

What an uplifting experience...! Integrating the cognitive semantic approach into the Hungarian as a second language teaching - whys and hows.

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I. Introduction

Research into the forms and functions of figurative language and thought has come a long way in the last thirty years. From the mid-1980s, a large number of surveys operating within the framework of cognitive linguistics revealed the essential role of metaphor and metonymy in our understanding and meaning-making mechanisms. As a result, instead of being merely stylistic tools, these cognitive operations have become recognized as main mechanisms through which human mind “comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning” (Lakoff 1993) both in terms of general and cultural-specific ways (cf. Kövecses 2005). Recognizing the prevalence of metaphor and metonymy in everyday language and thought, the issue of how to integrate the cognitive semantic approach to the L2 teaching practices has been an emerging theme in SLT discourse in the recent years. As a main contribution, the role of the metaphorical competence in L2 acquisition was acknowledged and an array of research was conducted on class-room activities aiming to develop learners’ metaphorical competence. (That is, “learners’ ability to comprehend and use metaphors in a given language as used in natural discourse” (Shirazi and Talebinezhad 2013:136). Over this already existing term I will prefer to use figurative competence).

Despite the fact that figurative language, especially metaphor made a significant headway into mainstream pedagogical practice and the design of teaching materials (Kellerman 2001:182), to the best of my knowledge, these had a negligible impact on Hungarian as a foreign language teaching (henceforth HFL) so far. Bearing all this in mind, the present study attempts to touch upon ways in which HFL teaching and learning can benefit from the cognitive semantic approach. After reporting a small-scale empirical survey on how enhancing metaphor awareness can facilitate the acquisition of novel figurative expressions, classroom activities of different sorts are introduced for the development of learners’ figurative competence.

II. The empirical survey

II.1. Aim and hypothesis

The aim of the study was to uncover whether and to what extent enhancing learners’ metaphor awareness – that is, drawing their attention to the conceptual bases of L2 figurative expressions – can foster the acquisition and performance of the unfamiliar figurative expressions related to the field of emotions. While doing so, special focus was on the use of verbal prefixes *fel* (‘up’) and *le* (‘down’).

II.2. Method

The experiment designing was inspired by Kövecses and Szabó (1996) and Boers (2000). Subjects were adult intermediate Hungarian learners with diverse linguistic background, 10 members in Class A and 9 in Class B (functioning as a control group), studying from the same teacher under the same circumstances. The two parallel groups of students were asked to read a text on good/bad emotions and emotional conflicts. As for the elaboration of the unknown expressions, Class B was given a vocabulary note organized along pragmatic lines (expressions ranging from very informal to formal ones), while for Class A the same input was explained by uncovering the conceptual metaphorical motivation of the expressions, all of them are instantiating upward and downward orientational metaphors, namely: HAPPY IS UP (e.g. *felvidul* – ‘cheer up’, *fel van dobva* – ‘to be in a great mood’ etc.), SAD IS DOWN (e.g. *lehangolt* – ‘to be in poor spirits’, *letört* – ‘uncheerful’, *lógatja az orrát* – ‘wilt down’ etc.) ANGER IS UP (e.g. *felmérgel* – ‘to make someone angry’, *felcsattan* – ‘to peal’, *a plafonon van* – ‘go off the deep end’ etc.), each of them were collected and investigated by Kövecses (1990, 2005), Nagy (2008), Imai (2013)). The participants were given 10 minutes to look over the vocabulary notes and ask for clarification. This was followed by a directed conversation about emotions and conflicts. Finally, the participants were given a close-test containing 1. items covered by the vocabulary notes (accounting for the acquisition of them), 2. unknown expressions instantiating the same conceptual metaphors (production test 1.), 3. unknown expressions instantiating the counterpart (or inference) of the ANGER IS UP metaphor, namely the CALM IS DOWN conceptual metaphor (production test 2.).

II.3. Results

In summary, the participants who had received the vocabulary notes organized along conceptual metaphors (Class A) scored 76,8% of the possible correct responses of the test, while Class B scored only 59,4%. This result suggests that the general hypothesis can be borne out even in distant L1-L2 conditions, such as Indo-European languages and Hungarian.

III. Conclusions

The aim of the presentation was to demonstrate that cognitive semantics may offer us a new and potentially useful view of figurative language, be it novel vocabulary or grammatical phenomena based on meaning extensions. The survey, however, also points out some limitations of the approach (issues of unpredictability, different degrees of transparency, transfer phenomena, competing patterns of conceptualization, oversimplification/semantic complexity). Despite of these, it is argued that the ever-growing number of studies providing description on Hungarian language in a cognitive semantics framework is waiting to be transplanted into the practice of HFL teaching. Their figurative basis is not limited to metaphor exclusively but deal with metonymy and conventional cultural knowledge as well. Studying and integrating these into the L2 figurative competence development would bring new color into this line of research.

Nagy, A. 2008. *Japán anyanyelvűek magyartanításának kérdései. Metaforikus tudatosság kialakítása és szókincsfejlesztés a kognitív szemantika metaforaelméletének segítségével.* MA Thesis.

Shirazi, G. and **Talebinezhad, R.** 2013. 'Developing Intermediate EFL Learners' Metaphorical Competence through Exposure.' *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 3/1. 135-141.