

A cognitive study of certain Animals in English and Arabic Proverbs: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Proverbs which are short and generally known sentences are handed down from generation to generation .They contain wisdom, truth, and traditional views in a metaphorical and memorable form .They are effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature .Their meaning cannot be understood independent of human cognition. The meaning must be surveyed in a way that human uses and understands easily .The present study compares and analyzes certain kinds of animal English proverbs with Arabic .These kinds are dogs and horses .This study is based on elected model gathering Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Sperber and Wilson (1986) approach as well as Hsieh's (2006) approach of semantic molecules to recognize the exact meaning of these proverbs and know their cultural background. This research aims to study the relevance theoretic notion of enrichment to be the procedure for deriving implicature /explicature from what is said .Two forms of this procedure are discussed .Grammatical motivation and conceptual motivation enrichment are tackled .This effect is insufficient to account for all cases but it cooperates with other cognitive mechanisms such as metaphoric and metonymic mappings .It also aims to apply cognitive linguistics on these proverbs and investigate the type of metaphors and metonymy manifested in them. For this purpose, 20 English and Arabic proverbs are collected; ten of each kind are analyzed in both languages .It is hypothesized that proverbs have the same function and underlay the same deep structure but different surface structure. They are cultural, social and cognitive values transmitted from one generation to another.

Key Words: Proverbs, the Great Chain Metaphor, Metonymy, and Semantic Molecules.

1. Introduction

Proverbs are economic mental pictures because many other situations can be understood from particular one. An interesting and informative source of folk knowledge is constituted by proverbs. Many factors can clarify the meaning of proverbs; some of them can be formal, religious, cultural, cognitive, etc. The study focuses on a cognitive, social, and pragmatic view .Adopting the cognitive view permits to understand the universal principles that underlie the cognition of proverbs, while social and pragmatic views help to understand the intended meaning beyond the linguistic structure of proverbs.

A semantic- pragmatic frame is adopted to tackle the wide gap between what people say in interaction and what they mean .Human beings live close to animals and this makes people know them well .According to Ruiz de Mendoza (1999:1),theorists assume that this gap can be filled by disambiguation and instantiation of indexical variable .This relation enables human beings to attribute some of negative and positive characters to each one of them .Through animal proverbs ,it becomes easier to understand and reveal human beings' culture and behavior .By using animal metaphors we can satisfy many purposes such as insulting ,praising ,criticizing and describing societies .The purpose of this research is the semantic analysis of certain kinds of animals in English and Arabic proverbs, as they represent our experience on the basis of cognitive linguistics. Mental mechanisms working in the interpretation of proverbs are investigated. Comparative analysis between Arabic and English proverbs is presented to prove that they are conceptual universal devices which have a communicative power.

2. Definition of proverb

Hussein and Khalaf (2004:4) state that proverbs are inherent sayings which are used to offer advice or present a warning. George and Dundes (1963:113) mention that the topic of proverbs is shared by the proverbers and proverbee via contextual information .They also state that proverbs express relative rather than absolute truth as a source of potential ambiguity.

According to (Selheim, 1971:21), Bin Salaam (838.A.D) defines Arabic proverbs as "they represent the wisdom of the Arabs in pre-Islamic and at Islamic time ...by means of which they metonymically attend their objectives". He (ibid: 23) adds that proverbs should be economic in wordings, semantically well-built and appropriately in comparison they extend.

Saeed (1997:15) states that, in most cases, proverbs are used figuratively because their meaning is interpreted differently from its literal meaning. The following proverb clarifies that " No gain without pain ".It can be used to mean that a student who complains too much assignments cannot achieve anything without some troubles .It also can be said to mean that the farmer must be patient to collect the crops .

Kuusi (1998:1) defines proverbs as "common sayings among the people; commonness is their state of being. There are sayings that were engraved on clay tables thousands of years ago and that are still repeated everyday over five continents"

Meider (2004:3) defines a proverb as "a short generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, moral and traditional views in a metaphorical and memorisable form and which is handed from generation to generation"

Syntactically, Dundes (1975:963- 965) states that a proverb must consist of two elements which are topic and comment as in:

Desperate diseases need desperate cures

Topic

Comment

Milner as cited in Fair (2003: 3) states that proverbs have two parts: the first one is called the "head" while the latter is labeled the "tail":

Who has a fair wife need more than two eyes?

Head

Tail

Weinreich (1978:72) as cited in Richard (1997:18) mentions that the grammatical subject of the proverb is abstract generic or symbolic and the tense of its verb is usually a present tense (non – past) because the past tense particularizes an utterance and strips it of its omnitemporal and polysituation potential.

Phonetically (Cudden 1982:27), states that a proverb is generally characterized by one of the phonic devices which are alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme. He mentions this proverb to clarify what is meant by alliteration:

Out of debt, out of danger

Thrall and Hibbard (1960:37) define assonance as the repetition of similar vowels in the stressed syllables of adjacent words as in the following proverb:

A friend in need is a friend indeed

Semantically, a proverb can be a polysynaptic unit since it has two meanings .The first one is literal while the second figurative (non-literal) which is modified to be suitable in a particular situation.

Leech (1974:10) states that the meaning of a sentence that can be understood without a context is called a literal meaning. In other words, the meaning of proverb can be derived from the meaning of a proverb's components without resorting to the context, such as "Never too old to learn ."

Pragmatically, proverbs are used with certain communicative aims that transcend their linguistic meaning and form. The users can manipulate them for communicative purposes .Leech (ibid) contends that the speaker's intention which varies according to the context of utterance determines the selection of fixed expressions.

From cognitive point of view, proverbs are mentally economical because it is easy to understand many situations presented in them from one particular. Specific allusion to a relevant fact can activate a whole scene about certain event in our mind.

Lakoff and Turner (1989 :162) in the following proverb " Blind blames the ditch " state that the people have a whole scenario in which a blind person has fallen into a ditch and he/she is blaming it for that fact ,with realizing that what prevented her / him from not falling is her or his condition.

Psychologically ,proverbs can be considered as a mirror by which we can know the way of thinking .They are used by people to ease themselves of what distress them such as this proverb "It's no use crying over spilt milk "(Johnson,1954:125).

Hoffler (1966:5-16) proclaims that proverbs are the philosophy of people and their experience handed from one generation to another .He elucidates his conviction of proverbs as being an urn of all schools of life philosophy. Lackoff and Turner (1989:65) argue that proverbs are built on cultural premise which needs not to be presorted or fixed. According to them" we conventionally understand these concepts not by virtue of metaphorical mappings between them and conceptual domains but rather by virtue of their grounding in what we take to be our forms of life , our habitual and routine bodily and social experiences."

Norrick (1985:23) states that in spite of the fact that many verbs are written in grammatical forms, some of them are not such as" Sure bind, sure find," Fair in the cradle, and fair in the saddle". He argues that the attribution of these ungrammatical aspects can be considered as cases of radical, ellipsis, overextensions of conventional grammatical rules formulaic or lexical archaic and demanding special lexical knowledge.

He (ibid) dilates proverbs as somehow frozen utterances in their words; they are "self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic context and poetic form." Thus, nobody can modify or add anything to their co-texts. The following example clarifies Norrick's definition:

A dog will not cry if you beat him with a bone

اطعم الفم تستحي العين

Both versions (Arabic and English) are fixed, in the sense that any modification, change, will make them sound strange.

3. Literature review

Lakoff and Turner (1989:162-173) state that the Great Chain Metaphor is the best way to interpret proverbs .It is derived from Generic is Specific Metaphor through which it is possible to pick a common general –level structure from specific schemas stored in the mind .Depending on Grice's maxim of quantity " be informative as is required and not more so ", they make a relationship between the Great Chain and Nature of Things. Through The Great Chain of Being, we can imitate the People Are Animals metaphor .The power of this Chain is derived from its availability for many different situations which have the same generic level structure.

They also (ibid) state that proverbs are metaphoric in their nature. Many authors criticized their statement saying that they are metonymic .Metonymy and metaphor have an equal importance because both of them have a mapping process ,either from a source domain to a target domain or from a target domain to a source domain.

Sperber and Wilson (1986:182) adopt what is called explicature which means an explicitly communicated assumption. It contrasts with implicature which means an implicitly communicated assumption .According to them ,this term implies three process : disambiguation ,fixation of reference and enrichment .The focus is on the last process which requires special attention. Recanati (1989:294) states that enrichment as one way of accommodating the utterance to meet contextual requirements is an interesting one. He distinguishes between two types of it: saturation and strengthening. The first one occurs when the meaning of an incomplete sentence sets up a slot that must be filled with the help of context, while the second requires that the available information be specific enough to satisfy our communicative needs. Strengthening cannot be achieved by retrieving complementary information from the context but by adding information which is prompted by the linguistic expression itself. He clarifies the difference between the two by mentioning two examples. The first one is "He is not good enough" which needs "for Mary to marry him" to be understood. This case manifests saturation.

The second is "It will take some time to repair your watch" in which the expression "some time" is vague conceptualization which needs to be a more specific one.

Grice (1975:41-58) clarifies the distinction between what is said and what is implicated. The first is manifested through syntax of the sentence while the latter is represented by virtue of word or sentence meaning (conventionally implicated) or by going beyond the meaning of words (non-conventionally implicated).

Lakoff and Johnson (2003:36) mention that the way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another is reflected by metaphor whose primary function is the understanding. The primary function of metonymy is referential. It is not merely a referential device but it allows us to profit from one entity to stand for another. It also regards a mean to provide understanding. For example, in the case of the metonymy THE PART FOR THE WHOLE there are many parts that can stand for the whole. Which part we pick out determines which aspect of the whole we are focusing on. When we say that we need some good heads on the project, we are using "good heads" to refer to "intelligent people." The point is not just to use a part (head) to stand for a whole (person) but rather to pick out a particular characteristic of the person, namely, intelligence, which is associated with the head.

They (ibid) state that the limits between metaphor and metonymy cannot be recognized easily because the former is used predicatively while the latter is used referentially. They (ibid) state that the relationship between the two is Idealized Cognitive Model which is present in proverbs (Specific and Generic).

Lakoff and Turner (1989) replace the Generic is Specific by Specific for Generic metonymy. Applying this approach, proverbs include a source-in-target metonymy with a domain expansion. They add that generic/specific distinction is metonymic in nature, 'specific' being a sub-domain of generic.

Ruiz de Mendoza (1999:1) mentions two patterns of interaction between metaphor and metonymy. He makes a distinction between source-in-target and target-in-source metonymy: "one, in which the output of a metaphoric mapping provides the source for a metonymy, and another, in which a metonymic mapping provides the source for a metaphor".

It can be concluded that an idea about the relevant materials to construct a metaphoric mapping which will generate a generic space can be given by a metaphorical expansion of a metonymy. A good example which clarifies this is "Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion". Metaphorically, the head of a body refers to a leader even though this head belongs to a part because control is up. The Great Chain metaphor interacts with one basic metaphor: control is up and with a metonymy of the source-in-target kind (Specific for Generic) which includes domain expansion to stand for the person that is able to lead.

A different metaphorical schema is presented by Lakoff and Turner (1989) by which we can conceive animals and apply this folk knowledge to the construction of metaphorical schemas. In this way, it is possible to understand people reflecting by lower-order forms of being or even resorting to human attributes and behavior a clear idea about these lower-order forms can be clarified. Depending on common propositions found in schemas for animals we can understand proverbs such as:

- Dogs are dependable, dependent, and loyal.
- Foxes are clever.
- Lions are noble and courageous.

Pragmatic reasoning is needed to understand the proverbs because they express certain communicative aims that transcend their linguistic form and meaning. They cannot be understood without a background of assumptions and values, so they are social phenomenon. Providing a message in an indirect way, context is needed to interpret them.

Depending on Wierzbicka proposal, Goddard (1998:247) studies animal expressions by presenting explications which are derived from describing their habitat, referring to their sizes and appearance, revealing their characteristic behavior and specifying their relation with human. These factors function as semantic molecules. They are primitive semantic features of animals. He summarizes all these factors in Fig (1):

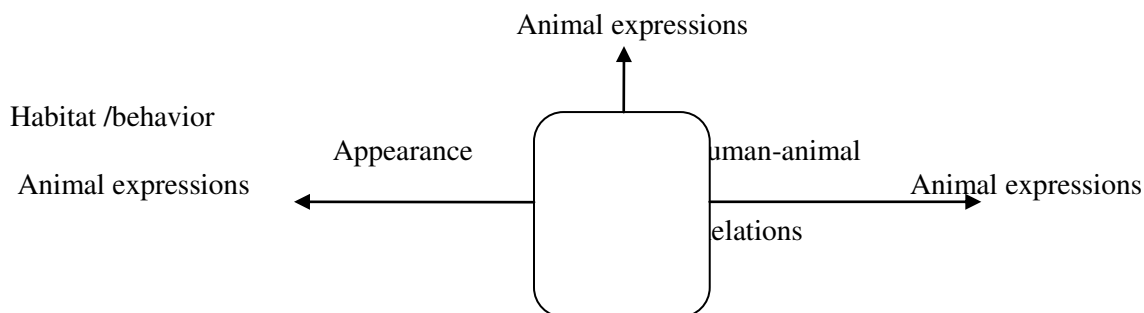


Fig 1: The derivation of animal words.

According to Hsieh (2006:2214), Goddard’s factors do not cover all the components of a metaphorical because our understanding of words is heavily depend on culture.

Goddard's factors can be interpreted differently by people according to their culture. Adding the most important factor to the first figure to draw the second figure as follows:

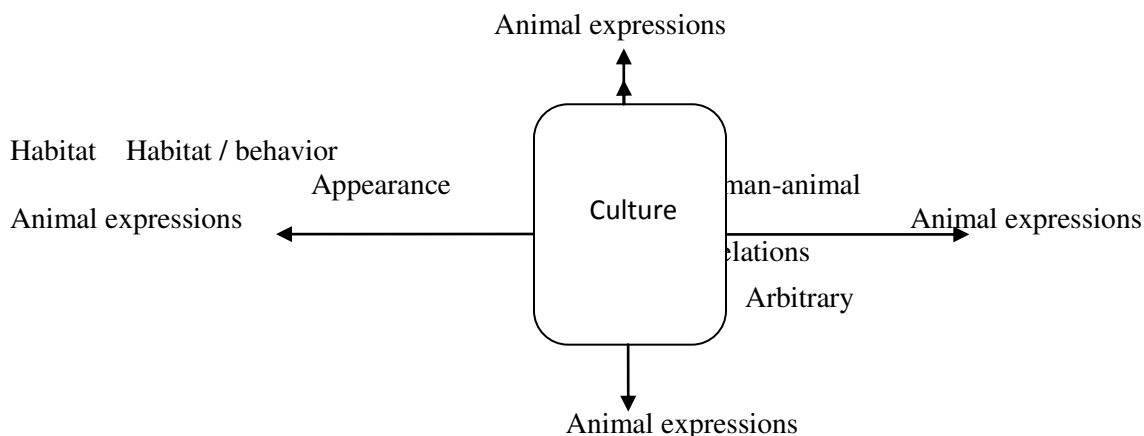


Fig.2: The derivation of animal expressions

4. Methodology

The data of the study are collected randomly because the study is concerned with qualitative approach not with quantitative one. The English data are collected from internet and specific sources which study proverbs while Arabic data are selected from Mojamh AL Amthal to the Author Abu –Fadhel Al Meidani. Collected data are presented with the identification to their metaphor and their metonymies. The data will be presented into two groups: each one of them contains ten proverbs .The first, one contains dog expressions while the second sample represents proverbs involving horse expressions.

Two models will be adopted to analyze these proverbs the first one is that of Lakoff and Turner (1989) which deals with the theory of Generic is Specific Metaphor through which the meaning of proverbs can be manifested and clarified. Because proverbs are social phenomena which provide a message in an implicated way, therefore, context plays its role in their interpretation. Goddard's semantic molecules which are extracted explications from describing the habits, with an indication to the size and appearance of these two animals are applied. They reveal their characteristics, behavior, and their relation with human.

5. Semantic Molecules and Generic is Specific Metaphor of Dog and Horse

Cultural and ideological differences are manifested in Arabic and English proverbs but the semantic molecules of "horse "and "dog " are somehow similar in both of them as exemplified in the following table:

Language	Animal	Semantic molecules
English	Dog	Weak ,scruffy, Coward , humble, loyal, ungrateful, worthless, slow in general, impatient , crazy, wasted efforts, gluttonous, lecherous, lazy, moody, flattering, off-key,
English	Horse	Strong , Clean , brave , noble , Thoroughbred , worthy , grateful,, quick
Arabic	Dog	Weak, scruffy, Coward, humble, loyal, ungrateful, worthless, slow in general, impatient, crazy, wasted efforts, gluttonous, lecherous, lazy, moody, flattering, off-key,
Arabic	Horse	Strong, Clean, brave, noble, Thoroughbred, worthy, grateful, quick

These semantic molecules are proved by the following proverbs which are chosen randomly.

1- Arabic Proverb

1- وجنت على نفسها براقش

English translation

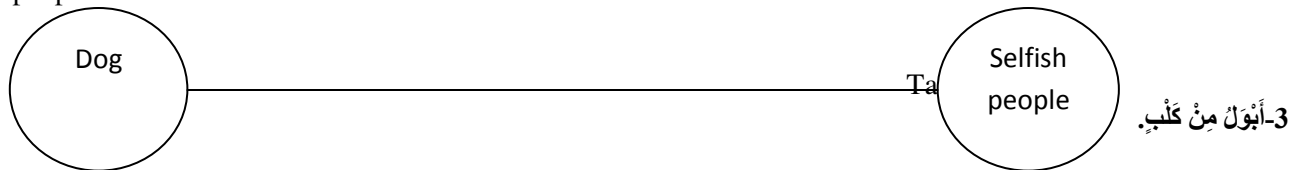
This is famous story in Arab culture telling us that in the past, a tribe was attacked and escaped taking their dog with them but the enemy could follow them because of their barking dog.



English proverb

2. Dog eats dog

It is used to describe a situation in which people will do anything to be successful, even if what they do harm other people:



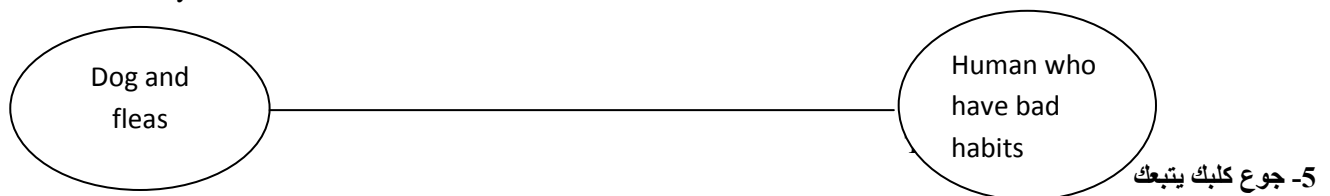
English Translation

This proverb tells the addressee that the dog is (najis) dirty because he urinates everywhere and anywhere, therefore, according to Islamic instructions anyone who touch a dog cannot pray. In Islam, a dog is a stinker (najis) animal and this general idea is reflected in the above proverb:



4. If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas

This proverb means that any person who associates and meets with people who have bad characteristics or habits will be affected by them.



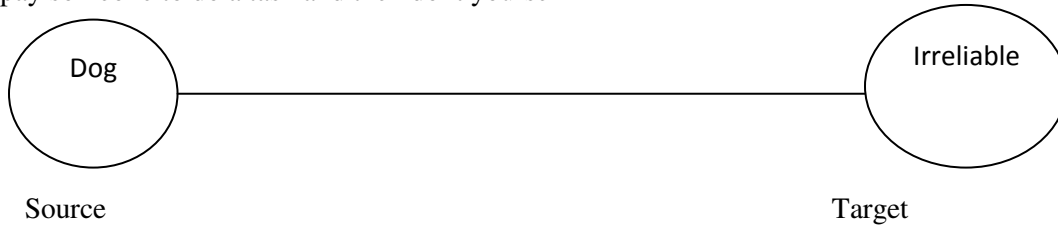
English translation

This proverb reflects a policy followed in some of Arab countries which says that if you make your dog hungry, he will follow you.



6. Don't keep a dog and bark yourself

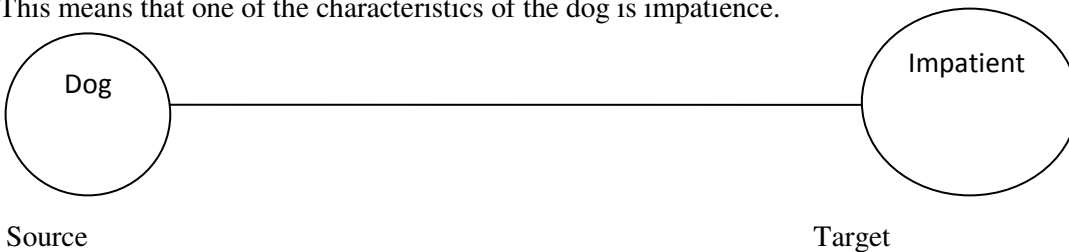
Don't pay someone to do a task and then do it yourself



7-إِنَّكَ لَا تُهَرِّشُ كَلْبًا.

English translation

This proverb means that if someone annoys a patient man and the last one lose his patience; he will say I am not a dog. This means that one of the characteristics of the dog is impatience.



8. Barking dogs seldom bite.

Meaning: People who make big threats don't usually carry them out.



English translation

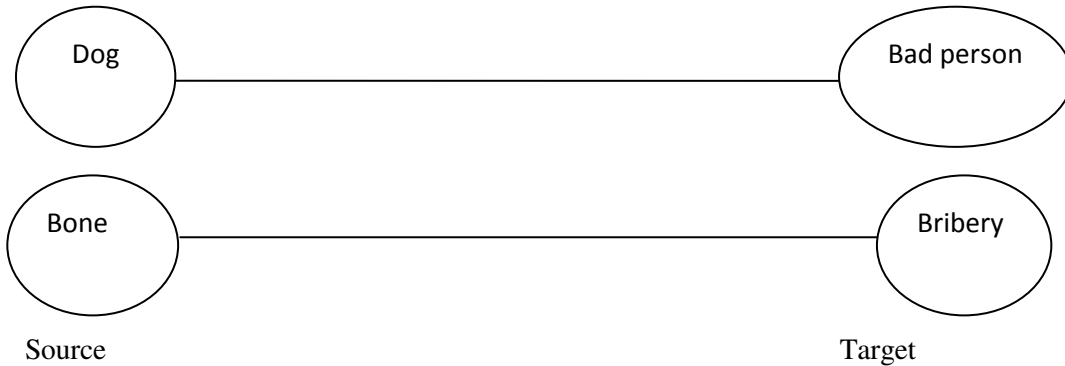
9- أَبْخَلُ مِنْ كَلْبٍ.

This proverb is said to compare between the generous and the miser one. This proverb refers that one basic characteristic of the dog is parsimony.



10. A dog will not cry if you beat him with a bone

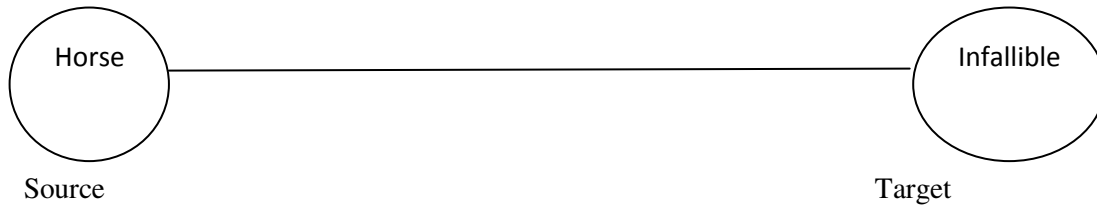
This proverb means that when anyone gives bribery no one can object his way.



11-إِنَّ الْجَوَادَ قَدْ يَغْتُرُّ

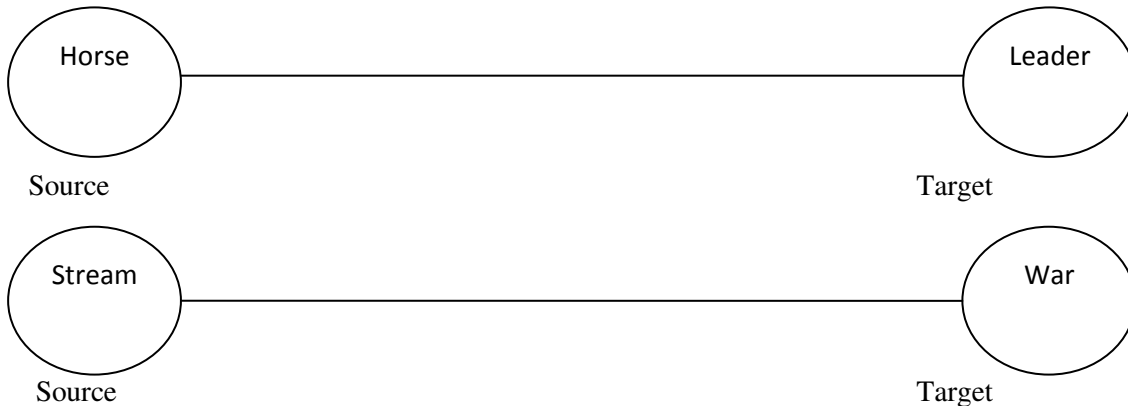
English translation

According to this proverb, A horse is scarcely makes mistake.



12. Don't change horses in the middle of the stream.

Meaning: Don't change your leader or your basic position when part-way through a campaign or a project.



13-إِنَّهُ لَحَثِيثُ التَّوَالِي

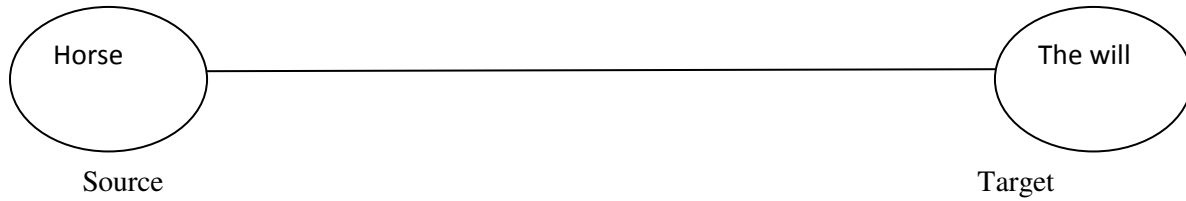
English translation

In this Arabic proverb, the real man is likened with a horse because of his speed. Anyone cannot distinguish between the back legs of a horse and its tail because of the speed.



14. You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink.

Meaning: An animal, and by implication a person, will only do what it/he wants to do



15- قَدْ يُمْكِنُ الْمُهْرُ بَعْدَ مَا رَمَحَ.

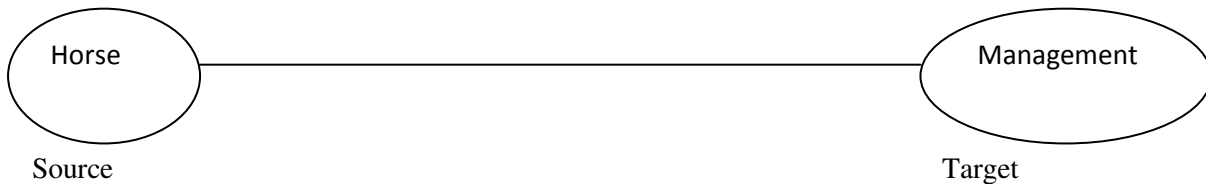
English translation

The noble man is likened with a horse when he makes a horrible mistake which reduces and runs short his rank.



16. Don't put the cart before the horse.

Meaning: Begin at the proper place; do things in their proper order.



17- تَرَكَتُهُ عَلَى مِثْلِ خَدِّ الْفَرَسِ.

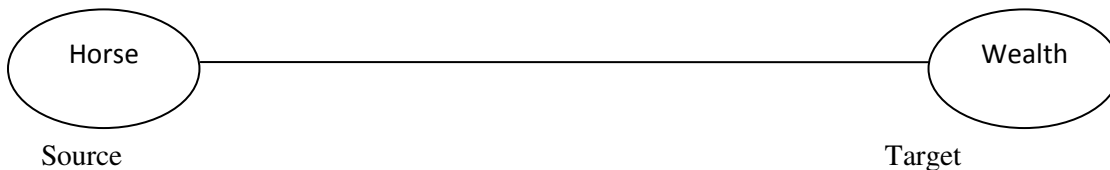
English translation

If you want to keep something as it, you can leave it in the cheek of a horse. Because part sometimes refers to the whole, this means that a horse refers to the uprightness.



18. It is too late to shut the stable- door when the horse is stolen.

This proverb shows the value of the horse because it refers to something if it lost this means that the owner loses wealth.



19- جَرَى الْمَذَكِّيَاتِ غَلَابٌ.

English translation

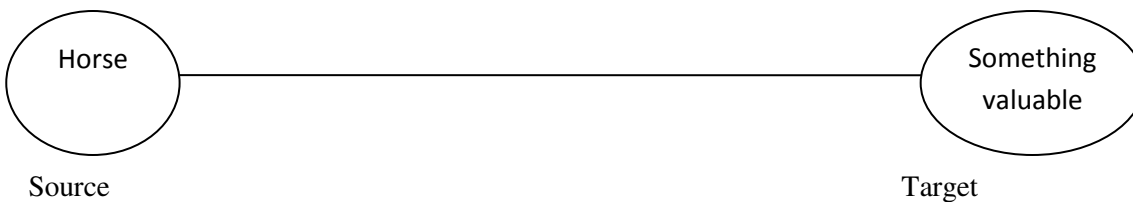
Here, Almuthkeiat the second word in Arabic proverb is the name of specific kind of horses which is distinguished from other by winning most of races in which he participate.



20. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Meaning: When given something don't be ungrateful.

Here, the horse also refers to the something worth which must be faced by gratitude
Not ingratitude.



Conclusion

This study focuses on the view that metaphoric and metonymic mappings are cognitive mechanism which yields sets of explicators which then become available for condition-consequence reasoning templates. They form the origin of implicature. This study proposes that metonymic mappings can be divided into two basic types according to whether the source of the mapping is a secondary part of the target or the opposite (the target is sub branch of the source). In the first case, the metonymy is needed to provide a well-defined domain of reference while the second case may be needed either to refer to a domain which cannot be identify easily in an economical and clear way or to highlight a relevant part of a domain in resorting to metaphoric correspondences.

In both languages, the selected proverbs have the same functions and referring to the same intended meaning. They imply the same mental mechanisms, metaphor and metonymy. In spite of the fact that these proverbs are result of cultural, cognitive and social values, they have something in common in two languages .It can be said that dogs and horses have nearly the same semantic molecules in both languages, they indicate the same contents (the same value). The proverbs having a dog expression usually indicate something bad and scruffy while those containing horse expressions indicate something good and noble.

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