Cat metaphors in Jordanian Proverbs: A psycholinguistic study

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ABSTRACT

Metaphor is a type of figurative language which is part of one's culture and speech. It is mainly used to describe something new by referring to something familiar. Therefore, a metaphor is related to cognition and it is not a merely linguistic expression. It was assumed that metaphors are linguistic entities rather than being part of thought and cognition, however, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed that metaphors are part of the human cognition and action. Moreover, they added that the human conceptual system is metaphorical in its structure in the sense that human actions and perceptions are metaphorical in nature. In addition, the systematicity of metaphors in a language reflects the underlying conceptual structure of how something is stored and understood (ibid). Animals are one type of reference that can be used in metaphors since animals have different connotations in a community. Moreover, animal connotations in metaphors may vary from one language and culture to another and, therefore, different ways of treating animals in the language reflects different ways of conceptions about them. Therefore, the present study tries to examine the conceptions of cats in Jordanian community through analyzing twenty proverbs about cats based on the conceptual metaphor theory.

Keywords: proverbs, conceptual metaphor, cat metaphors, Jordanian Spoken Arabic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is one type of figurative language which have the characteristic that its intended or figurative meaning is different from its literal meaning. A Metaphor is defined as a "cognitive linguistic device used to describe something new by reference to something familiar" (Cacciari and Padovani, 2012:515). Therefore, as being inferred from the meaning, metaphors are not merely linguistic entities, rather, they are part of the human cognition and that is why in the mentioned definition, metaphors are described as cognitive linguistic devices not only linguistic devices.

Proverbs are defined as "familiar, fixed, sentential expressions that express well-known truths, social norms, or moral concerns" (Gibbs and Beitel, 1995: 134). The interpretation of proverbs has been viewed by psychologists as a sign of higher reasoning because understanding proverbs is a proof which reveals peoples' ability to think in an abstract way. Moreover, this abstract way of interpreting proverbs leads to concrete interpretation of metaphorical expressions used in the proverbs since most proverbs are metaphorical in nature (ibid).

The present study focuses on cat metaphors in JSA and, therefore, reflecting people's perspective of cats because these proverbs are part of its culture. Therefore, following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor, this study tries to investigate the conceptions of cats in JSA by referring to its metaphoric expressions. Hence, the present study tries to answer the question: What are the connotations of 'cat' that can be inferred from metaphorical expressions in Jordanian proverbs? In order to answer this question, twenty proverbs that contain metaphors of cats will be collected online. Then, they will be analyzed based on the conceptual metaphor 'HUMANS ARE ANIMALS', and how this conceptual metaphor is reflected in the metaphorical expressions in Jordanian proverbs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between proverbs and cognition. Such studies linked the role of proverbs to higher mental reasoning. Piaget was one of the researchers to use proverbs in assessing mental status (Gibbs and Beitel, 1995) in which he examined the comprehension of proverbs in children between 9-15 years old and reported that children of these ages are unable to think in an abstract way and showed no understanding of the proverbs provided in the study when

he asked them to match a certain proverb with sentences that paraphrase the proverbs. Other researchers used proverbs as a tool to examine the ability of people with mental disorders to think in an abstract way. Hence, they used proverbs as an indicator for thinking abstractly and metaphorically. According to Goldstein in 1939, "the fundamental impairment producing a thought disorder is inability to think abstractly" (Cited in Andreasen, 1977: 465).

Hence, different studies used proverbs in assessing the ability to think abstractly in people with mental disorders such as schizophrenics. Searles (1962: 23) agrees with Werner who described this inability of thinking abstractly in schizophrenics as "a matter of regression to a primitive level of thinking". For Searles (ibid), he examined different schizophrenics, in his study, he examined two patients: one is forty-two- year old and the other is thirty- eight- year old. Each time these two patients were visiting Searles clinic, he used to use, sometimes, figurative language in his speech such as "And you feel, perhaps, that your therapist is like the heavy chairs-very hard to move?". He argues that his patients used to perceive such statements in literal way. Finally, he proposed that such patients' inability to think abstractly is due to their lack of imagination. Such studies reveal that metaphors and proverbs require a deep conception and cognition.

On the other hand, other studies have been conducted to examine the use of animal metaphors in proverbs. A study by Sameer (2016) focuses on the cognitive concepts of horse and dog in English and Arabic proverbs in terms of metaphors and metonymies in light of the semantic molecules approach. Another study by Muhammad and Rashid (2014) examined cat metaphors in Malay and English proverbs from a contrastive perspective. They found that there are similarities between English and Malay proverbs in reference to cats as being authoritative as in (when the cat is away the mouse will play), cat as cowardly as in (a shy cat makes a proud mouse) among other meanings such as: cats are dangerous, pretentious, useless, lazy, and opportunist. On the other hand, there are some connotations of cats which are specific to English proverbs and others are specific to Malay proverbs. Cat metaphors in JSA proverbs is the focus of this study to examine the different connotations of cats in Jordanian culture by applying the conceptual metaphor hypothesis.

Metaphors are also used in idiomatic expressions in a community. Zibin (2016) examined the comprehension of English metaphorical expressions by Jordanian learners of English as a foreign language. The researcher used six types of metaphors developed by Charteris-Black to be compared between English and Arabic. The sample of the study consisted of one hundred advanced Jordanian EFL learners who are majoring in English language and literature in their fourth year. The data consisted of twenty-four metaphorical expressions in English and its corresponding Arabic one. Then, she tested the participant's comprehension of the

idioms using a 24-item multiple-choice test provided with a short context for each expression. Based on the conceptual metaphor theory, the results showed that metaphorical expressions having the same conceptual bases in the two languages were better to comprehend by the participants.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study is based on the theory of conceptual metaphor proposed by Lackoff and Johnson (1980). The theory of conceptual metaphor proposes that metaphors are not only linguistic devices but are also part of the human's cognition, therefore, they are cognitive devices that reveal a certain thought and idea of a certain thing. Hence, it is based on the distinction between the literal and figurative meaning. Metaphors as being defined earlier, refer to the understanding of one idea in terms of another. Conceptual metaphor theory is based on two types of domains: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain refers to a concrete entity in the real world while the target domain refers to an abstract thing (ibid). For example, the metaphor, time is money, time is being described in terms of money. Therefore, time is the target domain and money is the source domain and that's why you can describe time using terms that are used to describe money such as: to steal time, save time, spend time and waste time.

Lackoff and Johnson posits that the process of metaphor is always from the source domain to the target domain and not the other way around. They also provided three main features of metaphors: systematicity, abstraction and asymmetry. Systematicity means that both domains are analogous systems and as a result, act in a similar way such as the example of time and money and the expressions used to describe them both. Abstraction in a way means that the two concepts in the two domains of the metaphor behave similarly but have no real connection. In other words, the connection between the two domains is an abstract one. Finally, asymmetry means that the transfer of meaning is from the concept in the source domain to the target domain and not the opposite (ibid).

In their theory, Lackoff and Johnson (1980) proposed the idea of mapping between the source domain and the target domain. Those mappings refer to the mapping of information from different source domains into more abstract target domains. For example, in the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, the mapping here is made clear in the way that the reasoning that one is doing about a travel is mapped into the reasoning one is doing about love. The different mappings of metaphors are used to be described as unidirectional because they are directed in one way, that is, from the source domain to the target

domain and cannot process in the other way because people tend to use their familiar knowledge and concepts of things to describe and interpret vague items and expressions.

Different examples of source domains have been proposed in the theory of conceptual metaphor such as time, love, arguments, humans...etc. Conceptual metaphors are written in capitals to differentiate them from metaphorical expressions. For example, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY reveals how people think of love and relationships. Therefore, different metaphorical expressions have been used based on the main conceptual metaphor of how people interpret love as a relationship such as:

"*It's been a long, bumpy road,*
We may have to go our separate ways,
We're at a crossroads,
We're spinning our wheels" (Gibbs, 1995:136)

Therefore, these different metaphorical expressions are based on one conceptual metaphor which is LOVE IS A JOURNEY in which we understand the concept LOVE in terms of other concrete things. The mappings between the abstract concept LOVE and the concrete one JOURNEY in such expressions reveal how these expressions are being built. For example, the mapping between entities in the love domain such as the lovers and their relationships correspond to the entities in the target domain such as the travelers, the vehicle.etc.

The conceptual metaphor hypothesis explains understanding proverbs in the sense that many proverbs are based on certain conceptual metaphors which give rise to the metaphorical expressions in the proverbs because as being said before, most proverbs are metaphorical in nature. Thus, after reviewing the hypothesis of conceptual metaphor and its relation to the metaphorical expressions in the proverbs used in a community, in the analysis section, the researcher analyzes twenty proverbs used in JSA that contain the word 'cat' in light of the conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE ANIMALS.

4. METHOD

The sample of the study consists of twenty proverbs used in JSA. All the proverbs contain the word 'cat' in order to examine the different connotations that lie behind using it in these proverbs, therefore, reflecting the general attitude of the Jordanian community towards this animal. The data were collected online by searching different websites that contain cat proverbs in the Jordanian community. The data will be analyzed based on the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lackoff and Johnson (1980) and specifically, the analysis will be based on the conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE ANIMALS and HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR. Moreover, the researcher will explain the source domain, the target domain as well as the mappings in each proverb as an application of the theory. Last, the researcher will compare the connotations of 'cat' in Jordanian community to those in

English language based on the results of Muhammad and Rashid (2014) who examined the connotations of cat metaphors in English proverb and compared them to those in Malaysian proverbs, however, in this study, the researcher will limit herself to their results in English proverbs and will compare them to those in JSA.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Below are twenty proverbs in JSA in which the word 'cat' appears in each. The proverbs will be analyzed based on the conceptual metaphor hypothesis to examine how cats are conceptualized in the Jordanian community. The suitable conceptual metaphor in this case is HUMANS ARE ANIMALS. Therefore, in these proverbs, the target domain is a human being and it will be described in terms of the source domain which is 'a cat' having certain characteristics.

(1) بسة بتاكل وبتنكر

bisseh btaakul wi btunkur

In this proverb, the source domain which is the cat is being conceptualized in terms of a human being who is ungrateful in the sense that if one does a favor to that person, he/she doesn't show any gratitude. Therefore, the mapping between such a cat should correspond to the target domain who is ungrateful human being in the sense that whenever you feed a cat, it shows no gratitude.

(2) بسة بسبع رواح

bisseh bsabiʕ rwaaḥ

Another meaning that can be conceptualized from 'cats' in this proverb is that cats rarely get hurt even when they fall from a high building or have a certain accident, they recover quickly. This proverb is similar to one in English which is 'a cat with seven/nine lives. This conception is being mapped into a person who survives from a certain accident in which it is expected that he/she is being hurt, however, they survive without being injured severely.

(3) البسة بتاكل عشاه

ʔ il-bisseh btaakul ʕaʃaah

Another meaning that can be associated with cats in JSA proverbs refers to very peaceful person. The metaphor here plays a role in understanding this association in the sense that it describes a very peaceful person who is even cannot react to a cat eating his/her dinner. The word cat here is being the one who is eating that person's dinner and describing a person who cannot defend himself even from cats shows that cats are very weak. Therefore, here cats are being described in terms

of weakness.

غاب البس العب يا فار (4)

ghab il-bis? il ʕab ya faar

This proverb corresponds to an English proverb which is 'when the cat is away, the mice will play'. In the two proverbs, cats are conceptualized as being authoritative. This mapping from the source domain which is a cat being authoritative corresponds to the target domain which refers to a person who takes an advantage by the absence of his/ her boss or an authoritative person.

بسه طلعلها سنان (5)

bisseh ṭil ʕlha snaan

Another meaning that corresponds to cats in Jordanian proverbs is cats being insignificant. This proverb also has a corresponding proverb in English which is 'kitten become tiger'. The meaning exemplified in the two proverbs refer to an insignificant person. The mapping here is from an insignificant cat who is very weak becoming strong to the target domain referring to a weak person becoming strong whenever there is a chance to be so. This meaning contradicts the meaning in the fourth proverb where cats as being authoritative.

اذكر القط بيجي ينط (6)

? uðkur ?il-quṭṭ biiji ynuṭṭ

This proverb refers to another meaning in which cats show up whenever someone mentions them. This meaning of cats' maps into a person who always shows up whenever someone mentions his/ her name.

اتفق القط والفار على خراب الديار (7)

?ittafaq ?ilquṭṭ wil faar ʕala xaraab lidyaar

In this proverb, cats are being referred to in a negative manner as they are associated with destruction and corruption. Both cats and mice here are viewed in a negative manner as they cause destruction. Therefore, the negative meaning of cats and mice is being mapped into people who cause destruction and corruption and cause misery to others.

إذا تصالح القط والفار يا خراب الديار (8)

? iða tṣaalaḥ ?il-quṭṭ wil faar ya xaraab lidyaar

This proverb has the same meaning of the previous proverb in which cats and mice are being viewed as a source of destruction and corruption. However, in this proverb, cats and mice are being viewed as two opposites who are always in a struggle and if they reconcile, destruction will happen showing that the two teams are a source of destruction from the beginning. Therefore, this meaning of cats and mice is being mapped into the target domain who are two opponents, once they reconcile, they

cause destruction to others, therefore, they are in nature bad people.

أحلام البسس فيران (9)

?aḥlaam ?il-bisas fiiraan

This proverb can be understood in two ways: The first one means that cats are shallow and naïve. Therefore, the meaning of a naïve cat whose dreams are merely related to mice is being mapped into a naïve person who thinks in a shallow way. The other meaning is that the dreams of someone are based on his/her nature. Therefore, the dreams of cats by default refer to the most things they love which are mice. Hence, someone's dreams always refer to what they always think of.

اللي بده يعاشر القط يلقى خراميشه (10)

? lli biddu y ʕaaʃir ?il- quṭṭ yilga xaramiiʃuh

Another meaning of cats that can be inferred from this proverb is that cats being dangerous. This proverb is similar to an English one which is 'play with cats and expect to be scratched'. It means that dealing or playing with cats could be harmful which is mapped into the meaning that playing with a dangerous and fierce person might be harmful. Therefore, someone should always be cautious when dealing with such people because in any moment, they might show their aggressive behavior.

أعط الدوارة للقط يغسلها والغنم للذيب يسرحها (11)

? a ʕṭi? iddawwara lal quṭṭ yghassilha wil ghanam la ððiib ysarriḥha

This proverb can be understood in two ways: The first one is that cats are useless, and they cannot do much work. In this case, the proverb resembles an English one which is 'keep no more cats than will catch mice' which bears the same meaning of the uselessness of cats. Another meaning that can be inferred is that cats are untrustworthy in the same manner that wolves are untrustworthy.

خمم على القطة أما العروسة تتغطى (12)

Xammim ʕala? il- quṭṭa ?amma ?il- ʕaruuseh titghaṭṭa

Here, the cat is being viewed as insignificant. The meaning is in comparing a cat and a bride by the verb used in describing the two. In the case of cats, it is to 'hide' a cat while in the case of a bride is to 'cover' her to indicate the insignificance of cats.

الفار القلق من بخت القطط (13)

? il-faar ?il-qaliq min baxt ?il-qiṭaṭ

Sometimes, cats are also associated with the meaning 'opportunist'. In such a proverb, a cat seems to seize an

opportunity if it observes a weak mouse. Therefore, the meaning opportunist cat is being mapped to meet a person who seize any available opportunity to his/her own advantage.

(14)   صلاة القطة فوق المغطة

ṣalaat? il-quṭṭa foq ?il-maghaṭṭa

Anothher meaning of uselessness of cats appears in this proverb. The meaning of the uselessness of cats is being mapped into a useless person who is not good at anything even his/her prayer is not well-performed.

(15)   إجى القط يعلم بابا النط

? ija ?il- quṭṭ yʕallim baaba ?in-naṭṭ

Different meanings can be inferred from this proverb. It can be related to useless, untrustworthy, or insignificant person who wants to teach or to give an advice to an experienced person.

(16)   شبعنا وشبعت قطوطتنا شو قلتي يا عروستنا

ʃbiʕna w ʃibʕat qaṭṭuuṭitna ʃuu qulti ya ʕaruusitna

This proverb is said in cases where a person proposes to marry a woman, and everyone wait her answer. Therefore, a person might say this proverb to indicate that they cannot wait more. A cat in this proverb refers to a person who is in that assembly waiting the bride's answer. The reference here to cats always is being mapped into a useless person in the sense that even our cat cannot wait more.

(17)   القط اللي ما صاب الشحمة قال عنها فايحة

? il quṭṭ ?illi ma ṣab iʃʃaḥmih qaal ʕanha faayḥa

Another meaning associated with cats as being useless and ignorant in this proverb. The meaning is that an unexperienced cat who doesn't know something and thinks that it is another thing is being mapped into a person who is still wet behind the ears and unexperienced who doesn't know the true reality of things.

(18)   البسة اللي لابسة كفات ما بتصيد فيران

? il bissih ?illi laabsih kaffat ma bitṣiid fiiran

In this proverb, cats are being viewed as lazy. It corresponds to an English proverb 'all cats love fish but hate to get their paws wet'. Hence, the meaning of lazy cats who wants to eat fish but do nothing to catch them is mapped into a person who lacks the self-discipline to succeed in something and all what he/she is doing is waiting and observing which is a bad behavior.

(19)   الفلاح بين محامين مثل سمكة بين قطتين

? il- fallaḥ been muḥamiin miθil samakih been quṭṭiteen

Here, a different meaning can be inferred from the reference to cats. The comparison is made here between a fish who is in a situation between two cats and an illiterate person being between two lawyers who are highly educated. Therefore, a cat here refers to an educated person being compared to an illiterate person who is distracted and confused because his/her speech and the way of thinking is different from that educated person. Therefore, a cat here reflects a literate person in comparison to fish.

(20)   من عجلة القطة جابتهم عميان

min ʕajalet ?il- quṭṭa jaabathum ʕumyaan

Also, cats are useless in this proverb. The fact that new-born cats cannot see very well evoked this proverb. Even that this is a fact, the person who is blamed in the proverb is the cat itself or their mother to indicate its uselessness. Therefore, a useless cat is being mapped into a useless person who is good at nothing.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to examine the conceptions of cats in Jordanian community through analyzing twenty proverbs used in JSA since the metaphorical expressions used in proverbs reflect the conceptions of the community. Based on the data analysis, it has been shown that the conceptions of cats in all the aforementioned proverbs are negative conceptions. Cats are always associated with uselessness, laziness, destruction, untrustworthiness and ignorance. Also, sometimes cats are associated with nothingness as being useless and not an important being among others.

Based on the conceptual metaphor theory, metaphorical expressions reflect conceptual basis since they are built according to the conceptions behind them. As mentioned earlier, conceptual metaphors are based on a source domain being mapped into a target domain. In other words, a target domain is being described by the source domain. Therefore, the source domain is the familiar and the more concrete domain by which the target domain is being described. The analysis of the proverbs in this study is based on two conceptual metaphors: HUMANS ARE ANIMALS and HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR (Lackoff and Johnson, 1980). Hence, the source domain is cats and the target domain are human beings.

In a comparison with Muhammad and Rashid's study (2014), it has been shown that there are similarities and differences between English and Arabic proverbs in conceptualizing cats. The two languages share certain conceptions of cats such as: cats as authoritative, dangerous, untrustworthy, useless, lazy and insignificant. On the other hand, in English proverbs, cats are being viewed sometimes as opportunist which is not found in Arabic proverbs. Moreover, in Arabic proverbs, certain conceptions as cats being hasty and ignorant are not found

in the English proverbs. However, in both cases, cats are viewed in a negative manner.

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