

FRIENDLY HAND – ACCUSING FINGER. METAPHORS IN THE PERSIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: Subject of this paper are metaphorical linguistic expressions, which reflect the relation between the target domains of NATION and COUNTRY and the source domain of HUMAN BODY in Persian. Media analyses on Iranian policy, speeches, and statements of government officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran are the main source for the research. The corpus of the collected phraseological units is analysed and classified in the light of the Conceptual metaphor theory.

Metaphorical linguistic expressions containing the terms *dast* “hand”, *angošt* “finger” and *mošt* “fist” are in the focus of the paper. It discusses the question if Persian political discourse demonstrates features of cultural conceptualisations, providing comparative analysis with English and Bulgarian. It is a part of a broader research on conceptual metaphors in contemporary Persian.

Keywords: Persian language, conceptual metaphors, human body, nation, country.

Hands are important symbol of peace and friendship as presented on the royal Achaemenid¹ monuments in the ancient Persepolis. Darius the Great is depicted holding a flower and a sceptre, and on another relief – his right hand is raised to the direction of the Faravahar symbol². On *The Procession of Nations* relief in Persepolis it is evident that in every group of human figures at least two of them are holding hands while walking together. These pictures are manifestation of the aim of royal Achaemenid authorities to depict themselves and people in the empire’s boundaries as friendly and good-willed. Later, on monuments dating back to the time of the second Iranian empery of the Sassanids³, hands are depicted as a central element of the famous investiture scene of emperor Ardashir I at Naqsh-e Rostam. The god Ahura Mazda is personally giving from his hand the symbol of power to the emperor.

The outstretched hand with its inward side directed up is a universal symbol of willingness to help or a need of help. The same hand, if raised above the head could

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¹ The Achaemenid dynasty rules the First Persian Empire during the period 550 BC – 330 BC. Persepolis is their ceremonial capital, whose earliest remains date back to 515 BC. It is declared by UNESCO a World Heritage Site.

² The Faravahar symbol is a winged sun disk with a human figure in the center, thought to represent Ahura Mazda, the main deity of Zoroastrianism, or the Guardian Angel of the king.

³ The Sassanid dynasty rules the second Iranian empire in the period 224-651. At Naqsh-e Rostam- the ancient necropolis of Achaemenids, the Sasanian kings depict their investitures and war victories on rock reliefs.

be a sign of threat or if near the head – sign of self-defence. Clenching one’s fist is usually regarded as a sign of anger or readiness for self-protection. Fingers and their positions also invoke various interpretations of human body language. The accusing finger, *angošt-e ettehām*, a phrase commonly used both in Persian and English reflects the gesture of pointing with index finger to someone. The raised fist, or the clenched fist, is a universal symbol of solidarity, support, unity, and defiance. These are small part of the examples of body language gestures, which construct a good base for the metaphorical linguistic expressions indicating the existence of various conceptual metaphors.

Aim of this study is to demonstrate the presence and functioning of two body parts – hands and fingers in the contemporary Persian political discourse in relation to the notions of COUNTRY and NATION. In addition, as an initiative stage of a broader research, the possible existence of culturally specific conceptualisations in Persian in contrast to English and Bulgarian are traced.

In order to achieve the aim, first, the meanings of *dast* “hand” and *angošt* “finger” will be noted as they are presented in *Farhang-e Amid*, a dictionary of modern Persian language and the encyclopaedic *Dictionary of Persian language* of Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda.

In Persian, the term that corresponds to the English “hand” is *dast*. Except of its literal meaning of a body part, several figurative meanings are found in the dictionary of Hassan Amid, such as the following:

1. Power and authority.
2. Norm and law.
3. Type.
4. Attitude.
5. Position.

Amid presents compound verbs with phraseological character as well, which include the “hand” component.

Az dast āmadan [from hand to rise]⁴ “to cope”, “to meet”.

Az dast dādan [from hand to give] “to lose”, “to be deprived of s.th.”

Az dast raftan [from hand to go] “to be lost”, “to disappear”, “to become helpless”.

Be dast āmadan [to hand to come] “to become ready”, “to be produced”.

Be dast āvardan [to hand to bring] “to make ready”, “to produce”.

Be dast budan [to hand to be] “to be aware”, “to be informed”, “to be observant”, “to be careful, attentive”.

Be dast-e ĉap šomardan [to hand left to count] “to be increased (number)”.

Be dast šodan (āmadan) [to hand to become (to come)] “to be produced”.

Dast ākhtan [hand to draw] “to outstretch hand”.

Dast afšāndan [hand to sprinkle] “to dance”, “to shake hands at the time of dancing”.

⁴ The transliterated Persian phrase is given in Italic and its word-by-word translation in English – in square brackets.

Dast andākhtan [hand to throw] “to outstretch hand to s.th.”, “to trick, to fool”.

The meaning of the term *angošt*, which Amid notes in his dictionary, is only the literal one of “finger”. Still, it appears as a part of compound verbs, collected by Ali-Akbar Dekhoda, such as:

Angošt khāiidan [finger to chew] “to regret”.

Angošt zadan [finger to hit] “to press fingers as a sign of happiness”.

Angošt nehādan [finger to lay] “to blame”, “to object”.

In the process of collecting data for this research, in addition to the above-mentioned dictionaries, the study concentrates on the presence of the terms *dast* and *angošt* in contemporary media discourse. A corpus of media items containing metaphorical linguistic expression has been collected, which demonstrate the existence of the NATION IS A PERSON and COUNTRY IS A PERSON metaphors in Persian. They are excerpted from Iranian media, which include speeches, notes and publications of government officials, diplomats, political experts, and journalists. The choice of the source of the study is motivated by two circumstances. “Politics in general is rife with conceptual metaphors,” as Kövecses notes (Kövecses 2010, 68). Sharifian highlights that the discourse of Iranian politicians, being an object of significant attention of the international media in the last decades, is characterized by the frequent use of figurative language (Sharifian 2011, 198). Furthermore, lexical terms which refer to the domains of NATION and COUNTRY in Persian are *mardom* “people”, *kešvar* “country”, *melliat* “nationality”, *nejād* “origin”, *dowlat* “government”. This indicates that the terms “nation” and “country” are terminologically close the most to the area of politics.

Kövecses points out that “the concepts of society and nation are extremely complex, and this complexity calls for metaphorical understanding. Common ways of comprehending society and nation involve the source concepts of person and family” (Kövecses 2010, 24). By providing selected examples of the collected metaphorical linguistic expressions, this study introduces HUMAN BODY as a single source domain, whose parts – hands and fingers are two of the elements of HUMAN BODY, by which NATION and COUNTRY are comprehended by Persian speakers.

Kövecses assumes that when dealing with common target domains like society and nation, it is a difficulty to see exactly how the simplified world, as depicted in the most common source domains, fits and “maps onto” the groups of common target domains (Kövecses 2010, 27). He regards society as an abstract complex system which is conceptualized metaphorically as a person but notes that it is not really the entire person that serves as the source domain of this metaphor but only the body of the person. Therefore, Kövecses suggests a modification of the conceptual metaphor by which we get the more precise version: AN ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEM IS THE HUMAN BODY.

The corpus of metaphorical linguistic expressions, collected for the purpose of a broader study on the NATION IS A PERSON/HUMAN BODY and COUNTRY IS A PERSON/HUMAN BODY metaphors in Persian, includes also the following body part notions: artery, blood, chest, eye, face, foot, head, heart, knee, mouth, shoulder.

Dast “hand” is frequently used term, denoting body part, which appears in the lexical staff of the collected expressions. Hands are that part of the body through

which people handle and operate with objects and for children – they are one of the main organs in the process of gaining knowledge of the world. Such phrases as *be dast-e kešvar budan* [at country's hand to be] or *be dast-e mellat residan* [to nation's hand to reach] mean that a material subjects or abstract ideas (natural resources or notions like independence, freedom, respectively) are at nation's will and disposal. In other words, hands of nation could be regarded as its ability to attain, possess, and handle with subjects. Gestures like *dast-e mellat bar dāštan* [hand of nation to take off] and *az dast-e mellat dādan* [from nation's hand to give] indicate the acts of withdraw and loss of both material subjects and abstract notions like goals, hope, opportunities. Thus, hands are an essential part of the “nation's body” and “country's body” and the term *dast* could be assumed to play a prominent role in the metaphorical conceptualization of nation and country as a person.

The phrase *dar/be dast-e mellat* [in hand of nation] has its English and Bulgarian equivalents: *in hand*, *в ръцете на народа* meaning “in possession”, „at people's will“. A variant of the phrase is *be dast-e mellat residan* [to reach hand of nation] – “to become nation's possession”.

Dast peydā kardan be čizi [hand to find to something] in Persian is understood as “to obtain something”, its English and Bulgarian equivalents are *to get/lay one's hands on something*, *слагам ръка* – “to get possession of, acquire or obtain”.

Omid-e khod rā az dast dādan [hope from one's hand to give] meaning “to become desperate” also has its English counterpart in the phrase *to throw up one's hands* – “to give up in despair”. *Forsat az dast dādan* [opportunity from hand to give] in Persian denotes “to miss an opportunity”.

Bā dast-e khāli [with hand empty] is used in Persian denoting “unarmed”, while the English *empty-handed* and the Bulgarian *с празни ръце* mean “carrying nothing”.

The Persian expression *dast az chizi bar dāštan* [hand to take off something] meaning “to give up” is similar to the Bulgarian *вдигам ръце от нещо*.

Dast-e kasi taghviyat kardan [one's hand to strengthen] meaning in Persian “to support” is semantically close to the English *hold one's hand* and the Bulgarian *държа за ръка*.

Dast-e dusti-ye khod rā derāz kardan [one's hand of friendship to make long] in Persian is an expression for friendship, goodwill, “to be ready to help”, which is similar to the Bulgarian *протягам ръка*.

Still, a few phrases presumably demonstrate culturally specific features in Persian. For example, *dast o panjeh narm kardan* [hand and palm to make soft] means “to contend” and reflects the conceptualization of interpersonal and international relations and conflicts as an act of wrestling. We could also hardly note equivalents to the Persian expressions *dast-e palid mošāhede šodan* [the pale hand to be noticed] denoting “to intervene in something” and *dast be kar šodan* [hand-to-work to become] – “to start working, acting”.

Proceeding to the phrases that contain the term *angošt* “finger”, we could assume that most of them have their parallel expressions in English or Bulgarian. For example, *angošt-e ettehām nešān dādan* [accusing finger to point] meaning “to

accuse, blame” is similar to the English *point the finger at* and the Bulgarian *соча с пръст*. The physical gesture of pointing the finger at someone motivates the existence and understanding of these metaphorical expressions. The phrase *angošt-e ettehām nešān dādan* is given an interesting interpretation in a government official’s speech in the following sentence:

Vaghti angošt-e etteham nešān mi dehid se angošt-e digar-e-tān be samt-e khodetān ast, meaning “When you point the accusing finger, your three other fingers are in direction to yourselves”.

Angošt dar čizi kardan [finger in something to make] meaning “to cause to change”, “to interfere” is also motivated by the concept that touching something, even with a finger, may lead to changing it. It has its equivalents in the English *have a finger in the pie* and the Bulgarian *умам пръст*, meaning “to meddle or interfere”.

Angošt bar dahān māndan [finger-in-mouth to stay] denotes “surprise”, “confusion”, and its Bulgarian equivalent is *оставам с пръст в уста*. Its meaning is grounded in a body gesture of expressing surprise.

Angošt šomāri [finger counting] stands for “a small number” in Persian and is similar to the English phrase *to count on the fingers of one hand* and the Bulgarian *броу се на пръсти*.

A few phrases containing the term *mošt* “fist”, which is semantically related to *dast* and *angošt*, could be added to the study in order to broaden its base for analysis.

Equivalents of the phrase *mošt-e ākhenin dar moghābel-e kasi/kešvari dāštan* [iron fist against someone or a country to have] meaning “to oppress” are noticed in both English and Bulgarian, where respectively *a heavy hand* and *с железен юмрук*, as well as *с твърда ръка* denote acts and relations of tyranny, persecution, oppression, or determination.

Ru-ye mošt-e ākhenin dastkeš dāštan [over iron fist a glove to have] in Persian stands for “trying to conceal one’s aims for oppressing others”, while the similar English phrase “hand in glove” denotes an intimate relationship or close association. This fact could lead to the assumption of the existence of a cultural difference in conceptualisations.

The following phrases could also be regarded as culturally specific, since to the extent the research is developed, their equivalents in English or Bulgarian are not noticed.

The expression *mošt-e kasi be surat nešastan* [one’s fist on face (of the world) to sit] means “to shock (with a decision or action)”.

Mošt-e mahkumi bar dahān kubidan [strong fist on mouth to hit] denotes “to demonstrate aggression, selflessness”, while *mošt be samt-e došman* [fist on the direction of enemy] stands for “readiness for self-defense”.

The phrase *mošt-e gerreh karde khali bāz šodan* [clenched fist to open empty] is used to express “falling short of one’s expectations”.

All these phrases, which denote interpersonal relations such as accusation, aggression, interference, self-defence, surprise, etc., when referred to the concepts

of NATION and COUNTRY, indicate that international relations could be conceptualized as interpersonal relations.

An interesting example of combining metaphorical expressions is a political cartoon by Mohammad Ali Rajabi, published by Fars News Agency (2015). It illustrates a man saying: *Dast-e dusti-ye mā hamiše derāze!* [Our friendly hand always long is], which in Persian as a metaphorical expression stands for “we are always ready to help”. At the same time, the cartoon represents the literal meaning of this phrase showing a long hand with clenched fist on the man’s back with “sanctions” written on it. This cartoon could be regarded as an example of multimodal metaphor: presenting, on one hand, the metaphorical linguistic expression, and on the other hand, it demonstrates visually and metaphorically the abstract notions “duplicity” and “aggression”.

The phrases included in this part of the research are all related to the concepts of NATION and COUNTRY and in some cases, THE WORLD. Their wide usage in the Iranian media discourse on politics leads to the assumption that NATION and COUNTRY as abstract complex systems are conceptualized as HUMAN BODY. Bodily experience and its correlation with emotions serves as a wide basis of metaphors: the readiness of a country for self-protection and defence is reflected in its clenched fist. A country’s fist could be regarded as metonymy of the readiness of its people to defence it, still this is one of the premises for its unity. The accusing finger appears as a sign of nation’s and government’s discontent. A nation or a country could attain, possess, or lose things and ideas, which is commonly represented in the hands-phrases. Being metaphorical, at the same time these linguistic expressions can be regarded as metonymies in the context of the media items. The figurative language of Iranian media and politicians often constructs a world in which people act and suffer as one person. The body of a country stands for its unity, wholeness, and integrity.

In conclusion, the presented metaphorical linguistic expressions, which are widely disseminated in the Persian political discourse and the media, enrich the definitions of “nation” and “country”. Having in mind the phrases containing other parts of human body, all of them together structure the knowledge of these abstract complex systems. The conceptual character of the items included in this study is grounded in human body and motivated by the bodily experience, functions, and personal relationships with others. To answer the question if the few marked phrases can be regarded as culturally specific for Persian, a further research is needed and would benefit from the cooperation with speakers and experts in more and various languages.

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