Prospective teachers' attitudes and relations toward the culture of English-speaking countries regarding their specialisation

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By using spontaneous metaphor research, our paper investigates prospective primary school teachers' attitudes and relations toward the culture of English-speaking countries and learning English as a foreign language. Metaphors reveal people's subconscious ideas and understandings towards their beliefs and attitudes, in this case, towards the culture of English-speaking countries. The participants consisted of student teachers specialising in English (N=12) or another specialisation (N=20). In addition, students' English proficiency was also reflected in this grouping, which helped to demonstrate the effects of prior English knowledge and experiences. An elicitation sheet with the unfinished sentence, "Foreign language learning is like ... because ..." was used as the tool of data collection. The data were analysed qualitatively by coding, categorising, and finalising the metaphors. The present paper focuses exclusively on the data in connection with the concept of culture while analyses of the other concepts are described in Kisné Bernhardt and Furcsa (2020). The findings of the metaphor research revealed different attitudes according to teacher students' specialisations and therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of selecting appropriate approaches to English teaching. In our paper, we first describe the importance and role of cultural beliefs in language teaching, then we focus on various aspects of metaphor research. The sociocultural dimension of metaphor research aims at investigating the involvement of sociocultural factors in the process of conceptualisation. In the second part of the paper, the findings of our metaphor research are presented.

Keywords: English culture, teacher education, metaphor research

The cultural beliefs of language teachers

Culture can be interpreted as an evolving concept which has an important effect on the teaching practices and attitudes of prospective language teachers. In this paper, this dimension of language teaching is analysed from a qualitative aspect with the aim of shedding light on what trainee teachers believe as regards this aspect. The primary aim of this research was to uncover students' relations towards culture and to investigate what impact these views have on the incorporation of culture in classroom practices.

The importance of culture and its roles in language teaching and learning have been emphasised in language pedagogy. Weninger and Kiss (2013) categorise three stages in dealing with culture. The first stage (1950–1990's) emphasises the facts to be learnt about the target language culture. The second stage, specifically the communicative era (the 1990's), highlighted the relationship between language and culture with culture viewed as a key component of language learning. Furthermore, the notion of intercultural communicative competence was introduced. The last stage (2000's) confirms a transnational approach in a globalised world. It is widely accepted nowadays that language and culture are interrelated and the interdisciplinary concept of intercultural competence includes the socially and culturally appropriate usage of language. Language education requires language teachers to be interculturally aware and competent users of the language who move beyond the limits of teaching grammar and vocabulary (Szaszkó, 2010).

Sociocultural implications of metaphors

Metaphors can be interpreted as reflections of respondents' socio-cultural contexts as they are affected by their cultural background, a phenomenon that reveals basic attitudes and beliefs. In this respect, metaphors can be seen as an integration between cognitive and socio-cultural factors. Gabillon (2005, p. 243) argues that the beliefs and attitudes produced by learners represent their socio-cultural contexts that are formed through sociocultural experience, including educational experience. More precisely, the cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives constitute a continuum as '*these two approaches should not be considered as mutually exclusive but rather points on a continuum where classical cognitive orientations are placed at one end and sociocultural orientations at the other*'. In this framework, beliefs are interpreted from a cognitive perspective as constant phenomena which are resistant to change. However, from a socio-psychological perspective, learner beliefs are viewed to be both stable and changeable. These concepts may give a more precise view of the structure of the respondents' beliefs and mechanisms.

Investigating cultural beliefs through metaphors

Trainee teachers' beliefs towards culture are based on their prior experiences and knowledge accumulated from personal experiences and educational background in a complex way. Each student brings a complex set of perceptions that plays a decisive role in formulating their beliefs concerning the process of learning and teaching. These beliefs have an important effect on their success in language learning, and later, on their language teaching practices. However, it is difficult to gain insight into what shapes teachers' mindsets: one possible solution is to investigate the transformation of these mental conceptions into metaphorical perceptions. The present study intends to relate participants' underlying assumptions about their concepts towards the culture of the English-speaking countries into metaphorical perceptions.

Metaphors are used to study aspects of the subconscious, containing tacitly held beliefs (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors are cognitive constructs which outline human thinking about the world. Metaphors are not seen as being merely a linguistic phenomenon, but rather a manifestation of representation and thought. This paper investigates the metaphorical conceptualizations of prospective teachers of English in connection with relations towards the culture of the English-speaking countries based on the established principles of the cognitive theory of metaphor recommended by Lakoff (2006, p. 185) stating that, '*the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another*'.

Metaphors allow us to describe abstract concepts (ideas, thoughts, and emotions) in concrete, familiar, and tangible domains. Moreover, metaphors are a means for comprehending and drawing interferences about these concepts. The complexity and interrelatedness of these concepts can be represented in the form of a metaphor grid (used for instance in Trentinné Benkő, 2016). Metaphors are valuable tools to reflect participants' beliefs and raise awareness of the underlying links between these concepts. The abstract idea of culture and the respondents' relations towards culture become more concrete through the cognitive process of substitution and similarity.

Student teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward foreign language learning

Metaphor as a qualitative research method has become widespread in the last few decades to raise awareness of theoretical expectations. In our empirical research, the metaphors that were spontaneously evoked in reference to the concepts of foreign language learning (N=32) could be distributed into six conceptual categories called target domains or secondary metaphors. According to the results, twelve spontaneous metaphors selected in four categories could be distinguished among the group of student teachers who have specialised in English Language teaching (STEL): *discovery, elixir, hobby, challenge*. There are twenty unfinished sentences in the sample of student teachers who have specialised in other subjects (STOS) and their metaphors fall into the following five categories: *discovery, elixir, hobby, pain, puzzle*.

As *Figure 1* represents, three conceptual frameworks are based upon similar notions and opinions in the whole sample. The research group (STEL) (*number 1*) and the control group (STOS) (*number 2*) are represented in different colours in *Figure 1* below[1].

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[2] The concepts numbered 1, 2 occurred in both the research and the control group.

Figure 1
Target domains and metaphors of the source domain

Foreign Language Learning (Source domain)		
Target domain/ secondary metaphor	*Subconceptional category*	*Metaphor*
Discovery (1,2)	***Culture (1)***	journey, new equipment, superpower
	Knowledge (1)	learning (N=2)
	Culture (2)	yin/yang, ticket, adventure, journey
	Improvement (2)	ripening, bird, neverending story
	Possibility (2)	magic, gift
Hobby (1,2)	***Happiness (1)***	sunshine, hiking
	Worship (1)	hobby
	Hobby (2)	sunshine, rollercoaster
Elixir (1,2)	***Elixir (1)***	air
	Basic condition (2) Need (2)	coffee before a sport match, IT, swimming
Challenge (1)	***Practice (1)***	singing, playing musical instrument
	Challenge (1)	experiment
Pain (2)	*Torture (2)*	winter, dentist
Puzzle (2)	*Analysis (2)*	highway code, competition, mystery (N=2)

Upon comparing the research and control groups, the following similarities and differences can be discussed. The most common type of responses characterised the process of foreign language learning as a form of discovery and innovation. There are three similar target domains (*'Discovery', 'Hobby', 'Elixir'*) referring to the idea of how pleasant, important, and enriching language learning can be (e.g., 'sunshine', 'new equipment', 'journey'). The target domain of *'Discovery'* dominates in both the research and control sample and the richest descriptions and most vivid ideas can also be found in this category. The attitude of the research sample can be described as predominantly positive towards language learning.

The differences of the notions transferred by the metaphors can be grouped into the categories of *'Challenge', 'Pain'* and *'Puzzle'*. As for student teachers' specialising in English language teaching (STEL), metaphors of language learning were described as a challenge or process and an activity in which an excessive amount of practice is needed. The ideas of language learning suggested by the control group include negative meanings referring to the difficulties and complications of learning ('dentist, winter'). Learning can also be described by metaphors suggesting thoughts of 'route where obstacles appear, a competition of winners and losers' ('highway code, mystery').

'Culture' as a subconceptual domain

Prospective teachers' attitudes and relations toward the culture of English-speaking countries through the concept of 'Foreign language learning' (FLL) was further investigated. In our metaphor research 'Foreign language learning' as a source domain (key concept) is a viable and important resource for gaining of a deeper understanding of the educational process. Primary student teachers' experience and knowledge of the language learning situations, indicated by metaphors, reveal relations to the educational system.

The metaphors of 'Foreign language learning' as a source domain have a variety of individual representations. Improved Metaphor Analysis (IMA) has been applied to provide a clear cognitive construct for the student teachers' way of thinking (Fábián, 2013). IMA follows the basic principles of metaphor analysis techniques (Vámos, 2003), highlighting a model with a focus on the importance of creating a new unit (target domain) as the secondary metaphor. 'A further merit of creating metaphors lies in the fact that it suits the investigation of beliefs and attitudes related to complex concepts even more' (Fábián, 2013, p. 1027) and it applies to the research process and analysis presented below.

As was stated by the procedure of data process in our research, the student teachers' metaphor-related concepts can be divided into propositions.

The contents of each proposition were explored carefully and rearranged into new categories, in which each new category is featured based upon the shared meaning of the included propositions. The newly created secondary metaphors retain the original visual representation of the target concept. Finally, the contents of the target domain have been analysed to establish the conceptual meaning of the characteristic features (Fábián, 2013).

Since metaphors must be studied for how they present the world rather than simply for what they say about that world, *'Culture'* - as one of the subconceptual domains and at the same time as a secondary metaphor (source domain) in the conceptual category of *'Discovery'* – consists of seven explanations of *'Foreign language learning'* (source domain).

Regarding the metaphors of student teachers specialising in English Language (STEL), two subcategories of *'Discovery'* can be distinguished as *'Culture'* and *'Learning'*. The subgroup of *'Culture'* indicates different views and notions concerning the concept of foreign language learning. It can be viewed as a tool that helps one become familiarised with new cultures and people in the world according to the metaphors of both student teachers specialising in English Language (STEL) and those specialising in other subjects (STOS).

Spontaneous metaphors which belong to the category of *'Culture'*, given by STEL, are the following: 'journey' (2) and 'superpower' (*'journey, because it is an opportunity to get to know new cultures'); 'a new tool, because it helps us learn about a new culture'; 'a superpower, because I am understood and can understand people in the world').

The subgroup of *'Discovery'* in the sample of STOS include concepts representing language learning as *Culture*, *Improvement* and *Possibility*. According to the three conceptual subdomains the approach of foreign language learning provides the chance of *'Discovery'* and is regarded the most important by this group of students.

The subconceptual domains of '*Culture*', '*Improvement*' and '*Possibility*' demonstrate language learning as an adventurous, exciting, and effective process. The concepts of '*Culture*' subgroup: 'yin/yang', 'journey', 'ticket' or 'adventure' focus on new and unknown traditions, mysterious places *('yin/ yang which aligns different cultures', 'a journey which never ends', 'adventure, because I can discover the world', 'a ticket to a new world I will be a part of').*

According to Jensen (2006), metaphors are commonly categorized as: active, inactive, dead, and foundational while their significance to educational research must be understood. In our research the theories of spontaneous metaphors are mainly active metaphors because active metaphors 'convey metaphoric connection between the topic term[2] and vehicle term[3]' (Jensen, 2006, p. 110) and salient characteristics of both terms can be described, furthermore the metaphoric resonance between the two concepts can be determined.

In active metaphors, the topic term ('Foreign language learning') must be interpreted through the vehicle terms. The target domain (*Culture*) characterises the source domain ('Foreign language learning') as it is described by the following metaphors (*Figure 2*). While these opinions take the form of a variety of utterances from simple structures to complex sentences at this stage, we introduce the concept of proposition, which is the smallest meaningful unit of the argument that supports the metaphoric statement. According to Simsek (2014) the concepts of 'Culture' domain tend to be mainly interactional (compare structural or functional metaphors in Simsek, 2014). Metaphor according to the source domain is a process which connects people and provides the opportunity to get information about new places and showcases cultural diversity. (See *Figure 2*)

Figure 2
Metaphors of 'Culture' (target domain)
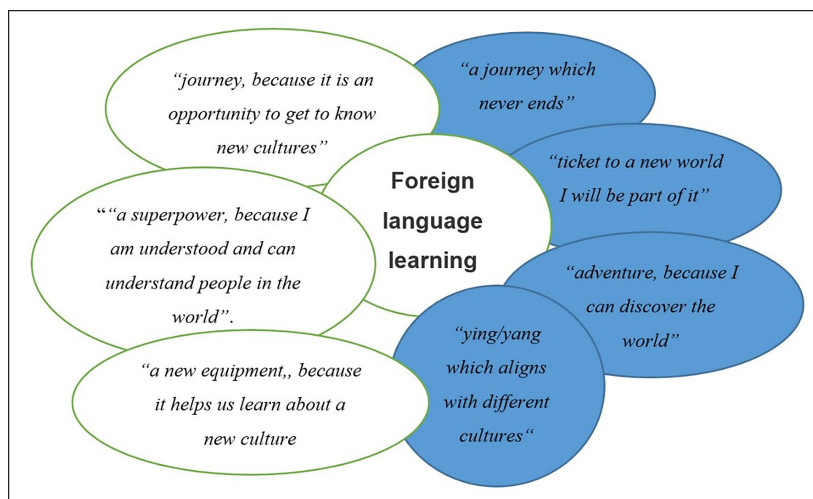
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[3] source domain

[4] target domain

Summary

Investigating prospective teachers' attitudes and relations toward the culture of English-speaking countries regarding their specialization, the results show that the concept structure of 'Foreign language learning' (source domain) is dominated by a cultural aspect. Based upon the spontaneous metaphors of the research and control group, the structure of the source domain has the following features in common:

  – *FLL* ('Foreign language learning') *is characterised by intercultural features, the encountering of cultures (differences, infinity, discovery, learning and understanding);*
  – FLL is an activity that provides relaxation and enjoyment;
  – FLL bears knowledge about and curiosities of the world;
  – FLL has practical purposes: essential, understanding and being understood;
  – FLL requires practice (only in the group of STEL);
  – FLL is challenging: it is based on rules and is a continuous improvement (only in the group of STOS).

As the previous structure indicates, metaphors refer to different elements of the key concept ('Foreign language learning'). During the process of learning a foreign language, students create and modify the meaning structure of the 'Foreign Language Learning' and the prototype of the target concept. One of the most important features of metaphor research is that prospective teachers use these metaphors to express themselves even as these concepts remain largely unconscious, As such, metaphors indicate a great deal about students' hidden thoughts and emotions towards 'Foreign language learning'. As stated by Fónagy (2000), a metaphor is like a Rorschach test as it can also express what we do not know and thus exceed our intentions.

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