

A Semantic Analysis of Rhetorical Figures in Jordanian Proverbs

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Abstract

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study thus far has attempted to identify nor classify the standard types of rhetorical figures (tropes). Arabic proverbs commonly contain, not to mention Jordanian proverbs. This gap is what triggered the researchers to conduct the present study with the hope that it would motivate further research, and ultimately fill such a gap in the literature of Arabic paremiology. The present study attempts to provide a semantic analysis of the rhetorical figures found in Jordanian proverbs. The sample of the study consists of 345 proverbs (all with themes relating to women) retrieved from two large national proverb compendia, namely, al-Uzayzi's (2012). The Jordan Heritage Encyclopedia, and al-Amad's (2008) Jordanian Popular Proverbs. Norrick's (1985) framework has been applied in the analysis of rhetorical figures, as well as in finding a correlation between the proverbs' literal and figurative meanings vis á vis their standard proverbial interpretation (SPI). The results of the study reveal that of all the rhetorical figures found in the Arabic language, Jordanian proverbs seem to employ only a relatively limited number. Jordanian proverbs exhibit figures, such as, synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, paradox and allusion; however, species-genus synecdoche turns out to be the most frequently used figure in Jordanian proverbs. The study also concludes that figuration (or metaphoricality) renders proverbs more generic, allowing them to be applicable to a wide variety of situations.

Keywords: Rhetorical figures; Jordanian proverbs; paremiology; semantic analysis.

دراسة دلالية للصور البلاغية في الأمثال الأردنية

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ملخص

وفقاً للأفضل ما لدى الباحثين من علم فإنه لا يوجد إلى الآن أية دراسة قد تطرقت لتعريف أو تصنيف أنواع الصور البلاغية التي عادةً ما تحويها الأمثال العربية ناهيك عن الأمثال الأردنية. ولذلك شكّلت هذه الفجوة لدى الباحثين دافعاً رئيساً لإجراء مثل هذا البحث وعلى أمل أن يكون حافزاً لإجراء دراسات مستقبلية وبالتالي يتم ردم هذه الفجوة في أدبيات علم دراسة الأمثال العربية أو (ما يُعرف بالبارمولوجيا). تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم تحليلاً دلالياً للصور البلاغية في الأمثال الأردنية. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من 345 مثلاً من الأمثال التي تتحدث عن المرأة والمستمدّة من مصدرين رئيسين هما: "معلمة للتراث الأردني" للغزيري (2012) و"الأمثال الأردنية الشعبية" للغمّدي (2008) وباستخدام نظرية نوريك (1985) جرى تحليل الصور البلاغية وإيجاد العلاقة بين المعنى الحرفي والمعنى المجازي للمثل من جهة والمعنى المؤلف أو المعجمي من جهة أخرى. كشفت نتائج الدراسة بأنه من بين كافة الصور البلاغية المستخدمة في اللغة العربية توطّف الأمثال الأردنية عدداً محدوداً نسبياً منها وهي المجاز المرسل، والاستعارة، والكناية، والمبالغة، والتناقض، والتلميح. إلا أن المجاز المرسل ذو العلاقة الجزئية يُعدّ من أكثر الصور البلاغية استخداماً في الأمثال الأردنية. وقد توصّلت الدراسة أيضاً إلى أن التصوير المجازي يجعل من المثل أكثر شمولية بما يسمح من استخدامه في العديد من الحالات والمواقف.

الكلمات الدالة: الصور البلاغية، الأمثال الأردنية، البارمولوجيا، التحليل الدلالي.



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1. Introduction

Although there has been no consensus among paremiologists (i.e. specialists in the study of proverbs) on a single all-inclusive definition, the proverb is traditionally defined by reference to its characteristic features which include self-containedness, pithiness, traditionality, didactic tendency, fixedness of form, and prosody. Figurative meaning (or figuration) is included under the prosodic features of the proverb, particularly in association with the use of rhetorical figures such as, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, etc. (Mieder 2004: 1). Barley (1972) considers figuration as an integral semantic property of the proverb, whereas Taylor (1931/1962) and Norrick (1985) argue against this assumption. To them, figuration in proverbs, along with prosody, are just common properties that are simply used as mnemonic devices to help render any given proverb more memorable and recognizable.

The present study aims to identify the standard types of rhetorical figures found in Jordanian proverbs, as well as the mechanisms used to relate the literal or figurative meaning of a proverb with its standard proverbial interpretation (SPI), i.e., its customary or dictionary meaning.

Prior to analyzing the figures in Jordanian proverbs individually, a review of the literature pertaining to figurative meaning in proverbs is imperative, particularly the generalization and transference models by Seitel (1969, 1999) and Barley (1972).

2. Theoretical background

In his analysis of Durham proverbs, Barley (1972) provides a complete analysis of proverbial figures. He distinguishes between a completely metaphorical proverb involving a description of a concrete scene (known as a *scenic* proverb), and a proverb containing only a single metaphoric NP or VP. In Barley's generalization model, a metaphorical proverb can be generalized or rather paraphrased into a literal maxim. By way of illustration of "maxim paraphrases", the proverb "*The person who has not tasted the bitter cannot appreciate the sweet*" becomes the maxim "*He who has not experienced the bad cannot appreciate the good*". Barley regards figurative meaning to be a defining feature of proverbs, while he considers literal meaning to be a characteristic of maxims. By contrast, Norrick (1985) considers figurative meaning as a common property of proverbs as is the case with other verbal folkloric genres, such as riddles, aphorism, and Wellerisms. Norrick considers figuration in proverbs to be a matter of degree because many proverbs can be understood as literal in one context and figurative in another. For example,

- (1) شجرة بلا ثمرة قطعها حلال
šajara bilā tamara gaṭiṣ-ha: ḥalāl
 Indef.tree without Indef.fruit cutting-it halal
 "Cutting a non-fruit-bearing tree is permissible/lawful"

Provided that it is used as a piece of advice for a married man whose wife is infertile, this proverb has a figurative meaning suggesting that divorcing a barren woman is lawful and acceptable. However, it is possible to interpret it literally, say, in the context of gardening.

Barley's model of generalization of a concrete scene can be seen as an expansion of Seitel's (1969, 1999) model for proverb performance. Seitel (1999: 28) coined the term "compositional finalization" as a blanket term for his approach to discourse analysis. Briefly, this approach "creates the underlying logical form of an utterance, a section of an utterance, or an exchange of utterances", and with respect to proverbs, it shapes "the contrast and analogy of a proverb use". That is, "compositional finalization" refers to the relationship between the scene/image described in a proverb and the applicable social situation in the real world.

Practically, Seitel (1969; 1999) explains that when a proverb is employed in an utterance during the speaker's turn, it is intended to deduce a response from the listener. This deduced response depends on the relationship between them (i.e. the speaker and the listener), which is affected by factors related to sex, age, status, etc. This desired response, according to Seitel (ibid.), represents the social context of the proverb's use. The two remaining parts in Seitel's model represent the

proverb situation and the social situation to which the proverb is applied. There seems to be a constant logical nature between the substantive terms of the proverb and the substantive terms of the logical situation. The underlying logic in proverbs that Seitel (ibid.) elaborates on is what distinguishes them from non-proverbial language. In this sense, it can be likened to the role of a plot in a narrative.

Seitel's model on the meaning proverbs emanates from their use in various situations instead of their internal semantics; in particular, it focused on the social functions of proverbs. By contrast, Barley's (1972) model was concerned with the meaning of proverbs as texts, irrespective of the contexts they occur in, which is also the focus of the present study.

The two models (i.e. Seitel's and Barley's) share one concept, that of the relationship between the proverb's image (or concrete scene) and the general idea (or SPI in Norrick's terminology) derivable from it. The image, related to the concrete description of a unique scene, can be generalized to become a mental concept or an abstract truth.

3. Methodology

The present study focuses on analysing the proverb as a distinct text which complete in itself, that is, not as embedded within a larger text or interaction. It describes the figurative meaning of the proverb and its relationship to the standard proverbial interpretation (SPI). SPI is basically the standard ideational semantic meaning of a proverb, i.e. the customary meaning known to the community.

Despite the increasing interest in paremiology (the study of proverbs) worldwide, there has been little work done on analysing Arabic proverbs in general and Jordanian proverbs in particular. The limited studies on Arabic proverbs have been mostly focused on proverbs as part of texts and interactions; however, the present study treats the Jordanian proverb as a distinct text, i.e. devoid from linguistic contexts. To this end, Norrick's (1985) framework has been applied in the analysis and description of the rhetorical figures within figurative proverbs. Such a description of the typology of rhetorical figures provides the basis for the classification of proverbs. For example, proverbs that contain the species-genus synecdochic figure are grouped together. In the case of proverbs which are variants of one another (i.e., they are synonymous), only one single proverb is taken into consideration. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there has been no attempt to analyze and classify semantic figures in Jordanian or, for the same matter, Arabic proverbs.

The primary data source consists of a collection of 345 proverbs gathered from two sources, namely, al-Uzayzi's (2012) *The Jordan Heritage Encyclopedia*, and al-Amad's (2008) *Jordanian Popular Proverbs*, which contain a collection of the most common Jordanian proverbs along with their standard meanings and sometimes the stories behind their creation. Both of the authors followed an alphabetical classification system in arranging the proverbs. Due to the large number of proverbs contained in these two books (over 3000), and the wide range of themes they cover, (such as spiritual beliefs, animals, food and eating, actions, consequences, and social relations, etc.), the researchers limited the scope of the analysis to proverbs which relate to the theme of women. Proverbs which contain the theme of women account for the lion's share of all the proverbs in the two compendia. Statistically, such a large amount of data set can be conveniently evaluated and ultimately helps toward reaching useful results.

3.1. Research Questions

The study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most recurrent rhetorical figures found in Jordanian proverbs?
2. Among all rhetorical figures found in Jordanian proverbs, what is (are) the most commonly used figure(s)?

3.2. Theoretical framework

The researchers have adopted Norrick's (1985) theoretical framework in the semantic analysis of proverbs in the corpus. Basically, Norrick argues that any semantic analysis of a proverb must primarily focus on the *standard proverbial interpretation* (SPI) (i.e. the customary meaning) which may coincide with or differ from its literal or figurative meanings. For example, *like father like son* can be understood as literal since its SPI and literal meaning correspond. Whereas, *No rose without a thorn* counts as figurative proverb because its SPI "there is no joy without hardship" differs from its literal meaning

“there is no rose without a thorn”.

In order to capture the concepts embedded in any given proverb, Norrick applied the semantics theoretical framework of Fillmore (2010) as an explanatory device. This theory provides adequate description of certain messages by appropriately contextualizing them. . The aim behind the contextualization of the message is to enable the hearer/addressee in maximizing comprehension with the least possible effort in cognitive processing . Fillmore (ibid.), the founder of frame semantics, explains that the semantic representation for a given term is composed of a set of cognitive schemata (i.e. background generic knowledge) represented by predicates.

For instance, the semantic representation for the two terms *ʔil-gird* “the monkey” and *gāzāl* “a gazelle” in the proverb *ʔil-gird bi-ʕain umm-u gāzāl* “The monkey in the eyes of his mother is a gazelle” include activation of the background knowledge associated with predicates like “have four legs”, “have tails”, “eat grass”, vary in their beauty”, and “are hunted for food”. The predicate “vary in their beauty” gains significance in the context of the proverb “The monkey in the eyes of his mother is a gazelle” since the paraphrase of the proverb can amount to a general idea (or SPI) “**Beauty** is in the eye of the beholder”.

4. Proverbial rhetorical figures

4.1. Synecdoche in proverbs

Synecdoche is considered by Barley (1972) and Seitel (1969, 1999) (among others) to be the most common proverbial figure of speech in proverbs. It is the rhetorical figure of substitution, i.e. substituting species (or microcosm) for genus (or macrocosm) or vice versa; in simple terms, synecdoche entails substituting a part for a larger whole or vice versa. Synecdoche functions as a strategy by which the speaker/writer emphasizes certain parts of the whole, accomplishes brevity, or provides a fresh insight into everyday language. Below is an example taken from the corpus:

- (1) رجعت حليمة لعادتها القديمة
rijʕa-t ḥalīma la-ʕādīt-hā ʔil-gadīma
 PERF.return_{3Sing.F.} Halimah(proper name) to-Def.habit_F-her the-old_F.
 “Halimah has returned to her old habit”

This proverb describes a concrete scene (one involving Halimah and her old habits) where the proper noun “Halimah” as a species stands for any human being (genus). This proverb can be generalizable to “someone returning to his/her evil ways”. The figurative relationship between the concrete scene and the general statement counts not only as species-genus synecdoche in traditional rhetorical terms, but also as microcosm-macrocosm relation.

4.2. Metaphor in proverbs

Metaphor simply means understanding one thing in terms of another. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 4-19), human thought or the “conceptual system” is metaphorical in nature. As a way of illustration, Lakoff and Johnson describe the conceptualization of the term *argument* in terms of a *battle*, and the reflection of such a metaphorical concept in daily language by a wide variety of expressions: *attacking an opponent's position*, *winning an argument*, *arguing strategies*, etc.

Proverbs are said to be commonly metaphoric in nature. Although metaphor can easily be found in all major word-classes (nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbs, and prepositions), in proverbs it limits itself to nominals only (whether single nouns or noun phrases). Norrick (1985: 117) classifies metaphoric nominals in proverbs into two types:

4.2.1. Predicate extension metaphors, i.e. when a nominal takes a semantic feature from another element in the proverb. The next three sub-headings tackle the three types of predicate extension metaphors proposed by Norrick (1985) with examples from the corpus.

4.2.1.1. Metaphoric anthropomorphization

Anthropomorphization results from attributing human characteristics to something non-human. It is the transference of the feature predicate “is human” to a non-human nominal. Anthropomorphization implies a comparison between the abstract nominal that has been “anthropomorphized” and the humans. For example, when it is said:

- (1) لنثاء ما تشبع من الذكر والارض ما تشبع من المطر

l-ʔiṇṭa mā tišbaʕ min ʔiḍ-ḍakar
 the-female NEG IMPERFget-enough_{3Sing.F.} of the-male
w-ʔil-arḍ mā tišbaʕ min ʔil-maṭar
 and-the-earth NEG IMPERFget-enough_{3Sing.F.} of the-rain

“The female can’t get enough of the male! The earth can’t get enough of the rain!”

In this proverb, the verb *tišbaʕ* which literally means “to satisfy one’s hunger” presupposes a subject nominal with human characteristics (or characterized by the predicate “is human”). The transference of the selectional restriction “is human” for the verb *tišbaʕ* onto the subject *ʔil-arḍ* “the earth” overcomes the anomaly of the proverb on the literal level. The transference of such a semantic feature “is human” also leads to the anthropomorphization of *ʔil-arḍ* “the earth”, and thus yields a figurative interpretation of the proverb. This proverb combines a literal or general statement *l-ʔiṇṭa mā tišbaʕ min ʔiḍ-ḍakar* “The female can’t get enough of the male!” with a figurative statement *w-ʔil-arḍ mā tišbaʕ min ʔil-maṭar* “The earth can’t get enough of the rain!”.

4.2.1.2. Metaphoric animation

Animation refers to transferring the selectional restriction “is animate” for the predicate onto the subject nominal. It can be readily noticed that the feature “is animate” characterizes the metaphoric animation, compared to “is human” in anthropomorphization. Below is an example from the corpus:

- (1) بخت الحزينة امعلق إبتينة

baxt ʔil-ḥazīna ʔimʕallag ʔibīṇa
 Def.fate the-miserable_{Sing.F.} hanging_{Sing.M} on-Indeffig-tree

“The fate of the miserable woman hangs on a fig tree”

The present participle *ʔimʕallag* “hanging” in this proverb, normally selects an animate nominal subject, which follows the predicate “is animate” and is extended onto the noun *baxt* “fate” leading to a figurative interpretation, particularly a metaphoric one since there is a comparison between the resultant animated nominal and humans.

4.2.1.3. Metaphoric concretization

Concretization is to make an abstract concept into something concrete so that it can be easily perceived. In proverbs, similar to anthropomorphization and animation, metaphoric concretization occurs when the predicate “is concrete” is extended to a nominal which previously lacked it. The resultant SPI of the proverb is considered metaphoric due to the fact that there is a comparison between the concretized nominal and some concrete object. Consider the example below:

- (1) لا فرحت الرعنا ولا إنبل غليلها

lā farḥit ʔir-raʕnā w-lā ʔinball ḡalīl-ha
 NEG PERF.rejoice_{3Sing.F.} thickheaded w-NEG PERFgot-wet_{3Sing.M.} Defspite-her

“The thickheaded woman did not rejoice nor her spite been fulfilled”

In this case of metaphoric concretization, the subject *ḡalīl* “spite” is concretized in collocation with the predicate *ʔinball* “got wet”. In other words, the verb *ʔinball* “fulfilled” (literally “got wet”) presupposes an argument that has the feature “is concrete”. Since the argument *ḡalīl* “spite” is an abstract concept, it follows that the predicate “is concrete” needs to be extended from the verb *ʔinball* onto its subject nominal *ḡalīl*. The extension removes the literal anomaly in the proverb and replaces it with a metaphorically concretized reading or SPI “The thickheaded woman did not rejoice nor her **concrete** spite been fulfilled”.

4.2.2. Nominal-attribute metaphor, i.e. when a nominal metaphorically stands for one of its salient features, as in the following example:

- (1) البنت الحرة مثل الذهب بالصرة

ʔil-bint ʔil-ḥurra miṭil ʔiḍ-ḍahab bi-ʔiṣ-ṣurra
 the-girl the-free_{F.} like the-gold in-the-sack_{F.}

“A free girl is like gold in a sack”

In this proverb, the metaphoric noun phrase *ʔid-dahab bi-ʔiṣ-ṣurra* “the gold in a sack” (particularly “gold”) stands for its attribute “is valuable”. This correlates with the proverb’s SPI which could loosely be paraphrased as “A free girl is valuable”. However, in order to arrive at this SPI reading from its literal counterpart, the nominal-attribute transfer from *dahab* “gold” into “is valuable” must be applied.

4.3. Metonymy in proverbs

Kövecses and Radden (1998: 39) define metonymy as “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target,

within the same domain.” For instance, the HEART FOR PERSON is a metonymy where the heart (the vehicle) provides mental accessibility to the person (the target) possessing the heart, as in: *galb-u ṭayyib* “He has a good/fine heart”. Metonymy, as a common figure of speech, is also recurrent in proverbs. It is based on the relationship between the literal meaning of the thing named and the implied meaning. A few types of metonymy were found in the corpus and will be treated below. Part for a whole metonymy is similar to synecdoche (cf. subsection 4.1.):

4.3.1. Instrument-function metonymy

In instrument-function metonymy, the relation is from an instrument to its function. As a rule to identify instrument-function metonymy, Norrick (1985: 129) proposes a rule in which the “instrument” expression is replaced with a “function” expression customarily related with it. For example:

- (1) البلقا أم لسان
ʔil-balgā umm ʔil-lsān
 the-brunette mother-of the-tongue
 “The brunette is very talkative”

The organ *ʔil-lsān* “the tongue” displays an instrument-function metonymy which is reinterpreted as “loquacious/talkative”. The proverb literally names the organ to mean its typical function, i.e. assisting in the speech production. Such interpretation brings the explicit literal reading of the proverb to its SPI which can be stated as “the brunette is fond of talking”.

4.3.2. Cause-effect metonymy

A recurrent type of metonymic relation in the corpus of the study is cause and effect. Cause and effect are regarded as interdependent in that they imply each other. Given the broad understanding of cause-effect metonymy, it can be inferred that, Jordanian proverbs with conditional clauses, can be considered as cases of cause-effect metonymy. A proverbial conditional clause basically consists of a dependent clause (or the cause) and main clause (the effect); therefore, provided that the main clause contains an *effect* that has a different interpretation other than the one stated literally, then the proverb can be considered as an exemplar of cause-effect metonymy. Following in Norrick’s (1985) footsteps in proposing rules to relate literal readings in the proverb with their metonymic SPIs, the rule for cause-effect metonymy can be stated as follows:

Rule (1): Replace the expression identifying the cause with one identifying the effect.

Below is one out of many relevant examples in the corpus that states:

- (1) اللي يشاور المرأة مرة
ʔilli yṣāwir ʔil-mara mara
 whoever IMPERFCONSULT_{3Sing.M.} the-woman IndefWOMAN
 “Whoever consults the woman is a woman”

In this proverb, it is suggested that consulting a woman (i.e. the cause) brings about shame (i.e. the effect) to the man. This proverb reflects the culturally prevalent viewpoint concerning women in that they are seen by some members of society as mentally and religiously deficient.

4.4. Hyperbole in proverbs

Hyperbole is yet another rhetorical figure that is found in the proverbs of the corpus. Norrick (2014: 17) maintains that proverbs with modifiers and adverbs, such as *no, never, all, always*, etc. or numerical element have the tendency to be overstatements or amplifications of speech, i.e. hyperbole. Below is an analysis of a hyperbolic proverb from the corpus:

(1) دق الطبله تيجي مئة هبله

dugg ʔit-ṭabla tījī mīt habla
 IMPERATplay the-drum IMPERFCOME-over_{3Sing.F} Indefhundred crazy-woman
 “Play the drum and a hundred crazy women will show up”

This proverb contains one single hyperbolic element *mīt* “a/one hundred” which qualifies the proverb as an amplified statement because it involves some emotional feelings on the part of the speaker with the aim of stirring the same emotional feelings in the listener. Therefore, it is possible to reinterpret the overstated numerical element *mīt* “a/one hundred” as *baʕīd/kām* “several” which seems more reasonable. Norrick (1985) emphasizes the fact that the hyperbole in any given proverb must be relativized (e.g. *dugg ʔit-ṭabla tījī kām habla* “playing the drum gathers **several** crazy women) and be coupled with species-genus synecdoche in order to be able to yield the familiar SPI (e.g. *dugg ʔit-ṭabla tījī kām habla* “festivities attract several women”).

After a thorough analysis of the proverbs in the corpus, taking into consideration the concept of hyperbole, there seems to be three types of proverbial structures that would fall under the category of hyperbole, namely, *exceptive proverbs*, *relative clause proverbs*, and *proverbs with categorical negation*. These types of proverbial structures would render any given proverb into becoming a hyperbolic one. The present researchers believe that the hyperbolic meaning is a byproduct of the concept of structural genericity in proverbs. Proverbs are meant to provide general statements about life experiences for the sake of enlightening and advising people. In other words, the proposition encoded in any given proverb does not specify one single entity or situation, but rather, enforces a generic meaning. Some grammatical constructions that yield generic readings in language include, adverbs (e.g. usually, always, etc.), ‘used to’, and definite NPs, etc.

4.4.1. Exceptive proverbs

An exceptive proverb consists of a sentence that contains a restricted negative statement, an exceptive particle like, *ʔilla*, *geir*, *siwa*, (equivalent in English to ‘except for/that’, ‘but’, or ‘only’), and the excepted noun, noun phrase, or the prepositional phrase. It seems that all exceptive proverbs with hyperbolic elements can be interpreted as hyperbolic proverbs and be accompanied by the phrase proposed by Norrick (1985: 132) “in the emotionally colored perception of the speaker”. By way of illustration:

(1) غير الأم ما بتلم

geir ʔil-um mā bi-tlim
 except the-mother NEG IMPERFgather_{3Sing.F}
 “No one gathers around like the mother”

This proverb is qualified as an amplification, considering the colored perception of the speaker. In order to bring it closer to its literal meaning, the negative particle *mā* “never” must be reinterpreted as *marrāt* “seldom”, and the exceptive particle *geir* “except” must be deleted, thus yielding via species-genus synecdoche *ʔil-um marrāt bi-tlim* “mother seldom gathers around”.

4.4.2. Relative clause proverbs

Proverbs that contain relative clauses are overwhelmingly introduced by the definite relative pronoun *ʔilli* and “who(ever)”, “what(ever)”, and “that which”; followed by the main clause. Jordanian proverbs prefer the relative pronoun *ʔilli* as head-initial, meaning it is not placed for most of the time after the noun it refers to. The particle *ʔilli* “who(ever)” is used in cases where the reference is general. In other words, omitting the head NP is considered a method to generate a generic reference (Jaradat 2007: 33). In this way, the listener is given the opportunity to widen the choice of referents.

(1) اللي أمه خبازة ما بجوع

ʔilli ʔumm-u xabbāza mā bi-jūʕ
 (he) who Def.mother-his baker_F NEG IMPERF.go-hungry_{3Sing.M}
 “He whose mother is a baker will never go hungry”

This proverb is stated hyperbolically due the presence of *mā* “never” when the meaning can be adequately accomplished by *marrāt* “seldom”. In addition to *mā* “never”, the hyperbole also depends on the generic meaning embedded in the headless

relative clause. The meaning implicitly refers to all bakers, and therefore must be relativized to *baʿīd/kām* “several/some”. The literal reading coupled with the species-genus synecdoche would yield the SPI *baʿīd ʔil-ummahā-t ʕind-hum ʔawlād bi-jūʕ-ū marrāt* “some (working) mothers seldom have hungry mouths (or children)”.

4.4.3. Categorical negation in proverbs

Categorical negation refers to the negation of the entire category rather than a precise item in the category (Brustad 2000, cited in Jaradat 2007). This type of negation mostly occurs with fixed expressions, such as *ʕumr* “ever”, and *hatta* “any”, in addition to the negation prefix/suffix markers *lā...wālā* “neither...nor” or the bound morphemes *mā...š, miš, mā* “not/never”.

Categorical negation in proverbs serves to induce a general sense as well as a general applicability of a given proverb to wider situations.

(1) ما عمرا ضرة ساوت إمطابق

mā ʕumrā ɖurrā sāwat ʔimṭābig

NEG ever Indef.CO-wife PERF_{3Sing.F.} Indef.Saj-bread-pie

“Never ever has a co-wife baked a saj-bread pie”

The meaning carried by this proverb does not target a specific individual, rather it carries a sense of generality which encompasses all co-wives. The generic meaning is intensified by the use of *ʕumrā* “ever”. The proverb’s SPI suggests that good deeds are not to be expected from co-wives. Such SPI is arrived at via generalizing the literal meaning of the nominal *ʔimṭābig* “saj-bread pie” into a more abstract, figurative meaning, viz. *ʕamal sāliḥ* “good deed”.

4.5. Paradox in proverbs

A paradox is a rhetorical figure of speech that involves apparent logical contradictions; however, upon further examination, one would find a reasonable truth at some higher level (Norrick 1985). Attempting to figure out a mechanism to account for the relation between the explicit seemingly contradictory literal meaning and the profound implied SPI, Norrick (1985) applied three strategies to help in the interpretation of paradoxical proverbs. As a matter of fact, Norrick builds on Golopentia-Eretescu’s model (1970 & 1971 cited in Norrick 1985: 134). The model starts by:

(i). assigning the conflicting terms in the paradoxical proverb to two separate universes of discourse (UDs) or as Norrick calls “separating frames of reference. For example, “Ann is both right and wrong” could be resolved as “Ann is right theoretically and wrong practically”;

(ii). the conflicting terms are leveled/relativized or as Norrick calls it “averaging-of-opposites reading (AO reading)”. For example, “It is raining but it is not” can be generalized by finding a middle ground between the contradiction as “It is drizzling”.

(iii). The third and last strategy is accomplished by considering one of the conflicting terms as correct and bringing the other term to agree with it. For example, “He is forty going on twenty” can be interpreted reasonably by modifying the second term by saying “He acts like he is twenty years old”.

It is not a either-or situation, meaning that one or all strategies may work in leading to the appropriate SPI of a given paradoxical proverb. To apply Golopentia-Eretescu’s and Norrick’s models, below is an example proverb from the corpus:

(1) عذاريب الزين كثيرات

ʕadārīb ʔil-zain kaṭīrāt

Def.flaw_{PL} (of) the-belle numerous

“The flaws of the belle are numerous”

Clearly, this proverb, if interpreted at a literary level, can be considered as self-contradictory. A general expectation held by some is that beautiful women are flawless.. Hence, the paradox is between the common expectations and the actual situation. However, after further cognitive processing of the situation, one might arrive to a sensible resolution of the intentional paradox. To resolve this paradox, the proverb could be interpreted using the averaging-of-opposites strategy by reducing the adjective *kaṭīrāt* “numerous” to *qalīla* “few” which in turns offers a more logical interpretation of the proverb and brings it closer to its SPI “the flaws of the belle are few”. This strategy has similarity with the way hyperbolic proverbs

are handled (cf. subsection 4.4.).

4.6. Allusion in proverbs

Allusion is considered a rhetorical figure employed to implicitly reference a well-known individual, a folklore, an event, or a literary work by means of comparison. Whether it is a word or a whole sentence, allusion intends mainly to evoke some emotional feelings on the part of the listeners, to enhance the meaning of the discourse, or some other pragmatic functions unique to the writer/speaker, such as to relate a text to other texts (intertextuality), to give credibility to an argument, or to show-off, for instance. It is often the case that simple allusions, albeit referring to very common knowledge, may run the risk of not been comprehended by lay people.

Below is an example in which we find an allusion. Such a proverb needs to be processed mentally and its literal meaning related to its SPI. The reason behind intertextual comparison is required to be figured out and to come up with a unified interpretation, encompassing both the alluding text with the rest of the text.

(1) كيد النساء كيد مقيم

kayd-u ʔin-nisā kayd-un muqīm

Def.guile_{Nom.} (of) the-women Indef.guile_{Nom.} permanent

“The women’s guile is truly permanent”

The noun phrase *kayd-u ʔin-nisā* “the women’s guile” is alluding to a verse 28 of Surah Yusuf in the Holy Quran which means “So when he saw his shirt rent from behind, he said, surely it is a guile of you women; surely your guile is great”. This proverb describes the persistent deceitful nature of some women. Almost all proverbs with allusions in the corpus allude to religious texts or figures. Such phenomenon can be associated with the fact that some Arabs are religious people and strict followers of their beliefs and values.

5. Results

The table below shows a classification of figurative proverbs based on the type of figures they contain.

Table (1): Classification of figurative proverbs according to figures of speech

	Figures of speech	Frequency	Percentage
2.	Species-genus synecdoche	65	30.09 %
3.	Metaphor 1. Predicate-extension a.) Anthropomorphization 12 b.) Animation 5 c.) Concretization 6 2. Nominal-attribute 6	29	13.42 %
4.	Metonymy 7 Instrument-function 4 Cause-effect 28	39	18.05 %
5.	Hyperbole	58	26.85 %
6.	Paradox	4	1.85 %
7.	Allusion	21	9.72 %
	Total	216	100 %

The table reveals that species-genus synecdoche is the most frequently used figure in Jordanian proverbs: 65 (=30.09%) out of 216 figurative proverbs. This finding corroborates Barley’s (1972) and Norrick’s (1985) claims who recognize synecdochic proverbs to be the proverbs *par excellence*; and species-genus synecdoche to be the unmarked proverbial figure. The reason behind

this fact could be related to the way the human brain conceptualizes reality, as well as to their applicability. It has been mentioned earlier under subsection (4.1.) that species-genus synecdochic proverbs can be applied to a variety of situations. The synecdochic proverb *sit w-jārt-ain šalā galī baiḍt-ain* “A lady and here two neighbors are frying two eggs” can be applied to a situation in which a group of women are gossiping in the kitchen while cooking; or more generally to the context of workplace; provided the proverb is further generalized into “There is a gathering of employees to do one simple and trivial task.”

6. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Out of all the figures of speech found in the Arabic language, there seems to a relatively limited number employed in Jordanian proverbs. For example, not one single case of irony, litotes, oxymoron, syncope, or puns, was found; not to mention the subtypes of the same figure. For example, metonymy related to container/content or emotion/cause-of-emotions were also not found in the corpus. Such limitation on the types of figures used in proverbs can be incorporated as part of the proverb definition, and thus become a defining feature of the proverb.

2. Proverbs are worthy of study as a genre in their own right because they are part and parcel of the fabric of languages. They can be analyzable as independent units since they simultaneously carry the features of a sentence and the text.

3. In relation to figurative proverb meanings, it has been pointed out that as to whether a proverb is said to be figurative or not depends on the fact that its SPI is different from its literal reading. Common rhetorical figures found in the proverbs of the corpus were treated individually: synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, paradox and allusion.

4. Under metonymic proverbs, it has been noticed that a recurrent type of metonymic relation in the corpus of the study is cause and effect. Jordanian proverbs with conditional clauses can be considered cases of cause-effect metonymy provided that the main clause contains an *effect* with non-literal interpretation.

5. Taking the concept of hyperbole into consideration, the analysis revealed three types of proverbial structures that would fall under the category of hyperbolic proverbs, namely: exceptive proverbs, relative clause proverbs, and proverbs with categorical negation.

6. The majority of proverbs that contain allusions allude to religious figures or texts. Such phenomenon can be associated with the fact that religion identifies the lives of Arabs by dominating every aspect in it.

7. It has been found that species-genus synecdoche is statistically the most frequently used figure in the corpus of the study: 65 (=30.09%) out of 216 figurative proverbs. This finding gives support to Barley's (1972) and Norrick's (1985) argument who recognize synecdochic proverbs to be the proverbs *par excellence*; and species-genus synecdoche to be the unmarked proverbial figure.

8. It has been noted that Jordanian proverbs are inextricably intertwined with the fabric of Jordanian culture. In this sense, a familiarity with Jordanian culture (and Arab culture in general for that matter) is necessary in order to be able to unravel the subtle meanings of certain proverbs. For instance, some proverbs mirror the patriarchal mindset towards woman, in that within the family life, gender discrimination is displayed in favoring male over female newborns, in regarding women as property or dispensable material, and in condescending viewpoints of divorced/widowed women.

9. **Semantic genericity:** Genericity in proverbs has been discussed along with the structures that enforce generic meanings in proverbs, viz. headless relative clauses, conditional clauses, exceptive clauses and finally, proverbs with categorical negation. It has been concluded that figuration (or metaphoricity) and generic theme play a pivotal role in creating semantic genericity. On one hand, both these features allow proverbs to be applicable to a wide variety of situations unrelated to the literal meaning of a proverb and irrespective of time and place. On the other hand, figuration is responsible for relating real life situations to the theme of a proverb. It is also often purported that in the proverb genre, metaphors are more common in nouns than verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or prepositions.

10. Proverbs are undoubtedly traceable and prevalent in all kinds of literature, whether in its oral or written form. The proverbial genre is also common in virtually all languages and cultures with some themes considered to be universal. Studies of proverbs across languages have paved the way for inter-lingual and cultural comparative studies of proverbs. Arabic proverbial literature is a vast yet still uncharted area according to contemporary paremiology, hence more research is needed using various methods of data collection, particularly, present-day proverbs used in naturally-occurring conversations. The

ultimate goal behind cross-lingual and cultural proverb research lies in having a universal classification and typology of proverbs, also known as the *international type system* (Kuusi 1972).

In comparison to other languages, the researchers noticed a dearth of specialized studies on individual Arabic proverbs. Almost all Arabic paremiological studies are focused on either collecting proverbs found in a particular area or dialect and classifying them accordingly, or investigating a group of proverbs with specific themes related to, for instance, God, misogyny, weather, humor, animals, politics, etc. Examining one proverb from all its pertinent aspects is recommended.

Appendix I: Transcription of the Arabic alphabet based on the encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics

(Volume I)*

Arabic alphabet	Symbol
أ	<i>ʾ</i>
ب	<i>b</i>
ت	<i>t</i>
ث	<i>t̤</i>
ج	<i>j</i>
ح	<i>ħ</i>
خ	<i>x</i>
د	<i>d</i>
ذ	<i>d̤</i>
ر	<i>r</i>
ز	<i>z</i>
س	<i>s</i>
ش	<i>š</i>
ص	<i>ṣ</i>
ض	<i>ḍ</i>
ط	<i>ṭ</i>
ظ	<i>ẓ</i>
ع	<i>ʿ</i>
غ	<i>ġ</i>
ف	<i>f</i>
ق	<i>q</i>
Jordanian variant of ق	<i>g</i>
ك	<i>k</i>
Jordanian variant of ك	<i>tš</i>
ل	<i>l</i>
م	<i>m</i>
ن	<i>n</i>
هـ	<i>h</i>
و	<i>w</i>
ي	<i>y</i>
فتحة ()	<i>a</i>
ضمة ()	<i>u</i>
كسرة ()	<i>i</i>
مد طويل /إى	<i>ā</i>

Arabic alphabet	Symbol
ضممة طويلة و	<i>ū</i>
كسرة طويلة ي	<i>ī</i>
Diphthongs	<i>aw</i>
(أصوات علة مركبة)	<i>ay</i>

Note: The definite article *al-* is transcribed in its assimilate form, e.g. *aš-šajara* “the tree” with a hyphen. The feminine ending is transcribed as *-a* not as *-ah*.

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