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Introduction to the Special Issue

The Social Impact of Metaphor: Cross-Cultural and Linguistic Perspectives

(STUDIES IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS 4)

The interdisciplinarity of metaphor studies proves how much there is to say about the pervasiveness of figurative language in everyday life. Studies spanning the humanities (and often beyond that, cf. metaphor in the healthcare context in Turner et al. 2022) include cognitive linguistics, which examines how metaphors shape our understanding and conceptualization of abstract concepts; psychology, with its investigation on the processing and understanding of metaphors; and social sciences, where researchers explore the societal and cultural influence of and on metaphor usage in communication. And communication can be understood cross-linguistically as well: the same conceptual metaphor can be realized differently across cultures and languages, evoking different images and understandings (cf. Yerznkyan & Movsisyan 2023/this volume on metaphors of understanding in English and Armenian). And not only that. Since metaphor has also been considered a rhetorical device meant to elicit certain feelings and influence beliefs, it is safe to assume that metaphors come with what Latané (1981) defines as *social impact*:

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By social impact, I mean any of the great variety of changes in physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behavior, that occur in an individual, human or animal, as a result of the real, implied, or imagined presence or actions of other individuals. (Latané 1981:343)

The social impact of metaphors is perhaps most apparent in the context of situations of extreme importance or evoking strong feelings, not only for global-scale crises like the COVID-19 pandemic or climate change, but also for more personal events like pregnancy loss or the death of a child. The choice of metaphors and the attitudes they represent have significant influence on the perception of the matter due to the transfer of connotations between the source of the metaphor and its target. For example, Reali and Avellaneda (2023/this issue) have shown an increase in the perception of one's agency in the context of war metaphors employed to talk about feminism. When global matters are considered, Semino (2021) discusses the active fire metaphor used to portray the pandemic as something that needed an urgent reaction from society. On the other hand, she observed the confusion that resulted from designating the severity of the situation in various areas of the UK according to traffic light colours. Elsewhere, Paliichuk examined the efficacy of metaphors like BLOCKAGE (Paliichuk 2022) or SPIDERWEB (Paliichuk 2023/this issue) in increasing awareness of the human trafficking crisis. The social impact in such cases is reflected in the public's response to the choice of figurative language; by studying the response to these metaphors, researchers can gain valuable insights into how to engage the public and achieve success in future campaigns tackling pressing social issues. But the social impact of metaphors extends beyond politics and into other spheres of everyday life, like education or law. Figurative language proves to be a tool for conveying meaning in instances such as foreign language learning (Dalpanagioti 2023/this volume) or the translation of legal documents (Järve & Kerremans 2023/this volume), where mutual understanding is not a given but nevertheless crucial. Metaphor scholarship, aware of the power figurative language wields, has a great potential to increase that awareness among other language users because, as Gibbs (2013: 1) puts it, "lovers of language adore metaphor".

This special issue comprises seven papers that examine the complex connection between metaphor, language, and cultural perception in the field of cognitive linguistics. Each paper explores the influence of metaphorical language on cultural and linguistic contexts, highlighting the complex and dynamic nature of language interpretation. These studies provide a comprehensive perspective on the influential role of metaphors in diverse languages and cultures, covering topics such as the translation of metaphorical terms in the EU's multilingual context, and the framing effects of metaphors in media and feminist movements. This issue emphasizes the significance of comprehending language beyond its literal interpretation, exposing its profound influence on thoughts, emotions, and societal attitudes.

The volume opens with **Kätlin Järve** and **Koen Kerremans**' study of the translation of metaphorical terms in the multilingual setting of the European Union. It examines the transfer of metaphorical English terms into Italian and Estonian, specifically focusing on the complexities and strategies involved in this interlingual process. The study employs a descriptive cognitive approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative analysis of data obtained from the IATE terminology database. It aims to provide practical guidelines for language professionals in the fields of term creation and translation, focusing on the substantial influence of metaphorical language in multilingual institutional communication.

Thomai Dalpanagioti's paper examines strategies for improving metaphoric competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This study integrates Frame Semantics and Task-Based Language Teaching methodologies to investigate the instruction of metaphor. This study investigates the utilization of metaphors by students in their writing, illustrating a development from unintentional, sporadic instances of figurative language to purposeful, extended metaphors. This paper presents evidence supporting the efficacy of an innovative teaching approach, offering valuable insights into the teaching of metaphors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Caroline Girardi Ferrari and **Maity Siqueira** investigate the recognition of metaphorical and metonymic mappings in proverbs of Brazilian Portuguese. The study evaluates participants' capacity to recognize the conceptual mappings within the meanings of six proverbs. The research indicates that individuals are capable of recognizing and linking these mappings to proverbs when prompted, although their evaluations differ depending on the specific types of mappings. This study aims to enhance comprehension of the formation and perception of proverbial meanings across diverse cultural contexts.

Josie Helen Siman and **Thiago Oliveira da Motta Sampaio** reexamine metaphor processing, arguing that it is influenced by a dynamic interaction of various factors with shifting importance over time. Rejecting categorical approaches, it proposes a complex systems science perspective, emphasizing the context-dependent, multidimensional nature of metaphor interpretation. This approach considers individual, conceptual, linguistic, and environmental factors, highlighting the non-linear, probabilistic nature of metaphor processing. The paper challenges traditional views in cognitive linguistics, offering a novel framework for understanding metaphor interpretation.

Florencia Reali and **Lucien Avellaneda** investigate the impact of war metaphors on perceptions of feminist causes. Conducted with Spanish-speaking participants, the study uses an experimental design to explore the effects of war metaphors and gender-inclusive language on attitudes towards elective abortion. Results indicate that metaphorical framing influences perceptions of feminism and related issues, such as the right to decide and perceived coldness of the main character. This study contributes to understanding the role of language in shaping attitudes towards feminist movements.

Elina Paliichuk explores the effectiveness of the SPIDERWEB metaphor in media for raising awareness about human trafficking. It examines how different presentations of the metaphor in media texts impact readers' perceptions and reactions, particularly among Ukrainian youth. The study involves an experimental approach with various text manipulations to assess changes in students' perceptions, focusing on their emotional responses and awareness of human trafficking risks. The results suggest that metaphorical framing in media can significantly influence audience understanding and attitudes towards human trafficking.

Yelena Yerznkyan and **Diana Movsisyan** investigate how understanding and evaluation interrelate, focusing on English and Armenian verbs. The paper analyzes the evaluative meaning of collocates, revealing how understanding is emotionally and rationally assessed. The study employs a corpus-driven analysis, identifying patterns in how understanding is metaphorically expressed, and classifies three types of evaluations: emotional, rational, and orientational. This research provides insights into the metaphorical nature of understanding in both languages.

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