

**“BABES-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY**  
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**IDIOMS OF BODY PARTS IN ENGLISH**  
**A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE**

**-summary-**

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR**

Prof. Stefan OLTEAN PhD

**PhD CANDIDATE**

Ildikó-Csilla TAKÁCS

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## **KEYWORDS:**

Cognitive linguistics, cognition, conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymy, source domain, abstract target domain, figurative meaning, idioms of body parts, English, Hungarian, cognitive strategies

## **SUMMARY**

In **Chapter 1** entitled *Introduction* we give details about the theme of the dissertation, the major aims and the scope of the paper, claiming the cooperative area of Cognitive Linguistics, Corpus Linguistics for the successive qualitative analyses. The main parts that lay the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study are briefly surveyed, and a number of previous similarly focused studies are examined by the role of idiom.

In **Section 1.1** the terminology used to denote the various types of lexical patterns or to describe identical or similar kinds of unit, since a reliable terminology proves the specialists' constant interest in the study of idioms, as well as their increasing awareness with reference to the frequent use of suitable arrangements in language.

**Section 1.2** claims that the human conceptual system is largely metaphorical and controls systematic metaphorical mappings between abstract and concrete conceptual domains. Abstract structures are meaningful only indirectly, and can be understood due to their systematic relationship to directly meaningful structures. Conceptual metaphors and metonymies that help import structure to certain abstract domains of our experience, are motivated by, and grounded in, our bodily experience. This grounding provides the experiential basis of metaphor and metonymy.

Idioms, which make use of parts of the human body, are more predictable than other idioms, simply because as human beings, we are completely familiar with our perceptions of the shape, size, and functions of individual parts of our own bodies, and we experience them every day. This is why it is easier for us to interpret the meaning of idiomatic expressions containing parts of the human body than, for example, idioms which contain names of animals (*e.g. to call off the dogs*).

**Section 1.3** defines any mental operations and structures that are involved in language, meaning perception, conceptual systems and reason. The human capacity for

conceptualisation is able to form complex concepts and general categories using *image schemas*, which are understood in terms of bodily functioning as structuring devices. These image schemas, apart from representing a reliable basis in conceptualisation, provide a double pattern that is then imported and preserved in metaphorical mappings. Furthermore, in Cognitive Linguistics, *imagination* is considered to be a basic human cognitive ability, central to human meaning-making and rationality.

**Section 1.4** outlines the basic principles of corpus research and methodology, and examines the way in which language corpora can be organized to contribute to the study of idioms. It reveals that corpus research into idiom has started to confirm the expectations and certifies to be valuable in understanding more about the characteristics and functioning of idioms, as Cowie et al. (1983) and Strassler (1982) have already pointed out and exemplified, the research relies on a set of criteria that permit idiom classification and include figurative language recognition.

**Section 1.5** clarifies the actual hypothesis, aims and configuration of the present dissertation. It describes several fields in order to determine how, why, when and which idioms are used in different situations, mainly in English but also in Hungarian. The cognitive framework provides the theoretical hypothesis, corpus linguistics presents the authentic language patterns to be researched, and data analysis makes possible data interpretation and evaluation, additionally the main body of this thesis continues, deepens and extends existing findings.

Contribution: idioms are considered to be a necessary unavoidable cognitive and linguistic tool in English, this dissertation is intended to provide evidence for the cognitive relevance of English idioms containing parts of the human body ‘head’, ‘face’, ‘eye’, ‘nose’, ‘hand’ and ‘heart’.

**Chapter 2** entitled *Theoretical Cognitive Approaches* examines the theoretical views in which idioms have been treated in earlier works written from the formal, functional, and cognitive perspectives. A comparative-contrastive description of the idioms is as necessary as useful since it allows a better understanding of their behaviour and of the boundaries conditioning their appropriate use. It becomes apparent that Cognitive Linguistics, with its experiential theory, has brought a completely new alternative analysis to the study of idiomatic language.



**Section 2.1**, as usually the first section of all chapters is the introductory part which sets the main aims of the chapter and gives a brief summary of the sections to follow.

**Section 2.2** reviews the conception of metaphor by introducing different definitions and accounts, as cognitive linguistics defends, metaphor is central part in language and thought; it supports its operational character at various levels of linguistic structure. The main guiding principles which permeate its literature are, as Evans and Green (2006) review them, that conceptual structure is embodied; semantic structure is conceptual, meaning account is encyclopaedic, and meaning production is conceptualisation. Metaphor, along with the bodily basis of meaning, the nature of conceptual structure becomes a central point in the cognitive linguistics research. The scope of human body metaphors in English thus includes distinct abstract target domains, such as events, actions, activities, states, causation, structure and organization, intensity, people, emotions, behaviour, characteristics and values, power relations, knowledge, ideas, and attention.

The level at which metaphor is characterised has been proved to be of substantial importance in any applied linguistic study centred on metaphor. Cameron (1999) elucidates by separating three levels of applied metaphor research: Level 1 tackles with the theoretical analysis and categorisation of metaphor; level 2 is widely concerned with metaphor online-processing issues, while level 3 deals with the neural activity that makes metaphor accessible for Level 1 and 2.

In **Section 2.3** we discuss the role of conceptual metaphors, which are the demonstrations and means of continuation of mental models. This also applies to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call ‘folk models’, which reflect social norms and implicitly share models of our everyday knowledge, and in this manner guide our actions. Furthermore, the relationship between the metaphorical linguistic expressions and the conceptual metaphors can be understood in the following way: the linguistic expressions (ways of talking) make explicit, or are manifestations of, the conceptual metaphors (ways of thinking), consequently it is the metaphorical linguistic expressions (or linguistic metaphors) that reveal the existence of the conceptual metaphors. That is, we have a conceptual metaphor when we interpret a more abstract domain (or concept) through a more physical domain (or concept) offline—either by means of long-term memory or as a result of a historical-cultural process.

The distinction between linguistic and conceptual metaphor, that is, between language and thought, is essential for understanding the mechanisms generating many idiomatic expressions. Thus, as cognitive linguists point out, while conceptual metaphors belong to the

level of thought and constitute a small group of mental schema, the human mind understands abstract concepts in terms of more concrete bodily experiences by establishing ontological correspondences across conceptual domains; linguistic metaphors, on the other hand, are the concrete realization in language of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff & Turner 1989).

The cognitive linguistic theory has emphasized the cultural variation in the conceptualisation of target concepts. Metaphors contribute to cultural variation both cross-culturally and within a culture, which arises at the specific level. Consequently, the influence applied by the cultural context on conceptualisation is apparent in the changes that occur in the cultural models and the conceptual metaphors.

**Section 2.4** reinterprets the traditional trope and point out the conceptual nature of metonymy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). They identify its function, that of providing mental access through one conceptual entity to another, and its background with specific conceptual relationships among their elements. Most metonymic expressions are not distant but come in larger groups that are categorized by a particular relationship between one kind of entity and another kind of entity. In other words, instead of mentioning the second entity directly, we provide mental access to it through another entity.

Metonymies, then, similar to metaphor, are conceptual in nature, and the conceptual metonymies are revealed by metonymic linguistic expressions. According to Panther and Thornburg (2007), conceptual metonymy is a cognitive process where source content provides access to target content within one cognitive domain. In addition, these cognitive mechanisms may equally join and produce the motivation for the meaning of the idiom together, as in the case of *gain the upper hand*, where *hand* is motivated by the metonymy *THE HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL*, and *upper* is motivated by the conceptual metaphor *CONTROL IS UP*. Due to the metaphor *CONTROL IS A VALUABLE POSSESSION* emerging via the use of *get* and *gain*, the ability to have control over things is seen as a valuable possession (cf. Kövecses 2002).

**Section 2.5** presents our summary on the definition of idioms, since they have definitely played an important part in the process of re-evaluation of language. In the traditional view, idioms are structures that consist of two or more words whose overall meaning cannot be predicted from the meaning of the constitutive parts. This same view holds that the overall meaning of idioms is arbitrary. While the cognitive linguistic view

agrees with the traditional view that the meaning of idioms cannot be predicted in full, it also maintains to a large extent that it can be motivated.

There are at least three cognitive mechanisms that participate in the motivation of idioms: metaphor, metonymy, and everyday knowledge (Lakoff, 1997). The claim is made that the meaning of idioms is not arbitrary but motivated, since the motivation of an idiom's meaning is based on a cognitive mechanism that links domains of knowledge to the idiomatic meaning.

In **Section 2.6** we discuss the role of idioms in our thinking in view of the fact that idioms arise from our more general knowledge of the world embodied in our conceptual system, the majority of idioms are therefore conceptual, and not linguistic, in nature. For this reason, idioms bring to light important aspects of everyday human thinking, at the same time as there are both culture-specific and universal ways of expressing concepts.

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.

**Section 2.7** presents our summary on the definition and characteristics of English idioms. Consequently, idioms are not in fact simply strange products of languages, but rather a reflection of how people conceptualize the world around them.

Contribution: the present chapter wishes to contribute to the theory of conceptual metaphor and metonymy and add valuable data for the benefit of a more detailed perspective on the issues of universality and cross-cultural similarities and differences, as well as on the relationship between the literal meaning of an idiom and its overall figurative meaning is not arbitrary, but is motivated by conceptual devices, such as conceptual metaphors and metonymies, which help speakers to 'make sense' of the idiom's figurative meaning.

**Chapter 3** entitled *Idioms of Body Parts in Cognitive Analysis* applies the theoretical framework developed by cognitive linguists to data collected from standard idiomatic dictionaries of English, as well as examines the features of idioms containing parts of the human body from a cognitive perspective. It also ascertains the conventional images, and finds the conceptual metaphors and metonymies, which help to create a link between the literal and the figurative meaning of idioms.

**Section 3.1** introduces and elaborates on why body idioms are adequate for recurring idiomatic patterns and gives a short presentation of the way the chapter is structured. The corresponding surfacing metaphorical expressions are comprehensively exemplified from the corpus of authentic English usage.

**Section 3.2** begins with a discussion of the *head* idioms, since the number of uses to which this word is put shows that it is very frequent and important in the English language. First, the general conventional knowledge is examined, which conceptually motivates the meaning of many idioms containing the word ‘head’, as this cognitive mechanism connects the physical or source domain of our knowledge with the abstract or target domain of knowledge which arises when the word ‘head’ is used in idiomatic expressions or any other figurative language. Next, the conceptual metonymies and conceptual metaphors are presented, which underlie various idiomatic phrases and motivates the polysemic use of the word *head* with the meaning ‘mind’ and ‘mental ability’, particularly the principle of intelligence, the spirit of consciousness regarded as an aspect of reality and especially the faculty of thinking, reasoning, and applying knowledge. (cf. LDOCE)

In **Section 3.3** the conceptual domain of the human *face* are described, which includes images of the shape, size, and parts of the face, as well as images of the functions of the individual parts. This domain will also contain descriptions of various facial expressions, which are connected with images of people’s prototypical patterns of behaviour.

With the help of the three cognitive mechanisms, conventional knowledge, conceptual metonymies and conceptual metaphors, we are able to see a bit more clearly how these idioms are motivated and how their idiomatic meaning can be explained. These cognitive vehicles can help us understand why the face represents the *person*, the *facial expression*, *respect*, the *mouth*, the *person’s identity*, as well as why people say ‘let’s face it’.

In **Section 3.4** KNOWING IS SEEING and UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING have been explored by the researchers in the *Metaphors we live by*-tradition several times and are found in many languages. The way human *eyes* are conceptualized seems to be reflected in the language that people use, particularly in idiomatic expressions. These can reveal a lot about people’s perceptions and consequently help us form a comparatively clearer picture that people have of the general concept of the human eye. The analysis shows how these domains are captured by the English eye idioms in the database.

During the process of idiom comprehension, speakers relate their shared conceptual images of abstract entities, such as ‘love’, to their shared conceptual images of very concrete

entities such as ‘eyes’, and all with the help of the three cognitive strategies. This process helps us to establish that the eye is often taken to mean the *person, eyesight, skills, attention* or *life*, as well as the fact that *eyes* are perceived as containers for emotional states or people’s intentions. These mechanisms play a key role in the way in which people understand idiomatic expressions of various kinds because they are the main link between abstraction and concrete entities in the world.

In **Section 3.5** the idiomatic expressions containing the word ‘nose’ can bring us a long way in trying to establish some kind of a conceptual basis for the speakers’ images and perceptions of this part of the human body. Yet again, with the aid of the previously described cognitive mechanisms, general conventional knowledge, conceptual metonymies and metaphors, the motivation of many idioms becomes clearer and helps us to make sense of the figurative meaning of many expressions.

The idioms examined show that cognitive strategies seem to facilitate to make sense of some idioms and show us how the *nose* is conceptualized in the mind. It can be conceptualized as *a person, instinct, an instrument* with which people intrude in someone else’s affairs, or as someone’s negative behaviour.

**Section 3.6** presents the *hand* idioms, since they are used to conceptualize the most frequently addressed target domains of the specific body part as well as its characteristics. This is also supported by the fact that most of the English human body idioms are hand idioms according to the database. Our everyday experiences with our hands provide the cognitive basis for us to conceptualize more accepted wisdom that are abstract, thus the hands can be used in the conceptualization of various target domains. All the metaphors and metonymies describing these targets are well grounded in our cognitive system and do not contradict our conventional knowledge about the hand.

Thus, the hand is taken to represent the *person, the instrument, the activity, the skill* and we seem to conceptualize control, freedom, possession and cooperation based on the images of the human hand. In addition, achieving goals are an important facet of hand idioms, which are commonly addressed by linguistic expressions of the Event Structure metaphor system.

**Section 3.7** describes the *heart* idioms in view of the fact that the heart is the centre of total personality, especially with reference to *intuition, feelings, emotions, moods, moral features* or *shortcomings* and even *memory*. In addition, the heart is seen as a container, or in general, an ‘easily broken’ object, in which the emotions contained are essential, as well as it

is conceptualized as various aspects of human attitude, characteristics, actions but principally the seat of emotions due to the metaphor EMOTIONS ARE IN THE HEART. It is the only organ whose ‘activity’ can be felt by merely touching our chest and one of the most precious part of the human body.

The selection of the examples of idiomatic expressions has attempted to show how body part idioms seem to be motivated. General conventional knowledge, conceptual metonymies or metaphors are cognitive mechanisms, which inspire the idiomatic meaning of many English idioms, and thus provide a clearer explanation of them. It is very difficult to tell how much weight to give to each of these cognitive vehicles as the motivator of various idiomatic expressions.

**Section 3.8** summarizes the chapter and provides a broad overview of how English idiomatic expressions containing parts of the human body are motivated by cognitive strategies.

Contribution: In total, 460 English idioms have been analyzed in order to find the degree of correspondence of conceptual structures in the English language *i.e.* correspondence of idiomatic expressions whose figurative meaning is the same and which are motivated by the cognitive structures.

**Chapter 4** entitled *A Case Study – Cognitive Strategies at Work in English and Hungarian* describes a cross-linguistic examination of idioms across English and Hungarian. It seeks to reveal the common patterns that occur in both languages and cultures and underlines the mappings, which linguistically or cognitively allow the imprint of cultural-specificity. Elaborating on the didactic function of idioms of body parts, the study endorses the teachability, learnability and efficiency on scales of conventionality, cognitive effort, attitudinal impact, familiarity and explicitness.

**Section 4.1** states the theoretical background of the chapter and the design of the case study sought to provide a rather detailed investigation meant to reveal how language resources are put to work in the use of idioms and it is aimed to draw the cognitive linguistics and corpus linguistic traditions closer together through a qualitative analysis.

**Section 4.2** aims at finding an answer to the naturally emerging question whether, and to what extent, the conceptual mechanisms available to English are available in unrelated languages such as Hungarian. Since the evidences for the embodiment hypothesis and the

examples quoted usually come primarily from English, the analysis and the comparison of English and Hungarian is useful for widening the scope of studies in the field.

The similarities between English and Hungarian are the result of the embodiment hypothesis and the common experiential grounding of the specific linguistic expressions, 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.

**Section 4.3** recommends the method to complement traditional ways of teaching vocabulary, and suggests that the effectiveness of memorizing words can be enhanced by using keywords referring to conceptual metaphors, schematic drawings to indicate meanings, mental pictures and teaching vocabulary in a systematic way. The cognitive approach can be employed in all stages of language learning, from the very beginning.

Language awareness facilitates the development of interpretative, inferential, and analytic skills, since experimental groups are more likely than their control peers to propose Hungarian translations that stay faithful to the conceptual mechanisms underlying the English originals. This finding gives us reason to believe that some experimental task design indeed triggers a certain degree of metaphor awareness in students. Teaching idioms of body parts represents a priority in all educational systems because of their high frequency in language use; they facilitate the learners' access to more native-like aspects of language production, as well as to the essential skills of maintaining discourse relations.

In **Section 4.4** various informant testing was conducted to see whether native speakers of Hungarian would be able to 'make sense' of some English idiomatic expressions. The purpose of this experiment was to see whether individual components of idiomatic expressions help informants to decode the figurative meaning of idioms in a foreign language, thus contributing to the overall connotation of these expressions.

In the first experiment have been assessed the effect of cognitive linguistic principles to teaching idioms of body parts. Therefore, students were given the task of identifying conceptual metaphors themselves, while they were presented with pictures illustrating unstated conceptual metaphors to stimulate dual coding.

Variation in ways of presentation and differences among learners, both have the prospective to deeply influence the effectiveness in particular classrooms of the pedagogical techniques for advancing idiom awareness. Particular variables suggested include the

characteristics of the figurative expressions to be taught, cross-linguistic considerations, task design, and possibly learner characteristics such as level of proficiency and aptitude.

In **Section 4.5** the second experiment describes and measures the effect of grouping the idioms of body parts by conceptual metaphors. The experiment also involves students' awareness of metaphor and linguistic motivation as well as similar effects on the learning of idioms can be obtained under task designs that offer students less explicit guidance and which thus give confidence to learner autonomy.

This section also shows how explicit guidance of the metaphorical motivation behind the teaching idioms of body parts along with the awareness and the motivation of idioms may give support to comprehension and retention. The results of the experiments indicate that a unique revelation is not satisfactory to turn metaphor awareness into a learning strategy for the future processing of figurative lexis. A more extensive curriculum seems to be needed to accomplish this, and despite that, individual differences would continue to play a part.

**Section 4.6** concludes the chapter and proposes some issues for future research. Thus, the Johnson-Lakoffian framework is enhanced with authentic language and thought and is complemented with empirical evidence.

Contribution: Insightful language thoughtfulness, enhanced by classroom training as well as explicit analysis and teaching in particular domains may be helpful when encountering new examples and it may be possible to turn the learners' awareness into a conscious approach to idioms where metaphors and metaphorical extensions prevail.

**Chapter 5** entitled *Concluding Remarks* evaluates the final conclusions on the constructions of the two languages under study. It also looks at the main body of the thesis and reports its findings, drawing attention to the motivation for the occurrence of particular words in a large number of idioms can be thought of as a cognitive mechanism that links domains of knowledge to idiomatic meanings.



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