

The concept of LEFT (čap) in the lingual consciousness of the Persian native speakers

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Abstract. In the frameworks of modern anthropocentric linguistics the researches focused on explicating the semantics of conceptual binary oppositions inherent in various cultures are of particular interest. The "right-left" binary together with other oppositions such as "up-down", "far-near", "good-bad", "self-other", etc. belongs to basic cultural oppositions derived from ancient archetypical concepts. The paper explores the concept of LEFT (pers. "čap") as a part of the "right-left" binary existing in the Persian lingual consciousness and by this example represents the methodic of studying concepts based on combining the cognitive linguistics approach with psycholinguistic experiment.

Keywords: binary opposition, cognitive approach, conceptual structure, lingual consciousness, psycholinguistic experiment

The anthropocentric paradigm in humanitarian knowledge, which came into being on the edge of XX-XXI centuries, caused an increasing attention from linguists towards the problems of human status, his communication with other people, and conceptualization of his outer and inner world. The issues of the world conceptualization are mainly discussed within two relatively new fields in linguistics, namely cognitive linguistics and cultural linguistics. Cognitive linguistics regards linguistic phenomena as products of human experience; its main focus is on how human beings comprehend, manipulate and metaphorically extend meanings. The cognitive approach to studying natural languages creates new opportunities for investigating conceptual structures of human consciousness [7; 12]. Cultural linguistics focuses on interrelationships between language, culture, and conceptualization, taking into account that various cultures provide different perceptions of reality and that languages reflect such variations [13; 5]. Cultural approach in linguistics is referred to the theory by W. von Humboldt, conception by Leo Weisgerber, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, and works by others researchers who claim that each language community has its own worldview, different from that of other groups.

Among researches concerning the expression of cultural information by linguistic signs, the works focused on explicating the semantics of conceptual binary oppositions inherent in the consciousness of representatives of various linguistic and cultural communities are of particular interest. One of these oppositions is the "right-left" binary which together with other oppositions such as "up-down", "far-near", "good-bad", "self-other", etc. belongs to basic cultural oppositions derived from ancient archetypical concepts. Great attention towards binary oppositions within the frames of relatively new linguistic streams is explained by the fact that these oppositions are being thought as powerful tools to elucidate the fundamental structure of human consciousness, culture, and language [4; 9; 8]. The content of this opposition in the Persian lingual consciousness has not been studied yet.

The goal of this paper is to determine the content of the concept of LEFT as a part of RIGHT-LEFT binary in the Persian lingual consciousness on the basis of psycholinguistic experiment conducted with Persian native speakers and further cognitive interpretation of its results. Thus, the main approach of this paper is based on combination of two methods – cognitive and psycholinguistic – involved

in the process of reconstructing certain conceptual structures in human consciousness.

It is well known that in most cultures and languages "right" is almost always thought of positively, whereas "left" is negatively connoted. This fact is usually explained as the outcome of universal human evaluation process, partly based on the principle of embodiment [11]. The article is also aimed to prove or deny this observation regarding the concept of LEFT in the Persian language and culture.

Interest toward the Persian "right-left" binary was induced by need of better understanding conceptual binary "truth-lie" (pers. "rāsti-doruq"), which we studied before. The necessity appeared due to the word "rāst" – one of the main lexical representatives of the Persian concept of TRUTH – which is poly-semantic and beside the meaning "truth" possesses at least four additional meanings, viz.: 1) strait, of no deviations; 2) actual, real; 3) righteous; 4) right [1, p. 1111]. Bearing in mind that analysis of responses to this stimulus demonstrated considerable actualizing of the meaning "right", the problem appeared how and to which extent the concept of RIGHT correlates with its opposition – the concept of LEFT within the structure of the Persian lingual consciousness. Therefore with the view to determine real psychological content of this conceptual binary we appealed to the Persian native speakers.

In our research psycholinguistic experiment was carried out in its two variants. At the first stage in the process of the free associative experiment (AE) the list of 20 words-stimuluses including the word "čap" (left) was read for the respondents – mostly students of Tehran State University. The task was to write down the first word-response to each word-stimulus. At the second stage the method of "direct explanation" or "expanded word definition" was applied (see [2, p. 77-78; 3, p. 199]) when the Persian native speakers were asked to explain their own understanding of the listed words. On the basis of the AE data there was formed an "associative field" (AF) of the examined concepts. Their "semantic field" (SF) was molded after the results of analysis of submitted expanded predications. Then the data were processed and interpreted corresponding to their rank frequency.

The Associative Field (AF) of the word-stimulus "čap" (left) is structured traditionally – from the stimulus towards the response; at first having fixed the core (most frequent responses), and then – the periphery (less frequent and single responses) of the AF. Number of the

respondents who reacted to the stimulus in appropriate way is specified in the breaks. When processing the results of AE it was decided to combine the responses after semantic similarity or derivative relations. Therefore all responses, which were in the mutual relations of synonymy or derivation and expressed the same idea, were enclosed to same group. In the AF specified below at first one can see the responses combined after the mentioned method, and then – one-word responses.

AF of the word-stimulus "čap" (left)

I – Responses combined on the basis of semantic similarity or derivative relations:

Related to righteous, truth (13): *rāst* correct, right (7), *moxālef-e rāst* opposite to right (3), *rāsti* truth (2); *qeyr-e rāst* not right (1); **politics** (12): *komunism* communism (3), *siyāsat* politics (2), *eslāhtalab* reformer (2), *jenāh-e siyāsi* political wing (2), *čapgarā* follower of left doctrine (1), *rāstgarā* follower of right doctrine (1), *hezb-e siyāsi* political party (1); **side** (8): *samt-e čap* left side (3), *jehat* side (3), *samt* side (1), *taraf* side (1); **hand, left handed** (8): *dast* hand (3), *čapdasti* to be left handed (2), *man čapdast-am* I am left handed (1), *dast-e čap* left hand (1), *čapdast* left handed person (1); **curvature** (6): *kaj* bent (3), *kaži* curvature (2), *rāh-e kaj* crooked way (1); **different** (5): *motafāvet* other, different (1), *motafāvet budan* be different (1), *dārā-ye afkār-e motafāvet* someone of different mind (1), *bar aks* vice versa (1), *fekr-e čap* left (different) opinion (1); **evil** (5): *badi* evil (3), *bad* bad (2); **way** (4): *rāh* road (1), *masir* route (1), *rāh-e qalat* wrong way (1), *birāhe* roaming (1); **street** (2): *xiyābān* street (2); **worry** (2): *gij* worried (1), *gijkonande* misleading (1); **do not like** (2): *dust nadāram* I don't like (2);

II – One-word responses:

ehsās feeling, *enherāf* deviation, *badbaxti* bad luck, *bidin* disbeliever, *tāriki* darkness, *tasādof* traffic accident, *jahannam* hell, *halqe-ye ezdevāj* wedding ring, *xatkeš* ruler, *dā'eš* Islamic State (terrorist organization), *rānande* driver, *sāz* music instrument *saz*, *šeytān* Shaytan, devil, *saxt* heavy, *kenār* bank, shore, *qalb* heart, *qiyāmat* Dooms Day, *kosxol* fool, *koneš* action, step, *māh* month, *nāmomken* impossible, *vājeguni* overturn

Rejected (9). Subtotal: 89+ 9.

According to the dictionary of the Persian language by Hasan Anvari (2003) the word "čap" possesses nine meanings, viz.: 1) side or direction Westward when facing North (opposition to right); also corresponding side of human body; 2) (polit.) one who demands quick social changes or follower of socialism and communism; 3) cross-eye; 4) different; rival, foe; 5) musical term; 6) pocket; 7) curved, not straight; overturned; 8) (mil.) military term; 9) left handed [1, p. 785]. Results of our experiment prove that the following six meanings (or lexical-semantic variants) of the word "čap" (lef) are most actualized in the Persian lingual consciousness:

1) **side, direction** (28 units = 31,46%): *rāst* right (7), *jehat* direction (3), *samt-e čap* left side (3), *moxālef-e rāst* opposite to right (3), *xiyābān* street (2), *rāsti* truth (2), *taraf* side (1), *samt* side (1), *halqe-ye ezdevāj* wedding ring (1), *rāh* road (1), *qeyr-e rāst* not right (1), *qalb* heart (1), *kenār* bank, shore (1), *masir* route (1);

2) **left in Politics** (12 units = 13,48%): *komunism* (3), *siyāsat* politics (2), *eslāhtalab* reformer (2), *jenāh-e siyāsi* political wing (2), *čapgarā* follower of left doctrine (1),

hezb-e siyāsi political party (1), *rāstgarā* follower of right doctrine (1);

3) **crooked, not straight, overturned** (11 units = 12,36%): *kaj* bent (3), *kaži* curvature (2), *enherāf* deviation (1), *tasādof* traffic accident (1), *xatkeš* ruler (1), *rānande* driver (1), *rāh-e kaj* crooked way (1), *vājeguni* overturn (1);

4) **left hand, left handed** (8 units = 8,99%): *dast* hand (3), *čapdasti* to be left handed (2), *čapdast* left handed (1), *dast-e čap* left hand (1), *man čapdast-am* I am left handed (1);

5) **different, opponent** (5 units = 5,62%): *bar aks* vice versa (1), *dārā-ye afkār-e motafāvet* one of different mind (1), *fekr-e čap* left (different) idea (1), *motafāvet* another, different (1), *motafāvet budan* to be different (1);

6) **musical instrument** (1 unit = 1,12%): *sāz* musical instrument (1);

7) **connotative meanings** (24 units = 26,97%): *badi* evil (3), *bad* bad (2), *ehsās* feeling (1), *badbaxti* bad luck (1), *bidin* disbeliever (1), *birāhe* roaming (1), *tāriki* darkness (1), *jahannam* hell (1), *dā'eš* Islamic State (1), *dust nadāram* I don't like (2), *rāh-e qalat* wrong way (1), *saxt* difficult, hard (1), *šeytān* Shaytan, devil (1), *qiyāmat* Dooms Day (1), *kosxol* fool (1), *koneš* action, step (1), *gij* worried (1), *gijkonande* misleading (1), *māh* month, *nāmomken* impossible (1).

Thus, of 89 non-zero responses 65 ones explicate 6 meanings of the word "čap" (left). Other 24 responses are those, which either realize connotative meanings of this word, or demonstrate pure associations to it. Of them 20 units or 83% are of negative connotation.

In order to classify all responses in formal way we divided them into several groups depending on the type of response, namely: paradigmatic, syntagmatic, thematic, evaluative, and personal. *Paradigmatic* responses demonstrate that the word-stimulus and the certain response may be in any of the following states: co-ordination, sub-ordination, super-ordination, or antonymy. Obviously in the process of determination of the paradigmatic responses lexical-semantic variants (LSV) of the word-stimulus should be taken into account. In *syntagmatic* relations we face appearance of the word-stimulus and the word-response as parts of one syntagma. *Thematic* association explicates the possibility of the both words to play the semantic roles of actants in certain situation i.e. they could be used together within the frameworks of thematically limited context. *Evaluative* associations demonstrate attitude and evaluations of the respondent towards the idea expressed by the word-stimulus. *Personal* responses shall mean those referring to own experience of the respondent (e.g. I love it) (see [6; 2]). The results of the formal classification of the collected responses are as follows:

– paradigmatic (45 units = 45,92%): **LSV 1:** *jehat* direction (5), *moxālef-e rāst* opposite to the right (4), *rāst* right (9); **LSV 2:** *čap dar siyāsat* left wing (12); **LSV 3:** *kaj* crooked (6), *vājeguni* overturn (1); **LSV 4:** *dast* hand (3); **LSV 5:** *motafāvet* other, different (4); **LSV 6:** *sāz* musical instrument "saz" (1);

– syntagmatic (8 units = 8,16%): *samt-e čap* left side (3), *čapdasti* to be left handed (2), *čapgarā* follower of the left doctrine (1), *dast-e čap* left hand (1), *fekr-e čap* left idea (1);

– thematic (20 units = 20,41%): *xiyābān* street (2), *ehsās* feeling (1), *enherāf* deviation (1), *badbaxti* bad luck (1),

- tāriki* darkness (1), *tasādoḡ* traffic accident (1), *jahannam* hell (1), *halqe-ye ezdevāj* wedding ring (1), *xatkeš* ruler (1), *dā'eš* Islamic State (1), *rānande* driver (1), *rāh* road (1), *šeytān* devil (1), *qalb* heart (1), *kenār* bank, shore (1), *masir* route (1), *qiyāmat* Dooms Day (1), *koneš* action, step (1), *māh* month (1);
- evaluative (13 units = 13,27%): *badi* evil (3), *bad* bad (2), *bidīn* disbeliever (1), *birāhe* roaming (1), *rāh-e qalat* wrong way (1), *saxt* difficult, hard (1), *kosxol* fool (1), *gij* excited (1), *gijkonande* misleading (1), *nāmomken* impossible (1);
 - personal (3 units = 3,06%): *dust nadāram* I don't like (2), *man čapdast-am* I am left-handed (1).

To form the semantic field (SF) of the word "čap" (left) all explanations collected after completion of the experiment's 2nd stage were divided into several "semantic subdivisions" comprising all types of language units of similar meaning: separate words, combination of words, parts of sentences, and phrases. The basis for such division was a provision used in Cognitive linguistics regarding particularities of cognitive interpretation of AE results. Hence, the associates obtained through psycholinguistic experiment "are interpreted as lingual representations of certain cognitive features making up the concept content" [10, p. 40]. All the mentioned subdivisions are listed after their frequency rank, while meanings that do not match any subdivision are listed separately. Here is the formed SF:

SF of the word-stimulus "čap" (left)

I – Explanations combined after semantic similarity:

Side opposite to right (20): *moxālef-e rāst* opposite to right (13), *jehat, samt* side (5), *dā'eš ke dar samt-e čap-e irān (arāq va suriye)* *hastand* Islamic State which operates to the left from Iran (in Iraq and Syria) (1), *sebqat az čap mojāz ast* overtaking on the left is allowed (1).

Left hand (13): *dast-e čap* left hand (6), *barāye neveštan monāseb nist* for writing is uncomfortable (4), *man čapdast-am* I am left handed (3);

Deviations from right (13): *enherāf* deviation (4), *eš-tebāh* mistake (3), *rāh-e čap* wrong way (3), *birāhe* wandering (2), *rāh-e šeytān* devil's way (1);

Something bad (9): *dar andiše-ye dīni bad ast* bad in religious view (4), *andišehā-ye bad* bad thoughts (2), *mafhum-e manfi* negative idea (1), *bad, zešt* bad, disgusting (1), *mahal-e past va pāyin* low position or place (1);

Precedent texts (7): *az dande-ye čap bar-xāstan* to wake from the left rib (2), *bār-e kaj be manzel nemiresad* declined cargo cannot be delivered (2), *bāham čap ofīādan* have bad relationship (1), *čap čap negāh kardan* look unfriendly (1), *xāb-e čap* dream which cannot come true (1);

Bound with politics (6): *komunism* communism (3), *čap az nazar-e siyāsi* left in political view (2), *ahzāb-e moxālef-e doulat* the opposition parties (1), *jaryān-e siyāsi* political process (1);

Opposes to others (5): *moxālef bā digarān* resists others (4), *zendegi be gune-i digar* different way of life (1);

Crooked, overturned (3): *čap kardan* overturn (1), *čizi ke kaj va nārāst ast* something crooked and uneven (1), *kaj šodan* incline (1).

II – Separate explanations:

angoštar-e ezdevāj wedding ring, *dust-eš dāram* I love it, *rāst* right, *šojā' budan* be brave, *kamtar be ān tavajjoh*

mišavad it is not paid much attention to, *mafhum-e nesbi* relative concept.

Rejected (6). Subtotal: 82+6.

Analysis of this SF should be commented regarding two points. The first note is bound with considerable share of the LSV of "left hand" and could be explained by absence of the grammar gender in Persian. Hence, difference in associations, which is significant for bearers of other languages having the gender category and may occur while using this word in a different gender form, does not exist for the Persian speakers. (For example, in Russian and Ukrainian the noun "pyka" (hand) is feminine, which requires grammatical agreement with appropriate adjectives). The second note concerns religious aspect. Negative evaluative component involving religious reminiscences may be explained as follows. Islam teaches that on the Dooms Day (*ruz-e qiyāmat*) everyone will be provided with the list of own life-time deeds (*kārnāme-ye amāl*) for final judgement. It is believed that righteous people will receive the list to their right hand, sinners – to their left hand [14, p. 70].

Finally, to proceed from the semantic level of the analysis to the conceptual one we summarized all non-zero responses (obtained at the 1st stage) and explanations (obtained at the 2nd stage). Operating total number of entries (171) allowed us to perform the cognitive interpretation of the data. Thus, according to the results of the psycholinguistic experiment the concept of LEFT in the Persian lingual consciousness has the following content:

"The concept of LEFT is associated in the Persian lingual consciousness mostly with three meanings of the corresponding word, viz.: side (38), left hand (23), left wing (*political*) (19). First of all LEFT is a side (38), opposite to the right (18), one of four geographical directions (15), spatial benchmark (4), the human body side where heart is located (1). **The LEFT is always bound with the RIGHT (32):** in general it is opposition (10) same as crooked/ overturned opposes straight/ even (11) but also as something abnormal and different from usual (9), sometimes it is associated with bravery (1) and readiness to fulfil a deed (1). Basically, however, the LEFT is correlated with something bad (32) in the man's life, which is confirmed by the actualized precedent texts (7). Through religious component (8) the LEFT is associated with evil (6), bad thoughts (3), something mean (1), negative (1), impossible (1), difficult (1), stupid (1), and bad luck in general (1); therefore the LEFT is unwanted (2). **The LEFT is regarded as deviation from the normal way of life (18):** aberration from the truth (5), wrong way (4), going astray (3), blunder (3), worry (2), and devil's way (1).

A few associations to the word "left" are related to traffic accident (2), feeling (2), musical instrument (1). There is also an opinion that the "left" is a relative concept (1) so, it is almost not paid attention to (1). Figuratively the "left" is associated with darkness (1) and the Moon (1)".

Thus, in this paper we tried to demonstrate how the data obtained in the result of psycholinguistic experiment could be cognitively interpreted for further reconstruction of certain concepts. As one can assume this approach based on the elaborated in the cognitive linguistics methods of interpretation of language meaning can help better understand the way in which lingual consciousness of native speakers operates and – more widely – creates new opportunities for investigating conceptual structures in human consciousness through linguistic data.

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