



Domains in Kurdish Family-Related Proverbs

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Abstract

The current study investigates cognitive domains in selected Kurdish proverbs. A cognitive domain refers to a context of knowledge background that is essential for understanding meaning. Since Kurdish proverbs evoke many domains, Kurdish speakers usually struggle to understand their meanings and identify their facets. At this juncture, the question posed is: Is the meaning of a proverb based on the domain in which it is embedded? To that end, the study adopts Cognitive Semantics approach in analyzing the selected domains. One crucial assumption is that aspects of human cognition shape linguistic features. Applied to Kurdish, it is hypothesized that proverbs are not often meaningful without a larger framework, which consists of related concepts that represent experiences. As for data collection, the study relied on reliable sources such as Shekh Mohamad Khal (2007), Ali Marouf Sharazoori(2010), Hoshyar Noori Lak (2011), and Karim Sharaza (1983). As for data analysis, the study adopts a qualitative introspective approach. The study then aims to identify the role of cognitive domains in the semantic construction and configuration of proverbs. Precisely, the aim is to reduce the degree of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the proverbs while they are being used. One interesting finding is that one cannot understand the meaning of a proverb without access to all the essential knowledge that relates to that proverb.

Key words: Cognitive Semantics, Cognitive Domain, Facet, Kurdish Proverbs

چه مکی بواری مه عریفی خیزان له پهندی پیشینانی کوردیدا

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پوخته

ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه تایبه‌ته به لیکۆڵینه‌وه له چه‌مکی بواری مه‌عریفی له ناو هه‌لبژاردیه‌که له پهندی کوردیدا. بواری مه‌عریفی بریتیه له چوارچۆیه‌ی کۆزانیی بابته‌یک که گرنه‌که بۆ تیگیشتن له واته‌. له‌به‌ر ئه‌وه‌ی پهندی کوردی پر له‌ بواری واتای جیاواز، زۆرجار ئاخیوه‌رانی زمانی کوردی رۆبه‌روی گرفت ده‌بنه‌وه له تیگه‌شتن و ده‌ستنیشانکردنی ره‌هه‌ندی واتاکان. له‌به‌ر ئه‌م هۆیه توێژینه‌وه‌که پشت ده‌به‌ستی به رێبازی واتاسازی مه‌عریفی له لیکدانه‌وه‌ی زانیاریه‌کان. گریمانه‌یه‌کی گرنکی توێژینه‌وه‌که ئه‌وه‌یه که درک یان بیرکردنه‌وه‌ی مروف رۆل و کارگه‌ری له تیگه‌شتن له خه‌سه‌له‌ته زمانه‌وانیه‌کان هه‌یه. گریمانه‌یه‌کی تر ئه‌وه‌یه پهنده کوردیه‌کان زۆربه‌ی کات واتادار نین به بێ گه‌رانه‌وه بۆ بواریه‌کی فراوانتر که چه‌مکه نزیکه‌کان له خۆ ده‌گری. ئامانجی توێژینه‌وه‌که بریتیه له ده‌ستنیشانکردنی کاریگه‌ری و رۆلی بواره مه‌عریفیه‌کان له تیگه‌شتن له پهنده‌کان. یه‌که‌یک له ده‌رئه‌نجامه‌کانی توێژینه‌وه‌که بریتیه له‌وه‌ی به بێ تیگه‌شتن له کۆی زانیاریه‌کانی په‌یوه‌ندیدار به پهنده‌کان تیگه‌شتن له واتاکانیان ئاسان نییه.

کلێله وشه: واتاسازی مه‌عریفی، بواری مه‌عریفی، رو(لایه‌ن)، پهندی کوردی

1 Introduction

The research theme of this study is Kurdish proverbs. As an essential property of language, a proverb can generally be defined as brief statement, usually of unknown and ancient origin, that offers wisdom, life advice or general truth about the peoples' social lives and experience. According to Arewa and Dundes (1964: 71), a proverb is "a statement which sums up a situation, passes judgment, recommends a course of action, or serves as a secular past precedents for present action". According to Speake (2003: ix), a proverb is "a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner" Ridout and Witting (1983: 7) define a proverb as "a popular short saying, with words of advice or warning". The terms all convey the notion of a piece of traditional wisdom,

handed down by previous generations. In Crystal's (2008: 184) words, proverbs are characterized by their brevity and directness. The syntax is simple, the images are vivid, the allusions are domestic, and thus easy to understand. Memorability of proverbs is aided through the use of alliteration, assonance, rhythm and rhyme, as demonstrated by proverbs such as *Death pays all debts*, *Fortune favours fools*, *Better be envied than pitied*, etc.

Lak (2006: 3) defines the Kurdish proverb as a short speech that expresses the nation's thoughts and opinions on life. It is a rich treasure of the past centuries, full of useful information and experiments. Sharaza (1983: 6) argues that the Kurdish proverb generally refers to a visible and overt truth. It is a traditional saying or phrase that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. It is a short sentence drawn from long experience. It is a short saying or piece of folk wisdom that emerges from the general culture rather than being written by a single, individual author. Kurdish proverbs convey wisdom or advice. They often give practical advice and are based on the shared human experience. Kurdish proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. An example of Kurdish proverb is *ئەگەر گۆل نیت، درکیش مەبە*. This proverb can be literally translated as: If you are not a flower, don't be a thorn. The proverb can be metaphorically translated as: If you cannot contribute positivity, at least do not contribute adversity. Like all proverbs, Kurdish proverbs are short, practical, and loaded with significance.

Hamawand (2016: 114) ascribes two qualities to proverbs. One of them is popularity. A proverb is popular for it contains enduring wisdom. The other one is pithiness. A proverb is short in form but full of meaning. Proverbs are characterized in three ways. First, the language is complex. Generally, proverbs have two interpretations: literal and non-literal. The literal interpretation is the basic meaning of a proverb. The non-literal interpretation is the metaphorical meaning of a proverb. Second, proverbs can be grouped under the same concept, but each deals with a different aspect of the concept. Third, some proverbs are compositional in nature. Their meanings are driven directly from their parts. Others are non-compositional in nature; they require the reader to use encyclopedic knowledge to detect their meanings. In *The bull must be taken by the horns*, the literal meaning is that in moments of danger during a bullfight, a strong expert will grasp the bull by the horns and so prevent it from tossing him, whereas the metaphorical meaning is that when faced by difficulties one should meet them fearlessly or boldly, not try to evade them.

The problem then lies in the interpretation of proverbs. Kurdish speakers usually face difficulties in understanding the meanings of proverbs. The reason is that proverbs are abound with many figurative schemes, which are omnipresent in everyday thought.

The capacity to discern the meanings of Kurdish proverbs requires certain kinds of cognitive abilities. At this juncture, the question posed is: Is the meaning of a proverb based on the domain in which it is embedded? To answer the question above, the study uses a new methodology.

Concerning the model of analysis, we choose the framework of Cognitive Semantics. The reason for the choice is that Cognitive Semantics provides insight into how the human brain works. Cognitive Semantics, as described in Langacker (1988), Lakoff (1987), Fillmore (1982), is a subfield of Cognitive Linguistics that examines the connections between language and human conceptualization. The main tenets of cognitive semantics are: (i) There is a relationship between meaning and mind. (ii) The ability to use language draws upon general cognitive resources. (iii) Grammar manifests a conception of the world held in a culture. (iv) The knowledge of language is acquired and contextual. (v) Linguistic meaning is based on how people perceive and understand the world. In short, cognitive semantics provides a rich perspective on how language reflects our cognitive processes and cultural context, going beyond mere linguistic analysis. On this basis, proverbs are argued to form sets highlighting distinct facets of meaning. The ultimate aim is to prove that proverbs are not only literal sayings but also figurative means of making statements about life.

Concerning data collection, the study relied on relevant sources such as Shekh Mohamad Khal (2007), Ali Marouf Sharazoori(2010), Hoshyar Noori Lak (2011), and Karim Sharaza (1983). Concerning data analysis, we adopt a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is a type of research that involves accumulating and examining non-numerical data to identify concepts, opinions, or experiences. This can be used to collect comprehensively insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. It helps identify important categories in the data, as well as patterns and relationships through a process of discovery. It is meant to measure something by its quality rather than quantity. The aim is to show that language and general cognition are interrelated and interdependent. Cognitive Semantics studies the processes by means of which conceptual content is produced, organized and comprehended in language.

2 The cognitive domain theory

The cognitive domain theory goes back to the 1980s, a theory that has been proposed and developed by Langacker, especially to stand against the semantic field theory. The theory is built on the belief that the meaning of a lexical element can best be defined with respect to the domain to which it refers. According to Langacker (1987: 147), 'Domains are

necessarily cognitive entities: mental experiences, representational spaces, concepts, or conceptual complexes'. Taylor (2002) states that a domain refers to any knowledge configuration that provides the context for conceptualizing a semantic unit. Evans (2007:61) asserts that the principal function or role of a domain is to give a specific sort of coherent fixed knowledge context against which other conceptual elements can be understood or characterized. For instance, linguistic elements such as *cold*, *hot* and *lukewarm* cannot be entirely portrayed without referring to the domain of temperature. As Hamawand (2009:94, 2011:46, 2016:146) explains, 'domain' refers to a context of knowledge background based on mental experiences. Concepts do not come into existence as isolated units in the mind, but can only be apprehended in a context of background knowledge referred to as a domain.

Domain is built on the idea that meaning is encyclopedic in the sense it covers a large collection of knowledge in great detail. The structure of a domain generally possesses some facets. Any facet is a partition of a domain which is related to a specific concept. Each facet is expounded by a suitable form of language. Lexical concepts cannot be understood independently of the cognitive domains in which they are embedded. Let us take Hamawand's (2016: 146) examples. The lexemes like foresee, foretell, and forecast assign distinct lexical concepts in the domain of prediction. Without understanding the domain of prediction, one would not be able to use these terms properly. Foresee implies that prediction is a consequence of normal reasoning and experience, as in *Economists should have foreseen the recession*. Foretell implies prediction made by using religious or magical powers, especially in literature or stories, as in *The prophet had the gift of foretelling the future*. Forecast implies prediction that is based on technical or scientific knowledge, as in *They forecast a large drop in unemployment over the next three years*.

In Cognitive Semantics, meaning interpretation is tackled by means of cognitive domains. According to Hamawand (2023: 92-3) the basic insight of the domain theory is that concepts cannot be understood independently of the domains in which they are embedded. A domain is a knowledge background with respect to which concepts can be properly described. A domain is a conceptual structure with respect to which the meaning of a lexical item can be described. A domain contains a set of facets, each of which describes a certain human experience, and each of which is realized by a different concept. A facet is a portion of a domain that is associated with a particular experience. To understand the meaning of a concept, it is necessary to associate it with the appropriate facet within a domain. The concepts that occupy different facets are not in complementary distribution. A close investigation of their behavior makes it clear they have distinct

meanings. The meaning of any concept can be better understood in terms of the background knowledge that underlies its usage and behavior. The employment of a domain approach is of fundamental importance to the characterization of proverbs.

In Evans's (2007: 61) words, "A domain constitutes a coherent knowledge structure possessing, in principle, any level of complexity or organization". A domain provides a particular kind of knowledge representation against which concepts are characterized. For instance, linguistic terms such as *hot*, *cold* and *lukewarm* relate to different kinds of lexical concept which can only be fully characterized with respect to the domain of temperature. The terms are points of access to encyclopedic knowledge. Each term represents a particular facet and a specific meaning. Related to proverbs, the meaning of a proverb cannot be understood independently of the domain with which it is associated. Within the domains, each proverb represents a particular facet. A facet is a portion of a domain which is associated with a particular experience.

3 The domain of family

According to Longman dictionary (2003: 568), a family is a group of people who are related to each other and have blood ties, especially mother, father, and their children. One of the most wonderful aspects of the human experience is the ability to build connections and create a sense of family beyond blood ties. Family is a cognitive area standing for a group of people who are closely linked to one another, particularly parents and their children. The members of a family are related not only by blood relationship but by sharing love, loyalty, compassion, support, trust, comfort and happiness. Family plays a significant role in our lives. The form of an ideal family comprises of three subdomains: parents, children, daughters and sons. Each subdomain consists of certain facets. Each facet represents a crucial experience of life. The subdomain of parents subsumes traits such as sympathizer, educator and caretaker. The subdomain of children subsumes traits such as respect, education and character. The subdomain of daughters subsumes roles such as luck, imitation and obedience. The subdomain of sons comprises such roles as pride, disloyalty and closeness.

Below are the subdomains of family, each subdomain having facets represented by proverbs.

3.1 The subdomain of parents

- (1) a. نازی دایک و باب به دل و گیانه، نازی بێ لهوان به نوکی زوانه.

Pamper coming from parents is from heart, pampering without them

comes from the mouth.

b. ئەگەر باوک دەهۆلچى بێ، منالەکانیشى هەلپەركێكەر ئەبن.

If the father is a drummer, his children would be dancers.

c. دایک بناغەى چاکەوخراپەى منالە.

Mother is the base for the good and bad behaviors of her children.

The proverbs in (1a-c) represent the subdomain of parents. The proverb in (1a) represents the facet of *sympathizer*. It means that kindness of the parents towards their children comes from the depths of their hearts. This means that others are hypocritical and do not emerge from their innermost feelings. The proverb in (1b) represents the facet of *educator*. The proverb's literal translation implies that if the father is a drummer, the son will be a dancer. It means that children look at their father's career and reputation and take them positively and negatively. The father should educate and bring up the son in the best way since children always follow in their father's footsteps. The proverb in (1c) represents the facet of *caretaker*. It literally means that the mother is the base for the good and bad behavior of her children. Mother is responsible for the way children are brought up when they are young. This has a great impact on the way you behave and make moral decisions in the future.

3.2 The subdomain of children

(2) a. منداڵ نەئێ بەسەرى بابم، با نەشێ بە گۆرى بابم.

If a child does not swear on his father's head, he does not need to swear on his grave.

b. ئەولاد شیرینه، تەریبە لە ئەولاد شیرینترە.

Children are sweet but education is sweeter than children.

c. منداڵ گۆچیلەیه، هەرچۆنێک پەرۆردەى بکەى وادەبێ.

A child is like a puppy as you educate, so you will reap the same.

The proverbs in (2a-c) represent the subdomain of children. The proverb in (2a) represents the facet of *respect*. It literally means that if a child does not swear on his father's head, he does not need to swear on his father's grave. This entails that children need to respect and serve their fathers when they are alive. There is no need to respect them after death. The proverb in (2b) represents the facet of *education*. It means that children are sweet, but their education is sweeter. It entails that uneducated or immoral children are better not to exist. Giving birth to children and feed them is not enough. What is important is giving

them good moral instructions so that they can be of advantage to the society. The proverb in (2c) represents the facet of *character*. It means that a child is similar to a puppy. You can train it and make something as you wish. Parents have many opportunities and tools to build their children's character. Parents should seek to instill in children the values of integrity, respect, responsibility, fairness, honesty, caring, and citizenship.

3.3 The subdomain of daughters

- (3) a. بهختی دایک جیازی کچه.
A mother's luck is her daughter's trousseau (hope chest).
b. کیز تهشی دایکی ده‌پرسی.
A girl spins her mother's wool spindle.
c. دایک بگه‌و کچ به‌ده‌ست خۆته‌وه یه.
Take the mother side, then the daughter obeys.

The proverbs in (3a-c) represent the subdomain of daughters. The proverb in (3a) represents the facet of *luck*. It means that the mother's luck or chance is important for a newly married daughter. If the mother is lucky, her daughter would be lucky too. When the married girls have good husbands, people say they are lucky like their mothers. The proverb in (3b) represents the facet of *imitation*. It means that a daughter spins her mother's wool spindle. A girl imitates what her mother does positively or negatively. The daughter follows the mother as a model. Daughters imitate their mothers and carry out what their mothers want. The proverb in (3c) represents the facet of *obedience*. It means that if you take sides with the mother, the daughter will obey you. The proverb means *like mother like daughter*. Daughters follow the speech and actions of their mothers.

3.4 The subdomain of sons

- (4) a. کوری باوکی خۆت به، له رپی شیرێ برۆ.
Be your father's son, take the lion's path.
b. کوری خۆم، نان خۆری خه‌لکی.
My son, other people's eater
c. کور، خالۆ وه‌له‌ده.
A boy is his uncle's son.

The proverbs in (4a-c) represent the subdomain of *sons*. The proverb in (4a) represents the facet of *pride*. It means that if a son grows up in his home with his father, he always lives gloriously as a lion without feeling of fear. The proverb in (4b) represents the facet of

disloyalty. It means it describes someone who gets distant from his father and is biased towards other people. As is known, a son from one's own blood and bone is supposed to be loyal and faithful to his family. The proverb in (4c) represents the facet of *closeness*. It means the male gender looks like or takes after their mother's brother. It is said that boys are always closer to their mothers' relatives than their fathers'.

4 Discussion

Our aim has been to explore the role of domains evoked by selected Kurdish proverbs. Proverbs are argued to form sets that highlight distinct facets. As mentioned earlier, a domain is defined by Evans (2007: 61) as a conceptual entity that constitutes a coherent knowledge structure possessing, in principle, any level of complexity or organization. The basic idea is that one cannot understand the meaning of a proverb without access to all the essential knowledge that relates to it. That is, It relates linguistic semantics to encyclopedic knowledge. The cognitive domain theory possesses some advantages or merits that are shown by Hamawand (2009: 94-5). First, it provides for each lexeme a particular role, concentrates on its actual utilization, and selects the criteria for being a member of the domain. Second, it allows the speaker to depict a situation in various ways, using each time a distinct lexical unit. The question that has been posed is: Is the meaning of a proverb best understood in terms of the domain to which it belongs? With respect to this question, the study has reached the following findings:

Specific findings:

1. A domain is a coherent body of conceptual content that provides context for explaining meaning.
2. A proverb is best understood according to the cognitive domain in which it is embedded.
3. The precise meaning of a proverb is defined relative to the facet which it occupies in a domain.

General findings:

1. Kurdish family proverbs reflect cultural norms, beliefs, and values within the community. They provide insights into how families perceive relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

2. Kurdish family proverbs carry wisdom accumulated over generations. They serve as a way to pass down practical advice and life lessons from elders to younger family members.
3. Kurdish family proverbs highlight traditional gender roles. Sons and daughters often have distinct expectations and responsibilities within the family structure.
4. Kurdish family proverbs which emphasize family unity, love, and support are recurring themes. Proverbs emphasize the importance of standing together during challenging times.
5. Kurdish family proverbs offer practical guidance for navigating family life, including hard work, patience, or kindness.
6. Kurdish family proverbs use metaphorical language. They often use metaphors and vivid imagery to convey deeper meanings. These metaphors resonate with cultural experiences.
7. Kurdish family proverbs connect Kurdish people across time and place, reinforcing a sense of shared heritage and identity.
8. Kurdish family proverbs suggest that generosity and stinginess ultimately lead to similar outcomes. Hoarding wealth does not necessarily bring happiness, and sharing brings its own rewards.

In summary, Kurdish family-related proverbs offer valuable insights into cultural norms, familial dynamics, and timeless wisdom. They provide cultural context, reinforce values, and offer practical wisdom for navigating family life. They reflect the shared experiences and heritage of the Kurdish people. They reflect the rich heritage and shared experiences of the Kurdish people.

5 Conclusion

In this study, we have addressed the notion of domain in Kurdish proverbs. A domain is the knowledge background with respect to which the meanings of lexical items can be properly described. To do so, we have chosen Cognitive Semantics, which gives satisfying accounts of aspects of the structure of language, and yields insightful analyses of proverbs. According to the domain theory, the study has found that the best way to characterize proverbs is by placing them in domains in which they show relationships of similarity and contrast. In this study, one domain of Kurdish proverbs have been used: the domain of *family*. The family domain contains four subdomains including *parents*, *children*, *daughters* and *sons*. The subdomain of parents contains three facets: sympathizer, educator and

caretaker. Each facet represents a distinct experience of life. The subdomain of children includes three facets: respect, education and character. Each facet conveys a different meaning. The subdomain of daughters comprises three facets: luck, imitation and obedience. Each facet represents a differing sense of the domain of family. The subdomain of sons contains three facets: pride, disloyalty and closeness. Each facet conveys a distinct role.

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