DİL, DÜŞÜNCE VE DİL ÖĞRETİMİ EKSENİNDE METAFOR

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METAPHOR IN THE AXIS OF LANGUAGE, THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı zihinsel bir kavram olan metaforun dil, düşünce ve dil öğretimindeki yerini irdelemektir. Zira metafor, uzun yıllar, yaygın bir anlayışla sadece edebiyatın bir unsuru, dildeki süslü ve ağdalı anlatımın bir parçası olarak görülmüştür. Ancak son yıllarda metaforun kavramsal bir olgu olduğu gerek dilin gerekse düşünce dünyasının önemli bir ürünü, bu yönüyle de metaforun sırf edebi ve süslü bir dil tarzı olmakla kalmayıp, bilinçli veya değil günlük hayatımızın da düşünsel ve dilsel bazda önemli bir parçası olduğu üzerinde durulmuştur. Bu anlamda, metafor kavramı gitgide artan bir ilgiyle, dilbilim, felsefe, sanat, politika, psikoloji ve nihayetinde dil ve dil öğretimi gibi birçok bilimsel disiplinin de çalışma alanına girmiştir

Anahtar kelimeler: *Metafor, dil ve düşünce, dil öğretimi*

Abstract

The aim of this study is to scrutinize a mental concept, metaphor, in language and language teaching. Metaphor was widely seen as a part of just literature and the element of ornamental use of language for a long time. But in recent years, metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon has been regarded as a significant product of both thought and language. Thus, it has been focused that metaphor is not only an ornamental and literary use of language but also an important part of our lives in terms of our language use and mental activities consciously or not. In this sense, metaphor has increasingly taken its place within the realm of many scientific disciplines such as

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linguistics, philosophy, politics, psychology, language and language learning and teaching.

Key words: *Metaphor, language and thought, language teaching.*

1. Introduction

Although metaphor has intrigued scholars for more than 2500 years, only in the last 25 years we have begun to empirically examine figurative language use and to develop explicit models for it. Metaphor is traditionally regarded as a strictly literary phenomenon, used to convey heightened meaning in diverse forms of prose and verse. That is the common view that does not reflect an accurate assessment of the usefulness and pervasiveness of metaphor in human thought and life. Metaphor appears everywhere bridging the gaps between experience and thought, between imagination and concept, and between the new and the known. Just as the linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson point out "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (1980, p.5).

This definition is remarkable for several reasons. The first and the chief point to appear is that metaphor occupies the core part of understanding others and ourselves. In other words, to learn something new or change the pre-existing knowledge; we are supposed to get new information. It is cognitive that any new learning frequently consists of reorganizing or re-conceptualizing the information available. Therefore, metaphoric use is a way that we arrange, categorize, or conceptualize. It, thereby, not only affects our language but directs our way of the process of perception and making inference as well.

Now that metaphor is central to our understanding of how language, thought and discourse are structured, the study of metaphor has also attracted attention amongst the scholars in a wide range of disciplines including also Applied Linguistics, and language learning and teaching. As metaphor is so omnipresent in everyday language, then language learners are bound to be confronted with metaphoric expressions at diverse stages of the learning process.

2. The Background

For most of us, metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another, although the two might seem different, they are actually similar in some way as in *He is a lion*. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2000) defines metaphor as: "a word or phrase used in an imaginative way to describe sb/ sth else, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and make the description more powerful."

Encyclopedia Britannica puts it: "Metaphor (is a) figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signaled by the words 'like' or 'as'."

For instance, we would consider the word *the sun* to be a metaphor in the sentence "Juliet is the sun". Kövecses (2002) expounds the reason for the common metaphorical use through the aim of fulfilling some artistic and rhetorical effect, as we speak and write metaphorically to communicate eloquently, to impress others with, "beautiful", and aesthetically pleasing words, or expressing some deep emotion. Most probably, what makes the metaphorical identification of Juliet with the sun is that Juliet and the sun have something in common, possibly due to their beauty and brightness. Indeed, as Kövecses outlines, this widely shared view (which is .not to say that this is the only view of metaphor) may be briefly characterized by remarking five of its most commonly accepted prominent aspects. First, metaphor is a property of words, namely, as a Iinguistic phenomenon. The metaphorical use of the sun is characteristic of a linguistic expression (that of the word *the sun*). Secondly, metaphor is used for the purpose of artistic and rhetorical influence, such as Shakespeare indites *"All the world's a stage."* Third, metaphor is dependent upon a resemblance between two entities or based on description of complex relations among several terms. Juliet must share some characteristics with the sun in order for us to be able to use the word *the sun* as a metaphor for Juliet. Fourth, metaphor is a conscious and an intentional use of words and you must have an extraordinary talent to be able to do it.

Likewise, Mahon (1999) argues the belief of Aristotle, a personage, as widely accepted any serious study of metaphor should begin with the seminal works of him, to use and to coin metaphors are the greatest kind of creative abilities that cannot be taught. In other words, Aristotle makes the following

statement to this effect: "The greatest thing by far is to have command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius" (Poetics 22: 1458b; Butcher p. 31; cited in Mahon, 1999, p.72). Fifth, as a widely shared consideration that metaphor, as a figure of speech, is used for significance only thus, it is not an inevitable part of human interaction.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor has been the central to our understanding of how language, thought and discourse are structured. It would be rather difficult to consider metaphor as a phenomenon that is of insignificance to the everyday pervasive use of language but as a phenomenon of the "poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish" that is a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.3) as being confined to special domains such as of literary language.

Kövecses (2002) concisely restates their conception "cognitive linguistic view of metaphor", which challenged the profoundly entrenched view of metaphor, as follows: (1) metaphor is a property of concepts, and not of words; (2) the function of metaphor is towards a better understanding of certain concepts, not solely focused upon aesthetic or artistic manifestation; (3) metaphor is often not based on similarity. (4) so frequently and spontaneously is metaphor used in everyday life by all people, not merely talented genius people; (5) metaphor, far from being mere ornamental and parasitic use of language, is, in effect, an inevitable part of structuring human perception, thought, and action.

As mentioned above, metaphor means much more than A is like B or A is B statements. Turner's (1991, cited in Gibbs, 1999, p.31) recognition is here significant to note that there are many verbal expressions that describe complex relations among several terms. Thus, a large number of proverbial expressions, sometimes called *xyz* metaphors, convey meanings through the complex interactions of their terms. Turner argues, readers must realize this combination of terms involved.

The love of money is the root of all evil.
Children are the riches of poor men.
Religion is the opiate of the masses.
Language is the mirror of the mind.
Wit is the salt of conversation.
Custom is the guide of the ignorant.

Finally, metaphor, as a cognitively-realized agency, organizes our thoughts and judgments, and structures our language. Once metaphor is defined as the process of experiencing something in terms of something else, metaphor turns out to be as aforementioned pervasive in everyday language in a systematical way. Not only is metaphor a ubiquitous phenomenon in language but influences our way of thinking as well. Thus, metaphor is a both linguistic and cognitive phenomenon because of the interaction of thought and language.

2.1. Metaphor, language and thought

Our ability to think and our ability to use language are interrelated. The innovative and creative interplay of language and thought is axiomatically evident in figurative language; Katz indicates this as "the ubiquitous characteristic of speech." In a general sense, thought has been considered as a form of mental experience (see for instance Johnson, 1972, cited in Katz, 1998) that mediates mental activities.

Taking a broad historical perspective on metaphor studies it is seen that scholars have highlighted the cognitive aspects of metaphor, not just the linguistic paradigms. Moreover, metaphorical language has been studied within diverse contexts of use, as an example joining the cognitive and socio-cultural dimension.

In using the term conceptual metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson emphasize the difference between metaphor as a kind of utterance and metaphor as a realm of thought. That metaphor is a mental phenomenon, sometimes confined to language, or manifested even in gesture appears to be axiomatic. However, it should be remembered that the fact metaphor is more than language does not come to mean that language form is irrelevant to the study of metaphor. The recent cognitive shift in metaphor studies, not in a very long period, takes to the concern with the interaction between the mental and the linguistic fields.

The interaction between language and thought leads to a transfer of meaning of words, which is known as metaphor. Thus, oral language may be the most common medium so as to express thought, and the language by which we convey our thoughts is constantly changing as Pugh, S.L., Hicks, J.W., Davis, M., and Venstra, T. highlight "Just as cognition is more than an

electrical impulse, language is more than a means of communication; it is also a tool for discovering, extending, and interpreting meaning"(1992, p.68). Therefore, metaphor is both a linguistic and a cognitive phenomenon.

Cognitive Linguistics suggests that we use metaphor intuitively and spontaneously to understand the mind, emotions and all other abstract concepts. These metaphors enable us to make sense of a concept such as 'mind', which we cannot see with our eyes or grasp with our hands. In other words, without such conventional metaphors, there would be no abstract thought.

Consequently, the arguments mentioned above manifest that as Richards indicates, metaphor is indeed more than merely "a sort of happy extra trick with words" (1936/1981; cited in Allbritton, 1995, p.43).It is displayed to serve a number of cognitive functions of significance such as providing new conceptual domains through metaphorical "scaffolds" using better known domains by means of providing a coherent framework, or schema for understanding such everyday issues as time, arguments, and emotions. Those coherent frameworks can form connections between elements, which is very important in terms of comprehension.

3. Metaphor in Language Teaching

Since metaphor is central to our understanding of how language, thought and discourse are structured, the study of metaphor has attracted attention amongst the scholars in a wide range of disciplines including also Applied Linguistics, and language learning and teaching. As has been emphasized so far, metaphor is so omnipresent in everyday language, then language learners are bound to be confronted with metaphoric expressions at diverse stages of the learning process. On the other hand, figurative language is potentially challenging for second language learners and teachers, because it is more difficult to approach systematically in second language environments. As we have shown, metaphor builds abstract meaning in language and as several researchers and linguists all have in common is the idea that our way of understanding the world is metaphorical.

Lakoff and Johnson claim that 'metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language" (1980, p.153). They found systematicity in the usage of conventional expressions and in the

reasoning of abstract concepts. Their findings led them to the generalization that "our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature"(1980, p.4).This influential view has motivated a considerable research effort by cognitive linguists and psychologists in the past decades, and there is now substantial evidence in support of the role of cognitive metaphor in the processing of linguistic metaphor (Gibbs, 1999). The theory has also played an important role in metaphor-related applied linguistic work.

Metaphor can be regarded within the communicative language teaching theory's terms of reference as well as acquisition theory since metaphor builds abstract meaning in language and it is the very mechanism of learning. We grasp new knowledge by analogy to the models we already possess (Petrie and Oshlag, 1993' cited in, 2001). This ability to map the known onto the unknown and thus to give it a conceptual framework holds the key to the question of how we can grasp new knowledge. Yet the role of metaphor in learning is larger even than this.

In a classroom environment, associations not only loosen students' thoughts and activate the language but may also help them explore the webs of meaning out of which a language has been constructed. In this way, a teacher can use a conceptual metaphor such as 'up is happy' to introduce language for describing positive states of mind (on top of the world, on an up etc.). In addition, metaphor provides the students with a very short and effective way that they can explore their own memories. Thus, the metaphor guides them into a language's conceptual core and fosters an emotional identification with it.

Therefore, it may be suggested that classroom is regarded as a place in which conceptual webs are waiting for the students' attention to be caught so that students can be provided creative support for their intellectual construction of language knowledge.

Ortony (2001) mentions three characteristics of metaphor where metaphor contributes to learning, that is, compactness, vividness, and inexplicability of arguments. Compactness refers to transfer from well-known to unknown domains; vividness donates capturing one attention and retention of the concepts by virtue of greater imagery aroused by the vehicle, and inexplicability proposes metaphor is employed to encode certain aspect of human life which it would not be possible to encode.

Metaphorical language allows us to express our abstract and difficult concepts in concrete terms. To a native speaker who is unaware of the metaphorical systems operating in the mind readily understands and uses expressions such as: "Look how far we have come", "It's been a long, bumpy road", "We can't turn back now" and "We're at a crossroads". Lakoff and Johnson say that this is possible due to the "generalizations governing polysemy" and 'generalizations governing inference patterns' found in language (Kondaiah, 2004, p.4). Nevertheless, how can a foreign language learner acquire such unconscious behaviour? Kondaiah (2004) replies this question in the light of Lakoff's hypothesis; namely, this process of acquisition can be facilitated when the metaphorical systems are used to bring to the attention of the learner the generalizations governing polysemy.

Singleton and Little state that as foreign language learners already possess "world knowledge" and "discourse knowledge" which can be used to help where there is a lack of "linguistic knowledge", an awareness of universal and differing metaphorical concepts may also be helpful (Kondaiah, 2004, p.11).

In learning of foreign language, metaphorical idioms may be drawn upon as a good source in that the idioms under metaphorical systems are better remembered and understood. Furthermore, familiarity to the foreign language can be achieved establishing a familiarity to the metaphorical concepts that are fundamental parts of the target language. For this purpose, teachers of English as a foreign language should provide tools and strategies to their learners to help them effectively build semantic memories of the words and phrases in the target language.

Collaborative activities for learners to study on paraphrases of metaphors provided by the teacher from a text and let students make their own expressions and compare these with the originals, classroom activities which use gap-fill and classifying activities and require learners to consider aspects of metaphoric use and specifically cross-linguistic comparisons appear effective tools in a learning setting.

The idea of using figurative language in teaching is sure enough not a new phenomenon. Comparisons have long been used to explain and clarify unfamiliar and unseen concepts. For instance, early scientists used a visible phenomenon, the movement of water in waves, to explain an "invisible"

phenomenon, the movement of light and sound (Pugh et al, 1992). Use of metaphor provides several advantages as a teaching tool to language learners; firstly, such a way is considerably efficient to organize and maintain information, and as it makes concepts clear and contributes further exploration metaphor is more thought provoking than ordinary dictionary definitions. Thirdly, as its nature, metaphors can present a specific environment for asking questions considering similarities vs. dissimilarities or comparison vs. contrast, namely, *if A is like B in this way then is it like B in another way?* Besides, using metaphor, both students can reflect their experiences by means of their creativity and imagination and teachers can get the opportunity to assess if students have understood a concept well by having them create their own metaphors.

Objectively speaking the process of devising a teaching metaphor entails preparation and well-structured thought, requires an obvious understanding of the concept. The first phase may be recognized as discovering the exact area to be grasped in a metaphorical concept. As a second phase, in addition to the similarities, also the discrepancies between the metaphors and concepts are to examine and see alternative metaphors. The third phase is to present the metaphor with several demonstrations, it is axiomatic that the students' critiques and their comprehension will enlighten the topic well and broaden their horizons.

3.1. Metaphor Awareness

Of evident importance to students is the development of metaphors that help them in the process of learning and contribute to their retention foreign language elements. Moreover, students confront with metaphoric expressions both in their real-life situation and learning environment.

Therefore, mastering conventional figurative language must be an inherent part of the language learning process too, especially since metaphors vary across cultures (Kövecses, 1995; cited in Boers 2000, p.553). Furthermore many figurative items are very frequently derived from their literal senses. That is why drawing learners' attention to these literal senses can enhance in-depth comprehension (Boers, 2000). Therefore, enhanced metaphor awareness

has a remarkable role in language learners' comprehension, and especially in their vocabulary acquisition.

Drawing students' attention to the figurative nature of their definitions, they will realize that metaphor is not solely an ornamental tool unique to poetry, but rather a natural and spontaneous aspect of language. In the second purpose, a wide variety of figurative expressions are mainly dependent upon a system which does not occur randomly. For example, students can be asked to list the symptoms of anger. When people become angry, typically their faces become red, they lose their self-control and become irrational. Each of these symptoms focuses on different metaphoric conception of anger, (ANGER IS HEAT, ANGER IS ADRENALIN, etc.) and such versions of this concept reflect in figurative language.

Directing and encouraging the use of a given metaphoric theme referring to its correlation in physical experience may improve students' deep understanding of its linguistic examples. With this regard, the learner will move forward as for using true words and expressions in true contexts. In other words, as Boers suggests *"the logic of the metaphor helps the language user choose its appropriate instantiations to fit a given context"* (2000, p.568).

Enhancement of language learners' metaphor awareness is a very advantageous dimension for introducing cultural diversities. Naturally, every language is rich in metaphoric expressions but of course are viewed and comprehended differently. It is because of the cultural background of diverse cultures. According to Ponterotto (1994), the basis of language is not form or structure as emphasized by both the Structuralist and Generative Grammar Schools. It lies to the heart of Semantics. Thus, the cognitive aspect of linguistics has focused on the dimension of meaning, idiomaticity and metaphoricity in language. Therefore, new insights may evoke new horizons for the learners' foreign language towards the stumbling block of language learning.

Language as culture carrier, metaphors akin to daily life and belief systems inform us about the people who use these terms. Through metaphors, it is strongly possible to view the understanding of the world of a society. As Mary McBride and Thomas Mullen write "Through metaphor we create bridges, ways of crossing over from one experience to another. By analyzing

metaphor, we may track the pathways of our own or another's experience" (1984; cited in Pugh et al., 1992, p.50).

Therefore, many instances of metaphoric expressions are the reflections of cultural backgrounds. With this historical-cultural perspective, language learners do have the opportunity to compare the figurative discourse of target language with their own language with regard to the importance of culture and cross-cultural depth in foreign language learning.

Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that not all figurative language including all metaphors lends itself equally well to such an approach. That is why it is imperative that further research and new suggestions be carried out.

4. Concluding Remarks

Consequently, metaphor, as a natural and inevitable phenomenon of language and of course thought, and pervasive in everyday interaction, is an important part of EFL curricula. Therefore, metaphor should not be excluded or neglected or considered merely in the realm of special ad hoc exercises, but be integrated into the method and materials of learning process from the very beginning in that the essence of language is not only form or structure as emphasized by both the structuralist and generative grammar tendency but it lies closer to the heart of semantic and pragmatic axis. Students can and should create metaphors *about* and *in* the target language both to improve his language acquisition and to control his own learning process, if the deepest concern of a program of language learning is not the language itself or literature but the development of critical thinking and creative expression through an autonomous learning process.

This peculiar ability lies at the heart of human intellectual inventiveness, creativity, and imagination. Thus, metaphor is worth studying in the realms of foreign language learning and teaching and may provide more effective and creative ways of presenting foreign language to the learners of other cultures.

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