

Biopolitics and the body through idiomatic prism

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Abstract. The focus of the article is centered on society culture literacy through the prism of communication. I attempt to carry out a comparative analysis of the East and the West body perception strategies with the help of the on-line national languages' corpuses. Societies are described through their attitude to labor, expressed in the idioms with a 'body' component. With the help of electronic linguistic corpuses (Corpus of the Internet and business Chinese), KOTONOHA (Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese), BNC (British National Corpus), COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) I analyze body stereotypes on the basis of idiom frequency indexes. The results of these findings are relevant to multicultural societies, migration adaptation practices and global business development. The research results have been processed into a database, marked with the Rospatent Certificate № 2013620397, dated March,13 2013.

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Introduction

The problem of biopolitics is multifarious and complex. The term 'biopolitics' was introduced by Michel Foucault [1] to cover the ever increasing connection between the human body and its cultural contexts. In modern reality this term is acquiring new meanings and connotations. 'One of the most frequently cited an effect of progress over the last 50 years has been the improvement in knowledge about the human body - an improvement which has been due mainly to technological innovation in medical and biological sciences' [2]. Modern global community members are pressed with new challenges of body perception, resulting from biotechnological progress in deciphering the human genome, which makes the body more 'readable'. These new dimensions, coupled with culture differences, come to the forefront in the field of modern biopolitics. Fig. 1 of Serelex graph [3] effectively demonstrates various implications of 'body' inclusion in countless spheres of modern activities.

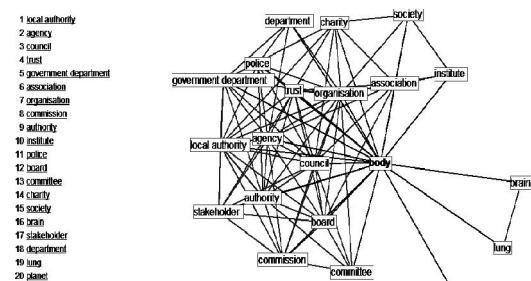


Figure 1. Serelex semantic proximity graph for the lexeme "Body" [4]

The subject matter of my research is focused around the following question: how far are human bodies talked about differently in different cultures, where do such differences stem from, and how can they be described, analyzed, possibly modified or put to practical use?

The idea of describing bodies through narratives is linguistically and culturally bound. As S. Benhabib has masterfully formulated: 'To be and to become a self is to insert oneself into webs of interlocution' [5]. In my research I make an attempt to analyze culture representations of body through the prism of idioms, which is conducive to understanding of the 'nation self'.

Material and methods

With the help of on-line electronic linguistic corpuses [6], KOTONOHA [7], BNC [8], COCA [9] I calculated idioms' frequency indexes, which are suggestive of body culture in China, Japan, Great Britain and North America.

KOTONOHA on-line Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese submits the contexts of a considerable time period between 1880 to 2008. This on-line corpus was organized by Japanese ministry of education, sport and tourism in collaboration with national scholars of Japanese. Each Japanese idiom is given with an index of frequency and the years of usage in writing. There is not a clear-cut distinction between the Internet communication and other types of communication as in Chinese corpus, but all idioms used in 2000-2008 were mentioned in Yahoo blogs.

For analyzing Chinese idioms frequencies I used Chinese corpus at Leeds University. I provided each idiom with a frequency index, illustrating its

usage frequency in the Internet and business Chinese. The most frequent idioms are viewed as the best examples of body perceptions, common to Chinese.

English Idioms are analyzed by checking frequencies using BNC and COCA. This type of analysis is very important as it helps demonstrate to which variety of modern English, British or American, this or that idiom belongs.

According to my proposition, it is possible to decipher interesting national body perception ideas from idioms and produce biopolitics guidelines this way. Modern neurophysiologists describe idioms as emotional elements, decoded by left and right hemispheres. "Emotional words trigger activation in other areas of the LH, such as the amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex, and posterior cingulate gyrus, as well. These regions have been claimed to be part of the limbic system [see Fig. 2], which plays a key role in emotion processing" [10]. "The data from a large body of research based on behavioral, electrophysiological, and neuroimaging methodologies appear to converge in indicating that both hemispheres are involved in the processing of words with emotional meaning, albeit in different, and probably complementary, ways" [Ibid.].

The Limbic System

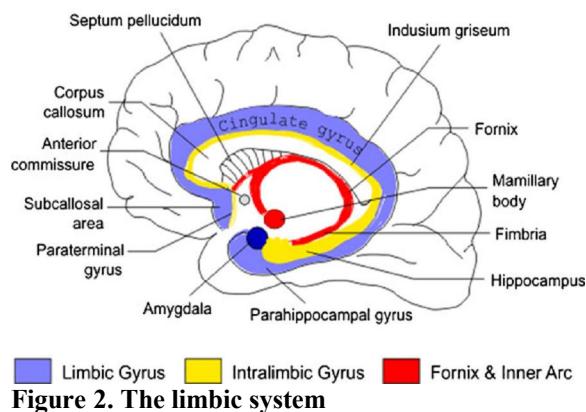


Figure 2. The limbic system

The understanding of body culture is indispensable for the atmosphere of mutual respect, in which modern global society has a unique chance to develop. I identify tendencies common to all these lingo cultures, which comply with the main goals of modern global coexistence – building a new society of deep understanding and shared knowledge which is able to overcome false psychological stereotypes.

Results and discussion

Japanese idioms contexts with 'body' scenarios are abundant. *Okorinimi-o furuwaseru* – 'to shake with one's whole body' – the maximum degree of one's anger [4 entries. Date: 1840–2002. Speaker's

sex: male – 3, female – 2]. *Karada-o kona-ni shite (hataraku)* – 'to make one's body a powder because of work' – to work very hard [5 entries. Date: 1830–1960. Speaker's sex: male – 6]. *Mi-ga katamaru* – 'the body gets firm' – 1) to get a stable position in life; 2) to get married [5 entries. Date: 1890–2008. 2 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 3, female – 0].

Mini-ni jmiru – 'to get into the body' – to get to the bottom of one's heart [8 entries. Date: 1910–2008. 2 entries during 1930–1950. Speaker's sex: male – 5, female – 4]. *Mi-ni au* – 'to suit to the body' – to be pleasant [10 entries. Date: 1910–2008. 2 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 6, female – 2]. *Mi-o sho suru* – 'to make a body in a way' – to have a manner of behavior [13 entries. Date: 1860–2008. 1 entry in 1994. Speaker's sex: male – 10, female – 4]. *Mi-ga motanai* – 'not to have even a body' – to suffer from a devastating poverty [18 entries. Date: 1920–2008. 2 entries during 2004–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 9, female – 2]. *Me-kara deta sabi* – 'rust, coming out from the body' – bad consequences of a precarious lifestyle [24 entries. Date: 1890–2008. 8 entries during 1990–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 17, female – 1].

Idioms with the highest frequencies

Mi-o makaseru – 'to lose one's body' – to step down in life [145 entries. Date: 1880–2008. 29 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 80, female – 15]. *Mi-mo kokoro-mo* – 'the body and the heart' – unity of body and soul [149 entries. Date: 1890–2008. 56 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 70, female – 40]. *Hito-no mi-ni naru* – 'to become one's body' – 1) to disguise oneself; 2) to understand one's situation [154 entries. Date: 1820–2008. 37 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 70, female – 20]. *Mi-o kakusu* – 'to hide one's body' – to hide oneself [218 entries. Date: 1890–2008. 19 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 160, female – 20]. *Mi-o yoseru* – 'to give a shelter to one's body' – to find lodgings [227 entries. Date: 1880–2008. 80 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 90, female – 25]. *Mi-ni tsuku* – 'to stick to one's body' – 1) to fix something; 2) to get something; 3) to learn something very well. [515 entries. Date: 1830–2008. 400 entries during 2000–2008. Speaker's sex: male – 90, female – 20].

My research has demonstrated the following outcomes. The Japanese associate their bodies with hard labor. Hard labor is the main material identity, visible through idiomatic prism. This labor process unites participants and makes them a unity of heart and soul. For centuries bodies in Japanese cultures have been viewed as an effective tool for serving and taking care of old parents. In Japanese culture it was

prescribed to keep bodies fit to be able to serve sovereigns and parents as well, as possible.

Now I proceed to the analysis of Chinese idioms with a ‘body’ component. *Hún2 bù4 fù4 tǐ3* – ‘the body got far from the soul’ – to be scared to death [the Internet – 127; business – 18]. *Shēn1 jiào* – ‘to teach with one’s body’ – to show one’s personal example [the Internet – 142; business – 139]. *Shēn1 bài4 míng2 liè4* – ‘to throw down one’s body’ – to suffer a terrible downturn, misfortune [the Internet – 181; business – 157]. *Ān shēn lì mìng* – ‘a calm body, a stable life’ – to be well-off [the Internet – 207; business – 41].

Idioms with the highest frequencies

Tǐ3 wú2 wán2 fūl – ‘the body all in hard bruises’ – to be severely bitten [the Internet – 249; business – 38]. *Shēn1qíáng2 li4 zhuàng4* – ‘the body is strong and the energy is abundant’ – to be full of vigor and energy [the Internet – 258; business – 93]. *Fěn3 shēn1 suì4 gǔ3* – ‘to make the body a powder after hard work’ – 1) to die a terrible death; 2) to work hard [the Internet – 258; business – 94]. *Biàn4 tǐ3 lín2 shāng1* – ‘the whole body is in wounds, like fish’s body is in scales’ – [the Internet – 344; business – 101]. *Shēn1 tǐ3 li4 xíng2* – ‘the body moves, the energy moves’ – to act with energy [the Internet – 446; business – 591]. *Shēn1 shǒu3* – ‘the body and the hand’ – talents, skills [the Internet – 574; business – 509]. *Shēn1 bù4 yóu2 ji3* – ‘the body does not have any freedom’ – to act against one’s will [the Internet – 576; business – 218]. *Tǐ3 huì4* – ‘the body can’ – to understand, to comprehend [the Internet – 585; business – 530]. *Shēn1 xīn1* – ‘the body, the heart’ – materially and spiritually [the Internet – 587; business – 580]. *Tǐ3 yán4* – ‘to study one’s body’ – to learn something from one’s experience [the Internet – 589; business – 579].

The scenario of suffering body, tormented by hard labor and work, is evident in Chinese idioms. Chinese are inclined to associate general well-being with the body well-being. On the contrary, bodies covered with wounds, are viewed as tragedy and bad luck. They use ‘bodies’ as cognitive mechanisms to get experience. On top of that, bodies are perceived as material objects and are often opposed to spiritual world and values. Generally speaking, Chinese tend to exaggerate body manifestations. This mechanism of hyperbole is typical of Chinese cultural heritage.

While analyzing English idioms with a ‘body’ component, I start from the definition of the lexeme ‘body’ provided by ‘word and phrase’ subcorpora of BNC and COCA. Body: 1) the entire physical structure of an organism (especially an animal or human being); 2) body of a dead animal or person; 3) a group of person associated by some common tie or occupation

and regarded as an entity; 3) the body excluding the head and neck and limbs; 4) an individual 3-dimensional object that has mass and that is distinguishable from other objects.

Let’s consider the following collocations with high frequency indexes.

A human body – 2207, *dead body* — 1343, *whole body* – 1217, *upper body* – 1070, *entire body* – 733, *female body* – 411, *male body* – 139. The most frequent verbs to be used with the noun ‘body’ are: *to cover, to lie, to recover, to burn, to bury, to dump, to drag, to wrap, to absorb, to press*.

Now I proceed to the analysis of idioms and collocations with a ‘body’ component. Corpora provide us with the genre of communication and type of printing material, where the idiom is used. *Body mind* [BNC – 1; COCA – 5 (2010-1990)] (spok – 1, fic – 0, mag – 2, news – 0, acad – 2). *To keep body and soul together* [BNC – 11; COCA – 32 (2012-1990)] (spok – 1, fic – 12, mag – 5, news – 3, acad – 0). *Over one’s dead body* [BNC – 27; COCA – 105 (2012-1990)] (spok – 10, fic – 46, mag – 9, news – 15, acad – 1). *Body and soul* [BNC – 69; COCA – 368 (2012-1990)]. *Growing body of* – a growing number [BNC – 48; COCA – 487 (2012-1990)] (spok – 17, fic – 4, mag – 112, news – 53, acad – 281). *Governing body* [BNC – 632; COCA – 656 (2012-1990)] (spok – 52, fic – 7, mag – 120, news – 272, acad – 183). *Body blow* – a severe trauma. trouble. [BNC – 29; COCA – 84 (2012-1990)]. *Body building* [BNC – 17; COCA – 37 (2012-1990)]. *Body of opinion* [BNC – 37; COCA – 25 (2011-1990)]. *A body snatcher* [BNC – 0; COCA – 9 (2012-1991)].

Idioms with the highest frequencies

Body bag [BNC – 5; COCA – 182 (2012-1990)]. *Body politic* [BNC – 52; COCA – 391 (2012-1990)]. *Body of evidence* [BNC – 55; COCA – 319 (2012-1990)]. *Body heat* – [BNC – 61; COCA – 395 (2012-1990)]. *Body mass index* [BNC – 50; COCA – 411 (2012-1990)]. *Body language* [BNC – 245; COCA – 1177 (2012-1990)] (spok – 263, fic – 236, mag – 290, news – 123, acad – 154). *Student body* [BNC – 59; COCA – 1227 (2012-1990)] (spok – 123, fic – 74, mag – 184, news – 388, acad – 450).

The analysis demonstrates a modern tendency to see body as a metaphor for an organization or system, which can achieve a tangible economic result: *governing body, student body*. The same evidence can be obtained from Fig. 1 Serelex graph for the lexeme ‘body’. **Body** is used in arts, show business and sports to generate profit and attract attention. I can rightfully assume that ‘body’ is perceived by Americans as an economic tool to increase gross margins, operating systematically and regularly.

Conclusion

Representatives of different cultures express their ideas according to universal parameters of their body perception. Thus it is more productive to analyze societies, paying attention to the linguistic manifestations of these parameters, fixed in community language, rather than concentrating on subjective body perceptions. ‘The basis for all stereotyping is the differential perception of groups. Without such differentiation between groups, stereotyping cannot occur’ [11]. J. Wilson stresses that stereotypes ‘... have been shown to be remarkably resilient to change’ [12]. Despite this fact, we assume that it is very important to concentrate on the common anthropological basis of humankind, fixed in communicative idioms, which testifies to the fact, that we can’t draw a sharp line of demarcation among representatives of different societies.

In practice the results of this study can be implemented in a special **socio-cultural dictionary** [13], [14], where the most frequent idioms are given as social stereotypes and the most powerful symbolic tools of influence and manipulation. The practical implications of my study lie within the domain of social influence area, driven by communicative idiomatic stereotypes and the problem of meaning in sociology [15]. The theoretical value of this research is the expansion of idiom status, whose role for the society analysis has been minimized to purely linguistic phenomena. I proceed from the idea that idioms are social in nature. Thus, their careful analysis adds to the profound understanding of social life, cultural literacy and economic environment, as A. Samuels rightfully put it ‘disputes concerning human nature underlie many debates on economic theory’ [16]. ‘Body’ issues produce a direct impact on labor redundancy and have to be taken into account at different levels: ‘on the one hand the labour redundancy is excess of able-bodied population at able-bodied age over the number of workplaces provided in the region, on the other hand - a lack of the offer of work and increase in demand at skilled work’ [17].

The results of these findings are relevant to multicultural societies, migration adaptation practices and global business development. Further research should contribute to the analyses of other languages and idiomatic clusters, resulting in smarter biopolitics across the globe.

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