

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF "FEAR" IN ENGLISH AND
ARMENIAN

In the paper we look into the common sphere of conceptual knowledge across cultures, taking as an example the idiomatic expressions concerning emotions, in particular, *fear*, in English and Armenian. Discovering ubiquitous patterns of thought encapsulated in various languages seems to go a long way towards promoting intercultural exchanges. Therefore, linguists of any theoretical affiliation are often intrigued by the possible existence of universals and, by the same token, by the nature of the relationship between thought and language. If the thesis concerning a common conceptualizing capacity is justified, we are most likely to pinpoint universal patterns within spheres of life relevant to all of us. For the current analysis a substantial number of idioms and fixed expressions have been collected from the two languages involved. Attention has been paid to the core conceptual metaphor motivating the idiom and the cultural correspondence underlying the linguistic form. The results seem to indicate that there is a significant correspondence between a universal concept and its different cultural realizations, which can be used as a tool for promoting intercultural integration. Idioms constitute one of the most elusive areas in intercultural exchanges. Apparently, fixed expressions have a relativist nature and are culture bound. However, if we have a closer look at the conceptual world behind idiomatic phrases, a universal world of concepts arises. Universality lies behind the conceptual metaphors shaping the idiom. The most ubiquitous concepts are grounded in the human body, and these include primarily the expressions of emotions. Since classifications rooted in subordinate-level concepts appear infelicitous for universal links to be detected, we look into their **image-schematic** basis.

Emotion is by far one of the most central and pervasive aspects of human experience. Its cognitive veracity is evidenced by human language, behaviour and physiology. If we are to examine the possible existence of cross-cultural commonalities via studying idiomatic expressions, it seems most plausible to conduct our research within the framework of cognitive linguistics.

Cognitive linguists assume that language reflects our conceptual structure and organization. Moreover, they argue that there exists a common conceptualizing capacity, which derives from shared aspects of human cognition. (Chomsky 1965) Therefore, instead of seeing language as the output of a set of innate universals that are specialized for language, cognitive linguists posit a universal set of cognitive abilities, which serve to "both facilitate and constrain

the development of our conceptual systems and, hence, delimit what is possible to express in language". (Evans & Green 2006:63-66)

One way in which embodied experience manifests itself at the cognitive level is in terms of **image schemas**. These are "rudimentary concepts like *object*, *container*, *verticality*, *force or motion*, which are meaningful by virtue of being linked to human pre-conceptual experience". (Johnson 1992:201-203)

Embodied concepts of this kind can be extended to provide more abstract concepts with structure. The conceptual projection thus emerging is referred to as **conceptual metaphor** (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Conceptual metaphors are structured, unidirectional mappings of elements from a more concrete domain, called the source domain, onto a less tangible target domain (e.g. **an emotion is an object**). Metaphors are general cognitive mechanisms that manifest themselves in human thought, language, and action. Therefore, metaphorical expressions (e.g. *give somebody love or throw fear upon somebody*) should be viewed as mere evidence of conceptual pairings. Conceptual metaphors often interact with conceptual metonymies, which are contiguity relations within one domain. For example, the **cause for effect** mapping has been successfully applied to the study of emotions by means of establishing a general metonymic principle: **the physiological effects of an emotion stand for the emotion** (Kövecses 1986:28-32). This lexical approach has been widely applied to the study of the structure of emotions and has led researchers to postulate a possible universality of some conceptual metaphors, among which **the body is a container for emotions** seems most ubiquitous. (Kövecses 2002:165-170).

However, crosslinguistic patterns within the domain of emotions go beyond the realm of metaphors. Emotions are target domains since they are primarily understood by means of metaphor. Consequently, **anger, fear or love**, are experientially motivated by, for instances, forces, containers or hot liquids. (Johnson-Laird & K. Oatley 1992:201-223).

A standard analysis involves determining physiological and/or behavioural reactions co-occurring with a particular feeling (e.g. **increase in body temperature**), as well as establishing a possible set of metonymies and conceptual metaphors. For instance, physical agitation as a reaction to a particular event gives rise to the **physical agitation stands for the emotion** metonymy, which, in turn, motivates a number of force-related metaphors: **an emotion is a natural force, an emotion is a physical force or an emotion is magic**. Moreover, linguistic evidence confirms temporal organization of emotions, within which causality, intensity and loss of control are the most prominent aspects. (Ungerer, Friedrich & Schmid 1996:141)

In what follows, we are going to provide a lexical study of the concept of **fear** in English and Armenian. In search of universal tendencies promoting

intercultural understanding, we are going to address the following research questions:

- which of the possible human reactions accompanying emotions are universal?
- which of the common symptoms give rise to concepts manifested via language?
- are there any universal source domains motivating conceptual metaphors?
- which aspects of human experience are most common in crosslinguistic data and should thus surface in multicultural integration?

The denotational meaning and dictionary definition of **fear** is:

- 1.V. be frightened; be concerned; be afraid of; have respect for;
- 2.N. fright, horror, concern, terror.

Fear is an emotional response to a perceived threat. It is a basic survival mechanism occurring in response to a specific stimulus, such as pain or the threat of danger. Some psychologists such as J. B. Watson, R. Plutchik, and P. Ekman have suggested that **fear** is one of a small set of basic or innate emotions. This set also includes such emotions as joy, sadness, and anger. Fear should be distinguished from the related emotional state of anxiety, which typically occurs without any external threat. Additionally, fear is related to the specific behaviors of escape and avoidance, whereas anxiety is the result of threats which are perceived to be uncontrollable or unavoidable. Fear almost always relates to future events, such as worsening of a situation, or continuation of a situation that is unacceptable. Fear could also be an instant reaction to something presently happening. Interdisciplinary evidence converges upon a prototypical set of reactions accompanying (Ibid.:132). The basis of comparison was established by referring to the already existing sets of English phrases connected with the domain of emotions (Kövecses 1986), as well as consulting bilingual dictionaries. The results indicate that universality is detectable at conceptual and linguistic levels. Where possible, the data is arranged with reference to physiological metonymies. The concept of **fear** is analyzed and the predominant metaphor motivated by physiological reactions is **fear is a force**. Driven by the nature of the image schema, the source domain highlights causality and/or intensity and lack of control (examples 1- 11 below):

FEAR IS A FORCE

a/ DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE AND PHYSICAL AGITATION STAND FOR FEAR BOTH IN ENGLISH AND IN ARMENIAN 1. *send shivers down one's spine* - մարմնով դող անցնել 2. *shake with fear* - վախից դողալ

3. *shake like a leaf* - տերևի պես դողալ

b/ DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE AND PALENESS STAND FOR FEAR

5. *turn pale/white* - վախից գունատվել/սպիտակել c/ INABILITY TO MOVE STANDS FOR FEAR 6. *be paralysed by fear* - վախից գամվել տեղում

7. *be petrified with fear* - վախից կարկամել 8. *hold one's breath* - վախից շունչը կտրվել

d/ BODY HAIR STANDING UP STANDS FOR FEAR

9. hair stands on end – *վախից մազերը բիզ-բիզ կանգնել*

e/ DROOPING POSTURE AND/ OR FLEEING STAND FOR FEAR 10. shrink with fear- *վախից կծկվել* 11. recoil with fear – *վախից ետ ընկրկել*

The **fear** is a **force** metaphor can be elaborated by tapping to various types of forces. Although the metonymic bases become far less prominent in the ensuing conceptualizations (12-14 below), the expressions still highlight the same aspects as those above, namely, intensity and lack of control.

FEAR IS AN ATTACKER 12. seized by fear – *համակվել վախով, վախը պատել*

FEAR IS A SOCIAL FORCE 13. a campaign of terror- *վախի/սարսափի տարածում*, 14. a reign of terror- *վախի մթնոլորտ*

Another set of metaphorical expressions related to **fear** is rooted in the **object** schema (examples 15-20). The only physiological basis detected for this conceptualisation may be the following:

FEAR IS AN OBJECT (A LIQUID)

DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE AND PERSPIRATION STAND FOR FEAR 15. cold sweat- *սառը քրտինք*

Other instantiations of the **fear** is an **object** metaphor seem motivated by human sensory experience and the overall universality of the sense of touch.

FEAR IS AN OBJECT 16. feel fear- *վախ զգալ, վախ/սարսափ ապրել* 17. have a fear - *վախ ունենալ մի բանի հանդեպ* 18. arouse fear in somebody- *մեկի մոտ վախ/սարսափ արթնացնել*

A further elaboration of the **OBJECT** schema is the **CONTAINER** gestalt: FEAR IS AN OBJECT (A CONTAINER) 19. live in fear - *ապրել վախի մեջ/մթնոլորտում* 20. get into a panic- *սարսափահար լինել, խուճապի մեջ ընկնել*

The 20 metaphorical expressions and idioms related to **fear** display substantial cross-linguistic consistency since as many as 20 of them are equivalent in the two languages analyzed at both conceptual and linguistic levels.

Thus, the concept of **fear** is predominantly structured by the **force** image schema. Consequently, causality, intensity, and lack of control over the emotion are highlighted in the abovementioned examples. On a more general note, the study highlights a non-trivial degree of universality at the levels of physiology, cognition, and language in the three languages analyzed.

In view of the current comparative analysis, metaphorical motivation of many idioms and collocations, particularly those related to human subjective experience, e.g. emotions, becomes evident. Moreover, the study conducted for FEAR in English and Armenian clearly demonstrates the ubiquity of two source domains, namely **FORCE** and **OBJECT**. The **force** gestalt seems to encapsulate the very nature of subjective emotional states, particularly if we refer to our

cultural roots encapsulated in etymological definitions. Namely, the word *emotion* is derived from physical motion, stirring, or agitation, (*Online Etymology Dictionary*) which, obviously, motivates the implementation of the **force** image schema for expressing causality, intensity, or lack of control. The **object** schema is related to the nature of the target domain itself, i.e. the ontology of things. As such, it is very strongly linked to the human sense of touch, which seems the most fundamental and primeval of all senses.

The above evidence from ontogenetic development, together with the embodiment commitment and the dominance of Gestalt principles, provides very strong motivation for considering the **object** image schema a primary universal concept. Finally, it appears that our claim for the cross-cultural ubiquity of the OBJECT schema can be placed within the universal hierarchy of beings which has dominated Western thought. (Lakoff & Johnson 1987:171).

Thus, the most important thing for propagating multicultural integration, though, is the fact that all the levels are ultimately rooted in the OBJECT schema. In other words, if we want to promote mutual understanding, we should appeal not only to embodied concepts but also to those which we share due to our common heritage.

Bibliography

1. Chomsky, Noam *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, MIT Press (Cambridge MA: 1965)
2. Evans, Vyvyan & Green, Melanie *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* Edinburgh University Press (Edinburgh: 2006)
3. Johnson, Mark *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, Chicago University Press (Chicago: 1987)
4. Johnson - Laird, P.N. & Oatley, Keith 'Basic emotions and folk theory' in *Cognition and Emotion* Vol. 6, 201-223 (1992)
5. Kövecses, Zoltan *Metaphors of Anger, Pride, and Love: A Lexical Approach to the Study of Concepts*, John Benjamins Publishing Company (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: 1986)
6. Kövecses, Zoltan *Metaphor - A Practical Introduction*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2002)
7. Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago University Press (Chicago and London: 1980)
8. Lakoff, George & Turner, Mark *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Chicago University Press (Chicago and London: 1989)
9. *Online Etymology Dictionary* at <http://www.etymonline.com>
10. Szwedek, Aleksander 'Objectification in metaphorical processes - some philosophical issues' in *Lingua Posnaniensis* Vol. XLVI, 121-130 (2004)
11. Ungerer, Friedrich & Schmid, H., J. *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*, Longman (London and New York: 1996)

<<Վախ>> զգացումի հասկացութայնացումն անզերեւում և հայերեւում

Հոդվածում վերլուծվում է հասկացութայնացման և կարգայնացման խնդիրը միջմշակութային համատեքստում <<Վախ>> զգացումն առկայացնող դարձվածքների հիման վրա: Առաջադրվում է այն թեզը, որ անզերեւում և հայերեւում ընտրված դարձվածքների հիմքում հաճախ ընկած է միևնույն փոխաբերությունը, որը վկայությունն է լեզվական և մշակութային համընդհանրությունների: