Cooking verbs and metaphor

Contrastive study of Greek and French

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Abstract

The present cross-linguistic study deals with cooking verbs in Greek and French in the light of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It intends to explore uniformity and diversity in metaphorical conceptualization and the lexical choices they underlie. It also discusses the significance of metaphor awareness in foreign language teaching.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, cooking verbs, corpora, cross-linguistic study, metaphor awareness

1. Introduction

According to the model of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987a; Lakoff 1993; Kövecses 2002), we can understand a conceptual domain which is abstract and subjective (target domain) in terms of another conceptual domain which is concrete and commonly experienced (source domain). The conceptual metaphor, “firmly established as one important component of a general theory of metaphor” (Steen 1999: 57), has received considerable attention right from the beginning of its appearance.

Many commonalities between languages have been recorded. “Metaphorical mappings vary in universality. Some seem to be universal, others are widespread, and some seem to be culture-specific” (Lakoff 1993: 245). According to researches carried out, “there have been a number of cross-linguistic studies which have investigated the possibility that metaphors are not language-specific” (Deignan & Potter 2004:1232). Nevertheless, criticism has also been directed at the groundbreaking work of Lakoff and Johnson. According to Kövecses (2004) we should take into account the universality of metaphorical conceptualization as well as its diversity. Kövecses (2010) argues that the universality of some metaphors can be proven or rejected by means of research in two typologically different languages.
2. Aims of the present study
Many researchers (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Tomlinson 1986; Diller 1991; Deignan 1997; Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Berrada 2007; Hassan 2010; Khajeh & Imran 2012) have focused on metaphorical conceptualizations of cooking, eating and food.

Bearing in mind the prevalence of metaphor in many discourse types (Wilson 1990; Charteris-Black 2004), the goal of this paper is to find the points of contact and conflict as regards metaphors related to cooking in Greek and French. We are interested in the lexical expressions they use to reflect world conceptualization. Cuisines of the two languages-cultures we are concerned with are characterized by rich culinary history. Greece has a special food tradition and France has the reputation of being a country with great gastronomy. Cooking is a common source domain ready to conceptualize target domains.

3. Methodology
3.1 Resources
In order to gather the verbs which are the subject of our research, we compiled two monolingual corpora. The French corpus is a collection of 850 recipes from the TV show Côté Cuisine launched by the channel France 3. The Greek corpus also contains 850 recipes presented on the TV show Chef στον αέρα launched by the channel ΣΚΑΪ (SKY). The French corpus provided around 150 verbs, while we established a list of approximately 120 verbs from the Greek corpus.

We enriched our lists with the aid of general and cooking dictionaries. We also made use of them to verify the meaning of some verbs.

3.2 Delimitation of the research
We delimited our study by excluding fixed expressions, e.g. laisser quelqu’un mijoter dans son jus (to stew in one’s own juice), ἕψαρσε στα χείλη (to bidevil), multiword verbs, e.g. cuire à la vapeur (to steam), ἕψαρσε στο γκριλ (to grill) and polysemous verbs, e.g. couper (to cut), σπάω (to break). Also, they are not concerns of this current contribution verbs which denote actions following the cooking procedure, e.g. τρώω (to eat), digérer (to digest).

1 http://programmes.france3.fr/cote-cuisine
2 http://www.chefonair.gr
3.3 Corpus

A corpus approach can highlight the systematic mapping of a domain onto another. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) ensure the significance of the context that really matters in several cases. A contextualized approach must be taken on metaphor (Leezenberg 2001; Cameron 2003; Cornejo 2007). According to Deignan (2005: 37) “the distinction between systematic and one-shot metaphors is also of interest to a linguistic description and it is relatively easy to establish using corpus data”.

To conduct our analysis we used homogeneous texts which fall under the field of journalism and come from the World Wide Web and, especially, the French Press (Le Figaro, Le Monde, Libération, Humanité, etc.) and the Greek Press (Μακεδονία, Τα Νέα, Έδος, etc.). Publicly available data are numerous, up-to-date and they can originate from trust-worthy sources. We relied on the Corpus français – Université de Leipzig3, a database comprised of circa 37 million sentences (700 million words) which uses the WWW as a corpus in order to retrieve linguistic information. We also used the text corpora from the Centre for the Greek Language4, which comprise about 5 million word tokens published in the newspapers Makedonia (3 millions) and Ta Nea (2 millions).

We also used dictionaries to find the metaphorical senses of cooking verbs having regard to the fact that “dictionaries do not capture all contemporary language use because there is a frequency threshold a meaning needs to pass in order to be considered sufficiently conventionalized” (Steen 2007: 100).

In order to process our language data we also used the open-source system Unitex5. We built concordances of cooking verbs and studied the results we received to identify the various linguistic realizations used to refer to other domains.

4. COOKING as source domain

In both French and Greek, COOKING is a source domain used in many metaphors. Let us consider ECONOMY as the target domain in the metaphor ECONOMY IS COOKING, a shared conceptual metaphor in both languages:

3 http://wortschatz.uni-leipzig.de/ws_fra/
5 Unitex has been developed by S. Paumier, University of Marne-la-Vallée, for the analysis of texts in natural language by using linguistic resources and tools in several languages (http://www-igm.univ-mlv.fr/~unitex/).
As it can be seen in the last example, persons in the company preparing its development are the cooks. Company’s development is the dish they are preparing. The development takes place at a slow pace like a dish that is being prepared slowly.

It must be noticed that there exist metaphorical entailments which are not expressed in both languages (Kövecses 2004), at least in lexicalized metaphors. ECONOMY IS COOKING does not specify the stage or method of the cooking procedure that is used and which can vary from one language to the other.

The examples provided below show some systematic cross-domain conceptual mappings:

POLITICS IS COOKING
(3) Μας έχουν σουβλίσει οι πολιτικοί. [Politicians have tortured (literally, spit roasted) us]
(4) Le pouvoir a pour habitude de laisser faïsander les situations. [Power is in the habit of not stopping the rot (literally, hanging)]

EMOTIONS ARE COOKING
(5) Δεν είναι καλό να ζηροφήνεσαι στη ζήλια. [It is not good to suffer (literally, roast) from jealousy]
(6) Comment rendre un garçon fou d'amour ? Fais-le mariner! [How to make a boy crazy in love? Let him stew (literally, be marinaded)! ]

PREPARING IS COOKING
(7) Εκπομπή με stand up comedy «ψήνει» το Mega-Star. [Mega-Star is preparing (literally, is baking) a stand up comedy show]
(8) Angela Lorrente fricassee déjà “Qui veut épouser mon fils”. [Angela Lorrente is already preparing (literally, is fricasseeing) “Qui veut épouser mon fils”]
5. Categorization of metaphors

Conceptual mappings are realized in a large number of linguistic metaphors. Metaphorical linguistic expressions, which “are words or other linguistic expressions that come from the language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain” (Kövecses 2010: 4), can have different levels of conventionality. Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 139) say that “conventional metaphors are metaphors that structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language”. Lakoff & Turner (1989: 55-56) argue that “At the conceptual level, a metaphor is conventional to the extent that it is automatic, effortless, and generally established as a mode of thought among members of a linguistic community”.

Lakoff (1987b) suggests four types of linguistic metaphor, including the conventionalized metaphors, a category of metaphors which contains words that preserve nowadays both their metaphorical and non-metaphorical senses, assimilated by the speakers and clear to them. The source domain is also mapped onto the target domain in many ways.

In accordance with Goatly’s (1997) classification of metaphors, conventionalized (tired) metaphors can be separated from dead (sleeping) metaphors. A conventionalized metaphor respects two characteristics which distinguish it from a dead metaphor, dependency and coreness:

[…], where a literal sense of a word is perceived as more core than an established metaphorical sense, the second sense is regarded as a conventionalized metaphor. Where there does not seem to be such a relationship of coreness and dependency between a metaphor and its literal counterpart, the metaphor is regarded as dead. (Deignan 2005: 41-42)

Cameron (2003) makes a distinction between metaphors that seem to be used deliberately and metaphors that occur because that was ‘just the way to say it’. She calls them deliberate and conventionalized. The above-mentioned distinction is discourse-derived and discourse-relative. She argues that “the deliberateness lies in the use of the linguistic metaphor in its discourse context for a particular purpose on a particular occasion. Conventionalized metaphors, on the other hand, are part of the participants’ shared language resources for talking about the particular topic” (Cameron 2003: 100-101).
In contrast to conventional metaphors, the new ones “are capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 139). Xiu (2011: 1616) states that “the study of new metaphor is an extension of the study of conventional metaphor. Conventional metaphor is characterized by a huge system of cross domain mappings, and this system is made use of in new metaphor.” As to the unconventional metaphors, the larger linguistic context can be proven necessary in view to guaranteeing the comprehension and interpretation of the metaphor (Kövecses 2009).

One pattern of metaphorical expressions that can be found in newspaper texts are so-called ‘topic-triggered’ (Koller 2003). According to Koller (2004) ‘topic-triggered metaphors’ are very often used in newspapers’ headlines, intending to grab reader’s attention (van Dijk 1988; Reah 2002). Let’s see a headline with its sub-headline drawn from the newspaper TA NEA (18 October 2013):

(9) Ψήλσ πέξδε αλάκεζα ςσκάθηα. Σα αδέιθηα πνπ έζηεζα λην ακεξηθαληθό όλεξό ηνπο ζηελ Διιάδ [They bake profits between buns.
The brothers who set up Simply Burgers live their American dream in Greece]

The lexical item κέρδη (profits), surrounded by a particular context, is used in an uncommon way. It implies ground meat. We do not usually understand κέρδη as ground meat. This ‘conceptual contrast’ leads us to identify the utterance as metaphorical (Romero & Soria 2005). “The meaning a metaphor will have for me will be partly culturally determined and partly tied to my past experiences” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:142).

The use of cookery language here does not result from a random choice. Ψήνω acquires a metaphorical meaning and was selected because of the surrounding

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6 ‘Topic-triggered’ metaphorical citations cannot be found only in Press. Based on the metaphor MAKING A FILM IS COOKING the creators of the French film Comme un chef invented metaphors presented at the opening credits of the film such as:

Scenario et dialogues décantés par Daniel Cohen
Musique concoctée par Nicola Piovani
Image façonnée, tamisée puis filtrée par Robert Fraisse
Costumes effilés par Emmanuelle Youchnovski
[Scenario and dialogues decanted by Daniel Cohen
Music concocted by Nicola Piovani
Picture moulded, sifted and filtered by Robert Fraisse
Costumes flaked by Emmanuelle Youchnovski]
linguistic context. Despite the fact that profits cannot be baked, either in terms of material or immaterial benefits, the concept is used effectively.

The predicate of the verb ψήνω cannot be κέρδη since the latter is something we do not put in the oven in order to bake it. The two concepts used literally are incompatible. Instead, foodstuffs can be used for this purpose and achieve profits.

Deignan (2005) argues that borders between conventionalized and innovative metaphors cannot be clear-cut. Metaphors can be considered as not belonging to the typical language use if the occurrences are rare, after a search in large-scale data. Steen & Gibbs (1999: 3) point out that “people may only have a subset of particular metaphors for a particular target domain, but not others”. There is consequently a possibility that a metaphor can be or not considered conventional.

According to Steen (2007: 97) “Dictionaries have been used as a convenient starting point to circumvent the problem of intuitions about distinct but conventionalized meanings in a number of studies of metaphor”, since we take account of their weaknesses (Fauconnier 1997).

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) identify three types of conceptual metaphor: structural, ontological, and orientational. In the structural metaphor, “the source domain provides a relatively rich knowledge structure”, with which we are familiar, “for the target concept” (Kövecses 2002: 37). We would probably expect similarities to a great extent between two domains. On the other hand, different methods of cooking in both cultures do not account for different conceptualization. For this reason, a comparison by using a mere juxtaposition of them would be a simplistic approach. If this was the case, verbs which denote a method of cooking that exists in both cultures, would only create resemblances.

Metaphors tend to be universal or near-universal at the generic-level. Specific-level metaphors tend to be different cross-linguistically (Kövecses 2008). Also, instantiations of the same conceptual metaphor can vary in both languages. Hence, it makes sense to explore the conceptual metaphors and the linguistic forms in which they ‘breathe life’.

In order to investigate similarities and differences between the two languages we are interested in, we are based on the combinations proposed by Kövecses (2003) and the configurations suggested by Deignan, Gabrys & Solska (1997) between any two languages.
6. Greek and French cooking verbs: A comparison

Two cooking verbs can share the literal meaning, the non-literal meaning and the conceptual metaphor. In addition, verbs with the same non-literal meaning can express other non-literal meanings. Let us take a closer look at the verbs *mitonner* and *mijoter* (to slow-cook). In the culinary jargon, the two verbs are used in the same way.

The literal meaning of the verbs is ‘to cook food slowly, over a gentle heat’. Verbs with a similar meaning are in Greek ζηγνβξάδσ (to boil slowly over a gentle heat) and ζηγνςήλσ (to cook slowly over a gentle heat). We can have metaphorical mappings such as:

**PREPARING IS COOKING**

(10) *Mais qu’attend Citroën pour mitonner une nouvelle 2CV ?* [What is Citroën waiting for to prepare a new 2CV?]

(11) *On vous mijote une surprise.* [We are preparing a surprise for you]

(12) *Σηγνςήλεηαη το Audi Quattro με τους 600 ίππους!* [Audi Quattro with 600 horses is being prepared!]

(13) *Σηγνβξάδνπλ νη δηεξγαζίεο ελόεη εθινγώλ.* [Processes in view of the elections are being prepared]

However, σηγνψήνω is an example with more than one non-literal meanings, e.g.:

(14) *Οι Ελληνες «σηγνψήνονται» κάτω από τον ήλιο.* [Greeks are toasted under the sun]

(15) *Τον Άγουστο κάρκαν, τώρα σηγνψήνονται.* [In August they were burnt, now they are suffering]

Languages can map notions in different ways. Verbs with the same literal meaning do not always share the non-literal meaning. In Greek, a verb with a correspondent non-literal meaning of *mitonner* and *mijoter* is the hypernym μαγειρεύω (to cook).

The first metaphorical sense provided by the *Dictionary of Standard Modern Greek* is ‘to prepare in secret something harmful’. It can also mean ‘to falsify’ or ‘to formulate something according to one’s belief or judgment’. The evaluation is negative. For instance:

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7 It is important to say that, due to lack of space and because of the complexity of the matter, it is out of the scope of this research to investigate in detail all metaphorical mappings mentioned.
PLOTTING IS COOKING

(16) Μυστικά, μαγειρεύουν συνωμοσίες εναντίον του λαού. [They secretly plot against people]

Nevertheless, examples from the corpus showed that the evaluation is not always negative and the verb can mean to plan or to prepare.

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(17) ΡΑΔΙΟ ΑΡΒΥΛΑ: «Μαγειρεύνουν» νέα εκπομπή. [RADIO ARVYLA: They are preparing a new show]

The non-literal meanings of cuisiner, equivalent verb in French, are ‘to falsify’ and also ‘to question’, ‘to interrogate’.

The verb καρυκένω means to add spices to a food to make it tasty. In French there are three near-equivalents with subtle differences in the literal meaning: assaisonné (to season / to dress a salad), épicer (to add spice to) or pimenter (to season with pepper / to spice up).

Metaphorically, the French verbs mean ‘to embellish something by making it more interesting, more pleasant’. LIVING IS COOKING becomes a reality in the following example:

(18) Comment pimenter sa vie et casser la routine? [How can you spice up your life and break the routine?]

According to the Dictionary of Standard Modern Greek, καρυκένω means ‘to interlard one’s speech with quips, imagery or other ways that can give a lighthearted tone in a speech, a serious or a tedious text’. This meaning was also found in the French corpus in a low number of examples. Its use is attributable to stylistic reasons.

Apart from these cases, there are also verbs with a more specific sense like muscadier (to season with muscade), poivrer (to season with pepper), ailler (to flavor with garlic), safraner (to season with saffron), vinaigrer (to season with vinegar), λαδούνο (to season with oil), αλατοπιπερόνα (to add salt and pepper) which are not part of the verbs that create commonly heard metaphors. However, we found some rare occurrences such as:
Among these verbs there is the exception of αιαηίδσ (to salt). In the Dictionary of Standard Modern Greek, the non-literal use of αιαηίδσ is ‘to add something clever or enjoyable in discourse’. The Dictionary of Modern Greek (2005) makes no reference to this metaphorical use. Yet, we can stop to the literal meaning of the verb which is to season food with salt, a product that gives savor and improves flavor. In the following example, the metaphorical transfer from the domain of cooking to the domain of everyday life is clear. LIVING IS COOKING, by adding salt we make mundane life more beautiful:

(20) Προκαλούν την ενολλαγή, αλατίζοντας την άνοιξη καιημερινότητα μας. [They cause alternation, adding zest to our tasteless everyday life]

However, αιαηίδσ manifests also structures with a negative evaluation. In the following citation it means ‘to make more intense’:

(21) Μιλούσε χαμηλόφωνα χωρίς την υπερβολή που συχνότερα αλατίζει κάθε συζήτηση. [He was talking in a low voice without the hysterical exaggeration that usually makes a conversation more intense]

Regarding the French equivalent verb saler (to salt), we did not find a systematic mapping. An example where it is used metaphorically is the following:

(22) Salez votre vie ! Selon une étude, le sel ne serait pas si mauvais que ça pour la santé. [Salt your life! According to a research, salt is probably not bad for health]

In French, saler is used to describe an expensive price, bill or invoice. In this case, seasoning with salt is unpleasant.

Verbs without a literal equivalent in the other language, e.g. larder and entrelarder (to lard), can have their own non-literal meaning(s). It must be mentioned that the domains which conceptualize a notion can often be different. Truffer (to garnish with truffles) does not have an equivalent verb in Greek. The non-literal meanings of truffer are ‘to fill with things scattered in abundance’ or ‘to stuff’. SCATTERING IS COOKING motivates the existence of the linguistic expressions:
(23) Il s’agit de truffer une maison de caméras cachées. [It is a matter of putting all over the house hidden cameras]

(24) Il peut juste truffer de balles la tête de son ancien complice. [He can just put many bullets in the head of his ex-accomplice]

(25) Ils rêvaient de le truffer de casinos ce littoral. [They were dreaming of filling this littoral with casinos]

Based on a different concept, SCATTERING IS GARDENING, the lexical items preferred for this purpose in Greek are σπέρνω⁸ (to sow) and φυτεύω (to plant).

(26) Η εταιρία είχε «φυτέψει» σωστήματα παρακολούθησης. [The company had put watching systems]

(27) Έσπειραν παντού σχολές. [They created faculties everywhere]

7. Metaphor awareness

Foreign language learners are not aware of the use of metaphors in everyday life, despite the fact that they use them. They are neither familiar with metaphors in the foreign language, which can provoke to them confusion accompanied by inaccurate and erroneous use.

“Research has shown that non-literal language poses a problem for second language learners whether it is in their ability to interpret, process, or produce metaphors” (Kathpalia & Carmel 2011). Metaphor awareness should not be missed from the foreign language classroom focusing on shared as well as different metaphorical themes (Kalyuga & Kalyuga 2008).

Taking due account of the use of corpora and taking advantage of the rich possibilities that concordances can offer (Braun 2005; Hunston 2002; Leech 1997; McEnery & Xiao 2010; Tribble & Jones 1997), we can raise students’ awareness of metaphor. The teacher can work with concordances which include citations from the literal and metaphorical sense of cooking verbs. Students can make comparisons to find the intralingual and interlingual resemblances and divergences by being interested in subjects like semantic aspects, the identity of main collocates of each verb, e.g. faire/laisser/mettre à mijoter mais faire mitonner, etc. They can also learn

⁸ Gardening is a source for metaphorical mappings in French. Semer (to sow) and planter (to plant) are used in the sense of ‘to scatter’, e.g. “…s’il ne menace pas de faire contrôler l’allocation de chaque kopeck par le Kremlin et de planter des caméras sur chaque chantier de reconstruction [...], ses ordres ne seront pas exécutés.”, “Mais ils ont les moyens à priori de semer des troubles graves dans quelques gouvernorats”.

to make correct use of (near-)equivalents and generate their own examples using the same verbs or other parts of speech related to these verbs, e.g. \(\text{αλατίζω} \rightarrow \text{αλατοπίπερο, αλάτι και πιπέρι} \) (salt and pepper).

Enhancing metaphor awareness can also contribute to the better understanding of fixed expressions (Kövecses & Szabó 1996; Boers 2004).

It can be reasonably supposed that we must take into consideration variables like the profile of the foreign language learner (age, level, mother tongue, etc.). “As regards the issue of age, it seems that adults are more susceptible to successful application of the cognitive linguistic framework” (Andreou & Galantamos 2008: 73).

Figure 1. Extract of the Unitex concordance for rissoler

8. Conclusion

We should first mention that the discourse perspective we adopted to conduct our research has turned out to be substantial. We located non-literal senses included but also not itemized in the dictionaries. The existence of both conventional and new metaphors in corpora requires our attention and strengthens the view that new metaphors should not be marginalized. They also have far-reaching effects in discourse and we are proposing to delve into them as well as the conditions of their creation.

When the literal meaning of two or more cooking verbs in Greek and French is the same, the linguistic manifestations reflecting the conceptual metaphors they are tied to can be either common or different. The same linguistic realities can also derive from verbs with a different literal meaning. It must be noted that attributes can be based on different conceptualizations stemming from specific semantic features or different domains, including the cases of absence of equivalent cooking verbs in the one of two languages. Verbs may also differ in productivity of their non-literal meanings.

It is also important to say that (near-)equivalents of a verb in the framework of the same language have not necessarily created conventional non-literal meanings to define a reality, e.g. σοτάρο, τσιγαρίζω, καβουρδιζω (to sauté).
Taken in conjunction, the findings presented in this study suggest that metaphor under the scope of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory still remains a matter of great interest to explore.

9. Perspectives
This contribution reflects arguably only part of the research in the domain of cooking verbs and metaphor. Our interests are of diverse nature. Further study is needed to enable an analysis of quantitative data and the examinations of aspects like the tendency of certain verbs to occur in the present or past tense, the active or the passive, their particular use in language styles, etc. We should also focus on other parts of speech that can have a metaphorical use, for example: τσιγάρισμα, ψημένος, dénøyautage, assaisonné, and fixed expressions which have among their constituent words a lexical unit form the domain of cooking. Needless to say that a thorough study of metaphorical thought in culture should form an integral part of the wider research. “Two languages or varieties may have the same conceptual metaphor but the linguistic expression of the conceptual metaphor may be influenced or shaped by differences in cultural-ideological traits and assumptions characterizing different cultures” (Kövecses (2003: 319). The metonymy-metaphor continuum must also be further addressed. Finally, the comparative study between Greek and French can extend to other languages.

References


