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Judeo-Spanish and Turkish Proverbs and Idioms with Djoha and Hodja Nasrettin: Questioning Wittiness via Conceptual Metaphors¹

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms where Hodja Nasrettin (he is known as Djoha in Judeo-Spanish) is depicted as a joyful, gullible, nasty, or an intelligent person. It suggests that some different and similar conceptualizations are employed in the proverbs and idioms of both languages in order to describe Hodja Nasrettin from an anthropological linguistic point of view. These conceptualizations of the concept of cleverness and credulity are based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980); however, the two researchers had never mentioned these conceptualizations in their works. These conceptualizations related to cultural and social experiences of Judeo-Spanish and Turkish speakers have been presented in this study for the first time. Besides, in Turkish Hodja is an old character, whereas in Judeo-Spanish, he is presented sometimes as an old, and sometimes as a young character. However, he gives advice to people from different age groups.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Conceptual Metaphors, Nasrettin Hodja, effects of the Ottoman culture on Turkish Sephardim

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1. Introduction

In this study, first, we will see the conceptual metaphors embedded in the Sephardic and the Turkish cultures, second, we will talk about previous studies, third, we will explain who Hodja Nasrettin is, and then we will give some information about the Sephardim, the native Judeo-Spanish speakers, and in the following chapters, we will define the conceptualizations of cleverness and credulity, underlying Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms where Hodja Nasrettin is present.

The aim of this study is twofold: first, it intends to discover whether different or similar conceptualizations underlie the Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms with Hodja Nasrettin; second, it tries to define the conceptual metaphors and metonymies related to cleverness and credulity in two different cultures that underlie the character and personality of Hodja, presented in a different manner, according to Judeo-Spanish and Turkish speakers, from an anthropological linguistic perspective. Besides, this study shows that both an old and a young whimsical Hodja character warns us to be clever and alert all the time in accordance with the cultural portrait of a witty Hodja existing in several Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms that involve cultural representations of cultural character stereotypes, cultural practices, and traditions.

Regarding the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, it is based on mental conceptual metaphors that define a concept with another one (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 14). Therefore, the source, the metaphorical concept defines the target concept, as in “FEAR IS ICE.” In this sentence, the concept of ice is the source used to depict the target emotion of fear. This indicates that a frightened person shivers and feels cold as a physiological effect of the emotion of fear.

Consequently, “our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinary wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 25). Thus, while “FEAR IS ICE” is a metaphor, “SHIVER STANDS FOR FEAR” is a metonymy. Radden and Kövecses (1999, p. 21) mention the following: “Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle [also often called the ‘source’, ...], provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same cognitive model.” Ungerer and Schmid (1997) posit that not only metaphors, but also metonymies are conceptual in nature: they can be regarded as “automatic,” “unconscious,” and “effortless” (p. 128) However, Ungerer and Schmid (1997) also cite that metaphors consist of mappings “across different cognitive models,” whereas metonymies of mappings “within a model.” The name of an office may stand for all of its workers, or a part of an object may stand for it: these are examples to metonymies (p. 128). The Cognitive Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) plays a crucial part in Anthropological Linguistics, since all human bodily actions, including facial expressions, body postures, and hand and finger movements (for instance, see Kövecses, 1988), and other observances and beliefs on human behavior, attitude, and characteristics are culture-specific ways of expressing emotions or thoughts, inasmuch as they and their interpretations differentiate between different populations around the globe to a great extent. The conceptualizations, thus conceptual metaphors and metonymies are culturally-oriented mental representations based on these bodily expressions and human characteristics. Each person belonging to a specific cultural group acquires these bodily actions or characteristics, attitudes, and behavior through intense interaction with the members of her / his cultural group, and uses them subconsciously in proverbs and idioms that are her / his own culture’s products. Kövecses (1995) defends that although all the



human beings have similar body shapes and ways of physiological functioning, the conceptualizations of not only ontology, but also of expression differentiate between cultures (p. 140). Besides, people from different cultures conceptualize other human characteristics, such as intelligence, tidiness, and credulity in accordance with what they have learnt from the people of their own culture about these positive and negative human characteristics. Consequently, founding this study on the existing ties between Anthropology and Cognitive Linguistics, we wished to discuss cultural beliefs related to credulity and cleverness widespread among the Sephardim and the Turks, reflected onto Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms where Hodja, or Djoha is the protagonist as a cultural stereotype of a clever or a gullible person, explained via cognitive metaphors and metonymies which are cultural elements belonging to both the Sephardic and Turkish cultures. Kövecses and Szabó (1996) argue that ‘source domains’ determine the meanings of idioms, referring to a ‘target domain,’ ‘ontological meaning’ provides more specific aspects of the idiomatic meanings; and ‘epistemic correspondences’ can describe connotative aspects of idiomatic meanings. Besides, we see that previous studies analyze bodily changes depicted in cognitive metaphors underlying various idioms in different languages such as that of Yu (2003), which discusses the conceptual metaphors where the organ of gallbladder is used to express the emotion of courage, since this organ is regarded as a decision maker in the traditional Chinese Medicine.

Concerning the character of Djoha in the Sephardic culture, Bardavid (1997) argues that Sephardim called intelligent, witty, and funny children Djoha, who is represented sometimes as a young, and sometimes as an old person in the Sephardic anecdotes; however, this character is always old in the Turkish anecdotes. Nasreddin Hodja was born in Sivrihisar in 1208; he used to live in Aksehir for studying (Sansal, 2007, para. 1). Turkish speakers call him Hodja Nasrettin and the Sephardim “Djoha”: he is known all over the world: “Nasreddin Hoca was a philosopher, wise, witty man with a good sense of humor... Nasreddin Hodja, or Hoca which means teacher in Turkish ("c" is pronounced in Turkish like "dj" or like "J" in "John" in English), is known as with different names in the world” (Sansal, 2007, para. 2 -3).

Most of the cultural groups that existed within the borders of the Ottoman Empire should have heard about Hodja Nasrettin, and converted him into their own culture and religion, and made him speak their own language and behave in accordance with their own traditions and mentality for mocking the deficits of people who try to cheat him. In fact, in every culture, he appears as a perfect ‘trickster’ who shows his wit and wisdom in each difficult situation where he needs to criticize others for their fraudulent behavior. He is a trickster in terms of the culturally- based jokes he tells. These jokes are flawless sources for analyzing the traditions and collective behavior of some cultural groups toward vice and virtue, represented in culture-specific Hodja anecdotes.

By the way, considering Sephardim, thus the native Judeo-Spanish speakers, who found homes in the Ottoman Empire in March 1492 successive to their expulsion by the Catholic monarchs of Spain, Isabella of Castilla, Ferdinand of Aragon, and their prime minister Torquemada (Sarhon, n.d., para. 1), they are originally from Sepharad, thus from Spain in Hebrew (Sarhon, n.d., para. 3). Harris (2005) defends that the differences between the Spanish language spoken by the Christians and the Spanish language spoken by the Jews in the Middle Ages were not as many as some might have thought (p. 110). According to Wexler (1977), Sephardim used Arabic and Hebrew expressions instead of their Latin equivalents (as cited in Avcıkurt, 1993, p. 45). Moreover, Clewlow (1990: 86) argues that Sephardim would say ‘*alhad*’, not ‘*domingo*’ (‘Sunday’) for avoiding Catholic terms. The Spanish



noun ‘domingo’ derives from the Latin noun of ‘domus’ (‘house’) that is used to refer to the cathedrals where Catholics hold Sunday services.

2. Materials and Methods

Regarding our data, we gathered the Judeo-Spanish idioms and proverbs from the book entitled *Djoha Ke Dize? Kuentos Populares Djudeo-Espanyoles (What does Hodja say? Popular Judeo-Spanish Stories)* of Matilda Koen–Sarano, published in 1991, and Turkish idioms and proverbs from the books entitled *Atalar Sözü (Words of Ancestors)* of Recep Duymaz, published in 2005 and the *Dictionary of Turkish Idioms, Türkçe Deyimler Sözlüğü* of Ali Püsküllüoğlu, published in 1998. In the successive sections, we will analyze the conceptualizations underlying the characteristics of Hodja in some Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms from an anthropological linguistic perspective.

3. Findings / Results

This study shows that cleverness and credulity are based on cultural conceptual metaphors as indicated in the subtitles of this section of findings and results.

3. 1. “CLEVERNESS IS PERFORMING THE ROLE OF AN ILLUSIONIST”

Nasrettin Hodja appears as a snob character both in Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs. He organizes and decorates everything in an expensive manner. The following conceptualizations underlie the proverb in (1): “PAINTED CEILING STANDS FOR PRIDE” and “PRIDE IS HEIGHT.”

(1) Djoha se topo’ kon tavan boyali

(literal) Hodja is found with a painted ceiling.

(metaphorical) Hodja is mentioning that he is proud of his richness.

Anthropologically, in the Sephardic culture, people associate high places with pride metaphorically. Linked to this cultural thinking, ‘ceiling’ is associated with pride. People need to paint their ceilings for being tidy, and they need money for buying some paint. This culturally-shaped metaphorical image represents a person clever enough to invent ways for becoming rich, and consequently, proud of his richness. Besides, the following conceptualizations underlie the Turkish proverb in (2): the spices are more common means of demonstrating one’s richness in the Ottoman and Turkish cultures: “SPICES STAND FOR RICHNESS,” instead of “COLORFULNESS STANDS FOR RICHNESS,” as in (1). However, the following conceptualizations are present both in (1) and (2): “THE MIND IS A CONTAINER FOR LUXURY” and “LUXURY IS AN ILLUSION.” Therefore, we arrive to the conclusion that in both cultures, “CLEVERNESS IS PERFORMING THE ROLE OF AN ILLUSIONIST.”

(2) Nasrettin Hoca sarmısağa serpiştirmiş: “Görüp göreceğin su, bu olsun” demiş.

(literal) Nasrettin Hodja put some spices on the garlic, and said, “The water that you will see should be this.”

(metaphorical) A person can invent some ways to show a simple object as a different more elegant one.



Moreover, food is very important in the Sephardic and Turkish cultures. The Ottoman dishes are famous for their spices that may turn a simple vegetable or meat into a one that is delicious to a greater extent. At this point, we see the reflection of food culture onto Turkish proverbs as an expressive means of wealth. A simple object can be very attractive after having been ornamented. Turkish people believe in the attractive power of decorations.

3.2. “CREDULITY IS HIDING OBJECTS”

In the Judeo-Spanish proverb in (3), we encounter a stupid Hodja. The proverb depicts a person who touches her / his left ear metaphorically and as a result of a cultural belief. However, in (3) this person is touching his left ear with his wrong hand, thus the right one, instead of the left one, leading to confusion on this opposite and more effort consuming action. This implies that a liar or a dishonest person can be discovered easily by observing her / his actions, attitude, and behavior. The conceptualizations that underlie the proverb are “CLEVERNESS IS TOUCHING THE RIGHT EAR,” “A LIAR IS NOT A GOOD ACTOR,” “THE MIND IS A GUIDE,” and “CREDULITY IS HIDING OBJECTS.”

(3) Djoha, onde es tu oreja?

(literal) Hodja, where is your ear?

(metaphorical) A person lies, or commits a bad action, while touching his left ear with his right hand.

Another image appears in the Turkish proverb in (4). This image describes that one must use her / his possessions for her / his own well-being. The object of ‘chewing gum’ maps onto the possessions the person is unwilling to spend. The conceptualizations, “STICKINESS STANDS FOR MEANNESS,” “KEEPING STANDS FOR MEANNESS,” “THE HAND IS A CONTAINER FOR POSSESSINGS,” and “CREDULITY IS HIDING OBJECTS” are employed in (4).

(4) Nasrettin Hoca’nın sakızı gibi elinde durur.

(literal) It stays on his hand, just like the chewing gum of Hodja Nasrettin.

(metaphorical) One does not spend or give or throw anything.

Furthermore, a chewing gum is an Ottoman cultural element which can be mixed with pudding; a person who does not use it in food or chew it is regarded as a stupid one. Therefore, money is to buy goods and food; one has to spend it prodigiously without being selfish and mean, as explained in (4).

3.3. “CLEVERNESS IS LYING”

In the Judeo-Spanish proverbs, Hodja appears as a liar and a person who exaggerates something, or tells lies. For denying what the speaker has told, the proverb in (5) is uttered:

(5) Asi biva Djoha.

(literal) Yes, we wish that Hodja lives.

(metaphorical) The speaker is not saying the truth: I wish to deny this.

However, in the Turkish proverb in (6), the Hodja Nasrettin tales are lies; Hodja is not a liar. The proverb is used referring to a person who tells various lies narrating an event, or who narrates events that have never occurred.



(6) Nasrettin Hoca Hikayesi gibi uydur uydur söyle.

(literal) Narrate it lying like a tale of Hodja Nasrettin.

(metaphorical) This event about which one is talking is false and unbelievable.

However, the following conceptual metaphor underlies both (5) and (6): “CLEVERNESS IS LYING UNTIL LIES WILL HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED.” In fact, both (5) and (6) emphasize that Hodja tales or anecdotes consist of lies based on cultural beliefs. (5) and (6) tell that one can invent stories for lying, but sooner or later another can discover that s/he is lying.

3. 4. “CLEVERNESS IS BEING NASRETTIN”

The Judeo-Spanish proverb in (7) and the Turkish proverb in (8) are used for describing or referring to a nasty and clever child, who invents various reasons for her / his right and wrong actions, responding quickly and wittily. In this case, the mind appears “AS A CONTAINER FOR IDEAS” and successively, this metaphor leads to these two proverbs in two different languages: “CLEVERNESS IS BEING NASRETTIN.”

(7) Es un Djoha.

(literal) S/he is a Hodja.

(metaphorical) S/he is nasty.

(8) Hoca Nasrettin’i zamanenin.

(literal) S/he is the Hodja Nasrettin of the time.

(metaphorical) S/he is very clever, reasons about events, and invents their causes.

Therefore, a witty child is called Hodja or Djoha in the Turkish and Sephardic cultures consecutively.

3.5. “CLEVERNESS IS RESPONDING RAPIDLY”

Djoha is a Sephardic character who invents causes for events rapidly as in (9). Imagine a seven-year-old student who tells that he is ill for not going to school; a clever person who finds excuses for escaping an event is depicted in (9).

(9) En Djoha kedo’ la kasa.

(literal) Hodja’s house fell down.

(metaphorical) Hodja finds excuses in order not to do anything.

Besides, the Turkish proverb in (10) presents Hodja as an obstinate and glutton character, “THE STOMACH IS A CONTAINER FOR TASTES,” and “PEARS STAND FOR TASTES” underlie the proverb in (10). Hodja invents a cause for his dissatisfaction. Each pear has its own diverse place in his stomach. Therefore, both in (9) and (10), the conceptual metaphor of “CLEVERNESS IS RESPONDING RAPIDLY” is present.

(10) Hoca, karnı doyduktan sonar kırk armut yemiş, onun yeri başka demiş.

(literal) Hodja ate forty pears, when he was just full, and said that their places were different in his stomach.

(metaphorical) A glutton or avid person can eat, or collect various things, and defend herself / himself by saying that s/he will use it in a different way.



3. 6. “CREDULITY IS DISORDER”

Both in Judeo-Spanish and Turkish, Hodja can be presented as an untidy person. However, the Judeo-Spanish proverb in (11) presents Hodja as an incapable person. He manages to do something, but then destroys it. Therefore, he builds up a relationship, or initiates a work; however, he withdraws from his relationship or work after destroying this relationship or work. The conceptualizations of “CREDULITY IS DISORDER,” “THE MIND IS A CONTAINER FOR IDEAS,” “FRIENDSHIP and LOVE or WORKS ARE BUILDINGS” and “A WORD OR ACTION CAN BE A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE” underlie this proverb.

(11) Ke aze Djoha? Aze i dezaze.

(literal) What does Hodja? He does and undoes.

(metaphorical) An incapable and stupid person manages to do something, but then ruins it.

Additionally, the Turkish proverb in (12) presents a place where people come to pray and make wishes: a cemetery. (12) alludes to a place where people can come and wish for impossible wishes. “IMPOSSIBILITY IS ILLUSION,” “THE MIND IS A CONTAINER FOR ILLUSION,” and “CREDULITY IS DISORDER” underlie the idiom in (12).

(12) Nasrettin Hoca Türbesi

(literal) Shrine of Hodja Nasrettin

(metaphorical) An untidy place where people can come to make unrealizable wishes.

All these conceptual metaphors underline the importance of realistic long-lasting love and work relationships in the Sephardic and Turkish cultures. Besides, a shrine is an Ottoman-Turkish grave type. As many people visit shrines of imams for making wishes by lighting up a candle, leaving a bottle of olive oil, or leaving a piece of paper on which their wishes are written, etc., these places become untidy. The expression in (12) is used in order to depict a dirty place. Conceptual metaphors and metonymies are anthropological elements defining cultural bases of thoughts and human relationships referring to different cultural objects, as in Sephardic and Turkish proverbs and idioms.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory examined the conceptualizations used for defining emotions and relationships in some proverbs and idioms of diverse languages. However, this study identifies the conceptualizations used for depicting the character of Hodja in two different cultures. These conceptualizations are inevitably anthropological elements based on cultural beliefs, traditions, and mental cultural representations of places where a person lives, food cooked in accordance with traditions and plants and cattle found in a specific country, leading to cultural observances. This study differs from the previous ones on Cognitive Metaphor Theory, analyzing the conceptual metaphors and metonymies based on cleverness and credulity in accordance with Sephardic and Turkish cultural practices that lead to their formation in the human mind. Most of the previous studies on Cognitive Metaphor Theory analyzed conceptualizations related to bodily expressions in idioms and proverbs of various world languages. However, this study lays the foundation for analyses related to human characteristics, such as cleverness, alertness, wit, credulity, as we did, and beauty, ugliness, and other positive and negative



qualities, as we suggest for further studies. In this study, Hodja Nasrettin and Djoha represent cultural stereotypes of clever and gullible people depicted in the Sephardic and Turkish cultures. Besides, the traditions and cultural observances are respected by Hodja and Djoha, rendering them useful elements for anthropological analyses due to their cultural beliefs, attitudes, behavior, and choices in cultural objects, such as food, et cetera. The two characters of Hodja and Djoha may explain the same idea by referring to different cultural concepts metaphorically, as Hodja is Muslim, whereas Djoha is Jewish. However, Sephardic Djoha anecdotes are products of cultural interactions with Ottoman Turks.

Besides, this study shows that some conceptualizations underlying Hodja Nasrettin proverbs in Judeo-Spanish and Turkish languages can be different, but also similar, when identifying the character and personality of Nasrettin Hodja. Both the young and the old characters of Hodja give excellent advice to people at different ages. Cleverness and credulity are two important characteristics in the ages of life. One should be alert all the time, and try to respond quickly in certain cases in order not to be cheated. Furthermore, s/he has to use her / his mind in order to make the right decision during her / his life. Nasrettin Hodja, or Djoha is a good example to the human behavior, and both Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms provide advice to people on how they should behave in different situations in different stages of life. Everybody may behave in a clever or a stupid manner in certain cases, but the proverbs and idioms of Djoha and Nasrettin Hodja give us advice on the perfection of cleverness so that we can be alert all the time. In the future, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, or the Conceptual Blending Theory should be applied to several Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs, idioms, or anecdotes in order to depict the character of other cultural stereotypes different from Hodja.

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