COGNITIVE AND LINGUODIDACTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH METAPHORS

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Abstract

This article examines the cognitive nature of English metaphors within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and considers the linguodidactic implications of this framework for teaching English as a foreign language. Metaphor is treated not as a rhetorical embellishment but as a fundamental mechanism of conceptualisation, through which abstract target domains are structured in terms of more concrete source domains. Drawing on a descriptive-analytical review of foundational and applied literature, the article classifies English conceptual metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological types and illustrates their systematic character. It then surveys evidence that explicit metaphor-awareness activities improve vocabulary retention and develop metaphorical competence, and discusses difficulties facing Uzbek-speaking learners, whose native conceptual system diverges from English in several respects. Classroom techniques are proposed, including thematic clustering of vocabulary by source domain, etymological elaboration, and contrastive metaphor analysis.

Keywords: *cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, linguodidactics, metaphorical competence, source domain, EFL vocabulary teaching, cross-linguistic transfer.*

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, metaphor was treated within rhetoric and literary criticism as a

decorative figure of speech with little bearing on ordinary thought. This view was decisively challenged by cognitive linguistics, in particular by Lakoff and Johnson, who argued that metaphor is not simply a matter of words but a mechanism of the human conceptual system that structures how people think, reason, and act[1]. On this account, human beings routinely understand one domain of experience — typically abstract or poorly delineated — in terms of another that is more concrete and physically grounded. Everyday English expressions such as "to defend an argument," "to waste time," or "to feel down" are therefore not isolated idioms but instantiations of underlying conceptual structures: ARGUMENT IS WAR, TIME IS MONEY, SAD IS DOWN[2].

This reappraisal carries direct consequences for language pedagogy. If metaphor is a pervasive and systematic feature of the lexicon rather than a peripheral literary device, then the ability to comprehend and produce metaphorical language — what Danesi termed *metaphorical competence*[3] — deserves a central place in the foreign-language curriculum. Yet in many EFL contexts, including Uzbekistan, metaphor is still taught as an assortment of idioms to be memorised in isolation, disconnected from the conceptual logic that motivates them. Such an approach makes figurative vocabulary harder to retain and leaves learners without the tools to decode unfamiliar expressions.

The article accordingly addresses two questions: (1) What are the principal cognitive types of English conceptual metaphors relevant to language instruction? (2) Which linguodidactic principles most effectively develop metaphorical competence in EFL learners?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative method typical of theoretical and applied linguistic research, rather than an experimental design

[1]Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors We Live By. – Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980. – P. 3.
[2]Kövecses Z. Metaphor: A Practical Introduction. – 2nd ed. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. – 375 p.
[3]Danesi M. Metaphorical competence in second language acquisition and second language teaching: The neglected dimension // Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1992 / Ed. by J.E. Alatis. – Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992. – P. 489–500.

involving primary data collection. It proceeds in two stages corresponding to the two research questions.

In the first stage, foundational works on Conceptual Metaphor Theory[4] were analysed to extract a classificatory framework comprising structural, orientational, and ontological metaphor types. This framework was then used as an analytic grid for organising illustrative examples of English metaphorical expressions. The examples are drawn from the standard repertoire discussed in the cognitive linguistic literature and from general English usage; they illustrate systematic patterns rather than constituting an original corpus study.

In the second stage, applied and pedagogical literature on metaphor and second-language acquisition was reviewed in order to identify empirically supported teaching principles. Particular attention was paid to studies reporting controlled classroom interventions, such as Boers' three EFL experiments on metaphor awareness[5], since these offer the closest available approximation to causal evidence in an otherwise largely theoretical field. Cross-linguistic findings on the cultural variability of conceptual metaphor[6] were consulted to inform the discussion of transfer difficulties. Six sources published between 1980 and 2010 were selected on the basis of their foundational status, direct relevance to the topic, and publication by established academic publishers or peer-reviewed journals.

RESULTS

Cognitive characteristics

Analysis of the foundational literature confirms that English conceptual metaphors cluster into a small number of recurring types. **Structural metaphors** map the internal structure of one concept onto another; ARGUMENT IS WAR, for instance, underlies "he attacked every weak point in my argument," "she defended her position," and "I won the argument"[7]. Each of these draws productively on the

[4]Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors We Live By. – P. 4–21.

[5]Boers F. Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention // Applied Linguistics. – 2000. – Vol. 21, № 4. – P. 553–571.

[6]Kövecses Z. Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. – 314 p.

[7]Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors We Live By. – P. 4–5.

shared structure of war — attack, defence, strategy, victory — to organise reasoning about verbal disputes.

Orientational metaphors are grounded in basic spatial orientations derived from bodily experience. English systematically encodes positive states as "up" and negative states as "down": one may "feel on top of the world" or, conversely, "hit a low point," "feel down," or experience a "sinking feeling"[8]. The productivity of this schema across many unrelated lexical items indicates an organising principle rather than a coincidental cluster of idioms.

Ontological metaphors conceptualise abstract experiences as discrete entities, substances, or containers. TIME IS MONEY generates "spending time," "wasting an hour," and "investing effort," treating an intangible dimension of experience as a countable, expendable resource[9]. Kövecses further distinguishes *primary metaphors* — simple, experientially grounded mappings such as AFFECTION IS WARMTH — from *complex metaphors*, which combine several primary mappings with cultural models[10]. Across all types, the analysis confirms a central claim of the theory: English metaphorical expressions are surface manifestations of a limited set of underlying mappings, so a learner who grasps the source domain gains access to a whole family of related items rather than a single phrase.

Linguodidactic characteristics

Danesi's notion of metaphorical competence provides a benchmark against which learner production can be assessed. He observed that even advanced learners, after several years of instruction, tend to produce language that is grammatically accurate but conceptually literal, relying on the conceptual metaphors of their first language rather than those of the target language[11]. Grammatical and lexical accuracy alone therefore do not guarantee genuine fluency; a further cognitive-conceptual dimension must also be developed.

[8]Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors We Live By. – P. 14–21.
[9]Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors We Live By. – P. 7–9.
[10]Kövecses Z. Metaphor: A Practical Introduction. – P. 78–92.
[11]Danesi M. Metaphorical competence in second language acquisition and second language teaching. – P. 489–500.

Empirical support for a specific pedagogical response comes from Boers, who tested whether organising figurative vocabulary by shared source domain improves retention compared with conventional, thematically unrelated word lists. Learners who received explicit instruction in the underlying metaphoric themes retained the associated expressions considerably better than those who studied the same items without any explanation of their motivation[12]. Littlemore extends this line of work into a broader programme, proposing that learners be guided to notice recurring source domains, to hypothesise about the motivation of idioms before being given an explanation, and to use visual schemas for the metaphorical basis of preposition use[13].

A further issue concerns cross-linguistic variation. Although many conceptual metaphors are near-universal owing to shared embodiment, a substantial number are culture-specific, varying in the source domains selected and the entailments elaborated[14]. For Uzbek-speaking learners, some English metaphors will map transparently onto analogous Uzbek structures, while others require abandoning an entrenched first-language pattern — a source of both positive transfer and interference errors.

DISCUSSION

The findings allow both research questions to be answered. English metaphor is a systematic organising principle of the lexicon, structured around a limited inventory of structural, orientational, and ontological mappings. Because a single source domain typically motivates dozens of related items, a curriculum organised around conceptual themes should generate more efficient and durable learning than one presenting idioms as an unordered list, precisely because it exploits the associative structure that organises the native lexicon.

On the pedagogical side, several practical techniques follow. *Thematic clustering* of vocabulary by source domain — presenting "journey," "building,"

[12]Boers F. Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention. – P. 553–571.

[13]Littlemore J. Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Second Language Learning and Teaching. – Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. – 212 p.

[14]Kövecses Z. Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation. – P. 88–115.

and "war" metaphors as coherent lexical sets rather than scattered items — allows learners to build on a single conceptual anchor. *Etymological elaboration*, briefly explaining the concrete origin of an expression such as the nautical source of "to weather a storm," strengthens the encoding of otherwise arbitrary-seeming idioms. *Contrastive Uzbek–English comparison tasks* can be built into vocabulary or translation classes to pre-empt transfer errors while raising metalinguistic awareness. Finally, *corpus-based noticing tasks*, in which learners search authentic texts for instances of a given conceptual metaphor, foster active engagement that receptive study does not provide.

These recommendations have limitations. The article is theoretical and descriptive, drawing on secondary sources rather than an original corpus or a controlled intervention with Uzbek learners. The generalisability of findings obtained with other learner populations to the Uzbek context therefore remains an empirical question, best addressed through classroom studies analogous to those of Boers[15] but designed around Uzbek–English metaphor pairs. A further constraint concerns teacher preparedness: a cognitively informed curriculum is unlikely to be implemented effectively unless teacher-training programmes themselves include a grounding in Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

CONCLUSION

English metaphors, viewed through Conceptual Metaphor Theory, constitute a systematic and pervasive feature of the language rather than a marginal stylistic device, and this carries substantial implications for classroom practice. The analysis distinguished structural, orientational, and ontological types, showing how a limited number of mappings generate large families of lexical expressions. On the linguodidactic side, the reviewed literature converges on the conclusion that explicit metaphor-awareness instruction, the cultivation of metaphorical competence as a distinct goal, and attention to cross-linguistic variation together offer a more effective approach than rote idiom memorisation. For the Uzbek EFL

[15]Boers F. Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention. – P. 566–569.

context, integrating these principles into curriculum design and teacher training represents a concrete and achievable step toward more effective instruction.

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3. Kövecses Z. Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. – 314 p.

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