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A Comparative Analysis of the Figurative Language in Arabic and South African Languages

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ABSTRACT

Arabic and South African languages contain rich idiomatic expressions, many of which are based on body-related metaphors that play an important role in everyday communication. This study compares body-part idioms in Arabic and South African to examine how physical body concepts are used to express abstract meanings. Most previous research has primarily focused on English idioms, leaving a noticeable gap in studies concerning Arabic and South African idioms. This study intends to fill that gap based on the perspective offered by Lakoff and Johnson, who emphasize that metaphors are intrinsic to everyday communication. Drawing on the conceptual metaphor framework of Lakoff and Johnson, the research analyses the underlying conceptual structures of these idioms. A qualitative comparative approach was employed to analyse and compare body-related idioms selected from Arabic and South African languages. The data being analyzed was specifically chosen to form a corpus for this study. The analysis shows that both languages rely extensively on conventionalized body metaphors. Despite cultural and linguistic differences, the two languages demonstrate notable similarities in the use of body idioms, although some differences appear in their conceptual interpretations. These findings contribute to cross-linguistic studies of metaphor and idiomatic expressions, addressing the limited research on Arabic and South African languages in comparison to the more extensively studied English idioms.

Keywords: Arabic Figurative Use; Linguistic and Conceptual Analysis; A Corpus; Body Parts Idioms; South African Figurative Use

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1. Introduction

A comparative research study examining figurative language in Arabic and South African languages, particularly looking at idioms related to body parts, would investigate how both conceptual frameworks and linguistic features influence the expression of figurative language in these languages. Figurative language, especially idiomatic expressions, often makes use of body parts to communicate meanings that go beyond their literal interpretations [1–4]. Idioms cannot be translated literally because of their figurative meanings, which add to their complexity and make them seem less clear [5]. Body parts are the most immediate objects associated with humans, so metaphorical expressions linked to them significantly influence our understanding of new concepts that embody specific functions in social reality. Lakoff and Johnson [6] argue that people often perceive abstract concepts through physical experiences, primarily drawing from their bodily interactions with the environment. This perspective suggests that the human body serves as a key reference point for comprehending more abstract ideas. Such a study would provide valuable insights into the cultural, conceptual, and linguistic distinctions between speakers of Arabic and South African as they employ idioms and other forms of non-literal expression.

The essential elements for employing metaphors related to the human body involve experiences and interactive activities in daily life, such as those related to health, strength, rights, thoughts, peace, safety, and various socio-cultural events and practices [7]. This approach can reveal deeper meanings, allowing individuals to communicate on a level beyond mere surface interaction. They engage with their subconscious and powerful mind [3]. Consequently, different cultures and societies generate unique extended meanings for metaphors, shaped by the socio-economic, cultural, educational, and political experiences of their people [3].

Idiomatic expressions associated with body parts such as the hand, heart, head, and eye are particularly abundant because they connect to overall human experiences while also reflecting unique cultural and cognitive perspectives. Benczes [8] investigates how the head is understood in English idioms and explores the connections between different idioms. In this study, the conceptual structure of body-related idioms in Arabic and South African, which belong to different linguistic families (Semitic and Bantu) and arise from diverse cultural and social backgrounds [9]. Different cultures embody their unique conceptualization of various abstract ideas by analyzing the conceptual framework of body idioms.

While figurative language is essential to communication in both Arabic and South African language, there is limited comparative research on how conceptual idioms and figurative expressions operate within these two languages. Most previous research has focused on English idioms, with comparatively limited studies on Arabic and South African idioms [2]. This study aims to fill this gap by utilizing the cognitive theory of metaphor as outlined by Lakoff and Johnson [6] in which metaphors are integrated into everyday speech. Arabic and South African languages differ significantly in their grammatical structures and cultural backgrounds, which likely affects how figurative language is constructed and interpreted.

This study aims to explore how the body parts are used to conceptualize various abstract ideas in Arabic and South African languages by comparing and analyzing the conceptual framework of body idioms. However, it does not intend to provide an exhaustive analytical study of all body idioms found in Arabic and South African dictionaries and literature; rather, it focuses on the most commonly used idiomatic expressions within a specific thematic classification related to the body.

Research Questions (RQ)

This research aims to address the key questions guiding the present inquiry, which include:

1. What body-related idioms are found in both Arabic and South African language in the selected sample, and what meanings do they convey?
2. What conceptual metaphors associated with abstract concepts support these idioms in Arabic and South African, and how do they differ?
3. Is there any common pattern in the figurative usage of body parts in both Arabic and South African languages?

2. Literature Review

The study of metaphor has transitioned from the humanities such as philosophy, poetics, and rhetoric into the realm of cognitive science, which includes fields like linguistics, psychology, and communication science [10, 11]. This shift has resulted in an overwhelming increase in theories, hypotheses,

and empirical data. The main outcome of this evolution can be found in one term: variation[11]. There is a vast array of theories and research that indicate that metaphors may not be a single concept. While many scholars agree that metaphor involves understanding one idea through the lens of another, this is not a universal consensus; moreover, not all instances of metaphor processing necessitate this kind of conceptualization. This raises an important question regarding how unity can be found within such diversity[11].

Languages embody the social, historical, and cultural experiences of people, which is reflected in the use of idiomatic expressions that often include references to human body parts for metaphorical purposes across different languages[3, 4]. However, each language has its own distinct systems and cultural beliefs regarding metalinguistic expressions, resulting in both similarities and variations in language perception. Moreover, idioms usually represent metaphorical meanings associated with verbal actions. Figurative language, especially idioms, frequently utilizes body parts to express ideas that go beyond their literal meanings[4]. Body-related idioms parts like the hand, heart, head, and eye; are particularly rich because they tap into overall human experiences while reflecting unique cultural and cognitive frameworks. There is a perspective suggesting that bodies function as cultural objects, meaning that various cultures, and by extension, their languages, represent emotional experiences through different body parts[12] This study aims to demonstrate that cultures may possess similar views on emotions conveyed via body parts. It is acknowledged that in many languages, the names of body parts often combine with other words to express emotions. Bataineh and Al-Shaikhli[12] recommended that researchers conduct experimental studies on idioms involving body parts, focusing on human anatomy and experiences to explore universality through cross-linguistic research.

This research compares the conceptual structure of body idioms in Arabic and South African languages. Two languages from different linguistic families (Semitic and Bantu), with different cultural and social contexts. Several studies have attempted to explain how idioms are conceptualized. The conceptual nature of idioms suggests that the meanings of their components may be linked to the underlying concept that the idiom represents. Lakoff and Johnson[6] explore the systematic nature of the concepts of metaphor. Additionally, Lakoff[13] emphasizes that conventional imagery is crucial in language, particularly concerning idioms. Conventional knowledge, as described by Lakoff[13], serves as a cognitive mechanism that provides language users with essential information about their environment. It consists of the shared understanding that individuals within a particular culture possess regarding specific conceptual domains, such as a human's body parts. This general knowledge encompasses typical details about body parts, including their characteristics like shape, size, and function.

A study by Pinker[14] (p. 240) argues that the widespread use of certain conceptual metaphors indicates that speakers can link abstract ideas to concrete examples in a coherent manner, suggesting an awareness of these metaphors. On the other hand, Sznajder[15] examined English metaphors in economic and business textbooks, highlighting that the metaphorical characteristics of commercial terminology can pose challenges for non-native speakers, as these terms often fall outside their familiar conceptual frameworks. Consequently, cultural differences can complicate the teaching of this metaphorical dimension.

According to cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphors arise from the collaboration between body experiences and cultural influences[8]. They originate from bodily sensations but are shaped by cultural interpretations. This idea is based on a simple premise that is central to cognitive linguistic theories, illustrating how human thought processes work. This premise revolves around the notion of embodiment, which serves as the physical and cultural basis of human cognition[12]. Lakoff and Johnson[6] assert that our thinking is grounded in the idea that our conceptual frameworks are fundamentally derived from shared bodily experiences and our awareness of the environment around us. As a result, a significant portion of our conceptual framework tends to be either universal or commonly found across various languages and cultures globally.

Figurative language is closely tied to cultural expressions and worldviews. A comparison between Arabic and South African figurative language can provide insight into how cultural values influence metaphorical thinking, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs in both languages. Arabic, for instance, may draw on religious or historical references, while South African languages may reflect more on culture or modern contexts[16]. Moreover, South African languages

and Arabic are structurally different languages, and these linguistic differences can influence how figurative language is formed and understood. For example, the rich root-based structure of Arabic morphology may influence the formation of idioms and metaphors, while South African languages (isiZulu) tend to be more flexible in terms of word order and sentence structure[14, 16]. Exploring how speakers of both languages process figurative expressions can shed light on broader cognitive-linguistic principles.

Compare the conceptual aspects of figurative language in Arabic, a Semitic language with a rich cultural and religious history, and isiZulu, a Bantu language that is deeply influenced by oral traditions and the sociocultural life of its speakers[14, 16]. By examining these two typologically different languages, this study seeks to explore and understand similarities in the use of body idioms in Arabic and South African languages and how both conceptual structures and linguistic elements shape the use of figurative language in these two languages.

It is worth pointing out that, although there have been many studies on metaphorical idioms, there has been limited research specifically comparing idioms in Arabic and South African languages.

3. Theoretical Framework

The idioms discussed in this paper have been analyzed and studied using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as established by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980. This theory posits that metaphors are rooted in our conceptual understanding rather than being solely linguistic features. This suggests that metaphorical phrases found in any language reflect the underlying metaphors present at a conceptual level. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) support this viewpoint by analysing a substantial range of words and expressions in English, which helps to clarify the systematic nature of metaphorical concepts.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) plays a crucial and widespread role in both language and cognition, as conceptual metaphors significantly influence how we use concepts and language from one domain to understand and discuss other domains[6]. Various perspectives analyse CMT; the cognitive-linguistic perspective highlights it as a mental process in which one concept is understood in relation to another[17]. From the cognitive tradition viewpoint, CMT is not merely a rhetorical device but rather a fundamental aspect of thought. As a result, metaphors primarily reflect conceptual ideas rather than just linguistic expressions.

Lakoff and Johnson[6] identify two levels of metaphor, including idioms: the conceptual and the linguistic. At the conceptual level, a metaphor represents a connection between two ideas, with one acting as the source and the other as the target[3]. The source domain typically consists of a tangible concept that is used metaphorically to help clarify an abstract concept, which serves as the target domain. The relationship established between the source and target domains, referred to as ontological mapping, relies on fundamental conceptual similarities between the two.

Lakoff and Johnson[6] suggest that the way we conceptualize 'argument' is influenced by the concept of 'war', as evidenced by phrases like "Your assertions are unassailable," "He attacked every weak point in my argument," and "He targeted every vulnerable aspect of my argument". In this framework, 'war' serves as the foundational domain that shapes our comprehension of the target domain, argument. Conceptual mapping refers to the relationships between elements in both domains, where the source domain is a more tangible concept, and the target domain is more abstract. In this context, applying insights from the domain of 'war' to the domain of 'argument' allows us to gain a better understanding of one by viewing it through the perspective of the other[18] (p. 206). The metaphor argument is that war is not just a singular case. Lakoff and Johnson claim that metaphors are integral to our conceptual framework. Therefore, languages like Arabic and African are rich in idiomatic and metaphorical expressions, largely due to their extensive use of conventional metaphors. While these metaphors are integrated into everyday speech, they often go unnoticed as metaphorical by speakers, and this supports Lakoff and Johnson's perspective on using metaphors.

While this study is primarily grounded in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson[6], more recent developments in cognitive linguistics suggest that metaphors are not only embodied but also culturally shaped. Scholars such as Gerard Steen emphasize that metaphor use can be deliberate and context-dependent, as proposed in Deliberate Metaphor Theory, where speakers intentionally use metaphor to influence

interpretation and communication[19]. Additionally, blending theory and cultural cognition approaches suggest that metaphorical meaning emerges from the interaction between bodily experience, cultural knowledge, and social practices.

The concept of embodiment is therefore not universal in the same way across cultures. Although all humans share similar bodies, the cultural interpretation of body parts and bodily experience differs across societies. For example, in many Arabic cultures, body-related metaphors often reflect concepts of honor, shame, dignity, and social reputation, particularly in idioms involving the face and head. In contrast, in South African culture, body metaphors frequently reflect communal values, cooperation, emotional control, and social harmony, as seen in idioms involving hands, heart, and social relationships. This suggests that while metaphor is grounded in the body, it is also shaped by cultural values and social structures.

Therefore, metaphorical expressions in Arabic and South African are not only products of embodied cognition but also of cultural cognition. The similarities between the languages may be explained by shared human bodily experience, while the differences can be attributed to cultural models, social values, and patterns of interaction within each society. This supports the view that metaphors are both embodied and culturally constructed, rather than purely universal.

4. Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative comparative approach to analyse and compare figurative language body-related idioms in Arabic and South Africa[20, 21]. The study mainly draws on Lakoff and Johnson's perspective of metaphor as an integral aspect of daily communication. The established role of linguistic metaphor has been a central focus in cognitive linguistic research. Numerous examples have demonstrated that metaphor is embedded in our language framework and its application.

4.1. Corpus

It should be noted that the data being analyzed was specifically chosen to form a corpus for this study. The corpus used in this study comprises sixteen body-related idioms drawn from Arabic and South African. Although the corpus is relatively small, the idioms were carefully selected according to qualitative criteria aligned with the study's aims. Specifically, the idioms were chosen because they are commonly used in everyday communication, culturally recognizable to native speakers, and clearly illustrate metaphorical mappings between body parts and abstract concepts. The selection also aimed to ensure representative coverage of several key body domains, including the head, eyes, hands, feet, face, and heart, which frequently appear in figurative expressions in both languages. Rather than focusing on frequency counts alone, the study prioritised conceptual salience and metaphorical clarity, selecting idioms that strongly demonstrate the conceptual metaphors underlying body-based figurative language. This approach is consistent with qualitative studies in cognitive linguistics that examine representative examples to illustrate conceptual metaphor patterns, following the framework proposed by Lakoff and Johnson. By selecting idioms that are both culturally familiar and conceptually illustrative, the corpus provides a focused dataset for examining how bodily experience structures abstract meaning in Arabic and South African.

The primary sources for these metaphorical idioms are body idioms from the Arabic language, which were extracted from the book *The Body Idioms in the Arabic Language* cited in Bataineh and Al-Shaikhli[12] and various pieces of Arabic idiomatic literature. South African idioms were sourced from dictionaries and a book of proverb collections, including *99 South African Proverbs and Sayings: A Collection of Classic South African Expressions, Wise Sayings and Advice* authored by Desaray Wilson-Mnyandu and Phiwokuhle Mnyandu[22] as well as language corpora. This collection offers valuable insights and useful data for the cognitive framework, as the idioms are frequently used daily in South Africa and Arabic. The selection process was based on identifying the most representative idioms within each thematic category. The categorization of idioms considers the overall meaning, which is affected by the meanings of their components. This study classifies idioms according to their thematic fields, which encompass advice, clarity and impression, disability, confusion and excitement, cooperation, generosity, bravery, emotions, and familiarity.

4.2. Conceptual Metaphor Analysis (CMA)

Each idiom was analyzed in terms of its syntactic structure and literal meaning; we compared common idioms, their

literal translations, and cultural significance.

- **Semantic Framework**: The idioms were categorized by semantic fields (e.g., power, emotion, advice) to understand how body parts are described in relation to different abstract concepts.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis**: This method focuses on mapping the similarities and differences between Arabic and African body idioms, exploring how each culture uses the body to conceptualize abstract ideas like authority, generosity, and emotion.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Semantic Structure of the Body Idioms in Arabic and South African Languages

Body idioms are considerably used in the Arabic and South African languages; they are associated with a great variety of abstract meanings that are related to the idea of support, advice, cooperation, kindness, power, bravery, help, strength, disability, physical assistance, commitment, and emotions. These meanings come from their culture and social interaction between people. The Arabic idioms listed below were collected from both *The Body Idioms in the Arabic Language* book cited in Bataineh and Al-Shaikhli[12] and various works of Arabic idiomatic literature. Additionally, isiZulu idioms were sourced from a compilation of traditional South African expressions, insightful sayings, and counsel titled *99 South African Proverbs and Sayings* by Desaray Wilson-Mnyandu and Phiwokuhle Mnyandu[22]. Lakoff and Johnson[6] highlight a significant connection between metaphorical concepts. According to them, metaphorical language arises from a framework of metaphorical concepts, which enables us to explore the role and significance of metaphors in our everyday experiences[6] (p. 8).

Table 1 outlines the semantic extensions that represent different thematic categories of the data. Semantic extension refers to using a word to describe something that lies beyond its strict dictionary meaning. This is done based on a logical connection between the literal and new, extended meanings. Following this, we will provide some insights into the conceptual structure that underlies each idiom:

(1) Idioms Concepts on Head and Eyes

The head and the eyes create so many combinations in both languages due to the importance of this part of the human body. The head and eyes idioms mentioned below (**Table 2**) use the concept of the head to represent life, drawing from people's historical experiences that are reflected in their idiomatic expressions[23]. We perceive the world around us through our eyes. The eye perceives images of everything around us, then stores them in our memories, and recalls them if required, without seeing them. We conceptualise everything around us through the eye. These conceptualisations are reproduced in our language, usually in the form of idioms. In the stated example, the concept of head refers to listening to someone's advice and working with it in Arabic, and eye also refers to insisting on doing something in South African idioms.

Table 1. The Semantic Extensions of the Idioms.

The Semantic Extension	Idioms
Advice	• كلامك علي عيني و راسي 'Your conversation is on my eye and head, catching my attention and occupying my thoughts'
	• Izindlebe ezingalaleli iseluleko, ziphelezela ikhanda lapho zinqunywa 'Ears that do not listen to advice, will share the same fate as the head when it is severed'
	• Iso lilodwa lixhoshwa libhekile 'Something can get into the eye while the eye is looking'
Confusion and excitement	• لا يعرف راسه من قدميه او رجليه 'He or she does not realise his head from his feet'
	• lo muntu unekhanda elinamanzi 'This person has a watery head
Cooperation	• لا يد الواحده لا تصفق 'One hand cannot applaud or clap'
	• Izandla Ziyagezana 'One hand wash another'
Generosity	• رجلي علي رجلك 'My foot on your foot'
	• Unyawo alunampumulo 'The foot has no rest'
	• unyawo alunamamehlo, luyimpumputhe (The foot has no eyes, it is blind)
Ability and Disability	• مكتوفي الايدي 'Someone's hands are tied'
	• Unyawo luyathakatha 'The foot is a witch'

Table 1. *Cont.*

The Semantic Extension	Idioms
Strength and Bravery	• شجع و قوي قلبك ‘Strength your heart and be brave’ • Inhliziyo ifana nembuzi okumele iboshwe ‘The heart is similar to a goat that needs to be restrained’
Emotions and Familiarity	• وجهك معروف و مالوف ‘ your face is familiar and known’ • inhliziyo iyaphuma ‘Heart goes out to’
Clarity and Impression	• لا يستطيع وجهه ‘ He cannot show his face’ • Konke oku enhliziyweni kubhalwa ebusweni ‘All that is in the heart is written on the face’

Table 2. Idioms on Head and Eyes: Arabic and South African Expressions.

a. Arabic Expression	South African Expression
كلامك علي عيني و راسي	Iso liwela umfula ugcwele
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
I will use your advice.	If you want something, nothing can stop you.

The Arabic expression refers to the abstract concept of ‘talk’ as a tangible entity that can be placed on someone’s head. This metaphor suggests that the head is the location for such talk. When combined with the notion of eyes, this imagery symbolises the acceptance of advice. The literal translation from Arabic to English illustrates that merging ‘talk’ with ‘eyes’ and ‘head’ signifies the act of embracing someone else’s counsel. The essence of these examples lies in the use of abstract concepts, such as “talk” linked to tangible elements like the eye and head. This connection creates a figurative interpretation, as an abstract idea is imposed on something concrete[1]. Many Arabs frequently employ this metaphorical language in their everyday conversations, often without being aware of its idiomatic nature. According to Al-Ramahi[1], our comprehension of culture, particularly concerning abstract concepts, is largely influenced by metaphorical thinking.

The South African expression refers to the concept of the eye as something that does not stop to cross the river, which advises that if you desire to get something, never give up and nothing can stop you. Another South African idiom concept on ears refers to the concept of accepting the advice, ‘Izindlebe ezingalaleli iseluleko, ziphelezela ikhanda lapho zinqunywa’: its literal meaning is ‘Ears that ignore advice are present when the head is severed’ indicating that a person who neglects guidance will face negative outcomes. In South Africa, the significance of bodily parts has been broadened to serve as idiomatic expressions. Like most idioms, the meanings of these phrases cannot always be understood merely by analysing the individual words[24].

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Arabic idioms illustrate a metaphorical mapping between bodily experience and abstract social meaning. The source domain is the human body, specifically the eyes and head, which are culturally associated with attention, respect, and awareness. The target domain is the abstract concept of accepting advice or showing respect to another person (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Conceptual Metaphors for Advice-Related Head and Eye Idioms.

Idiom	Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Metaphor
كلامك علي عيني و راسي	Eyes/Head	Respect, accepting advice	Respect is placing something on the head
Iso liwela umfula ugcwele	Vision/Crossing obstacle	Determination	Desire is overcoming obstacles

The conceptual metaphor underlying this idiom can be expressed as: Respecting or accepting advice is placing something valuable on the head and eyes. In many Arabic cultural contexts, placing something “on the head” symbolically indicates honour and high regard. Similarly, the eyes represent attention and perception. The metaphorical mapping, therefore, links physical elevation and sensory focus (source domain) to respect and acceptance of advice (target domain). Through this mapping, the idiom communicates the speaker’s willingness to value and follow the advice

offered.

In this idiom, the terms 'head' and 'feet' are used metaphorically in Arabic to refer to the idea that the person is not aware and is lost between the head at the top and the feet at the bottom of their body. These references to body parts are not meant to be taken literally; rather, they symbolize a person who, lacking awareness of their own body parts, is unable to comprehend or perceive the truth or other matters (**Table 4**). The head and feet represent the concept of being 'knowing nothing'. This indicates that the logical sequence of head and feet is disrupted. As a result, we become entirely baffled and unable to grasp what is happening due to this absence of logical structure. South African idiom has different expressions from Arabic expressions, in which someone is easily overstimulated and becomes excited far too readily. People with high levels of excitability possess an enhanced capacity to notice and react to their environment. Essentially, they are attuned to details that might escape others and tend to exhibit stronger reactions than the typical person. They often feel a burst of excitement and inspiration quite easily [24]. Thus, the essence of this idiom is 'to be in a complete state of confusion'. The target domain in these expressions is metaphorically based on the confusion and excitement theme.

Table 4. Conceptual Metaphors for Confusion and Excitement Idioms.

b. Arabic Expression	**South African Expression**
ليا عرف راسه من هيدمق او رجلي هي	Lo umuntu ekhanda eli amanzi
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
They do not know what good or bad way for them.	This person is easily excited.

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, Arabic idiom is based on a metaphorical mapping between body orientation and mental awareness (**Table 5**).

Table 5. Head and Feet Idioms: Metaphor Mapping in Arabic and South African.

Language	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Conceptual Metaphor**
Arabic	Body orientation (head vs. feet)	Confusion	Confusion is loss of orientation
South African	Water in the head	Emotional/mental instability	The mind is a container

Source domain: Body structure and spatial orientation;

Target domain: Mental state and understanding;

Conceptual metaphor: Confusion is loss of physical orientation.

The idiom conceptualizes confusion as the inability to distinguish between the top and bottom of the body. Since the head normally represents thinking and awareness, and the feet represent direction and movement, losing the distinction between them metaphorically represents a mental state in which a person cannot think clearly or make decisions.

In isiZulu idioms, the head is conceptualized as a container and water represent instability or uncontrolled movement. A "watery head" therefore metaphorically represents a person whose thoughts or emotions are unstable, leading to confusion or excitability.

Source domain: Physical properties of water;

Target domain: Mental or emotional state;

Conceptual metaphor: The mind is a container; emotional or mental instability is liquid movement.

(2) Idioms Concepts on Hands and Feet

Hands serve as tools for a variety of activities, including various types of work, forms of communication, and gestures for greetings and farewells, among others. This diverse functionality of the hands is why they frequently appear in many linguistic expressions, particularly idioms. In the following idioms (**Table 6**), the semantic meanings related to hands and feet refer to the cooperation, generosity, and kindness between people; some are based on the meaning of ability and disability to do something.

Both idioms mention the concept of cooperation metaphorically in the image of an applauding hand in Arabic culture, in which the single hand represents a person who needs assistance and support from others. The im-

age of hand washing in South African culture is that one hand cannot wash without using the other hand. The target domain in these expressions metaphorically revolves around the theme of cooperation; the semantic mapping between the source and the target domain highlights the necessity for a partner[24]. Many South African communities traditionally emphasize communal living and mutual support, as reflected in practices such as Ukusisa "cattle lending". However, the application of these values can vary across families, regions, and social contexts, and is subject to change over time[25].

Both the Arabic and South African idioms rely on bodily experience involving the hands to conceptualize cooperation, but they differ slightly in emphasis (**Table 7**).

Table 6. Hands and Feet Idioms: Cooperation and Mutual Support.

c. Arabic Expression	**South African Expression**
ا ليد الواحده لا تصفق.	Izandla Ziyagezana
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
Help each other and take by his hand.	No one can rise without help of another.

Table 7. Conceptual Metaphors of Cooperation in Hands Idioms.

Language	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Conceptual Metaphor**
Arabic	Clapping (two hands required)	Cooperation	Cooperation is joint action
South African	Washing hands	Mutual support	Cooperation is reciprocal help

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, Arabic idioms are based on a mapping between physical action and social interaction.

Source domain: Physical action involving the body (hands and clapping);

Target domain: Social cooperation and mutual support;

Conceptual metaphor: Cooperation is joint physical action.

The idiom draws on the embodied experience that clapping is only possible when both hands act together. This physical experience is mapped onto the abstract idea that successful action in social life requires the participation of more than one person. Thus, the inability of one hand to clap represents the limitation of individual effort without support from others.

In South African idiom, the act of washing is used metaphorically to represent helping behaviour. Since one hand cannot effectively wash itself without the other, the physical interaction between the hands is mapped onto social interaction between individuals. The metaphor emphasizes exchange, suggesting that cooperation involves mutual benefit and shared effort.

Source domain: Physical action of washing hands;

Target domain: Social relationships and mutual assistance;

Conceptual metaphor: helping is cleaning/support is shared action.

Both languages use the idiom concept of foot in their culture, but with different meanings. Arabic expressions often employ the term 'foot' as a metaphor. In this case, the term رجل (foot) symbolizes the concept of walking in someone else's footsteps (**Table 8**). The literal meaning is my foot is on your foot. That means you cannot leave without me. Whereas South African idioms use the word foot to be kind towards strangers because you do not know where your feet might take you one day. Therefore, the main semantic meaning here was generosity and kindness and giving value to someone, even if they are strangers.

Although both idioms are based on the foot as a source domain, they conceptualize different aspects of social experience (**Table 9**).

Table 8. Arabic and isiZulu Foot Idioms: Generosity and Kindness Mapping.

d. Arabic Expression	**South African Expression**
رجل علي رجلك	Unyawo alunampumulo

Table 8. *Cont.*

English Meaning	English Meaning
I will leave with you	Be kind toward strangers

Table 9. Conceptual Metaphors for Companionship and Loyalty in Foot Idioms.

Language	Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Metaphor
Arabic	Walking together/physical closeness	Companionship, loyalty	Support is moving together
South African	Movement/journey	Kindness, social behaviour	Life is a journey

From a conceptual metaphor perspective, Arabic idiom maps physical proximity and coordinated movement onto social commitment and companionship.

Source domain: Bodily movement and physical proximity (feet and walking);

Target domain: Social relationship (companionship, loyalty, support);

Conceptual metaphor: social support is moving together.

The idiom draws on the embodied experience of walking closely with someone. Placing one's foot on another metaphorically represents staying physically and socially connected. This is mapped onto the abstract idea of accompanying someone and offering support, emphasizing loyalty and togetherness.

In isiZulu idioms, the foot represents human movement through life. The idea that the foot "has no nose" suggests that a person cannot predict where they will go or whom they will encounter. This physical uncertainty is mapped onto a moral lesson: since future encounters are unpredictable, individuals should treat others with kindness and generosity.

Source domain: Movement and travel (feet as agents of motion);

Target domain: Social behaviour and moral values (kindness, generosity);

Conceptual metaphor: life is journeying social relationships are paths we travel.

There is a cognitive relationship between hands and movement in the Arabic idiom, in which metaphorically the concept of disability is illustrated by the image of restrained hands (**Table 10**). Being unable to move or to do anything, tied hands do not offer any help or support and they are disabled. In contrast, South African expressions use the foot as magic; metaphorically, the meaning of ability is based on the image of the magic foot that is able to move and do anything. The semantic mapping between the two meanings relies on a common thread of ability and loss of movement. Therefore, the target domain in these expressions is metaphorically rooted in the themes of the ability and disability.

These two idioms present a contrastive metaphorical structure, where opposite physical conditions represent opposite abstract meanings (**Table 11**).

Table 10. Ability and Disability: Mapping of Hands and Feet Idioms.

e. Arabic Expression	South African Expression
مكتوفي الايدي	Unyawo luyathakatha or Unyawo alunampumulo
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
Disability to do anything.	Ability to do anything.

Table 11. Conceptual Metaphors for Ability and Disability in Hands/Feet Idioms.

Language	Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Metaphor
Arabic	Tied hands (restriction)	Inability/powerlessness	Inability is constraint
Soth African	Magical foot (enhanced movement)	Ability/power	Ability is powerful movement

From a conceptual metaphor perspective, this idiom maps physical restriction of movement onto lack of ability or power.

Source domain: Physical constraint of the body (hands

and movement);

Target domain: Abstract concept of inability or powerlessness;

Conceptual metaphor: Ability is freedom of movement**;** inability is physical constraint.

The idiom is grounded in the embodied experience that hands are essential tools for performing actions. When the hands are tied, movement is restricted, and action becomes impossible. This physical constraint is mapped onto the abstract notion of being unable to act, make decisions, or influence a situation.

In South African idiom, the foot represents movement and action, while the notion of "magic" enhances this ability beyond normal limits. The metaphor suggests that having the ability to act is like possessing extraordinary power that enables one to move freely and accomplish goals.

Source domain: Movement and supernatural ability (magic associated with the foot);

Target domain: Abstract concept of ability, power, or effectiveness;

Conceptual metaphor: Ability is powerful movement.

(3) Idioms Concepts on Face and Heart

The face reveals significant information about individuals. It provides insights into their appearance, demeanour, and emotions. Facial expressions indicate whether someone is feeling happy, sad, bored, angry, or experiencing other feelings[23]. In the Arabic culture, the heart in idioms refers to the strength and power, love, and kindness. The term 'face' is often used metaphorically to signify notions of familiarity and honesty. In South African culture, idioms related to the face symbolize a person's reputation, honour, and self-worth. Meanwhile, the 'heart' in idiomatic expressions usually pertains to an individual's emotional essence, character, and ability to show empathy and kindness (**Table 12**).

In these expressions, the term 'heart' relates to the idea of strength (**Table 13**). The literal meaning of English implies that it empowers you, similar to the phrase as a man in idiomatic usage. From an Arabic cultural perspective, the heart is seen as the primary source of a man's strength, the power of a man. In South African culture, be brave and do not always listen to your heart. There are similarities in both languages in the meaning of the concept of the heart. Therefore, the semantic meaning here was a strength and bravery theme. Although both idioms relate the heart to strength, they conceptualize strength differently.

Table 12. Heart and Face Idioms: Arabic and South African Expressions.

f. Arabic Expression	**South African Expression**
شجع و قوي قلبك	Inhliziyo ifuna nembuzi okumele iboshiwe/Inhliziyo ayiphakelwa
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
Be a man.	Be strong and tied up your heart.

Table 13. Conceptual Metaphors of Strength and Bravery in Heart Idioms.

Language	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Conceptual Metaphor**
Arabic	Physical strength of heart	Courage/bravery	Courage is strong heart
South African	Controlling an animal	Emotional control	Emotions are animals

From a conceptual metaphor perspective, this Arabic idiom maps physical strength of an internal organ onto emotional courage and bravery.

Source domain: Physical strength and the body (heart as an organ);

Target domain: Emotional courage and bravery;

Conceptual metaphor: Courage is strength of the heart.

The idiom is based on the embodied belief that the heart is the centre of emotions and inner strength. Making the heart "strong" metaphorically means increasing emotional resilience and courage. Thus, bravery is conceptualized as physical strength located in the heart.

In South African idiom, the heart represents emotions or desires, while the goat symbolizes something that moves freely and uncontrollably. Tying the goat represents control-

ling emotional impulses. Therefore, strength is conceptualized not as emotional expression but as emotional control.

Source domain: Animal control and physical restraint;

Target domain: Emotional control and inner strength;

Conceptual metaphor: Emotions are animals, self-control is restraining an animal.

In Arabic expressions, the term 'face' signifies a person's familiarity with another (**Table 14**). It suggests that the face, as a physical feature, symbolizes aspects of one's character or personality. Feelings of sorry, regret, or happiness are always replaced or referred to the heart in South African culture. The use of some South African expressions serves as an effective means of managing facework. These idioms can soften the impact of harsh statements that, if expressed in plain language, might embarrass both the listener and the speaker. South African speakers employ these idiomatic expressions to steer clear of situations that could threaten one's face, helping to safeguard and maintain the dignity of themselves and others. Therefore, the main themes in these expressions were emotions, familiarity, and dignity. These two idioms demonstrate different metaphorical mappings, but both relate body parts to social and emotional relationships.

From a conceptual metaphor perspective, Arabic idioms map physical facial recognition onto social familiarity and identity (**Table 15**).

Table 14. Conceptual Mapping of Emotions and Familiarity in Face Idioms.

g. Arabic Expression	**South African Expression**
وجهك معروف و مالوف	Inhliziyo iyaphuma
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
You look familiar	To feel sorry for someone

Table 15. Conceptual Metaphors Linking Face Recognition and Social Identity.

Language	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Conceptual Metaphor**
Arabic	Face recognition	Social identity, familiarity	Identity is the face
South African	Heart movement	Sympathy, compassion	Emotions are in the heart

Source domain: Physical appearance (face recognition);

Target domain: Social identity and familiarity;

Conceptual metaphor: The face represents the person or identity is the face.

The idiom is based on the embodied experience that people recognize others primarily through their faces. This physical recognition is mapped onto the abstract concept of social familiarity. Therefore, knowing someone is conceptualized as recognizing their face, and the face becomes a symbol of identity and social presence.

The South African idiom conceptualizes emotions as something located inside the heart, and when the heart 'comes out,' emotions are expressed outwardly toward others. The metaphor therefore represents sympathy as emotional openness and empathy toward another person.

Source domain: Movement or exposure of an internal organ;

Target domain: Emotional expression (sympathy, compassion);

Conceptual metaphor: Emotions are in the heart; sympathy is the heart moving outward.

In the following Arabic expression, the word face refers to someone who feels embarrassed (**Table 16**). This illustrates that the term "face" is employed metaphorically to convey various concepts. In Arab culture, the face is regarded as the most significant part of the body for expressing emotions and impressions. The same is true for South African culture, in which facial expression is always related to what a person feels and what is in his heart towards others. According to their conventional knowledge, each person has only one face, which reveals their feelings and attitudes towards anything[23]. Still, when a person has two faces, this implies that this person has many attitudes or even perhaps feelings towards the same thing. Both idioms demonstrate a strong connection between the face and emotional expression, but they emphasize different aspects of this relationship.

Table 16. Face Idioms: Embarrassment and Emotional Expression Mapping.

Arabic Expression	**South African Expression**
لا يستطيع يواري وجهه	Konke oku enhliziyweni kubhalwa ebusweni/ Ukudliwa inhliziyo
English Meaning	**English Meaning**
He is so embarrassed.	What you feel towards others is clear on your face.

Source domain: Physical visibility of the face;

Target domain: Emotional and social state (embarrassment, shame);

Conceptual metaphor: The face is social identity shame is inability to hide the face (**Table 17**).

The idiom is grounded in the embodied experience that the face is the most visible part of the body and is closely associated with social identity. When someone is unable to "hide their face," it metaphorically represents a situation in which their emotions, especially shame, are exposed to others. Thus, embarrassment is conceptualized as unwanted social visibility.

Table 17. Conceptual Metaphors for Emotional Expression and Shame.

Language	**Source Domain**	**Target Domain**	**Conceptual Metaphor**
Arabic	Visibility of the face	Shame, embarrassment	Shame is exposure
South African	Writing on the face	Emotional expression	Emotions are written on the face

The South African idiom conceptualizes the face as a surface on which internal emotions (from the heart) are 'written.' The metaphor suggests that emotions cannot be hidden; instead, they become visible through facial expressions. Thus, inner emotional states are externalized and made readable to others.

Source domain: Writing, inscription on a surface;

Target domain: Expression of emotions;

Conceptual metaphor: The face is a surface; text emotions are written on the face.

Arabic and South African cultures share notable similarities, particularly in how they view individual identity as intertwined with group identity. Cultivating and maintaining relationships while preserving dignity is essential in their cultural practices. Idioms serve as effective tools for saving face, helping to prevent situations that could cause embarrassment or discomfort for others. In their culture, discussing private matters is frowned upon, and those who do are seen as taking pleasure in other misfortunes and spreading falsehoods. Consequently, the use of idioms helps protect the dignity of both the perpetrator and the addressee.

Many idioms exist that help mitigate the embarrassment associated with face-acting situations in both cultures. In South African culture, being impolite to those in authority is considered highly disrespectful and is generally condemned. Therefore, employing idioms as a means of showing politeness and preserving dignity reflects the concept of ubuntu. Ubuntu, as described by South African scholars such as Mbigi [17] and Letseka [26] emphasizes interconnectedness and the moral obligation to support others. This value may influence how bodily idioms are employed in South Africa, reflecting concern for community harmony. It is important to note, however, that interpretations of Ubuntu may vary across individuals and contexts.

From the above body idioms expression in Arabic and South African cultures, there are similarities in emphasis on prioritising the needs of the group over those of the individual. In collectivist societies, people are deeply embedded in unified groups, such as families, clans, and broader communities, feeling a strong obligation to protect one another in return for loyalty. This collective identity in South Africa, for instance, is influenced by the concept of ubuntu, which translates to 'humaneness', highlighting the belief that the identities of others shape one's own identity. As a result, individuals see themselves as interconnected [13]. Furthermore, in other cultures, such as the Thai context, Leksono and Jantem [4] illustrate that idioms are closely tied to cultural contexts. Thai idioms highlight the significance of family dynamics, religion, and personal beliefs. Additionally, these idioms reveal the prevailing role of males, such as fathers and older brothers, within the family structure. Idioms that underscore the beliefs of Thai individuals often connect to

elements like temples and monks.

The main components of the abstract meaning that were found in the body parts metaphors were experienced and interactive exercises in the everyday life of Arabic and South Africa including Advice, Disability, Strength and Bravery, Cooperation, Emotions and Familiarity and socio-cultural practices of any events at various levels. The conventional knowledge assists us in relating the literal meaning of that idiom and its idiomatic meaning. It conveyed a deeper meaning, then the users are communicating with their strong and subconscious mind. Consequently, different cultures and societies create various interpretations of metaphors based on the social, economic, cultural, educational, and political experiences of their populations.

This study draws attention to the linguistic structure that facilitates this kind of metaphor. Such metaphors are ingrained in the daily language of Arabic and South African speakers. The researcher observed that these communities tend to favour metaphorical constructions in their speech due to their heightened communicative impact. Additionally, metaphorical phrases introduce a unique cultural richness that is absent in straightforward expressions. Therefore, the findings reveal that body part idioms in both Arabic and South African utilise shared cultural knowledge. Speakers of these languages draw on their common experiences related to social and cultural elements, beliefs, and values that fundamentally shape the idioms. Additionally, this study not only enhances our understanding of idioms in both languages but also offers further evidence supporting the universal nature of cognitive metaphors associated with body part idioms.

In summary, the analysis of body-part idioms in Arabic and South African reveals several recurring conceptual themes, including advice, cooperation, ability and disability, strength and bravery, emotions, and familiarity. These themes emerge through metaphorical mappings between concrete body parts (such as the head, eyes, hands, feet, face, and heart) and abstract human experiences. For example, the head and eyes are frequently associated with perception, awareness, and advice, while hands and feet metaphorically represent cooperation, action, or ability. Similarly, the face and heart are closely linked to emotions, dignity, and social relationships.

The findings also demonstrate that although Arabic and South African belong to different linguistic and cultural traditions, both languages rely heavily on conceptual metaphors grounded in bodily experience, supporting the theoretical framework proposed by Lakoff and Johnson. Their theory suggests that metaphor is not only a linguistic device but also a fundamental structure of human thought. Moreover, the results indicate that many idioms in both languages reflect shared socio-cultural values, such as cooperation, respect for others, and collective identity. For instance, the South African concept of ubuntu emphasises community and mutual support, which is also reflected in idioms related to cooperation and kindness. Similarly, Arabic idioms often highlight dignity, honour, and interpersonal relationships.

5.2. Syntactic Structure of Arabic and South African Idioms

As noted earlier, Arabic and South African are different linguistic families (Semitic and Bantu), with different cultural and social contexts. This distinction is reflected not only in their grammatical structures but also in how idiomatic meanings are constructed and conceptualized. The analysis of the corpus reveals variation in syntactic patterns, particularly between verbal and nominal structures, which has important implications for how meaning is encoded in each language. The data indicate that Arabic idioms include both verbal and nominal sentences, whereas South African idioms in the corpus are predominantly nominal in structure. For example, the Arabic idiom لا يعرف راسه من قدمه (he does not know his head from his feet) is structured as a verbal sentence, beginning with a verb. In contrast, the South African idiom Iso liwela umfula ugcwele (The eye spans the entire river) is structured nominally, focusing on the subject rather than an explicit action.

This difference is not merely grammatical; it reflects distinct patterns of conceptualization. Arabic verbal idioms tend to emphasize actions, processes, and dynamic states, suggesting that meaning is often constructed through events or activities. In contrast, the predominance of nominal structures in South African idioms suggests a tendency to conceptualize meaning in terms of states, qualities, or generalized truths rather than specific actions.

From a cognitive perspective, this distinction can be interpreted within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Verbal constructions in Arabic often encode metaphor through process-based mappings for instance (knowing, hid-

ing, moving), where abstract concepts are understood as actions. On the other hand, nominal constructions in South African frequently encode metaphor as stable conceptual relationships, where abstract meanings are presented as enduring characteristics.

For instance, nominal idioms in South African languages often function as descriptive statements about reality or human behaviour, which may contribute to their use as generalized cultural knowledge or moral principles. This aligns with the observation that many South African idioms convey collective values and shared social norms, rather than individual actions. In contrast, Arabic verbal idioms may be more context-dependent, emphasizing individual experience, reaction, or situational behaviour.

The majority of noun-based structures in South African idioms may therefore suggest a conceptual orientation toward categorization and description, while the presence of verbal structures in Arabic idioms reflects a stronger orientation toward process and interaction. These differences highlight how syntactic form can influence not only linguistic expression but also the way abstract concepts are structured and communicated.

Most idioms are noun phrases that function as adjectives, either describing a person in certain situations or an object in others. Concerning Konke okusenhliziyweni kubhalwe ebusweni, it is the only adverbial phrase in the data. In Arabic syntactic structure, a sentence can start with a verb, and it is called a verbal sentence such as لا يستطيع يواري وجهه. These idioms serve as head modifiers in most situations. In contrast, there is no verbal sentence in isiZulu syntactic structure that starts with a verb. **Table 18** shows the dominant syntactic structures of the idioms:

Table 18. Dominant Syntactic Structures of Arabic and South African Idioms.

Syntactic Structure	Arabic Idioms	South African Idioms
Nominal sentences	4 sentences	7 sentences
Verbal sentences	3 sentences	0
Adjectival phrase	1 sentence	0
Adverbial Phrase	0	1 sentence

5.3. Body-Related Idioms in Arabic and South African (Q1)

The analysis identified several body-related idioms in both Arabic and South African that reflect important aspects of human experience. The idioms in the corpus mainly involve the head, eyes, hands, feet, face, and heart, which are commonly used in both languages to convey figurative meanings.

Idioms involving the head and eyes are frequently associated with perception, awareness, and advice. For example, the Arabic expression كل كامل على عيني و راسي metaphorically expresses acceptance of someone's advice, while the South African idiom "Iso liwela umfula ugcwele" emphasises determination and persistence. In both cases, the body parts are used metaphorically to represent mental processes and attitudes. Similarly, idioms related to hands and feet often represent cooperation, ability, or action. For instance, the Arabic idiom ايد الواحدة لا تصفق and the South African idiom Izandla ziyagezana both metaphorically express the importance of cooperation and mutual support. These examples demonstrate how body parts are used to represent social interaction and collective effort.

Idioms involving the face and heart are mainly associated with emotions, dignity, and personal identity. In Arabic, expressions involving the face frequently relate to social reputation or embarrassment, while the heart is often associated with courage or emotional strength. In South African, the heart similarly symbolises emotional states, while the face may reflect an individual's feelings or moral character. These findings indicate that body parts serve as important linguistic resources for expressing abstract concepts in both languages.

5.4. Conceptual Metaphors Underlying the Idioms (Q2)

The findings also reveal that several conceptual metaphors underlie the body-related idioms in Arabic and South African. These metaphors link concrete bodily experiences with abstract concepts, which supports the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson. For instance, the head and eyes are conceptualised as sources of knowledge, awareness, and perception. Idioms involving these body parts, therefore, metaphorically represent under-

standing, attention, or acceptance of advice.

Similarly, the hand is frequently used as a metaphor for cooperation, assistance, or ability, while the foot often symbolises movement, direction, or action. The heart, on the other hand, represents emotional strength, courage, or empathy. Through these metaphorical mappings, abstract ideas such as advice, cooperation, ability, strength, and emotional expression are conceptualised using physical experiences related to the human body. These conceptual metaphors demonstrate how figurative language reflects cognitive processes and everyday human experiences [27].

5.5. Shared Patterns in Figurative Body Metaphors (Q3)

A comparison of Arabic and South African idioms reveals several shared patterns in the figurative use of body parts. Despite belonging to different linguistic and cultural traditions, both languages frequently use similar body parts to express comparable abstract meanings. For instance, both languages use the hand to represent cooperation and mutual assistance, and the heart to symbolise emotional states or courage. Likewise, the face often represents dignity, reputation, or visible emotional expression in both cultures.

These similarities suggest that metaphorical thinking grounded in bodily experience may reflect broader cognitive patterns shared across cultures. At the same time, some differences can be observed in the specific interpretations of certain idioms, which are influenced by cultural values and social practices. For example, South African idioms often reflect communal values associated with the cultural concept of ubuntu, emphasising social harmony and collective identity. Overall, the findings indicate that while Arabic and South African idioms share common conceptual patterns, cultural context plays an important role in shaping their specific meanings and usage.

5.6. Cultural Divergences and Metaphor Use

The findings of this study suggest that differences in metaphor use between Arabic and South African idioms may be influenced not only by linguistic structure but also by cultural models and social values. Arabic idioms frequently emphasize concepts such as honour, embarrassment, dignity, and social reputation, particularly in idioms related to the face and head. This reflects the importance of social image and honour in many Arabic cultural contexts. According to Arab cultural scholars such as Abdullah Al-Hamoudi cited in Abdul-Raof[2], social reputation and honour play an important role in interpersonal communication and social interaction in many Arab societies. In contrast, many South African idioms emphasize cooperation, generosity, emotional control, and communal relationships, which reflect the communal and collective orientation often associated with many African societies. These cultural differences suggest that embodiment alone cannot fully explain metaphor use; rather, metaphor is shaped by the interaction between bodily experience and cultural worldview.

6. Conclusions

This study examined body-related idioms in Arabic and South African to explore how abstract concepts are expressed through bodily metaphors. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the study analysed a corpus of sixteen idioms containing references to body parts such as the head, eyes, hands, feet, face, and heart. In response to the first research question, the analysis revealed that both Arabic and South African contain numerous body-related idioms that represent key aspects of human experience. These idioms frequently express meanings related to advice, cooperation, strength, ability, emotional expression, and social relationships. Body parts, therefore, function as important linguistic resources for expressing complex abstract meanings in everyday communication.

Concerning the second research question, the findings indicate that these idioms are structured by underlying conceptual metaphors that link bodily experience to abstract thought. Concepts such as cooperation, courage, emotional expression, and awareness are metaphorically mapped onto concrete bodily domains such as the hand, heart, or eyes. These patterns provide further empirical support for Conceptual Metaphor Theory, proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which argues that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device but a fundamental mechanism through which humans conceptualise abstract experience. This supports their view that metaphorical expressions play a crucial role in our everyday communication. While Arabic and South African originate from different languages and cultures, there

are significant similarities in their use of bodily idioms in figurative language, despite the variations in their conceptual meanings. Additionally, this finding is consistent with the research conducted by Bílková [7] and Bin Mukhashin [23] The investigation showed both commonalities and distinctions in metaphorical language use between African and Arabic. This aligns with Taylor's [24] findings about the presence of both similarities and differences across languages.

Regarding the third research question, the comparison revealed several shared patterns in the figurative use of body parts across the two languages. Despite belonging to different linguistic and cultural traditions, Arabic and South African idioms frequently employ similar bodily domains to express comparable meanings. For instance, the hand commonly symbolises cooperation and assistance, while the heart represents emotional strength or empathy. These similarities suggest that metaphorical thinking grounded in bodily experience may reflect broader cognitive tendencies shared across cultures. At the same time, some differences in interpretation reflect the influence of cultural values, social norms, and historical experiences.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to research in cognitive linguistics by demonstrating how conceptual metaphors operate in languages that have received relatively limited attention in metaphor studies. Much previous research has focused primarily on English [27], while cross-linguistic comparisons involving Arabic and African languages remain scarce. By examining idioms from Arabic and South African, this study highlights both universal and culture-specific aspects of metaphorical thought.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on a relatively small corpus of sixteen idioms, which may not fully represent the range of body-related idiomatic expressions in both languages. Second, the analysis focused mainly on linguistic interpretation rather than empirical data from speakers, such as interviews or corpus-based frequency analysis. Finally, the comparison was limited to one African language, isiZulu, which means that the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other African languages.

Overall, this study demonstrates that body-related idioms in Arabic and South African reflect complex interactions between language, cognition, and culture. By revealing both shared conceptual patterns and culturally specific interpretations, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how metaphor structures human thought and communication.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research could expand this study in several ways. Larger corpora of idioms could be examined to provide a more comprehensive representation of metaphorical patterns in both languages. Comparative studies could also include additional African languages to explore whether similar conceptual metaphors occur across a broader linguistic spectrum. Furthermore, empirical methods such as corpus analysis, psycholinguistic experiments, or interviews with native speakers could provide deeper insights into how these idioms are understood and used in real communicative contexts.

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This study did not engage human or animal subjects, so it does not need ethical approval from Al-Asmarya Islamic University or University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data being analyzed was specifically chosen to form a corpus for this study. The primary sources for these metaphorical idioms are body idioms from the Arabic language, which were extracted from the book *The Body Idioms in the Arabic Language* as cited in Bataineh and Al-Shaikhli, and various pieces of Arabic idiomatic literature. The isiZulu idioms were sourced from dictionaries and a book of proverb collections, including *99 South African Proverbs and Sayings: A Collection of Classic South African Expressions, Wise Sayings and Advice* by Desaray Wilson-Mnyandu and Phiwokuhle Mnyandu. These sources are cited in the reference list below.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this work, the author used most of the time AI on Google to find some resources and references for my literature review, as it was not easy to find them because there are no other studies like my research study to compare Arabic and African languages. After using this tool/service, I reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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