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HEAD AS A CONTAINER IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN – A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE³

ABSTRACT: Within the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy Theory in this paper we aim to establish the ways the CONTAINER image schema is used in the conceptualisation of *head/glava* in English and Serbian to see whether these conceptualisations are shared in the two languages or, alternatively, whether they manifest any cross-conceptual and cross-linguistic differences. The corpus of our analysis has been compiled from various monolingual and bilingual English and Serbian dictionaries as well as dictionaries of idioms and idiomatic expressions in both languages. The main hypothesis of the paper is the following: since the mind is embodied and human concepts are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains, we expect to find little difference in the conceptualisation of *head/glava* as a container between English and Serbian. However, since the mind is also enculturated, i.e. culturally constructed and is filtered through specific languages, we hypothesise that the differences will mainly manifest not at the conceptual level, but in the linguistic instantiations in the two languages.

Key words: CONTAINER image schema, conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, head, English, Serbian.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987; Barcelona 2000; etc.) and Conceptual Metonymy Theory (Radden & Kövecses 1999; Radden 2000; Barcelona 2000; etc.), in this paper we set out to contrastively explore the ways in which the CONTAINER image schema is used in the conceptualisation of *head/glava* in English and Serbian to

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see whether these conceptualisations are shared in the two languages or, alternatively, whether they manifest any relevant cross-conceptual and cross-linguistic differences.

The corpus of our analysis has been compiled from various monolingual and bilingual English and Serbian dictionaries as well as the dictionaries of idioms and idiomatic expressions in both languages.⁴ As a rule, such reference books contain conventionalised and lexicalized expressions, which “constitute an integral part of the way speakers [of both languages] think and express themselves daily” (Gutiérrez Pérez 2008: 29). This, in turn, forms a solid basis for a comparative and a cross-linguistic exploration into the two languages, English and Serbian. In our opinion, conventionalised, lexicalised or dead metaphors, often metonymically based, being “*automatic, unconscious mappings, pervasive in everyday language*” (Barcelona 2000a: 5), provide ample evidence to support or refute our starting hypothesis: since the mind is embodied and human concepts are crucially shaped by our bodies and brains, we expect to find little difference in the conceptualisation of *head/glava* as a container between English and Serbian. However, since the mind is also enculturated, i.e. culturally constructed and is filtered through specific languages, we hypothesise that the differences will mainly manifest not at the conceptual level, but in the linguistic instantiations in the two languages. In our analysis we follow the methodological principles for the identification and description of conceptual metaphors in expressions which contain lexemes *head/glava* proposed by Barcelona (2001).

According to the main tenet of contemporary cognitive science metaphor is not only a matter of language but, much more importantly, a matter of thought and human cognition (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1987, etc.) which pervades our everyday lives. In Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as initiated and propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is no longer regarded as a mere textual, stylistic decoration, an ornamental figure of speech that only contributes to the expressiveness of the text, which was mainly the case in traditional rhetoric. Instead, metaphor is now understood as a figure of *thought*, a partial mapping from a familiar *source domain* onto a less familiar *target domain*. The TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN formula describes the metaphorical connection between the two domains, where complex and abstract concepts (target) are thought of and talked about in terms

4 A list of all consulted dictionaries is provided in the Reference section of the paper.

of conceptually simpler and more concrete notions (source), more closely related to our physical, embodied experience (e.g. LOVE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS MONEY, etc.). However, while *metaphor* is now used as the equivalent to *conceptual metaphor*, *linguistic metaphor* (more commonly known as a *metaphorical expression*) is the linguistic realisation of a particular conceptual metaphor.

Metaphor as a cognitive model has so far attracted much more scholarly attention than metonymy, “although [metonymy] is probably even more basic to language and cognition” (Barcelona 2000a: 4). The last two decades, however, have witnessed several important contributions to Conceptual Metonymy Theory, as originally proposed by Radden and Kövecses (1999) (see also e.g. Radden 2000; Barcelona 2000, Panther & Thornburg 2003, etc.). While metaphor includes a projection from one conceptual domain onto another conceptual domain, metonymy, on the other hand, is understood as a conceptual projection whereby one domain is partially understood in terms of another domain included in the same experiential domain (Barcelona 2000). It is, therefore, an intradomain phenomenon (Deignan 2005: 73). Because of the difference in the number of domains used for the conceptual mapping between metonymy and metaphor (one versus two domains of experience), a metonymy is said to be based on *contiguity*, i.e. on elements that are parts of the same idealised cognitive model⁵, while metaphor is based on *similarity* between two domains of experience.

However, despite the above mentioned, seemingly clear-cut, difference between metaphor and metonymy, the two cognitive mechanisms “often ‘meet’ at conceptual and linguistic crossroads” (Barcelona 2000: 1). Therefore, a strict difference between them cannot be drawn easily. As has already been mentioned, according to some authors metaphor and metonymy “differ only in the nature of the domains involved: in metaphor we find two conceptual domains while in metonymy there is a domain-subdomain relationship” (Díez Velasco 2001/2: 48). Many authors now point out that all metaphors are essentially metonymically-based (see e.g. Barcelona 2000; Radden & Kövecses 1999; Niemeier 2000; etc.), defining a metonymy-based metaphor as “a mapping involving two conceptual domains which are grounded in, or can be tracked to, one conceptual domain” (Radden 2000: 93).

5 Lakoff (1987) argues that idealised cognitive models help us structure our knowledge. They are relatively stable mental representations which represent theories about the world and which guide cognitive processes such as categorisation and reasoning.

Since our contrastive analysis of HEAD and GLAVA metaphors has shown that they are, in a vast majority of cases, metonymy-based, we shall use the notion of metonymy-based metaphors throughout the text that follows. In the next section our focus is on the notion of *image schema* as understood in the field of Cognitive Linguistics, where the CONTAINER image schema will be dealt with in greater detail.

2. THE CONTAINER IMAGE SCHEMA

The concept of image schema, as understood in Cognitive Linguistics, is one of the most significant mechanisms for metaphor construction. In Cognitive Linguistics, image schema is understood as an embodied prelinguistic structure of experience that motivates conceptual metaphor mappings, playing an important part in our understanding of the world. Image schemas are important since they “help to explain how our intrinsically embodied mind can at the same time be capable of abstract thought. As patterns of sensory-motor experience, image schemas play a crucial role in the emergence of meaning and in our ability to engage in abstract conceptualization and reasoning that is grounded in our bodily engagement with our environment” (Johnson 2005: 15). Image schema is defined as “a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programmes that gives coherence to experience” (Kövecses 2006: 207) and “without which our experience would be chaotic and incomprehensible” (Johnson 1987: xix). Image schemas “make it possible for us to use the structure of sensory and motor operations to understand abstract concepts and draw inferences about them” (Johnson 2005: 24). They are “gestalt structures, consisting of parts standing in relations and organized into unified wholes, by means of which our experience manifests discernible order” (Johnson 1987: xix). As our focus here is on the CONTAINER image schema, we provide the kind of bodily experience which causes the emergence of this schema, give a list of its structural elements and explain its underlying logic.

Johnson claims (1987: 21) that “[o]ur encounter with containment and boundedness is one of the most pervasive features of our bodily experience.” Kövecses (2006: 209) argues that the bodily experiences that motivate the existence of the CONTAINER image schema, although varied, may be reduced to two general types of experience. Firstly, our bodies are containers – they contain our body organs,

blood, other fluids, etc. Secondly, we function “within larger objects as containers” (Kövecses 2006: 209), such as buildings, rooms, forests, which contain us. It is mainly the former type of experience that we focus on in this paper, dealing with the head as a container in English and Serbian.

Three structural elements make up the CONTAINER image schema: “interior”, “exterior” and “boundary”, and “it is the organization of [its] structure that makes [it] experientially basic meaningful pattern in our experience and understanding” (Johnson 1987: 61). Kövecses (2006: 209) explains the basic logic of the CONTAINER image schema thus: “Everything is either inside the container or outside it. Moreover, if B is in A and C is in B, then one can conclude that C is in A.” Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 32) claim that the CONTAINER schema is “a gestalt structure, in the sense that the parts make no sense without the whole”. Also, all major parts of the human body may be seen as containers (see, e.g. Yu 2009, Niemeier 2000, etc.) with the boundaries and the contents they carry, which may be emptied, spilled, poured, etc. The CONTAINER image schema, therefore, is inherently embodied.

It is our aim here to establish whether HEAD/GLAVA is conceptualised in the same way in English and Serbian as a consequence of the shared physical experience we as human beings have with this indispensable part of our body, reflected in the use of the CONTAINER image schema. By conducting a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analysis of the HEAD expressions in English and Serbian, an attempt will be made to check the validity of the idea that human mind is embodied and that the folk model of head serves the purpose of conceptualising various human actions, feelings and activities, as well as to show how metaphor, metonymy and the CONTAINER image schema have a decisive role in understanding the meaning of expressions which contain the lexemes *head/glava* in them.

3. HEAD/GLAVA IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN – THE ROLE OF THE CONTAINER IMAGE SCHEMA

In the CONTAINER schema, the head is metaphorically understood as “a three-dimensional entity that can hold things inside” (Díez Velasco 2001/2: 53), meaning that the head is conceptualized as a bounded space with its inside and outside where content is stored. Kövecses (2002: 156) claims that “[a]s a rule, we are more interested in the content of a container than in the mere container so that we commonly find

metonymies that target the content via the container rather than the reverse metonymic relationship.”

Thus, *head/glava* expressions are frequently used “to refer to the head’s presumed content, that is the brain, the mind, human ratio, intelligence” (Niemeier 2008: 358). In fact, the head is conceptualized as a container which, similar to any other container, may be filled with certain content. Thus, it is possible to say both in English and Serbian: *in my head, inside my head, it never entered my head, to fill somebody’s head, u glavi, napuniti glavu nečim*, etc. which clearly indicates the metaphorical structuring of the head as a container. When you have something in your head (*imati nešto u glavi*) in Serbian it means that your brain resides inside the head metaphorically described as a container, which in turn guarantees rational behaviour of the head’s owner. Moreover, when the expression *pamet u glavu* (get smart) is used in Serbian for telling someone to be cautious prior to making an important decision or a major step in life, this advice may in effect be explained as the need for *putting the brain in one’s head*, which in turn presupposes the lack of it, i.e. an empty container.

Many head expressions may frequently “focus either on [the head’s] fullness vs. emptiness or on the dynamic process of filling or emptying it” (Niemeier 2008: 363). In the next section we deal in greater detail with the expressions in English and Serbian which are based on an empty or a full head metaphorically structured as a container.

3.1. Emptiness vs. fullness

In the expressions where the focus is on the emptiness or fullness of the head, the head metonymically stands for the content inside the container. According to the shared cultural model of the head, which claims that the head is the locus of reasoning, if a head is hollow (*šuplja glava*) or empty (*prazna glava, empty headed*), and if, at the same time the head stands for the person, then these expressions focus on the lack of brain inside this person’s head (the head conceptualized as a container is without any content), which, in turn, rests on the activation of another metonymy, BRAIN FOR INTELLECT/REASON. Therefore, the head “is primarily seen as the locus of rational thought, standing in opposition to emotions” (Niemeier 2008: 358).

In addition, the filling of someone’s empty head i.e. the head metaphorically

structured as a container without its content, is perceived as making that person forcefully accept someone else's opinion or a point of view, as illustrated in expressions such as *to fill someone's head* in English or *napuniti glavu nekome nečim* in Serbian, or *put something into somebody's head* in English. Other expressions, both in English and Serbian indicating an attempt to persuade someone include: *get it through somebody's head*, *get it into somebody's head* and *utuviti nekom nešto u glavu*. These expressions show that it is necessary to somehow forcefully make room for a thought/idea/opinion in somebody's head if we want to convince them of something, while the reason for the difficulty of putting the content into someone's head is its (the container's) thickness. The reverse is also true, according to some expressions in both languages: if we want to remove the undesirable content from somebody's head, we need to do it forcefully, although the content is accessible both to the owner of the head and other people. This may be instantiated by the following expressions: *izbiti iz glave* ['beat something out of someone's head'], *get/put something out of someone's head*, etc.

3.2. Overfullness

A number of head expressions both in English and Serbian metaphorically refer to the situation when the head is overfilled with its content, whatever this content may be. In this case, the content starts adversely affecting the head (=intellect and judgement), so that the person loses their ability to think clearly and logically or behave sensibly, as indicated in expressions such as *ideas buzzing in my head* or *glava mi buči (šumi)*, *u glavi mi buči (šumi)*. The noise which is thus generated by the content too big for the head threatens to overspill the boundaries of the head conceptualised as a container and jeopardise logic and intelligence. Likewise, if the content of the head is negative (such as *worries/brige*), as in *She's been filling my head with new ideas* or *glava mi je prepuna briga*, then it affects the status of the whole organism and its proper functioning and not just the head as an isolated part of the human body. This state of overfullness may become so intense that the head is jeopardised and may experience a major injury, as instantiated by the Serbian expression *puca mi glava* ['my head is cracking']. In English, such a metaphorical conceptualisation, in addition to the literal one (He *cracked his* head on the pavement

and was knocked out) does not have its verbal exponent, although there is a similar one, *my head is exploding*.

3.3. Memory

A very typical and expected connection is found between the head as a container and memory as its content. Information is stored in the head and, should a need arise, may be retrieved in a variety of ways. The neutral act of storing information in both English and Serbian is linguistically expressed in phrases like *keep something in your head* or *držati u glavi*. Furthermore, in situations when it is not so easy to remember something, the content of the head is treated in a number of ways. It may be forcefully put inside someone's head as in the English expression *beat something into someone's head*, or it may be poured into the container as in *uliti u glavu*.

On the other hand, while information retrieval in Serbian is conceptualised as the movement of the content out of the container (*govorio je iz glave*, i.e. he easily remembered the necessary information and did not use any notes), or into the container (as in *doći nekome u glavu*, meaning 'to remember or occur'), in English phrases like *off the top of one's head* indicate that the information retrieved is already placed outside of the container, or more precisely on its top. When it is difficult to retrieve a piece of information, the content of the head is moved around and shuffled until the desired information is found, as in the Serbian expression *preturati po glavi* or *mućnuti glavom*. Alternatively, if the person wishes to stop thinking about something or someone, they need to *get it out of their head*, Serbian expression being *izbaciti nekog/nešto iz glave*. A part of the head's content needs to be removed as this will mean wiping out of memory and lead to oblivion.

3.4. Intellectual ability

Generally speaking, both in English and Serbian, the content of the head mainly refers to intellectual ability, intelligence and reason, thus again confirming the existence of the shared folk model of the head in both languages. This time the head is conceptualised as a container which holds a certain content and as a locus for various intellectual activities that take place inside the container. The former type of conceptualisation is realised in metaphorical expressions such as *a good head for*

languages, where the head is understood to be a high quality container with a high quality content. There are also expressions like *get something in your head*, meaning ‘to understand something’, and in Serbian *imati nešto u glavi* or *imati u glavi*, i.e. ‘to be smart’. If, on the other hand, the head is seen as a locus for intellectual activities, then the person *does something in their head*, i.e. calculates something mentally, or, the Serbian equivalent, *računa u glavi*.

Lack of intellect and intelligence also belongs to this group and usually implies that there is no content in the head. Hence expressions like *empty-headed* in English or *nema ništa u glavi* in Serbian, i.e. lacking intelligence or knowledge. Furthermore, if the content of the head is not orderly, this is also a sign of impaired or lowered intellect or intelligence, such as in *He’s not right in the head*, or *You need your head examined* in English, or *fali mu daska u glavi* in Serbian.

3.5. Other types of content

Other contents of the head are also determined according to the person’s behaviour or characteristics. Hence, a person’s silly behaviour is conceptualized in Serbian as that person having bugs or flies in their head (*imati bube/mušice u glavi*) instead of a brain which performs intelligent activities. Another atypical content of a person’s head is *success*, which is found in linguistic expressions in both languages, where in English a person’s head is *big* or *swollen* because of success, or in Serbian, fame, money or popularity entered someone’s head and made them conceited (*slava mu udarila u glavu*). Finally, the content of the person’s head can be affected by substances such as alcohol or drugs (*The champagne went straight to my head/ Udario mu je alkohol u glavu*).

4. THE HEAD AND THE PERSON

Both English and Serbian are languages in which it is possible to say ‘the head and the body’ (*glava i telo* in Serbian), which means that the head may be conceptualized, in the sense of its being a physical entity, as (1) a part of the body with which it forms a coherent whole; and (2) a separate entity, which exists independently of the rest of the body (cf. Wierzbicka 2007: 16). Nevertheless, the most basic meaning of *head*, both in English and Serbian, refers to the top part

of the human body. This basic meaning of the head, however, is frequently used metonymically so that the head stands for the whole person, thus realising the BODY PART FOR PERSON metonymy (Barcelona 2000b: 6), which, in turn, is activated by the overarching PART FOR WHOLE metonymy (more traditionally called *synecdoche*). This is surely a unique characteristic of the head to stand for the body as a whole, unlike some other body parts which seem not to be sufficiently prominent or relevant to perform that metonymic role.

The HEAD FOR A PERSON metonymy is very frequently chained to the previously explicated metaphoric conceptualisation, the HEAD IS A CONTAINER, both in English and Serbian. In this metonymy, the content of the container is metonymically linked with the person, i.e. the properties of the head stand for the relevant and most salient properties of the person (physical and/or mental). This metonymy, in fact, is the condensation of two more basic and general metonymies, CONTENT FOR CONTAINER and PART FOR WHOLE. The content of the head (e.g. the mind) is metonymically linked to the container, the head, which is in turn metonymically linked to the person. Let us illustrate this metonymy by several examples from both languages: in Serbian, *prazna glava* [‘empty head’], *šuplja glava* [‘hollow head’], respectively standing for a stubborn, unintelligent and stupid person, as well as *empty head* in English.

A conceptualisation of the head as a container is also reflected in expressions *tvrda glava* in Serbian and (to have a) *thick head* in English, which conceptualise the head as an object, a solid object construed out of certain hard material so that the content which is supposed to reside in someone’s head (ideas, thoughts, plans, rational attitudes, etc.) cannot enter the container, all content remaining outside it, although the underlying logic of the head as a container presupposes contents filling it (Maalej 2008: 400). *Tvrda glava* and *thick head*, therefore, may refer to an obstinate, stubborn person whose head, metonymically standing for that person, does not allow new ideas to enter its interior, nor does it allow the existing ideas to leave it, all this being prevented by the hardness of the container, i.e. the head.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine some aspects of the CONTAINER image schema in English and Serbian used in conceptualisations of the *head/*

glava, as evidenced by various metaphorical and metonymic expressions containing this lexeme. Lakoff claims that “[m]etaphorical mappings vary in universality; some seem to be universal, others are widespread, and some seem to be culture-specific.” (Lakoff 1994: 245). On the basis of our analysis, we may say that, generally speaking, both in English and Serbian, the content which resides in a person’s head mainly refers to intellectual ability, memory, intelligence and reason, thus confirming the existence of the shared folk model of the head in both languages. Naturally, since two languages belong to two different cultures, the notion of the head necessarily needs to be differently conceptualised or filtered by the respective cultures. These differences, however, are mostly manifested on the linguistic rather than on the conceptual level, which is mainly due to the fact that our minds are embodied and that our physical experiences with our bodies to a great extent determine the way we perceive the world around us.

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GLAVA KAO **SADRŽATELJ** U ENGLESKOM I SRPSKOM JEZIKU – KOGNITIVNO-LINGVISTIČKA ANALIZA

Sažetak

Koristeći teorijski okvir pojmovne metafore i pojmovne metonimije, u ovom

radu pokušavamo da ustanovimo na koje se načine slikovna shema SADRŽATELJA koristi u konceptualizaciji glave u engleskom i srpskom, kao i da li su ove konceptualizacije iste, slične ili različite u ova dva jezika. Korpus za rad zasniva se na rečničkom materijalu, tj. na nekoliko jednojezičnim i dvojezičnim rečnicima engleskog i srpskog jezika, kao i na rečnicima idioma, fraza i izreka. Hipoteza od koje se u radu polazi glasi da neće biti velikih razlika u konceptualizaciji glave kao sadržatelja u engleskom i srpskom pošto su ljudski pojmovni sistem i um utelovljeni. No, pošto na um takođe utiče i kultura, koja se odražava na realizacije konceptualizacija na jezičkom nivou, razlike između ova dva jezika će mahom postojati na jezičkom nivou. Analizom je utvrđeno da se pamćenje, intelekt i razum konceptualizuju kao najtipičniji sadržaji glave, pri čemu se glava poima i kao mesto gde se odvijaju intelektualne aktivnosti i pohranjuju važne informacije. Netipični sadržaji glave jesu: mušice, buka, šum, brige, uspeh, alkohol, itd., što se uklapa u kulturni model glave kao mesta rezervisanog prvenstveno za intelektualne aktivnosti. Time je potkrepljena početna hipoteza rada o postojanju neznatnih razlika između engleskog i srpskog u ovom pogledu, i to uglavnom na jezičkom a ne pojmovnom nivou.

Ključne reči: slikovna shema SADRŽATELJA, pojmovna metafora, pojmovna metonimija, glava, engleski, srpski.