

Cultural Conceptualisations of Edible Items in Persian

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ABSTRACT

Metaphorical language is used extensively in everyday speech as well as in literary discourse. Since metaphors are mainly culturally-determined, they sometimes become the source of misinterpretation in intercultural interactions. Due to their concreteness and highly sensuous nature, edible items are liable to function as a source domain that can be mapped onto several target domains, including human traits. In line with this view, the current study aims to investigate the metaphorical conceptualisations of edible items in contemporary Persian from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics. Accordingly, a list of edibles was prepared and 237 Persian speakers in Iran wrote down their conceptualisations of each item. The results indicated that in Persian, edibles are associated with PERSONALITY and APPEARANCE as target domains. The paper concludes that edible conceptualisations can be largely attributed to the similarities between some traits of human beings and those of the food items. The findings of this study should lead to a better understanding of the Persian culture and language.

Keywords: Cultural conceptualisation, Cultural Linguistics, cultural metaphor, edible items

INTRODUCTION

An expression that is deviated from its original meaning to cast a distinctive and

rhetoical effect is known as a figure of speech (Alm-Arvius, 2003). There are two main types of igrures of speech, namely schemes and tropes. According to the

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“Merriam-Webster Online-Dictionary”, the term ‘trope’ comes from the Greek verb ‘trepein’ meaning ‘to turn’. Typically, in tropes, a word is associated with its secondary and less normalised meanings, while the literal meaning is left aside (Alm-Arvius, 2003). One of the main types of tropes is the metaphor, which associates two things that are perceived as different, but that have some traits in common (Burke, 1969).

The metaphor has been traditionally thought of as a poetic device rather than a common feature of everyday language. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) regarded the metaphor as a central feature of human perception and action. They maintained that our conceptual system determines how we make sense of the world; therefore, our mundane activities and interactions are underpinned by metaphors.

Food metaphors are pervasive across many cultures (Jacobsen, 2004). As Goode (1992) has stated, food is “a cultural domain that is often elaborated into complex systems of meaning” (p. 233). In fact, in many cultures, words referring to edible items are extended beyond the range of literal meanings and are hence used as insults, endearments or simply descriptions of human beings’ personality, mental states and appearance. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as ‘semantic extension’, occurs based on a link between the literal meaning of the item and its secondary associated meanings. In the case of edibles, this association is mainly based on the size, shape, colour and/or flavour of the items.

In fact, edible items are tangible and can be experienced through our senses as having distinct qualities. Based on these experiences, people conceptualise those who happen to have similar qualities in terms of certain edible items. We typically conceptualise “the nonphysical in terms of the physical-or the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, due to different cultural experiences with food and taste, there might be a disparity in the conceptualisation of these metaphors in various languages and cultures. For example, in Spanish, a good-looking person is associated with *queso* (cheese), whereas in American English, different types of cheese (e.g. velveeta, cheeseball and fromage) are associated with ugly women (Eble, 1996).

There are many idioms and expressions that are motivated by the conceptual metaphor of A HUMAN BEING IS FOOD. These idiomatic expressions have a secondary role in determining the mindset of people and shaping their conceptualisation of edibles. In fact, a metaphorical conceptualisation is first set in an expression. The frequent use of such expressions gradually leads members of a cultural group to internalise the associated conceptualisation. This is quite in line with what Sharifian (2011) states: “language can be viewed as one of the primary mechanisms which stores and communicates cultural conceptualisations. It acts as both a memory bank and a fluid vehicle for the (re)transmission of these socio-culturally embodied cultural conceptualizations” (p. 39).

Kövecses (2005) believes that “metaphors vary not only cross-culturally but also within cultures” (p. 89). He considers social variables (e.g. gender and age) among the major causes of disparity in metaphorical conceptualisation. Accordingly, the current research aimed to explore the conceptualisation of edibles in Persian and the impact of gender and age on such conceptualisation.

Investigating the relationship between culture, language and conceptualisation is the main focus of a branch of Linguistics known as Cultural Linguistics (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011). In order to examine the cultural conceptualisation underlying human languages, Cultural Linguistics provides a theoretical as well as an analytical framework (Sharifian, 2015). The theoretical framework considers ‘cultural cognition’ as its major concept. Cultural cognition is a form of ‘enactive cognition’ that is the result of social and linguistic exchanges between individuals through time and space (Sharifian, 2017). Also, cultural cognition is heterogeneously distributed (Sharifian, 2008). In other words, members of a society do not have equal access to their community’s cultural cognition. As for the analytical framework, Cultural Linguistics offers some tools, i.e. cultural schema, cultural category and cultural metaphor, for analysing cultural conceptualisations embedded in different features of human languages (Sharifian, 2003). Therefore, the current study aimed to explore culinary items as potential source domains mapping

onto the domain of human traits by using the framework of Cultural Linguistics.

The motivation for focussing on Persian food conceptualisation emerged from the fact that Persian abounds with food-related metaphors. This might be due to the strong gastronomic culture of Iran. However, outside of a few exceptions (Khajeh & Imran-Ho, 2012; Khajeh, Imran-Ho, & Tan, 2014a; Khajeh, Imran-Ho, & Tan, 2014b), inquiry on Persian conceptualisation of food items has been slow to emerge. In fact, food-related metaphors have been investigated from different perspectives and with respect to different target domains. However, the representation of human disposition and/or appearance in the guise of food items has not yet been investigated in the context of Persian language and culture.

First and foremost, the findings of this study would raise the awareness of Persian speakers as to the use of food metaphors, which have become part of everyday life. Moreover, the findings would help the speakers of other languages to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Persian food metaphors so as to establish better relationships with Persian speakers. In addition, the findings of this study would be of use to language mediators. As stated by Newmark (1988), the most challenging problem for translators is the translation of metaphors. In fact, translators might fail to convey the true message of a metaphor if not familiar with the underlying conceptualisation. In order to avoid such failure, there is a need to raise meta-cultural competence.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Cultural Linguistics and Metaphor

As a multi-disciplinary field of study, Cultural Linguistics examines the examples of conceptualisations that are culturally determined and reflected in features of human languages (Sharifian, 2015). Cultural Linguistics employs three analytical tools for that matter, namely ‘cultural schema’, ‘cultural category’ and ‘cultural-conceptual metaphor’. These tools are collectively known as cultural conceptualisation (Sharifian, 2003). According to Sharifian (2015), Cultural Linguistics views these conceptualisations “as heterogeneously distributed across the members of a group, rather than equally shared by the speakers” (p. 477). Such conceptualisations may be represented in different components of language such as metaphors, idioms and discourse markers (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2003).

As a central notion in Cultural Linguistics, the conceptual metaphor is described as a means of perceiving one domain in the guise of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Each conceptual metaphor, therefore, comprises two domains, namely a source domain that is physical and concrete, and a target domain that is abstract (Kövecses, 2005). To be more precise, the source domain is a conceptual domain in which the basic meaning is rooted (e.g. John is an *iceberg*) and the target domain is the one that is described in a metaphorical expression (e.g. *John is an iceberg*). Lakoff (1993) introduced two types of conceptual metaphor, namely

generic-level (primary/(near) universal) and specific-level (complex/cultural) metaphors. Generic-level metaphors are formed based on universal human experience (Kövecses, 2010). Typically, each culture/language has a distinctive way to put these primary metaphors together in order to form complex metaphors. However, even such (near) universal metaphors, which might be traced back to the shared experience of human beings, are not necessarily employed identically across different cultures/languages (Kövecses, 2010). For instance, the generic metaphor, ‘A HUMAN BEING IS FOOD’ may have different combinations or instantiations in various cultures.

The investigation of culturally-specific metaphors is of great significance within Cultural Linguistics (e.g. Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011). Accordingly, several studies have discovered Persian cultural metaphors from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics. For instance, Sharifian (2009) presented and analysed several cultural metaphorical instances used in the speeches of Iranian politicians. Furthermore, he provided a number of examples to highlight the semantic shifts that occur in the process of rendering a Persian metaphor into English. In another study, Sharifian and Jamarani (2015) introduced temperature as a source domain in terms of which one can comprehend the target domain of emotion. For instance, the Persian expression ‘*xâk sard-e*’ translated as “*soil is cold*” metaphorically denotes that emotional attachment to a dead person diminishes after their burial.

Food Studies

A large number of scholars have looked at food-related metaphors from different perspectives and with diverse scopes and objectives. For instance, Lin and Depner (2016) aimed to find food-related metaphors in the Hakka language in order to investigate metaphorical expressions and food categorisations. Also, they intended to examine the cognitive and cultural perception of the Hakka people with respect to food metaphors. They concluded that in Hakka, food is used to comprehend several target domains such as PERSONALITY, LIFE and HUMAN RELATIONS.

In another study, Faycel (2012) looked for food-related metaphors and their meanings in Tunisian Arabic proverbs. He found three main generic metaphors in these proverbial expressions, namely A HUMAN BEING IS FOOD, LIFE IS FOOD and EMOTIONS ARE FOOD. In fact, A HUMAN BEING IS FOOD WAS the most frequently seen conceptual metaphor in food proverbs.

In a book entitled '*Bite me: Food in Popular Culture*', Parasecoli (2008) explored the significance of food in popular culture. In fact, he analysed a number of books and movies with respect to food, body and booty metaphors. Parasecoli demonstrated that culinary themes are pervasively used in blues music. In this context, food-related terms are often used in a pejorative sense. For instance, 'biscuit' refers to a lovable female and 'biscuit roller' is used to refer to the "lover". In this type of metaphor, features of physical appearance

(e.g. skin colour) also play a vital role. For instance, 'honey' symbolises light-complexioned individuals and 'coffee' is used to refer to dark-complexioned people, leading to the formation of metaphorical expressions such as 'honey dripper' and 'coffee grinder' for describing a lover.

Berrada (2007) conducted a comparative study concerning the use of food metaphors in Moroccan and Classical Arabic. The findings of this study indicated that daily interaction in Moroccan Arabic is rife with culinary metaphors, while limited instances of such metaphors exist in Classical Arabic. He presumed that the existence of such metaphors in Moroccan Arabic might be the result of cultural borrowings.

Rodriguez (2007) examined the metaphorical identification of women in teenage and women's magazines. It turned out that these magazines frequently conceptualise women using edibles, body parts, members of royal families, animals and supernatural creatures as the source domains. She maintained that the frequent associations between women and such source domains convey sexist attitudes towards the status of women in the society.

Also, Achugar (2001) analysed the *piropo*, which is a flirtatious compliment coined by Spanish men to address women. He considered the *piropo* in Spanish discourse as both a speech event and a cognitive metaphor. In *piropos*, women are mainly depicted as objects. Due to some similarities between the physical qualities of women and food items, they are frequently characterised as edibles.

In spite of the abundance of culinary metaphors in Persian, few studies have empirically explored this topic. However, Persian food metaphors have recently attracted more scholarly attention. For instance, Khajeh et al. (2014a) conducted a comparative study to investigate the metaphorical conceptualisation of thought/ideas as food in English and Persian. Moreover, Khajeh et al. (2014b) explored food-related metaphors in order to determine the conceptualisations of anger in Persian and English.

In the reviewed studies, food metaphors were found to be closely related to PERSONALITY, LIFE, HUMAN RELATIONS and EMOTION. However, the conceptual metaphor of A HUMAN BEING IS FOOD or more specifically, the application of edibles as a source domain to refer to target domains such as human beings' personality traits and appearance has not yet been addressed in Persian. To fill this gap, the current study aims to look into this topic from the viewpoint of Cultural Linguistics.

METHOD

The present study is a qualitative attempt to identify the conceptualisations of culinary items among Persian speakers. The theoretical and analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics was adopted to analyse the collected data.

The data for the current study were collected in November 2016. The population of this study consisted of native speakers of Persian in Iran. Using the convenience sampling technique, a total of 237 native

Persian speakers residing in Iran participated in this study (58% female and 42% male). The average age of the participants was approximately 25.1. The participants were recruited on a voluntarily basis from among community groups, university students, students in private/public academic institutes and members of social networking websites.

As for the instrument of data collection, the researchers first prepared a list containing 29 edible items in Persian. The items were chosen based on the authors' intuition as native speakers of Persian and also derived from several online sources containing Persian food-related metaphors and slangs¹. In order to test the content validity of the questionnaire, it was given to four Persian-speaking experts in Linguistics and Cultural Studies. Based on the experts' feedback, the researchers omitted three of the items and added two. The questionnaire was then piloted with 20 participants from around the country in order to evaluate its comprehensibility and identify potential problematic issues of design and format. Also, the pilot study aimed at determining whether or not the items yielded the kind of data that were needed. According to the collective feedback provided by the pilot study participants, some slight changes were made to the instruction section as well as some of the items. In fact, the list was shortened to 20 edible items that had the potential for being used metaphorically.

¹<http://aryaadib.blogfa.com/post-564.aspx>; <http://ehsan-news123.blogfa.com/category/100>; <http://parsvideo.at/2014/03/05/>

Alongside a printed version, the researchers designed an online version of the questionnaire via Google Forms in order to collect the necessary data from different regions of Iran, taking into consideration the diversity of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Since the researchers aimed to examine the impact of age and gender on the conceptualisation of edible items in Persian, there were no age or gender limits for participating in the study. In this way, the data would allow for a look at the conceptualisation of different age groups, also opening a window into the differences between the conceptualisation of male and female participants. Therefore, the participants were asked to indicate their age and gender at the top of the questionnaire. They were also asked to write all the conceptualisations that they associated with each edible item, skipping the items that brought nothing particular to mind.

As for the online version, the participants were contacted via email or social media websites. In the first phase of data collection, a link to the online version of the questionnaire was sent to around 800 Iranians from different regions of the country, giving priority to the contact lists of the researchers and their colleagues. An email address was provided in the online version in case the respondents had any questions regarding the items or the purpose of the study. After one week, 163 completed online questionnaires were received (20.3% response rate).

In the second phase of data collection, the researchers visited several universities,

public/private academic institutes and public places (e.g. libraries and parks) in Mashhad, Iran, to distribute the printed questionnaires. The researchers' colleagues, friends and fellow students also took part in this phase of the study. Overall, 150 completed questionnaires were collected through face-to-face contact.

A total of 76 questionnaires (24 printed and 52 online) contained irrelevant responses and were hence excluded from the data analysis process. Therefore, the researchers were left with 237 valid questionnaires. Since the items and their conceptualisations were written in Persian, they were all translated into English by a professional Persian-English translator and then proofread by a professional editor.

The next step was to make a list of the conceptualisations associated with each edible item and to determine their frequency of occurrence. Furthermore, the researchers analysed the differences in the conceptualisations made by male/female and young (18-30)/old (30-55) participants.

Finally, the researchers set a threshold to distinguish between idiosyncratic and cultural conceptualisations. Accordingly, conceptualisations that were mentioned by more than 50% of the participants were considered to be 'cultural'.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the obtained results are presented and the conceptualisations of each item are discussed in detail using the Cultural Linguistics framework.

Kövecses (2010) claimed that social factors such as age and gender might yield disparity in metaphorical conceptualisation; however, there were no significant differences between the conceptualisations of male and female participants in the current study. Also, there were no significant differences between the conceptualisations of younger

(18-30) and older (30-55) participants, except that older participants left more items unanswered. Therefore, these two variables were abandoned throughout the analysis.

The following table contains Persian conceptualisations of edibles and their frequency of occurrence.

Table 1
Conceptualization of edible items in Persian

Edibles Items	Persian Conceptualisation						
	Frequency						
1 Pear	Dumb	Useless	Fat	Lazy	Naïve	Curvy figure	3
2 <i>Chilgoza</i> ²	Useless	Out of shape	Dumb	Annoying	Tiny	.....	.....
3 Pickled cucumber	Unfunny	Funny	Lanky	.....	.....	.....	.....
4 Turnip	Useless	Indifferent	Dumb	Bland	Ugly	.....	.....
5 Potato	<i>Bi gheirat</i> ³	Indifferent	Useless	Fat	Dumb	.....	.....
6 Sweet Tea	Sycophantic	Funny	Unfunny	.....	.....	.....	.....
7 Hazelnut	Cute	Tiny	Dumb	Chubby	Energetic	.....	.....
8 Rice pudding	Sluggish	Pale-skinned	Passive	Clumsy	.....	.....	.....
9 Yogurt	Sluggish	Passive	Useless	Pale-skinned	.....	.....	.....
10 <i>Shirin asal</i> ⁴	Sycophantic	Lovely	Unfunny	.....	.....	.....	.....

²Pine nuts from the chilgoza pine tree
³Lacking honour or manhood
⁴An Iranian confectionery product

Table 1 (continue)

Edibles Items		Persian Conceptualisation					
		Frequency					
11	Pepper	Agile	Hot-tempered	Sneaky	Cute	Sarcastic	.....
		92	56	46	30	23	.....
12	Chickpea	Nosy	Tiny	Useless	Dumb	.....	.....
		94	44	40	12	.....	.....
13	Peach	Pretty	Lovely	.....	.....	.....	.....
		173	56	.....	.....	.....	.....
14	Nectarine	Dumb	Pretty	Lovely	Useless	Fat	.....
		33	30	24	24	32	.....
15	Carrot	Useless	Dumb	Lanky	Red-haired	.....	.....
		71	47	17	9	.....	.....
16	Coconut	Headstrong	Experienced	Lovely	Hairy	Ugly	.....
		34	32	31	11	7	.....
17	Radish	Tiny	Cute	Chubby	Unfriendly	.....	.....
		87	49	23	4	.....	.....
18	Chocolate	Lovely	Sycophantic	Tanned	.....	.....	.....
		143	16	7	.....	.....	.....
19	Cotton candy	Dumb	Useless	Cute	Hairy	Sycophantic	Light-skinned
		32	31	30	28	7	5
20	Liver	Lovely	Pretty	.....	.....	.....	.....
		161	46	.....	.....	.....	.....

Pear

The participants in this study mentioned six conceptualisations for ‘pear’. Four of these conceptualisations (i.e. dumb, useless, lazy and naive) are associated with the PERSONALITY domain, while the other two (i.e., fat and curvy figure) are from the APPEARANCE domain.

As presented in Table 1, a large number of participants (n=141) conceptualised ‘pear’ as a ‘dumb’ individual. The high frequency of this conceptualisation might

stem from the Persian expression ‘*baboo golâbi*’, literally meaning ‘stupid pear’, but metaphorically referring to ‘a stupid person’.

The pear is known for its soothing properties, particularly in the digestive tract (McIntyre, 2000). It is, in fact, a soft and easily digested fruit. According to Faycel (2012), soft edibles are used to conceptualise inexperienced and naive people.

Pear was also mapped onto a person with a ‘fat’ and ‘curvy’ body. In fact, the

association between ‘pear’ and curvy body was more evident in the case of a female body.

The following are some authentic examples taken from daily conversations among native speakers of Persian in which the term ‘pear’ has been used metaphorically.

(1) Chetor-ee golâbi?
How-be.PRS.2SG pear?
“What’s up, fatty?”

(2) Moshkel az khodemoon-e ke ye âdame golâbi o
Problem from ourselves-be.PRS.1PL that a person pear Do marker (râ)
miresooneem be hadde zaferoon.
reach-PRS.PROG.1PL to saffron.
“We are to be blamed for falsely raising the status of a person.”

(3) Boro bâbâ golâbi.
Go.IMP father pear
“Go away dumbass.”

(4) (a) Boro az un bepors.
Go.IMP.2SG of him/her ask.IMP.2SG
“Go ask him.”

(b) Fekr mikon-ee un baboo golâbi chizi midune?!
Think do.PRS.2SG he/she stupid pear thing know.PRS.3SG
“Do you really think that stupid guy knows anything?!”

Chilgoza

Chilgoza is a small, elongated seed that is mostly found in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It received five conceptualisations from the participants of this study. Three of these associations

(i.e. useless, dumb and annoying) are of the PERSONALITY domain, whereas two of them (i.e., out of shape and tiny) are of the APPEARANCE domain. Consider the following example:

(5) Khial mikone man-am mesle khodesh chalghooz-am!
Think do-PRS.3SG I too like himself/herself chilgoza-be.PRS.1SG.
“He thinks that I am as chilgoza/dumb as him!”

In Persian, the tininess of edibles is mostly associated with small brain size, which explains its figurative usage to refer to dumb individuals. This is also the case with the other two seed items in the questionnaire, namely ‘hazelnut’ and ‘chickpea’. A tiny and ‘dumb’ person is conceptualised as being a ‘chilgoza’, ‘hazelnut’ or ‘chickpea’, all of which are characterised by their small size.

Tininess is also associated with uselessness in Persian. Accordingly, the participants conceptualised ‘Chilgoza’ to mean a useless person.

Pickled Cucumber

The third edible item is ‘*khiar shoor*’, which is literally translated as ‘salty cucumber’, but commonly called ‘pickled cucumber’ in English. The participants of this study mentioned three conceptualisations for this edible item. Two of these conceptualisations (i.e. funny and unfunny) come from the PERSONALITY domain, while the other one (i.e. lanky) refers to the APPEARANCE domain.

There are a number of Persian expressions containing the word ‘salt’ that are used to describe a funny person or someone who tries to be funny. For instance, ‘*namakdoon*’ (saltshaker) refers to a person who tells lame jokes and is considered unfunny. Also, ‘*namak rikhtan*’ literally means ‘pouring salt’, but metaphorically refers to an attempt to be funny by cracking lame jokes. The following example is another metaphorical expression containing ‘salt’.

(6) Dishab tu namak khâbidi?

Last night in salt sleep-PST.2SG

lit. “Did you sleep in salt last night?”

“Do you really think you are funny?!”

A pickled cucumber is left in brine; therefore, someone who tells lame jokes is conceptualised as having lain in salt i.e. someone who is trying to sound funny. These expressions might have informed the participants’ conceptualisations of ‘pickled cucumber’. In addition to taste, other features of ‘pickled cucumber’, such as its size, may have influenced the participants’ conceptualisations of this edible item (e.g. a lanky person).

Turnip

The participants of this study mentioned five conceptualisations for ‘turnip’. Four (i.e. useless, indifferent, dumb and bland) belong to the PERSONALITY domain, while ‘ugly’ belongs to the APPEARANCE domain. ‘Useless’, which is the most frequent conceptualisation of ‘turnip’, refers to an incapable and redundant person. In general, the conceptualisations of ‘turnip’ are attributable to its taste and appearance.

According to Faycel (2012) and Berrada (2007), food consumption involves a number of processes (e.g. seeing, desiring, tasting, smelling and digesting) that facilitate understanding of abstract domains. Turnip conceptualisations are, therefore, shaped through our experience with consuming this vegetable. For instance,

the participants use ‘turnip’ to describe a ‘bland’ individual, presumably because this edible item has a bland taste. In fact, a person is normally associated with a sweet edible item due to his/her social acceptance, while conceptualising someone in terms of a tasteless food item points to his/her social rejection (Faycel, 2012).

Potato

‘Potato’ was the third most common edible metaphor reported by the participants. It had five conceptualisations, four of which (i.e. *bi-gheirat*, indifferent, useless and dumb) are associated with the PERSONALITY domain, while only one (i.e. fat) is associated with the APPEARANCE domain. It should be noted that most of the conceptualisations of ‘potato’ stem from the shape and taste of this food crop.

The ‘potato’ metaphor is mostly associated with individuals who lack *gheirat* (roughly honour and manhood) or are *bi-gheirat*. Before discussing the conceptualisations of ‘potato’, a short explanation of the concept of *gheirat* is necessary. *Gheirat* is an integral part of Persian culture, as men are expected to protect the female members of their family. According to Zare (2011), when a man does not fulfil this responsibility, he is called *bi-gheirat* (lacking honour and manhood). In fact, there are a number of expressions related to the concept of *gheirat* in Persian. For instance, ‘*rag-e gheiratesh bâlâ zade*’ is literally translated as “his *gheirat* vein

has been raised,” but it metaphorically means “he has become *gheirati*” or “he has become angry as a result of something which has threatened his manhood/honour.” Particularly relevant to the discussion on ‘potatoes’ is the Persian expression, ‘*bi rag*’, literally translated as “without vein,” but which metaphorically means ‘without manhood and honour’ (*bi-gheirat*).

A major characteristic of ‘*gheirati*’ individuals is that they become angry very quickly. Due to its significant influence on blood pressure, anger causes the veins to become more visible (Hendricks, Bore, Aslinia, & Morriss, 2013). Accordingly, in Persian, the schema of *gheirat* has been associated with the vein. Iranians believe that the potato is ‘*bi rag*’ (or without veins) due to the fact that the crop can easily adapt to various climates and is indifferent to its position in the garden, being almost unaffected by soil and growing conditions (Bell, 2011). In the Persian language and culture, being *bi-gheirat* is also associated with being ‘indifferent’ and ‘useless’.

Sweet Tea

‘Sweet tea’ received three conceptualisations from the participants, all of which (i.e. sycophantic, funny and unfunny) are associated with the PERSONALITY domain.

The salient feature of sweet tea is its sweet taste. As Berrada (2007) maintained, the taste of a sweet edible provides an experiential model for the conceptualisation of positive human traits. This is in fact

contrary to the findings of this study, as the participants associated sweet tea with two negative traits, namely sycophancy and unfunniness. A sycophant is someone who says insincere sweet words to another person in order to gain some kind of advantage. Therefore, associating a sycophantic person with sweet tea is not only metaphorical, but also ironic. This is also the case with other sweet-tasting edibles included in the list, namely *shirin asal*, chocolate and cotton candy. The participants of

this study associated all these items with ‘sycophantic’ individuals. On the other hand, the sweetness of this item gave rise to its positive association with ‘funny’ individuals.

Hazelnut

‘Hazelnut’ was mapped onto two domains of APPEARANCE and PERSONALITY. There are, in fact, a number of Persian expressions that are motivated by the ‘hazelnut’ metaphor. For instance:

- (7) Maghz-esh andâze-ye yek fandogh-e./ Maghz fandogh-ee
 Brain-POSS.3SG size a hazelnut-be.PRS.3SG/ Brain hazelnut.ADJ
 lit. “His/her brain is as small as a hazelnut.”
 “He/she is dumb.”

As stated previously, the distinct feature of hazelnut is its small size. Therefore, the only property of ‘hazelnut’ that is visualised in these expressions is its size, which is often associated with dumbness.

Although tininess is sometimes associated with dumbness, when something

is both small and round, it can suggest ‘cute’ and ‘chubby’ children, as is the case with ‘hazelnut’ and ‘radish’ in Persian. From a nutritional standpoint, hazelnuts are a rich source of energy; therefore, they are associated with ‘energetic’ people.

Rice Pudding/Yogurt

‘Rice pudding’ and ‘yogurt’ are two culinary items that are alike in colour and nature. Both of these edibles have three conceptualisations related to the PERSONALITY domain and one associated with the APPEARANCE domain. Participants of this study associated both ‘rice pudding’ and ‘yogurt’ with ‘sluggish’, ‘pale-skinned’ and ‘passive’ individuals.

Due to their white colour, these edibles are associated with pale-skinned and passive individuals. In Persian, the term pale-skinned is used in two senses. It either refers to someone whose face has turned white due to shock, sudden fear or illness, or to a person who naturally has a very light complexion. Associating white substances with passive individuals springs from the fact that white is an achromatic and neutral color⁵.

In addition to their colour, the texture of these items has also been used to conceptualise human characteristics. In fact, ‘rice pudding’ and ‘yogurt’ are soft foods that are easily devoured without the need for chewing. Therefore, due to their soft and liquid nature, they are described in terms of ‘*shol-o vâ raft-e*’ in Persian. The best English equivalent for this Persian adjective would be ‘sluggish’. The word ‘sluggish’ is derived from ‘slug,’ a slow-moving snail. In fact, the metaphorical meaning of ‘rice pudding’ and ‘yogurt’ can

be best understood via the image of a slug. It is noteworthy that based on the results of this study, ‘yogurt’ is the second most frequently occurring edible metaphor.

Shirin Asal

‘*Shirin asal*’, an Iranian confectionery product, may be literally translated as ‘sweet honey’. Similar to ‘sweet tea’, this edible has three conceptualisations (i.e. sycophantic, lovely and unfunny), all of which are associated with the PERSONALITY domain. As stated previously, associating a sweet edible with negative traits such as sycophancy or unfunniness is both metaphorical and ironic. Regarding the ‘lovely’ conceptualisation, Faycel (2012) stated that “the experience of tasting a sweet and delicious food served to understand the appreciation of a kind and lovely person” (p. 21).

Pepper

In this study, ‘pepper’ refers to chili pepper. The ‘pepper’ metaphor, which is the most frequently used edible metaphor among the participants, has five conceptualisations. Of these, four (i.e. agile, hot-tempered, sneaky and sarcastic) belong to the PERSONALITY domain, while only one (i.e. cute) is associated with the APPEARANCE domain. These associations are mostly derived from the spicy flavour of this item. In fact, extensive consumption of chili pepper has a number of physiological effects, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure. It can even make one sweat and go red in

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_theory

the face. The experience associated with consuming chilli pepper is mapped onto the experience of getting angry and thus, provides the mental image of a hot-tempered person.

There are a number of commonly used Persian expressions that are motivated by the associations mentioned for ‘pepper’. For instance:

- (8) Felfel nabin che riz-e,
 Pepper NEG-see.IMP.2SG how tiny-be.PRS.3SG
 beshkan bebin che tiz-e.
 crack.IMP.2SG see.IMP.2SG how hot-be.PRS.3SG
 lit. “Do not see pepper as something tiny; crack it to see how hot it is.”
 “Do not judge the capabilities of someone by his/her size.”
- (9) Zabun-esh tond-o tiz-e.
 Tongue-POSS.3SG hot and spicy-be.3SG
 lit. “His/her tongue is spicy and hot.”
 “He/she has a sharp tongue.”

In Persian, the taste of ‘pepper’ is called ‘*tond-o tiz*’ (hot and spicy). The state of being ‘*tond-o tiz*’ also refers to a ‘sarcastic’ or ‘agile’ person. Persian speakers also use ‘pepper’ to describe children who are ‘cute’ in a mischievous way.

Chickpea

The ‘chickpea’ metaphor has four conceptualisations, three of which belong to the PERSONALITY domain (i.e. nosy, useless and dumb), while only one (i.e. tiny) is associated with the APPEARANCE domain.

There are a number of Persian expressions reflecting ‘tiny’ and ‘dumb’ as conceptualisations of ‘chickpea’, such as ‘*nokhod maghz*’, meaning ‘pea-sized

brain’ or ‘pea-brain’, and ‘*Maghz-esh andâze-ye yek nokhod-e*’, meaning “his/her brain is as small as a chickpea.” Besides these metaphorical expressions for ‘tiny’ and ‘dumb’ individuals, there are other Persian expressions that reflect the ‘nosy’ and ‘useless’ associations. For instance, ‘*nokhodi*’ refers to someone who is useless, particularly in a group game. Generally, the participants associated ‘chickpea’ with a ‘nosy’ person. This association is manifested in the Persian idiom ‘*Nokhode har âshî⁶ boodan*’, literally translated as “*to be a chickpea in every âsh*”. This idiom is used to refer to nosy individuals.

⁶Broth

Peach/Nectarine

Peaches and nectarines both belong to the *Prunus* genus family. The two are very similar, except for the fact that peaches have a fuzzy skin, whereas nectarines have a smooth covering. The participants in this study mentioned two positive conceptualisations for ‘peach’, one belonging to the APPEARANCE domain (i.e. pretty) and the other belonging to the PERSONALITY domain (i.e. lovely). However, ‘nectarine’ had five conceptualisations, three of them (i.e. dumb, lovely and useless) belonging to the PERSONALITY domain and the remaining two (i.e. pretty and fat) referring to the APPEARANCE domain.

In a study conducted by Lin and Depner (2016), the peach was found to be conceptualised by the Hakka people as an over-protected person. Interestingly, the participants of the current study used both ‘peach’ and ‘nectarine’ to refer to ‘pretty’ and ‘lovely’ women. This association is, of course, due to the similarities between some physical traits of women and these fruits that are implicitly transmitted to their metaphoric usage. ‘Peach’ and ‘nectarine’ are, in fact, sweet-tasting and mouth-watering. As well as having a sweet taste, the colour of these fruits is a shade of orange, which is a known as the colour of warmth and desire⁷. These positive associations explain the figurative use of peach and nectarine to refer to ‘lovely’ and ‘pretty’ women. In fact, Iranians

use the metaphoric expression ‘*holoo-e poost kand-e*’ meaning ‘peeled peach’ to describe attractive women. The remaining three conceptualisations of ‘nectarine’ are derived from its round shape.

Carrot

The ‘carrot’ metaphor had four conceptualisations among the participants. Two of them (i.e. useless and dumb) refer to the PERSONALITY domain, while the other two (i.e. lanky and red-haired) belong to the APPEARANCE domain. The participants of this study mostly used carrot to refer to ‘useless’ (i.e. incapable and redundant) individuals. Also, due to its colour and size, ‘carrot’ was associated with ‘red-haired’ and ‘lanky’ people.

Coconut

The ‘coconut’ metaphor had five conceptualisations, three of which refer to the PERSONALITY domain (i.e. headstrong, experienced and lovely), while the remaining two belong to the APPEARANCE domain (i.e. ugly and hairy). The term ‘coconut’ is derived from the 16th-century Portuguese and Spanish word ‘coco’, meaning ‘head’. Coconuts have a very hard and woody shell. Presumably, due to this hard shell, the participants described ‘headstrong’ and ‘experienced’ individuals with reference to this tropical fruit. As Faycel (2012) stated, “foods that are hard to eat are recruited to characterize experienced persons that are difficult to be deceived” (p. 8).

⁷<http://www.payvand.com/news/12/mar/1051.html>; <http://www.universeofsymbolism.com/color-meaning.html>

The paradoxical outer and inner colours of the coconut have also made people from the southern parts of Iran use it for describing themselves and claim that although their skin colour is dark, their inside is white and pure. There is even a very famous traditional southern song called '*siyahe nargile*', translated as "the black is a coconut," that is motivated by the 'lovely' conceptualisation of 'coconut'. However, 'coconut' is also associated with negative conceptualisations, mainly drawn from its physical appearance. For instance, because of its hairy husk, the coconut is used to describe 'hairy' and 'ugly' people.

Radish

In the current study, 'radish' was metaphorically mapped onto the APPEARANCE and PERSONALITY domains. The conceptualisations associated with the APPEARANCE domain (i.e. tiny, cute and chubby) has been discussed in the previous sections. The 'unfriendly' conceptualisation presumably springs from the sharp flavour and skin colour of the radish. According to Faycel (2012), while sweet edibles are associated with positive traits such as kindness and social acceptability, foods with a bitter, sharp or sour taste are associated with negative human traits. In the same vein, Lin and Depner (2016) found that ". . . radish with dark heart but sleek skin is mapped onto a person with a friendly look but evil heart . . ." (p. 15).

Chocolate

From the participants' point of view, the 'chocolate' metaphor had three conceptualisations, two of which (i.e. lovely and sycophantic) are associated with the PERSONALITY domain, while the remaining one (i.e. tanned) belongs to the APPEARANCE domain. The two PERSONALITY conceptualisations have been discussed in the previous sections. Except for the 'sycophantic' conceptualisation, 'chocolate' is mostly used to refer to women rather than men. According to Rodriguez (2007) ". . . there seems to be a clear tendency to portray women in the guise of sweets . . ." (pp. 22-23). It is indeed the dark colour of 'chocolate' that explains its figurative usage for 'tanned' women.

Cotton Candy

'Cotton candy' is metaphorically mapped onto the PERSONALITY and APPEARANCE domains. More specifically, 'dumb', 'useless' and 'sycophantic' belong to the domain of PERSONALITY, whereas 'cute', 'hairy' and 'light-skinned' refer to the APPEARANCE domain.

'Cotton candy' is used for 'hairy' and 'cute' people on the grounds of its fluffy and cotton-like appearance. Moreover, it has a soft and light texture and melts as soon as it touches the tongue. Eating cotton candy does not involve any strenuous activity like chewing and swallowing. It is as if nothing is being eaten at all. Furthermore, Faycel (2012) stated that being useless is described

in terms of foods with low nutritional benefits. These might be the reasons for associating ‘cotton candy’ with ‘dumb’ or ‘useless’ individuals. In addition to taste, texture and nutritional value, colour is also of significance in the metaphoric use of ‘cotton candy’, where the participants associated this edible item with ‘light-skinned’ people.

Liver

Roasted beef liver is a common dish among Iranians. The source domain ‘liver’ is mapped onto two domains of PERSONALITY and APPEARANCE by being associated with ‘lovely’ and ‘pretty’ women in the target domain. A number of Persian idiomatic expressions are based on the conceptualisations of ‘liver’. For instance:

- (10) Jeegar-e man-ee.
 Liver-EZ I-be.PRS.2SG
 lit. “You are my liver.”
 “I love you.”
- (11) Jeegar-e-to bokhor-am.
 Liver-EZ.POSS.2SG eat.PRS.1SG
 lit. “I want to eat your liver.”
 I love you.”

These conceptualisations are presumably motivated by the Iranians’ love for roasted liver. Furthermore, it may be common for people from different cultures to associate emotional experience with different body organs such as the heart, liver, belly or

even the throat (Sharifian, Dirven, Yu, & Niemeier, 2008). Apparently, one seat of emotion for Iranians is the liver.

CONCLUSION

The current study employed the framework of Cultural Linguistics to present an account of the conceptualisations of edible items in contemporary Persian. In general, people use many metaphoric words in their daily conversation; however, they may not be able to verbalise the underlying meaning of those words. Therefore, this study has attempted to bring to the surface the cultural conceptualisations underlying certain edible items in Persian.

The findings of this study demonstrate how edible items can be a palpable source domain for describing abstract target domains such as human traits. The data analysis indicated that in Persian, edible items are metaphorically mapped onto two target domains: (1) PERSONALITY and (2) APPEARANCE. Contrary to the researchers’ expectations, the data revealed that gender and age do not have any significant impact on the conceptualisations of edible items in Persian. Furthermore, the observations made in this paper revealed that cultural conceptualisation of edible items in Persian reflect certain commonalities between the experience associated with food and human traits. However, the disparate experiences with food and taste have led to cross-cultural or even within-cultural variation in the metaphorical conceptualisation of these items. In fact, a major contribution of the current study is raising language

practitioners' (e.g. translators, interpreters and teachers) awareness of the underlying conceptualisation of such items in Persian. In fact, language teachers can incorporate these edible items into their lesson plans so as to provide the opportunity for the learners to move one step further and become familiar with the cultural conceptualisations underlying these items. Furthermore, exploring the metaphorical conceptualisation of edible items in contemporary Persian helps members of other cultural groups to communicate more effectively with native Persian speakers.

The current study is the first attempt to explore food conceptualisations among Persian speakers. Hence, there are certain limitations associated with this study. First of all, the recruited sample of participants is not fully representative of the diverse cultural communities in Iran. Therefore, the findings may be generalised to the whole population only if supported by future studies with larger and, perhaps, more diverse samples. Also, the food items included in this study are not the only Persian edibles with metaphorical conceptualisations. Future studies on the topic may include other edibles, gradually leading to a large corpus of metaphorically-used edible items in Persian. Moreover, similar studies can be conducted to identify the underlying conceptualisations of the same edible items in other languages, such as English. Such studies would provide interesting information regarding the cross-language commonalities or variations in the conceptualisation of these items. This

would, in fact, allow for more generalised results regarding the impact of culture on the metaphorical usage of edibles.

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