

INTERNALIZATION AND PRODUCTION OF METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS WITH EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: *The paper presents the results of qualitative research with 20 EFL students, who were exposed to structured metaphorical input for one academic year. It will be demonstrated how metaphorical expressions covered in classes are used spontaneously by students in writing tasks some time after they had been introduced and practiced, which is clear evidence of internalization that surfaces during production.*

Keywords: *EFL, internalization, metaphor, production, qualitative research, vocabulary.*

1. Introduction

Metaphor, one of the basic concepts and mechanisms of cognitive linguistics, has found its application in the field of foreign language learning as well. Lazar (1996) was one of the first applied linguists who, relying on the fact that figurative meaning enables native speakers to understand and produce metaphorical expressions, propounded that the development of such an ability is of great importance for foreign language learners. The ability to tackle metaphorical meanings should keep pace with the increase of general knowledge of the foreign language, which is proven by research conducted by Littlemore (2001): metaphorical input in EFL classes improved the general linguistic production of foreign learners, whose communicative competence increased alongside their understanding of metaphorical expressions in the foreign language.

Due to the lack of native competence, learners do not and cannot process figurative meanings in the same way as native speakers, but they can increase their understanding of the foreign language by applying figurative thinking, an analytical, “enquiring” approach defined as “the use of a query routine which assumes that an unknown expression might be figurative, or which asks what the implications of using a figurative expression might be” (Littlemore and Low 2006:6). This process comprises a series of steps that non-native speakers apply when encountering words or phrases that they do not understand. Learners usually slow down if reading, or engage in extensive online analysis if listening, and ask themselves a series of questions to decipher the unknown segments of a sentence (Littlemore and Low 2006).

When trying to decode figurative meaning, learners have to connect two different elements, i.e. the source and target domains, and draw inferences regarding additional

meanings or cultural implications. This task is quite challenging and learners often ask their teachers for help. In order to avoid or prevent such situations and turn students into autonomous learners, foreign language teaching should focus on raising metaphor awareness with foreign language students. This is the task of the teacher, who should demonstrate that metaphor is not merely a poetic form, but a pervasive linguistic and conceptual mechanism. However, the question is how much exposure to theory will benefit the students, especially if they are not language specialists. Littlemore (2004) has shown that the theory-based approach burdens the teaching process with unnecessary theoretical linguistic information and that the practice-based approach based on inductive teaching is easier for foreign language students because it allows them to achieve a deeper understanding of metaphors without delving into linguistic theories.

Littlemore and Low (2006:24-25) describe in detail the inductive approach and illustrate how basic questions regarding the appearance, function or position of an entity can help students to understand metaphorical meanings of words and phrases in the foreign language, especially when simple transfers of meaning are in question. Many other expressions will remain opaque either because students do not know the literal meaning of the word or because the word itself is archaic or obsolete. The query routine comprises simple, direct questions that refer to the basic meaning of the words, the answers to which can guide students towards deeper understanding and aid information processing. Thus, learners are actively involved in processing the given topic: they ask questions and make meaningful connections with other topics. Simultaneously, learners connect the existing knowledge of word meanings in their mental lexicon with new meanings, which “enhances the learning process and aids the retention of new information, with the ultimate result of greater learner autonomy” (Radić-Bojanić 2011b:306). Essentially, this method of vocabulary teaching should be integrated with other approaches in foreign language teaching so that both students and teachers can achieve better results (Boers 2000).

The sign of true success as far as this method is concerned is the occurrence of metaphorical expressions in language production, especially spontaneous language production, because it is a clear indicator of the fact that internalization of metaphorical expressions has happened. However, the very nature of foreign language learning dictates a slow pace of progress due to the fact that a certain material, be that grammatical or lexical, needs to be repeated a sufficient number of times in a variety of different modes and manners in order to be placed in long-term memory and, thus, become available for later recovery during language production. The same is valid of metaphorical expressions in the foreign language, because learners need time first to understand the mechanisms behind metaphoricity, then to learn query routines and become proficient at using them, and finally to enrich their mental lexicon with additional meanings of the already familiar and known words. Once this has taken place, the newly acquired vocabulary items are ready for active use in language production. This paper illustrates the process of meaningful, metaphorical input which, in time, leads to meaningful production, a clear sign of the internalization of material.

2. Research Methodology

The purpose of the paper is to find out how a group of EFL university students process and retain metaphors both in controlled and free practice. The initial methodological tenets of this research are that the human conceptual system and changes therein cannot be observed externally and can only be established through direct testimonies of informants, and that genuine knowledge about human interaction or mental processes is best acquired not in controlled laboratory conditions, but in everyday settings (Eisner 1991:32-33). As the naturalistic paradigm focuses on the behaviour of people in their natural surroundings (Tullis Owen 2008), it was chosen for this paper as the most adequate approach which would provide material for analysis.

In naturalistic research data collection necessarily relies on direct, face-to-face interaction between the researcher, who is considered to be the most important instrument in data collection, and informants. Research material can be collected by observation, when the researcher makes notes about what he/she sees, or by questionnaires and interviews, when the researcher makes notes about what informants tell him/her.

Human interaction should be observed on a daily basis (Eisner 1991:32-33) by one and the same observer, who, in order to achieve the validity of the instrument, i.e. him/herself, must always use the same set of criteria and features in observation. This is one of the oldest research methods and it relies on collecting and noting down impressions about a specific situation that surrounds the researcher/observer. In naturalistic research, observation provides data which is founded on the experiences of research participants, on the basis of the methodological presupposition that human behaviour is purposeful and reflects deeper values and convictions (Richards 2003:106). Observation notes are made in the form of a criterially predefined journal or are sometimes recorded by camera or tape recorder, and then this data is transferred to a journal. Regardless of the particular data collection technique, the journal should ultimately contain detailed descriptions of external events in which the informants participated, the reactions of both informants and observer, and the observer's reflections, which later serve as a framework for the interpretation of research results (Patton 2002:302-304).

The research presented here is part of a larger project which was realized during the 2007/08 academic year. The research subjects were 40 first-year students of English language and literature at the Department of English, University of Novi Sad, who were divided into two groups: experimental and control. Both groups attended English language classes under the same conditions (the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference, the same course book, the same teacher), the only difference being that during the entire year the experimental group was exposed to structured metaphorical input adapted to the class syllabus. The metaphorical input followed all the principles of the inductive approach, i.e. the teacher introduced various metaphors in different tasks so the students were able to make inferences and use query routines. The teacher kept a detailed class journal during the whole academic year, where she noted all activities, student answers and reactions to various tasks, which is the source of the material analysed here.

3. The Experiment

In order to contextualize the research data and explain the results, metaphorical input at different research stages has to be described. As previously stated, time is one of the key factors in the process of foreign language learning and that is why attention will be paid to one segment from the first month of presenting students with new material and to one segment from the fourth month of input.

3.1. Metaphorical Input – First Month

One of the first metaphorical sets that the students tackled belonged to the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Upon reading the text in Box 1. (the task was adapted from Lazar 2003:24-25), the students were involved in controlled practice with the task to find in the text phrases that had the same meanings as the phrases below the text.

After I left school, I didn't take the usual path to college. I had always enjoyed woodcarving, so I took the first step towards trying to earn some money from this hobby. I decided to open a stall at our local market, selling some wooden toys I had carved. The toys sold very well, and I couldn't make enough of them, so two of my friends joined me and I showed them how to do it. Our little business was on the road to success, when unfortunately there was a fire in the garage where we stored our toys. We lost all our stock. Step by step, we had to build up the business again.

After a few years of doing this, we felt we were at the crossroads. We could have continued to sell out toys in the market. But we decided not to go down that road any more. Instead, we decided to sell out toys over the Internet.

In the last few years the company has become very successful, but all of us are arguing about everything and I feel very bored. I think I am coming to the end of the road with this company. It's time to take steps towards doing something different. One positive step might be to get some advice from friends and family. What do you think I should do?

- to be doing the right things in order to achieve a particular goal
- to make decisions to live your life in a particular way
- to feel that you have done all you can
- to do the first of a series of actions that you need to do in order to succeed
- slowly and carefully, so that you think about each stage before you move on to the next
- to follow a series of actions because you want to achieve a particular result
- to do something now that will make something happen later
- a good and useful action
- to be at an important point in your life where you have to make a decision about your future

Box 1.

Using a variety of strategies, the students were able to find the matches for the definitions below the text. Since one of the main strategies was imagery (Radić-Bojanić 2011a), the students spent some time drawing their own individual ways of visualizing the metaphorical expressions in question and were later asked to devise their own sentences and

use these expressions in them, which provided enough practice and repetition in a variety of ways.

3.2. Metaphorical Input – Fourth Month

Another group of metaphorical expressions that served as a foundation for controlled practice and later as a basis for students' production relied on the overarching metaphor HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS ARE BUILDINGS. Students were given the material from Box 2. (The task was adapted from Lazar 2003:48), which descriptively introduced metaphorical mappings found in these two similar metaphors.

Many people believe that our dreams contain personal and sometimes hidden messages. You can learn to interpret your dreams in order to discover more about yourself and your psychological motivation. This can be done by understanding common symbols that appear in dreams, such as:

Buildings These may represent the personality of the dreamer. In many cases, dreams about exploring a building are encouraging us to explore our own personalities. You may dream that you are exploring a building you know well, in which there are many unfamiliar rooms. This dream could mean that you are ready to develop in some way.

Home Dreaming of home is connected with a sense of emotional and financial security. A common dream is of returning to a house that you knew well in the past. Your feelings about the house in the dream may suggest something about how you feel about your past experiences.

A door This may represent how well you communicate your feelings or your thoughts. If a door in your dream is shut, it may mean you are not communicating with somebody.

Walls These support a building. If they are unsafe or falling down, maybe it is because you are not feeling very secure.

Box 2.

The exercise required students to use the available information in order to interpret dreams which contained messages based on the said metaphors. In order to help the interpretation, the teacher wrote the following mappings on the board:

buildings	–	relationships organizations
foundations	–	support, basis
doors	–	access
bricks	–	elements
wall	–	difficulties
ruins	–	damaged, destroyed
build	–	develop, grow
demolish	–	destroy, prove wrong

Relying on the information from the teacher, the students interpreted short dreams, some of which are given below, which enabled them to indirectly acquire relevant concepts and related vocabulary.

You are at a party. Suddenly the foundations of the building you are in start to crack.

Box 3.

While some students interpreted this dream as a literal party where the person involved experienced something bad, other students interpreted it as a quarrel or instability in family life, maybe even love problems. In any case, whichever domain of life students were aiming at, apparently they all understood the essence: building foundations are a metaphor for stability and security, whereas the cracking represents problems that threaten stability and security.

You knock on the door of a house belonging to a member of your family. He or she opens the door, and then slams it in your face.

Box 4.

This dream was interpreted by most students as a family quarrel, where the house stands for the family member with whom the person is quarrelling, a knock on the door is a metaphor for a communication attempt, and the slammed door is the rejection of reconciliation.

These short descriptions show that the students were able to understand metaphors when presented with short and clear instructions. In order to reinforce this lexical and metaphorical set, the students were given homework (see Box 5. – the task was adapted from Lazar 2003:49), where they had to connect the beginnings and endings of sentences, i.e. the underlined metaphorical expression and its paraphrase or meaning in the other part of the sentence.

A Your promotion will really <u>open doors</u> for you	1 so she <u>felt at home</u> having to travel for her new job.
B You cannot believe what those scientists say	2 and people cannot afford to buy new clothes.
C When the detective talked to the family about the accident	3 by showing that the facts were all wrong.
D Prices have suddenly <u>gone through the roof</u>	4 and give you lots of new opportunities.
E All new students have to do the Basic Skills Course	5 and is <u>trying hard to build</u> a new career for herself.
F It was very sad that Bill's accident	6 he was met by <u>a wall of silence</u> .
G She has always enjoyed living	7 as their theories are <u>without foundation</u> .

in other countries	
H After the war the economy was <u>in ruins</u>	8 <u>closed the door</u> on his career in athletics.
I He completely <u>demolished</u> my argument	9 and the government needed to <u>rebuild</u> it.
J She is very hardworking and ambitious	10 which <u>provides the foundation</u> for all their studies.

Box. 5

3.3. Production

The following week the students were supposed to do a written task in which they would use the metaphorical expressions covered in the previous week. The task (adapted from Lazar 2003: 50) was designed as a short story written by a group of students who would use some general questions as guidelines for ideas, with the choice of vocabulary more or less open for selection. Box 6. contains the initial part of the task and what follows are the stories written by four groups of students.

<p><i>Here are some questions which will help you to invent a story. Write down a few ideas for each question.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your story is going to have a hero or a heroine. Who is he or she? How old is he or she? What does he or she look like? Where does he or she live? • In what situation does your hero or heroine feel most at home? Why? • Your main character is trying hard to build something. What? A career? A relationship? • Somebody important promises to open doors for your hero or heroine. Who? What do they promise? • Your hero or heroine decides to take the opportunity offered by the important person. Along the way, your hero or heroine meets a wall of silence. From whom? About what? Why? • Despite the wall of silence, your hero or heroine still manages to reach their goal. But somebody says something about them which is without foundation. What is it? How does your hero or heroine feel about this? • At the end of the story, somebody's life is in ruins. Who? Your hero or heroine? The important person? Somebody else? Why?

Box 6.

Essay 1.

Lisa is a 26-year-old woman who lives in Dallas, Texas. She feels most at home when she is on her farm because she like nature and countryside. She broke up with her boyfriend and now her life is in ruins. She wants to build a new relationship. One day an elderly man knocks on her door⁷ and offers her a new job that she accepts. At work one day she meets the elderly man's son Josh, who asks her out. Eventually, she discovers that he is a spy. So, even though she is a tad bit apprehensive about her new love affair, they decide to stay together, but Josh gets into trouble because of his last assignment, which

was a failure. People start rumours and Lisa wants to move on, but Josh doesn't and his life is left in ruins.

Essay 2.

The story is about Merilin, a little girl from an isolated village. She is 15 years old, goes to secondary school and wants to become an actress. She is very sociable and likes to imitate people, she is humorous and self-confident. She has a specific look, red curly hair and a specific dressing style, but when you get to know her, she is very cute.

She feels most at home when she is in the center of attention and when people laugh at her jokes. Her aim in life is to become a famous animator and to earn a lot of money.

A famous director comes to her village to make a movie. He notices her while she is acting in front of her friends and offers her a role in his latest comedy. He opens her the door on the way of her success.

She, of course, accepts the role but what she doesn't know is that another actress has already got this role on the audition. But the director wants her. While they are working on the film, she is confronted with a wall of silence from other actors. She is not accepted by her colleagues because they are jealous of the offer put in front of such a young girl. She passes through a hard period of her life because she is alone, without her parents, and is not accepted.

The actress who has been rejected puts a lot of obstacles in her way. She makes up gossip and magazines are filled with false information about Merilin. But she is strong enough to confront these problems and to reach her goal. Her film is a great success and she becomes famous.

When the jealous actress sees that Merilin's film has turned out to be successful, she is so desperate that she tries to kill herself. Her life is in ruins.

Essay 3.

The heroine is a young perfectionist from 221 Baker Street, London. Her glance was delicate, but her stance was of iron as if someone could perceive the wall she put around her. But behind the facade of confidence lies a fragile foundation.

In winter mornings she finds herself in the most secluded parts of Central Park. That is when she feels at home, for her surroundings seem to adhere to the state of her mind. For years she has been trying to build a writing career worth of her family name. Her great-grandparents are from Victorian times so she has a great wealth. A distant cousin from Pennsylvania promises to open doors for her among the finest of the literature world, provided she help him financially.

She accepts her cousin's offer but along the way she meets a wall of silence when she realizes that what he really wants is her heritage. Despite her dreams being demolished, a mysterious admirer publishes her book and she manages to reach the top in the literature world.

She reveals her cousin's mean intentions in her book so his life is a complete ruin.

Essay 4.

Patricia Clooney is a 20-year-old student. She is beautiful and attractive, has a gift for acting and lives in L.A. She feels at home when she is on the stage, performing one of her favourite parts of

the plays at her college. She is trying to build a career of an actress. A famous movie director, after seeing her performing, promises to open some doors for her by offering her a part in a famous movie.

She is happy for starting to build the foundation of her career when she meets a wall of silence when her colleagues do not cooperate with her. They 'accidentally' forget to give her the new script which had some significant changes.

Despite all the obstacles, she manages to overcome them, but the main actress says some really bad and untrue things about the suspicious path she took to get the part in this movie. Patricia is very offended and discouraged, but she manages to reveal the real truth about her and the main actress gets fired for conspiracy.

The main actress's life is in ruins, she lost her job and good reputation she had up to then. Patricia gets the main role, which has proven to be a big step in her future career.

3.4. Discussion

The four essays written by students reveal a lot about their progress concerning the acquisition and use of metaphorical vocabulary, especially under closer scrutiny. Firstly, one can notice that most of the required expressions from the task itself were used in the original form (e.g. *feel most at home*, *life in ruins*, *build a new relationship*, *open the door*), which is indicative of the fact that they invested a conscious effort to use the newly learnt phrases in the essay.

Besides that, one can notice a few instances when the students tried to modify the newly learnt expressions to a certain extent, i.e. they tried not to copy them verbatim from the task (e.g. *confronted with a wall of silence*, *the wall she put around her*, *behind the facade of confidence lies a fragile foundation*, *demolished dreams*, *build the foundations of her career*). This testifies of their level of mastery of the linguistic material as well as some hints of deeper metaphor understanding and the development of metaphorical thinking.

Finally, the most encouraging finding that stemmed from the analysis of these essays was the existence of a group of metaphorical expressions based on the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which had been covered in class two months earlier. Sentence segments like *Lisa wants to move on*, *He opens her the door on the way of her success*, *She passes through a hard period of her life*, *The actress who has been rejected puts a lot of obstacles in her way*, *along the way she meets a wall of silence*, *she manages to reach the top in the literature world*, *Despite all the obstacles*, *the suspicious path she took to get the part in this movie*, *a big step in her future career*, which can be found in all four essays, are evidence that the students spontaneously used metaphorical expressions without any explicit requirements in the task. This is a clear indicator that the students fully understood the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY and metaphorical expressions stemming from it, which was covered in the first month of metaphorical input. This is also the first sign of long-term progress because this metaphor has obviously been internalized along with its linguistic realizations, which consequently means that the students have exhibited autonomous and creative use of metaphors and metaphorical thinking.

4. Conclusion

Like any other foreign language material, metaphorical content takes time to be understood, repeated, internalized and, finally, actively used in production. As the examples above show, material needs to be introduced gradually, repeated and reinforced in a variety of ways through different skills and only through such an approach will it become part of students' mental lexicon. Once they have grasped the lexical items and went over them enough times, students will eventually spontaneously use them during language production, which is essentially the ultimate aim of foreign language learning.

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