

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH THE  
SOMATIC COMPONENT 'HEAD'  
IN ENGLISH AND ARMENIAN\*

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**Keywords:** somatic component, phraseological unit, idiom, idiomatic phrases, equivalent, conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor, conventional knowledge.

*The present day linguistics is characterized by a great interest towards the phraseological units or idioms. Since the 1960s, English phraseological units have been receiving constant attention, both from the point of view of their meaning and form. The new tendencies in the English linguistics views these multi-word units differently as they have more or less unpredictable meanings. Idioms are of great importance in any language system as they are considered to be tightly connected with the acquisition of a foreign language. The use of idioms in the course of speaking helps any foreign language speaker sound more native and proficient. A good deal of work in this field has been carried out by G. Lakoff, A. Makkai, R. Gibbs, C. Fernando, Sinclair and others.*

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English gives the following definition of idiom: “peculiarity of phraseology approved by usage though having meaning not deducible from those of the separate words.”[1] They are also described as “conventionalized multiword expressions that are often but not always non-literal”[2]; as “polylexonic lexemes that are made up of more than one minimal free form or word” and that are “subject to a possible lack of understanding despite familiarity with the meanings of the components”[3] as a “a group of two or more words which are chosen together in order to produce a specific meaning or effect in speech or writing” [4].*

*Gibbs[5] shares the view that “idioms do not exist as separate semantic units within the lexicon, but actually reflect coherent systems of metaphorical concepts”.*

*Lakoff[6] suggests that “people have in their minds large sets of conventional images of the world around them, depending upon which specific culture they belong to”. For example Armenians would normally have a more or less clear image of the cathedral of Edjmiadzin, of the inside of a typical Armenian pub and so on, which might be different from a foreigner’s mental image of the same objects.*

*In the Armenian phraseology a considerable contribution has been made by P. Bediryan, Kh. Badikyan, A. Soukiassyan, S. Abrahamian and others. In his book “Modern Armenian phraseological units” [7] Badikyan distinguishes between phraseological units and idioms claiming that a phraseological unit is a more semantically transparent unit than an idiom. In fact, there is a slight difference between these two, as both relate to the form and meaning of the phraseological unit. S. Abrahamian pointed to the spontaneous character of idioms “an idiom is a stable multiword expression where the constituent parts lose their literal meanings. As such idioms are remembered and used as specific meaningful units and can’t be made up during the course of speaking”. [8]*

*Idioms represent an essential part of language i.e they influence the language format and have a great contribution to the cultural heritage. As idioms are frequently used in discourse, their role is very important in the core vocabulary and understanding of the language in general. Bearing a metaphorical nature idioms make the language showy by representing human experience and the way people perceive the world. These statements are more pertinent for idioms*

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Հոդվածը տպագրության է երաշխավորել ՄՍՀ օտար լեզուների ամբիոնը:

containing a somatic component as we are fully aware of our parts of body and how we use and perceive them. Introducing a new object we first of all compare it with our sensual aspects, in this way we make it clearer and more comprehensible. According to I.Stoyanova idioms consisting of somatic expressions are thought to be one of the most occasionally encountered idiom types. She also points out to the existence of multiple analogues of human body idioms in different languages and claims that these analogues are very close in their figurative meanings. She states that it is not for the fact that they are directly borrowed which causes the similarity of body idiom's figurative meaning in different languages, but rather for the fact that they are the most archaic group of idioms and they are closely connected with human body perception. It is assumed that the human-centered idiomatic expressions are a significant source of phraseology in both languages and that they are very frequently used in daily written and spoken language. This comparative analysis tries to demonstrate that human body idioms represent an important part of the backbone vocabulary both in English and Armenian and to show that the body idioms of both languages are similar in the meaning and usage. It examines idiomatic expressions related to human body, focusing on body idioms that contain head. [9]

The word 'head' in the Oxford English Dictionary [10] is listed as having no fewer than seventy-four different uses. These include its literal and directly connected uses (e.g. 'in man, the part of the body on top of the neck containing the eyes, nose, mouth and brain', and 'the seat of mind, thought, intellect, memory, or imagination'), as well as the head as a thing or part of a thing resembling a head in form or position (e.g. 'any rounded or compact part of a plant, usually at the top of the stem'). There are also figurative uses arising from preceding two senses (e.g. 'a person to whom others are subordinate; a chief, captain, commander, ruler, leader, principal person, head man'), phrases containing this word (e.g. 'over one's head', 'from head to foot'), and attributive uses and combinations (e.g. 'at the head', 'head-boom'). The number of uses this word has shows that it is very frequent and essential in the English language. The hundreds of combinations this word helps to create are perhaps more pervasive in English than may at first appear.

The situation is slightly different in the Armenian language. The Modern Armenian Explanatory dictionary by E. Aghayan (Արդի հայերենի բացատրական բառարան) gives only twenty-two uses of the equivalent Armenian word 'գլուխ'. As Armenian is an inflected language, the noun 'գլուխ' is the basis for many morphological derivations. So we can find words such as the adjective 'գլխավոր' (significant), or the adverb 'գլխավորապես' (mainly). [11] However, even in Armenian the frequency and malleability of this word shows it to be very significant.

Since the head is regarded as the most significant part of the human body (it is here that our slightest movements are controlled by the brain, that most of our perceptory senses are based, that we receive food, and that our main organs of speech are situated - in other words, our entire existence is controlled by organs which are situated in or on the human head), it is not surprising that it finds many different uses in language which refer to its size, shape, function, position, and significance for humans.

Proceeding from the above mentioned reasons it is extremely interesting to examine idiomatic phrases containing the word 'head' to find out how people conceptualize this part of the body. To demonstrate that the same conventional knowledge and conceptual metaphors and metonymies can be found both in Armenian and English, let's we start with conventional knowledge which motivates idioms. When we consider the Armenian idiom *գլուխ գլխի տալ*[12](literally 'to put heads together'[13] ) which means 'to think about or discuss something as a group', we know from our everyday experience that when we need to solve a problem, we usually consult other people in order to get their opinion on a particular matter. In doing this, we are usually in other people's physical proximity and while talking to them we lean our heads forward in order to be able to hear them properly. Also, when we imagine a typical problem-

solving discussion, we usually picture a group of people who are sitting in a circle and bring their heads closer to each other so that each one of them can hear the others better and speak to them all. The English idiom “to put their heads together” carries the same meaning and is motivated by the same conventional knowledge.

The Armenian idiom *գլխից մինչև կրունկները, ոտից գլուխ*[14] (literally ‘from head to heel’) which in English has its equivalent *from head to toe*[15] and whose meaning is the same, i.e. ‘completely, thoroughly, all over, covering your whole body’, shows that conventional knowledge is again at play. When we look at somebody, we usually look into their eyes first. If we want to examine their body with our eyes, our gaze starts at the person’s head and continues down towards the person’s feet. In this way, we fully examine the person with our sight, i.e. from their head to their feet.

It should also be noted that there is a direct interrelation between idiom and conceptual metaphor, metonymy, which underlie the motivation of many idioms. A “conceptual metaphor” is an underlying association that is systematic in both language and thought. A conceptual metonymy is a metonymy that is commonly used in everyday language in a culture to give structure to some portion of that culture’s conceptual system. [16]

Here are some of the most apparent conceptual metaphors and metonymies taken from Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. If we take the Armenian idiom *գլուխը դնելու տեղ չունենալ*[17] (literally ‘not to have a place to lay one’s head down’), which has its English equivalent “not to have a roof over one’s head” [18] in it can be clearly seen that using head we mean the entire body. The conceptual metonymy underlying the idiom seems to be the head represents a person. This metonymy motivates the meaning of the idiom which is ‘not to have a place to stay’. The speakers of both Armenian and English are able to infer this meaning because they subconsciously know that the head here is taken to mean the person. There are, of course, other examples of idioms motivated by this conceptual metonymy, such as not to harm a hair of someone’s head[19] *գլխի մազն անգամ չվնասել*[20]. In this idiom we can clearly see that the head is taken to mean the entire person.

In Armenian the idiom *գլուխը հասել*[21] (literally ‘to cut head’), which has its English equivalent in “heads will roll” [22] the head is taken to mean ‘life’ because conventional knowledge tells us that in the past, people who had committed a serious crime were sometimes executed by decapitation. Also, people of high positions in society having important responsibilities, were sometimes executed if they failed to perform their duties to the satisfaction of their superiors. Again, the conceptual metonymy the head stands for life motivates the meaning of this idiom, which is ‘somebody will be punished for their wrong-doing’.

An interesting extension of this idiom is the Armenian idiom *գլխազին տալ*[23] (literally ‘to put a price on somebody’s head’) which can again be found in the English expression to put a price on somebody’s head[24]. In the past (and sometimes even today) kings or other authorities put up notices for capture of dangerous criminals, for which a certain sum of money was offered to the successful capturer. It was common practice then to execute the criminal. Here we can quite easily see the metonymy the head stands for life, as the price for capture of the criminal was equal to what the criminal’s life was worth to a particular community. The meaning of this idiom then is very similar to the previous one and is understood as ‘to offer a reward for someone’s capture, defeat, or ruin’. Yet another example of this metonymy is the Armenian idiom *գլուխը տալ ինչոր մեկի համար*[25] (literally ‘to put the head on the block for someone’) which can also be found in English in to put one’s head on the block for someone[26]. As has been shown, all the mentioned idioms in which the head is used to stand for life, are based on people’s experiences which they have carried with them in the course of history and which are reflected in idiomatic language.

The Armenian idiom գլխի վրա շուռ տալ[27](literally ‘to stand something on the head’)which can be in the English equivalent to turn/stand something on its head[28] is a nice example of combining conventional knowledge and metonymy as a basis of motivation of this idiom. The meaning of this idiom, ‘to make people think about something in a completely different way’ is based on our conventional knowledge that logically, the human body is positioned in such a way that the head is up and the feet are on the ground. If we stand on our head, the logical order of things is disturbed, or utterly reversed. The position of the head above the body as opposed to below it can be taken as being normal. If we change this normality, we also change the logical order of things. The conceptual metonymy the head stands for order seems to be underlying this idiom.

Similarly, the Armenian idiom գլուխը կորցնել[29] (literally ‘not to know where one’s head is standing’) which can also be found in English not to know whether one is on one’s head or one’s heels’ [30] seems to be based on the same metonymy. If we are required to do many things at once, we very often confuse them because we have to think about too many of them at the same time. We usually skip from one activity to another as a result of which we do something wrong. This leads to a change in logical order of activity, i.e. doing one thing at a time, completing it and then moving on to another. Similarly, when we stand on our head, we confuse the logical order of things. The meaning of this idiom, ‘to be in a state of total confusion’ is very likely motivated by the conceptual metonymy the head stands for order.

There are a number of idioms, both in Armenian and English, in which the metonymy the head stands for intelligence can be detected as the chief motivation. Take, for instance, the English idiom to have a good head on one’s shoulders[31]. Its Armenian equivalent is ուսերին գլուխ ունենալ[32](literally ‘to have a good head’). In the sentence ‘John has a good head on his shoulders’, the way we understand the idiom is that we rely on the conventional knowledge which tells us that the brain is situated within the skull. Since we know that the brain is the seat of intelligence and the brain is in our head, it is likely that we tend to take the head as a representation of intelligence. The meaning of this idiom is then conveyed by the conceptual metonymy the head stands for life, and language users make sense of the idiom via this metonymy and understand its meaning as ‘to be intelligent’ or ‘to have common sense’.

In Armenian գլուխ ունենալ ինչ-որ բանի համար[33] (literally ‘to have a head for something’) coincides with the English idiom to have a head for something [34]the listener, in the process of arriving at the meaning of the idiom (‘to have a gift, an aptitude for something’) relates to the concept of the brain as the seat of the intellect. Also, the listener has a store of information, a concept involving the recognition that a talented person is exceptionally good at some activities or intellectually demanding work. The conceptual metonymy the head stands for talent helps to link these concepts together and the listener arrives at the idiom’s meaning.

The Armenian idiom տաք գլխով[35] (literally ‘to have a hot head’) which can also be found in the English idiom to be hot-headed[36], seems to be motivated by our conventional knowledge and the conceptual metonymy “the head stands for temper”. Our conventional knowledge of human physiology tells us that when somebody becomes agitated or angry, their bodily temperature rises slightly and they can feel the heat mostly in the upper part of the body as their pulse increases. With the help of this knowledge and the conceptual metonymy, people infer the meaning of this idiom, which is ‘to be easily angered, to react abruptly’.

This conceptual metonymy also seems to motivate the Armenian idiom սառը գլխով[37], (lit. ‘with a cool head’)in English with a cool head[38]. We know that if somebody is exposed to a difficult situation which needs to be solved without emotion and panic, and if they are not easily angered, they remain calm and manage to solve that situation without any problem. Because they do not get excited, their body temperature does not change, so it remains cool, as opposed to becoming hotter as is the case of an easily excited person. The conceptual metonymy the head stands for order seems to link this subconscious knowledge to the meaning of the idiom which is

*'to act without great emotion and panic, not to overreact, to behave calmly'.*

Probably the most frequent conceptual metaphor which motivates many idioms in Armenian and English is “the head is a container”. It has to do with the size and shape of the human head which resembles a container such as a can or a box. Since we know that head is the seat of intellect and thought, we can say that the head is a container for thoughts or the head is a container for ideas. These conceptual metaphors can be said to motivate idioms such as in Armenian *լիքը գլխով*[39]; (literally ‘to have one’s head full of something’), or in English *to have one’s head full of something*, in Armenian *գլուխը լցնել*, literally ‘to stuff something into one’s head’) in English *to stuff one’s head with something*[40].

We know that a container is used to store things. In the same way, the head is perceived as a container for ‘storing’ ideas and thoughts of various kinds. The idiom *to have one’s head full of something* conveys an image of a container being full of something which occupies the entire inside of the container. In the same way, if we think intensively about something or someone, all our thoughts are focused on them and there is no more ‘space’ in our mind to think of anything else. Our mind is fully occupied with thoughts about one thing. The metaphor *the head is a container* then links this subconscious knowledge to the meaning of the idiom which is ‘to be fully (intellectually or emotionally) occupied with something and think only about it’.

The Armenian idiom *դատարկ գլխով*[41] (literally ‘to have an empty head’) which finds its equivalent in the English idiom *to be empty-headed*[42] is another example of how the conceptual metaphor *the head is a container* links our knowledge connected with containers to the meaning of the idiom which is ‘not to know much/anything, to be uneducated’, or also ‘not to have a thought at a particular moment’. We know that if a container is empty, it is of little or no use to anybody. In the same way, if somebody has no ideas or interesting thoughts, he comes across as an unthoughtful, uneducated or uninteresting person. The above conceptual metaphor then links this knowledge to the meaning of this idiom.

The conceptual metaphor *disagreement is shaking one’s head* can be found in the Armenian idiom in *գլուխը թափահարել*[43] (literally ‘to shake one’s head’) also has an English equivalent *to shake one’s head*[44]. We know from our everyday experience that the most usual conventional gesture for people expressing disagreement with something is the movement of the head in a way that the head is turning from side to side and then returns to its former, upright position. When we see somebody shaking their head, we know that they are expressing their disagreement with something or someone. The meaning of this idiom, ‘to express disagreement’, is arrived at with the help of our conventional knowledge and the conceptual metaphor *disagreement is shaking one’s head*.

It is important to note, however, that not all figurative language can be dealt with in this way. Some idiomatic expressions are too opaque and it is difficult for the learners to imagine them [45]. Naturally, there are many idioms in both Armenian and English which are not shared by the other language. In Armenian, for example, there is the idiom *գլխին տեր ունենալ* [46] (literally ‘to have an owner over one’s head’) meaning ‘to protect somebody’. Here the underlying conceptual metonymy *the head stands for life* can be detected. Another example is the Armenian idiom ‘*գլխի ընկնել*’ [47] which means ‘to understand’ and which seems to be motivated by the conceptual metonymy *the head stands for intelligence*.

Some idioms which can be found only in English are, for example, *to be/stand head and shoulders above someone*[48] which means ‘to be much better/greater than someone’ and which seems to be motivated by the conceptual metonymy *the head stands for intelligence*. Another example which is motivated by conventional knowledge is the idiom *to get one’s head down*[49] which means ‘to get back to work’. In this case, general knowledge tells us that when people work, they have to lean their head forward/down in order to see clearly what they are doing. This image is then reflected in the idiom.

*As can be seen from the previous analyses, the conceptualization of the human head depends on conventional knowledge which we have about the placement, shape, and function of this part of our body and gestures connected with it. It is also suggested that the other two cognitive mechanisms, i.e. conventional metaphor and metonymy, play an important role in the way we store information about the human head in our memory. The human head can therefore be taken to represent the person, life, temper, talent, intelligence, order; it is also seen as a container for thoughts, ideas, memories and dreams. The meaning of the word 'head' partially motivates the meaning of many idioms containing it, as the head is the seat of the intellect, dreams, emotions, and is the most essential part of the human body which governs its existence. Although there are more idiomatic expressions both in English and Armenian which contain the word 'head', and which would require further analysis to confirm or refute the claim that the meaning of the constitutive parts of some idioms partially motivates their meaning, the examples given show that in many cases this is so.*

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#### **SUMMARY**

#### **Comparative analysis of phraseological units with the somatic component 'Head' in English and in Armenian** **Saida Hayrapetyan**

This paper has attempted to show that Armenian and English idiomatic expressions containing the somatic component ‘head’ are motivated by cognitive strategies such as general conventional knowledge of the world and conceptual metaphors and metonymies which underlie the figurative meaning of these idioms. The claim that idioms are motivated by three cognitive strategies, i.e. general conventional knowledge and conceptual metaphors and metonymies, has been tested on a number of idioms in both Armenian and English.

ԱՄՓՈՓԱԳԻՐ

«ԳԼՈՒՄ» բաղադրիչով դարձվածային միավորների համեմատական վերլուծությունը  
անգլերենում և հայերենում  
Սաիդա Հայրապետյան

*Բանալի բառեր՝ սոմատիկ բաղադրիչ, դարձվածաբանական միավոր, դարձվածք, դարձվածքային արտահայտություններ, համարժեք, վերացական փոխանունություն, վերացական փոխաբերություն, ավանդական գիտելիքներ:*

Այս հոդվածը փորձել է ցույց տալ, որ հայերեն եւ անգլերեն դարձվածքները, որոնք պարունակում են «գլուխ» բաղադրիչը, հիմնավորվում են պատկերավորման արտահայտչական միջոցներով, ինչպիսիք են՝ աշխարհընկալման ավանդական գիտելիքները, փոխաբերությունները եւ փոխանունությունները, որոնք ընդգծում են դարձվածքների փոխաբերական իմաստները: Այն պնդումը, որ դարձվածքները հիմնավորվում են երեք ճանաչողական միջոցներով՝ ավանդական գիտելիքներով, փոխաբերություններով եւ փոխանունություններով, փորձարկվել է մի շարք դարձվածքներում՝ հայերեն եւ անգլերեն:

РЕЗЮМЕ

Сравнительный анализ фразеологических единиц с соматическим компонентом  
«голова» в английском и армянском языках  
Саида Айрапетян

*Ключевые слова: соматический компонент, фразеологизм, идиома, идиоматические фразы, эквивалент, концептуальная метонимия, концептуальная метафора, традиционные знания.*

В данной статье была предпринята попытка показать, что армянские и английские фразеологические единицы с соматическим компонентом "голова" мотивированы познавательными подходами такими как общепринятое знание, концептуальные метафоры и метонимии, лежащие в основе образных значения этих идиом. Утверждение, что идиомы мотивированы тремя познавательными стратегиями, то есть общие традиционные знания и концептуальные метафоры и метонимии, было протестировано на ряде идиом в армянском и английском языках.