

OF METAPHORS AND METAPHORICAL COMPETENCE: BUILDING MATERIALS FOR VOCABULARY EXPANSION

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ABSTRACT

One of the features that distinguishes the communicative ability of a perfectly functional 'learner' of a language from a fluent communicator with a flair for language is a lack of 'natural flavour' and attendant imagery. This 'natural flavour' is evident in the almost casual use of metaphors, similes and analogies both in written and spoken forms. In approaching a perceived divide between the largely 'colourless' language of learners and the 'colourful' language of much of the materials to which learners are often exposed to, this paper explores the use of conceptual metaphors and linguistic metaphors as a means of building a storehouse of vocabulary, that is, from a mini-market to a hyper-market and thus, enriching the language in general use. It describes how a conceptual metaphor is used to provide a nucleus around which new and appropriate vocabularies are introduced. The paper represents the work done in designing related materials to be used in language classrooms with intermediate learners of English. It assumes that a recombination of imagery with the functional use of language can and should be taught from the intermediate level and beyond.

Introduction

The average speaker of English invents 3000 metaphors per week according to Danesi (1992:491). This clearly indicates that metaphors are no discourse ornaments. Metaphors are pervasive in everyday language both in the spoken and written discourses.

If metaphors are pervasive and add so much colour to the language used why not tap the potential it has in vocabulary teaching? Just as we have grammatical competence, pragmatic competence, communicative competence why not teach our learners metaphorical competence? Students are not explicitly taught metaphorical competence according to Danesi (1992:497). However, students are indirectly tested on their ability to display a wide range of expressions in their work. Surely, our learners are not expected to expand their vocabulary by osmosis? Metaphors are used to convey an intended meaning precisely and concisely and if our learners know this, they would be able to express themselves better. They would be more articulate. Lexical items are powerful indices of expression. Hence, the use of metaphors (acting as nuclei) is a systematic way of expanding their lexical storehouse.

The aim of this paper is to explore the concept of metaphors and to use them as a tool in expanding the learners' (intermediate and beyond) storehouse of vocabulary from a mini-market to a hypermarket. I will begin by examining George Lakoff's idea on metaphors. His concept of metaphors provides a base (nucleus) to systematically expand the learners' vocabulary. This paper will show how to develop appropriate exercises using metaphors for the purposes of teaching and learning vocabulary.

Definition

What are metaphors? Are metaphors parts of our thoughts or are they part of the language?

Lakoff (1993) believes that to understand metaphors one has to go beyond the language into the realm of thought. Metaphors are general mappings across conceptual domains. This cross-domain mapping suggests that its locus is not in the language but in thought. Thus, the very nature of metaphor itself is to understand one conceptual domain in terms of its association with another. This association allows an abstract notion to be expressed through language via a more concrete or tangible idea, which is usually present in the physical surrounding. This idea attempts to explain at least partially how the human mind understands and processes metaphors. It is exemplified below.

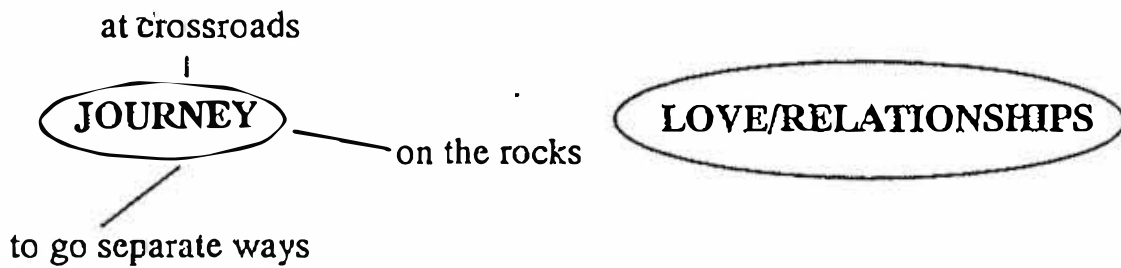
The abstract conceptual domain of love is very often thought and perceived as the concrete conceptual domain of journey. Our physical experience of a journey allows us to understand the senses of words associated with journey like *way*, *crossroads*, *rocks* etc. Take the example of *way*. The most common sense of the word *way* is path or road.

The same conceptual meaning of this word can be extended or mapped on to describing LOVE/RELATIONSHIPS as in example (1) below. Here, *way* is used to mean a forward movement but not literally down a road or a path. The phrases *a dead-end street*, *on the rocks*, *at crossroads* also have extended senses in the context of love/relationships as can be seen below:

1. We'll just have to go our separate *ways*,
2. Our relationship has hit a *dead-end street*,
3. Our marriage is on the *rocks*,
4. We are at *crossroads*.

Source Conceptual Domain

Target Conceptual Domain



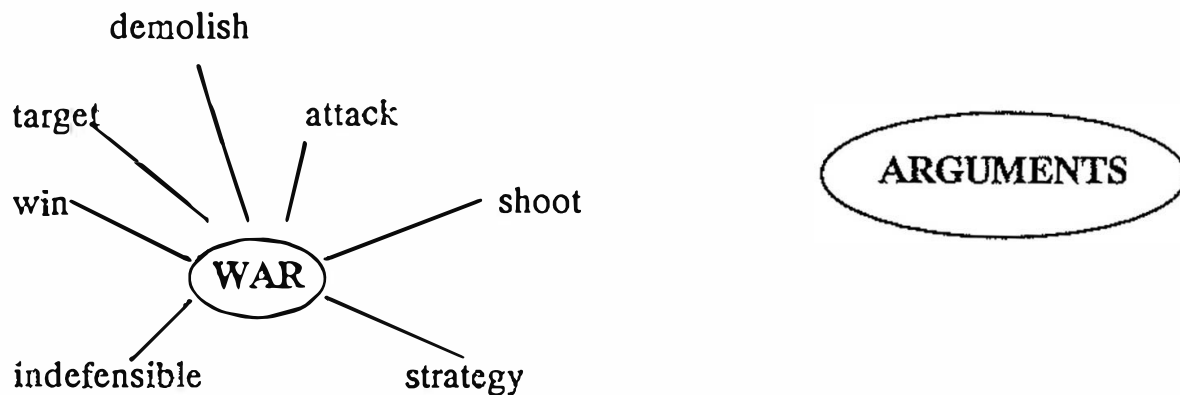
LOVE IS A JOURNEY is a conceptual metaphor where the features of journey are mapped onto the idea of love. This mapping from a source domain (journey) to a target domain (love) allows us to verbalize our thoughts of love which otherwise would virtually be impossible.

Another conceptual metaphor is ARGUMENT IS WAR.

ARGUMENT IS WAR (Conceptual metaphor)

Source Conceptual Domain

Target Conceptual Domain



Therefore, we have various lexical items to talk of war and if we conceptualize ARGUMENT to be WAR then these linguistic metaphors (demolish, target etc.) can be utilized to speak of ARGUMENT as well.

- 5. Your claims are undefensible.
- 6. His criticisms were right on target.
- 7. He shot down all of my arguments.
- 8. He attacked every weak point in my argument.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980)

Lakoff's definition of metaphors allows us to look at metaphors systematically as in the examples above. One is able to conceptualize the target domains as nuclei, which provide for the extended senses of the words in the source domain. A point of interest here is, these extended senses are generally the entries that ensure the more common sense in the Collins Cobuild Dictionary (1987). For example, the word *attack* has several senses. The meaning associated with war, which is fight, is entry 2 whilst the sense associated with arguments is entry 3 (1987:80).

Pedagogical Implications

It is believed that individuals organize words they recall in conceptually related groups (Cornu 1979). The semantic clustering of lexical items either semantically or syntactically is thought to aid learners. Hence, it seems only reasonable for pedagogical purposes to organize vocabulary items in semantic fields. Most textbooks on teaching and learning vocabulary place a strong emphasis on introducing new English vocabulary in such clusters. However, Tinkham (1993) has shown in his study, the negative effects of learning semantic sets. To further support this, Waring (1997) replicated Tinkham's study on Japanese students and obtained the same results. Tinkham (1997) established through his study that thematic clustering (i.e. a group of words organized within certain thematic concept - e.g. Frog - frog, green, hop, pond, slippery, croak) is a better method of facilitating vocabulary learning compared to semantic clustering (i.e. a group of words that share certain semantic and syntactic similarities, e.g. Animals - frog, fish, lizard, cow). The source/target conceptual domains provide a nucleus ideal for thematic clustering. For instance, *war* is a thematic concept surrounding which we have words like demolish, strategy, indefensible. These lexical items are of various parts of speech. As such, they are not a semantic cluster. Using metaphors, one would be able to organize lexical words/phrases thematically and this may improve the retention of these items and hopefully, easy retrieval.

Danesi proposed that these metaphors be extracted from the discourse and be taught and practised in the classroom. Therefore, one can draw upon Danesi's suggestions and develop suitable materials for the appropriate learner levels that are intermediate and beyond because they do assume knowledge of conceptual meaning of more basic lexical items. The following section deals with how the materials were constructed to expand the learners' storehouse of vocabulary from a mini-market to a hypermarket. According to Levinson (1983:157), second or foreign language learners have problems in mainly two areas when they encounter metaphors: recognition and interpretation. Therefore, it is necessary to help them recognize and then interpret these metaphors. Helping

our learners grasp the conceptual mappings (to understand one thing in terms of another) and then helping them to map the lexical phrases to build up their semantic network can do this. The tasks designed attempt to gradually immerse the learners into a world of metaphors.

There are a few others who share the same view. Gillian Lazar (1996) has written an article titled 'Using figurative language to expand students' vocabulary. She looked at figurative language in general which encompasses similes, metaphors, analogies etc. A. Deignan et al. (1997) in 'Teaching English metaphors using cross-linguistic awareness-raising activities' has suggested a useful approach to help L2 learners understand and produce metaphors taking into account their cultural differences.

Below are samples of the tasks designed for upper-intermediate and advanced learners. This is ensued by an explanation of the processes involved in developing these materials.

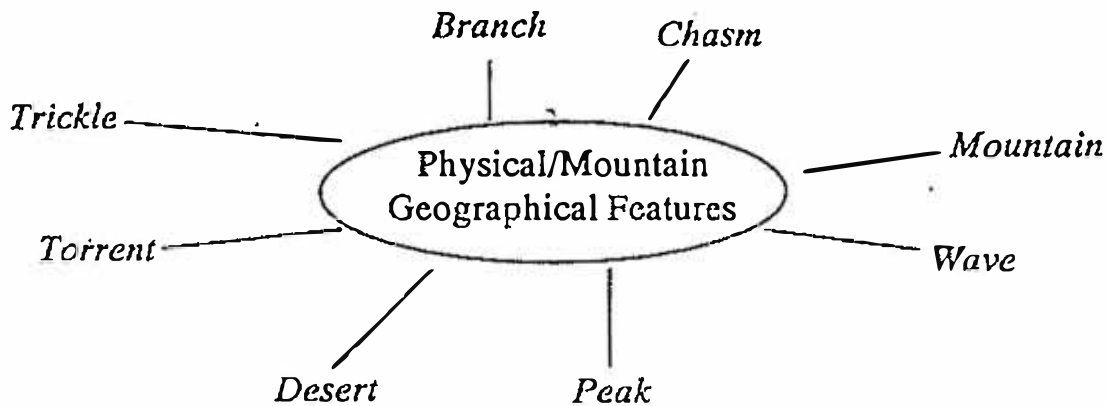
TASK 1

Part A

Look at the following list of words. Can you match each word with the definition that best explains its meaning?

branch	mountain	torrent	chasm
peak	wave	trickle	desert

1. a large area of sandy land that has very little water or plant life
2. a large amount of water that flows or falls very quickly
3. a very deep crack in rock, earth, or ice
4. an extremely high hill that usually has steep sides
5. the slow flowing of a liquid in very small amounts
6. the pointed top part of a mountain
7. the part of a tree that grows out from the trunk and gets leaves, buds, or flowers
8. the raised moving part of water on the surface of the lake or sea



Part B

The words you have just defined and classified as geographical/physical features also have at least one other meaning. Can you find one of those meanings for each word by completing this exercise? Use the list of words in Part A above to complete the following sentences. The first one has been done for you.

1. She went to speak to the Bank Bumiputra manager of the Kajang branch .
2. The buses had arranged to leave at 9 a.m. but by 7.45 there was already a slow _____ of people arriving to catch them.
3. All I did was ask for my book back, but she answered with a _____ of abuse.
4. There's a _____ separating the two political parties, and they'll never agree on anything.
5. His career has reached its _____, and he is really enjoying his success.
6. A _____ of panic swept over the crowd at the KRU concert when they heard the fire alarm.
7. When we came back from holiday we had _____ (plural word) of washing to do.
8. The city of London is no cultural _____ - it has many theatres, libraries and music of all sorts.

(Adapted from Lazar 1996)

Part C

List out the words and their meanings in Part B in the table below:

	Words	Meanings
1	branch	
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

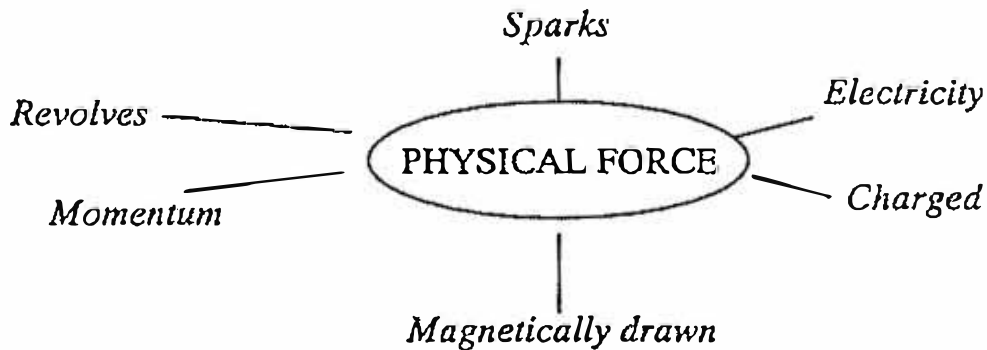
These words are no longer describing the physical/geographical features. What are they describing?

The conceptual metaphor here is EXPERIENCES ARE LARGELY GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES. This task allows the learners to use the application and analytical levels of their cognition. They will, first, have to discover the basic meanings of the given words. They will have to analyze the sentences in Exercise B in order to apply their understanding of the words in Exercise A. In Exercise B, the learners are to infer and generate the extended senses of the words from the contexts (2-8).

TASK 2

Part A

The italicized words can all be used to talk about physical force. Explain the meanings of these words.



Part B

Fill in the blanks below with the appropriate words.

1. The Bakun dam is capable of generating sufficient _____ to meet the nation's needs.
2. Watch the gap for blue _____.
3. The earth _____ around the sun.
4. The _____ of the bullet is a multiplication of its mass and its velocity.
5. The 2 opposite poles of a magnet are always _____ to each other.
6. Simply exchange a dead battery pack for a fully _____ one. (attributive adjective).
7. My car battery has been fully _____ (predicative adjective).

Part C

Now, try and fill in the blanks below with the words in Part A. These words also have at least one other meaning. The first one has been done for you.

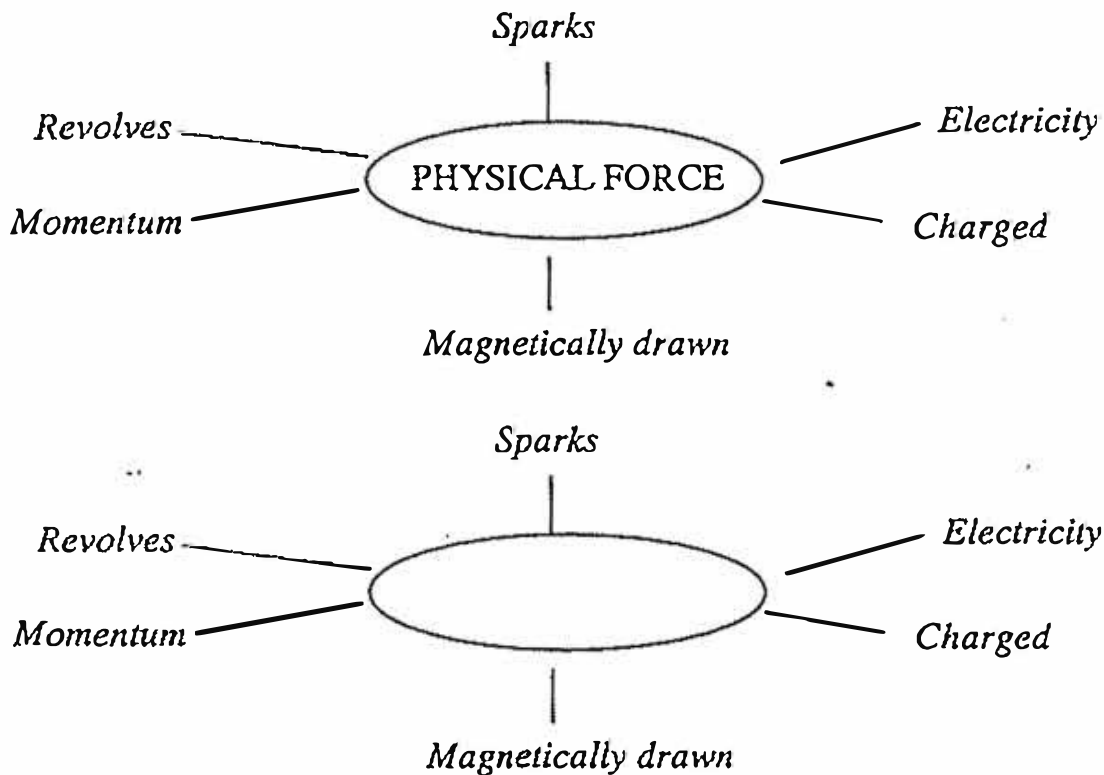
1. The viewers could feel the electricity between Jack and Rose in the blockbuster movie 'The Titanic'.
2. They were _____ to each other the moment their eyes locked into gaze.
3. There were _____ whenever they met.
4. The atmosphere around them was always _____.
5. They have certainly lost their _____ after having been married for ten years.
6. His whole life _____ around her.

What do these words mean in the sentences above?

Do they mean the same as in Part A?

These words are not describing a physical force. What are they describing?

Complete the diagram below.



The concept of LOVE AS A PHYSICAL FORCE is used in the task above. The first exercise may be less demanding than the second. The underlying assumption is that the senses are commonly used to describe physical force and it is part of their observation and understanding of their surroundings. The learners can be encouraged to infer from the context. The dictionary should be the last resort.

The following are processes and considerations in selecting and preparing the task sheets. The tasks guide the learners through these stages that are to know the meanings of words in the source domain, to be able to map from the source domain to the target domain and finally to extend the meanings of the words.

Firstly, the appropriate conceptual metaphors were identified. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have prepared a comprehensive but not exhaustive list of metaphors. The metaphors chosen were the more common ones (concrete) and not too abstract and they were arranged from the least to the most abstract that is EXPERIENCES AS GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES and LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE.

Next the lexical items were chosen and the linguistic metaphors were built up with the help of the Collins Cobuild Dictionary. The sentences were adapted to reflect the local context. This is evident in almost ALL the tasks. The aim was to make it meaningful to the learners.

The parts of speech of the focus in both frames were maintained. For example, TASK 2 [Part B (6); Part C (4)].

There is a gradual progression in the tasks. Practice was from the guided to the completely autonomous.

A pertinent point to note is that not all the conceptual metaphors are common across cultures and languages. Although, some metaphors may be universal as in 'more is up', there are those which are not. For instance the word *green*, in English connotes innocence and it is the same in Tamil. However, this is not so in Malay. A word of caution to the enthusiastic teacher is the need to judiciously select the metaphors for fear of importing foreign culture resulting in conflicts. Thus, cross-linguistic awareness raising activities are vital, especially so when the metaphors are not universal.

In conclusion, for most native speakers, metaphors have become clichés or in other words have died a natural death over time in terms of novelty. These have become entrenched in the language. However, this is not so for our language learners and perhaps, for some of us as well. These metaphors may be novel. Hence, in this paper I have explained and argued for the actual teaching of and use of metaphors in the classroom. The tasks aim to provide a means of developing the learner's vocabulary from a mini-market to a hypermarket. With metaphors, shopping for lexical items is made easier for learners. I have also shared the processes involved in developing the materials.

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