



## **A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Image Schemata in Selected English Proverbs**

**Submitted by: Alya'a Abdul-Sada Atia**

**Supervised by: Asst. Prof. Ali Muhsin Gharab (Ph.D)**

**Wasit University/College of Education/Department of English**

### **Abstract**

This study intends to examine image schemata in English proverbs based on the Johnson's image schemata types in a cognitive semantic approach. Thus, the present study considers firstly some theories concerning cognitive linguistics, cognitive semantics, image schemata and its types. Then it examines the three categories of the Johnson's (1987) image schemata, namely, container, force, and path image schemata. The fundamental aim of the study is to answer a set of questions such as (1) what are the main types of Johnson's image schemata in English proverbs? (2) How do image schemata play a dynamic role in structuring human physical experiences even before learning a language? (3) In which way does the use of certain linguistic items redound on deciding the type of image schemata? However, the consequences of the current study show that (1) Some of English proverbs contain Johnson's types of image schemata, namely, container, force, and path schemata, (2) image schemata have an experiential basis, and (3) the meaning of most of image schemata in English proverbs is associated with using certain linguistic items.

**Key Words: cognitive linguistics; image schemata, proverbs**

## 1. Introduction

Some psychologists, linguists, and philosophers perhaps hope to confine the term of "meaning" merely to that which can distinctly be expressed. One of the basic assumptions in cognitive linguistics underpins on the fact that the structure of cognition is reflected by the structure of language.

Meaning cannot be conveyed only by the inherent meanings of words and sentences in conversation (Paltridge, 2012). It is rather produced based on various elements including the purpose of the interaction, the correlation among the participants themselves, the context in which the utterance occurs (including linguistic and physical context), the perception of physical objects, the body, and the physical incidents. However, in wisdom sayings and aphorisms, there are certain texts contain special meanings in nature. Thus, certain issues are raised when attempting to interpret some proverbs. This may return back to the complexity of their internal structures despite the fact of having simple external structures. This is emphasized by Honeck (1997) when he points out that proverbs are claimed to be an intuitive aspect that requires people to activate their mental functioning, and that their interpretation cannot be maintained intuitionally.

Because proverbs are highly complex, an interdisciplinary perspective is required to demonstrate how people use and interpret them. Therefore, cognitive science is the best scope that helps provide a good chance for examining the secrets of proverbs. A certain proverb may have a further deep meaning different from its basic literal one. For instance, the following proverb has a further implicit meaning different from what is said literally:

***"Affection blinds reason"***

The interpretation of such a proverb requires a special device to be maintained. Meanwhile, the meaning of this proverb cannot be realized only by the authentic meaning of its articulated words. The problem implies deciding the type of criterion according to which the meaning of this proverb can be captured. Certain questions are raised in such situations such as: Is there

any relationship between the embodiment and the mental representation of the linguistic meaning of this proverb? If there is so, on which criterion can the linguistic meaning of this proverb be interpreted, the body, the mind, the perception of physical objects, or on other perceptual factors?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics (CL henceforth) is a modern school of linguistics that emerged in the early 1970's. First, it originated with the cognitive science in the 1960's and 1970's that is concerned with the human categorization. CL has been also influenced by the cognitive psychology especially the early psychological work of Gestalt (Evans & Green, 2006). On the other hand, Evans (2007) believes that cognitive linguistics has newly emerged within cognitive science from the 1980's onwards. However, cognitive linguistics is mainly concerned with linguistic thought and practice. That is, it puts its main focus on "meaning, conceptual processes, and embodied experience" in examining language and the mind and how they interact with each other. There are two principles or commitments on which cognitive linguistics is informed: the generalization commitment and the cognitive commitment. Thus, they are known as cognitive semantics and cognitive approaches to grammar.

Moreover, Lakoff and Johnsen (2003) define cognitive linguistics as a science which tries to present such elucidative establishments for the conceptual systems and the general study of language of the mind. Thus, they state that cognitive linguistics internalizes cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and developmental psychology. Accordingly, it might explain as many fields of language as possible from syntax to semantics to discourse. Cognitive linguists believe that each sentence, even the simplest one, is realized with cognitive means. There are also other evolvments in cognitive linguistics; each was tackled by pioneers, such as: Tamly, Lakoff, Fillmore, Langacker, etc. Chief among these are mental spaces by Fauconnier, frame semantics by Fillmore, and cognitive grammar by Langacker. Thereby, the

most significant scholars who were responsible in molding this branch are Gilles Fauconnier, Charles Fillmore, George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker and Leonard Talmy (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003; Evans, 2007).

Cognitive semantics is a significant scope in cognitive linguistics which emphasizes that language structure is reflected via human cognition and language cannot be analyzed unless meaning has been concentrated. However, one of the basic conceptual structures to which cognitive semanticists pay attention is image schema. Image schema is described as a reflection of human experiences and interactions with the outside world.

## 2.2 Image Schemata

In his (1987) book *The Body in the Mind*, Mark Johnson suggests that image schemata are the result of embodied experiences within the conceptual system. As a result of people's interaction and collaboration with the external world, image schemata are extracted on the basis of perceptual and sensory experiences of this interaction.

Schema is an abstract conceptual image which results almost from people's daily interplay with the world as well as its reflection. Image schemata are formed from perceptive and sensuous experiences. Ergo, embodied experience is responsible for deriving image schema. According to the cognitive semanticists' point of view, image schema is one of the essential **conceptual structures** to the cognitive semantics. Thus, they believe that image schema is derived from human's daily activities such as walking, sleeping, eating, in addition to realizing the surrounding environment. These conceptual structures are formalized in the mind in order to be used later for thinking about more abstract concerns (Evans, 2007; Safavi, 2010). The word 'image' in image schema is parallel to 'imagistic' term that is used in psychology, whereby 'imagistic' refers to deriving conceptual experience from the experience of outside world. This experience is called sometimes as sensory experience. The term 'schema' in image schema refers to the idea that image schemata are abstract concepts rather than detailed or rich ones. For example, words like *pencil* and *teacup* have further schematic meanings like *thing* and *container*. The abstract concepts consist of patterns arising from

recurring instances of embodied experience (Evans, 2007). Moreover, Cruse (2006) believes that image schemas are fundamental conceptual structures used to "contribute to the construal of more complex conceptual structures" (p.84).

Furthermore, image schemata are one of the theoretical construct in cognitive linguistics which is based on the conceptualization of experience (Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Lakoff & Turner 1989). Image schemata are defined also as the schematic transcript of images. Images are illustrations of distinct embodied experiences (Fillmore, 1975). Images, on the other hand, are derived from **domains** that are described as embodied or grounded (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Image schemata are considered schematic rather than specific images. That is, they stand for schematic patterns that emerge from imagistic domains such as containers, paths, links, forces, and balance. The function of these schematic patterns is to replay in a variation of embodied domains and structure bodily experience (Lakoff 1987; Johnson, 1987). Humans' bodily and non-bodily experiences are tended to be structured by image schemas. Image schemas structure the non-bodily experience through the process of metaphor (Talmy, 1972; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987).

The 'experiential' view of the world is summed up by Johnson (1987) when he states that there should be order and pattern to humans activities, conceptions, and perceptions, so that they can understand and reason about connected, meaningful experiences. A schema is, therefore, a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity occurring in these ordering activities. These regulate patterns arise as structures that have meanings mainly at the level of human physical movements. Thus, the dynamic character of image schemata is realized as constructions that are intended to organize and structure the experience and comprehension.

### 2.3 Types of Image Schemata

Image schemata contribute to the basic facts for obtaining more details about lexical concepts. This becomes more evident in the sense that image schema consists of various type including container schema, force schema, and path schema (Johnson, 1987 ; Evans, 2007).

1. CONTAINER SCHEMA: It is a concept that comprises of interior, boundary, and exterior elements. Container image schema is realized by the use of certain prepositions including *in*, *into*, *out*, *out of*, and *out from*. In this sense, container schema is lexicalized by the use of certain linguistic items. Furthermore, containment image schema gives a boundary braking up the inside from the outside.

2. FORCE SCHEMA: This type, like the other types of image schemata, emerges from the everyday interaction and experience with the world as children grow by moving around the environment and being in contact with animate organisms and inanimate objects. It involves physical and metaphorical interaction. For example, *wind* and *gravity* are physical forces, while *love* and *justice* are metaphorical forces. Force schema consists of certain elements including the source and target of the schema, a direction and intensity, a path of motion of the source and/or target and a sequence of causation.

3. PATH SCHEMA: A path is a means of moving from one location to another. It consists of a starting point or a SOURCE, a destination or GOAL, and a series of neighboring locations in between which connect the source and goal. Different lexical items can give rise to different components of path schema.

e.g. (a) SOURCE SCHEMA:

John left [England].

(b) GOAL SCHEMA:

John travelled [to France].

(c) SOURCE-GOAL SCHEMA:

John travelled [from England] [to France].

(d) PATH-GOAL SCHEMA:

John travelled [through the Chunnel] [to France].

(e) SOURCE-PATH-GOAL SCHEMA:

John travelled [from England] [through the Chunnel] [to France].

## 2.4 Proverbs

It is not an easy process to trace the ancestry and history of a proverb in a specific language. However, as a general, Karagiorgos (1999) believes that the earliest corpus of proverbs can be traced back to ancient Egypt, about 2500 B.C. However, Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, was the first person who was engaged in the classification and examination of proverbs, about 384-322 B.C. He considers proverbs as a survival of an older wisdom. Mieder defines proverbs as "a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" (Mieder, 1985, p.119; 1993, p.24). Moreover, "A proverb is a concise statement of an apparent truth which [had, or will have] currency among the people" (Gallacher, 1959, p.47).

Furthermore, proverbs have a great social role in human interactions for their essential importance. Their significance implies in the sense that they carry out the need of people to sum up their experiences and observations into blocks of wisdom that offer ready-made annotating on the social relationships and human affairs. For this, folk of definitions has been created such as "Proverbs are the wisdom of the streets," "Proverbs are the children of experience," and "Proverbs are true words." Proverbs distinctly consists of a lot of senses, experiences, wisdom, and truth. As a result, they stand for representing a ready-made traditional comment in oral speech acts and formal writings (Hasan-Rokem, 1990; Mieder, 2004). For characterizing proverbs,

Mieder points out: "Proverbs, like riddles, jokes, or fairy tales, do not fall out of the sky and neither are they products of a mythical soul of the folk. Instead, they are always coined by an individual either intentionally or unintentionally" (2004, p. 9). Finally, Winick (2003) demonstrates that "proverbs address recurrent social situations in a strategic way" (p.595).

### 3. Methodology

The proverbs are selected according to the three types of Johnson's image schemata namely: container schema, force schema, and path (or movement) schema. In this study, a descriptive qualitative method is used to describe the phenomenon of IS in a cognitive semantic framework based on Johnson's types of image schemata. That is; the method of this research systematically uses a set of procedures to answer the research question via describing the most significant types of image schema and then provides that through analyzing a set of English proverbs that contain the three types of image schema. The researcher adopts Mark Johnson's cognitive semantic approach to IS (1987). The data has been taken from the book of **Proverbs: A Handbook** by Mieder (2004).

### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

#### 4.1 Container Image Schema

*"A man of gladness seldom falls into madness"*

Meaning: One who has a precious mind and thinks well before any decision in his life will definitely have a good personality and gain success in all his fields of life, and hence he might not face any difficulty when taking decisions.

Analysis: This proverb is licensed by the **metaphorical (or conceptual) projection** of the CONTAINER image schema onto the abstract conceptual domain of a state, to which the concept of MADNESS belongs. This leads to the conceptual metaphor of STATES ARE CONTAINERS. According to the metaphorical projection process, meaningful structure from bodily experience gives rise to concrete concepts like the CONTAINER image



schema. The concrete concept here is MADNESS since it is characterized as a CONTAINER. Since it is a container, it is comprised of the structural elements, namely, interior, boundary, and exterior. Therefore, MADNESS is conceptualized as a container image schema, and in turn as a concrete domain. This type of image schema is raised from our embodied experience in the external world. In this way, this process is construal by which a person's experience in the world is conceived in a variety of ways. Furthermore, there are two different domains indicating the metaphorical mappings, the **source** domain and the **target** domain (in which the link is implied between them).

While a domain is the background knowledge for representing concepts, as readers, we previously have formed a bit of knowledge that MADNESS is an abstract state that cannot be touched or seen. This leads to a conceptual metaphor STATES ARE CONTAINERS. This term suggests the relationship between CMT and IS in which IS is discussed with respect to CM. Hence, the relationship is identified in terms of IH. Since domains that give rise to images are embodied or grounded, MADNESS becomes an embodied **concrete domain** which refers to the physical experience of being a container. In this sense, the concept of MADNESS is an image-schematic in nature. MADNESS is therefore conceptualized as if it is a hole that a glad man never falls into, and this is emphasized more by the non-spatial use of the preposition *into*. For this reason, the CM that is represented by the term MADNESS has an **experiential basis** in our everyday life like the situation with such containers as a cup of tea, a box, a hole, etc. That is, MADNESS becomes meaningful here because these containers in the external world have meanings. Therefore, the spatial scene that is related to the preposition *into* in the external world in a sentence like *I fell into a hole* involves a function of containment. Thus, being contained in a hole prevents me from walking and all at once my foot ceases to travel. In this case, this proverb includes the process of **perceptual meaning analysis** and at the same time **conceptual structure** of the concept

of MSDNESS by which the process of forming image schema is resulted via re-description of spatial experiences as in the case of the English preposition *into* that has been used in a non-spatial scene. This case intends to hold between one **mental space** and another.

#### 4.2 Force Image Schema

##### *"Affection blinds reason"*

Meaning: The term of AFFECTION refers to fondness, love, and tender attachment, i.e., a feeling of liking for a person or place. The metaphorical meaning behind this proverb indicates that love is deaf and blind. Love occurs without reason

Analysis: The metaphorical meaning behind this proverb is illustrated through blindness of reason. REASON cannot be blinded since it is an abstract state. This proverb has a metaphorical meaning that AFFECTION has the power to blind reason. That is to say, when somebody loves, he has no reason to love and he cannot see any imperfection in his beloved. The concept that is implicit in this proverb indicates that AFFECTION can be conceptualized as having a FORCE image schema. AFFECTION is considered as the source of the force therefore while REASON represents the target of the force. The target of the force can be described as the aim of the source. Thus, the source of the force, AFFECTION, is directed towards the target (or the goal) in order to affect that entity. In this proverb, these two entities (the source and the target) are regarded as two actors. The actors can be referred to as the protagonist and antagonist. The protagonist here is represented by AFFECTION which is the main entity to be directed on the antagonist which is REASON.

Therefore, this proverb has an abstract concept of power represented by AFFECTION in a metaphorical format. The use of AFFECTION here has a figurative indication to make REASON blind as it is an abstract state that has no power in its nature, but it becomes meaningful since it derives its meaning from such physical forces in

the external environment. Since AFFECTION is an abstract state, the FORCE image schema that is implied in this proverb is static.

#### 4.3 Path Image Schema

##### *"Hope springs eternal in the human breast"*

Meaning: This proverb contains a clear meaning that hope is a basic powerful device which enables the human challenge the difficulties in life. That is to say; things get better by holding hope during the difficult times.

Analysis: In this proverb, there is a clear image of PATH schema that is conveyed by the locomotion of HOPE. That is to say; HOPE is an abstract state in its nature, but it is conceptualized here in terms of a physical movement. Generally, a PATH schema contains either a physical or a metaphorical movement from one location to another. This proverb involves a metaphorical movement and, thus, HOPE is the conveyer of this movement. The PATH schema here is highlighted by the use of SPRINGS as the essential meaning of this verb indicates jumping or moving quickly from one place to another. Thus, the notion that is conceptualized about this proverb reveals that HOPE has a metaphorical movement which is described in terms of springing. This is because HOPE is an abstract state that does not have the ability to spring or move anywhere physically.

According to the intrinsic elements of PATH image schema, this proverb involves a starting point of movement or a SOURCE, a GOAL or a destination, and a MOVER. There is no an immediate point through which HOPE passes. The starting point or the SOURCE of motion is implicit so that it can be understood from the context based on the intended meaning of the proverb. The SOURCE of movement can be described in terms of OUTSIDE. The GOAL of motion is explicitly indicated; that is to say, it is symbolized by the use of HUMAN BREAST. The use of HOPE indicates that it is a MOVER because it changes its position from one space (a metaphorical space) to another. So, it means that HOPE changes its location from OUTSIDE to spring in HUMAN BREAST. As a result, HOPE was not found in the HUMAN BREAST at the beginning. The starting point or the SOURCE of movement henceforth is represented by OUTSIDE. Thus,

HOPE is the mover that has an intent, which is springing in HUMAN BREAST. Moreover, the PATH schema of this proverb is embodied as it is based on the experiences of physical motion. The physical motions start with people as they learn first such experiences of movement in life, such as crawling, moving around in the physical world, getting out of the bed, running away from an animal, then bicycle or deriving to work, and so on. All these bodily experiences involve that the mover changes his/her location from one place to another, so that the alterations of the mover's location can have the schematic structure of SOURCE-PATH-GOAL.

## Conclusion

The cognition of English proverbs is derived from human sensory experiences of the outside world. Thus, the abstract concepts of English proverbs can transform into objective concepts. This is because the three types of image schemata that have been addressed here are based on a variety of objects that can be touched and seen in the external environment. Image schemata are cognitive because they cannot be touched or seen. They are in fact observed or perceived only based on sensory-motor experiences as one cannot see or touch motions or forces. In the case of Path, for example, what one can see is an object that can move from one place to another (sensory-motor experience). Hereupon, containers, forces, and paths can be encoded in imagistic representations. Consequently, the cognition that is implied in English proverbs is embodied. This means that English proverbs are based on such sensory experiences. This further indicates that there are certain factors on which the meaning of English proverbs can be decided; among these are the body, the observation of the physical events, the perception of the physical objects, and the other participants involved in the interaction. English proverbs are considered a reflection of human life experiences. They are discussed in terms of what humans experience in the physical world. Human cognition which is involved in English proverbs is affected by the structure of the language. This is obviously observed when certain linguistic items help to decide the type of image schema. That is to say; a CONTAINER image schema is maintained through using certain linguistic items like *in*, *into*, *out of*, *enter*, *etc*, a PATH image schema can also be

decided based on such lexical verbs as *move*, *go*, *cross*, *creep*, *etc.*, and a FORCE image schema is also affected by the use of special lexical verbs. Moreover, image schemata in English proverbs cannot be assumed as either solely mental or solely bodily. Instead, they are considered as a mix between both the body and the mind and they can be called 'body-mind'. This is because if they were considered as only mental, they would not have any interactive or concrete meaning and, in turn, English proverbs would not have any sense of such an effective meaning.

## References

- Cruse, A. (2006). *A glossary of semantics and pragmatics*. Edinburg: Edinburg UP.
- Evans, V. (2007). *A glossary of cognitive linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press
- Fillmore, C. J. (1975). *An alternative to checklist theories of meaning, proceedings of the first annual meeting of the Berkeley linguistics Society*. Amsterdam: North Holland.
- Gallacher, S. A. (1959). Frauenlob's bits of wisdom: Fruits of his environment. In *Middle ages, reformation, volkskunde. festschrift for John G. Kunstmann*, no editor given (pp. 45–58). Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP.
- Hasan-Rokem, G. (1990). *The aesthetics of the proverb: Dialogue of discourses from Genesis to Glasnost*. *Proverbium* 7: 105–116.
- Honeck, R. (1997). *A proverb in mind: The cognitive science of proverbial wit and wisdom*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind. The bodily basis of meaning, imagination and reason*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Karagiorgos, P. (1999). *Greek and English proverbs*. Corfu: P. Karagiorgos, Cambridge Scholars.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire and dangerous things: what categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.



- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mieder, W. (1985). Popular views of the proverb. *Proverbium* 2: 109–143.
- Mieder, W. (1993). *Proverbs are never out of season: Popular wisdom in the modern age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mieder, W. (2004). *Proverbs: A handbook*. London: Greenwood Press
- Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Bloomsbury.
- Safavi, K. (2011). *Introduction to semantics* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Tehran: Mehr Sureh.
- Talmy, L. (1972). *Semantic structures in English and Atsugewi*. Ph.D. Dissertation, The university of California, Berkeley.
- Winick, S. D. (2003). Intertextuality and innovation in a definition of the proverb genre. In W. Mieder (Ed.), *Cognition, comprehension, and communication: A decade of north American proverb studies (1990–2000)* (pp. 571–601). Baltmannsweiler, Germany: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren.