

Developing Business English Students' Metaphorical Competence in Foreign Language Learning Higher Education Contexts

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Abstract: This article is aimed at showing the ways in which Business English teachers may be able to facilitate the use of metaphor for their students since it is a part of the lexicon which causes them the most difficulties. The inclusion of the study of metaphors in a specific English language programme can provide students with a useful tool to interpret vocabulary, improve reading skills and understand different cultural backgrounds. Our aim is to put forward a didactic proposal to be used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes at a Master's course currently taught at the University of Almería, Spain, in order to develop students' metaphorical competence within the foreign language learning process.

Keywords: metaphor; metaphoric processing; metaphorical competence; foreign language learning.

Summary: Introduction. Theoretical background. Methodology. Didactic proposal. Conclusions.

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo mostrar cómo los profesores de Inglés de Negocios pueden facilitar el uso de la metáfora entre sus estudiantes, ya que forma parte del léxico que suele causar más dificultades. El estudio de las metáforas en los programas de enseñanza de inglés específico provee a los estudiantes de una herramienta útil para comprender el vocabulario, mejorar su capacidad lectora y comprender los fundamentos de un tema particular. El objetivo es presentar una propuesta didáctica que pueda ser puesta en práctica en un programa de inglés para fines específicos (IFE) en el Máster que se imparte en la actualidad en la Universidad de Almería, con el fin de desarrollar la competencia lingüística de los estudiantes durante el proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera a la hora de usar las metáforas.

Palabras clave: metáfora; procesamiento metafórico; competencia metafórica; aprendizaje de lengua extranjera.



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Sumario: Introducción. Marco teórico. Metodología. Propuesta didáctica. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

Metaphors have always been a potential problem for the foreign language (FL) student (Ghane and Reza 2013). Although these instruments do not necessarily prevent the general comprehension of a text, it is true that, if they are not understood, they may become an obstacle to achieving conceptual fluency. As Doiz and Elizari state, “deficient or insufficient metaphoric competence may impair learners’ receptive and productive skills in the foreign language” (2013: 52). The capacity to understand semantic anomalies, or the ability to construct possible meanings in a language other than their own, is one of the skills a FL student must attempt to master. If one of the commitments language teachers undertake is that students acquire a broad knowledge of the linguistic aspects that make up a text, it should be considered that the frequent presence of metaphors in daily language, and in non-literary written discourse, would be included as part of the FL learning process. In language learning, knowledge of vocabulary has an essential role in understanding and using the language.

The development of metaphoric competence is also important for understanding news, which contains a relatively high density of metaphoric/figurative language (Steen 2010, qtd. in Doiz and Elizari 2013), as well as economic and financial issues presented in various media. Journalists often use metaphors which reflect cultural backgrounds of the discourse community and attract audience attention. Among all the elements of language concerning culture, metaphors are worth paying attention to. They are used very often in everyday communication, and fulfil important aspects of meaning-making. Thus, bringing cultural elements through metaphoric processing into language teaching becomes more and more important.

The present didactic proposal has been specially designed for a Business English language course for two Master’s Degrees currently taught at the University of Almería, Spain, with a focus on developing students’ metaphorical competence throughout the foreign language learning process. Adopting a cognitive approach, this paper focuses on the part of the lexicon which proves more difficult for foreign language students so that they may understand and acquire concepts in an optimal

way. Students will learn how to identify and recognize various metaphors used in business language, both in their mother tongue (Spanish) and in a second language (English). The aim of this paper is, therefore, to show how metaphor can be included in specific language programmes in order to help students understand vocabulary and improve their reading skills. The specific aims regarding the students' skills are twofold:

- (1) to increase business vocabulary;
- (2) to improve reading skills in specialised business contexts.

For our purpose, twelve articles related to recent socioeconomic events in both English and Spanish, taken from *The Economist* and *El Economista* (2011–2014), have been used in the proposal design. Following the guidelines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Lasagabaster 2012), as well as the proliferation of ESP courses at the university level, the use of authentic material has been included, as the lesson plan is tailored particularly for Business English students.

Although various studies have addressed difficulties in the use and comprehension of metaphors in educational contexts (Charteris-Black 1998; Cortés de los Ríos 2001; Cortés de los Ríos and Corral 2016; Heidari, Dabaghi, and Barati 2015; Velasco 2004; among others), there are few studies that focus on explicit teaching aids to help both lecturers and students following an ESP program to cope with such complex cognitive mechanisms at the university level.

This paper is divided into four sections, beginning with an overview of the theoretical background of the study, followed by the methodology and steps followed in the design of the didactic proposal. Later, a proposal of exercises is provided which demonstrate how to activate students' knowledge of metaphor. It continues with assessment activities, and concludes with a discussion of the findings and further research.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: METAPHORICAL COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING. THE USE OF METAPHORS IN THE FIELD OF BUSINESS

The ability to understand and produce metaphoric/figurative language in the FL has given rise to the concept of metaphoric competence, which falls under the more general notion of conceptual competence or conceptual fluency, defined as “the ability to express

oneself in the L2 while utilizing the conceptual system of the L2, rather than relying primarily on the conceptual system of the L1” (Danesi 2008: 243). Likewise, Littlemore and Low affirm that

(...) metaphorical competence plays an integral and vital role in all areas of communicative competence. More specifically, metaphorical competence contributes to grammatical, textual, illocutionary, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences. Metaphor is thus highly relevant to second language learning, teaching and testing, from the earliest to the most advanced stages of learning. (2006: 3)

Figurative language may be learned in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom in a number of ways. For instance, we can focus on the “literal meaning of the key word which is used figuratively” (Boers and Lindstromberg 2012: 96). Certain linguists have called for metaphor to be taught in the EFL classroom such as Lakoff (1993), Henderson (1986), Low (1988), Lindstromberg (1991), White (1997), Charteris-Black (2000), Bailey (2003), Semino (2008) and, more recently, authors such as Hoang (2014) or Wan (2014), Heidari, Dabaghi and Barati (2015), among others. People constantly use expressions related to one conceptual domain in order to explain another, and to understand a number of facts and processes in their surroundings. For example, it may be beneficial for a student to recognize metaphorical expression in this example: *All morning the Bank of England had been fighting a desperate battle to save the pound* (White 1997: 241), and to verbalise, following a brief discussion, the most appropriate metaphorical concept, THE CURRENCY CRISIS IS WAR. The fact that we adopt this figure as a cognitive tool, separated from rhetorical devices, is that, not only does it provide a specific way of thinking about a certain topic (in this case, CURRENCY), it also refers to a form of action against this situation, which would lead to a class discussion on the problems caused by currency devaluation and possible steps to avoid it, among other related topics.

Since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson’s book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), the study of conceptual metaphor has undoubtedly been one of the major topics in the cognitive linguistics research scenario. Barcelona defines metaphor as “a symmetric mapping of a conceptual domain, the source, onto another domain, the target. Source and target are either in different taxonomic domains and not linked by a pragmatic

function, or they are in different functional domains” (2011: 53). The number of studies which have demonstrated the ubiquity of metaphor and its usefulness as a cognitive tool to understand abstract concepts by way of more concrete ones has proliferated in specialised fields, such as those of Business, Economics and Finance (Cortés de los Ríos 2007; Henderson 1986; Herrera 2008; Herrera and White 2000, 2012; Langer 2015; Serón 2005; Skorczynska 2010; Smith 1995; Wang *et al.* 2013; White 1997, 2003, 2004; among others). Metaphors in business texts are not merely used for explanatory purposes but they also have become an integrated part of its language, and serve as an indispensable cognitive mechanism forming a constitutive part of people's conceptual framework.

There are different reasons for the growing popularity of metaphors in business. One of them is the number of metaphors, which in this field is connected with their relation to general language (Bielenia-Grajewska 2009), and another reason is that metaphorical names are remembered more quickly and easily (Espunya and Zabalbeascoa 2003; Steen 2004). Sierra Ayala (2001) asserts that the language of business, being a part of our everyday discourse, is full of metaphors. Therefore, metaphors are a useful tool to understand complicated specific concepts.

The lesson we propose is based on the research literature on the use of metaphors in the field of business. Among the most relevant contributions are the following: Boers (1997) studied a cluster of metaphors related to the notions of HEALTH, FITNESS and RACING (e.g. *long term subsidies are addictive or lagging behind competition*); White (1996) studied the use of metaphor in the British press in reference to the monetary crisis of 1992; Herrera and White (2000) proposed a methodology focused on cognitive semantics to teach the metaphorical uses of growth (e.g. *economic growth wilts under higher taxation*); and Boers and Demecheleer (1997) analysed the following metaphorical concepts in the discourse on the western economy: JOURNEY, HEALTH and WAR (e.g. *the moves towards privatization and liberalization; Britain's car industry now looks healthier*). According to these authors, various activities in the domain of Business and Economics are commonly conceived as the motion of a company or as a path towards a goal. This type of metaphor has its own experiential 'logic,' and its inferences yield additional metaphors with their own associated value judgments (e.g. *an activity is a movement over a path; decision-making is choosing a direction; progress is moving forward; moving forward is good*;

immobility is bad, among others). Additionally, HEALTH is associated with life expectancy and life quality, while illness is associated with pain and death (e.g. *this Business headache; Britain's car industry now looks healthier; even greater paralysis in decision-making*).

On the other hand, business discourse often shows a high frequency of instances where companies, organizations, national economies, etc. are conceived as animate entities engaged in a struggle of some kind (e.g. *the Commission may not have the stomach for a fight; Brussels is on the war-path against subsidies*). In the same year, Boers and Demecheleer established three conventional metaphorical models: PATH, HEALTH and WAR metaphors. (e.g. *the moves towards privatization and liberalization; the financial haemorrhaging; the budget for 1994 is a field of struggle*). In fact, Tomoni (2012) stated that the COMBAT metaphor (also referred to as WAR metaphor) has proven to be once again very prolific in business discourse. Charteris-Black (2000) distinguished between animate metaphors to describe the economy (*growth* or *depression*) and economic organizations (e.g. *parent/sistercompany*), and inanimate metaphors to describe market movements (*rebounds* or *sides*).

Another important underlying cognitive model for the conceptualization in the field of business is the metaphor THE ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM (Kovecses 2002; Castaño, Laso, and Ventura 2014). In the 1890s, Alfred Marshall had already argued that “economic reasoning should start on methods analogous to the physical statics, and should gradually become more biological in tone” (cited in Henderson 1986: 149). He analysed Business development with reference to a natural cycle of growth, change and decay. The organism conceptual metaphor is a type of metaphor with great generative power (Charteris-Black 2000; White 2003).

Reehorst (2012) states that the source domains that are regularly used to predicate something about the state of the economy are: MOVEMENT, HEALTH, WAR, WEATHER CONDITIONS, FEROCIOUS ANIMALS, NATURAL DISASTERS, NUCLEAR DISASTERS and FITNESS.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the method and steps followed to design the didactic proposal offered in this paper.

2.1. Intended audience

The present didactic proposal has been designed to be applied on a Business English language course appearing on two Master's Degrees currently taught at the University of Almería, Spain. Both MA Degrees are 60-ECTS programmes taught in one academic year. The Business English course is a 3-ECTS compulsory course taught in the second semester of each MA Degree program. Both courses are taught completely in English by two non-native-English-speaking lecturers specialising in ESP.

Students following these courses are usually Spanish-native speakers with an average age of 22–24. Most students come from undergraduate studies related to the field of business, so they are expected to have, at least, a basic knowledge of business matters. Regarding the language level, all students taking these courses have, at minimum, a B1 English language level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) .

Although the didactic proposal of this paper is specifically aimed at the potential students of the above mentioned MA degree programmes, it may be applied in any undergraduate or postgraduate educational context in which business content is taught through the medium of English, regardless of the students' initial language level. To reduce the degree of difficulty of the lesson, they would begin by learning figurative English lexis with the help of metaphors in their native language (in this case, Spanish). The aim is for the students to recall the target language in a better way in order to subsequently use it in the recognition or production phases.

2.2. Course and activities design method

On a theoretical level, the course topic is introduced by following the assumptions proposed by various referents in the field of Cognitive Linguistics. First, we examine the origin of cognitive metaphor (Reddy 1979); then, we define this figure in terms of Lakoff's findings (1987), and according to the experientialist theory of the meaning. In this manner, we teach the terminology of the structure of this figure (target domain and source domain) and the directionality between them (the comprehension of an abstract concept via another specific concept). This explanation is illustrated with typical examples of conceptual metaphors

taken from Lakoff and Johnson (1980): TIME IS MONEY and AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING. In the same way, we present the metaphorical concept and the metaphorical expressions and show how they are different. To give an illustration of a cognitive metaphor in the field of economics and business, we speak about the knowledge students have of 'health' and how it could be transferred to the business and economics fields. Both concepts could be mapped to say ECONOMICS IS HEALTH. This type of mapping is considered as a conceptual metaphor and is shown by the following metaphorical expressions: *Companies are in good health* or *The firm is suffering from a chronic deficit* (Boers and Demecheleer 1997: 115–129). Lastly, we explain the difference between linguistic metaphor and cognitive metaphor and refer to other contributions as regards this cognitive mechanism.

Before explaining the cognitive theory of metaphor, the students' awareness regarding this figure is activated, as can be seen in the following diagram:

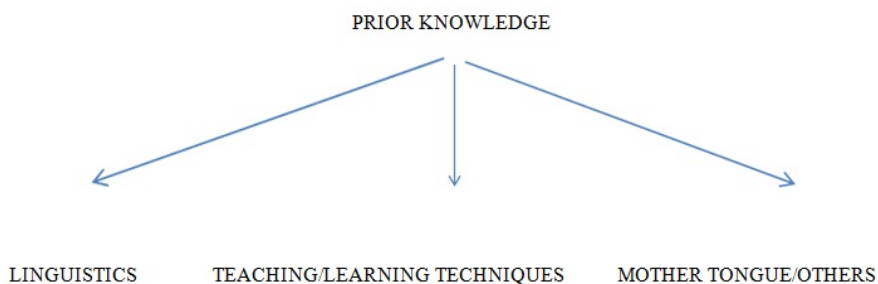


Figure 1. Diagram on the activation of students' awareness of metaphor.

In order to measure the students' language level, their previous linguistic knowledge would be used. To facilitate this, the lecturers ask questions such as:

- What do you understand by metaphor?
- Have you learnt about it theoretically, in practice or both?
- What type of metaphors do you know?
- What synonyms could you give for metaphor?

Secondly, the students are asked how they had been taught metaphor in the FL classroom. In this sense, it would be useful to know whether this topic was introduced using literary texts, general English language texts, specific language texts or through its conventional use in spoken discourse. Similarly, it would be interesting to know the working procedure followed in the classroom; in other words, if metaphor has been studied using the functions of identification, classification, comparison, contrast and the search for equivalences in L1 and L2.

Finally, the last question is whether the students' knowledge of metaphor was acquired via their native language in the foreign-language classroom or both should be discovered. In order to put the previously mentioned theoretical concepts into practice, we ask the students firstly to read two lists of linguistic expressions, one in Spanish and another one in English (see Appendix), and to carry out different activities. Secondly, we give students metaphorical expressions and texts which, together with the previous linguistic expressions, have been taken from the corpora indicated below.

2.3. Corpus

The corpus is composed of a set of twelve articles taken from two of the most relevant journals from the field of business, in English and Spanish. The English corpus is composed of six articles taken from *The Economist*, a well-known journal, published over a three-year period, from 2011 to 2013. The articles address the Arab Spring, a topic of intense relevance in that period. The articles are comprised of 960 words on average, which yields a total of 5,814 words. This international financial journal is widely known for having directly related to the field of economics and, indirectly, the linguistic code of ESP. Since being founded, it has deeply influenced linguistics as it sets out in its style guide the use of an accessible language for ordinary people, with a preference for colloquial terms (Alcaraz Varó and Hughes 2004). The Spanish corpus consists of six articles relating to the effects of the current Arab crisis on the Spanish economy, taken during the same period from the national financial newspaper *El Economista*, which is considered one of the top ranked financial journals in Spain. In each case, the articles have 895 words on average, which yields a total of 5,371 words. The articles composing both corpora were selected by virtue of their relation to the topic and the average length (a similar length was sought in both

languages), as well as the purpose of using authentic materials, as proposed by the guidelines of the EHEA (Lasagabaster 2012), in order to improve both the lexical repertoire and the reading comprehension of the students.

The articles comprising the corpora are listed below:

ENGLISH CORPUS

1. “Oil pressure rising.” *The Economist*, 24 February 2011.
2. “The 2011 oil shock.” *The Economist*, 3 March 2011.
3. “The great slowdown.” *The Economist*, 19 July 2012.
4. “Mistrust the trusts.” *The Economist*, 7 November 2013.
5. “To stop the slaughter.” *The Economist*, 9 November 2013.
6. “The new economics of oil.” *The Economist*, 6 December 2014.

SPANISH CORPUS

1. “La subida del petróleo dañará más a España y las economías débiles del euro.” *El Economista*, 26 February 2011.
2. “La tensión en Libia reactiva el temor inflacionista en las bolsas europeas.” *El Economista*, 22 February 2011.
3. “España pagará caro el crudo por el conflicto en Ormuz.” *El Economista*, 16 January 2012.
4. “¿Caerá el barril un 67%? La guerra del petróleo barato se parece a la de 1986.” *El Economista*, 27 November 2013.
5. “¿Cuánto afectará Siria al precio del petróleo? Libia debería preocupar más.” *El Economista*, 29 August 2013.
6. “¿Qué hay detrás de la Guerra del petróleo barato? La batalla de Arabia contra Irán.” *El Economista*, 11 December 2014.

2.4. Typology of activities

The activities are geared towards teaching typical business metaphors (i.e. ECONOMY IS HEALTH, ECONOMY IS WAR, ECONOMY IS A PATH, ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM, ECONOMY IS A NATURAL DISASTER, ECONOMY IS A PARTY, ECONOMY IS A GAME), as established by scholars such as Henderson (1986), Boers and Demecheleer (1997), Charteris-Black (2000), Herrera and White (2000), White (2003),

Reehorst (2012) and Tomoni (2012), in order to assist FL learners in the understanding of content specific business lexis and in specialised business reading. Table 1 describes the parameters used to design the proposed activities, including the main objective and the type of tasks.

Parameter	Objective	Type
<i>Parameter 1</i>	Make students familiar with recurrent source domains in the field of business in both languages, Spanish and English.	Short-answer questions. Recognition and identification activities. Reading and underlining figurative language.
<i>Parameter 2</i>	Show students how to learn vocabulary and how to classify language using metaphorical expressions previously provided by the teacher.	Multiple-choice activities.
<i>Parameter 3</i>	Make students think about possible similarities and differences of categorization in the conceptualization of the economy in the English and Spanish cultures.	Guided questions.
<i>Parameter 4</i>	Allow students to read and discuss real business articles.	Reading comprehension activities. Matching exercises.

Table 1. Parameters, objectives and typology of activities.

The teaching/learning method will vary in accordance with parameters 1 to 4 above, each of which is illustrated with sample activities in the following section.

3. DIDACTIC PROPOSAL

Based on the theoretical assumptions described previously, this section includes the activities composing the didactic proposal according to the four parameters indicated.

PARAMETER 1. The following sample activities are used to familiarise students with recurrent source domains in the field of business in both Spanish and English. We first require students to analyse the metaphorical expressions taken from the Spanish (L1) press in order to be able to complete the task more easily in English (L2) later.

Activity A. Read the following list of Spanish metaphorical expressions and indicate the source domain in each one:

1. Los bajistas vuelven a dirigir sus ataques hacia el sector bancario.
2. Esta cadena de contagios no es sólo una cuestión exclusiva del sector energético.
3. La marea negra de los precios del petróleo amenaza seriamente la frágil recuperación de la economía.
4. La subida de precios afecta a España, situada en el furgón de cola de la recuperación.
5. Las petroleras celebran las alzas del crudo.
6. La subida del precio del petróleo tiene un doble efecto sobre los precios internos (...) incluso antes de producirse el efecto de fichas de dominó en el Magreb.
7. Las grandes empresas del sector sacan el champán.
8. Después de la euforia alcista del lunes, ayer los mercados europeos corrigieron con fuerza.
9. Digamos que a largo plazo puede erosionar el PIB esos dos puntos más de coste de la factura.
10. Los mercados se vuelven más timoratos ante movimientos bruscos.

Answers: 1. WAR; 2. HEALTH; 3. NATURAL DISASTER; 4. PATH; 5. PARTY; 6. GAME; 7. PARTY; 8. LIVING ORGANISM; 9. NATURAL DISASTER; 10. LIVING ORGANISM.

Activity B. The HEALTH, WAR and PATH metaphors are very recurrent in Business. Identify, from the given list, metaphorical expressions that support these concepts.

Answers:

HEALTH: America tends to *suffer* the biggest immediate impact; A large enough spike in the price of oil can do great *damage*; Oil prices are driven by other factors that *hurt* confidence; The 2011 oil *shock*; Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait is a *painful* reminder; Less *vulnerable* banks does not mean *immunity*; Crude caused *headaches* and debate (...).

WAR: If disturbances *hit* Algeria and *threaten* its oil industry too (...); When oil markets *tighten*; Emerging economies may be *hit* harder by a spike; The price of oil has had an unnerving ability to *blow up* the world economy; A monetary *clampdown* that *throttles* the recovery; Oil's march higher *sparks fear* in the markets"; There is potential serious *tension*.

PATH: When the oil price *jumps*; The global economy was already *slowing*; Prices should keep *heading north*; Oil prices *are driven* by current conditions; Libya and Algeria *halt* oil production.

Activity C. There is a classic metaphorised concept, ECONOMY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. In the given list, identify English metaphorical expressions that refer to this ontological metaphor.

Answers: The fundamental laws of supply and demand, and *naked* fear; (...) when it projected a global *growth* of 4.4%; The Saudi oil *giant* Aramco; Inflation caused by *robust* global *growth*.

Activity D. Read the following English sentences taken from the selected business press articles. Use a dictionary to look up the meaning of the words you do not understand. Underline the metaphorical words. Which source domain is used in them to communicate the socioeconomic situation in Arab countries?

1. Investors weren't betting on a quick resolution yesterday.
2. (...) such a highly-g geared economy is vulnerable to a number of risks; for example, if political unrest spreads to Saudi Arabia.

3. Against this backdrop, continued bad news from Libya and neighbouring countries could begin to undermine growth expectations.
4. Hopefully, for the sake of the global economy and the citizens of Libya, current fears won't amount to much.

Answers: 1. GAME; 2. LIVING ORGANISM; 3. WAR; 4. LIVING ORGANISM.

PARAMETER 2. We shall now go on to present the following exercises aimed at showing students how to learn vocabulary and how to classify language using metaphorical expressions previously provided by the teacher. Sample activities for parameter 2:

Activity A. For the following exercise, we will focus on the conventional metaphor *ECONOMY IS A NATURAL PHENOMENON*. Complete the following metaphors with the most appropriate prototypical category:

1. It has caught investors unaware since the crisis at the start of the year.
 - a. exploded
 - b. went out
 - c. erupted
2. Experts say a sustained run at around \$120 a barrel risks a serious to the recovery.
 - a. headwind
 - b. way
 - c. direction
3. He does not examine the scenario of a full-blown Gulf crisis.
 - a. hourglass
 - b. catastrophic
 - c. fantastic
4. Big importing countries such as the euro area, India, Japan and Turkey are enjoying especially big
 - a. liquidity
 - b. profit
 - c. windfalls
5. The firms that weather the current will have masses more shale to exploit.
 - a. situation
 - b. storm
 - c. context

Answers: 1. erupted; 2. headwind; 3. catastrophic; 4. windfalls; 5. storm.

Activity B. For the following exercise, we will focus on the conventional metaphor THE CURRENCY CRISIS IS A WAR. Complete the following metaphors with the most appropriate prototypical category:

1. If disturbances Algeria and threaten its oil industry too, the buffer of spare capacity would fall below where it stood in 2008.
 - a. take
 - b. hit
 - c. occur
2. When oil markets, another set of problems emerges.
 - a. tighten
 - b. threaten
 - c. win
3. The price of oil has had an unnerving ability to the world economy.
 - a. catch up
 - b. look for
 - c. blow up
4. Oil's march higher sparks in the markets.
 - a. pain
 - b. fear
 - c. relief
5. There is potential for serious in this current economic context.
 - a. growth
 - b. headaches
 - c. tension

Answers: 1. hit; 2. tighten; 3. blow up; 4. fear; 5. tension.

PARAMETER 3. Culture should be taken into account in the teaching/learning process of a foreign language. The following sample activities are aimed towards thinking about the possible similarities and differences found when categorizing the conceptualization of the economy in the English and Spanish cultures.

Activity A. As you will have been able to check, the socioeconomic events are conceptualized in English press articles by means of the following categories: HEALTH, WAR, PATH, LIVING ORGANISM, NATURAL

DISASTER and GAME. Are the same categories used in the Spanish corpus? Are there any differences in Spanish culture?

Answer: The conceptual category of party was not found in the English corpus. This could be due to the fact that this category is more rooted in the Spanish culture.

Activity B. As you will have been able to check, the socioeconomic events are conceptualized in Spanish press articles by means of the following categories: HEALTH, WAR, PATH, LIVING ORGANISM, NATURAL DISASTER and GAME. Are the same categories used in the Spanish corpus or are there any differences in English culture?

Answer: All these conceptual categories have been found in the Spanish corpus.

PARAMETER 4. As one of the objectives of the Economy and Business English course is for students to be able to read and discuss real business articles, the following sample activities will focus on specialized business reading.

Activity A. Underline the metaphorical expressions that you encounter in the following text:

THE price of oil has had an unnerving ability to blow up the world economy, and the Middle East has often provided the spark. The Arab oil embargo of 1973, the Iranian revolution in 1978–79 and Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 are all painful reminders of how the region’s combustible mix of geopolitics and geology can wreak havoc. With protests cascading across Arabia, is the world in for another oil shock? There are good reasons to worry. The Middle East and North Africa produce more than one-third of the world’s oil. Libya’s turmoil shows that a revolution can quickly disrupt oil supply. Even while Muammar Qaddafi hangs on with delusional determination and Western countries debate whether to enforce a no-fly zone, Libya’s oil output has halved, as foreign workers flee and the country fragments. The spread of unrest across the region threatens wider disruption. The markets’ reaction has been surprisingly modest. The price of

Brent crude jumped 15% as Libya's violence flared up, reaching \$120 a barrel on February 24th. But the promise of more production from Saudi Arabia pushed the price down again. It was \$116 on March 2nd—20% higher than the beginning of the year, but well below the peaks of 2008. Most economists are sanguine: global growth might slow by a few tenths of a percentage point, they reckon, but not enough to jeopardise the rich world's recovery. That glosses over two big risks. First, a serious supply disruption, or even the fear of it, could send the oil price soaring. Second, dearer oil could fuel inflation—and that might prompt a monetary clampdown that throttles the recovery. A lot will depend on the skill of central bankers.

The Economist, 3 March 2011.

Answer: Students' own answers.

Activity B. Match the conceptual metaphors that the metaphorical expressions from Activity A highlight:

A COUNTRY IS A LIVING ORGANISM.
ECONOMY IS WAR.

Answer: Students' own answers.

Activity C. Discuss the following issue raised in the article: What are the effects of the price of oil in the world economy?

Answer: Students' own answers.

4.1. Assessment

We will evaluate students by means of recognition and production activities. As for the former, students should be able to:

- a) Recognize vocabulary items, whose literal meaning they should understand, in order to use them in gapped sentences, but with a figurative meaning.

- b) Identify the figurative meaning of words in the field of business using monolingual dictionaries.
- c) Contrast business vocabulary in English and Spanish.

With regard to the latter, we will evaluate whether students can generate metaphors with the source domains associated with the economy. Some activities are described as follows:

Recognition activities

Activity A. Look at the following list of words and circle the definition that best explains their meaning: *hurt*, *jump*, *throttle*, *catastrophic* and *robust*.

1. requiring or suited to physical strength
2. to leap or spring off the ground or other support by a sudden muscular effort
3. to cause bodily harm to
4. extremely bad
5. to choke (someone) by squeezing the throat

Answers: 1. robust; 2. jump; 3. hurt; 4. catastrophic; 5. throttle

Activity B. The words you have just defined have, at least, one other meaning. Can you find it by completing the following exercise?

1. Prices are driven by other factors that confidence.
2. When the oil price (...)
3. A monetary clampdown that the recovery.
4. He does not examine the scenario of a credit-crunch crisis.
5. Inflation caused by global growth.

Answers: 1. hurt; 2. jumps; 3. throttles; 4. catastrophic; 5. robust

Activity C. Choose two words from the above list. Look at the meanings given in activities A and B. Translate the words into your native language. Do they have the same meanings as in English or do you need different words to express them?

Answer: Students' own answers.

Activity D. Use different English-language dictionaries to find out whether in the definitions of the term WAR there is a figurative meaning alluding to business.

Answer: Students' own answers.

Production activities

Activity A. Write three metaphors in which the most characteristic recurrent source domains of economy of the topic studied, i.e. HEALTH, WAR and PATH are shown.

Answer: Students' own answers.

Activity B. Write a short text about the economic situation in your country using metaphors to describe it.

Answer: Students' own answers.

CONCLUSIONS

With this essay, we have attempted to show how cognitive semantics can be of use in teaching figurative language to Business English students. As language teachers, we must propose various methods in order to help our students enhance their lexical knowledge. We have focused on metaphors as an important cultural element to communicate in a particular language. Metaphor instruction features direct teaching of metaphorical language through the use of conceptual metaphors as cognitive tools for language learning. Learning the use of culturally adequate source domains like PLANT to describe target domains like ECONOMY in a given communication situation can help develop students' conceptual competence.

By means of the methodological proposal presented along with the activities suggested, we believe that our students can learn linguistic phenomena that form part of our everyday spoken language, or that appear in the structure of a non-literary text in an active, dynamic and

creative way. Therefore, studying such phenomena should not be overlooked. By including metaphors in an EFL or ESP programme, students will have a tool at their disposal to interpret vocabulary, to improve reading fluency and, consequently, to develop their communicative competence. Once FL learners are able not only to recognize and understand metaphorical expressions but also to produce them, they have reached a higher level of FL proficiency. As a result, improving conceptual competence should play a central role in foreign language teaching.

In spite of its growth and widespread use, research on metaphor and FL education remains scarce, and the practical applications of this knowledge for language teaching/learning have not yet been explored in depth. This paper offers a didactic proposal to be implemented in an ESP classroom at tertiary level. The purpose is to provide language teachers with suggestions and tips that facilitate their work when dealing with metaphors in the classroom. These can be reinforced by further contributions so that a major methodological proposal regarding the introduction of such extensive but usually little considered language phenomenon can be designed.

APPENDIX

A. List of English metaphorical expressions

1. America tends to suffer the biggest immediate impact.
2. A large enough spike in the price of oil can do great damage.
3. If disturbances hit Algeria and threaten its oil industry too (...)
4. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait is a painful reminder.
5. When oil markets tighten (...)
6. Emerging economies may be hit harder by a spike.
7. Prices should keep heading north.
8. Oil prices are driven by current conditions.
9. Oil's march higher sparks fear in the markets.
10. (...) when it projected a global growth of 4.4%.
11. There is potential serious tension.
12. The global economy was already slowing.
13. Libya and Algeria halt oil production.
14. The price of oil has had an unnerving ability to blow up the world economy.
15. The 2011 oil shock (...)
16. Inflationary caused by robust global growth.
17. Less vulnerable banks do not mean immune.
18. Crude caused headaches and debate.
19. The fundamental laws of supply and demand and naked fear.
20. (...) a monetary clampdown that throttles the recovery.
21. When the oil price jumps (...)
22. The Saudi oil giant Aramco (...)
23. Oil prices are driven by other factors that hurt confidence.

B. List of Spanish metaphorical expressions

1. Los bajistas vuelven a dirigir sus ataques hacia el sector bancario.
2. Esta cadena de contagios no es sólo una cuestión exclusiva del sector energético.
3. La marea negra de los precios del petróleo amenaza seriamente la frágil recuperación de la economía.
4. La subida de precios afecta a España, situada en el furgón de cola de la recuperación.
5. Las petroleras celebran las alzas del crudo.
6. La subida del precio del petróleo tiene un doble efecto sobre los precios internos (...) incluso antes de producirse el efecto de fichas de dominó en el Magreb.
7. Las grandes del sector sacan el champán.
8. Después de la euforia alcista del lunes, ayer los mercados europeos corrigieron con fuerza.
9. Digamos que a largo plazo puede erosionar el PI esos dos puntos más de coste de la factura.
10. Los mercados se vuelven más timoratos ante movimientos bruscos.

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