisted of 8 Jordanian proverbs. The study relies on the descriptive approach to meet the study goals. The study finds that translating Jordanian proverbs into English encounters various challenges, most significantly the cultural aspects. Moreover, the translation of Jordanian proverbs is challenging due to colloquialism, which indicates omitting the proverbs' social, semantic, and cultural values.

In line with this argument, the study of Berggren (2018) aims to investigate the embodiment of proverbs that relate to body parts, eyes in particular in the English, Swedish, and Japanese languages. The study goes into detail about the history of proverbs and their spread over the world; it also shows the usability of these proverbs in everyday communications in various languages. The study also includes the culturally specific proverbs that are not similar to the Western norm and showed their sources. Moreover, the study illustrates the cultural markers that existed in these proverbs and the method of interpreting the metaphoric representation of eye-related proverbs through humans' bodily experiences. Besides, the study adopts "Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory" to analyze the metaphoric representation of the studies proverbs by the metaphoric concepts.

The study of Rakhimova, Mukhamadiarova, & Tarasova (2019) describes the cultural and linguistic features of German proverbs that describe family relations. The researchers analyze the related literature and followed the structural and semantic analysis method. Besides, the researcher follows the semantic and lexical groups description method and the comparative method. The study sample consisted of 180 proverbs that describe family relations. The study indicated that proverbs that describe family relations in the German language would cover a wide range of relationships between wife and husband, parents and children, parenting instructions, and relationships with family relatives. Therefore, these proverbs have critical importance to the German families' mentality. Hence, some of these proverbs describe women's role in German families and society because they reflect the traditional features of the wife image in society. Proverbs that describe the family relations in the German language show that women have strong personalities, while husbands are helpless and weak. Moreover, these proverbs picturize the wife as a strong human being. In addition, the family relation proverbs showed that the main role in the German families belongs to the mothers because

most of these proverbs describe the mother's attitude toward their children and the mother's qualities. On the other side, there were various proverbs that describe women's duties, such as housework and taking after their children.

Similarly, Mansyur and Said (2019) examine body-related proverbs from a semantic and cognitive standpoint. From a linguistic and cognitive standpoint, this study investigates the cognitive mechanism that encourages humans to develop proverbs that symbolize human bodily parts. The researcher employs the qualitative method, and the data are collected from Wolio proverbs. The researcher mapped the proverbs' domains based on metonym and metaphorical concepts. The study indicates that proverbs are those language expressions that illustrate a connection between human cognition, culture, and language. The study finds that mapping of the studies proverbs holds images of negative, natural, and positive meanings. The meaning of the body-related proverbs does not only hold the cultural experience and illustrates the generality of proverbs, which indicates that proverbs are spread among cultures. Moreover, the metonymy mechanism indicates moving the parts of the body-related proverbs to the humans' general behavior nature. Above all, the study finds that there are differences and similarities in the metaphorical propositions in the semantics of the body-related proverbs.

3. Methods

The researchers have adopted the qualitative research design to mimic the natural and real environment and to address some social and traditional phenomena related to a particular society.

English proverbs were collected from written books, and only body-related proverbs were included. Arabic proverbs were collected from the Jordanian proverb book, namely, Popular Proverbs in Jordan "الامثال الشعبية في الاردن" by Hani Subhi Al-Amad (1973).

The researchers adds comments on the literal and intended meaning of the proverbs and their structure including the semantic and syntactic aspects. In addition, the researcher applies the speech act to highlight the figurative language meaning in different situations and contexts. In addition, the researcher lists the proverbs based on their subject in lists to analyze their pragmatic meaning leading to inferring the figurative language.

The study sample has chosen 40 Jordanian proverbs. In addition, proverbs and idioms with reference to the body parts are categorized into different groups. These proverbs and idioms are divided into five groups. Thus, body-related proverbs/idioms have five themes:

1. Proverbs/ idioms referring to the relationship with relatives and marriage advice.
2. Proverbs/idioms referring to relationships with friends and strangers
3. Proverbs/ idioms referring to describing the individuals' characteristics
4. Giving advice and satisfaction with sustenance
5. Proverbs/ idioms related to body organs associated with food

4. Results

4.1 Body related proverbs in context

This section discusses Jordanian proverbs and idioms related to body parts that were extracted from a book of Jordanian proverbs. This section analyzes the actual settings of the proverbs by dividing them into five sub-sections, and in each section, the researcher provides examples to illustrate the metaphorical meaning.

4.1.1 Proverbs and idioms referring to the relationship with relatives and marriage advice

The first classification of proverbs involves instructions for humans in their relationships and illustrates the importance relative to human life. These proverbs also involve linguistic units that present suggestions for marriage and choosing the correct partner. The first group of body-related proverbs and idioms includes proverbs that share the same linguistic items related to marriage advice and the criteria of choosing the partners. These proverbs and idioms contain body parts, such as eye, flesh, brain, and legs.

Example 1

The Jordanian proverb “ما بضي على العين الا جفونها” (nothing covers the eye except its eyelids) is used to indicate that you can never live without your relatives, which means that “blood is thicker than water”. This proverb compromises that the human shall maintain a good relationship with his/her relatives because they are the main source of support and happiness. This proverb has more than the literal meaning and includes a metaphorical representation, which is illustrated in referring to the relative by the eyebrow of the eye as a sign of close relations.

In addition, this proverb has other equivalences that share the same meaning and could be uttered in the same context, such as “انا وخوي على ابن . - ما يحمل همك الا ابن عمك-” الدم ما بصير مية“ عمي, وانا وابن عمي ع الغريب

Example 2

This classification involves various idiomatic expressions and proverbs that underline and organize humans' relationships with friends and strangers. These proverbs involve instructions on how to deal with people you love and people you hate, as well, these proverbs indicate some greetings and methods of expressing the human's feelings toward friends and strangers, such as missing them or respecting them.

The proverb “شاور لكبير والزر غير وارجع لعقلك” (**Consult the eldest and the youngest then go back to your (mind) own decision**) means that the human shall consult everyone, and the final decision shall be based one's own conviction. This proverb indicates that the human shall consult everyone before taking any decision, and the final decision refers to him (to his mind). This proverb refers to the human mind as a human and suggests consulting the mind before reaching the final decision.

“شاور لكبير والزر غير وارجع لعقلك” This proverb refers to make sure and study the subject deeply before starting it because it will be hard to skip it. This proverb motivates the hearer to consult

everyone and to take the final decision based on his / her convention. The figurative language in this proverb is illustrated in the metaphoric exemplifying of the brain as a place or human (return to).

“اللي واقع من فوق رجليه لا حسيفة عليه” (Elli waqe9 men fouq rejleih la haseifah lieh). This proverb means don't feel sorry for the misery that people bring to themselves on their own. In addition, there is another proverb that shares the same meaning “اللي من ايده الله يزيدده”. The figurative language in this proverb is illustrated in “واقع من فوق رجليه” exemplifying that the human who takes the wrong decision is falling over his head.

4.1.2 Proverbs refer to relationships with friends and strangers

Example 3

The proverb " طعمي الثم بتستحي العين ". This proverb has more than one meaning and exceeds the literal meaning. Hence, the actual sense of this proverb is not related to eating or feeding, but it is related to the gentle treatment of friends or strangers to improve friendship, relations, and human behavior.

Example 4

The proverb “اخذه على قد عقله”. The literal meaning of this proverb is “take him as the extent of his mind”, while the metaphorical meaning of this proverb indicates that humans shall treat others based on their minds and knowledge. This proverb indicates avoiding conflict with others by dealing with them based on their mentality and knowledge.

4.1.3 Proverbs refer to describing the individuals' characteristics

This classification involves proverbs and expressions that present descriptions of humans and show their experiences, such as the experienced person, stubborn, wise person, and unforgiving person. These proverbs include some of the body parts, such as the ear, eye, flesh, shoulder...etc.

Example 5

The proverb " بعرف من وين توكل الكتف " is used to show that the speaker is well-experienced, wise, and has self-confidence. Using this proverb in the speech is related to study and exams, however, the speaker achieves various benefits from this proverb because it suggests that the addressee can reach whatever he/she wants because he/she has enough wisdom, intelligence, and experience.

Example 6

The literal meaning of this idiom “عظمه طري / عوده قاسي” is “His bones are soft/strong”, while the metaphorical meaning is “Wet behind the ears / experienced person”. This idiom is used to indicate that a human is soft/strong. However, using this idiom in the speech is related to the human's experience in life, and the speaker can achieve various benefits from this idiom because it suggests that the addressee has few experiences.

Example 7

The Jordanian idiom “لحمه مر” means “His flesh is bitter, which metaphorically means “unforgiving person”. This idiom is used to indicate the addressee is hard and intelligent.

4.1.4 Giving advice and satisfaction with sustenance

This classification of proverbs and expressions was launched to present advice to the humans to satisfy with their fortune and accept what Allah gave them to reach the internal self-satisfaction. Besides, these proverbs are like guidelines for humans in their life to avoid irritating people or acts and to seek the things that could benefit them.

Example 8

The Jordanian proverb “اللي بوكل على ضرسه بنفع نفسه” means who eats on his sprocket benefits himself, and this proverb indicates that “self-sufficiency is of most benefit to people”. Hence, this proverb is used to indicate the addressee shall take care of himself/ herself and seek his/her interests. However, the literal meaning involves eating, and the human who eats by himself will gain the benefit. Hence, this is not the intended meaning of this proverb because it is used as advice for the addressee to look after himself/herself.

4.1.5 Proverbs containing parts of the body related to food

This classification of proverbs idioms is built on the function of somebody’s organs such as the hand, mouth, and stomach with food. For example, using the function of mouth “eat” and “taste” to refer to how to deal with others.

Example 9

The Jordanian proverb “طعمى الثم بتستحي العين” means that if you feed the mouth the eye becomes bashful. What is clear here it is not related to the actual sense, but it is related to the nice treatment given to someone; a good treatment is good to improve others’ behaviors.

5. Conclusions

The researcher attempts through this study to answer the research questions to confirm or reject the study hypotheses presented in the first chapter. Hence, the research questions are intended to pave the way for and help the researcher toward a more accurate and comprehensive knowledge of body-related proverbs. The study finds that Jordanian proverbs and idioms about bodily parts are divided into five categories:

1. Proverbs and idioms refer to relationships with relatives and marriage advice.
2. Proverbs and idioms refer to relationships with friends and strangers.
3. Proverbs and idioms refer to describing the individuals’ characteristics.
4. Giving advice and satisfaction with sustenance.
5. Proverbs and idioms related to body organs associated with food.

Besides, the study reveals that figurative language, personification, metonymy, metaphor, paradox, parallelism, and simile exist in the Jordanian proverbs and idioms. Furthermore, the study finds that Jordanian proverbs and idioms related to body parts hold some grammatical characteristics, such as verbless sentences and imperative clauses.

5.1 Implications

This section illustrates the research implication and how could the findings be important for policy, practice, or theory. The main aim of this study is to fill the research gap in the field of Jordanian proverbs related to body parts on what are the adopted figurative language, structure, and organization. The researcher has conducted this study using the qualitative analytical approach and through various primary and secondary resources, with special attention to the Jordanian Book [Popular Proverbs in Jordan “الامثال الشعبية في الاردن”] for the author Hani Subhi Al.Amad (1973). In this sense, the researcher believes that this study would provide practical and theoretical addition to the theory and practice, such as understanding the structure, organization, and language in the spoken proverbs in Jordanian society. Besides, this study holds significant practical contributions in terms of providing adequate theoretical data as needed in social and linguistic studies in this field.

5.2 Limitations

The present discourse study aims mainly to examine body part-related proverbs in Jordanian Arabic, and other proverbs not related to body parts are excluded. This thesis is intended to examine the proverbs related to body parts in Jordanian society, while other proverbs are excluded.

5.3 Recommendations

This section discusses the study directions and limitations for future works. The study proposes two ways for expanding the current work in the future:

1. It is recommended to conduct studies to investigate the impact of social variables, such as gender, education, religion, status, and social distance. It is recommended to take these variables into consideration because they might impose a significant effect on responding to and producing these proverbs.
2. The present study focused on studying the Jordanian body-related proverbs, and the study recommended studying this topic in other dialects or cultures.

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