

The roles of Misconceptions to Perceive the Cultural Memory of Various Languages

Murat Demirekin

Abstract—Culture is defined as information and behavior acquired through social learning. In this respect, a language cannot be separated from its society and culture, where it is created. When a language is learned and taught as a foreign language it takes on another significant role as the language also functions as the reflector of s cultural memory, which create the community altogether.

In this study, we will mention about roles of metaphors in the process of learning different languages of various cultures. Furthermore, we will try to attract attention to the richness of metaphoric expressions as well as their distinctions, which might sometimes come up with a “myth” of misperceptions for the foreign learners of a language. Finally, we will be stressing on the importance of metaphors and the role of cultural memory to perceive the community itself as a whole.

Keywords—Misconceptions, language learning, culture, memory

I. INTRODUCTION

DURING the whole life, each individual is in quite close contact with the literature, philosophy, art, customs and traditions of a society. Within this interaction one’s language and culture serve as a common collectors and denominators of their memory.

There are some crystallized words of communication in cultures and languages . Such words, which convey the intention that is meant in the short and concise way, reveal the memory of a nation that has been created as a result of common use for ages. During this long-standing contact, one’s language use and expression cannot be excluded from their society and culture. When a language, which also facilitates the development of cross-cultural awareness, is learned and taught as a foreign language, it conveys a significant role, because the language is the carrier of values as well as metaphorical expressions which create a community as a whole.

Various students come from different cultures, particularly from neighboring countries to study or work in Turkey and the Middle East region as representatives cultural exchange and intercultural learning programs. The most common problem they encounter is to face with the new and weird culture.

As a word of Latin origin, *cultura* stands for something that is sowed in the soil to for cultivation. (Webster: 1993). Before the French Revolution, when Voltaire used the word as the establishment and development of human intelligence for the first time, the term *cultura* gained a different meaning, which

was followed by the dissemination of the sense from French into German and then to all European languages as a term to be used for the moral values.

According to Haviland et al (2008:9) culture is defined as a society’s shared and socially transmitted ideas, values, and perceptions, which are used to make sense of experience and which generate behaviour and are reflected in that behaviour. These standards are socially learned, rather than acquired through biological inheritance. Because they determine, or at least guide, normal day-to-day behavior, thought, and emotional patterns of the members of a society, human activities, ideas, and feelings are above all culturally acquired and influenced. The manifestations of culture may vary considerably.

The manifestations of a specific culture are usually observed through the oral and written as well as the meta-language that are used various contexts. Due to the specificities of the cultural and linguistic elements in the target language, students who come from other backgrounds must deal with some challenges of language varieties especially while learning idiomatic and metaphoric expressions.

A thorough foreign language course should offer more to a student than structural varieties, yet offer a student about the culture of the country cultural expressions. For instance, a foreign student who is learning to speak Turkish should learn about the history of Turkey, its common traditions, typical people, some literature, and even its cuisine. This is to say that by taking a foreign language course, a person both learns about a place and its people as well as metaphorical expressions, which are created over lots of communicative contexts in the minds of people in the target culture.

The word metaphor originates from the Greek word *metapherein* (“to transfer”), where meta means “among” and pherein means “to bear, to carry” (Merriam-Webster Online).

Therefore, the word “metaphor” may refer to “a transfer of meaning from one thing to another”.

We may underline the reality of metaphors in the process of education and training in different languages and cultures, which is particularly noteworthy within the phase of communicating with people from different cultures, Moreover, we can stress on their importance and the role to perceive a specific culture with all aspects.

II. USE OF METAPHORS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

A metaphor, which might be peculiar in each culture, also refers to a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or an idea used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in drowning

in money); broadly : figurative language in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or action is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in "the ship plows the seas" or "a volley of oaths" (Webster:1993). If all the words that make up a metaphor sense are known, it will likely have a good chance of getting the intended image.

Individuals frequently use the metaphorical expressions to be able to express themselves more dramatically in their own cultures. In this respect, metaphors are expressed especially outside of the real meanings of words in various cultures in order to provide the narrative style of the stunning expression.

However, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) and Lakoff and Turner (1989) approach to metaphor use and analysis in which metaphors are not special but rather 'ordinary and commonplace'. Furthermore, they claim that 'human thought processes are metaphorical' and we use metaphors all the time, every day without even noticing. They represent our cognitive processes and our way of understanding and interpreting the world.

Metaphors are used for the transfer of inner thoughts and feelings to the outside when the words are inadequate. Metaphor is a principal mechanism behind abstract thought and comprehension. (Karairmak and Guloglu:2012). Unlike the traditional perspective that views the metaphors as linguistic expressions addressing indirect narrations, contemporary approaches view the metaphors as a significant and complementary part of the conceptual system.

As a form metaphoric expression like simile, euphemism, an idiom is often used to describe an incident or a situation, benefiting from the different rhetoric expressions. (Aksoy,1988). According to this statement, idioms are concepts, words, situations in a particular syntax that specifies a structure or meaning with of a collection of stereotyped phrases, which often distinguishes from the actual meanings of words or a sentence.

Swales (1994) conducted a research on the students' perceptions of language learning. The participants in Swales' (1994) study were twelve adult female students from developing countries learning the English language at the British Council in Dubai. They were asked to draw cartoons to describe their perceptions of learning a foreign language. As Swales concluded, the drawings were closely related to social and political experiences of women in developing countries. The most prominent themes they depicted were nature, village life, family/nurturing, and personal empowerment that education gives.

Each idiom in a language is created as a result of the metaphorical accumulation of the cultural memory. Idioms, which are commonly used other than their basic meanings can hardly ever be translated into other languages with the vocabulary and grammar structures same equivalents into other languages . For example, in English, If the phrase "It's raining cats and dogs" is translated into another language word for word it turns into meaningless phrase. However, considering the dictionary meaning and patterns in English, the statement "it's raining cats and dogs" can be given with its equivalent in Turkish as "It is raining as if it is pouring out of a glass, in

French: *it's raining ropes*, in Russian: *Pouring as if out of a bucket*, In Chinese: *it's raining boats and casks*, and in Arabic: *it's pouring from heaven*.

Given the context of the relationship between language and culture of a society for hundreds of years' experience, perception of nature and an intense expression of literal thinking, metaphorical expressions emerge as a product of the society itself and have also a significant role in teaching a foreign language. The more foreign language learners use the idiomatic expressions in its accurate sense, the more dominance will be enabled over language. This dominance will also enable the foreign language learners to socialize and interact more efficiently with the native speakers of the target language. For instance, one who does not come from an Islamic and Turkish background will find it difficult to associate the meaning of the phrase "one who steals the minaret also prepares sheath of it" in their own discourse, which means someone who steals or tells lies also prepares the excuse of that event. Metaphorical expressions are developed subconsciously after they are uttered in some situations in daily life upon being faced by reading a literary text, or on hearing an idiom or a proverb.

Many teachers already intuit the strength of this argument. For example, the 'state is location' metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1999), derives from a wider conceptualization of time and the actions within it as space. When we say, 'I am *going to sleep*', we posit a state, 'sleep' as a state towards which we are in motion. More broadly, the future, itself, is a destination in space towards which we travel. Teachers who use time lines to teach a tense system have always understood this. Teachers who treat their classroom space as itself a metaphor of time, with forward points and past points, can elaborate upon the strength of this metaphor, relocating time structures in the spatial metaphors from which they have been derived.

Metaphorical expressions reflect the tendency of cultures. Therefore when the effective use of language and cultural elements are integrated into the learning process together, it facilitates understanding of the cultural elements as well. No doubt that all the metaphors are very difficult to teach , on the other hand they also encourage to acquire the grammatical structures, which are specific to realize the rich communication skills. (Tuglaci:1987).

III. CONCLUSION

As a culture of a society creates a situation, through which language elements can be understood, learning metaphors is a key element in the process of language learning. Although the meanings of metaphors are hard to recognize, which might also make it difficult to understand the target culture and as a consequence, a group of the target culture might look down upon the other one as being linguistically superior. The fact is that understanding the ideas and behavior of others individually and socially will be the wealth to contribute to the intercultural communication.

In addition, learning how to use metaphors in their appropriate places, enabling to express them where and to whom to use, assisting the learners to sense in discourses will all be the key elements to perceive different languages and

cultures and prevent learners from incorporating the misconceptions into the classroom environment.

As a result, interleaving the metaphors in the process of learning of languages, will both help discovering across languages , and assist to comprehend similarities and differences between their own language and in the target language when producing and the receiving the linguistic expressions.

REFERENCES

- [1] D. Aksan, *Her Yonuyle Dil, Ana Cizgileriyle Dilbilim*, Ankara: TDK Yayınları, 1995.
- [2] O.A. Aksoy, *Atasozleri ve Deyimler Sozlugu 3*, (Ankara: Turk ve Tarih Kurumu Yayınevi, 1977.
- [3] Ö.Demirel, *Yabancı Dil Öğretimi*, Ankara: Pegem Yayınları, 1999.
- [4] G. Elkilic, "Turkish Students' Understanding of Transparent and Opaque Idioms in English in Reading as Well as in Speaking." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*.Vol.4, No.2, 2008.
- [5] E. Guralnik, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* . (New York and Cleveland: The world Publishing Company, 1993.
- [6] Ozlem Karairmak and Berna Guloglu , "Metaphor: The Bridge Between Client and Counselor" *Turk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Dergisi / 2012*.
- [7] M. Maad, "Time Pressure and Within-task Variation in EFL Oral Performance" , *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 5–12, accessed September 14, 2012. doi: v5n1, 2008
- [8] P. Tuglaci, *Dictionary of Idioms in English and Turkish*. (İstanbul: İnkılap Publications, 1987.
- [9] G. Tum, "Atasözleri ve Deyimlerin Değişik Kültür ve Dilleri Anlamadaki Rolü", *Türkçe Dilbilim Çalışmaları Özel Sayısı*, *Turkish Studies*, Ekim-Kasım-Aralık, s.666. 2010.
- [10] G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- [11] S. Swales, From metaphor to metalanguage. *English Teaching Forum Online*, 32(3), 8–11. Retrieved November 1, 2006, from <http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol32/no3/p8.htm>,

Murat Demirekin worked as a teacher of basic English at private schools and courses for four years, at state schools for another 4 years, finally and as an instructor at the department foreign languages of the university for the last 6 years.

He completed his MA on "the use ICT for the pre-service English teachers", and attended some conferences to present about the themes of ICT, Language Teaching and the roles of metaphors in terms of teaching a foreign language. After 12 years of teaching at various private and official schools, he has been a lecturer at the department of Foreign Languages in Aksaray, Turkey, where he has taught Turkish as a foreign language as well.