

DCCD 2020

Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

INTRODUCTION OF METAPHORS IN ITALIAN FL TEACHING: PROBLEMS AND OPTIONS

Zinaida S. Tyurina (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow City University, 5B Malyj Kazennyj pereulok, 105064, Moscow, Russia
turinazs@mgpu.ru

Abstract

The article deals with the problems of introducing the metaphor in the foreign language teaching to the undergraduate students studying Italian. The metaphor is considered as one of the most widespread tools of representing the background cultural knowledge that make up the unique national linguistic picture of the world, which reveals the importance of the metaphor for the linguodidactics purposes. The theoretic base of the study lay in the research works of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff, Johnson), linguocultural approach to metaphoricity (Maslova, Teliya and the others). The aim of this research consists in studying the process of introduction of metaphor in Italian FL teaching and finding the ways of facilitation of metaphoric interpretation process with consideration of national culture specific character. The author points out the most common mistakes of caused by the lack of metaphorical abilities of FL students and deduces some practical principles of introducing the metaphors in FL teaching process according to such aspects as relevance with main culture concepts, interpretative complexity for non-native speakers and communicative value. The results of the present study can be used as a base for elaboration of the teaching technology aimed to develop the metaphorical competence of undergraduate FL students on different levels.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Metaphor, metaphoricity, picture of the world.



1. Introduction

The view on the metaphor as on one of the ways of representing the background cultural knowledge (implicit, not directly expressed in verbal form, knowledge that is tacitly perceived by the participants in the interaction as “for granted”) that makes up the unique national linguistic picture of the world is highly relevant to the modern linguodidactics tendencies based on the principles of communicative- and culture-orientation of FL teaching. The metaphoric studies of Maslova (2016), Kondratyeva and Kameneva (2019), Pimenova (2015) and many other russophone linguists are based on the point (the point of view which is rather distant from the traditional metaphor theories based on Aristotle’s conception expounded in Rhetorics) that metaphor is a way of perception of the world that uses previously acquired knowledge for comprehending the new objects and phenomena (Maslova, 2001, p. 91). Moreover, the specific character of metaphor consists in comparing the world with the human scale of knowledge and perceptions and with a system of cultural and national values, which let the metaphors be perceived as a reflection of national picture of the world - historically formed in the consciousness of a certain linguistic collective and reflected in the language, a set of ideas about the world, a certain way of conceptualizing reality, unique for every nation. I would like to point out that such a view is closely related to the anthropocentric scientific paradigm (which focuses on the way a person cognizes the world through self-awareness, his theoretical and objective activity in it) by highlighting of the main role of human mind in the process of metaphor emergence. On the other side, metaphor is not only a result of individual human cognitive process, but also a verbalization of national collective perception of the world which determines the main cognitive processes of an individual belonging to a certain nation. Therefore, the analysis of metaphors can give to a researcher a complex of unique culture knowledge which becomes more important by FL learning (for more information on metaphor in the FL teaching context see also Farias and Veliz (2016), Holme (2004) because the discrepancy of metaphorical thinking of different native speakers can provoke certain problems by cross-cultural communication.

The culture facts hidden in the semantic structure of metaphors frequently concerns so called background culture knowledge, significant cultural information potentially known to native speakers and community members living in the country of the language's use, necessary for adequate verbal communication, understanding the deep meaning of oral and written texts (Khodyakova & Suprunova, 2017, p. 237). Such background culture knowledge include also national ideas, prejudices, values, which often remain not verbalized and can be perceived only by targeted analysis. The importance of background culture knowledge in FL reading is widely studied by modern Chinese researchers Lu (2018) and Yang (2017). Russian researchers Grigoryeva and Cherkashina (2019) focus on the analysis of culture facts hidden in the linguistic frames and the perspectives of introduction of such analyzing methods in the FL teaching developing the conception of the linguocultural approach, conceptual FL teaching basis, built on the dyad "language culture" where each of the components is simultaneously an object of learning and a prism through which the learning process takes place.

Thus, the present metaphoric conception can be a theoretical basis for introduction of metaphors in the process of FL teaching as a source of specific background culture knowledge, necessary for deep immersion in the foreign culture for the communicative purposes. Among the modern researchers of culture topics in FL teaching I would like to highlight Hungarian researcher Gabriella Kovács (2017) who

considers the culture as the fifth language skill, additional to the traditional ones like reading, listening, writing, and speaking (Kovács, 2017, p. 83).

2. Problem Statement

The ubiquity of metaphors in the FL texts of any level and subject area (including both conventional (both lexical and traditional) and non-conventional (so called “creative metaphors” that give to the speech a figuratively expressive colour, bright emotional assessment) metaphor) is an additional reason of including the metaphors in the FL teaching process. However, frequently the FL students experience certain difficulties with identification and interpretation of the metaphors, especially with specific metaphorical contexts referring to unique national culture realities. Often the interpretation problem consists in referring of the image laying in the metaphorical basis with the realities typical for the native picture of the world, not for that of the studied FL. Connotative incongruity, axiological difference and semantic variation between two different culture backgrounds (between the native and the foreign, I mean) can cause difficulties or even impossibility of appropriate metaphor interpretation and, hence, misunderstanding in the process of cross-cultural communication.

3. Research Questions

Therefore, the question of the research I raise deals with the practical solution of the problem of the development of metaphoric interpretative notions of FL students through the example of Italian L2 teaching process.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research consists in studying the process of introduction of metaphor in Italian FL teaching and finding the ways of facilitation of metaphoric interpretation process with consideration of national culture specific character.

5. Research Methods

In accordance with the purpose of this study I use the following research methods: analysis of scientific literature, inductive method, metaphor classification method for linguodidactic purposes, observation.

6. Findings

As seen above, the main difficulty emerging at the process of metaphoric context analysis by FL students lay in their incomplete capacity for modeling an adequate relation between the structure and the system of specific images forming the analyzed metaphor.

To prove this supposition, I offered to a group of undergraduate students (19 pers.), studying Italian FL for almost 3 years to analyze an authentic Italian article containing a significant number of conventional

metaphors. The students were invited to identify the metaphors in the article and to interpret them in their native language.

As a result, I marked two main types of mistakes made by participants of experiment:

1. Mistakes caused by non-capacity for metaphor identification (approx. ¼ of respondents) – some students found out not all the metaphors, some of them instead declared as metaphors non metaphoric collocations (phraseologisms, metonymy etc.);

2. Mistakes caused by non-capacity for adequate metaphor interpretation (approx. 2/3 of respondents) in particular:

a. by incorrect connotative analysis;

b. by reference with the images non typical for the Italian culture.

The initial hypothesis, the observation of the process of Italian FL teaching on different levels for undergraduate students and the results of the experiment determine the necessity of reconsideration of the introduction of metaphor contexts in the FL teaching.

According to the undergraduate academic plan of practical course of Italian FL and in line with the didactic principles of accessibility, regularity and comprehensiveness, the emersion into the FL metaphoricality should proceed in close relationship with the lexical themes based on important culture concepts.

Therefore, in order to get deeply acquainted with the typical metaphoric models of the italoophone picture of the world, the FL students need to arrange a developed scheme of relations between certain semantic spheres (concepts) according to the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson (2003). For this purpose, the teacher should arrange a variety of authentic metaphoric contexts selected under the thematic unity principle and invite the students to analyze them presenting as a conceptual metaphor A is B, where A is target domain and B is source domain. The main context selection principle, however, should be correspondence and importance of the theme (concept) to the FL picture of the world. Therefore, analysis of the selected metaphors should be aimed not so much on the developing of the interpretative ability of the students as on the co-reference of different concepts among them which frames the unique national character of typical metaphoric transference.

At this step, I would like to highlight the importance of the metaphoric context selection principles deriving from the aforesaid, such as *authenticity* and *reference to the main national culture concepts* (i.e., for the Italian language such concepts could be *cuisine, family, liberty, regionality, football, wine, Catholicism* etc. As told above, the variety of concepts is unique for every language).

However, the sequence of introduction of the typical national metaphoric models should consider not only their importance for a certain culture, but also the common interpretative abilities of the students. Therefore, on the early stage of FL teaching, the suggested metaphoric contexts should mainly contain so called *universal metaphors*, based on the concepts familiar to the representatives of different culture, concerning the common world history, religion, mythology of Ancient Greece and Rome, world literature, etc – which have analogues in most part of the European languages and which evoke in the mind of the representatives of different culture similar associations. Such decision can facilitate the process of training of the metaphor analyzing because the students can completely focus on the structure of the metaphor and not on the specific national semantic and connotative characteristics.

The next step would be the introduction of authentic foreign metaphoric contexts which have certain value for the native culture of the FL students. These could be metaphors based on similar conceptual model which refer to different images still belonging to the same concept. For example, for the russophone Italian FL students such metaphoric model could be *stupid person is a bird*. This model products analogical metaphors in both Russian and Italian language like *Questa ragazza è un'oca/эта девушка просто гусыня*, but still there are similar metaphors which refer to different birds with unique meaning to only one culture: *Lui è un merlo/опять пришел этот пингвин* where the certain bird still means a stupid clumsy person, however the species of the bird has a special meaning for the only one of the both national pictures of the world. Still according to my observation work the similarity of basic metaphoric models on one hand is easier for adequate interpretation of the FL students. On the other hand, introduction of such models and the analogy searching between two or more pictures of the world can be an efficient intermediate step to the studying of the specific (non equivalent) metaphors including those based on the unique national culture facts. However, sometimes the image of the source domain can be based on the unique cultural fact, not known to the FL students (for example, an endemic plant or an animal). Therefore, the students are forced to make some cultural research to find out the specific meaning of the target cultural fact.

Basing on the aforesaid, I highlight the next essential metaphoric context selection principles such as *concerning of the common culture knowledge of the students, concerning of the native culture knowledge of the students and semantic comparison* between two or more linguocultural systems.

On the advanced level the FL students can deepen their metaphorical interpretative competence by studying the authentic metaphoric contexts based on the images and semantic nuances which do not have analogues in the native picture of the world of the students. It is important still that on this level the FL students could be able to identify such metaphors despite the probable lack of specific culture knowledge. On this point the students should be taught to find out the unique meaning of the background culture fact, which determines the common sense of metaphor, not only by analyzing the structure or semantics of metaphor components, but also by studying the reference literature (monolingual and etymological dictionaries, culture, history and literature sources etc.) to find out the specific context which gave birth to the metaphoric relations between a certain culture fact and the target domain.

However, there is one more important aspect which must be taken in consideration when concerning the metaphorical competence of FL students (for more information see Hashemian 2019; Sabet & Tavakoli, 2016): all the selected metaphorical contexts should be closely related to the communicative purposes. In other words, the selected metaphors should have a certain communicative value for the modern national linguistic context, should be widely used in spoken or written modern language and have a reference to certain communicative situations. Still, I would like to point out that the last statement is valid only by conventional metaphors using. When the FL students reach the advanced level of metaphoric competence, they learn not only to use conventional metaphors in appropriate communicative situations, but also to use metaphor as a tool of explanation, emotive expression, judgement expression, euphemization, codification etc. according to the national FL picture of the world and to control the interference of the native language metaphoricity. Therefore, the selected metaphors should have a certain potential as a model for new metaphoric expressions when necessary.

Thus, I would point out such selecting principles like *communicative orientation* and *metaphoric model productivity* which impact positively on the comprehension of the metaphor as a communicative tool. The importance of co-reference between metaphors and communication is also highlighted in the study of Italian linguodidactics researcher Cristina Dalla Libera (Dalla Libera, 2017).

7. Conclusion

The results of this study could be presented as following typological schemes which show different types of the metaphors according to abovementioned selecting principles.

The most significant typologies are systemized according to following aspects:

1. relevance with main culture concepts:
 - metaphors relevant to main culture concept;
 - individual metaphors relevant to the inner world of the author.
2. interpretative complexity for non-native speakers
 - universal metaphors, familiar to the speakers of different origin;
 - metaphors based on the same conceptual model, but referring to different culture fact in different national picture of the world.
 - metaphors based on specific national culture facts which have certain value only for native speakers.
3. communicative value:
 - metaphors which can be referred to the certain communicative situation and are registered in the referred literature. The students can use them when speaking or writing without any transformation;
 - metaphors which can be used as models for metaphoric production of the non native speakers when necessary;
 - metaphors which currently have no or inconsiderable communicative value because of their archaic character, f.e.

The suggested typologies can make a basis of the forming of metaphorical competence in accordance with cross-cultural approach and become the source of specific background culture knowledge which remains frequently beyond the focus of FL academic plan.

References

- Dalla Libera, C. (2017). Le metafore concettuali in un approccio comunicativo nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere [Conceptual metaphors in an approach communicative in learning of foreign languages], *EL.LE*, 6(1), 25-40.
- Farias, M., & Veliz, L. (2016). Conceptualizações metafóricas da aprendizagem de línguas de estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira [EFL students' metaphorical conceptualizations of language learning]. *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 55, 833-850.
- Grigoryeva, E., & Cherkashina, E. (2019). Stanovlenie lingvokul'turologii kak novogo podhoda k prepodavaniyu yazykov i kul'tur [The formation of linguoculturology as a new approach to teaching languages and cultures], In A. A. Urazbekova (Ed.), *Sovremennyy russkiy yazyk: funkcionirovaniye i problemy prepodavaniya*, (pp. 250-255) Bupadest: Russian Centre for Science and Culture in Budapest.

- Hashemian, M. (2019). Investigating the Relationship Between L2 Learners' Metaphorical Competence and Emotional Intelligence. *Journal of new advances in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 19-37.
- Holme, R. (2004). *Mind, Metaphor and Language Teaching*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Khodyakova, L. A., & Suprunova, A. V. (2017). Fonovye kul'turnye znaniya kak baza dlya formirovaniya obshchekul'turnoj kompetentsii v protsesse chteniya teksta [Background cultural knowledge as a basis for the formation of general cultural competence in the process of reading a text]. *Scientific notes of Orel State University*, 1(74), 236-241.
- Kondratyeva, O. N., & Kameneva, V. A. (2019). Diachronic political metaphorology: linguistic personology. *European Proceedings of Social And Behavioural Sciences*, 76, 2797-2805. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2019.12.04.234>
- Kovács, G. (2017). Culture in Language Teaching. *Acta univ. sapientiae, philologica*, 9(3), 73–86.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. The university of Chicago press.
- Maslova, V. A. (2001). Lingvokul'turologiya [Linguoculturology]. Akademiya.
- Maslova, V.A. (2016). Russkij yazyk v aspekte kodov lingvokul'turologii [Russian language in the aspect of codes of linguoculturology]. *Vestnik of RUDN University. Russian and foreign languages and teaching methods*, 3, 27-33.
- Pimenova, M. V. (2015). Modeli politicheskikh metafor v diskurse SMI 2005 goda [Models of political metaphors in the media discourse of 2005]. *Current Issues in Philology and Pedagogical Linguistic*, 1, 51-61.
- Sabet, M., & Tavakoli, M. (2016). Metaphorical Competence: A Neglected Component of Communicative Competence. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 4(1), 32-39.
- Yang, X. (2017). Cultural Background on Reading Comprehension in Junior High School, *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(2), 370-374
- Lu, Y. (2018). Influence of cultural background knowledge on English reading, *Education, Culture and Social Development (TECSD)*, 1(1), 46-50. <https://doi.org/10.26480/icecsd.01.2018.46.50>