

The study of semantic frames of external body part terms in Persian language¹

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Abstract

This article studies 14 semantic frames of external body part words in Persian. Semantic frame is a knowledge structure required for understanding the meaning of a word or related set of words. Unlike internal body parts (e.g. heart, brain and bones), external body parts (e.g. arm, leg, head and trunk) are observable and can be delineated, therefore their referential meanings seem perfectly clear. Frame semantics is an approach to the study of word meaning or lexical semantics, which holds that lexical meaning can only be properly studied and described considering a particular body of knowledge, known as frames. This theory provides a powerful tool to study lexical meaning. As Evans (2007: 193) puts it “a given word foregrounds a particular part of the semantic frame to which it is relativized, and yet cannot be understood without the other elements which make up the frame. One consequence of this is that a word provides a route through a particular frame. That is, as words relate to slots in the frame, they

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directly relate certain elements within a frame". Two questions then arise: 1) how are the principal frames pertaining to body parts are represented in Persian language in terms of syntactic or morphological structures? 2) What are the semantic elements of these frames? The aim of this study is to recognize semantic domain of body part terms in Persian and to present its realizations in morphology and syntax. For this purpose lexicographic data is mainly used. Considering the body part frames of English on FrameNet as a model, the same frames extracted for Persian language using a Persian dictionary. As a rule of thumb, if a word was defined by reference to a body part, it was concluded that it was related to body frame (e.g. blink: involuntary shutting and opening of the eye). The Findings reveals that among the body-related frames, one of them is the central frame (containing core elements like hand, arm, foot, leg and head), through which other frames are related to body parts, including: 1) body decoration (nail varnish, tattoo), 2) body harm (slap, kick), 3) body part description (black-eyed, ponytail), 4) disease (leprosy, acne), 5) cloth and clothing (gloved, put on a hat), 6) holistic body description (muscular, bony), 7) posture (cross-legged, lying down), 8) body movement (nodding, limp), 9) sense (smell, touch), 10) accessory (belt, earring), 11) body-based sign (handshake, wink), 12) body surface (mole, scar), 13) body care (brushing, shaving). The study also reveals that body frame manifestation is either explicit (e.g. eye, head, lip, foot, hand) or implicit (e.g. kick: foot, brush: tooth, hear: ear). The explicit manifestation of body frame includes a body part word used in word formation processes to make a new word (e.g. eye in eyelash, finger in fingerprint). It is also possible for body frame to be implicitly present in the sense of a word which becomes explicit in the definition of words (kick: to hit someone or something with your foot, smell: something that you notice by using your nose). The main explicit morphological and syntactic structures representing body frame are 1) in phrases and sentences describing an action or an entity related to body, e.g. *češme žaponi* (Japanese eye). 2) in noun formation as in *gardan-band* (lit. neck-tie) (necklace), *dahanšuje* (lit. mouth-washer) (mouth lotion). 3) in adjective formation as in *češmi*, an adjective meaning related to the

eye, *Gatreje češmi* (eye drop), *labsuz* (*lit. lip-burner*), an adjective meaning the quality of a liquid which is very hot and enjoyable. 4) in compound verb formation as in *gush dadan* (*lit. ear-giving*) (to listen), *pa kardan* (*lit. foot-doing*) (put on shoes). The data also reveals the implicit presence of body frame. The main morphological and syntactic structures representing body frame implicitly are: 1) simple nouns as in the definition of *mesvak* (toothbrush): an oral hygiene instrument used to clean the teeth, gums, and tongue. 2) simple verb as in the definition of *xarandan* (to scratch): to rub your finger nail hard on part of your skin. 3) simple adjectives as in the definition of *Guz* (hump): a round raised part on a person's or animal's back. 4) compound adjectives as in the definition of *sijahčorde* (dark skin). The same study may be carried out for internal body part words. The universality of body part terminology across languages of the world has made it an interesting domain of research. The present article sheds light on some aspects of this domain in Persian language.

Key words: Frame semantics, semantic frames, body part term frames, external body part terms.