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Improving the Speaking Skills Through the Use of Metaphor on First Year English Major Students.

El desarrollo de la expresión oral a través del uso de la metáfora en los estudiantes de primer año de la carrera Inglés.

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Abstract

At present most approaches in foreign language teaching are governed by communication as the final goal of any course emphasizing on the development of speaking as a language skill. Speaking is the most useful way man uses to express his knowledge, and feelings. It is the main means used to establish relationships among people. Research indicates that the speaking skill is associated with success in many areas of life, including students learning and academic performance, and such studies has demonstrated that different languages do exhibit different patterns of figurative language use. Since metaphor has been present in language thus in literature, it is important for learners to have a better understanding of metaphor by integrating them into the materials of the course from the very beginning. So, this work offers some considerations to foster first year English students´ speaking skill in the teaching learning process of Integrated English Practice I through the use of metaphors as they are considered the basic building block of language. Consequently, the authors outline basic important propositions

for the organization of activities aimed at overcoming the student needs on lexical items by using metaphor which will serve as a guide for teaching. The work will be included on Integrated English Practice I content and the activities will demand inference in communicative situations and collaboration to help students for comprehending metaphor. As a result, the examination of metaphor from the learner's point of view might offer valuable insights into a large and important area of vocabulary.

Resumen

En la actualidad la mayoría de las tendencias para la enseñanza de la lengua extranjera están condicionadas por la comunicación como elemento fundamental, con énfasis en el desarrollo de la expresión oral. La expresión oral es una habilidad que permite el enunciado de ideas y es vista como la herramienta más usada en el intercambio de conocimientos y sentimientos en el proceso de comunicación. Investigadores demuestran que la expresión oral está asociada a éxitos en muchas áreas de la vida, e incluyen el aprendizaje de los educandos y su desarrollo académico en diferentes idiomas los cuales reflejan el uso de patrones del lenguaje figurativo. Desde que la metáfora es vista tanto en el lenguaje como en la literatura, es necesario para los educandos incluirla en los programas de estudio desde las primeras etapas para su comprensión. Por consiguiente, el trabajo ofrece algunas consideraciones para el desarrollo de la expresión oral a través del tratamiento y uso de la metáfora en los estudiantes de primer año la carrera de inglés por considerar la metáfora como la construcción básica del lenguaje. Por su parte las autoras proponen actividades a través de la asignatura Práctica Integral de la Lengua Inglesa I con el objetivo de sistematizar elementos lexicales usando la metáfora y así contribuir al desarrollo de la expresión oral de los educandos. Como resultado de la propuesta, la

comprensión y uso de la metáfora permitirá a los estudiantes ampliar léxico y por ende adquirirán mayor elocuencia a la hora de expresarse oralmente.

Keywords: speaking; motivation; creativity; lexis; metaphor; collaboration.

Palabras claves: expresión oral; motivación; creatividad; léxico; colaboración.

Introduction

Most approaches in foreign language teaching are governed by communication as the final goal of any course with emphasis on the development of speaking as a language skill. Speaking is the ability to express ideas when sharing information. It is the most useful way man uses to express his knowledge, and feelings. It is the main means used to establish relationships among people. Research indicates that the speaking skill is associated with success in many areas of life, including students learning and academic performance, and such studies has demonstrated that different languages do exhibit different patterns of figurative language use. Since metaphor has been present in language thus in literature, it is important for learners to have a better understanding of metaphor by integrating them into the method and materials of the course from the very beginning.

Metaphor may be defined from different perspectives. A Glossary of Rhetorical Terms defined it as an implied comparison achieved through a figurative use of words. The word is used not in its literal sense, emotions and associations from one context are associated with objects and entities in a different context.

On the other hand, the term metaphor in Greek means to carry something across or transfer which suggests many of the more elaborate definitions. In many dictionaries, it is defined as a comparison between two things, based on resemblance or similarity, without using like or as.

Aristotle viewed metaphor as giving the thing a name that belongs to something else. He described the process of understanding a metaphor as finding similarities within differences and suggested that, in order to reach an interpretation, hearers would need to draw on shared cultural understandings. Cameron (2003) pointed out that Aristotle makes a point some later philosophers ignore: that metaphor is not a matter of semantics or pragmatics, but of both. However the tradition is to see metaphor as decoration and comparison.

For most English teachers, metaphor is only an element of figurative language by which one thing is compared to another. The traditional view supports that words are used metaphorically in order to create an artistic or rhetorical effect, to impress people or to express a deep emotion. But contemporary views launched by Lakoff and Johnson ´s (1980) revealed that metaphor is not only a matter of poetic device, but a part of the conceptual word.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) brought a cognitive turn to Metaphorology and metaphor became a cognitive mechanism through which people construct a conceptual world. In order words, metaphor was recognized and highlightened because of their conceptual importance. It is fundamental to the structuring of thought and language, and people usually use the concepts and lexis for one semantic area to think and talk about other areas. They explain that metaphor is an integral part for the ordinary ´s people every day language and thought and called itirreplaceable because it allows people to understand themselves and the world in ways that no other modes of thought can.

Metaphor is so pervasive that every single word of the language may have originated from a metaphor. Piero Scaruffi (2001) points out that some thinkers have even suggested that all languages may be metaphorical. Believing that metaphor is a key element of reasoning and

thinking; people must construct and understand it, as metaphor is an essential part of being a mind.

Consequently, the identification and interpretation of metaphor both in day-to-day language act as a necessity and beyond that it has a great role in human thought understanding and reasoning.

It was not until the 18th century that metaphor tends to deal with what is generally and universally acceptable. They needed no readers to complete it or to join in with any thought process. They were pre-packaged finished products of language.

Some metaphor researchers of the twentieth century still hold some value for metaphor. These theories work with restricted views of metaphor influenced by the rise of logical positivism and philosophy, though the dominance of cognitive linguistics.

Modern and cognitive view took the attraction of linguistics and prepared a kind of base for empirical studies. This interest resulted in many researchers that aimed at reevaluation of metaphor, giving an end to the classical views and placing metaphor in the center of understanding and thought. They challenged the traditional view by claiming:

- Metaphor is the main mechanism through which people can comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning.

- Metaphor allows people to understand a relatively abstract or inherently structured subject matter.

- Metaphor is based on correspondences with the people´s experiences rather than on similarities.

- The system of conceptual metaphor is mostly unconscious, automatic, and it is used with no noticeable effort, just like the linguistic system.

- The metaphor system is central to the people's understanding of experience and to the way we act on that understanding.

- The metaphor system plays a major role in both the grammar and lexicon of the language.

It is clear that the contemporary theory of metaphor is revolutionary in many respects. They see metaphor as a key instrument both in producing new expressions, and organizing human thought. Besides, they have useful practical applications in foreign language teaching.

Consequently, the authors outline basic propositions which are important for the organization of activities aimed at overcoming the student needs on lexical items by using metaphor which will serve as a guide for teaching and learning from a meaningful perspective way. The work will be included on Integrated English Practice I content by means of activities which demand reasonable inference in   communicative situations, collaboration, and creativity to help students' strategies for comprehending metaphors. As a result, the examination of metaphor from the learner's point of view might offer valuable insights into a large and important area of vocabulary.

So, the article offers some considerations to foster first year English Major students´ speaking skill in the teaching learning process of Integrated English Practice I through the use of metaphor as they are in everywhere - descriptions, labels, thoughts, feelings, and as well as they are considered the basic building block of language.

Development

Language is usually considered to be rule-governed, but these rules when speaking can be broken when people use metaphor in language processing. All languages allow people to convey information via metaphor.

In recent years, when teaching foreign languages, the speaking skill acquisition has partly increased, as a result the work which had been exposed in the 31st International Association of Foreign Language English Teachers (IATEFL) Conference University of Manchester in England by Deignan A. (1998), it was demonstrated the complexity and importance of lexical phenomena such as fixed expressions.

Lakoff and Johnson ´s (1980) argued a great deal that language is motivated by metaphor and the students need to develop metaphoric competence: awareness of metaphor and strategies for comprehending and creating metaphors. Considering that they are an integral part of the language and should not be ignored. Not only for the acquisition of vocabulary, but also to facilitate learning grammar.

More generally metaphor is a way of conveying a proposition or referring to an object via word or phrase that literally denotes some other object concept, and people for a particular rhetorical effect.

Metaphor is also a predominant way of teaching and learning idiomatic expressions as well as collocations and new words. They are frequently used in poetry through various ways. Therefore it is necessary and important to understand the meaning through language and literature. Metaphor is a key to open the door of understanding and creating meaning for all learners.

First year English Major Students are aware with a speaking section which provides varied practice of the English language involving meaningful exchanges in different communicative situations. The section includes language functions, the grammatical uses, and lexical areas associated with the functions in the syllabus.

Therefore, the students should be encouraged to communicate among themselves using the language already known by them in such areas and elicit the new language content, in terms of vocabulary items and grammatical structures that would be necessary to meet the communicative goals of Integrated English Practice I lessons.

This subject, from the first English Language Major curriculum,comprises theme topics related to descriptions of the weather, people, places, housing, occupations, and others which allow the students to re-contextualize new language items. These lexical items may be represented by metaphor with specific lexical rules and meaning.

Through thesubject, the students may be oriented that metaphor is used in a way that is slightly different from its basic meaning. For example, when dealing with the topic related to the weather´s description, and predicting it, they may be focused on vocabulary items to enlarge their understanding of the language area.

Taking as point of departure the word *sunny,* it may be explained its first meaning is connected with the weather, so may be talked about *a sunny day*. However, sunny can also be used in expressions like *a sunny smile,* the children's sunny faces to mean happy; in these collocations sunny is used in a metaphorical way.

Another example may be with the expression light and *dark light*. In English it is associated with happiness. Hence a face shines with pleasure and eyes shine with excitement or delight. If someone's face *lights up* or their *eyes light up*, they show that they suddenly feel happy. If an atmosphere lightens or a mood lightens, it becomes more relaxed or cheerful than it was.

On the other hand, *darkness* is associated with unhappiness and negative feelings. *Dark thoughts* are gloomy or sinister ones and *dark days* or *dark times* are unpleasant times to live

through. If someone's face darkens or their eyes darken or someone's expression darkens, then it is known that that person is unhappy, often because they are feeling angry.

Words associated with *fire* and *heat* often suggests *anger* in English. A heated debate, a heated discussion or a heated conversation is one in which people disagree in an angry way with each other.

When dealing with people´s descriptions, the teacher may explain if someone has *a fiery temper*, it means that he/she *often gets suddenly angry*. The word *flare* means show a bright light in the dark. So if someone refers to tempers flared, it means that people became angry with each other. Similarly *violence flares up* and *troubles flare up.* These all mean that *problems which existed in the past suddenly become serious again.*

However, not all metaphors relating to fire suggest anger. If someone feels very embarrassed, his/her cheeks burn with embarrassment. A *blaze* is a very bright fire. It can be talked about a blaze of glory or a blaze of publicity meaning.

In addition, the word fair may be explained in different contexts. For example, expressing colour when someone has a *fair hair*, and denoting reasonable making reference to a *fair decision.   Meaning dry* and *sunny,* related to a *fair weather* for going for a walk.

In most of the cases, the meaning is suggested by the context, but these are figurative meanings which make the students more difficult to attribute to an actual meaning to the word, and the expressions are more useful for them to regard the whole expression as a single unit of thought.

Besides, metaphor can be thought as a matter of collocation, in that the degree of metaphorical effect depends upon the mutual unexpectedness of two or more co-occurring

words. Likewise learning collocations is a good idea to expand vocabulary items. Some collocations are fixed expressions also, they can express the following:

a) Give you the most natural way to say something, for example: *smoking is strictly forbidden* is more natural than *smoking is strongly forbidden.*

b) Give you alternative ways of saying something, which may be more colourful/expressive or more precise, for instance: instead of repeating, it was very cold and very dark, we can say, *it was bitterly cold and pitch dark.*

c) Improve the student's style in communicating: instead of saying poverty causes crime, you can say *poverty breeds crime*; instead of saying a big meal you can say *a substantial meal.*

Examples for more collocations describing appearance:

- A short, *dumpy woman* was selling flowers at a stall on the street corner, (short and quite fat woman; used more often of women than of men).

- A *portly gentleman* answered the door, (fat and round; usually used of middle-aged and older men).

- A *lanky youth* was standing at the street corner, (tall and thin and tending to move awkwardly!).

- He bears a striking resemblance to his father, (looks remarkably like)

- The lady who entered the room had a very *striking appearance*, (unusual appearance, in a positive, attractive sense).

Examples for collocations with housing:

She *left home* to go to university, but moving away from her family made her *feel homesick.*

Peter's back from a *year abroad*. His family are *throwing a party* to welcome him home.

To a guest who's just arrived, *come in and make yourself at home* while I finish getting dinner ready, (relax and make yourself comfortable).

I haven't lived in Oxford for long, but I already *feel at home* there.

I'd like to buy a *second home* near the coast, (house used only for weekends, holidays, etc.)

Taking into account these views, the authors consider that metaphor is a central mechanism through which words develop multiple meaning and therefore is of practical importance. That´s why, metaphor should not be excluded or postponed, it must be integrated to the materials of the course in first year English major students.

The authors suggest some activities designed to help to increase first year English major students´ speaking skills through the use of metaphor. These activities will help students to see how familiar words can be used in extra, interesting ways.

Activity 1

Objective: to identify fixed idioms in the passages listened.

a)   While you´re listen the following passage, try to notice metaphorical language usage.

My father and my two older brothers are all well-built with broad shoulders. My father is going bald, but he still has a very youthful appearance for someone who is over forty. My brothers both have thick hair and bushy eyebrows. My younger brother is only two — he's just a tiny tot, but he's very cute. My mother has dark hair — in fact my mother had jet-black hair when she was younger, before she went grey - but on my father's side he has fair hair.

Hi, Mave. Luke and I have just moved into our dream home. It's a big old four-story house. It's got a spacious living room which has a wonderful view of the park, and a cozy study where we can both work. And there are some lovely light, airy bedrooms which overlook the garden. There is a separate basement flat, which we might turn into a granny flat for my mother. And if we want to add an extension' there's room for that too. It needs to be completely renewed, but Luke and I have always wanted to do up

Come and visit. Love, Julia.

Activity 2

Objective: to re- contextualize fixed idioms in the passage read.

Grasp as much information you can from the description you listened, and tell the teacher your own version.

Activity 3

Objective: to use fixed idioms and engage the students´ interests on descriptions.

Pair work

Each pair will be given an idiom identifying or describing someone´s feature. Make up a conversation using at least three of them.

A weather friend   ….. A friend that deserts in difficulty

Blue –eyes boys ……..favorite

Gift of the gap……. The ability to speak well

To lose ground… to become less popular

Cool as cucumber……not nervous or embarrass.

Wears heart on sleeves…..express feelings openly

Burn candle at both ends …. ….To be extravagant

Heart to heart talk……..frank talk

Wet and behind the ears….. Young and without experience

Ride in a high horse….. Fell superior

The salt of the earth …… very good and honest

 Birds of the same feather ….. People of some character

Activity 4

Objective: to use fixed idioms in descriptions.

Find in a dictionary the meaning of the following idioms and use them to enhance

explanations and understandings and to explain yourselves more clearly.

Herculean task

Read between the lines

Making hay while the sun shines

To make a mountain of a molehill

Cut no ice

Pour cats and dogs

Let the grass grow under the feet

Conclusions

1. The study of metaphor is of practical importance because it is quite updated in

    everyday English language use.

2. First year English Major Students may gain more insights into fixed expressions in

    the language, and increase their understanding and usage.

3. The activities may serve as a vehicle to foster first year English Major Students´ speaking skill in the teaching learning process of Integrated English Practice I through the use of metaphor.

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