

The Notion of Image Schemas in Kurdish Proverbs

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Abstract— This study examines the notion of image schemas in selected Kurdish proverbs. As used in Cognitive Semantics, image schemas refer to conceptual structures that represent recurring patterns in our experience of the physical and psychological world. They are abstract concepts consisting of patterns emerging from repeated instances of embodied experience. Examples of image schemas include CONTAINER, PATH, FORCE, SCALE and CYCLE schemas. Applied to Kurdish proverbs, it is argued that image schemas serve as the basis for organizing knowledge and reasoning about the world. They are derived from concrete physical experiences that are projected onto abstract concepts. The aim of the study then is to show how image schemas provide the basis for richly detailed lexical concepts. One interesting finding is that image schemas arise directly from sensory and perceptual experience. They are functions of Kurdish speakers' everyday interaction with and observation of the world around them.

Index Terms— Cognitive Linguistics, Cognitive Semantics, Image schema, Proverb.

I. INTRODUCTION

The research theme of this study is Kurdish proverbs. As a fundamental feature of language, a proverb can generally be defined as a short popular saying, usually of unknown and ancient origin, that expresses commonplace truth or useful thought. According to Speake (2003: ix), a proverb is "a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner". Ridout and Witting (1983: 7) define a proverb as "a popular short saying, with words of advice or warning". Proverbial expressions have been given a variety of labels: adages, dictums, maxims, mottoes, precepts, saws, and truisms. The terms all convey the notion of a piece of traditional wisdom, handed down by previous generations. The effectiveness of a proverb lies, as Crystal (2008: 184) states, largely in its brevity and directness. The syntax is simple, the images vivid, and the allusions domestic, and thus easy to understand. Memorability of proverbs is aided through the use of alliteration, assonance, rhythm and rhyme, as demonstrated by proverbs such as *Death pays all debts*, *Fortune favours fools*, *Better be envied than pitied*, etc.

In Hamawand's (2016: 114) opinion, two qualities characterize proverbs. One is popularity. A proverb is popular

for it contains enduring wisdom. The other is pithiness. A proverb is short in form but full of meaning. Proverbs cover a wide range of human experience, gained through doing, seeing or feelings things. Proverbs have two interpretations: Literal and non-literal. The literal interpretation is the basic or usual meaning of a proverb. The non-literal (metaphorical) interpretation is the symbolic meaning of a proverb when it is applied to a new real-life situation. That is, their literal meanings are given new applications, or extended to new situations. Let us take an example like *The bull must be taken by the horns*. The literal meaning of the proverb is that in moments of danger during a bullfight, a strong expert will grasp the bull by the horns and so prevent it from tossing him. The metaphorical meaning of the proverb is that when faced by difficulties or perils one should meet them fearlessly or boldly, not try to evade them.

The problem then resides in the interpretation of proverbs. Kurdish speakers usually encounter difficulties in understanding the meanings of proverbs. The reason is that proverbs are fraught with many figurative schemes, which are ubiquitous in everyday thought. The ability to grasp the meanings of Kurdish proverbs requires certain kinds of cognitive abilities. At this juncture, two questions are posed. Do proverbs employ image schemas? If so, in what way do the schemas reflect experience? To answer the questions above, we choose the framework of Cognitive Semantics. The reason for the choice is that Cognitive Semantics explains the various types of meaning that exist within a language, providing insight into how the human brain works. It indicates that the ability to use language draws upon general cognitive resources. It describes the world as people conceive of it. It takes the relationship between meaning and mind as its central concern. The ultimate aim is to prove that proverbs are not only literal sayings but also figurative means of making statements about life.

As for data source, we relied on different references including Shekh Mohamad Khal, Ali Marouf Sharazoori, Hoshiyar Noori Lak, and Karim Sharaza.

As for data analysis, we adopt a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is a type of research that involves accumulating and examining non-numerical data to identify concepts, opinions, or experiences. Qualitative research is employed to understand how people experience the world. This can be used to collect comprehensively insights into a problem

or generate new ideas for research. Qualitative research is commonly used in the social sciences and humanities, in subjects such as sociology, anthropology, education, health sciences, history, etc.

II. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cognitive Linguistics, as Hamawand (2023: 25) describes, is a broad contemporary movement pioneered by Ronald Langacker, George Lakoff, Charles Fillmore, Talmy and others in the later decades of the twentieth century. As Evans and Green (2006: 3-4) and Croft and Cruse (2004: 1-4) mention, Cognitive Linguistics emerged as react against the dominance of formal approaches to language, especially Generative Linguistics. According to Taylor (2002:8), Cognitive Linguistics deals with the relation between language and cognition. Language is part of the human cognition, not an autonomous component of mind. As Lee (2001: 1) and Hamawand (2008: 17) mention, meaning is given centrality. Linguistic structure is a direct reflex of cognition in the sense that a particular linguistic expression is connected with a particular way of conceptualizing a given situation. This contrasts with the opposite of the generative model, in which the structure of a linguistic expression is determined by a formal rule system that is widely independent of meaning. In Cognitive Linguistics, language serves as an implement for organizing, processing, and conveying information. It characterize how the human mind comprehends and produces language.

One significant branch within Cognitive Linguistics pertains to Cognitive Semantics. According to Hamawand (2016: 73), it is an approach to meaning based on ideas drawn from other theories like philosophy, psychology, anthropology, etc. Evans and Green (2006: 156) argue that Cognitive semantics began as a reaction against the objectivist view of meaning assumed by truth-conditional semantics, which is developed within formal linguistics. As Evans (2007: 26-7) clarifies, Cognitive semantics is concerned with investigating the relationship between experience, the conceptual system and the semantic structure encoded by language. In specific terms, scholars working in cognitive semantics investigate conceptual structure (knowledge representation) and conceptualization (meaning construction). Cognitive semanticists employ language as the lens through which cognitive phenomena can be investigated. They try to demonstrate the ways the mind processes language to organize experience, and vice-versa. They aim to explain the relationship between experience, the conceptual structure and the semantic structure encoded by language.

As Langacker (1991: 315) explains, the foundational claim of Cognitive Semantics is that an expression's meaning cannot be reduced to an objective characterization of the situation described. Equally important for linguistic semantics is how the conceptualizer chooses to construe the situation and portray it for expressive purposes. An expression's precise semantic value is determined by numerous facets of construal, including the level of specificity at which the situation is characterized, background assumptions and expectations, the relative prominence accorded various entities, and the perspective taken on the scene. As Hamawand (2016: 73) stresses, importance is given to the role of speaker in characterizing scenes and

determining meanings, employing the conventional means of language. The meaning of a linguistic expression refers to a concept in the mind of the speaker. This contrasts with the pre-cognitive accounts of meaning, where the meaning of a linguistic expression is seen as an objective reflection of the external world. That is, in the pre-cognitive accounts of meaning there is no place for the speaker in shaping the language.

There are four central assumptions of Cognitive Semantics, These are listed below.

1. Conceptual structure is embodied. In light of this assumption, the nature of conceptual organization arises from bodily experience, so part of what makes conceptual structure meaningful is the bodily experience with which it is associated. For example, in *He's in/out of trouble*, the man is described as if he is in a locked space with bounded landmark. The bounded landmark has the functional property of containment. The concept associated with containment is an instance of what cognitive linguists call an image schema. It is this bodily experience that gives rise to meaningful concepts. This involves a metaphorical projection of the CONTAINER image schema onto the abstract conceptual domain of STATES, to which concepts like love, trouble and health belong.
2. Semantic structure is conceptual structure. In light of this assumption, semantic structure (the meanings conventionally associated with linguistic expressions) can be equated with concepts in the mind of the speaker. Semantic structure is then the conventional form that conceptual structure requires in order to be encoded in language. For example, *He wrote a book* and *A book was written* represent active and passive constructions that are conventionally associated with a functional distinction. In active sentences, we focus on the active participant in an event by placing this unit at the front of the construction. In passive sentences, we focus on the participant that undergoes the action.
3. Meaning representation is encyclopedic. In light of this assumption, semantic structure is encyclopedic in nature. Words do not have conventional meanings as given in a dictionary. Rather, words serve as points of access to vast repositories of knowledge relating to a particular concept or conceptual domain. For example, in the expressions *The child is safe*, *The beach is safe*, and *The shovel is safe*, the word *safe* has a range of meanings, each of which emerges as a consequence of the context in which it occurs. In the first, the interpretation is that the child will not come to any harm. The second does not mean that the beach will not come to harm. It means that the beach is an environment in which the harm is minimized. The third does not mean that the shovel will not come to harm. It means that the shovel not cause harm to the child. In order to understand what the speaker means, we have to draw upon our encyclopedic knowledge.

4. Meaning construction is conceptualization. In light of this assumption, meaning is constructed at the conceptual level. Meaning construction is equated with conceptualization: a dynamic process whereby linguistic expressions serve as prompts for an array of conceptual operations and the recruitment of background knowledge. From this, it follows that meaning is a process rather than a discrete thing that can be packaged by language. For example, in the expression *The end of term is approaching* the phrase *the end of term* is structured in terms of MOTION. Of course, temporal concepts cannot undergo literal motion because they are not physical entities. However, these conventional metaphoric mappings allow us to understand abstract concepts like TIME in terms of MOTION.

III. IMAGE SCHEMAS

According to Hamawand (2016: 74), an image schema is “a conceptual representation which emerges from human bodily interaction with the world. It is a dynamic pattern which is grounded in human bodily movements through space”. To Evans (2007: 106), it is an abstract conceptual representation that arises directly from our everyday interaction with and observation of the world. According to Johnson (1987: 29), they are dynamic analog representations of spatial relations and movements in space. As abstract concepts, they emerge from repeated instances of embodied experience. They derive from sensory and perceptual experience. They refer to very basic conceptual structures that represent recurring patterns in our experience of the physical world. They are based on a holistic awareness of the motion and location of our own bodies and the experience of other things moving and acting on each other. Image schemas are important. As Cruse (2006: 84) states, they contribute to the construal of more complex conceptual structures. They serve to organize our experience. In metaphor, they serve as the source domain or concrete basis in metaphoric mappings. They map spatial structure onto conceptual structure.

Image schemas cover a wide range of experiential structures that are pervasive in experience. Examples of image schemas include container, source-path-goal, force, scale and cycle schemas.

A. Container schema

According to Murphy and Koskela (2010: 84), the CONTAINER schema represents the basic notion of containment. The basic structure of the image schema consists of an interior, a boundary and an exterior. In Hamawand's (2016: 74) opinion, the concept of containment is the act of keeping an entity in an enclosed space and consequently restricting its movement. The concept arises as a result of the properties of both the enclosed space and the human body. The concept reflects a physical relationship in which embodied experience interacts with enclosed spaces. A container image schema can have additional optional properties. (i) Transitivity of enclosure (whereby if one object is enclosed by a second, and that by a third, the first is also enclosed by the third). (ii) Objects inside or outside the boundary. (iii) Protectedness of an enclosed object. (iv) The restriction of forces inside the

enclosure. (v) The relatively fixed position of an enclosed object. The container image schema gives rise to abstract states conceived as a container, which is shown by the use of the prepositions *in*, *out of* and *into*, as in *He is in debt*, and *He is out of debt*. These bodily experiences, as Hamawand (2016: 74) expounds, give rise to the conceptual structure, or the image schema, of containment. Debt is described as an enclosed area in which the person is involved.

The following examples illustrate how container schemas are exhibited in proverbs, constructed for communicative purposes.

- (1) a. نه قفل نه بين گيان له عمر ابدايه.
Without brain, the body is in torture.
b. ناو له بيژنگدا نه هينين.
He brings water in sieve.
c. دهرزي له چاوي خوتدا ببينه، نينجا گاسن له چاوي خلكدا.
See a needle in your eyes then see a plow in people's eyes.
d. نه ليني له گهروي مار دهرهاتوه.
It seems he has come out of snake's throat.

The proverbs in (1a-d) contain image schemas denoting containment. In (1a), the trajector گيان (body) is the content, whereas the landmark عمراب (torture) is the container. The containment schema is encoded by the spatial sense of the preposition *in*. The proverb means since the brain controls every aspect of human thoughts, actions, and sensations, there can be no life without it. In (1b), the trajector ناو (water) is the content, whereas the landmark بيژنگ (sieve) is the container. The containment schema is encoded by the spatial sense of the preposition *in*. The proverb means that trying hard without a plan deflects one from reaching a goal. In (1c), the trajector دهرزي (needle) and گاسن (plow) are the contents, whereas the land mark is چاوي (eyes). The containment schema is encoded by the spatial sense of the preposition *in*. The proverb means see a small fault of your own then see other people faults.

In (1d), the trajector نهو (he) is the content, whereas the landmark قورگي مار (snake's throat) is the landmark. The containment schema is encoded by the spatial sense of the preposition *out of*. The proverb is said to someone who is right, telling truth and what is real.

B. Path schema

According to Lakoff (1987: 283), the path image schema has the following elements: a trajector, a starting point or source, a destination or goal, and the path in between. The trajector the moving object, the source is the initial location, the path is a series of intermediate points which it occupies, and the goal is the final location where it ends. In Johnson's (1987: 28), the image schema results from our recurring bodily experiences of moving from one place to another along a certain route. As Lakoff (1993: 220-222) contends, the path schema structures our conception not only of physical or metaphorical movements but also of any process, involving a change from an initial state to an end state. For instance, one of the most frequented metaphors, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, is structured on the path schema. Literally, the concept of a journey involves a starting point, path, and destination. Metaphorically, it aids understanding of what constitutes a purposeful life, reflecting ambition, actions and achievement.

- (2) a. منالی به درماتان، ناچیتته سهرباتان.
Pampered children cannot get upstairs.
b. مه نجهل خلیوهوه، سهرقایی خوی دوزیهوه.
The pot rolled and found its lid.
c. دز به ریگه به کدا دهروا، خاوهن مال به سه ریگه دا.
A thief goes in one path and a household goes in one hundred paths.
d. لهسه ریگه لابهدهت، درک نهچی به پینتا.
If you get away from the path, a thorn stings your foot.

The proverbs in (2a-d) contain image schemas denoting path. In (2a), the proverb means that spoiled children cannot move a long way to achieve their goals in life on their own. Spoiled and pampered children usually rely on their parents to reach their aimed destination and secure their future. In (2b), the proverb is said when someone finds a friend that is close to him / her in terms of likes and dislikes. They are most attracted to others with similar personalities. They have mutual thoughts in many aspects of life. In (2c), the proverb means that a thief has experience, knows his direction of coming in and going out, whereas a household does not know in which directions to go to find the thief. A thief uses stealth so that the owner is unaware of the theft. In (2d), the proverb means one should not get away from the tradition and constitution; otherwise one will face problems and difficulties. When one is on the wrong path the universe purposely makes things not go in one's favor so that one will be forced back onto one's true path.

C. Force schema

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 49), and Johnson (1987: 42-44), a force schema involves physical or metaphorical causal interaction between participants. It includes the following elements: a source and target of the force, a direction and intensity of the force, a path of motion of the source and/or target, and a sequence of causation. In Cruse's (2006: 65-66) view, the schema expresses our experience of how entities interact with respect to force, including the exertion of force, the blockage of force and the enablement of force. The following illustrate some of the basic force relations: Liz picked up the cup. (Liz applied force to the cup) Liz held the cup. (Liz acted to prevent some presumed external force from affecting the cup) Liz dropped the cup. (Liz allowed an external force to move the cup). These notions can be extended to non-physical events as in The government has raised the price of oil, The government has acted to maintain the price of oil, and The government has allowed the price of oil to fall.

- (3) a. شفق نه زانی قوناغ له کوییه.
Kick knows where the divan is.
Or kick knows where the step is.
b. برا له پشت برابن، مه گهر قهزا له لای خوا بن.
If brothers back one another unless a fate comes from the God.
c. ژن گرییه به کس ناکریتیهوه.
A wife is a knot; no one can untie.
d. دهستیک نه توانم بیبرم، ماچی نه کمم.
If I cannot cut a hand, I will kiss it.

The proverbs in (3a-d) contain image schemas denoting force. The proverb in (3a) is said when someone has not done his own task normally, but does so when force is exercised on him. The proverb in (3b) is said when brothers stand together and support one another no force can separate them except something that comes from God. The proverb in (3c) is said when a woman's nature is full of mystery; it is difficult to understand. It is no wonder that men find it difficult or impossible to understand women. Women are like tightened knots. It is not easy to know everything about them. The proverb in (3d) is said when something cannot be cured must be endured. When one cannot face another person, he must negotiate with him. The saying means that there is no point in complaining about what is unavoidable. One must simply learn to live with that which one is not able to resolve or improve.

D. Cycle schema

A cycle schema is an image schema which involves repetitious events and event series. Its structure includes the following: a starting point, a progression through successive events without backtracking and a return to the initial state. It involves a course or series of events that recur regularly and usually lead back to the starting point. It is a series of events that happen in a particular order, one following the other, and are often repeated. Johnson (1987) introduces the cycle image schema as 'a temporal circle', which already points to a complex rather than conceptually simple notion. The life cycle of plants, for example, begins with a seed. The planted seed germinates, forming a seedling. The seedling grows into an adult plant gradually. The fully mature plant now participates in reproduction, which occurs by pollination. The newly produced seeds repeat the same life cycle to generate new plants similar to the parent.

- (4) a. دنیا دهوران دهورانه.
Life is continuously rotating.
b. کیز تهشی دایکی دهرتسن.
A girl spins her mother's wool spindle.
c. دنیا وهک تاسی همامه ههر روزهی به دهست یه کیکه وهیه.
Life is like bathroom's bowel, each day it is held by a person.
d. دوی هه موو ناخوشیهک خوشیهک یهت.
After any difficulty, pleasure follows.

The proverbs in (4-da) contains image schemas denoting cycle. The proverb in (1a) means that life does not stop at one point. Today, it is with you. Tomorrow, it will be against you. Life is rolling around and the world is changeable. The proverb in (4b) means that a girl imitates what her mother does positively and negatively. The proverb in (4c) means that life smiles for a different person each day. Today it smiles with you; tomorrow it smiles with another person. It is just like the metal bowel in a public bathroom used for washing, when one finishes another person holds it. The proverb in (4d) means that no difficulty lasts forever. Peace and joy follow harsh and tough times.

E. Scale schema

A scale schema is an image schema that contains a set of levels used for measuring or comparing the amounts or frequencies of things in a particular system. According to Hamawand (2023:

130), "Physically, scale refers to the process of measuring the amount of something. Metaphorically, scale refers to the process of measuring the degree of something. Scale is an image schema in which an increase or decrease in one thing causes or correlates with an increase or decrease in another thing. The meaning of scale emerges from embodied experience". As Johnson (1987: 123) notes, the gestalt image schema of scale is pertinent to our understanding of increase in height, volume, or number. The scale schema is a dynamic embodied pattern, involving objects or events. It involves an increase or decrease of physical or metaphorical amount. It consists of a closed- or open-ended progression of amount, a position in the progression of amount, one or more norms of amount and a calibration of amount.

- (5) a. **بۆ دوستان ههزار كهمه، بۆ دوژمن يهك زوره.**
One thousand friends are few, one enemy is too many.
- b. **كهه بئى و زور ببسته.**
Say a little, listen more.
- c. **كهه مخورى دايمخوريه.**
Eat less but often.
- d. **مالى زياد سهه ناشكيني.**
More properties do not break head.

The proverbs in (5a-d) contain image schemas denoting scale. The proverb in (5a) means turn an enemy into your friend, do not turn your friend into an enemy. The proverb advises the reader about the danger of having even one enemy. The proverb in (5b) advises the reader not to say more words because saying more words will harm you. Instead, it is more useful to listen more to get more information. The proverb in (5c) means eating too much harms the health. Instead eat less but repeatedly. The proverb advises one not to exaggerate in anything in life. The proverb in (5d) means having more things than one needs do not have disadvantage if they have no benefit.

IV. DISCUSSION

Our aim has been to explore the different kinds of image schemas contained in Kurdish proverbs. As mentioned earlier, an image schema is defined by Johnson, (1987: xiv) as 'a recurring, dynamic pattern of perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience'. It is a recurring **structure within our cognitive processes which establishes patterns of understanding and reasoning.** Two questions have been posed. Do proverbs employ figurative schemes? If so, in what way do the schemes reflect experience? With respect to these questions, the study has reached the following finds:

1. A schema is a knowledge structure that allows one to interpret and understand the world. Schemata are a method of organizing information that allows the brain to work more efficiently.
2. Proverbs have both literal and metaphorical meanings. In order to understand that connection, we need to understand the involved literal meaning and then the emerged metaphorical meaning.

3. The meaning is explained according to an appropriate image schema. To interpret a proverbial expression, we need to select from a set of available image schemas.
4. The metaphorical uses of proverbs are derivable from senses based on bodily experience, considered as sources of meaning making, encoded and projected at the levels of grammar, semantics, and discourse.
5. Image schemas have internal structure that provides constraints on the meanings. They show how embodied interaction with the world can be an essential component of cognition.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have addressed the notion of image schemas in Kurdish proverbs. As Oakley (2012: 215), explains, a schema is an organized pattern of thoughts that help organize our knowledge of the world. It is argued that a schema is based on bodily experience. Schemas provide a valuable explanation for how we interact with the world or a template for generating meaningful representations of the world. To do so, we have chosen Cognitive Semantics, which gives satisfying accounts of aspects of the structure of language, and which yields insightful analyses of figurative structures. Five types of image schemas have been used. The container schema is related to our frequent experience of inserting objects into and removing them from bounded areas. The path schema represents a prototypical motion event, where some mover starts at a source and moves via a path to arrive at a goal. The force schema involves physical or causal interaction between participants, and the qualitative changes that they undergo. In the cycle schema, an action that a path can represent occurs recurrently. In the scale schema, a set of levels are used to measure or compare things in a particular system. The aim of the image schemas is to represent physical experiences of humans, and enrich the content of their messages. This is evidenced in the proverbs produced by speakers to communicate.

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