

An Analysis of the Cognitive Dimension of Proverbs in English and Spanish: the Conceptual Power of Language Reflecting Popular Beliefs

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In this paper I examine the role of generic cognitive mechanisms in language structure and use through an analysis of proverbs related to dogs in English and Spanish. I give an outline of proverb cognition based on universal principles, which constitutes an alternative view to that of Lakoff & Turner (1989), and is in line of Ruiz de Mendoza (1999b: 54), who puts forward a more economic and motivated conceptual model. Besides, by means of a corpus of study I carry out contrastive cognitive and sociolinguistic analysis between English and Spanish proverbs. Such analysis shows how proverbs share a common underlying schema of cognition, while they reflect different cultural beliefs. Thus, proverbs constitute a rich resource to analyse the way we process experience and conceptualise the world. The conclusion can be reached that proverbs are a conceptual universal phenomenon with high communicative and cross-cultural value.

1. Introduction

In this work, I try to clarify the mental mechanisms that work in proverbs and I discuss my views on their specific/universal nature. After this I make a comparative analysis between English and Spanish proverbs, which leads me to conclude that they are a conceptual universal phenomenon, with high communicative and instructive power. Even more, they constitute an interesting and informative source of folk knowledge.

The study of proverbs has been approached from many different points of view: personal, formal, religious, cultural, cognitive, etc. In this work I adopt a cognitive, a social and a pragmatic view. On the one hand, the cognitive view permits to access the universal principles that underlie the cognition of proverbs. On the other, the social and pragmatic view allows us to look beyond the linguistic structure of proverbs in order to explore the reach amount of background knowledge and cultural beliefs they portray.

Cognitively, proverbs are **mentally economical**, since from one particular situation presented in them we can understand many others. Besides, we can activate a whole scene about a certain event in our minds just through the allusion to a relevant fact or moment of this one. For instance, in the proverb *Blind blames the ditch* (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 162) we have a whole scenario in which a blind person has fallen into a ditch and so he/she is blaming it for that fact, without realising that his/her condition is what prevented him/her from not falling. The proverb takes us to the moment when the blind has already fallen, but we can imagine the whole event, starting from the moment in which the blind was walking and had not still arrived to the ditch. Going further, this can be applied to any situation in which someone blames others for their own restrictions.

Pragmatically, proverbs are used for communicative purposes and we need **pragmatic reasoning** in order to understand them. That is, they are used with a certain communicative aim that transcends their linguistic form and meaning. Besides this, they reflect an implicit typology of patterns of reasoning or argument. For this and other reasons, proverbs are interesting to study, since through them we can extract many ideas on how we think, how we conceptualise and categorise the world, and how we transmit traditional folk knowledge from generation to generation.

2. Outline of Proverbs Cognition

2.1 *How proverbs work.*

For the interpretation of proverbs, according to Lakoff (1989) we have the **Great Chain Metaphor**. It is composed of the **Generic Is Specific** metaphor, which picks out from specific schemas common generic-level structure; the **communicative maxim of Quantity** (“Be as informative as is required and not more so”), which limits what can be understood in terms of what; and the interaction between the Great Chain and **the Nature of Things**.

Deriving from the Great Chain of Being we encounter the **People Are Animals** metaphor, which is also present in many proverbs. The Great Chain Metaphor’s power lies on its availability for a big variety of situations with the same generic-level structure. Thus, the proverb ‘Big thunder, little rain’ can apply to a barking dog and to a person or even to the weather itself, and the English proverb ‘All bark and no bite’ will apply to practically all similar situations, except to dogs, unless it is not metaphorical.

2.2 *Metaphoric or metonymic?*

Lakoff (1989) defines proverbs as metaphoric in nature, but recently there have been some studies that oppose to this view, and defend that they are metonymic. Metonymy is as much an important cognitive mechanism as metaphor: in both of them we find a mapping process, either from a source domain to a target domain or from a target domain to a source domain. According to Ruiz de Mendoza (1999b: 54), the limits between metaphor and metonymy are not very clear, since we can use metaphors predicatively or metonymies referentially, and we can give a potential metonymy a metaphoric trait, among other things. In fact, the only distinguishing criterion between metaphor and metonymy is that metonymic mappings are domain internal -they hold a domain inclusion relationship- while domain external mappings are proper of metaphors - that is, mapping takes place across domains. This explains why authors like Kövecses & Radden (1999) and Panther & Thornburg (1999) seem to defend the view that metonymy is essential for the interpretation of proverbs. In relation to this, Ruiz de Mendoza considers that the relationship between the two Idealised Cognitive Models (hereafter ICM’s) present in proverbs (specific and generic) are in a stand-for-relationship. Then, instead of the Generic Is Specific metaphor we would have the **Specific for Generic** metonymy, applied to a particular situation through the Generic Is Specific mapping. Proverbs would therefore consist of a source-in-target metonymy involving domain expansion.

The importance of the relationships which hold between ‘generic’ and ‘specific’ in the organisation and processing of information was first noted by Lakoff and Turner (1989). These authors, however, granted these relationships metaphorical status. More recent accounts (Kövecses and Radden, 1999; Panther and Thornburg, 1999) have convincingly argued that the generic/specific distinction is metonymic in nature, ‘specific’ being a subdomain of ‘generic’. In addition to this observation, we note that the relationship between these two ICM’s is not an identifying one but rather of the ‘stand-for’ kind. Kövecses and Radden (1999: 34) have already hinted at the importance of these metonymies for the interpretation of proverbs (Ruiz de Mendoza 2001b: 4).

Therefore, proverbs make use of high-level metonymies, which are the ones that implement generic ICM’s (which are abstractions of non-generic ICM’s).

2.3 *Conceptual interaction patterns in proverbs.*

Goosens (1990) distinguishes four patterns of interaction between metaphor and metonymy, which Ruiz de Mendoza (1999b) summarises in two, as a result of the distinction he makes between source-in-target and target-in-source metonymies: “one, in which the output of a metaphoric mapping provides the source for a metonymy, and another, in which a metonymic mapping provides the source for a metaphor” (1999a: 19). From all these patterns, the metonymic expansion of the source of a metaphor provides the relevant material for the construction of a metaphoric mapping which will produce a generic space. Therefore, these two patterns of interaction are relevant when we deal with proverbs, since they allow for the use of the Specific For Generic metonymy that constitute proverbs.

An example of it is: ‘Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion’. For the *head of a dog* part, we have a metaphorical understanding of leaders as being the head of a body, in terms of the basic metaphor Control Is Up, so by virtue of this metaphoric understanding, we can map part of an animal that is physically up (the head) onto that of a person, which is physically, and in turn metaphorically up, and still preserve the generic-level structure. Here, the Great Chain metaphor interacts with one basic metaphor: Control Is Up, and with a metonymy of the source-in-target kind, the Specific For Generic one, which involves domain expansion: *head* stands in a subdomain relation with *person*. In this case it stands for the person that has a leading role.

2.4 *Generic-level structure and the Extended Invariance Principle.*

The source domain of the People Are Animals metaphor is developed through a source-in-target metonymy. This metonymy structures a mental space to make the mapping from a specific to any generic situation that will be the source domain – or part of it – of the metaphor. We have two input spaces, one created by the metonymy and the other derived from the specific situation to which the metonymy applies.

In my view, the source-in-target metonymy in proverbs dealing with many-correspondence metaphors does not provide all the elements of conceptual structure needed to create a generic space which permits the metaphoric mapping, but it just highlights, as I have just said, what is relevant to understand such metaphoric mapping. The generic space is built upon a different basis from the input space created by that metonymy, which develops just

one of the correspondences. Thus, the generic structure which shares such properties to make the relation between domains possible is taken from the source and from the target domains of the metaphor as a whole, from all the correspondences.

Related to all this, the Extended Invariance Principle formulated by Ruiz de Mendoza (1998a: 263) gives systematicity to the cognitive processes which underlie such phenomena. It says: "Metaphorical mappings preserve the generic-level structure of the source domain in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain." Ruiz de Mendoza (1998a: 265) redefines it in order for that principle to make the convergence of more than one cognitive domain possible without violating the generic-level structures of any of them: "All contextual effects motivated by a metaphoric mapping will preserve the generic-level structure of the source domain and of any other input space involved, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain." Thus, we have the convergence of the Generic Is Specific metaphor and the People Are Animals one, together with any ICM, either abstract or not, which appears in metonymies.

2.5 The universality and specificity of proverbs: implications.

What is universal about proverbs is the cognitive mechanisms speakers use in order to produce, understand and transmit them, which we have already explained from the Great Chain Metaphor Theory (GCMT) perspective. Now, if we let the cultural perspective interfere, we may state that The Great Chain metaphor is a cultural model which defines attributes and behaviour applying to humans, animals, plants, complex objects, and natural physical things, as we have seen before.

Lakoff & Turner (1989: 193-194) present different metaphorical schemas that show how we conceive animals, and how we apply this folk knowledge to the construction of metaphorical schemas. Thus, we can understand people in terms of lower-order forms of being or even understand these lower-order forms of being in terms of human attributes and behaviour. According to them, the domain of animal life is one of the most elaborate ones, which we use to understand the human domain. This is important for proverb analysis and interpretation. They present some common propositions that take place in schemas for animals:

- (1) - Pigs are dirty, messy and rude.
- Lions are courageous and noble.
- Foxes are clever.
- Dogs are loyal, dependable and dependent.
- Cats are fickle and independent.
- Wolves are cruel and murderous.
- Gorillas are aggressive and violent.

These are metaphorical propositions within schemas[...]. Our folk understanding of what these animals are like is metaphorical[...] It is so **natural** for us to understand non-human attributes in terms of our own human character traits that we often have difficulty realising that such characterisations of animals are metaphorical Lakoff & Turner (1989: 194).

According to this quotation, Lakoff & Turner (1989) seem to assume that this folk knowledge that is behind proverbs is natural, and so universal. In my opinion, the fact that it is so overspread and so deeply rooted in a wide variety of cultures does not mean that it is

natural. It is a convention, no matter how spread it is, and therefore, it is subject to possible changes. Then, these metaphorical propositions are not universal, but common to many societies. This is what makes many proverbs coincide, if not in the perspective or in the form, at least in the message along different cultures in the world. Hatch and Brown (1995) have convincingly argued that although we think proverbs are bound to culture, there are many with equivalents across cultures. But even if we do not have the same proverbs, we can interpret them if we encounter them for the first time, because of their universal underlying mental mechanisms.

We may say, in relation to this, that we have two types of proverbs (Orbaneja y Majada 1998): those with a common, universal morality, guide for the practice of virtue, similar in all countries, if not in the form, at least in the message; and those which are particular, born from a historical fact, a local custom or a specific event. They have their own identity signs which characterise the place or time of origin.

From my view, proverbs are always a result of social, cultural, political values, and the only difference between ones and others is their range of extension along countries and societies. This previous distinction is, in any case, useful for the sake of this work, since I intend to extract some similarities and differences from a corpus of English and Spanish proverbs, in order to arrive to some conclusions that show how proverbs reflect social values. Lakoff & Turner's (1989: 213) is quite catastrophic in this respect:

For whatever reason, perhaps because in our early cognitive development we inevitably form the model of the basic Great Chain as we interact with the world, it seems that the Great Chain is widespread and has a strong **natural** appeal. This is frightening. It implies that those social, political, and ecological evils induced by the Great Chain will not disappear quickly or easily or of their own accord.

Proverbs are understood in relation to a background of assumptions and values, so they are primarily a social phenomenon. Context is essential for their correct interpretation, because they provide a message in an indirect way. They are learned through social interaction and for social purposes, and they promote social values. I doubt whether proverbs reflect social values or transmit them, but in any case we can learn many things about a specific culture just by looking at them.

3. Comparison of proverbs in English and Spanish

3.1 Introduction

Proverbs, like species, evolve. They are vast in imagery, they are familiar, and easy to learn. Apart from their cultural range, their lifetime varies enormously. In this piece of work I have selected proverbs related to dogs just for the purpose of reducing the scope of proverbs to analyse.

In the cultural model of the Great Chain, we have hierarchies that are not merely descriptive, but also instructive. They transmit to us how the world should be 'ideally' organised. The basic Great Chain concerns the relation of human beings to lower forms of existence. In this scale, animals are prototypically characterised by their instinctual behaviour, though according to our commonplace knowledge, higher animals like dogs have

also interior states as desires, emotions and limited cognitive ability, like memory. According to the Great Chain metaphor, all these attributes will lead to a specific behaviour. If we join the Generic Is Specific metaphor, we will be able to understand human traits in terms of animal ones. This allows for the creation of metaphorical schemas about different animals, such as the one shown above. Dogs, according to this, are portrayed as dependable, dependent and loyal. With this information in mind, I focus on those proverbs.

We can have different types of proverbs, with respect to the metaphors used in them. All of them make use of the Generic Is Specific metaphor, but we may find proverbs with animals as protagonists – so there is also the People Are Animals metaphor – and others where animals are just participants or even they are absent from the proverb. An example of dogs being participants is in the Spanish proverb: ‘*Quien da pan a perro ajeno, pierde pan y pierde perro*’, which maps any particular person –expressed through the indefinite pronoun *quien* – to whoever can be in that situation. In general we note that in Spanish we find more proverbs of that type than in English, while in English it is more frequent the representation of people through animals. In Spanish we also have more religious metaphors, such as ‘*A quien Dios pare bien, la perra le pare lechones*’, and a more frequent use of the elements of nature, that is, there seems to be a more frequent use of the **Extended Great Chain**.

3.2. Corpus of study

My corpus has been extracted from a number of compilations of proverbs, both in English and in Spanish: Carbonell (1996), Flavell (1997), Junceda (1998), and Canalleda (2001). Out of all these, I have decided to delimit my scope of research in order to provide this piece of research with more accuracy and more detailed explanatory and descriptive power. Thus, I have selected those proverbs where dogs are the protagonists – those where we find the People Are Animals metaphor – at least in one of the two languages I am dealing with. The corpus analysed is provided in Figure 1 below:

SPANISH	ENGLISH
1.-[<i>A cada pajarillo le llega su veranillo</i>] [<i>A cada santo le llega su día de fiesta</i>]	1.-Every dog has his day
2.- <i>A los galgos del rey no se les escapa la liebre</i>	2.-...
3.- <i>A otro perro con ese hueso, que yo roído lo tengo</i>	3.-...
4.- <i>A perro flaco todo son pulgas</i>	4.-[<i>The weaker has the worst</i>] [<i>An unhappy man's cart is eith to tumble</i>]
5.- <i>Al perro que duerme no le despiertes</i>	5.- <i>Let sleeping dogs lie</i> [<i>When sorrow is asleep, wake it not</i>]
6.- <i>A perro viejo no hay tus tus</i>	6.-...
7.- <i>Borracha está la ladra: tres días ha que no perra</i>	7.-...
8.- <i>Can con rabia con su dueño traba/a su amo muerde</i>	8.-...
9.- <i>Can que mucho lame saca sangre</i>	9.-...

10.-De casta le viene al galgo ser rabilargo	10.-...
11.-El mejor amigo, un perro	11.-A dog is a man's best friend
12.-El perro del hortelano ni come las berzas ni las deja comer	12.-...
13.-El perro en el barbecho ladra sin provecho	13.-...
14.-El perro ladra, pero la caravana pasa	14.-The dogs bark but the caravan goes on
15.-El perro viejo no ladra en vano -El perro viejo cuando ladra da consejo	15.-An old dog barks not in vain -If the old dog barks, he gives counsel
16.-[En todas partes se cuecen habas]	16.-In every country dogs bite
17.-Ládreme el perro , y no me muerda	17.-...
18.-Los perros , hermanos; y los ganaderos, extraños	18.- Dog does not eat dog
19.-Los perros de Zurita, no teniendo a quién morder, uno a otro se mordían [El diablo, cuando no tiene nada que hacer, mata monas]	19.-The dog that is idle barks at his fleas
-[Loro viejo no aprende a hablar]	20.-You cannot teach an old dog new tricks
-Más vale perro vivo que león muert	21.-A living dog is better than a dead lion
22.-[Más vale ser cabeza de ratón que cola de león]	22.-Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion
23.-Menea la cola el can , no por ti, sino por el pan	23.- Dogs wag their tails not so much in love to you as to your bread
-Muerto el perro se acabó la rabia - Perro muerto no muerde ni ladra	24.-Dead dogs bite not [Dead men don't bite]
25.-Nunca perro en casa de herrero	25.-...
26.- Perro alcucero nunca buen consejero	26.-...
27.- Perro ladrador poco mordedor [El gato maullador, nunca buen cazador]	27.-Barking dogs seldom bite
28.- Perro que muchas liebres levanta, pocas mata Perrillo de muchas bodas no come en ninguna por comer en todas Galgo que a dos liebres corre a ninguna coge [Quien mucho abarca poco alcanza] [No se puede estar en la misa y en la procesión]	28.-...

Figure 1 Corpus of analysis

Notation: [...]: There is no a dog proverb but there is a correspondent one
 ...: There is no correspondent proverb in the language

3.3 General comparative analysis

- We have more proverbs with dogs in Spanish than in English. In Spanish, the word *dog* has three equivalents: *perro*, which is the most general one; *can*, which is given a negative connotation of hunger or anger (in proverbs 8, 9, 23) and so it represents negative aspects of people; and *galgo*, which is more tied to hunting activities, so it is related to the nobility, who was the social class who could afford to practice that kind of activity in the days when those proverbs must have appeared (2, 10, 28). All this contradicts Lakoff's metaphorical schema about dogs (1989), which are for him naturally seen as loyal, dependable and dependent, and argues instead for the specificity of culture in this respect. This demonstrates that it is not the view we have of animals or of the elements of the Great Chain what is universal, but the metaphorical structure of proverbs, our mental schemas with which we build up our representation of reality, though then we categorise it in different ways.
- In Spanish proverbs we also find more of them related to hunger, food, the harvest or hunting (2, 3, 12, 13, 16, 18, 23, 27, 28) than in English (18, 23), what may be explained by the fact that when those proverbs were created the situation in Spain was worse, there was a crisis and it is known that people usually talk about those things they lack, as the Spanish proverb 'Dime de qué presumes y te diré de qué careces' illustrates.
- In Spanish proverbs we also note the presence of religious metaphors (1, 19), in the sense that they deal with religious or superstitious affairs, whereas in English we find that their equivalents deal with dogs. As we see, it is more frequent in English the representation of people with animals (higher use of the Basic Great Chain), while in Spanish the presence of God or of abstract things is more marked (higher use of the Extended Great Chain). In Spanish, nevertheless, we find more proverbs which use alternative animals (1, 20, 22, 27) instead of dogs, though the proverbial expression keeps still the same form as for the rest of it.
- Something that is also interesting is the mentioning of drunkenness in a Spanish proverb (7). Although in the corpus presented here there are not more instances about it, Spanish proverbs do frequently mention wine, drunkenness, alcohol in general, which is also a particular sign of our culture.
- In this corpus we can also note the personification of abstract elements such as feelings (5) and the appearance of man as representative of human kind (4, 24), in English, which in Spanish have equivalent versions with the People Are Animals metaphor.

All the differences presented by now show different perspectives used in these metaphorical constructions, different cultural scripts, but they share the underlying deep meaning in most cases and all of them are invariably composed through the same mental mechanisms: metaphor and metonymy.

For instance, in 'Better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion' compared to 'Más vale ser cabeza de ratón que cola de león', the same cultural script and the same metaphors and metonymies are present, what only varies from one to the other is the animal (*ratón* for *dog*, which represent both 'someone not too important'). Even they share the same form and the social values promoted coincide.

We may also have different cultural scripts in proverbs in one or other language, so the proverb would be culturally specific, such as 2, which appeared as an irony against the hunting of the king of the epoch (Felipe II), who arranged the hunting so that his dogs always found the here. There is no equivalent version in English then.

3.4 Pragmatic and sociolinguistic analysis

In this section I carry out an analysis of those original Spanish proverbs whose English counterparts are based on a different pragmatic scenario, or which do not have a correspondent dog proverb in English, as well as of those original English proverbs for which there is not any Spanish correspondent dog proverb. First of all, something that must be noted is that in the cases in which there is an original English dog proverb which does not have a Spanish dog proverb counterpart, we find other alternative proverbs in Spanish based on a different metaphor, though transmitting the same message with a similar ICM. This is the case of proverbs in 1, 16, 20, and 22. In 1, 20, and 22 there is just a change in the animal that acts as protagonist in the metaphor. Thus, we still keep the People Are Animals metaphor. In 16, on the other hand, the Spanish counterpart does not make use of such metaphor, but of a high-level metonymy, where the impersonal and concrete action of cooking beans is used to represent a more abstract situation: the fact that everybody has to face difficulties in life, in all parts of the world. This proverb is still based on the Great Chain Metaphor, within which we encounter the specific for generic metonymy (see Point 2.2).

Secondly, it is also interesting to note the fact that in the case of existing original Spanish proverbs related to dogs for which there is not a correspondent one in English, it is more frequent the complete lack of an English proverb than the availability of a proverb related to other pragmatic scenarios. This happens in 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 25, 26, and 28. This shows a higher tendency in Spanish to use proverbs to represent how speakers deal with certain life experiences. Going further, if we examine the message these proverbs transmit, we can see that there are certain coincidences with respect to their pragmatic and social meanings. Proverbs 2, 3, 6, and 10 are all of them built around a common idea: the fact that age makes people get experience and lose innocence. In this case, then, the People Are Animals metaphor works to identify a dog's age with a person's age and to relate it to experience. With respect to proverb 7, it has been commented above, and it shows one feature of Spanish culture: the socially accepted custom of drinking alcohol and getting drunk. Drinking alcohol may be something common in many cultures, but the difference between the English and the Spanish ones is that in the English culture it is not so openly and so socially accepted as something funny and positive. With respect to the rest of proverbs, each of them contains a different message related to folk knowledge, which is not specifically related to Spanish culture, but to people's behaviour and way of being.

The fact that English lacks a proverb to represent certain attitudes and situations does not imply that such attitudes do not exist in the English culture. Rather, it simply indicates that in Spanish people are more concerned with them. According to Lakoff (1987), language is a conceptual phenomenon. This means that it depends on experience. That is, we talk about what we live, about our life experiences, and about what calls our attention. Thus, for instance, a proverb 9, which can literally be translated as 'A dog which licks you too much makes you bleed', means that it is not good to flatter anyone in excess, that being too affectionate can result in the opposite effect, and offend the other person.

With respect to those English proverbs for which there is not Spanish counterpart, in the case of the corpus analysed we do not have the case. We only have the possibility of lacking a correspondent dog proverb, but we have another proverb with an alternative pragmatic scenario, as said above.

After this analysis, we can obtain the idea that in the Spanish language there is a higher tendency to represent popular beliefs through proverbs. This does not mean that English does not have a wide range of proverbs. In fact, this conclusion is valid for this piece of research, but it may be biased by the corpus of study used. Thus, a wider study would be necessary in order to prove whether this tendency is applicable to proverbs in general, instead of just to proverbs where dog are the basic elements. Further studies in this line are then welcome.

3.5 Cognitive analysis of some proverbs

Despite the cultural differences we may have seen before, all proverbs show a common metaphorical schema, which is shown in Figure 2. This demonstrates that what varies across cultures are scripts, the view of reality, categories, but not the way we categorise, or the way we think or structure it in our minds.

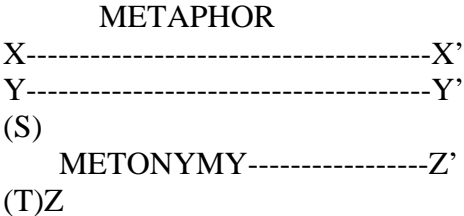


Figure 2 *General schema for proverbs: metonymic expansion of one of the correspondences of the source domain of a metaphor*

First, we present in Figure 3 a proverb which exists just in Spanish – number 2 in our corpus – since it was born from a particular cultural anecdote:

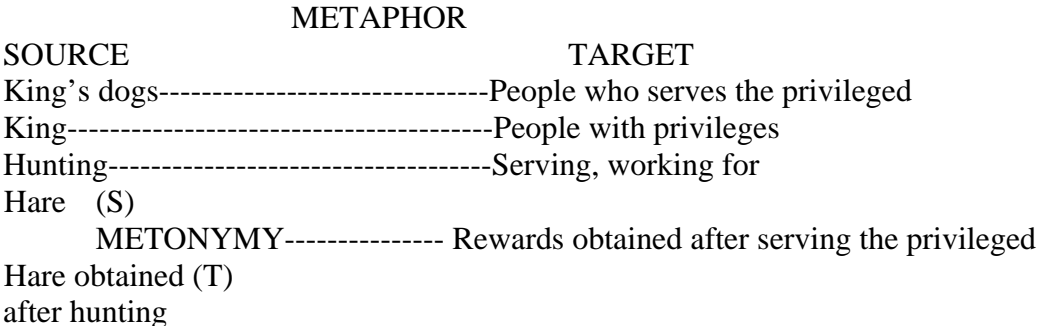


Figure 3 *Metaphorical schema of 'A los galgos del rey no se les escapa la liebre'*

The next proverb to be analysed (1) does have an equivalent one in Spanish but it shows different cultural scripts: ‘Every dog has his day’. As we can see in the corpus, in Spanish its equivalents show a different perspective: a religious metaphor is one of them (‘A cada santo le llega su día de fiesta’), and the other one shows the same cultural scripts, but there is just a different animal (‘A cada *pajarillo* le llega su veranillo’). The form is the same in all of them. This simply shows that a good, dependable person who will always be rewarded is represented by different figures: a dog, a little bird or a Saint, which acquire the same metaphorical values. Therefore, in all of them the underlying mental schemas are the same, as Figures 4, 5 and 6 illustrate:

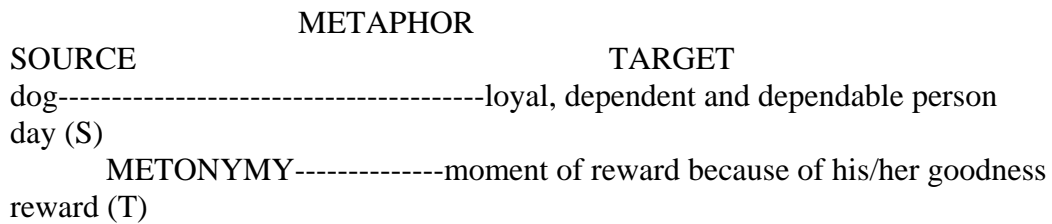


Figure 4 *Metaphorical schema of ‘Every dog has his day’*

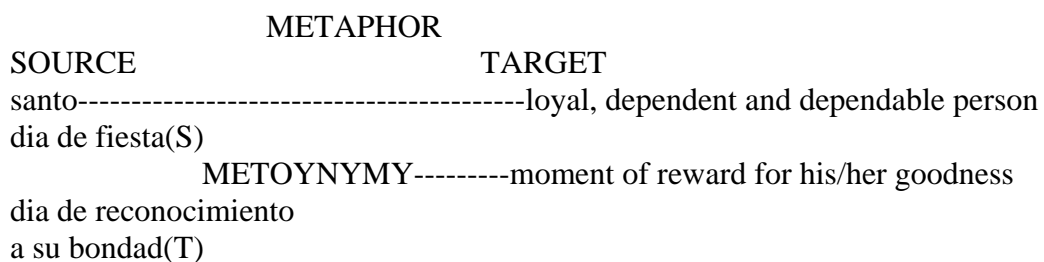


Figure 5 *Metaphorical schema of ‘A cada santo le llega su día de fiesta’*

In ‘A cada *pajarillo* le llega su veranillo’, *pajarillo* is equivalent to *dog*, it is seen metaphorically in the same way as a noble, good animal. This is emphasised by the endearing suffix *-illo*.

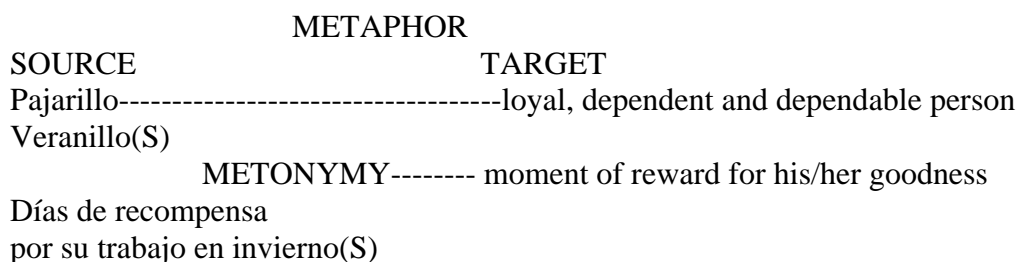


Figure 6 *Metaphorical schema of ‘A cada pajarillo le llega su veranillo’*

4. CONCLUSION

In this article I have aimed at showing some insights into the role of generic cognitive mechanisms in language structure and use. Through this brief cross-linguistic examination of metaphorical and metonymic phenomena in proverbs has served to demonstrate that they lie on cognitive and pragmatic universal principles. Besides, by looking at the social meaning they convey, I have found evidence for the systematic process of conventionalisation that takes place in proverbs throughout different languages. Such process involves a number of cognitive mechanisms that have been analysed. This kind of study has also served to understand how grammatical resources are developed in them.

I defend the view that, though proverbial expressions may vary across cultures and may express different cultural scripts, they show that the cognitive mechanisms speakers use in order to understand and to produce them are the same. Nonetheless, a further study on languages other than English and Spanish would provide evidence for their universal systematicity. Finally, it is important to note the interest and usefulness of proverbs. They are highly economic resources to transmit ideas, and thus, they are pragmatically efficient. Even more, they are informative for anyone who wants to have access to the traditions and to the popular beliefs of a community of speakers. For this, they are also extremely valuable for sociolinguistic purposes.

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