

**“How Are We Going to Erase this Shame?”
A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Shame Metaphors in Russian
and Jordanian Arabic Discourse**

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Abstract: The study examines the factors that shape the metaphoric conceptualization of shame in Russian and Jordanian Arabic (JA). The study adopts Conceptual Metaphor Theory as based on main meaning focus (Kövecses 2011) as its theoretical framework. Data were collected from two types of sources: social platform pages (VKontakte, Facebook) and informants' responses (20 native speakers of Russian and JA). The data collected from both sources were manually analyzed using a qualitative approach and employing MIP and Steen's five-step procedure (2007). We argue that a) shame in Russian and JA is conceptualized through common source domains (PHYSICAL WEIGHT, STAIN/DIRT, HIDDEN PLACE, PHYSICAL DAMAGE OR PAIN, PURSUER/HUNTER, CURSE, and INHERITABLE LEGACY) and culture-specific domains for Russian (FIRE, COLD, BLACK HOLE) and JA (BLACKENING OF FACE, THROWING *ṣga:l* 'traditional Arab headband', PHYSICAL SIZE); b) the main meaning focus of Russian and JA metaphors of shame can arise from both predetermined similarities and contrastive contexts, which highlights the importance of cross-cultural research on this emotion.

Keywords: culture, emotion discourse, Jordanian Arabic, Russian, shame metaphor

1. Introduction

Language provides a framework for understanding and expressing emotions, and the metaphors used can influence our perception and response. Shame is a significant emotion intrinsic to the human condition, affecting identity and behavior (Brown 2007). It is recognized as a prevalent self-critical negative emotion (Hejdenberg and Andrews 2011; Stadter 2020; Tangney and Dearing 2002), impacting psychological functioning and well-being. Shame inspires fear and doubt while encouraging negative behaviors. A common assumption is that discussing shame is challenging or taboo due to its association with vulnerability and powerlessness. As Brown (2015) notes, “shame derives its power from being

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unspeakable” (p. 58). When individuals cannot articulate their experiences of shame, these feelings can fester, resulting in ongoing pain and suffering.

Recent research has shown how language can express shame through metaphors (Bogdzevič 2021; Pietrzak 2021). Metaphors, understanding one concept through another, are powerful tools for articulating abstract or emotionally charged experiences (Zibin, Altakhaineh and Hamdan 2022). Utilizing metaphors can help individuals process and regulate their emotions while communicating them in a meaningful way.

Despite the growing research on shame metaphors across languages and cultures, a gap exists in the contrastive analysis of shame metaphors in Russian and Arabic. Some studies have examined shame metaphors in Russian (Pavlenko 2008) and Arabic (Al-Jallad 2010a, 2010b) separately, but research directly comparing the conceptualization of shame in these two unrelated languages is scarce. This gap is significant as both Russian and Arabic are major world languages with rich cultural traditions that may influence the metaphoric representation of shame. Additionally, the complex historical and cultural relationships between Russia and the Arab world may affect how shame is experienced and expressed.

Therefore, this study aims to reveal the linguistic and cultural factors that influence the metaphoric conceptualization and expression of shame in these languages. Qualitative analysis of shame metaphors can enhance our understanding of the interaction between language, culture, and emotion, contributing to the development of more culturally sensitive approaches to the study of shame.

2. SHAME metaphors

The source domains of SHAME metaphors, identified in metaphor studies, reflect how individuals conceptualize and experience shame (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Danziger 1990; Keltner and Haidt 1999; Kövecses 2000; Tangney and Dearing 2002; Semino and Demjén 2016): PHYSICAL FORCE or BURDEN, EXPOSURE or NAKEDNESS, DISEASE or CONTAMINATION, PUNISHMENT or VIOLATION, ANIMAL or OBJECT, SOCIAL DEATH, DARK or HIDDEN PLACE, LOSS OF FACE, HOT or BURNING SENSATION, POISON or TOXIN, BARRIER or OBSTACLE. The source domains of SHAME metaphors reveal the different ways individuals conceptualize and experience shame. They also show the critical role of language in shaping these experiences. Additionally, researchers can obtain new insights into the cultural and social dimensions of this emotion, which may reveal how it is influenced by cultural practices, beliefs, and identities.

Research on SHAME metaphors and expressions has been conducted across various languages, including Standard Arabic (Pietrzak 2021), Chinese (Bedford and Hwang 2003), English (Díaz-Vera 2014, 2024; Röder and Peeters 2020; Omonova 2023), Japanese (Takano and Wong 2021), Lithuanian (Bogdzevič 2021), and Russian (Pavlenko 2008). The majority of research on shame emphasizes its universal or pan-cultural nature, but recent evidence in cultural studies indicates that experiences of shame exhibit cross-cultural variations.

Cultural norms and values influence how shame is experienced, expressed, and regulated (Gausel et al. 2012). Cultural differences in individualism and

collectivism affect the nature and function of shame. Individualistic cultures prioritize personal autonomy and self-expression, leading to shame being seen as a private emotion reflecting a failure to meet personal ideals (Tangley and Dearing 2002). In contrast, collectivist cultures emphasize social harmony and group solidarity, resulting in shame being experienced as a public emotion tied to failing group expectations. However, there are few cross-cultural studies on shame metaphors, primarily contrasting English with other languages like Danish (Dineen 1990), Polish (Krawczak 2014), and Old Norse (Díaz-Vera and Manrique-Antón 2015). This trend is due to several factors: English is widely spoken and studied, it predominates in academic publications, and it has a strong tradition of research on emotion metaphors, facilitating cross-linguistic comparisons.

Although Russian and Arabic are unrelated languages, both Russia and Jordan tend to embody collectivist cultures. Thus, exploring the metaphorical conceptualization of shame in these two languages will contribute to the expanding field of research on emotion metaphors, as well as their universality and cross-cultural variation.

3. Method

3.1 Data collection

Two specialized corpora were compiled from two primary sources to explore the metaphors of shame in Russian and JA, the dialect spoken daily by Jordanians. The latter includes three sub-varieties: Urban, Bedouin, and Rural (Zibin and Al-Tkhayneh 2019). The urban sub-variety is predominantly spoken in Amman, the capital city, while the other two are found in different regions throughout Jordan. The corpus collected for this study contains instances from all three sub-varieties of JA.

The primary challenge of this study lies in data collection. Russian has a freely accessible representative collection of texts, boasting over two billion tokens along with search tools and linguistic annotations, but it was necessary to utilize social media data to ensure comparability between the sample sizes for Russian and Arabic, as no freely accessible representative corpus exists for JA. The selected sources of data are VKontakte (VK) for Russian and Facebook for JA, particularly since Facebook is currently blocked in Russia.

VK is the largest and most popular social network in Russia, launched as a website similar to Facebook, utilized in Russian-speaking countries and former Soviet republics, commanding a market share of 71.8 percent (source: Popsters 2024). The platform offers multiple language options but is predominantly used by Russian speakers. Conversely, Facebook is the most widely used social media platform in Jordan, with a share of 83.55 percent (source: Statcounter 2024). Data for this study were collected from Jordanian Facebook pages where users post comments in JA. Consent forms were not needed from the social media platforms users as the data is available publicly. However, all their identifying information was kept anonymous.

Two pages in each language discussing unfortunate events and social issues were selected, specifically Gubernia74 and Psychology (Russian) and Ammon News and Confessions (JA). The first pages are local news agencies in Russia and Jordan, while the second are public forums where users confess their marital and other social problems and seek solutions. To ascertain that the users are indeed Russian or Jordanian, several procedures were followed: 1) the authors are native speakers of Russian and JA and were able to determine whether the written content is authentically in Russian or JA; 2) based on Herring and Paolillo (2006), we also relied on the information provided by the user on their page, such as city and country; 3) three native speaker informants for both Russian and JA were involved to assist with accounts that were difficult to accurately identify. Nevertheless, Zibin and Al-Tkhayneh (2019) note that even after following these procedures, the dialect of the users may not be completely accurate, as some users may intentionally deceive others by pretending to be someone else, even using a dialect they do not typically speak. In total, 458 Russian and 545 JA posts and comments were collected from 253 and 223 users, respectively. The researchers copied the entire comments and/or posts and pasted them into a Word document for later analysis. The total number of tokens collected from the social platform pages amounted to 8,001 and 7,360 words. The posts and comments were selected based on their relevance to the themes of shame and dishonor in Russia and Jordan, specifically if they expressed shame using terms such as *стыд*, *срам*, *нозор* ('shame, disgrace, dishonor') and عار، شمانة، عيب، ('*gloating, shame, dishonor*'), among others.

The second source of data collection involved obtaining data directly from 20 native speakers of Russian and JA (12 males and 8 females, mean age: 45 years). Ethical approval was obtained from South Ural State University and the University of Jordan, and all participants signed consent forms. Informants were randomly selected from popular malls in Chelyabinsk and Amman. They were asked to write down expressions used in Russian or JA to convey feelings of shame and dishonor, specifically creating sentences reflecting their personal experiences or discussing the shameful behavior of others. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary, and there were no restrictions on the number of expressions they could provide. They were encouraged to write any relevant expressions (see Alazazmeh and Zibin 2023). To ensure comprehensive coverage of all three sub-dialects of JA, particularly in the pronunciation of phonemes such as /q/, participants were asked to read their written expressions, and their responses were recorded verbatim. This procedure was not applicable to Russian. In total, 121 Russian expressions and 102 JA expressions were collected, including repetitions, resulting in a total corpus size of 1542 and 1600 words, respectively.¹

3.2 Data analysis

The data collected from both sources were manually analyzed using a qualitative approach, in which the types of metaphors used were identified (Maalej and Zibin 2025). This method of data analysis emphasizes the identification of source domains rather than calculating occurrences, as outlined by Kövecses et al. (2019, 2024). We suggest that any quantitative analysis would be theoretically

inconsequential due to the small size of the specialized corpus. To identify metaphors of shame and dishonor in the collected Russian and JA corpora, we employed the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). This procedure was chosen because we are particularly interested in metaphors where comparisons are implicit rather than explicit (see MIPVU).

Initially, we read each expression to grasp its overall meaning within its specific context. We then identified lexical units that could potentially be metaphorical in each expression. For every identified lexical unit, we established both its basic or literal meaning using a dictionary, as well as its contextual or figurative meaning (if applicable). The literal or basic meaning is typically more concrete and recognizable from common usage, for instance, related to sensory expressions or possessing historical significance. In contrast, the contextual meaning reflects the specific usage of the expression within the collected data. We determined a lexical unit to be metaphorical if its contextual meaning could be inferred from its basic meaning. Specifically, if transferring meaning from one domain of experience (i.e., source domain) to another (i.e., target domain) facilitated our understanding of the lexical unit within its context, we classified it as a metaphor. Additionally, we utilized Steen's steps (2007) to extract the conceptual metaphor for the metaphorical expression. Illustrative examples in the two languages are provided below:

(1) Мне трудно очистить свой опыт от стыда и других неприятных чувств.

mn'e 'trudnə ɐtɕi'sitʲitsʲ svɔj 'opit ɐt
'stidə i 'drugʲix nʲɪprʲi'jatnix tɕɔfstʲ
lit. 1SG.DAT hard clean-INF REFL.POSS.SG.M experience from
shame-GEN.SG and other-GEN.PL unpleasant-GEN.PL feeling-GEN.PL
'It is difficult for me to overcome shame and other negative feelings'.

كيف بدنا نمسح هالعار

ki:f bidna nimsaħ ha-l-ʕa:r
how want.we erase.we this-DEF-shame
lit. how can we erase this shame/dishonor.
'We cannot overcome such feeling of shame'.

In example (1), the expression reflects a desire to eliminate shame. The primary lexical units are *очищать* 'erase or cleanse' / *nimsaħ* 'erase or wipe' and стыд / ʕa:r 'shame/dishonor'. The meanings of *очищать* / *nimsaħ* convey the action of removing or cleaning something from a surface, grounded in concrete experience. However, the contextual meaning signifies the act of erasing the intangible concept of shame. *стыд* / *ʕa:r* retain their meanings of disgrace and humiliation but are portrayed as physical entities that can be wiped or erased. Thus, *очищать* / *nimsaħ* are metaphorical, implying the removal of a non-physical state rather than a concrete object. The metaphor suggests that shame is a stain one wishes to cleanse

or erase. Following Steen's five-step procedure (2007), the first step is to determine whether a word or expression identified by MIP is metaphorical or literal. The second step is to identify the underlying propositions related to the conceptual domains of shame and stain/dirt, linking the act of cleaning with removing a physical stain. The third step forms an open comparison between the source and target propositions: SIM $\{\exists F \exists a [F(\text{shame})]_t [\text{stain/dirt}(a)]_s\}$. Step four converts this into a closed analogy: removing shame is like wiping away dirt. The final step establishes mappings between the domains of shame and stain/dirt: the feeling of being stained maps to experiencing shame, and the action of cleaning maps to rectifying a situation or restoring honor.

The identified metaphors were categorized based on their source domains, and to ensure the reliability of these metaphors, two additional coders who speak Russian or JA and have cognitive linguistic training independently analyzed subsets of the data using the same procedure. Inter-coder reliability via Cohen Kappa was measured (0.89/0.83), and any differences were discussed and resolved to maintain consistency in the identification process.

3.3 Theoretical framework

The analytical model or theoretical framework we employed to examine metaphors of shame and dishonor in Russian and JA is based on the concept of metaphor as based by main meaning focus (Kövecses 2000/2010, 2011). Kövecses defines main meaning focus as follows:

“Each source is associated with a particular meaning focus (or foci) that is (or are) mapped onto the target. This meaning focus (or foci) is (are) constituted by the central knowledge that pertains to a particular entity or event within a speech community. The target inherits the main meaning focus (or foci) of the source” (Kövecses 2000: 82).

To delineate meaning focus, special attention must be given to central knowledge. Kövecses characterizes it as generic, conventional, intrinsic, and characteristic knowledge related to an entity or event, as defined by Langacker (1987). For example, the main meaning focus of “building” as a source domain involves constructing a strong building, which maps onto creating a lasting complex system (Kövecses 2000: 82-83). Many conventional metaphorical expressions associated with this metaphor pertain to aspects of construction, indicating the development of a complex, stable, and sustained abstract system such as an argument, theory, or institution. The main mappings include similarities between building/making and creation/construction, strength and stability, and building and complex abstract systems (Kövecses 2011). Conversely, the mappings between the designers or creators of a theory and the architects of a building exemplify non-central mappings.

However, in many instances, the meaning focus may not be inherent or predetermined; rather, it may emerge in contrastive contexts. This refers to situations in which one concept is compared to another, revealing that a specific

In these examples (2–3), SHAME is depicted as a burden or weight that an individual carries on their body, affecting their posture. This metaphor suggests that shame is a heavy and oppressive emotion that weighs a person down, making it challenging to endure and requiring strength, resilience, and emotional fortitude. Within the context of Russian and Arab cultures, which are characterized by collectivism, shame as a burden may symbolize the weight of societal expectations and the imperative to meet them, thereby avoiding dishonor to society, community, or family.

Pride and dishonor are conceptualized in Russian and JA through the image schema of up-down. Specifically, the metaphor *being proud is having one's head up* conveys that an individual experiences pride when their head is held high, thus highlighting the position of the head; by extension, the neck is elevated as the foremost part of the body (cf. “raise my head up high”). In contrast, when the head abandons this elevated position and lowers to the ground, or is even buried in the sand, it serves to represent shame and dishonor (see Zibin, Altakhaineh and Musmar 2024).

(B) STAIN/DIRT: In this source domain, shame is portrayed as a stain or dirt that envelops individuals and requires removal or cleansing.

(4) Мне стыдно. Я запятнал свою репутацию.

mnʲe 'stidnə | ja zəpʲɪt'nal svə'ju
rʲɪpʊ'tatsʲjʊ

lit. 1SG.DAT ashamed 1SG stain-PST.SG.M REFL.POSS.ACC.SG.F
reputation-ACC

‘I am ashamed. I tarnished my reputation’.

وسخت اسم عيلتها

wassax-at ʔisim ʕe:lit-ha
stained-she name family-hers

lit. she stained her family’s name

‘She shamed her family.’

(5) Ты можешь смыть позор кровью.

tʲi mɐ'zɛʂ smʲɪtʲ pɐ'zor krɐ'vʲjʊ

lit. 2SG can-2SG.PRES wash-INF shame-ACC blood-INS

‘You can wash away the shame with blood.’

ما بغسل العار إلا الدم

ma: bjiʕsil ʔil-ʕa:r ʔilla ʔid-damm
not wash DEF-dishonor except DEF-

blood

lit. dishonor can only be washed by blood.

‘Honor should be restored by bloodshed.’

The metaphors (4-5) reinforce the negative connotations of shame, suggesting that it renders an individual feeling impure, tainted, or unclean. This metaphorical projection is explicitly conveyed through the synonyms of the Russian verbs *пристыдить*, *осрамить*, *опозорить* ('bring to shame'): *забросать грязью* ('to throw mud at'), *смешать с грязью* ('to mix with mud'), and *встоптать в грязь* ('to trample in mud'). As dirt is a substance that individuals typically seek to remove or avoid, the metaphor highlights the undesirable and potentially removable nature of shame, while also accentuating its negative impact and the idea that it can leave a lasting mark. The phrase 'washing away the shame with blood' can imply (a) redemption or sacrifice, where one seeks to atone for a shameful act through significant sacrifice; (b) revenge or violence, suggesting that one aims to eliminate or avenge a shameful act through violent means; and (c) catharsis, representing an intense emotional release or purging of shame, with 'blood' symbolizing deep, passionate emotion. The metaphor indicates that the process of liberating oneself from shame is intense, costly, and potentially painful.

In Jordanian culture, family honor is closely linked to masculinity or male machismo ideology (see Wikan 1984: 637). Consequently, it is often perceived that women and girls can bring dishonor to their families through certain actions, such as engaging in relationships outside of marriage in the Arab world in general (see Rehim et al. 2023). In such instances, male family members, or even extended male family members, may feel societal pressure to resort to extreme measures—often involving violence and vengeance—to cleanse or wash away the dishonor and restore their family's reputation. These notions are deeply rooted not only in Jordanian culture but also in Arab culture in general and are largely independent of religious influences.

(C) HIDDEN PLACE: Shame is portrayed through this source domain as something that should be concealed or kept confidential.

(6) Когда мне стыдно, я хочу спрятаться или исчезнуть.

kəg'da mn'e 'stidnə | ja 'xotεo spr'i' tats:ə | il'i
 iε:i'znutʃ

lit. when 1SG.DAT ashamed 1SG want-1SG.PRES hide-INF.REFL or
 disappear-INF

'Shame makes me want to hide or disappear.'

العرب لازم يطموا حالهم بالتراب

ʔil-ʕarab la:zim jtʕumm-u ɦa:lhum fi: t-tra:b
 DEF-Arabs should bury-they themselves in
 DEF-sand

lit. Arabs should bury themselves in sand.

'Arabs should hide from their shame.'

In (6), the concept of hiding or burying oneself (with sand) indicates a desire to withdraw from public view due to shame and to evade judgment or social

ostracism. This notion is grounded in two metaphors: that shame should be kept secret and that keeping it secret involves covering or hiding (in sand). The image of being buried may evoke negative associations, such as death, yet our interpretation focuses on the desire for invisibility—a wish to disappear from the sight of others to escape social judgment. The JA example reflects this desire and is influenced by the surrounding environment, where Arabs have traditionally lived—and some continue to reside—in a desert characterized by vast expanses of sand. It is important to note that the act of covering oneself with dust, while seemingly related, carries a different connotation in other cultural contexts. In Christian traditions, throwing dust or ashes on one's head signifies repentance and mourning (Lamentations 2:10). Therefore, the physical act of covering oneself is present in both scenarios, but the intended meaning differs, with the JA context emphasizing a desire for invisibility rather than solely signifying grief or remorse.

(D) PHYSICAL DAMAGE OR PAIN: In this source domain, shame is perceived as a physical damage or injury.

(7) Я была раздавлена стыдом.

ja 'biɬə rəz'davl'inə sti'dom
lit. 1SG be-PST.SG.F crush-PP.SG.F shame-INS
'I was crushed by shame.'

العار كسره

ʔil-ʕar kasar-uh
DEF-shame broke-him
Lit. shame broke him.
'He was devastated by shame.'

(8) Стыд – это сильная парализующая боль.

stɪt | etə s'il'i'najə pərəli'zujæ:ə bolʃ
lit. shame COP strong-NOM.SG.F paralyze-PRS.PTCP.ACT.NOM.SG.F
pain
'Shame is a severe paralyzing pain.'

العار هد حيله

ʔilʕa:r hadd he:luh
DEF-shame weaken/brought down ability/strength
lit. shame had weakened his strength
'Shame made him weak.'

In examples (7–8), the source domain is physical breakage, where the metaphors profile the concept of breaking a physical object to illustrate the emotional or social impact of shame. Specifically, when something is broken, it is typically rendered ineffective; thus, this metaphor reflects how shame can similarly fracture or weaken (see *ʔilʕa:r hadd he:luh* 'shame made him weak') a person's

spirit (metaphorically). The metaphor conveys an image of damage and fragility, suggesting that experiencing shame can leave one feeling fractured and powerless. Shame is depicted as having the capacity to deplete one's energy or willpower. The emotional burden of shame can be heavy, potentially exhausting one's inner strength. Being 'crushed or broken' implies a lack of control, as if the individual is unable to resist the force of shame or cope with its intensity. This metaphor implies a sense of victimization, conceptualizing shame as an external force acting upon the speaker. The source domain in these examples (physical weakening or damage resulting from an overwhelming experience) is applied to an emotional and social context. The destructive nature of shame is further emphasized by the SHAME AS PAIN metaphor (сильная парализующая боль), which highlights the extreme and intense nature of shame that can cause significant discomfort, rendering the individual unable to move, act, or function normally, whether emotionally, psychologically, or physically. This metaphor reflects the debilitating effect of shame, showing its power to overwhelm and incapacitate the individual, thus hindering personal growth or progress, as they may feel stuck or unable to move forward in their lives.

(E) PURSUER/HUNTER: Shame is an entity that can persistently haunt an individual, even extending beyond death in some cases.

(9) Стыд преследует меня всегда.

stit pr'is^(j) 'l'edo(j)it m'i'n'a fsig'da
 lit. shame pursue-3SG.PRES 1SG-ACC always
 'Shame is always haunting me.'

العار رح يلحقنا للقبر

ʔil-ʕa:r raħ jilħag-na: la-l-gabur
 DEF-shame will follow-us to-DEF-grave
 lit. shame will follow us to the grave.
 'Our shame is everlasting.'

The metaphor depicts shame as a persistent and relentless force, often impacting the individual in subtle or unexpected ways. The individual may feel compelled to escape or conceal themselves from shame, much like one would attempt to evade a hunter. The experience of being "pursued by shame" can elicit feelings of fear, anxiety, or constant vigilance, as the individual anticipates the next manifestation of this emotion. This source domain highlights a power dynamic, where shame exerts control while the individual feels like a vulnerable prey. It conveys a sense of inevitability, suggesting that shame is an inescapable force that will catch up with the individual, regardless of their efforts to evade it.

(F) CURSE: Shame is a detrimental stigma that is associated with either an individual or a group of individuals.

(10) СТЫД – ЭТО ПРОКЛЯТИЕ: МНЕ СТЫДНО ЗА ВСЕХ И ЗА ВСЕ.

stít | etə prə'klatʲije | mn'e 'stidnə zə 'fsʲex i zə 'fsʲe

lit. shame COP curse 1SG-DAT ashamed for all-ACC.PL and for all-ACC.SG

'Shame is a curse: I am ashamed of everyone and everything'.

لعنة العار رح تلاحقهم

laʕnet ʔil-ʕa:r raħ tla:ħiʔ-hum
curse DEF-shame will follow-them

Lit. the curse of shame will follow them.

'Shame is a curse that never goes away'.

This metaphor describes individuals who feel stigmatized and subsequently experience shame due to their deviation from societal norms. It implies a sense of helplessness and the challenges involved in overcoming this emotion, highlighting its detrimental impact on the individual's emotional well-being and overall quality of life. The metaphor suggests that shame acts as an external force that afflicts the individual, isolating them from others and causing lasting harm.

(G) INHERITABLE LEGACY: Shame can be transmitted in a manner similar to inheritance or legacy.

(11) Чужой стыд становится нашим собственным и передаётся из поколения в поколение.

tʲeʊ'zɔj stít stə'novʲitsə 'naʃim s sɐp'stvʲinim
i pʲirʲi'da(j)itsə iz pəkə'lʲenʲjə f pəkə'lʲenʲje

Lit. other-POSS shame become-3SG.PRES. REFL our-POSS.SG own-SG and pass-3SG.PRES. REFL from generation-GEN.SG in generation-ACC.SG

'The others' shame becomes ours and is passed down through generations.

تركوا العار لولادهم

tarak-u: ʔil-ʕa:r la-wla:dhum
Left-they DEF-shame to-children

Lit. they left shame to their kids

'Their legacy of shame was left to their children'.

In example (11), shame is portrayed as a collective experience within a family or cultural group, influencing the identities of its members and reflecting shared histories, experiences, and expectations. Each country has a history marked by significant traumas, such as wars, revolutions, and political repression. These

collective historical experiences can contribute to an enduring sense of shame, which is transmitted through generations. This metaphor captures the lasting emotional impact of historical traumas on contemporary societies and individual psyches. It aligns with the contexts of collectivist tendencies that emphasize family, community, and shared history, characteristics prevalent in Russian and Arab cultures. The cultural focus on remembering the past reinforces the notion that emotions like shame are inherited and preserved across generations.

4.2. Different source domains

4.2.1 Specific source domains of SHAME in Russian and JA

4.2.1.1 Specific source domains in Russian

(A) FIRE: Shame is conceptualized as an intense, burning sensation—a potent force that possesses the capacity to both destroy and create. It serves as a symbol of transformation and renewal.

(12) СТЫД – ЭТО ОГОНЬ, КОТОРЫЙ СЖИГАЕТ МЕНЯ ДОТЛА.
 stit | etə. v'gonj | kə'torij szɨ'ga(j)it
 m'i'n'a det'la
 Lit. shame COP fire REL.NOM.SG.M burn-3SG.PRES
 1SG.ACC completely
 'Shame is fire burning me down'.

Conceptualizing shame as fire (12) reveals its intense, passionate, and dualistic nature. In Russian culture, fire often serves as a dual symbol, representing both destruction and purification. On one hand, fire burns, destroys, and leaves devastation in its wake, suggesting that shame can similarly have a destructive impact on an individual's sense of self, relationships, and overall well-being. Additionally, fire spreads quickly and easily, indicating that shame can grow rapidly and consume an individual's thoughts, emotions, and energy, leading to feelings of depletion or overwhelm. Fire also induces discomfort, further emphasizing the painful and distressing aspects of shame. This metaphor encapsulates the deep-rooted concepts of suffering and endurance that arise from historical, cultural, and religious contexts. In religious contexts, fire is often associated with spiritual trials and purification, evoking more positive connotations and suggesting that shame may serve as a trial that tests, refines, and transforms an individual's spirit, potentially leading to personal growth, renewal, or spiritual cleansing. This duality is reflected in various aspects of Russian life, including folktales, religious beliefs, and historical events.

(B) COLD: Shame can be experienced similarly to cold, reflecting the harshness of low temperatures and symbolizing the necessity for resilience to endure.

(13) СТЫД заставля́ет замере́ть и засты́ть. Мне хо́чется не бы́ть.
 stit zəstə'vlæ(j)it zəm'i'rietj i zə'stitj | mn'je
 'xotət̪sə n'e 'bitj |

Lit. shame make-3SG.PRES freeze-INF and freeze-INF 1SG.DAT want-3SG.PRES. REFL NEG be-INF
 ‘Shame makes you freeze. I wish I didn’t exist’.

The source domain in example (13) is determined by the origin and development of the lexeme *стыд* [*styd*] in Russian, which traces back to the Proto-Indo-European root *steu-* or *stu-* (indicating severe cold or hard frost). Over time, the meaning of this root shifted from its original association with severe cold or hard frost to encompass an emotional or psychological state. Such semantic shifts are not uncommon in language evolution, as physical sensations or environmental conditions often come to represent abstract concepts. In the case of *стыд* [*styd*], the harsh and unyielding nature of severe cold may have been metaphorically extended to describe the emotional experience of shame, which can similarly be harsh, uncomfortable, and paralyzing. Furthermore, Russia is known for its long, harsh winters, with temperatures often dropping well below freezing in some regions. Thus, the conceptualization of shame as cold may also be influenced by the surrounding environment.

(C) BLACK HOLE: Shame is associated with a cosmic body from which nothing can escape.

(14) Стыд – это черная дыра, которая затягивает и уничтожает любое ощущение собственной ценности.

stít | etə t̪eɪr'naɣə d̪i'ra | kɐ'torəɣə
 zəvɪ'ga(j)it i ɒn'it̪ɕ ta(j)it lʲɔ'boɣə vɛ:ɔ'ɕ:ɛnɪjə
 sɐp'stvɪm(:)əj t̪ɕi'n:əsʲtʲi

Lit. shame COP black-NOM.SG.F hole REL.NOM.SG.F pull-3SG.PRES and destroy-3SG.PRES any-ACC.SG.N feeling-ACC.SG own-GEN.SG.F value-GEN.SG

‘Shame is a black hole that drags in and destroys any sense of self-worth’.

In (14), the source domain is a black hole, an astronomical object with a gravitational pull so powerful that nothing can escape it. ² The metaphor highlights the inescapable and destructive nature of shame, which can consume an individual's life narrative, trapping them in a cycle of negative emotions. This shame emerges as a central and obscuring force, shaping their experiences and perceptions. It is associated with a global devaluation of the self, often stemming from social events in which the individual's status is questioned or rejected. Just as black holes are invisible and can only be observed indirectly through their gravitational effects on nearby stars and matter, shame may also be concealed or not openly discussed; however, its impact on an individual's life is unmistakable. Shame isolates the individual, severing their connections to others and to positive aspects of life.

4.2.1.2 Specific source domains in JA

(A) BLACKENING OF FACE: This source domain signifies a loss of social status or reputation, particularly in cultures such as the Jordanian culture that emphasize honor and respect.

(15)

سود وجهنا

sawwad widzih-na

blackened.he face-ours

lit. he blackened our face

‘He deeply shamed us.’

In Arab culture, and specifically within Jordanian culture, the color black is metaphorically associated with negativity, particularly dishonor. In contrast, white is typically linked to honor, purity, and a positive reputation (Zibin et al. 2025). Consequently, the metaphorical concept of “blackening of the face” (also referred to as “loss of face”) suggests that one’s reputation or honor has been tarnished by shameful actions. This expression signifies that an individual has brought dishonor to their family, which is represented metaphorically as a black mark on their face, reflecting their social standing or public image. This can be viewed as a culturally rooted method of expressing the consequences of shame and dishonor on familial honor through color symbolism.

(B) PHYSICAL SIZE: The metaphor here relates to physical size.

(16)

صغرنى قدام الناس

s^ʕayyar-ni:

gudda:m

?i-nna:s

Belittle.me-he

in.front.of

DEF-people

Lit. he belittled me in front of people

‘He made me publically shamed.’

In JA, physical size is often used metaphorically to convey feelings of shame. Specifically, being perceived as small can symbolize embarrassment, shame, and a loss of face. This concept is rooted in the belief that smallness or a diminutive appearance is associated with insignificance, weakness, or a lower social standing. Conversely, the expression *kabbarni*, meaning “he made me big,” signifies a sense of pride and empowerment. In social contexts, the feeling of being small may indicate that one’s dignity or reputation has been undermined in the eyes of others.

(C) THROWING {ga:l ‘Traditional Arab headband’

(17)

رمى العقال

rama:

?il{ga:l

threw.he

DEF-head band

lit. he threw his head band.

‘He has been dishonored and vows to restore his honor’

The act of throwing one’s [men’s] *ʕga:l* ‘headband’ holds significant cultural importance in Arab societies, including Jordan. This traditional headwear, worn by men, symbolizes dignity, honor, and social status. Consequently, throwing it to the ground is viewed as a symbolic gesture that reflects a sense of shame, dishonor, or the gravity of a situation that requires immediate attention. It signifies a commitment not to wear the headband until the honor and dignity of the affected individual are restored, or until the urgent issue causing the dishonor is resolved. This gesture in Jordanian culture serves as both a public acknowledgment of a serious problem and a pledge to address it.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that in Russian and Jordanian cultures, shame is perceived as an intensely strong, unpleasant, and painful emotion, characterized by feelings of exposure, powerlessness, and negative self-evaluation. It arises from the perception that behaviors or circumstances are immodest, indecorous, or dishonorable, leaving individuals or groups feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. Consequently, in both languages, shame is conceptualized metaphorically through several common source domains: PHYSICAL WEIGHT, STAIN/DIRT, HIDDEN PLACES, PHYSICAL DAMAGE OR PAIN, PURSUERS/HUNTERS, CURSES, AND INHERITABLE LEGACIES.

The similarities between the two cultures can be attributed to several factors. First, both cultures are collectivist, placing a high value on family and community. Shame is often experienced not only on an individual level but also as an emotion that impacts the social group, influencing the metaphors used to emphasize the societal repercussions of personal actions. Second, both cultures share historical narratives marked by significant challenges and transformations, including wars and social upheavals. These experiences may shape metaphors that convey the heavy burden of shame, often viewed as something inherited or shared across generations. Third, although the expressions of shame differ, both Russian and Jordanian metaphors acknowledge the necessity of proactively addressing this emotion. In both cultures, there is an understanding of shame’s potential to disrupt social harmony, with metaphors frequently highlighting the need for rectification or cleansing, whether through personal introspection or public gestures. Finally, the similarities in metaphors can be understood through the universal human experiences of shame as a powerful and socially mediated emotion (see Kövecses 2011). Both cultures express a need to align personal actions with societal values and norms; this illustrates how shame serves as a mechanism for social regulation and cohesion. Moreover, the metaphors reflect how collective memory and shared experiences shape cultural expressions of emotions, which leads to parallels even in culturally distinct contexts (see Sharifian 2017).

Both cultures place a high value on honor and reputation; however, the ways in which they express and conceptualize shame differ according to cultural symbolism and socio-environmental factors. Russian metaphors often draw from

environmental and cosmic sources (e.g., FIRE, COLD, BLACK HOLE), which reflects natural and existential elements (Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Rakhilina 2006; Herzberg et al. 2021; Herzberg et al. 2022). In particular, Russian metaphors frequently utilize environmental elements such as fire and cold, which are indicative of the country's harsh climate. For instance, cold is associated with paralysis and numbness, mirroring the immobilizing nature of shame. Conversely, the metaphor of fire conveys a consuming, purifying force, linking to cultural narratives of endurance and transformation through adversity, yet metaphors such as "black hole" – representing an all-consuming void and inescapable gravity – reflect existential concerns in Russian culture, particularly themes of suffering, isolation, and the search for meaning in the face of adversity, aligning with the introspection and emotional complexity found in Russian literature.

In Jordanian culture, honor has an important societal value. The traditional Bedouin lifestyle primarily centers around community and clan structures. The source domains employed in JA emphasize the communal nature of Bedouin society, where individual actions are evaluated based on their impact on the family and tribe. Metaphors such as "blackening of face" and "throwing *ʕga:l*" are tied to the social and public nature of shame. These expressions show the importance of maintaining a good reputation and highlight the communal efforts required to restore one's honor after it has been tarnished. Actions such as throwing *ʕga:l* carry rich symbolic meaning; they demonstrate the role that gestures and symbols play in Jordanian social practices. These metaphors emphasize the collective responsibility to address and rectify shameful situations.

Based on the above analysis, we argue that the main meaning focus of Russian and JA metaphors of shame can arise from either predetermined similarities or contrastive contexts (see Kövecses 2011). This may illustrate the complexity of conceptual metaphor formation. The first category is evident in common source domains such as STAIN/DIRT, PHYSICAL WEIGHT, and PHYSICAL DAMAGE, which relate to the inherent qualities of shame as something burdensome, sullied, or injurious, aligning with the target domain's characteristics. For example, the metaphor "SHAME IS STAIN/DIRT" arises from the abstract concept of eradicating shame. On the other hand, some metaphors may arise from contrasts (see Kövecses 2011). In JA data, there is often a contrast between emotional or social states, such as being diminished or sullied, and culturally or personally desirable states, such as honor, pride, and purity. For instance, the state of being small contrasts with the cultural ideal of being significant or respected. Such contrasts reflect the undesirable effects of shame in relation to cultural expectations or values. Examples such as throwing headwear on the ground illustrate how social and cultural juxtapositions create specific meanings, with such acts symbolizing both the loss of honor and the commitment to restore it. This indicates that an understanding of JA metaphors of shame may require an analysis of both intrinsic associations and contextual contrasts.

6. Conclusion

In the two cultures, shame is recognized as a multidimensional experience including self-evaluative, social, emotional, behavioral, and physiological components, characterized as a sinking emotion associated with feelings of being flawed, inadequate, and unworthy of belonging. Given that both cultures are collectivist, shame is often perceived as group-based and influential on social identity; it arises from the individual's perception of the self in relation to societal norms and expectations. Nonetheless, there are language- and culture-specific variations in the metaphoric framing of shame, which highlight the importance of cross-cultural research on this emotion.

Conceptual metaphor theory, based on main meaning focus, illustrates that metaphors are not merely linguistic tools but also reflect underlying cultural beliefs and values. This study reveals the influence of cultural and environmental factors on the cognitive and emotional frameworks through which shame is understood and communicated. The metaphoric expressions serve as bridges between tangible experiences and abstract emotional states, which highlights the shared yet distinct ways in which cultures experience and address emotions such as shame. This understanding of shame's cultural dimensions, along with its cognitive and communicative foundations, can inform culturally sensitive approaches in fields such as therapy, education, and social policy. Finally, the exploration of shame within metaphor research offers a promising avenue for further investigation into this complex emotion.

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Endnotes

¹ The phoneme /q/ (ق) in Jordanian Arabic (JA) exhibits allophonic variation across different subdialects. Although Modern Standard Arabic dictates its realization as a uvular stop, vernacular speech patterns reveal pronunciations such as a glottal stop [ʔ] (often heard in Amman, particularly among younger, urban women), a [k] sound (frequently observed in rural areas, especially among speakers with a Palestinian background), and a [g] sound (characteristic of the Bedouin dialect). This variation is influenced by factors including origin, age, gender, social class, and formality of the context.

²As one reviewer pointed out, 'black hole' can refer to a "memory black hole", highlighting Russia's approach to its Soviet past, or be associated with areas like Dzerzhinsk. The validity and relevance of these alternate meanings in this context are contested.

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