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Teaching Figurative Language

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المخلص :

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تبيان الدور الذي يلعبه البيان على النص الأدبي من سرد ووصف وتوضيح. تملك الصور البيانية القدرة على الوصف الدقيق والشرح المفصل للنص الأدبي، فضلا عن القيمة الجمالية التي تضيفها له، فيشعر القارئ بمتعة القراءة ودقة التصوير. كما أن المقال يحاول تسليط الضوء على فكرة تلقين المتعلم (باللغة الهدف) لغة البيان..

الكلمات المفتاحية:

النص الأدبي; الصور البيانية; الطالب ; المتعلم.

Résumé

Cet article a pour objet de démontrer l'impact de la maîtrise de la langue figuré chez un apprenant de la langue cible. L'objectif de cette étude est de faire ressortir les points de forces qu'un étudiant pourrait jouir en maîtrisant les figures de style.

La métaphore est en tête de liste, car elle représente la clef pour parvenir a un écrit expressif par excellence. Enfin, la maîtrise des figures permet de communiquer à la fois le message -qu'un texte peut porter- avec efficacité et d'embellir son style.

. Mots clés :

la maîtrise de la langue; apprenant; étudiant ; métaphore;

Abstract:

Rhetoric is the act of discourse, an art that aims to improve the facility of speakers or writers who attempt to inform, persuade, or motivate particular audiences. Those who employ a figure of speech may do so with different aspects in mind or with a different feature in view, so that even when the depotatum is the same, the significatum will vary . That is why a single image may fulfil several different purposes or meanings even while it remains the same (Egan, 1998, p.125), and this is figurative language.

Key words:

Figurative language ; teaching ; figures of speech ; conceptual system ; L2 learners



Introduction

To understand the need for explicit figurative language teaching is to look at recent research on human information processing. The information – processing results apply in three areas, the limits of our working memory, the importance of practice, and the importance of continuing until students are competent. Current information processing theories suggest that there are limits to the amount of information learners can attend to and process effectively. Therefore, approaching metaphor, as the most common figures of speech, conceptually has several advantages. Firstly, it allows for instance a picturesque understanding. Secondly, as Kovecses (2000) cites that some phrasal verbs such as ‘calm down’ or ‘simmer down’ have a special significance when used in metaphorical language .

..1 What is figurative language?

The perception of structural similarity may be induced by what was called basic metaphors, these include ontological and orientational. Ontological metaphors, involve ways of viewing intangible concepts, such as feelings, activities, and ideas as entities. When we identify these experiences as substances, “we can refer to them, categorise them, group them, and quantify them- and by this means, reason about them” (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson 1980, p.25) e.g., ‘We are working toward peace’ Orientational metaphor organises concepts by giving them a special orientation, they are not random; but based on structure of our bodies, and how people physically interact in a specific culture or environment, e.g., “ I’m falling a sleep” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 14). If two concepts (one abstract, the other concrete) share this basic shape status, this can induce the perception of certain structural similarities between the two .



The importance of this set of examples or metaphor types from a cognitive view is that metaphors are not just semantic extensions of one isolated category to another category in a different field, but that the connections and relations between categories play an important part. Thus, it is not enough to state that ideas are objects and words are containers. Instead, the systematic and coherent analogy between the two conceptual fields sending and receiving of 'parcels' and 'linguistic communication' must be recognised and emphasised. In addition, the wealth of knowledge associated with concepts and conceptual fields must be taken into account.

.2What is meant by conceptual system?

According to (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), our conceptual

system, which is largely metaphorical, structures what we perceive, how we get

around in the world, and how we relate to other people. To illustrate their point,

Lakoff and Johnson choose the example of war, which is said to have structured

our style of making arguments. As in real war, we see the person we are arguing

with as an enemy; we plan and implement strategies; we attack our enemy's views and defend our own, and of course, we could win or lose arguments.

Figurative language allows speakers or writers to communicate meanings that

differ in various ways from what they literally say. People speak figuratively for

reasons of politeness or to avoid responsibility for the outcomes of what is

communicated Grice (1989), to express ideas that are difficult to communicate

using literal language, and to express thoughts in a compact and vivid manner.



Among the most common forms of figurative language, often referred to as “figures of speech” are metaphors, where ideas from dissimilar knowledge domains are either explicitly, in the case of simile (e.g., My love is like a red rose), or implicitly (e.g., Our marriage is a rollercoaster ride compared, metonymy, where salient part of a single knowledge domain is used to represent or stand for the entire domain (e.g., The White House issued a statement); idioms where a speaker’s meaning cannot be derived from an analysis of the words’ typical meanings (e.g., John lets the cat out of the bag about Mary’s divorce) ; proverbs where speakers express widely held moral beliefs or social norms(e.g., the early bird captures the worm).

One traditional assumption, still held in some areas of cognitive science, is that figurative language is deviant and requires special cognitive processes to be understood. Whereas literal language can be understood via normal cognitive mechanisms, listeners must recognise the deviant nature of a figurative utterance before determining its non-literal meaning (Grice 1989, Searle 1979). For instance, understanding a metaphorical comment, such as ‘Criticism is a branding iron’ requires that listeners must first analyse what is stated literally, then recognise that the literal meaning (i.e., that criticism is literally a tool to mark livestock) is contextually inappropriate and they infer some meaning consistent with the context and the ideas that the speaker must be acting cooperatively and rationally (i.e., criticism can psychologically hurt the person who receives it, often with longlasting consequences.)

..3The most common forms of figurative language

For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is in essence “understanding and



experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.5), it is a matter of thought rather than language. Traditionally, figurative language, especially in literary contexts is regarded as something used for effect or for ornament and contrasts with literal language. Cognitive metaphor challenges the very basis of that notion. We are aware that in traditional rhetoric there are subtle differences between figures of speech, notably metaphor and metonymy for instance.

Cognitive linguistics recognises this difference, whereas metaphor treats one thing, inculturally determined and cognitively recognisable ways, as another for the purpose of understanding a metonymic utterance. Like metaphors, metonymic concepts reflect more than one use of language i.e., more possibility to shape a metonymic meaning. So, a generic term adheres better, when speaking about metaphorical applicability to all categories. Metaphor thus, might be used as a generic term to cover all aspects of figurative language.

The notion of a metaphoric competence is discussed by Low (1988) in his paper “On teaching metaphor”. The focus is on alerting learners (L2) to the presence and effects of conventional metaphor and pedagogical approaches to achieving this in ELT contexts. Therefore, the emphasis is on the “discoursal and pragmatic aspects of metaphor rather than literary uses” (ibid.). He identifies a number of functions of metaphor in language use and includes “how things in life are related in systematic ways we can at least partially comprehend through the complex structure of conceptual metaphor” (ibid.). Although the term “competence” is used, Low writes in terms of skill or strategy as this carries within it the notion of “behaviour which is variable between individuals and which appears to be alterable under appropriate instruction” (ibid.) - skills which native speakers are expected to be



proficient at and which learners need to master if they are to be competent language users.

It is possible that Low uses the term in a way which is analogous with "communicative competence" Hymes (1972). Intrinsic to the notion of competence in this sense is the notion of skill, a variable of an incremental nature that can be influenced through instruction and practice. To be a skilled language user implies both receptive and productive skills in the language. However, in addition to linguistic knowledge, learners need socio-linguistic skill and knowledge to be 'proficient', or to have attained a level of proficiency that is 'native-like'. As (Cameron and Low 1999) point out, the universality and systematicity of grounded, generic-level, metaphors are more transparent and more easily understood by most L2 learners but problems occur in linguistic choices with attempts at linguistic metaphor and the pragmatic context. Low (1988) enumerates a number of areas that could be addressed by language teachers, and course and materials designers through explicit instruction in the conceptual basis of language. These are listed below:

*Developing an understanding of the metaphorical nature of language and the normal metaphors "we live by."

Arriving at plausible meanings for utterances that contain semantic anomalies and contradictions.

*Knowing the boundaries of conventional metaphor; understanding what is heard in terms of conventional metaphor but also knowing what is not said. What are acceptable extensions of conventional metaphor? When can speakers acceptably innovate? When can metaphors be acceptably mixed?

*Areas where word-class differences and cross-linguistic preferences can lead to unconscious innovation or simply error in the L2. In many cases where metaphors are analysed cross-linguistically, understanding can be achieved but there are problems in the linguistic choices L2 learners make.



*Typical hedging devices which are metaphorical in nature but part of native speaker usage.

*Awareness of metaphorical layering; many utterances and expressions can be interpreted on a number of levels easily perceivable in the L1 but require more explanation in L2.

*Sensitivity in the use of metaphor in terms of social and political correctness.

This is important when learners come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

*Developing an interactive awareness of metaphor – why do speakers use metaphor? What are the positive and negative purposes of using metaphorical language in everyday use, in literature and in different walks of life? What do metaphors highlight and hide? Low (1988)

.4. Teaching figures of speech namely metaphor

The work by Petrie and Oshlag included in Ortony (1993, pp.579-609) has led

to extensive discussion on the use of metaphors in second language teaching (SLT) and second language acquisition (SLA). Petrie pointed out that metaphors and analogies hold great instructional value in many major subject fields including literature, business, politics, psychology, physics, etc. He suggested that using metaphor based-instruction can help students to view situations from a fruitful new perspective, and that metaphors and analogies help students to learn unfamiliar and abstract concepts. For example, a teacher can raise students' interest in new subjects by telling them that they are going to meet many new friends (a metaphor for new ideas) during the unfolding school year. The above mentioned authors have argued that such instruction can effectively bridge the gap between the teacher's



knowledge and the students' lack of knowledge by drawing on the teacher's and students' shared experiences.

In the same way, (Danesi 1993, pp. 489- 500) introduced the idea of 'conceptual fluency', i.e. how a given language builds concepts on the basis of metaphorical structuring. He argued that conceptual fluency is a largely unconscious mechanism in native speakers that is deficient in learners. Learners tend to think within their L1 conceptual system, which means that their utterances do not quite fit into the structure of the L2. Works mentioned in Danesi's study (e.g, Sontag, 1975; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, Kovecses, 1986) present the following ideas:

*We are living in a world of conceptualisation.

*Conceptualisation is an intrinsic feature of discourse programming.

*The programming of metaphor into discourse is a feature of L1 competence.

These points form the basis of Danesi's arguments regarding conceptual fluency, metaphorical competence, and the teachability of metaphorical concept.

In recent years, insights into the nature of language in use in vocabulary studies

have emerged through corpus analysis. In particular, there is greater evidence of

the range in which words occur together: collocation. This has influenced ELT

methodology towards a focus on words in "strings" or "phrases" (Nattinger&

DeCarrico, 1992) with an emphasis on functionality and pragmatic awareness.

This fits within the paradigm of communicative language teaching and can be

found in many recently published course books and ELT materials. It is debatable whether this has improved on simple item-by-item rote learning with regard to the teaching of lexis. The emphasis on



functionality is limiting as it excludes a closer examination of the cultural aspects of language as well as the elements of systematicity and coherence identified through a conceptual approach .

Conclusion

The pervasiveness and everyday utility of metaphors are just two of the most prominent factors that add importance of the study of metaphor. Kittay (1989) for example insisted that metaphor goes beyond the linguistic domain into arts to other media of expression. In the same line of thought, Goatly (1997) in a chapter entitled 'The Interplay of Metaphors' sets out categories and labels to describe how writers of literary works shift their metaphors across and within text domains. With conceptual metaphor, the words that are used are often of little interest, what is important is the abstract underlying relationship (s) between two concepts or entities. With linguistic metaphor the entities may have to be inferred, but the conceptual metaphor, they almost always have to be, leading to frequent arguments concerning their optimal specification Kovecses (1997). Conceptual metaphor can be said to represent ways of thinking, in which people typically construe abstract concepts such as time, emotions, and feelings in terms of easily understood and perceived entities, such as places, substances and containers (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

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