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New meanings and old constructions: the conceptualization of 'fearing' and 'protecting' in Old Persian in comparison with other Indo-Iranian languages

In the ancient Indo-Iranian languages, the argument structures of verbs meaning 'to fear' and 'to protect' respectively show interesting similarities. In this regard, Old Persian data, despite the scarcity of the evidence, are particularly interesting.

This paper focuses on the Old Persian verb *tars-* 'to fear, to respect', drawing on the tools of both comparative-historical and cognitive linguistics. In particular, two issues will be taken into account: 1. the meaning and the etymology of the verb *tars-*; 2. its argument structure. Both aspects can be adequately explained by adopting the perspective of cognitive linguistics and, in particular, by considering metaphorical and metonymic processes.

As far as the first point is concerned, the verb *tars-* is the only emotion verb attested in Old Persian where it means 'to fear, to respect' with a strong political connotation. This meaning is the end point of a semantic change that originates from the Indo-European root **tres-* 'to tremble (with fear)' (cf. *LIV*² 650-651). This "composite" meaning has been reconstructed on the basis of the plurality of meanings attested in Indo-European languages, among which 'to be afraid'/'to fear' is the most frequent meaning, followed by 'to tremble, to shake' and, more rarely, 'to flee (in fear)'.

In particular, the relationship between the meaning 'to tremble, to shake' and that of 'to be afraid, to fear' will be considered. The conceptualization underlying the semantic shift from 'to tremble (with fear)' to 'to fear/to be afraid' – that is, from the more concrete source domain to the abstract target domain – will be explained as an essentially metonymic process, according to Kövecses (1998: 148-149 and further works) and Radden (e.g. Radden 1998, in Athanasiadou and Tabakowska). Furthermore, the analysis will confirm the need to study human emotions according to an "integrated" perspective that takes into account both the biological-cognitive and the socio-cultural aspects.

The second aspect worthy of attention is the construction of *tars-*. Here again, drawing on one of the fundamentals of cognitive linguistics, it will be assumed that the choice of a specific linguistic expression reflects a particular conceptualization of a given event, in other words it is motivated by cognitive factors. In particular, it will be shown that, despite the intervening semantic change, the Old Persian verb *tars-* has retained the original construction with the ablative (and the preposition *hacā* 'from'), which was common to ancient Indo-Iranian languages (Vedic, Avestan, and Old Persian). Interestingly, in this linguistic group, the construction with the ablative (with or without a preposition) is shared by *verba timendi* and verbs meaning 'to protect'. In Old Persian the construction is exactly the same for both verbs (see example 1 for Old Persian *tars-* and example 2 for Old Persian *pā-*).

(1) *iyam dahyāuš Pārsa (...) hacā anīyanā naī t̥rsati*

'This country Persia (...) does not fear anybody else' (DPd 6-7, 11-12).

(2) *utā imām dahyāuṃ Auramazdā pātu hacā haināyā*

'And may Auramazdā protect this country from the (enemy) army' (DPd 15-17)

Finally, for the construction shared by *verba timendi* and verbs meaning 'to protect', a common meaning will be proposed that includes both the semantic component "cause" (a metaphorical

extension from “origin/source”) and the component “distance”, both typical of the Indo-European ablative. The shared meaning can be formulated as follows: “X trembles with fear/fears in relation to an entity that is a potential source of danger and that must be kept at a distance”.

References

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