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CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN THE DISCOURSE OF SOCIOLOGY AND ESP LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Abstract: Teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to sociology students relies on the use of the authentic discourse of sociology which often resorts to explaining complex concepts in terms of conceptual metaphors. Some metaphors are conventionalized to such an extent that students often fail to recognize or are not aware of the use of metaphorical expressions which are indicative of a certain type of a conceptual metaphor. Against the background of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the aim of this paper is to shed light on the importance of *metaphor awareness* which implies introducing and familiarizing students with the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphors prior to assessing their *metaphoric competence* in recognizing the relevant conceptual metaphors which are part of the discourse of sociology. Within a specifically designed classroom activity, the paper illustrates the way in which the SOCIETY IS A MACHINE, the SOCIETY IS A PERSON and SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE A DISEASE metaphors are recognized linguistically and conceptually, but also contextually - as being part of the specific theoretical perspective in sociology.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphor awareness, metaphoric competence, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), discourse of sociology

1. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) which outlined the main tenets of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the prevalence of the figurative use of language in everyday discourse has been widely recognized. In the domain of foreign language teaching, it has also become apparent that language learners "are bound to be confronted with figurative

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discourse at various stages of the learning process" (Boers 2000, 553) and that raising metaphor awareness can be a useful pedagogical tool for enhancing both receptive and productive language skills (Littlemore and Low 2006). With the development and expansion of CMT, "applied linguists began to explore the practical implications of the theory for language learning and teaching" (Nancey 2017, 503) which has resulted in numerous studies which integrate CMT insights with either specific ESP objectives (Charteris-Black 2000, Đurović and Silaški 2014) or general foreign language learning objectives which are outlined in Nancey (2017), MacArthur (2017), and Littlemore and Low (2006). The underlying aim of such studies is related to raising foreign language learners' metaphor awareness which can be broken down into more specific goals: (1) recognizing that metaphorical expressions are a common feature of language, (2) recognizing that metaphorical expressions are not arbitrary but motivated and (3) recognizing that metaphorical expressions are surface manifestations of deeper conceptual links between literal and abstract domains of meaning. The concept of *metaphor awareness* thus implies introducing and familiarizing students with the cognitive linguistic definition of conceptual metaphors which opposes the traditional view of metaphors as being nothing more than "ornamental language devices" (Kövecses 2017,13).

The applications of CMT to foreign language teaching and learning also emphasize the importance of *metaphoric competence* which is "an umbrella term that has been used to refer to an individual's ability to understand and produce metaphors" (Littlemore and Low 2006, 79). One of the ways of gaining insight into foreign learners' metaphoric competence is "to measure their understanding of metaphorical language" (Nancey 2017, 505). However, *measuring* the understanding of metaphorical language in either quantitative or qualitative terms is more easily said than done especially because "metaphoric competence relies as much on generic cognitive abilities as it does on linguistic ones" (Littlemore and Low 2006, 79). For example, a foreign language learner's degree of metaphoric competence (usually tested via gap-fill exercises related to metaphorically motivated idiomatic phrases, prepositions, phrasal verbs, collocations or other phrases) may depend upon their general cognitive learning style - "a person's habitual way of perceiving, organizing and processing information' (Littlemore, 2001, 462) as much as upon the presented CMT-related instructions. In that sense, metaphoric competence is thought to be inherently variable, but still significant in terms of assessing the *practical* skills of foreign language learners in decoding and encoding metaphorically structured concepts which could improve their overall foreign language competence.

The aim of this paper is to assess the metaphoric competence of first-year sociology students who take ESP classes as part of their curriculum. Since students usually have no prior knowledge of the cognitive linguistic definition of metaphor, we specifically wanted to focus on the effects of instruction-based

learning in verifying whether introducing and familiarizing students with the theoretical background and practical instantiations of conceptual metaphors (as part of the metaphor awareness procedure) would help them recognize similar patterns in the discourse of sociology. Within a specifically designed classroom activity, the assessment of *metaphoric competence* is here qualitatively assessed in terms of sociology students' overall ability to *comprehend* and *recognize* the relevant conceptual metaphors both linguistically and conceptually, but also *contextually*, as being liable to the interpretation within a specific sociological perspective.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The following section provides insight into the key conceptual metaphor terminology and constructs which were presented to students as part of the theoretical input prior to taking part in the activity designed to assess their metaphoric competence. The first step involved asking the students to pay attention to the relation between the underlined word (theory) and words in *italics* (commonly used for emphasis or contrast) and decide whether the following examples[1] were metaphorical or not:

1. Major premises, including facts and assumptions, are the *foundation* of any scientific theory.
2. If you want to *build* a theory, you have to follow a scientific approach.
3. Their theory *caved in* under the weight of criticism.
4. Sociologists *construct* different theories to prove their point of view.
5. This is just the *framework* of the proposed theory.
6. Their theory needs more *support*, otherwise it will *fall apart*.
7. If you don't *support* your theory with *solid arguments*, the whole thing will *collapse*.

Of the total of 30 students participating in the activity, 21 recognized that examples used for describing the concept of theory are metaphorical because the italicized words (*foundation*, *framework, build*, *support*, *construct*, *cave in*, *fall apart*, *collapse*) are "somehow borrowed"[2] from their literal sense, i.e. used in their non-literal sense "to describe the characteristics of things which are not physical in nature", but were not yet sure as to how to describe the precise metaphorical nature of these examples other than stating that "we usually use the same words for describing both physical and abstract things based on the similar type of experience". The remaining 9 students reported that there was nothing metaphorical about these examples and that these were conventional

1 The set of examples presented here are taken from various sources (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Grady 1997, Kövecses 2010) and have been slightly adapted.

2 The citations without direct reference to the source (author), used here and thereafter, represent the transcripts of students' responses to the relevant question.

ways of talking about theories. This result is consistent with the variable level of foreign language learners' metaphor awareness (Littlemore and Low 2006).

Based on the examples given above, the following step focused on introducing the conceptual metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS[3]. The students were familiarized with the common conceptual metaphor form TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN with the aim of illustrating that conceptual metaphors operate on a *conceptual basis* as *cross-domain mappings* (Lakoff 1993) where the SOURCE domain (usually more concrete - e.g. BUILDINGS) enables the conceptualization of the TARGET domain (usually more abstract in nature - e.g. THEORIES) based on *experiential correlations* or *similarity* (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Moreover, the students were once again reminded that the term *metaphorical expression* refers to "a linguistic expression (a word, phrase or sentence) that is the surface realization of a cross-domain mapping" (Lakoff 1993, 203) and that "conceptual metaphors are both a linguistic and a cognitive phenomenon" (Charteris-Black 2000, 154). In examining the relevant metaphorical expressions which instantiate the THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS metaphor, we thought that it would be convenient to ask why the following sentences[4] seemed odd:

1. ?This theory has no *windows.*
2. ?The *tenants* of the theory are behind in their *rent.*

The purpose behind presenting these examples was to show that only *salient* elements in the target domain of THEORIES have a corresponding role in the source domain of BUILDINGS (Grady 1997, 40). Kövecses (2010, 91-92) sees this as a case of *metaphorical utilization* - cross-domain mappings rely on the selective exploitation of the source domain with the aim of *highlighting* the aspects of the target domain that are relevant in conceptualization.

The last step involved familiarizing students with the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) which is a practical and systematic method for identifying metaphorically used words in a text (Steen et al. 2010). It consists of several different steps (Pragglejaz group 2007, 3) the ultimate aim of which is to establish the difference between the *basic* and the *contextual* meaning of a lexical unit. The contextual meaning should be (1) sufficiently distinct from the basic meaning and (2) similar enough to be understood in comparison with the basic meaning. The students were asked to check the meaning of the word *foundation* by accessing the on-line *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDCE) where they learned that the basic meaning '*the solid layer of cement, bricks, stones etc. that is put under a building to support it*' is metaphorically used to denote '*a basic idea, principle, situation etc. that something develops from*'.

3 The THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS conceptual metaphor, often cited in the cognitive linguistic literature, is specifically chosen as an example here because it aligns with and bears relevance to the first-year sociology course *Sociological Theories* taught in Serbian.

4 The examples are taken from Steen (2007, 38).

Following the short introduction of some of the key concepts related to conceptual metaphors, the handouts consisting of 30 randomly arranged metaphorical expressions (excerpted from various sources related to the discourse of sociology) were distributed to 30 students participating in the activity. Their main task was to group the metaphorical expressions in relation to the relevant target and source domains. The students were additionally informed that they should focus on three conceptual metaphors the target domains of which are SOCIETY or a relevant feature of SOCIETY.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall results of the metaphor awareness activity showed that first-year sociology students were particularly quick in recognizing the SOCIETY IS A MACHINE metaphor both linguistically and conceptually, while the remaining two conceptual metaphors posed a challenge either in terms of grouping the examples which instantiate the given metaphors or in terms of deciding on the relevant source/target domain. The following sub-sections illustrate the results in more detail.

3.1. The SOCIETY IS A MACHINE metaphor

The SOCIETY IS A MACHINE metaphor (Kövecses 2010, 155) was easily recognized in terms of metaphorical expressions that dominate and motivate the underlying conceptual link between the target and the source domain. The most illustrative corpus examples provided by students include the following:

1. We all are just *cogs in the machine* of society.
2. As *parts of a machine*, we keep the *gears* of society *turning*.
3. How does our society *work*? What makes a society *function* well?
4. We either live in a *functional* or a *dysfunctional* society.
5. What social problems are seen as *dysfunctions* of a society?
6. All of these problems can lead to a *breakdown* of a society.
7. How do we *mend* a *broken* society?

The conceptualization of SOCIETY in terms of a MACHINE revolves around the perspective on society which implies the interconnectedness and interdependency of all of its elements. As individuals, we are (1) *cogs in the machine* or (2) *parts of the machine* who keep the *gears turning* in an effort to ensure that our society (3) *works* or *functions* well. The students suggested that these metaphorical examples seemed to be motivated by Émile Durkheim's (1858–1917) perspective which proposed that a society was greater than the sum of its parts. If we all contribute by playing our roles in society, the system will function smoothly. To that effect, we can recognize the difference between (4) a *functional* or a

dysfunctional society. A *dysfunctional* society usually implies that some parts do not positively contribute to the maintenance of society but cause disharmony and conflict rather than coherence and integration. As a consequence, social problems arise as (5) *dysfunctions* of a society. For example, crime can bring dysfunction to communities, while divorce and domestic abuse can bring dysfunction to families. These metaphorical expressions were, quite unexpectedly, recognized by students as being specifically related to Robert Merton's (1910-2003) theory of (manifest or latent) *functions* and *dysfunctions* of society. A (6) *breakdown*, which denotes a major mechanical failure in its literal sense, is here used to highlight the prolonged failure of a society to function appropriately due to large-scale issues such as wars, natural catastrophes, mass migrations, etc. If we wanted to (7) *mend* a *broken* society, it is clear that we would not need to literally repair something that is physically damaged or broken but provide informed arguments or suggestions for the resolution of social problems which characterize a *broken* society in the sense of the overall lack of unity, equity and equality between its members.

3.2. The SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor

In trying to frame the second conceptual metaphor, the students suggested that the conceptualization of the target domain (SOCIETY) either draws on the source domain of HUMAN BODY or HUMAN BEING. Since both of these source domains are in line with "personification as a form of ontological metaphor" (Kövecses 2010, 39), we agreed that the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor, which is conventionally recognized in cognitive linguistic literature (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 17; Kövecses 2010, 155), would be best suited for the following corpus examples:

1. A *healthy* society is the one in which all of its citizens play a role in shaping the future.
2. In an ideal society, each individual is a *cell* that is *integral* to the *organism*'s well-being.
3. Social institutions and other *organs* of our society can *sicken*.
4. Values, beliefs, behaviors, norms and ideologies are the *connective tissue* of our society.
5. A society can lose its cultural *identity* through colonization, migration and globalization.
6. The most *vulnerable parts* of our society are children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, etc.
7. We are *blaming* the society, yet *we are the society*.

In discussing the potential motivation for the conceptual mappings, the students were able to recognize that the first three examples instantiating the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor can be seen in juxtaposition to the examples of

the SOCIETY IS A MACHINE metaphor since they rely on the same conceptual link – the interconnectedness and interdependency of parts of the abstract system. A (1) *healthy* society, therefore, can be seen as a counterpart of the MACHINE source domain which deals with how our society *works* or *functions* well (example 3 in 3.1.). In referring to (2) *cells* that are *integral* to the *organism's* well-being, the implication is similar to the one suggested by *cogs* or *parts of the machine* (examples 1 and 2 in 3.1). The (3) *organs* of our society that can *sicken* can be compared to parts of the machine that can malfunction and thus bring *dysfunction* to the whole society (examples 4 and 5 in 3.1). Apart from these, the source domain of a PERSON highlights many other aspects of the society – (4) the *connective tissue* (that holds our body together) primarily encompasses parts of non-material culture (values, beliefs, norms, ideologies, etc.), whereas the self-perception of a society in terms of its overall cultural traits is conceptualized as (5) *identity*. The (6) *vulnerable parts* of our society are members who are most susceptible to violations of their fundamental human rights and thus need special protection. In (7) *blaming* the society, we are trying to distance our individual selves from the causes of social injustices by assigning blame to "the other" personified entity. However, since (7) *we are the society* metonymically presupposes the relationship in which the sum of individuals stands for the collective entity personified by society, we realize that we all bear a responsibility in ensuring equal access to wealth, health, well-being, privileges and opportunity.

3.3. The SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE A DISEASE metaphor

In formulating the last conceptual metaphor, the students had difficulty determining the appropriate target and source domain. As plausible as it may seem at first sight, the SOCIETY IS A SICK PERSON metaphor, which was suggested by the students, does not really capture the appropriate motivation for the cross-domain mappings illustrated by the metaphorical examples in our corpus.

Perhaps too optimistically, the students were expected to recognize that the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor (presented in 3.2) belongs to a wider BODY-based ILLNESS metaphorical scenario (Musolff 2016) which allows for the conceptualization of SOCIAL PROBLEMS in terms of the source domain of a DISEASE. After some corrections, the students agreed that the following set of metaphorical expressions was illustrative of the underlying conceptual correlation:

1. For many societies, the new forms of *plague* are nepotism and bribery.
2. Corruption is *metastasizing* and *spreading its malignancy* to other *cells* of the society.
3. The homeless and migrants are *sucking the blood* of this society.
4. How do we *detect* the *symptoms* of organized crime in our society?
5. We have to admit that organized crime is a *chronic disease* of our society.

6. Societies are rarely *diagnosed* with one *disease* only.
7. Can a society really be *cured* of all the *ills*?

When SOCIAL PROBLEMS are foregrounded and conceptualized as a DISEASE in relation to the SOCIETY IS PERSON metaphor, nepotism and bribery take the form of a (1) *plague* which is a contagious disease, while corruption is seen in terms of a terminal malignant disease which is harder to treat as it is (2) *metastasizing* and *spreading its malignancy* to other *cells*. The image of homeless people and migrants (3) *sucking the blood* of our society evokes the derogatory concept of *parasitic species* and most likely suggests that these members of a society are exploiting and abusing the welfare system instead of working hard to earn a living on their own. By trying to (4) *detect the symptoms* of a (5) *chronic disease*, we are actually trying to find evidence that supports the cause of a persistent social problem such as organized crime. When societies (6) are rarely *diagnosed* with one *disease* only, we are in fact admitting that multiple social problems can occur simultaneously but that they can be clearly identified, delineated and evaluated in the context in which they occur. The question of whether a society (7) can really be *cured* of all the *ills* further corroborates the conceptual correlation between the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor and the SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE A DISEASE metaphor.

4. CONCLUSION

By delving deeper into the subject matter of sociology for the purpose of teaching ESP to first-year university students, we realized that sociological concepts and relations could be explained in terms of conceptual metaphors but that the students were not aware of the metaphorical nature of the discourse of sociology. With the aim of raising metaphor awareness, we designed an activity (1) to illustrate how theoretical implications of CMT (Cognitive Metaphor Theory) match their practical applications in language use, but more importantly, (2) to test whether the students understood the motivation for the use of certain conceptual metaphors against the theoretical background of sociology. Based on the corpus of metaphorical examples, the conceptual metaphors that the students were expected to recognize were not randomly chosen. The SOCIETY IS A MACHINE and the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphors were intended to show that the target domain of SOCIETY can be conceptualized in terms of different source domains depending on the process of reification and personification (i.e. the conceptualization of SOCIETY in terms of an inanimate or animate entity respectively). The SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE A DISEASE metaphor was expected to be tied to a wider BODY-based ILLNESS scenario which relies on the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor but essentially emphasizes SOCIAL PROBLEMS as the primary target of conceptualization.

In terms of the motivation behind the use of these metaphors in the discourse of sociology, the students were able to recognize that both the SOCIETY IS A MACHINE and the SOCIETY IS A PERSON metaphor reflected the relationship between the individual and the society, whereas the SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE A DISEASE metaphor emphasized social problems as conditions that disrupt the normal functioning of a society. What is more important, however, is the fact that the students were able to attribute the use of these metaphors to the framework of *(structural) functionalism* - a sociological theory which sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.

Based on the overall results presented in this paper we would like to suggest that activities designed with the aim of raising metaphor awareness can be a valuable asset in ESP teaching and learning. Foreign language learners can benefit from metaphor related activities as it gives them the opportunity to explore the figurative potential of the target language and draw comparisons with the figurative nature of their own native languages. Such activitities can also assist them in deciding which expressions from the target language can be transferred (or literally translated) to their native language (Littlemore and Low 2006) and may reveal a degree of universality and systematicity of certain conceptual metaphors.

When it comes to teaching and formally assessing the pedagogical applications of metaphor, one of the problems which has been recognized by pedagogy-oriented cognitive linguists is the fact that the whole concept of metaphor and metaphoric competence is "not reflected in any of the major models currently guiding syllabus design, such as the CEFR[5]" (MacArthur 2017, 418). This could be attributed to the general belief that metaphorical language does not merit attention as it is being thought of as an 'icing-on-the-cake' type of knowledge: useful, but not absolutely necessary (Nancey 2017). Another reason could also be the fact that foreign language learners might be able to develop metaphoric competence quite independently of any interventions on the part of their teachers. However, as Kövecses (2001) notes, the passive existence of metaphorical expressions in the mind is not enough - learners must be made aware of the underlying conceptual motivation to be able to actively use them in the process of learning a foreign language. Lastly, the reason as to why CMT-inspired research has not had a greater impact on syllabus design could also be the fact that metaphor-related exercises "are still marginal" in published language teaching materials (MacArthur 2017). In examining how figurative language is dealt with in teaching materials, Littlemore and Low (2006, 203-209) recognize three different approaches. The first approach is to "present figurative language as something special" which involves treating figurative language, or more specifically some *aspects* of figurative language, as something unusual. The second is the "present conceptual metaphor" approach where sets of lessons

5 CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

are structured around conceptual metaphors. The third and most challenging is the "attempt to integrate figurative language into the textbook" approach. This approach implies the integration of activities focusing on various aspects of metaphoric competence into standard teaching textbooks and sees it as crucial if research into metaphoric competence is to have much real impact on language teaching, learning and assessment.

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POJMOVNE METAFORE U DISKURSU SOCIOLOGIJE I NASTAVI I UČENJU ENGLESKOG JEZIKA STRUKE

Rezime

U ovom radu predstavljeni su osnovni postulati teorije pojmovnih metafora (Lejkof i Džonson 1980) koji su poslužili kao deo teorijskog inputa studentima sociologije u nastavi engleskog jezika kao jezika struke na prvoj godini osnovnih studija. U cilju prepoznavanja metaforičnosti diskursa sociologije, osmišljena je aktivnost koja je od studenata zahtevala da na osnovu izbora određenih metaforičkih izraza iz korpusa prepoznaju i formulišu tri pojmovne metafore i odrede motivisanost upotrebe datih metafora u svetlu njihovih saznanja o sociologiji kao nauci koja izučava društvo. U okviru prve dve metafore studenti su prepoznali da se ciljni domen DRUŠTVA može konceptualizovati u terminima izvornih domena MAŠINE i OSOBE. Treća metafora se oslanja na metaforu DRUŠTVA kao OSOBE, ali se fokusira na DRUŠTVENE PROBLEME koji se konceptualizuju kao BOLEST. Na osnovu aspekata društva koje ove metafore združeno ističu, motivisanost njihove upotrebe prepoznaje se u kontekstu funkcionalizma kao sociološke teorijske perspektive koja analizira društvo kao sistem međusobno povezanih delova.

Ključne reči: pojmovna metafora, metaforička kompetencija, engleski jezik struke, diskurs sociologije