

ЯЗЫКОЗНАНИЕ

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Shoes in the Arabic Socio-Cultural Space and in the Lexical-Semantic Field

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The article is devoted to the analysis of stable lexical structures in the Iraqi dialect, which include various lexemes denoting shoes. The author of the article examines the issue of cultural traditions associated with shoes in the Arab world, noting the existing negative connotations: the deliberate display of shoe soles is considered indecent in Arab society, and hitting with shoes is regarded as a humiliating insult. Researchers believe that these traditions can be correlated with various factors: both religious and cultural, and perhaps also historical. The author of the article also gives the most striking examples of the manifestation of such an attitude (nicknames of political leaders, the situation with shoes thrown at the US President during a press conference, etc.). Shoes often symbolize baseness, spiritual decline and inappropriate human behavior, and therefore are often mentioned in descriptions of political figures. There are also many proverbs, sayings and superstitions related to shoes in Iraqi folklore. Unique amulets against the evil eye, made in the form of shoes, both real and decorative, are common in Iraq. Shoes, as an element of Iraqi culture, are used in cartoons and can also appear in surnames. The article emphasizes the importance of understanding not only cultural, but also lexical features associated with shoes, as this contributes to the establishment of high-quality intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: Arab culture, Arabic language, shoes, vocabulary, ethnography.

Introduction

The traditions of Arab countries related to footwear are of interest to ethnographers. For instance, a deliberate demonstration of the soles of shoes is considered indecent in Arab society; while hitting someone with a shoe is regarded as a humiliating insult.

Researchers believe that these traditions can be in correlation with various factors: religious, cultural, and, probably, historical. In Islam, negative connotations associated

with shoes correlate with the concept of *najasa* (نجاسة *nağāsa*), that is, with everything “unclean” that the sole of a shoe can come into contact with. It is also believed that the tradition of trampling on defeated enemies and kissing the shoes of rulers, demonstrating submission, could have had an impact.

Arabic lexemes denoting shoes

In literary Arabic, the following lexemes are actively used to denote shoes: *خف* *ḥuff*, *نعل* *naʿal*, *حذاء* *ḥidāʿ*. At the same time, the word *نعل*, as a rule, has a negative connotation and is used in derogatory expressions. The lexeme *خف*, on the contrary, has a positive connotation and is associated with the concept of cleanliness and, probably, correlates with the religious tradition of stroking shoes with your hand before performing a ritual ablution. The word is also used in the proverbs: *رجع بخفي حنين* *rağāʿa biḥuffay ḥunayn* (‘returned with nothing’, *lit.* ‘returned with Hunein’s slippers’).

Alongside with these lexemes, loanwords for shoes are used in various dialects. Thus, in the dialects of the Syro-Palestinian group, the word borrowed from the Persian language *صرمایه* *širmāya* is used, whereas in the Egyptian dialect, the lexeme *جزمة* *gizma*, of Turkish origin, is used. In Iraq, as well as in Jordan and Palestine, the borrowed word from the Turkish language is *قندرة* *qundara* or *كندرة* *kundara*. All the listed lexemes also have a negative connotation.

Let us consider the words with a relevant meaning used in Iraqi dialects: *قندرة* *qundara*, *كلاش* *klāš*, *يماني* *yamanī*, *بابوچ* *bābūč*, *نعال* *nāʿal*, *شحاطة* *šahḥāṭa*. The lexeme *يماني* (*lit.* ‘Yemeni’) is used to denote a certain type of shoe — closed shoes without heels, traditionally made of black or red leather. Shoes of this kind were originally produced in Yemen, then they began to be made in Aleppo, and later they gained popularity in most of the Middle East, including Turkey, due to their convenience [1]. Interestingly, a similar situation occurred in Russian when the place of manufacture became the name of the shoes: rubber slippers are colloquially called “сланцы” (‘slates’) as they are produced in the city with the same name.

It should be emphasized that all these lexemes are very common in speech. It is appropriate to say about an unworthy person: *قندرة عتيكة* *qundara ʿatīka* (*lit.* ‘an old shoe’) or *ابن القندرة* *ibn l-qundara* (*lit.* ‘the son of a shoe’) [1].

Shoes in the Arabic socio-cultural space

Shoes often symbolise pettiness, spiritual decline and inappropriate behaviour, and, therefore, are often mentioned in the description of statesmen. For example, during the demonstration against the policies of Prime Minister Nuri al-Said (1888–1958) and statesman Salih Jabr (1896–1957) in Iraq, the following slogan was heard: *نوري السعيد قندرة وصالح* *nūri s-saʿīd qundara w-ṣāliḥ ġabir qīṭānhā* (*lit.* ‘Nuri al-Said is a shoe, and Salih Jabr is his shoelace’) [1].

Also worth mentioning is the incident that happened to George W. Bush on December 14, 2008. During a press conference between President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki in Baghdad, a correspondent for Al-Baghdadia TV, Muntadhar al-Zaidi, threw one and then the other shoe at the US president, accompanying his actions with the words: “This is a gift from the Iraqis. This is a farewell kiss, dog”. Despite the fact that after the incident, George W. Bush said that he found the situation amusing, and stressed that

such a thing was a sign of a free society, the reaction of the Arab world was unequivocal. The Arab public regarded al-Zaidi's actions as an extremely harsh expression of protest and the attitude of the Iraqi people towards the actions of the American government in Iraq. Afterwards, on January 29, 2009, a monument to the shoe thrown at the US president was unveiled in the city of Tikrit (Iraq) (Fig. 1). However, just one day later, the monument was dismantled by the authorities of Tikrit.



Fig. 1. Monument to the shoe thrown at George W. Bush.

Source: Archive of photos for January 2009. *Interfax*. Available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/photo/6/3033> (accessed: 10.03.2024).

In 2014, Barack Obama, during his meeting with King Abdullah Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, unaware of the special semantic load associated with shoes in Arab society, committed a serious violation of the rules of non-verbal communication. He took a pose that allowed the interlocutor to see the sole of his shoes, which received a mixed reaction (Fig. 2).

The leader of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, during his meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2004, in all likelihood, deliberately struck a cross-legged pose with a demonstration of his soles to the interlocutor, which Arab society perceived as disrespectful (Fig. 3).

There are also many superstitions related to shoes in the Iraqi folklore. For example, it is believed that if you put shoes under the head or next to the head of a sleeping person, they will have bad dreams. However, if a person sees shoes in a dream, it means that they are in for something good or a quick marriage for a girl.

If the shoes turn out to be lying one on top of the other, this means that the owner will soon set off on a journey.

An upturned shoe lying with the sole up is considered a bad omen in Iraq, because a person who leaves his shoes like that angers the God, therefore, angels will not enter such a house [2, p. 141]. There is a similar sign in Egypt. For example, Yahya al-Tahir Abdullah



Fig. 2. US President Barack Obama at the meeting with King Abdullah Al Saud of Saudi Arabia.

Source: Obama to cut short India trip to visit Saudi Arabia. *Daily Herald*. Available at: <https://www.daily-herald.com/20150124/news/obama-to-cut-short-india-trip-to-visit-saudi-arabia/> (accessed: 10.03.2024).



Fig. 3. Muammar Gaddafi's meeting with Tony Blair.

Source: Muammar Gaddafi: a life in pictures. World news. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2011/feb/22/muammar-gaddafi-life-in-pictures> (accessed: 10.03.2024).

mentions this in his story “The Collar and the Bracelet”: “The clumsy Khazina believes that upturned shoes are a bad omen...” [3, p. 16].

There was also a belief that it was possible to expel evil spirits from a person by beating him with shoes. At weddings, unmarried girls ask the bride to write their names on the soles of her wedding shoes. According to common beliefs, this should help them meet their love and get married soon. Peculiar amulets against the evil eye, made in the form of real or decorative shoes, are quite common in Iraq. Such amulets can be hung on a car — as a rule, they are hung at the back — or on the fence of a house [4, p. 264].

Shoes, as an element of Iraqi culture, are often mentioned in cartoons and caricatures (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Caricatures by Burhan Al-Mufti.

Source: The material is provided by the author of the cartoons and is published with their consent.

Some Iraqi surnames are derived from roots denoting shoes. Among the most famous examples is the surname of the Iraqi singer محمد رشيد القندرجي Muhammad Rashid al-Qundarchi (1886–1945).

Lexemes denoting “shoes” in the Iraqi dialect

Furthermore, we will take a closer look at some set expressions with lexemes denoting “shoes” in the Iraqi dialect, since it is in this dialect that such expressions are most common compared to other dialects of the Arabic language.

The lexemes قندرة *qundara*, كلاش *klāš*, يمني *yamani*, بابوچ *bābūč*, نعال *nāl* are among the proverbs, sayings and set expressions and are actively used in spoken language.

Now, let us consider in more detail the most common structures of this type:

صايرة بالقنادر *šāyira bil-qanādir*

صايرة بالنعل *šāyira bin-ni‘il*

Lit. ‘goes with shoes’. Both expressions are used to denote “a major conflict”.

عندي قنادر *‘indī qanādir*

Lit. ‘I have shoes’. The expression can be used when responding to a request to lend money. Let us compare it with the phrase in Russian: “У меня нет ни шиша” (‘I haven’t got a thing’). The answer has a prominent negative connotation.

قندرة عتيقة *qundara ‘atīga*

Lit. ‘An old shoe’. It is used to describe a bad, vicious person.

ايا قندرة *‘ayā qundara*

Lit. ‘What a shoe you are!’ The expression means “What a bad person you are!”

Similarly, a common swear word is used:

إبن القندرة، بت القندرة *‘ibin l-qundara / bit l-qundara*

Lit. ‘Son, daughter of a shoe’. It corresponds to the expression “сукин сын, дочь” (‘son, daughter of a bitch’) in Russian. Just as in Russian, it can sometimes be used for praise. Let us compare it, for example, with the Russian expression: “Ай да Пушкин, ай да сукин сын!” (‘Way to go, Pushkin! Good job, son of a bitch!’). In the Iraqi dialect: شكك *škad* *‘ibin l-qundara* / *bit l-qundara* (‘What a beautiful demoness!’)

ولد القنادر *wild l-qanādir*

Lit. ‘Children of shoes’. The expression has only recently appeared in the language. It is used to describe members of the Chamber of Deputies of Iraq and vividly reflects the attitude of the people towards their government.

هو (هي، انت...) وقندرتي *huwwa w-qundartī*

Lit. ‘He (she, you, etc.) and my shoe’. The phrase is used to express one’s disrespectful attitude towards someone.

مكانه يم القنادر *makāna yam l-qanādir*

Lit. ‘His place is next to the shoes’. The phrase is used to describe an unworthy person who has no place in decent society.

انت هم فد قندرة *‘inta ham fad qundara*

Lit. ‘You’re some kind of shoe too’. It is used to express dissatisfaction with someone’s actions.

شايف نفسه فد قندرة *šāyif nafsa fad qundara*

Lit. ‘He sees himself as some kind of shoe’. It is used to describe an arrogant person. Let us compare it the Russian expression: “Он себя мнит непонятно кем” (‘He puts on airs’)

ألف يمني (قندرة) على راسك *ʿalif yamanī (qundara) ʿalā rāsak*

Lit. ‘A thousand shoes on your head!’ The set expression is used derogatively.

أصير انكس من القندرة إذا أحجى وياح *ʿašīr ʿangas mn l-qundara ʿidā ʾahčī wiyāč*

Lit. ‘I’ll be worse than a shoe if I start talking to you!’ The set expression is used, as a rule, by women when quarrelling with each other.

يتمسح بالقندرة *yitmassah bil-qundara*

Lit. ‘He’s rubbing against shoes.’ The expression is used to describe a person who ingratiates himself, fawns over someone, humiliating himself.

أبوس قندرتك *ʾabūs qundartak*

Lit. ‘I will kiss your shoes’ is comparable with the expression in Russian: “Я буду целовать тебе ноги” (‘I will be kissing your feet’). The expression is used to mean a humiliated plea.

يشرب العرگ بالقندرة *yišrab l-ʿarag bil-qundara*

One may literally say about a heavy drinker: “He drinks arak (aniseed vodka) with a shoe”.

Parents, scolding their guilty child, may say:

هسه أگوم ارگعك بالنعال *hassa ʾagūm ʾarigʾak bin-niʿāl*

Lit. ‘I’m going to get up and beat you with a shoe’.

An example of such “shoe-beating” for educational purposes, which occurred in Egypt, was captured on video and got into social networks. The situation occurred after a young man started flirting with a girl who had come to the cafe with her mother. The elderly woman decided to punish the insolent man in this way¹.

تذب قندرتك توگع على واحد *tdib qundartak toga ʿalā wāḥid*

Lit. ‘If you throw your shoes, they’ll fall on someone like you.’ It corresponds to the expression in Russian “куда ни плюнь, попадешь на...” (‘wherever you spit, it will end up on...’).

ما يسوى قندرة *mā yiswa qundara*

Lit. ‘He’s not worth a shoe.’ The expression is used to describe a nasty, bad person. Let us compare it the Russian expression: “Он и гроша ломаного не стоит” (‘He’s not worth a damn’).

In some cases, such expressions may also be used for praise. For example:

قندرته على راسي *qundarta ʿalā rāsī*

Lit. ‘His shoe is on my head’ which means “his shoes are better than my head”. The expression is used when the speaker wants to emphasize his respect for the interlocutor.

When describing a person’s appearance, a native speaker of the Iraqi dialect may also use expressions:

چنه قندرة عتيگة *čanna qundara ʾatīga*

Lit. ‘It looks like an old shoe.’

¹ The First Middle Eastern. VKontakte. Available at: https://vk.com/kief_point?w=wall-100977738_175076 (accessed: 01.12.2023).

وجها وجه القندرة *wiḡihha wiḡh l-qundara*

Lit. ‘Her face is like a shoe’. To describe an unpleasant, repulsive person.

It is interesting to note a lexical and grammatical peculiarity of the word قندرة. In the Iraqi dialect the four-letter verb قندر with the meaning “to ignore” was derived from this word. For example: عوفه لتقندره *’ufa latqandara* (‘Do not pay attention to him’).

There are also a large number of proverbs, which include the above-mentioned lexemes. Here are some examples from the Baghdad dialect:

كلاش يگلہ لكلاش مرحبا قرداش ² *klāš yigulla liklāš marḥaba qirdāš*

Lit. ‘One sandal says to the other sandal, “Hello, friend!”’ [5, p. 151]

The proverb is used when describing a meeting, friendship or communication between dishonourable, spiteful people. In a way, its meaning is similar to the meaning of the Russian proverb “Рыбак рыбака видит издалека” (‘A fisherman sees a fisherman from afar’) which, however has a negative connotation.

There is another proverb with a similar meaning:

تلاگی البایوچ و الكلاش گلہ مرحبا قرداش *tlāga l-bābūč wil-klaš galla marḥaba qirdāš*

[6, p. 253].

The following proverb is also widely used:

یچد أبو كلاش ویاكل أبو جزمة *yičid ’abū klaš w yākul ’abū ḡuzma* [7, p. 244]

Lit. ‘The owner of the sandals works (a poor man), and the owner of the shoes eats (a rich man)’.

The occurrence of the proverb is connected with the fact that traditionally simple sandals (كلاش) were worn by poor people who could not afford to buy expensive shoes (جزمة). The Iraqi poet Abboud al-Karkhi wrote a poem using this common proverb in it:

یچد أبو كلاش وبعنتي

یاكل أبو جزمة هني

و الناس من آل ويني

³ یچدون للحننتری

[8, p. 325]

yičid ’abū klaš w yi’tini

yākul ’abū ḡuzma hanī

wi n-nās min ’āl w banī

yiččidūn lil-ḥabantarī

‘The poor man works and goes about his business,

And the rich man eats and rejoices.

People have been working for tricksters since ancient times’.

یطیر من الحافي نعل *yiṭayyir min l-ḥāfi na’al*

Lit. ‘He steals slippers even from a poor man’.

² قرداش, from the Turkish language, is used to denote “friend”.

³ حننتری, a trickster, borrowed from the French language.

The expression is used to describe an unscrupulous trickster who will stop at nothing. Let us compare it with the Russian expressions: “Он мать родную продаст” (‘He would sell out his mother’) and “Он конфетку у ребенка отнимет” (‘He would take away a candy from the child’).

يقتغ اليمني *yiftig l-yamani* [8, p. 339]
Lit. ‘He will tear (even) light shoes.’

The expression is used to describe a greedy person who wears shoes until they have holes and begrudges buying a new pair.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that in all dialects of the Arabic language there are linguistic constructions, which include various lexemes denoting shoes, the Iraqi dialect is particularly diverse in this sense. As already noted, the absolute majority of such phrases have a negative connotation, although there are some exceptions, as, for example, in the expression أبو س قندر تك.

The frequent use of lexemes denoting shoes, as well as the existence of a large number of proverbs, sayings and superstitions associated with this object, indicates its special importance in the Arab cultural tradition. Understanding these features is relevant in the light of the growing interest in issues related to inter-cultural communication, which is impossible without understanding the peculiarities of the language and culture of the people.

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Обувь в арабском социокультурном пространстве и в лексико-семантическом поле

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Статья посвящена анализу устойчивых лексических конструкций в иракском диалекте, в состав которых входят различные лексемы, обозначающие обувь. Автор статьи изучает вопрос культурных традиций, связанных с обувью в арабском мире, отмечая существующие негативные коннотации: намеренная демонстрация подошв обуви считается в арабском обществе неприличной, а удар обувью расценивается как унижительное оскорбление. Исследователи полагают, что эти традиции можно соотнести с различными факторами: как религиозными, так и культурологическими, а возможно, еще и историческими. Автор статьи также приводит наиболее яркие примеры проявления подобного отношения (прозвища политических лидеров, ситуация с ботинками, запущенными в президента США во время пресс-конференции, и пр.). Обувь часто символизирует низость, духовное падение и неподобающее поведение человека, а потому нередко упоминается в описании политических деятелей. В иракском диалекте присутствует большое число устойчивых выражений, в состав которых входят лексемы, обозначающие обувь. Выражения такого рода широко распространены и употребительны в иракском диалекте по сравнению с другими диалектами арабского языка. В иракском фольклоре существует также немало пословиц, поговорок и суеверий, связанных с обувью. Распространены на территории Ирака своеобразные обереги от дурного глаза, выполненные в виде обуви, как настоящей, так и декоративной. Обувь, как элемент иракской культуры, используется в карикатурах и может также встречаться в фамилиях. В статье подчеркивается важность понимания не только культурных, но и лексических особенностей, связанных с обувью, так как это способствует налаживанию качественного межкультурного диалога.

Ключевые слова: арабская культура, арабский язык, обувь, лексика, этнография.

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