

# Conventionalized Metaphors in Jordanian Colloquial Arabic: Case Study: Metaphors on Body Parts

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## Abstract

Jordanian colloquial Arabic is rich with conventionalized metaphorical expressions. Indeed, these expressions make a high percentage in the daily speech of Jordanians. Though these expressions are metaphorically structured, their metaphorical sense has been lost for their wide literal use. This study aims at bringing an analysis to metaphors of body parts, which have become routinely used expressions in Jordanian colloquial Arabic. In addition, the study explores the impact of such metaphors on the effectiveness of social communication. The study is based on Lakoff and Johnson's view of metaphor as part of everyday speech. Lakoff and Johnson reveal that metaphors are part of our everyday speech. In fact, conventionalized metaphors are metaphors that have become part of our conventional knowledge of Arabic.

**Keywords:** Metaphorical sense, Metaphors of body parts, Conventionalized metaphors and Conventional knowledge

## 1. Introduction

Within the structure of Jordanian colloquial Arabic, the conventionalized metaphorical expressions are heavily used in everyday speech. In effect, the speakers can easily communicate together using such metaphors. Even socially, these metaphors make strong indicators of belonging to certain social categories or classes. As noticed, speakers of Jordanian colloquial Arabic show a high interest in implementing such expressions within their daily communication for their tremendous impact in facilitating the process of socialization and supporting the communication. Lakoff believes that metaphor is not the matter of language, but the matter of thought. His philosophy is based on that all our existence is purely metaphorical; we fill up our language with metaphors without any reason. It is in our nature that makes us perceive everything through metaphor. G Lakoff supposes, "*...everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical*" (Lakoff 1993: 203).

Distinctively, conventionalized metaphors on body parts are largely used among Jordanians for their high potential as expressive linguistic means. Indeed, the familiarity with these expressions makes them mainly used as means of effective communication among Jordanians. Body parts are the closest items to human beings. Thus, the metaphorical expressions that are deeply related to them reflect their importance in building up certain conceptual representations of new concepts that represent certain functions within social reality.

In fact, this study makes a sort of highlight on the linguistic structure that makes such type of metaphors. Such metaphors shape every single detail of everyday language of Jordanian Arabic. The researcher observes that Jordanian people prefer to implement metaphorical structures in their dialect for their communicative strengths. Moreover, metaphorical expressions add certain cultural flavor that could not exist in expressing concepts in a direct manner.

## 2. Literature Review

In Beardsley's article titled "Figurative Language" (1966), the author regarded figurative language as the most important and fascinating aspect of language. Beardsley criticized those who simply regarded metaphor as a kind of poetic decoration that was not essential in our daily life. He stated that metaphors not only appeared in poetry and imaginative works such as novels and short stories, but they also played a major role in expository and persuasive works. Being functional, they occurred in our everyday conversation. Richards's article (1967) titled "The Command of Metaphor" in which he confirmed that a metaphor involves comparison between at least two objects. He was the first to discuss the complex interrelationships that might exist between tenor and vehicle while talking about metaphors. As stated by Richards (1967), a metaphor is sometimes "vehicle," sometimes means "vehicle and tenor together." The border between literal and metaphorical meanings is not fixed or constant.

On the other hand, Searle (1979) thought that Richards' comparison theories about metaphor were incorrect, arguing that resemblance between objects need not be the case and a

metaphorical expression actually gets the true conditions of the metaphor not from the literal meaning.

Studying the conventionalized metaphors happened to be by the very beginning of eighties when Lakoff and Johnson published their own book titled *Metaphors We Live By*. By publishing that book in 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have caused a drastic change in the field of cognitive linguistics. Later on, a large number of scholars have been taking similar steps by leading an investigation in the same track, with a great conviction that metaphor is essentially a system of thinking. In their book, Lakoff and Johnson obviously affirm their thinking about metaphor:

Metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, 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. (p. 3)

Moreover, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) question the reality of dead metaphors, proposing that these metaphors are even more alive than others are as they are “metaphors we live by” (p. 55). Furthermore, metaphors are not only linguistic phenomena; they have an important influence on our cognition, and for the most part, they govern and define our conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 6). On the other hand, Jerrold M. Sadock in his work “Figurative speech and linguistics” attributes psychological nature to metaphor stating that “I take it for granted that the underlying principles governing metaphor are of a general psychological sort and are thus not specifically linguistic...” (Sadock 1993: 42 ).

Besides, William G. Lycan (2000) thinks that almost every sentence produced by any human being has metaphorical elements and non-literal usage in language is the rule, not the exception. However, most of the philosophers think otherwise. Giora describes salient meanings as “coded meanings foremost on our mind due to conventionality, frequency, familiarity, or prototypicality” (2003, 10).

Kövecses (2002) mentions the concept of a “dead metaphor,” a metaphor that has become so conventionalized that it is no longer a metaphor (p. ix). Additionally, Kövecses (2002) summarized the traditional features of metaphor. First, metaphor is a characteristic of words; it is a linguistic phenomena. Second, metaphor is used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose. Third, metaphor is based on a resemblance between the two entities that are compared and identified. Fourth, metaphor is a conscious and deliberate use of words. Fifth, metaphor is a figure of speech that is not indispensable. As Kövecses (2002) remarks, “the metaphorical process typically goes from the more concrete to the more abstract but not the other way around” (2002, p. 6).

Gibbs and Tendahl (2006) claim, there will be no systematic correlation between amount of cognitive effort and amount of cognitive effects obtained, and “it will be the context that determines how quickly we can process a metaphorical utterance of whatever kind” (2006,

396). Adding to that, Steven Pinker (2007) provides a compromise, indicating that some words have metaphorical origins that have completely lost their figurative value (p. 239).

Later on, Pinker (2007) points out that the proliferation of some conceptual metaphors suggests that the speakers are able to connect the abstract to the concrete in a systematic way, indicating that they are on some level aware of the existence of the conceptual metaphor (p. 240). On the other hand, Skorczynska Sznajder (2010) studied metaphors in textbooks for business and economic English. She points out that the metaphorical nature of business language could prove difficult for non-native speakers, as the terms used were often not a part of their conceptual world. As a result, cultural differences can make this metaphorical aspect difficult to teach (p. 31).

### 3. Methodology of the Research

The research is mainly based on Lakoff and Johnson's view of metaphor as part of every day speech. The conventional nature of linguistic metaphor has been one of the key points of cognitive linguistic research; in fact, various examples have been made available which prove that metaphor is part of our language system and its use (e.g. Lakoff; Johnson, 1980, 1999).

### 4. Corpus

The texts and their translations into English used in this research have been extracted from a book titled *Diwan Baladna The Unprecedented Spoken Arabic Dictionary*.

### 5. Analysis and Discussion

#### 5.1 Metaphors on the Hand and Head

*The hand* is one of the body parts that are commonly used as part of conventionalized metaphors. It is culturally and socially linked with the idea of support, work, power and help. That is, most of the conventionalized metaphors that include the word *hand* are metaphorically referring to such concepts. As stated in example (1), the word *hand* is used conceptually as a means to express the idea of "support".

#### Example (1):

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- اعتبرني <u>أيدك</u> اليمين	Consider me as your <u>right hand</u> .	I have got your back.

The concept of support is represented linguistically by the use of the word *hand*, particularly *the right hand*. Example (1) demonstrates that considering oneself *the right hand* of the other makes one a good supporter. *The right hand* not the left one is with a sort of religious connotations more than cultural or social ones since culturally, there is no difference between the right and left hand. However, this conventionalized metaphorical expression is mentally present in the minds of Jordanian speakers more than the expressions of immediate and direct offer for help. This expression connotes that the speaker-addresser- of the text is very close to the addressee since the addresser considers oneself part of the addressee's body. Example (2) also clarifies the idea. The word *hand* is used in example (2) in order to express the need

for someone's support. The literal translation of this example into English is missing the metaphorical sense since it interprets *the hand* as physical one while in colloquial Arabic, it is normally interpreted as "help". Steven Pinker(1994) claims that “language is not a cultural artifact that we learn the way we learn to tell time or how the federal government works, instead, it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brain” (p. 4).

### Example (2)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- أيدى بزنارك	My <u>hand</u> on your belt.	I owe you one.

Culturally speaking, the word *hand* is metaphorically associated with the idea of productivity, work and power. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that there is a strong correlation between “metaphor” and “metaphorical concept” (p. 6). Metaphorical linguistic utterances are the result of a system of metaphorical concepts, and this system allows us to examine the function and importance of metaphors in our lives (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 7). Example (3) clarifies the idea of being financially not fine. In fact, the example illustrates that the length of hand can metaphorically signify the concept of poverty and richness. Moreover, the word *hand* is used to express the concept of failure. As mentioned in example (4), the Arabic conventionalized metaphor is structured on the idea of hand position in order to express the concept of failure.

### Example (3)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- العين بصيرة والأيدى قصيرة.	The <u>eye</u> is on sight and the <u>hand</u> is short.	I'm short on cash.

### Example (4)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- رجع أيد من ورا و أيد من قدام	He returned with <u>a hand</u> in front and another behind.	It was a wild goose chase.

The concepts of support, help, poverty and failure are frequently expressed in colloquial Jordanian Arabic by the use of the linguistic expression *hand*. Clearly, *the hand* as a body part is considered one of the most important body parts that is used metaphorically to convey a large number of communicative messages among Jordanians. Its metaphorical effect is conventionalized because it is widely used. More importantly, the communicative value achieved by the use of this body part in expressing the mentioned concepts is very high since cognitively, Jordanians feel that expressing the concept metaphorically sounds more effective and powerful than that achieved by the direct and non-metaphorical way. In other words, the sense of concept is communicated in both ways; however, the conventionalized metaphor distinguishes itself by the poetic effect it leaves in the mind of the receiver.

Furthermore, the *head* as a body part is metaphorically realized to convey certain concepts.

Example (5) shows the word *head* as a metaphorical one. This example refers to the concept of "talk" as a concrete being that can be put on someone's head. Thus, *the head* in this example is a place on which *the talk* can be put. This metaphorical use of the word *head* in addition to *eyes* in combination with talk creates the concept of accepting the advice. As the literal translation of this conventionalized metaphorical expression from Arabic into English indicates, one can conclude that:

*Talk + Eye + Head = Acceptance of advice*

The receiver of the metaphorical expression in example (5) can realize that the three items mentioned make a new concept, which is the acceptance of advice.

#### Example (5)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- كلامك على عيني وراسي	your talk is on my <u>eye and my head</u> .	I will take your advice.

What makes the metaphorical sense in example (5) is that one abstract item, which is *talk* is placed on concrete items, which are *eye* and *head*. Accordingly, the metaphorical sense is caused by having an abstract item placed on concrete one. However, this metaphorical sense is conventionalized among Jordanians since no one could sense that there is any sort of metaphor. Instead, the researcher has found that most common people use this metaphorical expression as part of their normal and everyday talk without realizing that it is metaphorically structured. Kövecses (2005) maintains that our understanding of culture, and specifically abstract elements, is entirely based on metaphorical thinking.

*The head* is also conceptualized metaphorically as a place where decisions could be stored or taken. In example (6), *the head* is presented as a place where the speaker can put certain things. The ideas in mind are portrayed as concrete items that can move from one place into another. The English equivalence for the Arabic expression in example (6) can clarify the idea that the Arabic expression refers to the place where ideas and decisions can be made. However, the English equivalence of the colloquial Jordanian expression indicates that the metaphorical expression in Arabic is translated metaphorically into English.

#### Example (6)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- حطيت براسي	I put in <u>my head</u> .	I have made up my mind.

Furthermore, the words *head* and *legs* are used together metaphorically in Arabic as in example (7) to refer to the idea that the closest body parts are unknown for certain person. The use of body parts in example (7) is not literal in the sense that they are mentioned, however, they refer to the idea that a person who does not identify his/her closest body parts cannot know or see the truth or other things. *The head* and *legs* are two body parts that are means or signifiers to the signified "know nothing".

**Example (7)**

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- مش عارف رأسه من رجليه	He doesn't know his <u>head</u> from his <u>feet</u> .	He doesn't know which way is up.

**5.2 Metaphors on the Heart and Face**

In addition, the word *heart* in example (8) is associated with the concept of power; consequently, the Arabic expression *قوي قلبك* as in example (8) with the literal translation into English *Strengthen your heart*. is realized in idiomatic English as *Be a man*. The idiomatic translation from Arabic into English reveals that *the heart* is the basic source of power to the man. In other words, *the heart* is mentioned in order to refer to the source of power. From cultural perspective, *the heart* is considered a sign of power in Jordanian as well as Arab societies. That is, once *the heart* is metaphorically mentioned, the concept of power is present.

**Example (8)**

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- قوي قلبك	Strengthen your <u>heart</u> .	Be a man.

*The heart* has also become the storage of secrets. Example (9) reveals the idea that *the heart* is the place where secrets are saved. Instead of directly pointing to the idea that a person is "honest", *the heart* and *the tongue* as parts of body are metaphorically used to express the concept of "being honest". The use of these body parts is the means to signify the idea that "the person is honest." It could be noticed that the relation established between the body parts and the intended meaning is the relation of **Source** and **Means**. That is, *the heart* is the source and *the tongue* is the means. Between the source and means, the idea of being a straight shooter is metaphorically expressed. The concept of metaphor has echoed in a different way, specifically, as "a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. The term "metaphorical expression" refers to a linguistic expression (a word, phrase, sentence) that is the surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping" (Lakoff 1993: 203)

**Example (9)**

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- إلي بقلبه على لسانه-	What's in his <u>heart</u> is on his <u>tongue</u> .	He's a straight shooter.

*The face* is also used metaphorically to refer to the idea of one's familiarity with a person. Example (10) indicates that *the face* as a body part is a reference to someone's personality. That is, this body part is used metaphorically to signify the degree of familiarity with a person. *The face* is mentioned, however, the whole body is meant. The following sequential interpretation (shape A) clarifies the motion of the concepts in example (10):

**Shape (A)** وجهك (your face) *concept 1* → (whole body) *concept 2* → (the person's

identity) *concept 3*

### Example (10)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- وجهك مألوف	Your <u>face</u> is familiar.	You look familiar.

The word *face* is also used metaphorically in example (11) to refer to the whole body. Adding to that, it refers to the state of being through which a person surpasses. As shown, the idiomatic translation of the conventionalized metaphor in example (11) is "He was so embarrassed." This gives evidence that the word *face* is used metaphorically to state certain idea. It is clear that *the face* in Jordanian culture is the most important body part that a person can use to express feelings and impressions. Explicitly, the idea of embarrassment can be associated with this body part as indicated in example (11).

### Example (11)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- هو مش قادر يفرجي وجهه	He can't show his <u>face</u> .	He was so embarrassed.

One more use of the word *face* in colloquial Jordanian Arabic is to denote "Beat it". That is, *face*, from the social perspective, is an essential part of the body that keeps the person's pride. In example (12), the word *face* is used along with the word *turn*, which creates a new sense for both words. The following colocative relations could explain the metaphorical relation established between the word *face* and *turn*.

اقلب الورقة - *Turn over the paper.*

اقلب الصورة - *Turn over the photo.*

اقلب الكتاب - *Turn over the book.*

اقلب وجهك. **Literal translation: Turn your face.**

**Metaphorical translation: Beat it.**

As it appears, the relation established between the word *turn*, *the photo*, *the paper*, and *the book* is a literal one while the relation between *the face* and *turn* is metaphorical. However, the metaphorical relation has been deliberately conventionalized because of its high use among Jordanians.

### Example (12)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- اقلب وجهك	Turn your <u>face</u> .	Take a hike. or Beat it.

### 5.3 Metaphors on the Foot

Colloquial Jordanian Arabic makes use of the word رجل = *foot* in building up a



metaphorical structure. In example (13), the word *رجل* or *foot* is used as part of body to refer to the idea of following one's steps. Example (13) is translated literally into *My foot* is on *your foot*. Physically speaking, someone's foot is on other one's foot.

#### Example (13)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- <i>رجلي على رجلك</i>	My <u>foot</u> on your <u>foot</u> .	I'm right behind you.

However, the conventionalized metaphor in example (14) also presents the idea of stretching one's legs in relation to the concept of living within one's means. The semantic relation established in this example is based on two main expressions *stretching legs* and *your comforter*. This metaphorical relation creates a specific semantic relation between these two mentioned expressions that leads into an analogous idea, which is living within one's means.

#### Example (14)

Arabic Expression	Literal Translation	English Equivalent
- <i>ع قد لحافك مد رجلك</i>	Stretch your <u>legs</u> only as far as your comforter goes.	Live within your means.

## 6. Conclusion

Colloquial Jordanian Arabic features metaphorical because of the high use of conventionalized metaphors. Though these conventionalized metaphors are realized within everyday language, no one could feel that they are metaphorical at all. In fact, the metaphorical expressions that are deeply related to body parts are intensively used among Jordanians. Such expressions are culturally oriented in the minds of users. Moreover, they express in depth how the world is conceptualized in the minds of Jordanians. Clearly, these are not merely linguistic expressions, but they are representations of webs of thoughts and concepts about the world and reality. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such metaphors in daily communication makes them preferable linguistic structures among Jordanian speakers.

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