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Embodiment via body parts

Studies from various languages and cultures by Zouheir A. Maalej & Ning Yu

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Book review

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Embodiment via Body Parts: Studies from various language and cultures. Zouheir A. Maalej, & Ning Yu, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011, ix + 258 pages, \$135.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-90-272-2385-2.

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Recent trends in linguistics and cognitive science reflect an increasing interest to explore the relationship between culture and language on the one hand, and the human mind and body on the other. The edited volume *Embodiment via Body Parts: Studies from various language and cultures* is a contribution to this line of inquiry that investigates the interaction between embodiment and culture as a means to further the understanding the underlying culturally specific cognitive processes.

The authors situate the present volume within previous cognitive linguistic work on the intersection between body parts, human cognition, language and culture (Ziemke et al., 2007; Frank et al., 2008; Sharifian et al., 2008) by focussing on the role of individual body parts, both internal and external, in the embodied conceptualisation of emotions in various cultures and languages. The volume is based on the hypothesis that the use of body parts as a means to conceptualise human cognitions, such as emotions, personality traits, cultural values and mental faculties, etc. represents language-body connections that might allow for deeper insights into the underlying culturally shaped mind-body connections (e.g., Gibbs, 2006). Special attention is also given to clarifying cultural and language specific manifestations of specific body parts and bodily experiences that are expressed through the use of metaphor and metonymy.

The introduction of the book outlines the theory of embodiment and how it is intertwined with the concept of culture in cognitive science. The ten studies are divided into three sections corresponding to the geographical locations of the languages in order to accentuate the cultural aspect of embodiment, as compared to

arranging the chapters in accordance with similarity of body parts. However, the lack of an acknowledgment and critical discussion of sociocultural phenomena, such as subcultures, immigration and diasporas, indicates an implicit assumption that cultures and languages could be possibly geographically fixed.

The first part focuses on European perspectives on body parts, including the Danish, English, Estonian, German (compared to Indonesian), Modern Greek, and Spanish languages. The first chapter, by Sophia Marmaridou, “The relevance of embodiment in lexica, and collocational meaning: The case of *prosopo* ‘face’ in Modern Greek” demonstrates that the metaphorical and culturally motivated polysemy of ‘face’ (*prosopo*) embodies psychological and social aspects of the self, and spatial orientation, whereas *prosopo*-related collocations embody social organisations and institutions, and evaluations of social qualities.

In Chapter 2, “Dynamic body parts in Estonian figurative descriptions”, Ene Vainik shows that there is no relationship between specific body parts and the expression of emotions in Estonian. Instead, the embodiment of emotional universals (e.g., fear, anger, joy, and sadness) (Wierzbicka, 1999) is based on a range of observable, dynamic and external body parts rather than non-observable body parts. Types of cognitive mappings are also positively correlated with three types of bodily manifestations (i.e., metonym for observable symptoms, metaphor for internal images, and metaphonymy for bodily sensations) that are moderated by the cognitive perspective (observer vs. emoter).

The cross-linguistic study of Chapter 3, “Metaphors and metonymies of MOUTH in Danish, English, and Spanish” by Uwe Kjær Nissen provides evidence that firstly, bodily experiences are mapped onto metaphorical and metonymical expressions of the word *mouth*, and the equivalents of Spanish *boca* and Danish *mund*, and secondly, that the differences in mapping mind and body onto the body part ‘mouth’ are culturally motivated, even in closely related European languages.

The analysis of Chapter 4, “HEAD and EYE in German and Indonesian figurative uses”, by Poppy Siahaan, is an account of how both languages share similarities but also differ in the metaphorical and metonymic extensions of the same body parts as source concepts. The results showed that in both languages the ‘head’ draws on the target domain of (human) LEADER and CHARACTER TRAITS; however, in German the figurative expression is more frequently associated to the function of *Kopf* ‘head’ and *Auge* ‘eye’, whereas in Indonesian the *kepala* ‘head’ is

more strongly related to its position, and *mata* ‘eye’ to the appearance of its shape.

The second part represents East Asian perspectives on body parts, exemplified by Japanese and Chinese. Chapter 5 “Speech organs and linguistic activity/function in Chinese”, by Ning Yu, explores the metonymic chain from the speech organ to language. The study proposes that the metonymies SPEECH ORGAN FOR SPEAKING (i.e., act of speaking) and SPEECH ORGAN FOR SPEECH (i.e., manner of talking and reading) are conventional expressions in Chinese. While SPEECH ORGAN FOR LANGUAGE does not commonly arise in the Chinese lexicon, it is however realized in the lexicographic writing system as a component of the radical ‘mouth’ that represents the meaning of ‘language’ and ‘speech’.

In Chapter 6, “Inner and outer body parts: A case of *hara* ‘belly’ and *koshi* ‘lower back’ in Japanese”, Tomokazu Nagai and Masako K. Hiraga show that the metaphorical expressions of the outer body part *hara* ‘lower back’ embody attitude and behaviour, as compared to the inner body part *koshi* ‘belly’, which metonymically motivates figurative expressions of mental and spiritual stability. In relation to figurative expressions that also include non-human entities, however, *hara* is predominately extended metonymically, whereas expressions related to *koshi* are often extended metaphorically

Chapter 7, “A cultural-linguistic look at Japanese ‘eye’ expressions”, by Debra J. Occhi, examines how the social-cultural image schema of the ‘eye’ motivates metaphorical expressions as a means to express emotional states. The study outlines the use of vertical ‘eye’ metaphors as an index of social hierarchy, and other social-cultural features, including gender, personality, and mental health.

The third part shows Middle Eastern and North African perspectives on body parts, such as Tunisian Arabic, Persian and Turkish. In Chapter 8, “Conceptualizations of *cheshm* ‘eye’ in Persian”, Farzad Sharifian examines how *cheshm* ‘eye’ is conceptualized as a container for various emotions, character traits and cognitive functioning. The Persian cultural conceptualization of the ‘eye’ is also associated with the belief of ‘casting a charm or spell’ in the form of bad luck, sickness and loss. Although the notion of perception reflects the notion of intuition and inspiration, the figurative meaning of the ‘eye’ is not related to the concept of mind and thinking.

Chapter 9, “Figurative dimensions of *ʔayn* ‘eye’ in Tunisian Arabic”, by Zouheir A. Maalej, examines how ‘eye’ reflects a culturally motivated

conceptualization of mental faculties (e.g., knowing, understanding, thinking), physical states (e.g., sleep, death), emotions (e.g., love, desire, anger), character traits (e.g., ambition, greed, naiveté), and cultural values (e.g., respect/consideration, hospitality) through the use of image schema-based metaphors, metonymies and metonymically motivated metaphors.

In Chapter 10, “The apocalypse happens when the feet take the position of the head: Figurative uses of ‘head’ and ‘feet’ in Turkish”, Mustafa Aksan investigates social stratification through the use of verticality (UP-DOWN) in culturally exploited metaphors and metonymies of the body parts ‘head’ and ‘feet’. While conceptual metaphors and metonymies involving the head (UP) embody positive cultural values (e.g., HEAD FOR ORDER, HEAD FOR RULER, HEAD FOR TALENT), the feet (DOWN) represent culturally negative values (e.g., LESS IS DOWN, LOW STATUS IS DOWN).

The book is a valuable collection of empirical evidence in the field of culturally extended embodiment. It successfully explores the interaction between human mind, language and culture, as much as the relationship between metonymy and metaphor in embodiment. Despite the decision to group the chapters in accordance with geographical location of cultures and languages, I found myself intuitively drawn to read the chapters separately in order to conduct an “impressionistic” cross-cultural comparison of the symbolic use of similar body parts. In this sense, the chapters can be read separately. The authors could have perhaps included a summarising discussion that would have critically outlined in what ways the various languages and cultures are similar, how they differ in the conceptualisation of human cognition through the use of the same body parts, and equally, how different body parts are associated with similar human concepts.

In conclusion, *Embodiment via Body Parts: Studies from various language and cultures* is a very commendable book for students and researchers who are interested in the intersection of culture and language, and metaphor and metonymy in the articulation of human cognition and bodily experiences.

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