



Fostering Creativity and Figurative Thinking in English Language Classroom

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Students with a flair for languages:

- improvise
- play with words
- stretch the semantic dimension of the vocabulary they already possess
- paraphrase in order to fill in the gap in their existing knowledge



Examples triggering further thought

- He is under age.
- Her boss is a dinosaur.
- The prices of gas went up last month.



Metaphor

- the items compared must not be too similar
- they must share some characteristics
- they are likely to be dissimilar in that they come from different semantic field and similar in that they share obvious, minor characteristics



Metaphors We Live By

Lakoff & Johnson: 1980

- traditionally regarded as a mere figure of speech
- nowadays acknowledged to be a widespread feature of everyday thought and language
- helps us comprehend and express an abstract concept via another, specific one
- a cognitive mechanism whereby one conceptual domain (*source*) is partially mapped onto a different conceptual domain (*target*)
- understanding and experiencing one type of thing in terms of another



Metaphoric intelligence

language → thought → creativity

production and comprehension of metaphors



cognitive mechanism → figurative thinking

- cognitive or linguistic phenomenon
- frozen metaphors versus novel metaphors

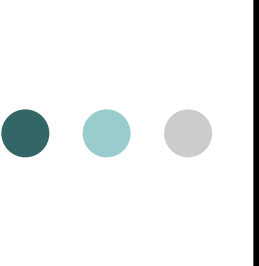


Metaphoric intelligence

Littlemore: 2001

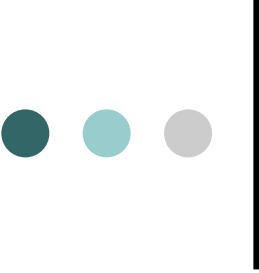
traits of metaphoric intelligence/giftedness:

- **loose analogical reasoning**, involving the comparison of disparate types of information while the large stretch of imagination is required for the similarities to be recognized
- **divergent thinking** able to solve problems requiring the generation of several equally acceptable answers



Metaphors in English language classroom

- the need of provoking and promoting figurative thinking underlying the process of understanding and producing metaphor and metaphorical extension
- introduction of metaphorical systems as an approach to teach polysemous words to foreign language learners
- and to develop the approach further to encourage, promote and foster creative and figurative thinking in production of novel metaphors



Metaphors in English language classroom

- to instruct and guide English language learners so that they can anticipate the meaning of metaphoric expressions
- metaphor, as cognitive mechanism, permeates idioms, idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs, collocations, polysemy...
- dealing with metaphors should develop gradually, starting from transparent, less opaque and heading to more opaque expressions
- such an endeavour in the case of verbally gifted students is creative, fun and highly rewarding for both teachers and learners



Proposed activities

- **monolingual dictionary:** a snapshot of the way we see things and feel about them, of the images and metaphors we use, consciously or unconsciously, when we talk about any subject in our lives (Nicholls, D: 2003)
- learning to be built on pre-knowledge
- metaphorical language allows us to express our abstract and difficult concepts in concrete ways
- metaphors provide a handy and memorable way of organizing new vocabulary to be learnt
- acquisition of new senses of the words learners already know and, finally, adequate and creative use of the new vocabulary



Proposed activities

- the literal meaning of the lexeme HAND (body part)
- search in their dictionaries for its sememes, i.e. figurative meanings
- HAND OF A WATCH/CLOCK, HAND AS A WORKER, A GAME OF CARDS
- AT HAND, OLD HAND, GET/LAY/PUT YOUR HAND ON, HAVE YOUR HANDS FULL, LIVE FROM HAND TO MOUTH...)
- self-explanatory and transparent (AT HAND=EASILY AVAILABLE)
- require further discussion and comparison with students' mother tongue (OUT OF HAND = REFUSE WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT)



Proposed activities

Metaphors We Live By

- **conceptual metaphor**
(clusters of interrelated metaphoric expressions)
- ARGUMENT IS WAR
- LIFE IS A JOURNEY
- ANGER IS A HEATED LIQUID IN A CONTAINER.
- COMMUNICATION IS SENDING
- incentive for learners to browse through their language repertoire and try to arrange the metaphoric expressions they already know around one of the offered conceptual metaphor
- help students find some logic in metaphoric expressions
- bring some kind of order and sistematicity to an idiomatic and seemingly chaotic domain of language



Proposed activities

Metaphors We Live By

- **orientational metaphors**

(organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another -spatial orientation)

- **HAPPY IS UP**

- TO FEEL UP, HIGH SPIRITS, TO CHEER UP, ON TOP OF THE WORLD, WALK ON AIR, IN SEVENTH HEAVEN, BE OVER THE MOON, JUMP FOR JOY, BE ON CLOUD NINE

- help students track sets of associations and explore the webs of meanings out of which a language is constructed

- a need to compare and contrast with the mother tongue, in order to notice various relations between the two languages, facilitating learning significantly



Conclusion

- Over time, metaphor shifts lexical meaning towards grammatical meaning.
- Randal Holm notices that languages use the propositional schema of possession to express various notions of time (Holm: 2001).
- Techniques and activities will be designed to teach other grammatical concepts, problematic for foreign language learners.
- In the work with verbally gifted creative learners, new ideas will arise, while the old ones will get improved.