Raising Metaphor Awareness in English for Law Enforcement

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Abstract

Metaphor awareness is an asset for the ESP teacher, although it is not usually present in the second language curriculum. The discourse of technical expert groups in the field of crime is saturated with metaphor. In the Police Training Centre located in Avila, metaphor awareness raising activities are successfully included in the police ESP syllabus as a language learning strategy. Students in the second course of the Executive Scale of the Spanish National Police (CEFR B1) receive input in conceptual metaphors related to drugs, offences and offenders, police officers and equipment, and penalties and penitentiaries. This enables them to understand new specialized terms, enhances L2 vocabulary retention, and improves motivation, learner’s autonomy, and intercultural competence. Metaphors are entitled to find their way into any law enforcers’ foreign language teaching curriculum.

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1. Theoretical background

Semino (2008: 1) defines metaphor as "the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else." Metaphor awareness is a pedagogical asset for the ESP teacher, although it is not usually present in the second language curriculum (Doiz and Elizari 2013). It has been widely studied, mainly in advertising, though it may prove equally useful for practitioners in other ESP areas, such as Science (Roldán-Riejos and Úbeda Mansilla 2013) or Business English (Herrera-Soler and White 2012).

The Cognitive Metaphor Theory was developed within the field of cognitive linguistics following ideas expressed in the well-known book *Metaphors We Live By*, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). They claimed much more than the traditional purely aesthetic function for metaphors and suggested that human thought is metaphorical and that we would be unable to think and act without suitable metaphoric structures. According to this theory, metaphor involves two elements: the topic or tenor and the vehicle (Bailey 2003; Littlemore and Low 2006). In other words, a metaphor consists of a target or recipient domain (an abstract concept, located in higher cortical areas; the semantic field under discussion) and a source or donor domain (a concrete concept, located in the sensory-motor system; the semantic field used to understand the target). Interconnections between these two domains, belonging to different superordinate domains, are established by analogical mappings. Metaphoric thinking maintains “double vision” and enriches the object by holding it simultaneously in two points of view (Manning 2012).

The use of metaphor in English for Law Enforcement extends "double vision" and includes the avoidance of direct references to embarrassing, distressing or taboo subjects. As a result, the technical lexicon associated with crime is saturated with a metaphoric language that has a tendency, especially in police-related environments, to a slang that names things indirectly or figuratively (Mattiello 2008).

Recognizing and contributing to metaphorical networks is a necessary skill for second language learning (Littlemore and Low 2006). Unprompted ESP students use metaphors in their area of speciality in a rather intuitive way, and training in this aspect makes them more knowledgeable about the specific language of their discourse community (Roldán-Riejos and Úbeda Mansilla 2013). Being unaware of the metaphoricity of language may involve falling into the trap of conceptual transfer from one language to another (Juchem and Krennmayr 2010).

While “simple” or “primary” metaphors are potentially universal, as they are based on universal human experiences (Kövecses 2005), complex conceptual metaphors that emerge from the primary metaphors are greatly influenced by culture, and are very apt starting points for introducing intercultural competence in the ESP classroom. Indeed, it is this link between language and the culture that requires understanding of the ways in which metaphors are able to function within the specific culture and / or sub-culture of crime and punishment in the target language studied in the classroom.

2. Teaching metaphor in English for law

While it seems clear that ESP Students at the Police Training Centre really do benefit from becoming familiar with conceptual metaphors common in English for law enforcement, the question remains, what is the best way to familiarize these ESP Students with metaphoric language? Lack of time is an obstacle, for English lessons take up two hours in the students’ weekly schedule.

ESL lessons in metaphor take place in the second year of the Executive Scale of the Spanish National Police Corps (Common European Framework of Reference level B1). This is specifically the promotion course for subinspectors. Students are divided into two sections of twenty students each.

Metaphoric awareness raising activities are included in the syllabus, following a Presentation-Practice-Production sequence in a first class period, which is continued the next day:

1. The students think of examples of Spanish metaphors connected to the police function according to their own experience as police officers (*barrer del mapa, tener el mono, pisar los talones*, etc.) and explain to the rest of the group in what contexts they used them.

2. Students are then paired up and each pair studies a series of short English texts written in a slang containing metaphorical expressions whose meaning is not apparent at first glance. They try to infer possible meanings of those expressions, bearing in mind the concept of metaphor. Knowledge of conceptual metaphors enhances conceptual
fluency and contributes to receptive fluency, that is, understanding of given metaphors. Students check their inferences in police dictionaries and online glossaries in order to fine-tune the meaning. This activity promotes critical thinking and interactive learning.

3. Partners are encouraged to use a contrastive approach and to discuss whether the English metaphor also occurs in Spanish or not. For instance, trip coincides with the Spanish viaje but cold turkey in Spanish is mono, so it is different. Activating previous knowledge helps to engage trainee officers with the topic. A procedure like this motivates student officers, since it links classroom activities with the real use of language in Law Enforcement, both in English-speaking situations and in their prior professional experience in interactions carried out in Spanish. It fosters students’ autonomy and supports intercultural competence.

In the subsequent class period, students are presented with two lists of unknown crime-related metaphorical terms, with their Spanish translations. One list contains figurative vocabulary based on the conventionalized conceptual metaphors the students are acquainted with, and the other is composed of linguistic metaphors for which no previous conceptual explanation has been provided. They are given five minutes to memorize the lists and are then required to produce the meanings of the English terms in random order. It is much easier to memorize terms connected with conceptual metaphors students are familiar with. This activity develops both memory and lateral thinking.

The range of conceptual metaphors is illustrated by the following ten selected examples belonging to the world of drugs. These, and similar metaphors (Montagne 1988) allow trainee police officers to understand in context connected metaphorical ESP drug-related expressions such as the ones provided:

2) **DRUGS ARE HAPPINESS:** ‘Joy powder’, ‘Laughing weed’, ‘Happy pill’, ‘Giggle smoke’.
3) **DRUGS ARE PLAYFUL THINGS:** ‘Go on a sleigh ride’, ‘Nose candy’.
4) **DRUGS ARE VEHICLES:** ‘Take a cruise’, ‘Cadillac express’, ‘Maserati’, ‘Trippers’.
5) **DRUGS ARE HIGH PLACES:** ‘Perfect high’, ‘Airplane’, ‘Climb’, ‘Cloud nine’.
6) **DRUGS ARE ANIMALS:** ‘Puff the dragon’, ‘Cold turkey’, ‘Wild cat’, ‘Galloping horse’, ‘Squirrel’.
8) **DRUG DEALERS ARE AUTHORITY FIGURES:** ‘Sugar daddy’, ‘Travel agent’, ‘Candyman’, ‘Bomb squad’.
9) **COCAINE IS WHITENESS:** ‘Snow’, ‘Sugar’, ‘White lightning’, ‘White tornado’.

The follow-up communicative activity is to brainstorm reasons for the link between the target domain and the source domain. Some of the elicited answers are: Drugs are women because drugs seduce like a beautiful woman; Drugs are playful things because they are ways to escape problems and because the speaker wants to emphasize the apparently harmless aspects of taking them; Drugs are vehicles because you leave your routines behind and run away from your reality for a while; Drugs are high places because of the euphoria they produce; Drugs are afterlife creatures because you seem to depart from this world under their effect, etc.

Some of these metaphorical expressions (often described as “dead” or “sleeping”), e.g. ‘sugar’ or ‘trip’, have become lexicalized after being widely used, are less striking and may eventually be hardly recognisable to speakers. Although they can be easily mistaken for literal language through overuse, draining them of their figurative sense, they still retain their metaphorical function (Radden and Sirven 2007).

The student officers must now learn to divide the metaphor samples into heuristic (experiential) or justificatory (apologetic), building in the receptive skill to deduce the speaker’s attitude. Experiential metaphors have to do with perception and the senses, like sugar or airplane, and justificatory metaphors minimize the danger or side-effects of drugs, like happy pill or nose candy. Using publicly accessible databases like the one compiled by the U.S. government Office of National Drug Control Policy or the Police National Legal Database for England and Wales they search the Internet to find more examples and thus learn how to use them as well as understand them. The Internet can also provide information regarding register and geographical background of the lexis.
Finally, as group work, the students design in English a Government prevention campaign against drugs abuse on the basis of the Spanish ones they already know and others they can locate online from English speaking countries. In their exercise the officers have to introduce as many metaphors as they can fit in the text.

The trainee officers consider this approach to metaphor as very relevant for their professional performance and feel a confidence that helps to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Students do the same exercises later in the academic year with other areas of conceptual metaphors, such as penitentiaries:


At this point, students can link prior knowledge to creative skills to become more familiar with the use of metaphors in Law Enforcement discourse. When the procedure is inverted, students try to elicit the conceptual metaphors from a list of terms classified into three sections.

This exercise can easily be extended into a written essay format that focuses on a parallelism with the target domain. The conceptual metaphor used in this instance is POLICE EQUIPMENT IS FOOD, with the sample list ‘Biscuit’, ‘Pea-shooter’, ‘Jam sandwich’, ‘Jam buttery’, ‘Hog-leg’, ‘Cherry toppers’, ‘Berry’.

Finally, after the meaning of a metaphor has been explored in full, three strategies are suggested for translation of L2 metaphorical terms into L1 (Fernández and Remondino 2013). These are (1) using an exact equivalent metaphor; (2) looking for a metaphor with a similar sense; and (3) paraphrasing untranslatable metaphors.

This kind of activities develop metaphoric competence, a part of ‘conceptual competence’ or ‘conceptual fluency’ that consists in “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).

The methods outlined above reveal the benefits or raising metaphor awareness in Law Enforcement. For instance, it builds skills in specialized lexicon. It improves reading, translation and communicative skills, it motivates the students and it makes them aware of the cultural aspects of the target language. It also increases the students’ intuitive approach both to neologisms and the secondary or sub-meanings of a criminal micro-language. Besides, research has shown that raising metaphoric awareness in this way improves vocabulary retention (Boers 2000, Littlemore 2001).

3. Conclusions

Metaphor is a highly recommended resource for building skills in specialized lexicon. Explicitly relating figurative expressions to their underlying conceptual metaphors helps learners understand and retain the target items (Doiz and Elizari 2013). The exploitation of metaphors in Law Enforcement promotes critical thinking and interactive learning in pair and group work; it also fosters students’ autonomy (a vital skill for a professional who will engage in lifelong learning and updating) and requires and supports intercultural competence. The development of metaphorical competence also boosts students’ interest in the foreign language (Velasco Sacristán 2009). Metaphors form a vital part of the law enforcers’ foreign language teaching curriculum.

References


