An Anthropolinguistic Approach to the Comparative Analysis of Idioms Containing Objects in Spanish and Persian

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Abstract

The present study attempts to carry out a contrastive analysis -within the framework of anthropological linguistics- on idioms formed in relation with common concepts in Spanish and Persian, based on how natives speakers of these languages deal with the objects around them. In this approach, the possible similarities and differences between linguistic components are analyzed according to the native speakers' cultural and sociological issues. This approach, more than anything else, is indebted to the theory of linguistic relativity, a theory based on the influence of language on thought and, in particular, on the individual's attitudes towards objects, and how his/her language treats objects around him/her. The main question of the present research is what impacts do objects and artifacts have on the creation of possible similarities and differences in idiom formulation, in native Spanish and Persian speakers' culture. Since idioms are an inseparable part of folklore and popular knowledge, and perhaps the most culture-bound part of language, the authors try to assess the effects of cultural interaction with objects around Spanish and Persian native speakers on their idiom formulation referring to common concepts, through the contrastive analysis of object-containing idioms in Spanish and Persian, in order to present a model for an inter-linguistic analysis within an anthropolinguistic framework. The main objective of this research is the comparison of the idioms containing objects in Spanish and Persian in order to show how the attitude of the speakers of those languages towards objects, is reflected in the form and content of idioms under the influence of the context and cultural characteristics. Based on the analysis carried out in this study, in Spanish and Persian, idiomatization referring to a common concept according to the special interaction of these native speakers with the objects around them, tends more towards cultural differences than similarities, and the focus of idiomatization similarities has been based on objects and artifacts that are used in the household.

Keywords: Idioms, Anthropolinguistics, Linguistic relativity, Objects, Contrastive analysis

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1. Introduction

One of the central issues that the Antropolinguistic studies are seeking for is to consider the Language as a cultural function and event; and one of the subjects discussed in the Relative Linguistic Hypothesis is to confirm that people's thinking is influenced by how they interact with objects around them in terms of language. On the other hand, the mass culture has more influence in formulating the 'idioms' than in other linguistic elements. For example, since in the Catholicism the cross is a symbol and reminder of the Passion of the Christ; in Spanish the idiom (To be a cross: Ser una cruz) is used to express the concept of "something annoying": «Tener que madrugar es una cruz para mí.» (Having to get up early is a cross for me.) While in Persian to express this same concept, the idiom (عذاب اليم بودن: To be a painful punishment)   is used under the influence of The Quran in the idiomatization: «براي من زود بيدار شدن از خواب عذاب اليم است.» (Having to get up early is a painful punishment for me.) Now the question is what are the results of comparing the idioms containing objects in Spanish and Persian? And the hypothesis of this article is that due to the cultural differences between Iranians and Spaniards, which can potentially lead to differences in the way they encounter objects around them, in relation with the idiomatization from a common concept, rather than seeing similarities, we will see differences in these two languages.

Question: what are the results of comparing the idioms containing objects in Spanish and Persian?

2. Literature Review

2.1) In 1995, Monroy Casas y Hernández Campo published an article called "A Sociolinguistic Approach to the Study of Idioms: Some Anthropolinguistic Sketch". In this article, they defined the idiom as a sequence of words functioning as a single unit whose meaning cannot be inferred from the meaning of the parts. In the repertoire of any language idiomatic expressions constitute a special category of lexical items presenting a fixed structure and a specific behavior in language use. And

they discussed a small sample of Spanish and English idioms (proverbs, and sayings in particular) within an anthropolinguistic framework in an attempt to foreground not just differences but some curious coincidences between the two cultures in their apprehension of reality.

2.2) In 2012, Rita Marinelli and Laura Cignoni published an article called "In the same boat and other idiomatic seafaring expressions". In this article, they reported that a total of 200 Italian expressions were first selected and examined, using both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, as well as specific lexicographical works dealing with the subject of idiomaticity, especially of the maritime type, and a similar undertaking was then conducted for the English expressions. They discussed the possibility of including both the Italian and English idiomatic expressions in the semantic database Mari Term, which contains terms belonging to the maritime domain. They described the terminological database and the way in which the idiomatic expressions can be organized within the system, so that they are connected to other concepts represented in the database, but at the same time continue to belong to a group of particular linguistic expressions. Furthermore, they studied similarities and differences in meaning and usage of some idiomatic expressions in the two languages.

2.3) In 2014, Teilanyo published an article called "A Comparative Study of Selected Idioms in Nembe (Nigeria) and English". He, based on assumptions and criticisms of the Sapir-Whorfian Hypothesis with its derivatives of cultural determinism and cultural relativity, studied certain English idioms that had parallels in Nembe (an Ijoid language in Nigeria's Niger Delta). He concluded that while the codes (vehicles) of expression are different, the same propositions and thought patterns run through the speakers of these different languages. However, each linguistic community adopts the concepts and nuances in its environment. Therefore, the concept of linguistic universals and cultural relativity complement each other and provide a forum for efficient communication across linguistic, cultural and racial boundaries.

3. Methodology

In order to examine the hypothesis, fifty idioms containing objects were first collected from several dictionaries of Spanish idioms. Then, they were classified into five different areas: containers, utensils, garments, home and its furniture, jewelry and ornaments. Finally, they were compared with their Persian equivalents separately. Of course, due to the limited space of the article, only twenty of the fifty idioms examined have been mentioned, and the rest is used only in the conclusion.

4. Conclusion

In the 34 Persian equivalents of the 50 revised Spanish idioms, the area chosen for idiomatization is different and in the 26 Persian equivalents of those the area chosen for idiomatization is similar. Thus, it can be concluded that in Spanish and Persian, idiomatization referring to a common concept according to the special interaction of these native speakers with the objects around them, tends more towards cultural differences than similarities, and the focus of idiomatization similarities has been based on objects and artifacts that are used in the household.