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A Study of Food and Drink Metaphors in Iraqi Syriac

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Summary

This study investigates the ways in which Syriac native speakers from Iraq conceptualise their understandings of various abstract domains, feelings, emotions, actions, customs, traditions and practices through their experiences of the concrete fields of food and drink metaphors. The conceptual metaphor theory (1980) by Lakoff and Johnson has been adopted for the data analysis. A focus group discussion (FGD) was employed as a tool for data collection and 43 idiomatic food and drink expressions were collected from this. Five native Syriac speakers from various regions and of different genders, ages, tribes and nationalities participated in the discussion. The study shows that Syriac speakers use many food and drink metaphors in their everyday language. The study concludes that food and drink metaphors are used by Syriac speakers mostly to conceive abstract concepts related to feelings, attitudes and emotions. The study shows that foods and drinks are strongly rooted in the Assyrian and Chaldean culture and many traditional dishes are used in its vernacular language as metaphors.

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1 Introduction

Language users often unconsciously use metaphors in conversations. This study adopts the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) which says metaphor is the result of a cognitive process that enables readers to comprehend and understand one domain in terms of another. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the role of food and drink metaphors in everyday communication in Syriac to show how Syriac native speakers view food and drink culturally and how this affects speech. This study focuses on language as it is spoken and used in everyday interactions rather than its written forms.

The hypothesis proposed is that conceptual metaphors do not occur randomly but that they have a cultural and social context, based on people's physical and cultural experiences, via unconscious processes.

The topic of metaphor has been well researched (Hartati, Panah and Matsom 2021; Khalid and Hayder 2020; Toma 2010; Al Jumah 2007; Salih 2000, among others), yet it has not been researched thoroughly in terms of applying it to food and drink metaphors used in everyday language. Syriac, as discussed in more detail below, is one of the oldest languages still in use in the Middle East but though it is spoken by over 2 million speakers it has not been studied and documented in terms of its food and drink metaphors. This study will contribute to studies of metaphor in doing this. In addition, this study will attempt to explore Assyrian culture and heritage through language.

This study will help people interested in heritage and culture understand the way in which Assyrians and Chaldeans, who are minorities in their countries, conceptualise foods and drinks, and how they use these metaphors as expressions in their everyday interactions.

2 An Introduction to the Syriac Language

Syriac was the first language to emerge in the Middle East (Duvall 1992: 22–3). It is considered one of the Semitic languages (Aramaic, Arabic and Hebrew), named after Sam, Noah's son, and its history extends from the tenth century BC to the eighth century AC (Al-Shammany 2007: 178). Elya (2009: 3), in his article 'Assyrian Language, the Inheritance of Acadian', points out that Syriac was a language written with pictures first, before it became a cuneiform alphabet. The language belongs to the Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac people with slight differences in pronunciation between them. These people used Syriac from the

establishment of the first, Sumerian, later called Acadian, and later still Babylonian, civilisation – and this is the reason why, to the present day, they are known as the Chaldean-Syriac-Assyrian people (Elya 2009).

Today, Syriac is divided into Western and Eastern accents. The latter is also divided into two pronunciations: an ancient one called Sybraya, meaning the literary, and a new or modern one, which is the vernacular, or spoken, language. Syriac in its oldest form was the language spoken by Jesus Christ and his disciples (Al-Shammany 2007: 178). The Eastern dialect in its modern form is spoken mostly in Iraq. The participants in this study use the Eastern dialect.

Syriac, the language of the region in Iraq, is known to have continued to widespread across the region until the period when an Islamic tide invaded and imposed Arabic over all other languages in the seventh century. Thus, Syriac became limited to the areas the Arabic Islamic tide did not reach, such as Turkey, parts of Syria and Lebanon, and some regions from Persia such as Uremia. As for the Eastern accent, this expanded more than the Western in Iraqi regions, especially in the north such as Zakho, Hakkari, Erbil, Nineveh Plain and others.

The Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriac Orthodox churches all comprise Christian denominations that live in northern Mesopotamia in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, as well as others in the diaspora in the United States, Australia and European countries, especially Sweden and Germany. Members of the Orthodox faith belong to various Syriac Christian churches, such as the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Chaldean Church and the Church of the East. They are also distinguished by their mother tongue Syriac, a northeastern Semitic language that originated as one of the Aramaic dialects in Edessa, an ancient city in Upper Mesopotamia founded during the Hellenistic period by King Seleucus I Nicator (r. 305–281 BC). However, only Assyrian and Chaldean participants took part in this study; Syriac Orthodox were excluded as there are none in Duhok where the study took place. For further differences between the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Syriac Orthodox and their relationship to the Assyrian language (see Ross, Tadros and Johnson 2021).

3 A Theoretical Background

Richards and Schmidt (2010) argue that Cognitive Theory is taken as mental manufacture in individuals' minds (Richards and Schmidt 2010: 93), and cognition represents the operations that create grammar, conceptualisation and thought (Fauconnier 1997: 10). The literature also emphasises a strong relationship between language and thought. Cognitive Linguistics represents an approach to the study of language, mind and embodied experience which is primarily concerned with investigating the relationship between language, mind and socio-physical experience.

Regarding Conceptual Metaphor Theory, it is stated by Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 16) that metaphor is very common in everyday life, and that this is not only true for language but also for actions and thoughts. People's ordinary conceptual systems, used for thinking and acting, are fundamentally metaphorical. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of intellect; they also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details.

The word 'metaphor' stems from a Greek word, *metaphora*, or *metaphorein*, meaning 'transfer' (Charteris-Black 2004: 19). The Greek etymology is from *meta*, implying 'a change', and *pherein* meaning 'to bear, or carry'. Thus, the word 'metaphor' itself has a metaphorical meaning in English: 'a transfer of meaning from one thing to another'.

Metaphor has been defined differently and is contested by different scholars. Standford (1936: 101), for instance, defines metaphor as the process and result of using a term (X) normally signifying an object or concept (A) in such a context that it must refer to another object or concept (B) which is distinct enough to characteristics from A to ensure that in the composite idea formed by the synthesis of the concepts A and B and now symbolised in the word X, the factors A and B retain their conceptual independence even while they merge in the unity symbolised by X.

4 Methodology and Data Collection

The procedure that this study will follow represents a framework of cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory. Use will be made of the well-known Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphor We Live By* (2003) to analyse the food and drink

metaphors. This framework argues that people's lives are significantly influenced by the conceptual metaphors they use to explain complex phenomena.

This theory has changed our understanding of the role of metaphor and its understanding in language and the mind. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of the mind, allowing us to employ our knowledge about our physical and social experience to supply an understanding of unlimited topics. As these metaphors work on structuring the basic notions of our experience, they are metaphors that can shape our perceptions and actions without us ever noticing them. Hence, they are 'Metaphors We Live By'. It is to be noted that this theory has, within the cognitive sciences, developed to become central to contemporary understanding of how we think and how we express our thoughts in language. Hence this theory has been selected to analyse the food and drink metaphors used by Assyrians to express their culture and heritage through language.

A focus group discussion (FGD) was used as a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understanding of food and drink metaphors in Syriac. The aim of this method was to obtain data from a selected group of individuals. Five Syriac native speakers from various villages and regions participated in the FGD (see Table 1). It is to be noted that these five participants showed their consent to have their names published in the study. Participants were selected from different regions and clans to guarantee covering most food and drink metaphors in Syriac as Syriac spoken in the vernacular has variations from one part of the country to another. The FGD lasted for one hour and a half and it was facilitated by a researcher who prompted the participants to brainstorm as many food and drink metaphors as possible and to state the occasion in which each metaphor is used. However, the FGD was not solely relied upon for data collection and analysis, but was complemented by the researcher's own knowledge, positionality and secondary research.

The author is a Chaldean himself and is married to an Assyrian, so this made the FGD proceed more smoothly. In particular, my own background as a Syriac speaker, my positionality in the social context of where I live and my knowledge of the Chaldean and Assyrian communities in Iraq all influenced positively my ability to secure the trust of participants and convince them to take part actively in the FGD, and especially that the language that was used in the FGD was Syriac. This gave an informal flavour to the meeting, and prompting participants to brainstorm food and drink metaphors was not a difficult task.

4.1 The regions participants came from

Akra. Akra is an Iraqi city in the Duhok Governorate in northern Iraq. Before 1991, Akra was administratively affiliated to Nineveh Governorate, but after the 1991 uprising it officially became one of the regions affiliated to the Kurdistan Region, according to which it became administratively separate from Nineveh Governorate, one of the oldest districts in Iraq. A mixture of Chaldeans and Assyrians live in Akra.

Barwari Bala. Barwari Bala, or Barwari for short, is a plain located in the far north of Iraq in the area between the city of Duhok and the Iraqi-Turkish border strip in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This area had formed one of the most significant Assyrian communities before the Assyrian massacres during the Second World War when most of its Assyrian inhabitants were killed. Kurds currently constitute the majority population, in addition to scattered Assyrian/Chaldean villages. Barwari Bala is located between the Zab River in the east, the Khabur River in the west and the Matina Mountains to the south.

Amedi. Amedi (or Amadiyah) is an Iraqi-Kurdish town and district administrative centre in Duhok Governorate, a famous summer resort and hill station along one of the tributaries of the Great Zab in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, nearly 10km from the Turkish border. It is located 70km north of the city of Duhok and is 1,400 metres above sea level. The city is built on top of a mountain and includes a number of ancient gates. It has a population of about 8,000 and is currently under the influence of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Amedi is known as the city of the kings of the Assyrians and the Medes and the sultans of the Kurds.

Duhok. The city of Duhok was originally inhabited by Chaldean Christians, who still own vast lands there.

Nerwa. Nerwa belongs to the Deralok sub-district, which in turn belongs to the Amadiyah District in the Duhok Governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Nerwa Christians are the majority population in Nerwa. They are Assyrians and constitute one of the biggest clans in the area.

Table 1. Participants in the FGD

Name of participant	Gender	Region	Nationality	Age
Siranosh Toma	Female	Akra	Chaldean	55
Michael Esha	Male	Barwari	Assyrian	76
Youram Nissan	Male	Bebad – Amedi	Assyrian	61
Ashwaq Yaqo	Female	Duhok	Chaldean	38
Shmuel Sleewa	Male	Nerwa	Assyrian	66

Source: Author's own.

5 Analysis of Food and Drink Metaphors

Metaphor is a beautiful word picture. It is not to be taken literally; its effectiveness depends on the recipient's recognition of the intended comparison and their appreciation of its appropriateness.

A metaphor is an implied comparison of two things or events based on an implied or explicit point of similarity. To analyse a metaphor, Crofts (1994: 35–52) states that there are three parts to be identified: the topic, which is the item under discussion and which can be an object or person or event; the image, which is the picture to which the topic is likened; and the point of similarity, which is what, in the context, the topic and image have in common. The analyst should state the point of similarity in generic terms that will apply to both the image and the topic. It is helpful to state the full comparison like this: As the image shows the point of similarity by doing or being something, so the topic shows the point of similarity by doing or being something. Another model is used in support of the first model, which is that presented by Newmark (1997) on 'Eating and Drinking as a Source of Metaphor in English'. This model shows the extra information needed for understanding the use of proverb in everyday life. This model shows how a proverb is used and linked to the nature of its usage in everyday life; additionally, showing the most important message that is sent by the proverb.

Forty-three food and drink metaphors were selected from the FGD. These metaphors are analysed below. For each Syriac food and drink metaphor, a literal English translation is provided followed by a semantic translation (what the metaphor means). An example containing that metaphor when necessary to help contextualise it, and from interviewee quotes, is usually provided. The analysis starts with the identification of parts of the

metaphors. Finally, a statement of the comparison is mostly given in full. These metaphors are classified into five main groups as follows:

- Group (1): Metaphors related to generic eating
- Group (2): Metaphors related to traditional dishes
- Group (3): Metaphors related to bread
- Group (4): Metaphors related to drinks
- Group (5): Miscellaneous

Group (1): Metaphors related to generic eating

Metaphor 1

(خلوخ ريشوخ) ***You ate your head.*** (You are not behaving well.)

Topic: Dissatisfaction.

Image: The head governed by the brain getting tired (figuratively being eaten out) from bad actions and unreasonable words.

Point of similarity: This phrase is used when wanting to express dissatisfaction with the behaviour of someone as a result of their acting badly or uttering unreasonable words. Ashwaq said, 'I often say, "You ate your head" to my five-year-old kid when he is naughty.'

Metaphor 2

(قم اخلتي وشاةتي) ***You ate and drank me.*** (You tricked me.)

Topic: Cleverness and ingenuity.

Image: Not only eating something but also drinking it.

Point of similarity: Eating and drinking something means finishing it off; in the same way a person's cleverness and ingenuity are expressed when doing or saying something great.

This is a phrase often used to express a person's cleverness and ingenuity in their behaviour towards someone who has acted or spoken inappropriately. Shmuel said that he lost the argument with his clever partner over an issue related to business concluding that, 'My friend ate and drank me'.

Metaphor 3

(هاخلوخ؟) or (دخول) *Hey, have you eaten it now?* or *Go ahead and eat it.* (Are you happy now?)

Topic: A bad thing happening.

Image: Eating something that is not supposed to be eaten.

Point of similarity: Bearing the consequences of doing something unpleasant is compared to eating something that undesirable.

This phrase is used when there is a consequence as a result of doing a bad thing and that has led to a fair penalty for the negative action. Youram said, 'Have you eaten it now?' to his stubborn son who, against his father's wishes, went into a business and lost all his money.

Metaphor 4

(خلي خاسطرا بان فينا) *I ate a slap or a kick.* (I was slapped or kicked.)

Topic: Being slapped or kicked.

Image: Eating a slap or kick.

Point of similarity: Being exposed to a slap or kick is compared to eating the slap or kick.

This phrase is used for a person who has actually been beaten or hit by someone. Shmuel said, 'When I was a kid, I ate a lot of slaps and kicks from my dad'.

Metaphor 5

(خلي خامقلب) *I ate a prank.* (I was pranked.)

Topic: Being pranked.

Image: Eating a prank.

Point of similarity: Being pranked is likened to eating it.

This phrase is used as a result of falling into a trap or prank orchestrated by someone as a kind of innocent joke or humour. There was a debate regarding this expression. The Chaldean speakers agreed on eating a prank, yet the Assyrian participants preferred eating a pipe (a steel one) to denote the same meaning. This is probably because Assyrians

are affected by the Iraqi Arabic expression of 'انضرب بوري' meaning 'I was beaten a pipe' to express the state of being deceived.

Metaphor 6

(فلان قم اخلي ريشي) ***Someone ate my head.*** (Someone is really annoying.)

Topic: Being annoyed.

Image: Having a headache.

Point of similarity: Being annoyed by someone is likened to having a real headache which is expressed by the head being eaten.

This phrase is spoken to an annoying person. Michael said, 'I guarantee that most Assyrian mothers have said "You ate my head" hundreds of times to their kids; I haven't said it, though'. This metaphor is very similar to Metaphor 1, but Metaphor 1 does not necessarily involve annoying the speaker directly, while Metaphor 6 does. This is because the 'You ate your head' metaphor is often used as a negative appeal to someone who is being very naughty, especially a child. 'Someone ate my head', however, is most often uttered to adults who are deliberately trying to be annoying.

Metaphor 7

(خلي فاري) ***I ate money.*** (I spent money.)

Topic: Spending money.

Image: Eating in the sense of benefiting from something.

Point of similarity: Spending money is likened to eating it.

This phrase is used to refer to spending money. Michael stated that he had eaten a lot of money when he was a reckless young man.

Metaphor 8

(ايخالا د قنرا) ***Eating worries.*** (Being worried.)

Topic: Worrying.

Image: Eating unpleasant things.

Point of similarity: Exposure to sadness and worries is likened to eating sadness and worries. Ashwaq reflected on her school days when she would feel stressed before final exams. She said, 'I have eaten so many worries because of the exams that I had to take'.

Metaphor 9

(ايخاللا د بقا د ناشى) ***Eating others' rights.*** (Taking away the rights of others.)

Topic: Stealing rights.

Image: Exerting power and eating something not belonging to you.

Point of similarity: Eating here is likened to stripping or stealing the rights of others, especially poor people, minorities or women, i.e., vulnerable groups. Michael criticised the unjust rich who were considered property owners in the villages and took many portions of taxes from the poor peasants, saying, 'They mercilessly eat the rights of the poor'.

Metaphor 10

(خلوخ سما) ***Eat poison.*** (Screw you.)

Topic: Hatred.

Image: Death or killed by poisoning.

Point of similarity: Wishing someone died by eating poison.

This phrase is sometimes used when someone wants to show hatred to another person by making negative appeal to them as a result of a negative attitude or an unpleasant expression. Youram said that he is usually tempted to say, 'Eat poison' to his adversaries, but he does not mean it.

Metaphor 11

(خلي جرجوخ / خلي ليوخ) ***May I eat your heart / May I eat your liver.*** (I love you.)

Topic: Intimacy and affection.

Image: The heart is thought of as the source of loving feelings.

Point of similarity: Loving someone is likened to eating the source of their loving feelings, which is the heart.

This phrase is said to someone the speaker loves a lot. It expresses intimacy, affection and romantic feelings. Siranosh said, 'I use "I eat your heart" to my husband, but "I eat your liver" to my baby nephew'. The liver is linked to children because they are regarded as a piece of the body after the famous Syriac saying of 'Our children are our livers'.

In this section, the metaphors analysed related to eating in general and were used mainly to express negative things such as misbehaving, annoying and tricking others, being beaten and kicked, being pranked, having worries and taking away others' rights (see Metaphors 1–10). Generic eating, however, is also used to express positive feelings (see Metaphor 11) when connected to the heart or liver. This is because it is known that in Assyrian and Chaldean culture the heart symbolises love and good feelings. The heart has been described throughout Assyrian and Chaldean history as the main repository of feelings, soul and spirit, a phenomenon common in many cultures. According to common belief in the region, the heart is the centre of consciousness, the soul and the spirit and the brain is barely mentioned in this context.

Group (2): Metaphors related to traditional dishes

Metaphor 12

(خول ماشي) ***Eat mung beans.*** (Go away.)

Topic: A verbal polite punishment.

Image: Everyone can eat mung beans, culturally speaking, because almost all Assyrian villages would grow mung beans and they were a very common, ordinary meal.

Point of similarity: As it is not something special to eat mung beans, so do that (as a punishment) instead of what you are doing or saying. This phrase is used as a kind of polite verbal punishment by people who do not want to resort to bad words. ' "Eat mung beans", I just said it to my youngest son a few days ago when he asked for money,' said Siranosh. However, as mung beans are grown less frequently nowadays and are no longer a common meal, this metaphor has become less common with younger people; though they would still understand why mung beans are being used in the expression.

Metaphor 13

(فشلن ابفرجي) ***We became dolma.*** (The space is too tight.)

Topic: Tightness of space.

Image: Lack of enough space.

Point of similarity: Stuffing vegetables in a pot is likened to cramming many people in one place.

This phrase is used sarcastically when many people are crammed into a narrow place (for example, in a small car) to denote the tightness of the place, just as in the pot for making *dolma*, which is a heritage Assyrian dish where different varieties of vegetables are placed and crammed together in a pot. Stuffed onions are placed along with aubergines, courgettes and peppers, then stuffed vine leaves, and a glass dish is placed on the surface. Water, tomato sauce, sumac, ghee and salt are added, and the ingredients left over a medium heat. The sauce is poured over the *dolma* until it is completely submerged. All these ingredients are left on medium heat for half an hour, then the heat is reduced, until the ingredients are cooked. Shmuel confirmed that his large family used to use this metaphor when going on picnics as his car was small. 'I have bought a bigger car now', he said.

Metaphor 14

(ما فثلا فاغا؟) ***Are you cooking pacha?*** (You are taking too much time.)

Topic: Getting delayed without apparent reason.

Image: Cooking *pacha*, which takes effort and time.

Point of similarity: Getting delayed unreasonably is likened to cooking the traditional dish of *pacha*, which requires time and effort.

Pacha, which is a traditional Iraqi dish, is made from sheep's head, trotters and stomach, all boiled slowly and served with bread dipped in the broth. *Pacha* is a special dish served at Christmas and Easter and it takes a long time to prepare. While both Christmas and Easter are important and special religiously for Assyrians and Chaldeans, Easter has a special significance to the Assyrians and Chaldeans, and they even call it 'the Great Feast', in comparison to Christmas, which is called 'the Small Feast'. Part of this is that Easter was originally the celebration of Ishtar, the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility and sex. Her symbols (like the egg and rabbit) were, and still are, fertility and sex symbols. This

phrase is used when someone delays doing something despite it being simple. Michael said that he remembered using this metaphor with his wife who was only getting him some tea, but she took her time.

Metaphor 15

(ما بوة خيلا فاغا من مخوشكا؟) ***Have you eaten pacha this morning?*** (You are unusually energetic and active.)

Topic: Being talkative and energetic.

Image: Eating a heavy meal.

Point of similarity: A person talking too much or acting with energy is likened to eating the heavy meal of *pacha* in the morning, which is not usual.

It is known that eating *pacha* gives people plenty of energy. Therefore, this phrase is used to describe a person who talks a lot or exhibits unusually high energy levels. Shmuel said that he used to use this metaphor to his football friends when they performed unusually well in matches.

Metaphor 16

(خلوخ كجكاجي) ***Eat kichkachi.*** (Well done.)

Topic: Compliment.

Image: *Kichkachi* is fried and sweetened apples. It an Assyrian traditional dessert usually made on special occasions, in particular Easter, Christmas and weddings.

Point of similarity: As *kichkachi* is special and delicious, you can enjoy it as a reward. This phrase is used as a light, verbal compliment – a kind of joke about an action or job that is well done.

However, this metaphor can also be used ironically. One can easily identify if it is used ironically or seriously based on the situation and context. For example, when Youram said, 'I was painting a house and I was really tired. A friend called and asked what I was doing. I simply replied, "I am eating *Kichkachi*"', it was obviously ironic as the fatigue resulting from hard manual labour is likened to eating this delicious dessert that is eaten in a time of relaxation and happiness.

Metaphors related to traditional dishes are of significant interest because they strongly tie to Syriac and Chaldean culture. Particular dishes such as *dolma*, *pacha*, and *kichkachi* are connected to festivals that are culturally specific and unique. The uniqueness of these traditional-dish metaphors illustrates how these metaphors may not even translate outside of the Assyrian and Chaldean community to other communities in the region. If they were used more broadly in the Iraqi non-Assyrian, non-Chaldean context they would not be easily understood.

Group (3): Metaphors related to bread

Metaphor 17

(لخما وگسا) ***Bread and belly.*** (Not paid well.)

Topic: Paying someone for work.

Image: Eating bread.

Point of similarity: Paying someone for a job is likened to offering them bread.

This phrase is used when hiring someone without paying them anything (or just a little), and only offering them food while working. Siranosh stated that when she asked her sisters to help her make pastries for Christmas, she jokingly offered not to pay them any money but 'bread and belly'.

Metaphor 18

(لخمن فُخا ايلبي) ***Our bread is unsalted.*** (We are unlucky.)

Topic: Bad luck.

Image: No one likes bread that is unsalted.

Point of similarity: Not receiving due respect from others is likened to unsalted bread.

This phrase is used to denote a lack of luck in life, usually when one fails to be treated well by others. Youram pointed out that he used this metaphor when he was surprised not to be invited to the wedding of one of his close friends.

Metaphor 19

(لخما لا خلوخ كو بيبي) ***You won't eat bread in my house.*** (I threaten you.)

Topic: Threat.

Image: Not having food at home.

Point of similarity: Not allowing someone to enter one's home is likened to not allowing them to eat bread (metonymically food) in that home.

This phrase is used to threaten someone that they will not be allowed to enter the house or under the speaker's roof in the event that they do something disgraceful that the speaker does not like. Youram said, 'I was always saying "You won't eat bread in my house" to my son when he was coming home late, but I would still let him in'.

Metaphor 20

(اوا شولا لا ماخل لخمنا) ***This job does not provide bread to eat.*** (This job is useless.)

Topic: Uselessness.

Image: Providing no bread to eat.

Point of similarity: Little or no payment for a job is likened to providing no bread to eat.

This phrase is used when doing something, be it work or an action, which is useless. Siranosh noted that she said to her son, who dreamed of professional drawing, 'Art in this country does not provide you with bread to eat, so don't be stubborn and focus on your studies'.

Metaphor 21

(لبوخ خيلي لخمنا من نأيتنا) ***We haven't eaten bread with our ears.*** (We are not stupid.)

Topic: Stupidity and gullibility.

Image: Not even knowing which part of the body to use to eat bread.

Point of similarity: Stupidity and being deceived easily are likened to not knowing that bread is eaten via the mouth and not the ears.

This phrase is used as a response to a person who tries to defraud and deceive the speaker. The meaning of the phrase is that the speaker is clever enough to realise that someone is trying to deceive them, and they are not stupid enough to fall into their trap. Youram said,

'I use this phrase to my boss when he doesn't want to pay me on time; of course, he knows that I'm kidding with him'.

Metaphor 22

(بوخ خيلي خا لهما موخدادي) ***We have shared bread together.*** (There are close bonds between us.)

Topic: Connections of respect and association.

Image: Sharing meals together.

Point of similarity: Sharing meals together, which is expressed by eating bread together, is likened to having connections and bonds of respect and loyalty.

This phrase is used to express the connections and bonds of respect between certain people and others. Bread and salt are both words closely related to food, for they are mainstays of food in the Assyrian community and are indispensable. Bread and salt have been used as symbols of fulfilment and maintenance of the covenant since ancient times. Shmuel recalled that he had recently used this metaphor to someone he had been imprisoned with in the Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s.

Bread has a particular significance in Syriac culture, especially in relation to its Christian connotations. Bread in Metaphors 17–22 is used figuratively as a metonymy to refer to food. In a metonymy, the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated because of its common and recurring relationship with the other. Thus, the 'crown' or 'the sceptre' can be used to stand for a king, and 'Hollywood' for the film industry; 'Milton' can signify the writings of Milton ('I have read all of Milton') (Abrams 2009: 119). Bread has a religious and cultural significance for Assyrians and Chaldeans, and it relates to the biblical imagery around bread, for example in the Lord's Prayer – 'Give us today our daily bread' (*The New King James Bible* 1985, Matthew 6: 11). Beyond mere nutrition, bread has a historical and contemporary importance in the Assyrian and Chaldean Christian faith. Bread is also important in Christianity as altar bread (also called sacramental bread) where it is used, alongside wine, as one of the elements at the altar in church.

Historically, bread, as is the case nowadays, was produced in different ways, some specific to particular regions or populations. When studying the terms and icons of bread in the Assyrian texts, it seems clear that there is a continuity of some types of bread specific to

Assyria from the middle Assyrian era to the last century of the Assyrian Empire. This continuity represents the strength of the Assyrian identity over a period of half a millennium and the constancy of its cultural independence in some respects from the neighbouring Babylonian state. Most of the written sources refer to ritual activities, and the conservative traditions expected in ritual contexts undoubtedly contributed to the long-term durability of some breads (Postgate 2015). It is known that the Assyrians are some of the first peoples to embrace Christianity, doing so from the first century AD. They contributed to the theological growth and dissemination of this religion in the regions of Central Asia, India and China. This contributed to the Assyrian sanctification of bread, one of the biblical symbols.

Group (4): Metaphors related to drinks

Metaphor 23

(لا شافة من اينا ودرشنة) ***Do not dirty the spring that you drink from.*** (Do not betray trust.)

Topic: Betrayal.

Image: A lack of gratitude and disloyalty by ruining a source of goodness.

Point of similarity: Betraying and being rude to someone who has shown you a favour is likened to drinking water from a spring and then dirtying the water.

This phrase is said to the person who thinks or is tempted to think about committing something that is considered a betrayal or an insult to a person who has shown a favour to them. Michael said that this metaphor is very similar to (ايجا داخلة لا مخة فينا ال سينيك ديوخ), 'When you finish eating do not kick the plate'.

Metaphor 24

(شاية د مايي ايلي) ***It is drinking water.*** (It is my cup of tea.)

Topic: Doing something easily.

Image: No need to make an effort when drinking water.

Point of similarity: Effortlessly drinking water is likened to doing something enjoyably and easily.

This idiom is used when referring to something that you like and enjoy and can do easily. Drinking water is done without effort, so it describes what is 'good' and 'nice' over many years. Shmuel commented saying, 'Providing for my family nowadays is not drinking water.'

Metaphor 25

(مايي لا مطي الي) ***He won't have time to drink water.*** (He will definitely die.)

Topic: Death.

Image: Having no time left.

Point of similarity: Dying is expressed here by having no time left even for drinking a cup of water.

This phrase describes the situation in which a person is bound to die if he does something. This metaphor is therefore used to warn others not to adventure. Ashwaq said that she warned her daughter who was climbing a high mountain, saying, 'Be careful, if you fall, you won't have time to drink water'.

Metaphor 26

(دلا شغيا بولي رؤيا) ***He gets drunk without drinking alcohol.*** (He is too foolish.)

Topic: Foolishness.

Image: Drunk.

Point of similarity: People usually only get drunk if they drink alcohol, but the person described here gets drunk and 'stupid' without drinking alcohol.

An extremely idiotic, stupid or foolish person is described with this phrase. That is, this person does not need to drink alcohol in order to be mad and drunk; he is already so. Siranosh commented regarding this metaphor, indicating that teachers used this metaphor to describe lazy students.

Metaphor 27

(افخا لا امر دوي خموؤيلا) ***No one says that their yogurt drink is sour.*** (Nobody does themselves down.)

Topic: Not blaming and putting oneself down.

Image: Not admitting that one is wrong.

Point of similarity: As no one would admit that their yogurt drink has gone sour, so no one would admit that they are wrong.

Ayran or *shanina*, which is a yogurt-based drink, is well-known in the Assyrian region. Not everyone knows how to make this beverage well. In the past, it was made from yogurt by placing it in a sheepskin bag, and then hanging and shaking it until it turned into a liquid. When it turned into a liquid, the butter that floated on the surface was extracted for cooking. *Shanina* is mainly made of yoghurt milk and water, and it tastes slightly sour. The secret is that it should not taste completely sour otherwise, as this metaphor denotes, it is counted as a negative point. However, it is difficult for someone who is not good at making this drink to admit that their drink is sour. This phrase is used to denote that people do not admit their mistakes and do not blame themselves, even if they are wrong. Ashwaq said that mothers who know that their son is not good looking find it difficult to admit that, so this metaphor applies to them very much.

Metaphor 28

(شەقي خا غيا خيئا) ***Why not drink another tea?*** (Why not staying even longer? – said ironically.)

Topic: Hoping that someone leaves.

Image: Offering a second cup of tea with an ironic tone.

Point of similarity: As an irony, a second cup of tea is offered to a guest so that they feel that it is time to leave.

In Iraq, in general, tea is the most common hot drink and is drunk more than coffee. Tea is possibly one of the most important things offered to guests in every Assyrian and Chaldean household. In Assyrian culture, it is considered very common for friends to invite each other to drink tea in order to spend time together. This phrase is very sarcastic in nature and is used when someone, a guest for instance, overstays and it is polite that they leave. This phrase may be uttered, hoping that the addressee understands that it is time to leave. Ashwaq recalled the early days of her marriage when she would visit her new family

repeatedly and stay up late at night. She said, 'My husband's family must have wanted to tell me, "Drink another cup of tea", certainly sarcastically'.

Metaphor 29

(بلايلوخ اش نيرا ويمدروخ سديا) ***He takes you to the sea and brings you back thirsty.*** (He promises you amazing things, but he will never keep his promises and will not help you.)

Topic: Promises not kept.

Image: Showing you the sea and not letting you drink from it.

Point of similarity: This metaphor means that you do something without reaping any benefit, and all your labour is wasted; you must beware of work that is useless and the wrong person who accompanies you in this work. Michael, who was not on good terms with his former boss at work, said that this metaphor fully applies to him.

Metaphors related to drinks unpack another important aspect of Assyrian and Chaldean culture. Similar to bread, water (which is used in Metaphors 23, 24 and 25) also has a biblical significance. The word 'water' is used in a variety of metaphorical ways in Scripture. In John 4:10–15, Jesus speaks metaphorically of his salvation as 'living water' and as 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life'. Another biblically significant drink is wine (which is indirectly used in Metaphor 26), and it is a symbol for Jesus' blood that is shed for the sake of his people (*The New King James Bible* 1985, Matthew 26: 26–8). Drinks such as those made from yogurt beverage (Metaphor 27) and tea (Metaphor 28) are culturally, but not religiously, significant.

Group (5): Miscellaneous

Metaphor 30

(جوزوخ قورقو اش لبي) ***You crack your walnuts on my heart.*** (You are teasing me.)

Topic: Teasing someone.

Image: Hurting.

Point of similarity: Teasing someone is likened to cracking walnuts on the heart, a harsh and painful thing to do.

This phrase is said to people when they tease the speaker, especially when the speaker is already in distress. Walnuts have a special cultural significance for Assyrians, particularly those living in Akra, which is the famous in Iraq for producing them. The resort of Gerbish, which is originally an Assyrian village and belongs to the district of Akra, is a beautiful resort that is shrouded in walnut trees. Siranosh from Akra, a fan of Barcelona, said, 'On the night Barcelona was beaten by Real Madrid, I commented on a Real Madrid fan's Facebook post like this, "Come on! Don't crack your walnuts on my heart" '.

Metaphor 31

(فلان 24 ساعي كفينالي) *X is hungry 24 hours.* (X is never satisfied.)

Topic: Not being satisfied with what a person has.

Image: Feeling hungry all the time.

Point of similarity: When someone is discontented and not satisfied with what they have it is likened to feeling hungry all the time.

This phrase is said to someone that does not feel happy with what they have and always keen to receive more, even when more is not needed. Shmuel said that he usually tells his son, 'You are hungry all the time', when he asks for more pocket money.

Metaphor 32

(ايخالاد غيغكي) *Sparrow's food.* (Too little of something.)

Topic: Too little.

Image: The amount of food eaten by sparrows.

Point of similarity: When something is too little, it is likened to sparrow's food.

This phrase is used to denote a small amount of a certain thing, which may be food or something else. Siranosh said that her little sister eats very little, so she always tell her at home, 'You eat just as sparrows would eat'.

Metaphor 33

(غيغكي اد اشة كمري طالي لكة اخلة تينيا) *Year-old sparrows are telling me you don't know how to eat figs.* (The inexperienced are criticising the experienced.)

Topic: Illogical criticism.

Image: Good sparrows know how to eat ripened figs and vice versa.

Point of similarity: Experienced people are likened to sparrows with their skills of eating figs at the right time, and vice versa.

Sparrows are known to be attracted to figs, and Assyrian villagers often suffer from birds eating their figs once they are ripe. Fig trees are very common in Assyrian villages and figs also have a biblical significance. Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves after they were said to have sinned. This was the start of the fig tree being used as a symbol in the Bible. Also, throughout the Bible, the fig tree is a common metaphor for the people of God (*The New King James Bible* 1985, 1 Kings 4: 25). This might have a link to Assyrian and Chaldean Christian faith. Michael said that he uses this metaphor when his son tries to teach him something.

Metaphor 34

(خليا ومريرا) ***Sweet and bitter.*** (Through thick and thin.)

Topic: Loyalty.

Image: Times of ease and times of trouble.

Point of similarity: Being loyal is likened to staying supportive of someone whether the taste is sweet (happy times) or bitter (times of trouble).

This phrase is used when someone supports or stays with someone through thick and thin, i.e., even if there are problems or difficulties. Ashwaq pointed out that she has always said to her husband, 'I will stay with you in sweet and bitter times', as encouragement when he could not find a job.

Metaphor 35

(خليا وخموؤا) ***Sweet and sour.*** (It is confusing.)

Topic: Confusion.

Image: Two different tastes or flavours that should not be mixed are in fact mixed.

Point of similarity: The oddity of mixing sweet and sour flavours is likened to the mixing of opinions, resulting in conflict and a lack of clarity.

This phrase is used when opinions are mixed and conflicting, and are no longer clear. Michael described the current conflicting political and economic situation in Iraq as 'sweet and sour'.

Metaphor 36

(يقورا اش وطمكا) ***Heavy on stomach.*** (Clumsy.)

Topic: Dull person.

Image: Something hard to digest.

Point of similarity: A dull person is likened to being indigestible and heavy on the stomach.

This phrase is used to refer to a person who is not fun, but dull and heavy-handed, someone who fails to understand things in their simplicity, is awkward or clumsy and shows a lack of skill. Siranosh said that she and her family would always use this metaphor when talking about unwanted guests.

Metaphor 37

(اينا ملوحة) ***Salty eye.*** (Hungry eyes.)

Topic: Sexual lust and desire.

Image: Being salty or erotic.

Point of similarity: The glare that a person gives to the opposite sex out of sexual lust is likened to salty eyes.

This phrase applies to the look that a man or woman gives to someone of the opposite sex, characterised by extreme sexual lust and desire. Ashwaq and Siranosh agreed that there are certain salty-eyed male gynaecologists, and women should be careful when visiting them.

Metaphor 38

(ميتا من كفنا / اينا كفنةا وگسا سويةا) ***Hungry eyes and full stomach / Dying from starvation.*** (Eyes bigger than the stomach.)

Topic: Greed.

Image: Visual hunger.

Point of similarity: Someone that is greedy is likened to someone with hungry eyes and a full stomach.

Most commonly, this phrase is used to describe a situation where someone takes more food or had more food on their plate than they can eat in one meal. This is actually the literal application of the phrase. Figuratively speaking, however, it is also used in Syriac to refer to someone who is greedy and never refuses money and gifts, even if not in need. Youram stated that he used this metaphor to his friend who put too much food on his plate and could not finish it.

Metaphor 39

(فؤخنة د طلوحوي بد فيشا جو كاسوخ و خا خبرا لا فايش جو كاسوخ) ***The lentil pot can stay in your belly, but a secret can't.*** (You don't keep secrets.)

Topic: Not keeping secrets.

Image: Being able to bear difficulties but not able to keep secrets.

Point of similarity: Inability to keep secrets is likened to keeping a pot of lentils inside the belly but not being able to keep a secret there.

This phrase is applied to a person who reveals secrets as a bad habit. Siranosh said that she uses this metaphor with her friend who is inclined to reveal secrets to others.

Metaphor 40

(طيمما د فوموخ يدخلي) ***To know your taste in food.*** (To know your offer.)

Topic: Knowing the price offered.

Image: Knowing the way someone thinks through knowing their favourite food.

Point of similarity: Knowing the price offered by a seller is likened to knowing their favourite food.

This phrase is used in commercial transactions when the speaker wants to know the price offered by the seller.

Culturally speaking, Assyrians and Chaldeans, like other Iraqis, are not direct when it comes to money. It is considered more polite to be indirect when asking to be paid or giving the exact price or amount in transactions. Most likely, that is why this metaphor has been coined. Both Shmuel and Youram said that they have used this metaphor a lot when trying to buy a car or a phone.

Metaphor 41

(مخكوسوخ بقطنا ب شيكر) ***I will interrupt your talk with sugar.*** (May I interrupt you?)

Topic: Interrupting someone.

Image: Sugar to sound sweet and polite.

Point of similarity: Interrupting someone is made more polite by adding sugar to sound sweet. This phrase is used to request permission to interrupt someone's speech politely. Michael said that he always says, 'Let me interrupt your talk with sugar', to his friends when arguing about something.

Metaphor 42

(ألنا جياول بطمي فا دن د لقلو كاكي) ***God gives pistachios to people who don't have teeth.*** (God gives gifts to people who don't have the skills to make the most of them.)

Topic: Having opportunities but not knowing how to use them.

Image: Lacking teeth to eat pistachios.

Point of similarity: As pistachios need strong teeth to be eaten, so opportunities need the right skills and thinking so they can be realised.

This phrase is used as a form of regret when talking about people whom God has given abundant opportunities, but they lack the required skills and the thinking to make the most of those gifts; thus they are envied for the opportunities that they often squander. For instance, Shmuel said that he uses this metaphor talking about rich people who do not invest their money in projects which are considered profitable.

Metaphor 43

(لا ماضي ال اينيا كمرى خموؤينا) *They cannot reach the grapes and yet say that they are sour.* (They cannot reach something, so they underestimate its value.)

Topic: Inability to reach a goal.

Image: Underestimating something that cannot be reached.

Point of similarity: This phrase is used for people who cannot reach something and then underestimate its value and importance. When Siranosh was accepted to study at the Institute of Commerce for Professional Study, she was criticised by one of her colleagues, who had also applied for the same course but was not accepted. Thus, this metaphor applies to her.

Metaphors in Group 5 show a number of metaphors that are also shared in Kurdish and Arabic. For example, the metaphor about walnuts being broken on the heart (Metaphor 30) is shared by Kurds as well the pistachio metaphor (Metaphor 42). 'Sweet and bitter' (Metaphor 34) and 'Sweet and sour' (Metaphor 35) as well as Metaphor 34 about the grapes are also used in Arabic. However, Metaphors 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 41 are unique to Syriac and Assyrian and Chaldean communities.

6 Findings and Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the Assyrian and Chaldean cross-cultural variances of metaphorical usage in the domain of foods and drinks.

Based on the analysis of food and drink metaphors in the previous section, it is clear that the vast majority of the 43 metaphors considered do not have metaphor equivalents in English. Thus, for translating these metaphors from Syriac to English, the image in the source language (Syriac) cannot always be retained in the target language (English) because the image that is attached to the metaphor is unknown in the target language, or the associations triggered by the source language metaphor get lost in the target language. This shows that Assyrian and English cultures differ and view foods and drinks differently.

The following conclusions can be inferred from the findings of this study:

1. Syriac native speakers make use of many food and drink metaphors. This shows that the Assyrian and Chaldean people have close cultural relationships with food and drinks, and they view food and drink as important, to the extent that they often use foods and drinks in everyday language.
2. Conceptual food and drink metaphors do not occur randomly in Syriac. Expressions related to foods and drinks have a basis in context, people's physical experiences and cultural experiences. Thus, the verb 'to eat' is widely used both negatively and positively to mean 'to receive', 'to experience', 'to undergo', 'to steal', etc.
3. Several food and drink metaphors are closely connected to agriculture, especially metaphors around grapes, sparrows, yogurt and mung beans. This hints towards the agricultural origins of the Assyrian and Chaldean community and this has affected the way people use language in the vernacular.
4. The way Syriac speakers use food and drink metaphors is conventional, i.e., the use of food and drink metaphors is based on or in accordance with what is generally done or believed, and the expressions used are intended to convey a particular meaning according to an agreed convention.
5. Several traditional meals are used to coin metaphors, particularly around the *kichkachi* dessert (see Metaphor 16), *pacha* (see Metaphors 14 and 15), and *dolma* (see Metaphor 13). This is an innovative way of understanding heritage. It allows food and drink metaphors to powerfully tell us how people think of themselves, their realities and their relationships. For example, the *dolma* metaphor is used to express tightness of space resulting from a lot of people gathering together, and this signifies that Assyrians and Chaldeans are highly sociable and do not lead isolated lives.
6. Food and drink metaphors are used by Syriac speakers to conceive abstract concepts related to feelings, attitudes and emotions. In general, Syriac speakers are not direct in their transactions and life dealings, so they resort to food and drink expressions to indirectly express themselves as a means to mitigate the stress of serious arguments. Also, in the past most Syriac speakers were not educated, so they resorted to food and drink metaphors to express complicated and abstract ideas.

7. Use is made of biblical food symbols such as bread and figs, in addition to some drinks such as water and wine. This denotes that Assyrians and Chaldeans express their Christian faith in their language.
8. Lakoff and Johnson's framework of 'Metaphors We Live By' is clearly applicable to Syriac speakers' use of food and drink metaphors in their everyday interactions. This framework was useful because it shows that food and drink metaphors served as a tool that enables Syriac native speakers to use what they know about their direct physical and social experiences to understand more abstract things such as everyday life dealings, work, time, mental activities and feelings. This framework was applied in this study in the sense that conceptual metaphors were seen in Syriac speakers' everyday lives. Conceptual metaphors, thus shape not just Syriac speakers' communication, but also the way they think and act. It can be concluded therefore that metaphor allows Syriac speakers to use knowledge about their physical and social experiences to provide an understanding of many and various topics. Ultimately, it can be said that food and drink metaphors help Syriac speakers express the way they think and their thoughts in language.

To sum up, food and drink metaphors used by Syriac speakers were investigated because this helps understandings of the role of food and drink in cultural/community practices and how metaphors are specific with respect to the use of traditional foods and dishes as images in an attempt to express certain ideas. Language helps us understand traditional customs relating to food and drink and vice versa. The metaphors studied were classified into five main groups. Group (1): Metaphors related to generic eating in which it was shown that the word 'eating' is associated with negative things, most likely because the notion of eating is linked to devouring or finishing things up voraciously. Group (2): Metaphors related to traditional dishes, which are the most significant metaphors as they are strongly tied to Assyrian and Chaldean communities, and they form culturally specific items that cannot be easily translated into other languages. Group (3): Metaphors related to bread, which has a particular significance in Syriac culture, especially in relation to its Christian connotations. Group (4): Metaphors related to drinks which reveal another important aspect of Assyrian and Chaldean culture that is similar to bread, i.e., the Christian faith expressed through drinks such as water and wine. Group (5): Miscellaneous, and in this group several metaphors were listed that are common also in Kurdish and Arabic as they share a similar culture in the Middle East, yet some other metaphors were unique to Syriac speakers such as 'to know your taste in food' and 'salty eye'.

Additional research on Syriac metaphor is recommended; it is needed specially to focus on a particular aspect of food such as fruits and vegetables because of its significance in the Assyrian and Chaldean culture, in addition to other agricultural metaphors, which might unpack further aspects of Assyrian and Chaldean heritage and culture. Other metaphors such as human body metaphors (for example, 'bend someone's ear', 'dead hand', 'lazybones', 'word of mouth', etc.) and colour metaphors (conceptual metaphors using colour terms) are other areas that have not been investigated thoroughly in Syriac. These are important because the way Syriac speakers conceptualise the human body and colour metaphors differs from it in other languages, and this needs close investigation. A study contrasting English and Syriac metaphors is also needed.

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