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A Comparative Study on Persian and American Proverbs Including Double Main Perception Verbs

Abstract. The investigation delves into the essence of both Persian and American proverbs. Examining embodiment proverbs from Persian and American cultures, this study aimed to focus on verbs associated with five main perception senses. The objective of this study was to find embodiment-related proverbs from both cultural perspectives, striving to present a comparative analysis. The data were sourced from the Persian Dictionary of Proverbs, authored by Jamshidipour (1968), and the Dictionary of American Proverbs, authored by Wolfgang Mieder (1992). The data were analyzed to ascertain the prevalence, speech function, grammatical construction, and conceptual framing of these proverbs. Upon analyzing the collected data, Persian proverbs were framed within both 'loss-framing' and 'gain-framing'. However, American proverbs predominantly featured 'loss-framing' and 'avoidance-framing'. While the most grammatical construction of Persian proverbs is declarative sentences, the grammatical construction of American proverbs has more variety. In terms of speech function, both Persian and American proverbs primarily served as statements and indirect advice. Finally, the study concluded that the verbs 'see' and 'hear' held the highest frequency of usage among perception verbs within Persian and American proverbs.

Keywords: Persian Proverb, American Proverb, Perception Verb, Framing, Speech Function

1. Introduction

Proverbs serve as concise tools for effectively communicating intended messages using minimal words. Mieder (2002) defines proverbs as concise expressions within a society, encapsulating insights, principles, ethical values, and cultural perspectives in a fixed, easily remembered form. Proverbs are linguistic expressions that illustrate a strong

connection between language, culture, and human cognition (Mansyur and Said 2019). These proverbs serve as enduring reflections of collective wisdom and cultural values.

While recent studies have explored the influence of particular body parts such as the hands, heart, feet, and head on cognitive functions, research on body-related proverbs remains limited (Mansyur and Said 2019). Moreover, previous research has not yet compared embodiment proverbs that involve perception verbs in Persian and English. This study seeks to bridge this gap through the study of embodiment proverbs in Persian and American languages, focusing on their frequency, framing, and speech function (Sharifrad 2024).

The five basic human senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell —are recognized by five sensory body organs. These human senses collectively act as tools for the brain, constructing a coherent understanding of the world around us. In cognitive linguistics, the principle of ‘embodiment’ highlights the essential influence of the physical body in shaping an individual’s everyday cognitive processes (Gibbs 2006). This notion emphasizes the intertwined the growth and interplay of the “mind and body” (Maalej and Yu 2011, 12).

Heine (2014) emphasizes the human body’s significance as a fundamental model for comprehending intricate concepts that may be challenging to articulate. Employing metaphorical expressions with action verbs such as see, hear, touch, taste, or smell helps bridge the gap between physical perception and abstract understanding, enabling the transfer of experiences (Manasia 2016). According to example No. 1, the analysis includes a Persian proverb focusing on two perception verbs *see* and *hear*, elucidating its framing, and speech function.

Example No. 1:

شنیدن کی بود مانند دیدن

šenidan key bovad mānand-e didan
hearing when be.PRS.3SG like seeing

Lit. Hearing of a thing is never like seeing it

‘Seeing is believing’

The Persian proverb ‘Hearing of a thing is never like seeing it’ parallels the English proverb ‘Seeing is believing,’ both conveying a similar literal meaning. In essence, both proverbs function indirectly as advice and the grammatical construction is a declarative sentence. However, a notable difference in framing emerges between the Persian and English versions: the Persian proverb adopts a tone of ‘loss-framing’, while the English proverb leans toward ‘gain-framing’ (Sharifrad 2024).

1.1. Perception Verbs, Grammatical Construction, Framing, and Speech Acts Function

Different human body parts and perception verbs can carry positive, negative, or neutral associations. Languages can interpret the same embodied experiences in diverse ways or assign distinct meanings to identical bodily experiences or body parts (Maalej and Yu 2011). In the field of linguistics, grammatical construction¹ refers to a syntactic arrangement of words that can encompass various forms, including sentences, phrasal structures, and intricate lexemes like phrasal verbs. According to Sharifrad (2024, 76), framing is categorized as “gain framing,” “loss framing,” and “avoidance framing,” an approach that builds on the earlier work by Brdar-Szabó, Sharifrad, and Abumathkour (2023, 288).

Speech functions, as noted by Sharifi and Ebrahimi (2012), are modes of communication wherein the speaker aims to convey specific content. Body-related terminology finds widespread use across languages, exhibiting both consistent and varying perceptions regarding the body’s role in metaphor formation. Following Austin’s (1975) theory on speech function, three functional elements constitute them: (O’Gray 2005, 304) first, ‘the locutionary meaning’, that represents ‘the literal meaning’ of spoken words; second, ‘the illocutionary meaning’, that concerns ‘the social function’ of the utterance, encompassing direct or indirect requests, refusals, praises, or complaints; and third, the perlocutionary meaning, which pertains to the impact of spoken words on the listener or recipient (Sharifi and Ebrahimi 2012). Additionally, Nippold, Martin, and Erskine (1988) highlight that proverbs fulfill a variety of functions. In this study, speech function will be categorized as direct or indirect advice, direct or indirect warnings, and statements or complaints. Likewise, identical body parts or bodily encounters might be used to symbolize and organize various abstract ideas.

2. Methodology

Within each nation and linguistic community, a distinct collection of proverbs emerges (Mieder 2004). Iran, recognized for its diverse and multicultural landscape, predominantly utilizes Persian, also referred to as Fārsī, as its official language (Windfuhr 2009). Although the origins of these proverbs remain enigmatic, they have seamlessly integrated into the language over time, becoming an integral part of everyday conversations among the people (Ahmadi 2012).

The use of American proverbs extends beyond the United States, as they are often referenced and adapted in various countries and cultures around the world (Mieder 1993). For example, proverbs like ‘Don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched’ or ‘Actions speak louder than words’ convey practical advice and timeless truths, making them relatable across different cultural contexts.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_construction

Perception verbs play a significant role in proverbs. Proverbs often make use of perception verbs to highlight the importance of observation, understanding, and insight in daily life. The questions that can be raised in the current study are as follows:

RQ 1. Which perception verbs are most commonly found in Persian and American proverbs related to embodiment?

RQ 2. What are the most common grammatical structures involving perception verbs in Persian and American proverbs related to embodiment?

RQ 3. What are the most common speech act functions expressed in Persian and American proverbs that include perception verbs related to embodiment?

RQ 4. What are the most common framings found in Persian and American proverbs that incorporate perception verbs related to embodiment?

The methodology for the collection of proverbial data involved a comprehensive review of both Persian and American proverb dictionaries. I have read and considered all pages of the Persian and American dictionary pageby-page to extract the embodiment proverbs including double perception verbs such as ‘see,’ ‘hear,’ ‘touch,’ ‘smell,’ and ‘taste.’

According to the paper published by Sharifrad (2024), Jamshidipour (1968) authored a Persian proverb dictionary, a collection of proverbs, superstitions, and folklore, initially released in 1968 by “Foroughi Publications in Iran” (Sharifrad 2024, 77). This comprehensive dictionary spans 295 pages, organizing proverbs alphabetically according to the Persian alphabet. Despite its age, this enduring dictionary highlights the extensive history of Persian proverbs, reflecting their longstanding presence in Iranian discourse. While some entries have become obsolete, the majority remain integral parts of daily conversations among the Iranian populace (Sharifrad 2024).

The Dictionary of Persian Proverbs draws upon a variety of sources, all of which are mentioned in the research by Sharifrad (2024), including Ali Akbar Dehkoda’s extensive compilation in four volumes from 1931. Additionally, it incorporates the Farnoodsad collection by Saeed Nafisii in the same year, Suleiman Hayyim’s Persian and English dictionary of proverbs from 1955, and Seyed Kamaluddin Mortazaviyan’s publication of proverb stories in 1961. Further enriching its content are contributions from Seyyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh’s dictionary of slang words from 1921 and Mohammad Hossein Ibn Khalaf Tabrizi’s ‘Decisive Proof’ dictionary released in 1963. Moreover, it integrates wisdom from Sa’di’s renowned works ‘Golestan’ and ‘Bostan’ from the seventh century, along with a collection of proverbs curated by Amirqoli Amini in 1960 (Sharifrad 2024).

In contrast, the renowned American Proverb Dictionary, overseen by Wolfgang Mieder as editor-in-chief, alongside Stewart A. Kingsbury and Kelsie B. Harder as editors, emerged in 1992 through Oxford University Press (Sharifrad 2024). This collection boasts 15,000 American proverbs, serving as a groundbreaking compilation primarily derived from oral traditions rather than written sources. This compilation marked a significant milestone in capturing English proverbs rooted in spoken language (Sharifrad 2024).

Initially, the collected proverbs underwent separate classification and systematic analysis. Each Persian proverb was attributed to separate perception verbs in Persian

and English. The specific page number and source in Yusuf Jamshidipour’s Dictionary of Persian Proverbs (hereinafter referred to as ‘Jamshidipour’) was specified (Sharifrad 2024, 78). Similarly, the American proverbs were detailed with their respective page numbers in Wolfgang Mieder’s Dictionary of American Proverbs (hereinafter referred to as ‘Mieder’) (Sharifrad 2024, 78). This detailed analysis aimed to address three specific research questions, focusing on Persian and American embodiment proverbs that shared common perception verbs like ‘see,’ ‘smell,’ ‘hear,’ ‘touch,’ and ‘taste.’

The Persian embodiment proverbs were transliterated and glossed based on the Leipzig Glossing Rules² and then they were translated into English. An interlinear gloss³ refers to a line of the original text and its translation into another language. When a text is glossed in this manner, each line of the original text is accompanied by one or more corresponding lines of transcription. These glosses serve as a literal, word-for-word translation of the source text that helps the reader understand the relationship between the source text and its translation, as well as the structural elements of the original language. For instance, based on Leipzig Glossing Rules, PL refers to Plural, OM refers to Object Marker in the Persian Language, PST refers to past, etc. Following this, the literal translation was made and then a comparison was drawn between the Persian and American proverbs including perception verbs, examining their frequency, framing, grammatical construction, and speech function.

A. PROVERBS INCLUDING TWO SAME-PERCEPTION VERBS

A-Double See

(1) Persian Proverb

بالات رو دیدیم زیرت را هم دیدیم (Jamshidipour-P.49 & P.78)

bālāt rā didim, zirat rā ham didim
top OM see-PST.3PL bottom OM see-PST.3PL

Lit. We saw your top, we also saw your bottom
‘Actions speak louder than words’

Framing: loss-framing
Grammatical Construction: declarative sentence
Speech Act Function: complaint

When an individual consistently makes empty promises and repeatedly delays acting, the expression “I saw you above, I saw you below” is used in reference to them.

² <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf>
³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interlinear_gloss

The reference to the upper and lower parts is metaphorical, symbolizing the visible and concealed aspects of a person rather than being taken literally.

There is a story behind this proverb: one day, a beggar approached a house and knocked on the door. The homeowner, at that moment, was on the roof and responded, "If I were downstairs, I would have given you something." The following day, the beggar knocked on the same door again, but this time the homeowner was downstairs and said, "If I were up on the roof, I would have given you something." In response, the beggar wittily remarked, "We observed you when you were on the rooftop, and we observed you when you were downstairs." This pointed out the inconsistency in the homeowner's excuses and highlighted the beggar's keen awareness. Embodiment Proverbs in Persian (Estelah Farsi. Accessed on December 17, 2023).

(2) Persian Proverb

پیغمبر دیده را ندیده نگرفت (Jamshidipour-P.86)

Peyqambar dideh rā nadideh nagareft

Prophet see-PTCP OM NEG.see-PTCP NEG.get.3SG

Lit. The prophet did not see what he didn't see

'Seeing is believing'

Framing: loss-framing

Grammatical Construction: declarative sentence

Speech Act Function: statement

This proverb underscores that no matter how discerning and wise a person may be, they cannot overlook or disregard something that is clearly and unmistakably evident. So, the "prophet" is not meant to be taken literally but is used metaphorically to represent a person with extraordinary insight and exceptional judgment. As stated in one of the teachings of prophet: "We judge based on outward appearances, and God is the one who knows the secrets of people's hearts" (Hawzah. Accessed on December 17, 2023).

(3) Persian Proverb

ندید بدید وقتی که دید به خودش چید (Jamshidipour-P.254)

Nadid badid vaqti ke did be xodaš cid

NEG.see see-PST.3SG when see-PST.3SG brag-PST.3SG

Lit. He/She didn't see, He/She saw, but when he/she saw, he/she placed it on themselves

'You never know what you have until it's gone'

Framing: loss-framing

Grammatical Construction: relative clause

Speech Act Function: statement

This proverb implies that individuals may not grasp the full significance of something until they have personally encountered it. The metaphorical notion of “placing it on themselves” after “seeing” signifies assuming responsibility for their newly acquired understanding.

(4) Persian Idiomatic Expression or a Poetic Verse- Parable

نو دیدیم نو زمان دیدیم هفت ساله عروس لب بام دیدیم (Jamshidipour-P.259)

No didim no zamān didim haft sālē arus lab-e bam dididm

New see-PTCP.3PL new time see-PTCP.3PL seven bride near roof see-PST.3PL

Lit. We've seen the new things, we've seen new era, we've seen a seven-year-old bride on the rooftop

'We've seen it all, even the kitchen sink'

Framing: gain-framing

Grammatical Construction: declarative sentence

Speech Act Function: statement

This proverb is employed in response to encountering unexpected and astonishing occurrences, even those as unconventional as witnessing a seven-year-old bride on a rooftop, which is considered highly unusual in traditional Iranian culture. It communicates the idea that life is brimming with unforeseen events and underscores the importance of being prepared for the unexpected. The verb 'see' is a metonymy for experiencing unexpected events.

(5) American proverb

See yourself as others see you (Mieder-P.530)

Framing: gain-framing

Grammatical Construction: imperative clause

Speech Act Function: direct advice

Individuals may not possess a comprehensive awareness of their impact on others. This proverb acts as a reminder to remain aware of the impact that our actions and words have on others and to modify or improve them when necessary. The figurative aspect of this saying employs a metaphor that does not pertain to physical sight but rather pertains to the cognitive and emotional process of self-reflection and considering how one is perceived by others. There is a Persian idiom which has the same message:

آيينه رويآ كجا دارد؟

Ayene-ye royā kojā dārad?

Mirror dream where has Q

Lit. Where does the mirror of dreams have?

This phrase is used to prompt self-reflection and is often understood as ‘Where can you find a mirror to reflect your dreams?’

B-Double Smell

(6) American proverb

They that smell least smell best (Mieder-P.548)

Framing: loss-framing

Grammatical Construction: relative clause

Speech Act Function: statement

This proverb implies that individuals who display modesty and humility tend to leave a better impression on others. In essence, it promotes the idea that people should let their virtues and actions speak for themselves instead of trying to gain attention through boasting or self-promotion. So, it is a straightforward statement that conveys its meaning directly.

C-Double hear

(7) American proverb

What you hear never sounds half so important as what you overhear
(Mieder-P.290)

Framing: loss-framing

Grammatical Construction: conditional clause

Speech Act Function: statement

The proverb straightforwardly asserts its meaning without the use of figurative language. It emphasizes that information obtained indirectly, like accidentally overhearing or eavesdropping, can hold more significance than what is openly shared or communicated to you.

D-Double Touch

There is no double touch verb in the Persian dictionary of Jamshidipour or in the American dictionary of proverbs by Wolfgang Mieder.

E-Double Taste

There is no double taste verb in the Persian dictionary of Jamshidipour or in the American dictionary of proverbs by Wolfgang Mieder.

B. PROVERBS INCLUDING TWO DIFFERENT PERCEPTION VERBS

A-See and Hear

(8) American proverb

Better seen than heard (Mieder- P.530)

Framing: avoidance-framing

Grammatical Construction: declarative sentence

Speech Act Function: indirect advice

This proverb emphasizes the value of demonstrating or proving something through actions, conduct, or achievements rather than relying solely on verbal statements. There is a Persian proverb that not only has the same meaning but also the same perception verbs.

شنیدن کی بود مانند دیدن

šenidan key bovad mannd-e didan

Lit. Hearing is not as the same as seeing

(9) American proverb

Hear, see and be silent (Mieder-P.290)

Framing: avoidance-framing

Grammatical Construction: imperative clause

Speech Act Function: direct advice

This proverb encourages the practice of being an effective listener and a keen observer to acquire knowledge and insights. It implies that valuable insights can be acquired through listening to and seeing one's surroundings. In addition, it suggests being silent, especially when speaking may not have a positive impact on the situation.

3. Data Analysis

The analysis of data delved into the frequency, framing, grammatical construction, and speech function of these collected Persian and American embodiment proverbs. To address the first research question, the total number of embodiment proverbs ex-

tracted from the Persian and American dictionaries of proverbs is 9 proverbs including 5 Persian embodiment proverbs and 4 American embodiment proverbs. According to Table No.1, the total number of Persian embodiment proverbs including double *see*, is 4, but the total number of American embodiment proverbs including double *hear*, *see* and *smell* are 3, 3, and 1, respectively.

Table No. 1. Embodiment proverbs include two same-perception verbs

Body parts	Touch	Taste	Hear	See	Smell
Persian Proverbs	-	-	-	4	-
American proverbs	-	-	3	3	1
Total frequency	0	0	3	7	1

So, the total number of double *see* in American and Persian proverbs is 7 which shows that the frequency of *see* is more than the other perception verbs, especially in Persian proverbs.

Embodiment proverbs including two different Perception verbs were only available in American proverbs, and it was related to the perception verbs ‘see & hear’. The frequency was only 2 proverbs in Examples No. 8 and 9.

To address research question 2, the grammatical construction of American proverbs has more variety than Persian proverbs, while the grammatical construction of Persian proverbs contains more declarative sentences than conditional, imperative, or relative clauses.

Table No. 2. Grammatical Construction of proverbs includes two same-perception verbs

Grammatical Construction	Persian		English	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Relative Clause	1	20%	1	25%
Conditional Clause	0	0	1	25%
Declarative Sentence	3	60%	1	25%
Imperative Clause	1	20%	1	25%
Verbless Sentence	0	0	0	0
Total	5	100.0	4	100.0

Regarding research question 3, the speech function in Persian proverbs are statement (3), complaint (1), and direct advice (1), and there was no direct or indirect warning. The speech functions in American proverbs are statement (2), indirect advice (1), direct advice (1), and there was no complaint or direct and indirect warning. To summarize, the following symbols show the results clearly.

Persian proverbs: statement > complaint ≥ direct advice
American proverbs: statement > direct advice = indirect advice

To address research question 4, the framing in Persian proverbs is loss-framing (3) and gain-framing (2), but the speech acts function in American proverbs are loss-framing (2) and avoidance-framing (2). To summarize, the following symbols show the results clearly.

Persian proverbs: Loss-framing > Gain-framing

American proverbs: Loss-framing > Avoidance-framing

4. Conclusions

The examination of the proverbs highlights 'see' and 'hear' as the most common used perception verbs in both Persian and American proverbial languages. While shared universal embodiment and cultural elements foster similarities across languages, there is space for culture-specific interpretations, leading to the creation of distinct linguistic expressions. As the aim was to consider the Persian and American embodiment proverbs including perception verbs, it is obvious that no verbless sentence is available as grammatical construction while the frequent grammatical construction of Persian proverbs is declarative sentences and American proverbs have a different variety of grammatical construction. Predominantly, the speech function observed in both Persian and American proverbs revolve around statements and advice, conveyed in direct or indirect manners. 'Loss-framing' emerges as a common framing technique in these proverbs. Interestingly, despite similarities in ideas, disparities arise in the choice of perception verbs between certain Persian and American proverbs. Ultimately, for portraying a mood or situation, nothing surpasses the efficacy of a proverb in capturing them precisely. Thus, integrating embodiment proverbs into your language holds the capacity to greatly enhance its appeal and skillfully engage an audience.

5. Limitations of Study

This research compared the frequency, grammatical construction, speech function, and framing of Persian and American embodiment proverbs including double perception verbs. So, this makes the number of proverbs limited for comparison and consequently, the result is not consistent. If further research considers and compares Persian proverbs and American proverbs including even a single perception verb, the results will be more reliable than the comparison of proverbs with double perception verbs. It is also suggested that the other Persian dictionary of proverbs should be considered to find whether the same results for the Persian proverbs including double perception verbs will be concluded.

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