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# The fascination of translating idioms

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*The present paper is aimed at outlining and refining the concept of cognitive metaphors and metonymies, which help language users to make sense of the figurative meaning of many idioms containing body parts by linking the physical domain of knowledge to the idiomatic meaning of such idioms. Elaborating on the didactic function of idioms with body parts, the paper endorses the concepts of teachability, learnability and efficiency on scales of conventionality, cognitive effort, attitudinal impact, familiarity and explicitness. This study restores idiom to its position as an essential communication instrument, and, in an attempt to expose idiom-in-use, it develops or suggests strategies for examining, evaluating and translating it by providing in a concise way information about how people conceptualize the world around them.*

Key-words*: idioms, cognitive metaphors, figurative meaning, translation*

## 1. Introduction

This study investigates the integration of idioms in our thinking, the brainchild of Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987), which is a groundbreaking cognitive theory of idiom. There is substantial experimental evidence that the meanings of idioms can be motivated partially in that speakers recognize some, often figurative, relationship between the words in idioms and their overall figurative interpretations. The parts of idioms refer to different knowledge domains, many of which are conceptualized in terms of metaphor.

People may recognize tacitly that the metaphorical mapping of information between two conceptual domains actually motivates why idioms mean what they do. According to Gibbs (2014, 67), "one way to uncover speakers' tacit knowledge of the metaphorical basis for idioms is through a detailed examination of speakers' mental images for idioms". As Johnson (1987) claims:

> What is true will depend upon how our reality is carved up that is, how our understanding is structured. And that depends on many things: the nature of our organism, the nature and structure of our environment, our purposes, our conceptual system, our language, our metaphorical and metonymic projections, our values, and our standards of accuracy. (1987, 210)

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The analyses in this study can be a partial answer to the question whether or not we may speak about cross-cultural concepts in people's minds. It is suggested here that there must be a certain degree of similarity in the way in which people conceptualize the world around them; otherwise, no sensible communication via languages would be possible. If people in various cultures did not share many similar notions of the earth around them, and if their experience was not conceptualized in a similar way, they would hardly be able to make themselves understood, or to translate from one language into another. This point is also considered by Taylor (1995): "since ... certain experiences are presumably common to all normal, healthy human beings, ... it comes as no surprise that we find both considerable cross-language similarity in metaphorical expression, as well as cross-language diversity" (1995, 141).

However, it must be stressed here that idiomatic expressions only form one part of figurative language that is motivated by metaphorical mappings. By relating the concrete to the abstract areas of human experience, the cognitive framework seems to be a very useful tool in explaining idiomatic language. Nevertheless, if we relate this point to idioms containing parts of the human body, it seems clear that since speakers take into consideration the denotative meanings of the key words in idioms in order to be able to infer their figurative meanings, individual components systematically contribute to the overall sense of many idioms.

## 2. The Figurative meaning of idioms

Idiomatic language has always been defined by differentiating it from literal language, which has also functioned as an anchor point for defining metaphorical language. Therefore, an interesting and crucial question is what kind of notion of literal language researchers implicitly or explicitly assume while defining idioms. Makkai, Weinreich, Cermák and Cowie *et al.* would agree on the point that idioms are units of discourse in which the relationship between the literal and figurative meanings is purely arbitrary and whose overall figurative meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of their individual parts. Swinney and Cutler (1979) also support this view: "An idiom is a string of two or more words for which meaning is not derived from the meanings of the individual words comprising that string." (1979, 523). Similarly, Nunberg *et al*. (1994) suggest that: "An idiomatic phrase ... is simply an idiosyncratic type of phrasal construction that is assigned its own idiomatic meaning" (1994, 507). These scholars seem to generalize about the predictability of meanings of idioms based on their claim that the meaning of most idioms is not predictable from the meaning of their constituent parts.

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Palmer (1981) asserts that, when people infer the meaning of idioms, they do not resort to the meaning of each lexical unit: "The meaning of the resultant combination is opaque – it is not related to the meaning of the individual words, but is sometimes (though not always) nearer to the meaning of a single word (thus "to kick the bucket" equals "die"). (Palmer 1981, 80)

This should mean that the relationship between the overall figurative meaning of idioms and their wording (*i.e.* the selection of words in an idiomatic string) is completely *ad hoc*. As will be explained further, this claim cannot hold, as it is very likely that: "The figurative meanings of idioms are not arbitrary, but are partially determined by how people conceptualise the domains to which idioms refer." (Gibbs, and Nayak 1991, 94)

For example, if people conceptualize the human head as 'life' in expressions such as *to put the head on the block for someone*, meaning 'to take responsibility for someone's wrong-doings', the way in which the word-string is selected will depend on the concepts of the human head which people hold. Since the head seems to symbolize life, we know that if we expose it too much to dangerous situations we set ourselves at risk of being harmed. It is the same when we set our life at risk for someone.

Consider, for example, how we interpret the idiom *to put one's head in a noose*. In order to infer its overall meaning, we first look for the key word in this idiom, which in this case is 'head'. Since our conventional knowledge tells us that *to put one's head in a noose*, when performed literally, sets the person at great risk of being harmed; we can infer the meaning of this idiom as 'to invite harm upon oneself'. It seems clear that the human head and life share the same conceptual domain and the idiom can thus be interpreted as referring to a person setting his life at risk. The word 'head' makes the meaning of the idiom partially predictable.

Nevertheless, why is the word 'head' used in this idiom rather than, say, 'hand'? It is because the head is very often conceptualized in our mind as signifying life: by exposing our head carelessly, we set our life at risk. The underlying conceptual metonymy *THE HEAD STANDS FOR LIFE* makes the motivation of this idiom clear and facilitates our interpretation and understanding of it.

In Titone and Connine's (1999) hierarchy, idiomatic expressions can be:

1) normally decomposable, in which a part of the idiom is used literally (*e.g. pop the question*);
2) abnormally decomposable, in which the referents of an idiom's parts can be identified metaphorically (*e.g. pass the buck);*
3) semantically non-decomposable idioms, in which the idiom meaning is less likely to be compositionally derived from the words that comprise the string (*e.g. chew the fat*) (Titone, and Connine 1999, 1661).

These processing differences in the comprehension of decomposable and non-decomposable idioms do not imply that readers have no directly stipulated figurative meanings for decomposable idioms. Instead, it appears that the analyzability of

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decomposable idioms provides a very useful source of information that facilitates people's recognition that an idiomatic word string is meant to have a figurative interpretation. One explanation for the commonly observed finding that idioms are processed more quickly than literal phrases is that these studies primarily employ idioms that are more analyzable than non-decomposable (cf. Gibbs, Nayak, and Cutting, 1989).

Gibbs (2014, 66) claims that

> " understanding idioms only requires that people assign figurative meanings to the parts of idioms; there is no need to analyze automatically each expression according to its entire literal interpretation. This seems especially likely given people's extreme familiarity with many idiomatic expressions. Therefore, people ordinarily attempt to perform some sort of compositional analysis, although not necessarily a literal analysis, when comprehending idiom phrases to attach meanings to these phrases' specific parts." (Gibbs, Nayak, and Cutting 1989). Thus, the figurative meanings of idioms may be based on their internal compositional semantics even though this does not mean that idiomatic meaning is based on what scholars normally assume is literal meaning. Contrary to the popular conception that the literal meaning of a phrase or sentence is its compositional meaning, many phrases have compositional meanings that are based on the figurative meanings of their individual parts."

Furthermore, all of us have subconscious knowledge of the cognitive mechanisms (metaphor, metonymy, conventional knowledge) which link literal meanings to figurative idiomatic ones (Kövecses, and Szabó 1996, 351). After all, these cognitive mechanisms come out when we are asked to produce images of abstract terms such as 'freedom', for example. The concept 'freedom to act' is nicely expressed by the idiom *to have a free hand*. Here, the underlying conceptual metaphor could be FREEDOM TO ACT IS HAVING THE HANDS FREE (ibid: 342). We know that if we are not required to perform a specific activity we can do whatever we wish. Thus the meaning of this idiom "to act as freely as one wishes" is arrived at with the help of our conventional knowledge and a metaphor. It is the word 'hand' which makes the meaning of the idiom predictable, since hands are the 'tools' with which we perform various kinds of activities, whether voluntarily or under pressure.

However, if we try to 'translate' an idiom into literal language, it very often loses its semantic richness and precision of meaning. Take, for instance, the idiom *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*, which can be translated into literal language, as "it is only a matter of very subjective opinion who or what one considers beautiful". As can be seen, the idiom *beauty is in the eye of the beholder* (as well as many other idioms) cannot be substituted by a single word as it is impossible to express its meaning by a single lexical unit without severely altering its meaning and omitting much of its semantics.

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Gibbs and O'Brien (1990) have shown in a number of experiments that individual words systematically contribute to the overall figurative interpretations of idioms*, e.g. to spill the beans* is analyzable in the sense that the word 'beans' refers to the idea of a secret and 'spill' to the idea of revealing a secret. Thus, they overturn the traditional view of idioms as being semantically non-compositional.

Gibbs and O'Brien (1990) have also demonstrated that people have implied knowledge of the metaphorical basis of idioms and that speakers show remarkable consistency in their images of idioms with similar figurative meanings, even if their forms are different (*e.g. to spill the beans* and *to let the cat out of the bag*).

According to Kövecses and Szabó (1996), the meaning of many idioms depends on the following factors:

(1) Source-target relationship, which determines the general meaning of idioms;
(2) Systematic correspondences, or mappings, between the source and target domains, which provide more specific meaning of idioms;
(3) Particular knowledge structures, or inferences, associated with the source domain, *i.e.* the general knowledge of the world;
(4) Cognitive devices, such as metaphor, metonymy, conventional knowledge of the world (1996, 352).

Take, for instance, the expression *to keep half an eye on something*. Our general conventional knowledge of the world (3) tells us that when we do not have enough time to supervise an activity or somebody properly, we tend to devote less attention to them. Our gaze is directed towards that activity or person and 'touches them', thus partially supervising them. The conceptual metaphor (4) SEEING IS TOUCHING facilitates the mapping (2) of the knowledge of physically looking at something only randomly and occasionally (source domain) onto the meaning of the idiom, which is not to devote full attention to someone/something (target domain) (1).

This cognitive framework, however, does not work in all cases. If we take idiomatic expressions such as *long in the tooth*, it is difficult to determine the source and target domains as well as the conceptual metaphor/metonymy, which facilitates the link between them. It is also highly unlikely that people know the historical origins of this idiom in order to be able to conceptualize it and refer to some concrete situation. This can be seen as limitations of the cognitive theory.

However, the examples sufficiently demonstrate that many idioms have at their basis conceptual metaphors and metonymies, which connect the concrete and abstract areas of knowledge, thus helping speakers to make sense of an idiom's figurative meaning. They should also serve as a perfectly logical explanation as to why idioms mean what they do – the cognitive strategies which are at work when speakers infer the figurative meaning of an idiom (*i.e.* conventional knowledge, conceptual metaphors and metonymies) facilitate most of the process of inference of meaning of idiomatic expressions.

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Smith *et al*. (1981) investigated the use of figurative language in American literature and their analysis showed that the human body had invariably been the most common source domain for metaphors between 1675 and 1975, and that the subjects of the metaphor were chiefly human psychological processes. Of the 1882 instances of figurative usage selected, most frequently, *i.e*. in 555 examples, the human body was used as the primary source concept.

Benczes (2002) also carried out a comprehensive study of a recent American collection of metaphorical idioms titled "Figurative Idioms" by George Nagy. She counted all the body-based metaphorical idioms in the dictionary and found that out of twelve thousand idioms over two thousand have to do with the human body. This means that approximately one-sixth of all the idioms in the dictionary are related to the human body. This also shows that the human body as a source domain is exceptionally productive in the area of metaphor and metonymy-based idiomatic expressions. This remarkable finding shows that a large portion of metaphorical meaning derives from our experience of our own body. Bodily experiences are often correlated with certain abstract or subjective experiences, which give rise to conceptual metaphors that we find natural and well motivated.

The fact that in English the human body appears to be the most frequently used domain, as indicated above, shows that the human body is emphasized largely and is claimed to be cognitively significant to speakers. This anthropomorphic view also illustrates that there is a complex relationship between language, conceptualization, the human body, and the cultural context.

## 3. The translation of English and Hungarian idioms

Translating idioms may be the solution to the communicative and heuristic approach to reinforcing L2 learners' metaphorical competence, since the sensible use of native language versus the target language is advantageous in perceiving the common characteristics and divergences that can occur.

According to Duff (1989), translation activities, if effectively designed, can be employed to develop accuracy, flexibility and clarity; at the same time, they are a real life community task, which L2 learners are regularly confronted with when they identify factors of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variety in idioms.

Baker (1992) confirms that the translation of an idiom into another language is conditioned by many factors and quite often idioms are misleading to students because they offer a reasonable literal interpretation and their idiomatic meanings are not necessarily signalled in the text. Thus, she advocates for combining formal and semantic aspects in translation and suggests four strategies in translating idioms:

1. **Similar meaning and form** – using an idiom in the target text, which conveys roughly the same meaning as the source language idiom and consists of equivalent lexical items

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2. **Similar meaning and dissimilar form** – using an idiom in the target text, which conveys roughly the same meaning as the source language idiom but consists of different lexical items
3. **Translation by paraphrase** – when an equivalent cannot be found in the target language or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language due to the stylistic difference as regards the source language and target language preferences
4. **Translation by omission** – leaving out an idiom in the target text because it has no close equivalent in the target language, or because its meaning cannot be easily paraphrased or for stylistic reasons (Baker 1992, 71)

According to Beréndi, Csábi and Kövecses (2008), several kinds of acceptable translations of the idioms can be classified as follows:

1. **One-to-one equivalents**: most of the English body part idioms have a one-to-one Hungarian equivalent. However, some idioms have very close equivalents, which are based on the same mappings between the same domains, or even the same entailments, but have a slightly different wording. Kövecses (2001, 2005) points out that, even when two languages share the same conceptual metaphor, one-to-one correspondences or 'mirror translations', which would be the only correspondences significantly aiding acquisition if we did not consider deeper connections of vocabulary, form only a small part of the linguistic expressions rooted in the given conceptual metaphor.
2. **Same conceptual metaphor translations**: some other translations are not so close formally, but are still rooted within the same conceptual metaphor or metonymy. For example, the English idiom *to lose one's heart* can also be translated as *elveszíti a szívét* instead of *elveszíti a bátorságát* (*to lose courage*). While this is not a one-to-one equivalent, both idioms are instantiations of the *THE HEART STANDS FOR COURAGE* metonymy.
3. **Different conceptual metaphor translations**: students resort more often to this way of translation, which involves using expressions that belong to another conceptual metaphor or metonymy. For example, *be head and shoulders above the rest*, where *THE HEAD STANDS FOR INTELLIGENCE*, can be translated as *messze kimagaslik* or '*he is far above'* (GOOD IS UP).
4. **No conceptual metaphor translations**: for example, *to see eye to eye* is translated into Hungarian as *farkasszemet néz*, or 'to *look someone in the eye*'.

The English idioms and their Hungarian equivalents can be systematically described by the specific patterns that arise based on the analysis of the idiom database. Generally, in the case of each idiom-equivalent pair, the word forms are necessarily different in each case, and their figurative meanings are always the same.

Thus, variation can only be expected to occur in the literal meaning or the underlying conceptual mechanisms of the given idioms. According to Csábi (2004), the following major categories can be found concerning the different types of equivalence:

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I. English and Hungarian equivalents with *different word forms and the same literal meanings that are motivated by the same conceptual metaphors, and the same or different conceptual metonymies and conventional/ /cultural knowledge, and have the same figurative meaning*. For example, in *a free hand,* control is conceptualized via the human hand; the metonymy *THE HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL* and the metaphor CONTROL IS HOLDING IN THE HAND motivate the idiom. The metaphor FREEDOM TO ACT IS FREEDOM TO MOVE is particularly important in grasping the meaning of the idiom. The Hungarian equivalent *szabad kéz,* lit. *free hand*, is motivated by exactly the same mechanisms, and uses the same body part.

II. *Different word forms and different literal meanings, which are motivated by the same conceptual metaphors, and the same or different conceptual metonymies and conventional/cultural knowledge, and have the same figurative meaning.* For example, the idiom *turn a blind eye to something* is motivated by the metaphor ATTENTION IS LOOKING. The metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING also motivates the meaning of the idiom. The Hungarian idiom *szemet huny valami felett,* lit. *close the eye over something*, also implies the planned action, since it refers to deliberately closing the eyes when learning about something.

III. *Different word forms and different literal meanings that are motivated by different conceptual metaphors, and the same or different conceptual metonymies and conventional knowledge, and have the same figurative meaning.* For example, the idiom *get out of hand* is also motivated by the metonymy–metaphor pair *THE HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL*– CONTROL IS HOLDING IN THE HAND. In addition, the control metaphor, CONTROL OVER SOMETHING IS THE PHYSICAL MANIPULATION OF AN OBJECT, works here. The Hungarian equivalent, *elveszti az uralmát valami felett,* lit. *lose one's power over something*, is primarily motivated by the metaphor CONTROL IS A VALUABLE POSSESSION. The metaphor CONTROL IS UP is also at work, since the idiom is about *having control over something*.

IV. *Different word forms and different literal meanings*, *which are motivated by different conceptual metaphors*, and the *same or different conceptual metonymies and conventional knowledge*, and *have different figurative meanings*. The analyzed idiom database does not contain any data that belongs to category IV since this category is mostly present in literary works (Kövecses, 2005).

V. Idiom-equivalent pairs with *different word forms and different literal meanings*, *which are motivated by the same or different conventional knowledge* and not by conceptual metaphors or conceptual metonymies, and have the *same figurative meaning* expressed by means of literal meaning. For instance, in the idiom *out of hand,* the hand again is seen as the instrument for control, since *THE HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY*, the decision to let something go from the hand-container is referred to via mentioning only the hand, and not the activity itself.

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The literal equivalent, *gondolkodás nélkül,* lit. *without thinking*, focuses on the rapidness of the action, which is done without thinking about any precedence of the action.

VI. This group consists of equivalents, which are motivated not by conceptual metaphors, but by conceptual metonymies, whereas *the literal meanings can be similar, partly similar, or different*. For example, the motivation of the idiom *come face to face with someone* is provided by the metonymy *THE FACE STANDS FOR THE PERSON*, thus the body part can stand for the whole person since the face and mimics provide direct contact with the person. The Hungarian idiom *szemtől-szemben,* lit. *from eye in eye*, uses another significant body part, the *eye,* for this purpose, so the metonymy *THE EYES STAND FOR THE PERSON* is at work.

In the motivational analysis of the given idioms, Kövecses's (2005) uses the proposed categorization system in order to systematically differentiate between word form, literal meaning, and figurative meaning in relation to the conceptual mechanisms. Putting into practice his categorization system, the similarities and differences between specific linguistic expressions of different languages can be determined.

Overall, the majority (87.99 %) of the expressions in the database belong to groups I, II, III, and VI, where conceptual mechanisms provide motivation for the figurative meanings of the expressions. There is only a small number of idiom-equivalent pairs, which lack metaphorical and metonymical motivations, and whose meanings are expressed by means of literal sense. The similarity on the level of metaphors is great. The same or partly similar metaphors motivate the figurative meanings in almost 60 % of the cases (groups I. and II.). Different conceptual metaphors occur in 23.32 % of all cases (group III.).

No metaphorical motivation is provided in 17.67 % of the cases (groups V. and VI.). Regularly, metaphors and metonymies together provide motivation to idioms and their equivalents. However, it is also possible in a small number of cases to have conceptual metonymies only (group VI.). Conventional/cultural knowledge most frequently goes together with conceptual metaphors and metonymies, but in few cases, they happen to be the only motivational mechanisms (group V.).

As the idiom database shows, the most common case for the expression of the same figurative meaning is the use of different word forms, similar literal meanings, and similar conceptual mechanisms. Although the figurative meanings are shared, the literal meanings of Hungarian equivalents use a body part or a related expression, and more than half of these equivalents 60% employ the same body part, as a result idioms and their counterparts in the database reveal the universal association among the human body.

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## 4. The Comparison of English and Hungarian human body idioms via translation

In translating idioms of body parts my aim is to find out similarities and differences between English idioms and their equivalents in Hungarian, as well as to identify common and different cultural patterns in the two languages, since knowledge provides the motivation for the overall idiomatic meaning. In order to have translatable concepts in two languages, compatible semantic structures are necessary in the two languages. If there are no compatible semantic structures or universal structures available, ideal translation is not possible. However, if conceptual motivation is largely shared, the degree of translatability is greater. In the same way, if conceptual motivation is not shared, the degree of translatability is lower.

Human body idioms in Hungarian are greater in actual number than in English since several equivalents may belong to a single English idiom. The majority, *i.e.*, 58.30% of the Hungarian equivalents utilize some kind of a body part or a related word in the word form. When the Hungarian equivalents are translated with the same body parts, the same associations are true for them as above in relation to English. There are some cases, however, where different body parts are made use of in the Hungarian equivalents. Thus, interestingly, certain body parts can be preferred more in Hungarian than in English. The most frequent substitution is in the case of the equivalents of English *face* idioms, where the *eye* is frequently used instead of the *face*. In addition, the *eye* can be used instead of the *nose*. The *heart* can also be used instead of the body in the equivalents of the idiom *body and soul.* The whole person can also be in the focus instead of a specific human body part.

Emotions and emotional control are also frequent target domains of English *head*-area idioms and their Hungarian equivalents. The metaphor EMOTION IS A FORCE exists and is used frequently in both languages (cf. Kövecses, 2000), and the metaphor EMOTIONAL CONTROL IS KEEPING THE SUBSTANCE INSIDE THE CONTAINER is a frequent motivational mechanism. Several equivalents of English, *face*, *eyes*, and *head* idioms are structured by metaphors related to control, especially emotional control.

Emotional control is seen in equivalents of English *head*, *face* and *heart* idioms as keeping the substance inside the body–container, since people are seen as containers and emotions are viewed as substances in a container. Thus, control is often thought of as a possession, or as physical object manipulation.

Kövecses (2000) and several students of his have looked at two Hungarian women's magazines (*Nők Lapja* and *Kiskegyed*) and some corresponding English ones (*Mc Call's, Hello* and *Best*) and found that the use of figurative language in the English magazines corresponded to the same metaphoric and metonymic patterns in the Hungarian magazines as well:

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EMOTIONS/HAPPINESS ARE CAPTIVE ANIMALS

- *Engedje szabadon érzelmeit*, merjen őszintén örülni, és legyen hálás annak, aki ez örömöt szerzi. A szeretetért szeretet jár cserébe.
- Let your feelings *go free*, dare to be sincerely joyous, and be grateful to the person who brings that joy. Love should be given in exchange for love.

EMOTIONS ARE SUBSTANCES INSIDE A PERSON/CONTAINER
EMOTIONAL TENSION IS PRESSURE INSIDE THE CONTAINER

- Az édesanyám tényleg türelmes, érzékeny asszony volt, de *bennem* rengeteg az indulat. . . . *Bennem gyűlik, egyre gyűlik* a feszültség. . . nyolcvanszor meggondolom, mielőtt valakit kiosztok, inkább sokáig tűrök, tűrök, aztán egyszer *kitörök.*
- My mother was a truly patient, sensitive woman, but there is much temper *within me*. . . . Tension *gathers and gathers inside me*. . . eighty times I think over before I give somebody a piece of my mind, I rather take it and take it, and then I *burst out* all at once. (Kövecses 2000, 141)

Heltai (1990) deals with the problems of translation that result from the differences in the lexicon of languages such as English and Hungarian. These semantic differences are manifestations of alternative ways of conceptualization. Heltai considers general tendencies of lexical differences and claims that Hungarian uses more motivated word forms than English, since word formation and compounds dominate in Hungarian, which means that Hungarian overtly marks the extension of meaning. On the other hand, English usually assigns a new meaning to an old form. This is a major difference on the lexical level in the two languages.

The analysis of the idiom database shows that embodied experience has an enormous role in the similarities between English and Hungarian, since the two languages share several of the conceptual metaphors and metonymies, and much of the conventional/cultural knowledge about concepts. There are many similarities on the generic-level in view of the fact that the majority of the most frequent generic-level metaphors are common to English and Hungarian, and because of the universal nature of embodiment, and the common experiential bases employed.

The link between figurative idioms and culture is an indirect one in the sense that many idioms reflect the culture of the past rather than the present. After all, even native speakers are usually no longer aware of the origins of the idioms they use. Research into folklore and national tradition may give insights with reference to the birth of particular idioms, thus, the specific linguistic expressions motivated by cultural knowledge can be the instantiations of conceptual metaphors and metonymies.

Nevertheless, insight into a community's collection of idioms may help us recognise the experiential domains which have left their marks on the language, and which must therefore have been significant parts of the community's culture. As Danesi (1993) states:

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> Differences in thought occur only in surface-level cognitive structures which are embedded in specific cultures. Thought, therefore, exists without language at a more fundamental level – in the imagination – but it becomes language-dependent at the metaphorically fabricated surface level. At this level, languages serve to differentiate and codify conceptual distinctions deemed to be significant by a culture.' (1993, 133)

To sum up, idioms and their equivalents in the database reflect the coherence of the universal relationship among the human body, conceptualization, language, as well as real-world objects and events. In addition, the source domains chosen by English and Hungarian are coherent and well-motivated in each language. The fact that similarities in the two languages can be the result of embodiment provides a strong argument for their overall coherence.

On the one hand, the similarities between English and Hungarian are the result of the embodiment hypothesis and the common experiential grounding of the specific linguistic expressions. On the other hand, the differences between English and Hungarian are mostly the result of cultural preferences. Thus, different aspects of domains can be singled out in different languages, which can result in cross-cultural differences.

The present analysis suggests that cross-cultural variation can be manifested in various ways in English and Hungarian. Cross-linguistic differences can occur in literal meanings and conceptual mechanisms, as well as in the expression of the same or different conceptual metaphors and metonymies. Idiom–equivalent pairs in which more differences ensue with respect to literal meanings and conceptual mechanisms rank lower as they occur less frequently. The differences between the two languages, in contrast, result mainly from dissimilarities in the cultural context, distinctions in social/personal concerns, differentiations in cognitive preferences/style, and divergences in coherence.

## 5. Conclusion

The cross-linguistic study presented in this paper is claimed to be helpful in providing a wider cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspective to conceptual metaphor and metonymy analysis. The systematic comparative study of idioms and their motivations can shed light on the general tendencies of similarities and differences of idiom motivation in the two languages. The semantic transparency of a figurative expression depends on a variety of factors, such as its correlation with a conceptual metaphor or metaphor topic, and the closeness of that association (Flores d'Arcais 1993, Gibbs 1995). Idioms closely connected with an established conceptual metaphor are usually more transparent than the more marginal ones and

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those which are not related to any themes. For example, *to win someone's heart* is transparent and more evidently motivated by the love is in the heart metaphor; *head over heels in love* is more difficult to understand.

According to Beréndi, Csábi and Kövecses (2008), the intuitive use of metaphorical competence in L1 could serve as a basis for approaching figurative language in L2. Nevertheless, metaphorical competence in L1 develops without instruction, or conscious identification of either source and target domains, or mappings. Most linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphors such as TIME IS MONEY are so evident that people do not think of them as metaphors at all. Since the association of meanings may be altered in different languages, the motivations for equivalents in different languages do not always match *e.g. Put aside some time for learning languages*, is based on TIME IS MONEY, while the Hungarian equivalent is *Szakíts egy kis időt nyelvek tanulására* is motivated by TIME IS A SOLID OBJECT. Even the same conceptual motivation does not ensure that forms, which have the same literal meanings, will express certain figurative meanings.

All things considered, even if two languages share the same metaphoric source domain for a given target, it is impossible to predict the exact form an idiom will take in L2 (Kövecses, 2005). Moreover, students could be made to appreciate the importance of the anticipated idiom instruction by being shown the drawbacks of careless transfer from L1. Therefore, cross-cultural differences in idiomatic themes and cross-linguistic variety in figurative language could be a useful pathway for raising L2-learners' idiom awareness. Provided students are aware of the conceptual metaphors which lie behind most of language, and idiomatic language in particular, they will be able to make much better use of them, whether as a native speaker or second-language learner.

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