

## EXPLORING THE COGNITIVE CONCEPT OF METAPHOR COMPREHENSION IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Abstract:** Second language learning and second language teaching has gained a significant amount of attention in the past years because of its tremendous implication in the pedagogy. Language is the common ground which connects people of different cultures around the world. When we talk about language, we have to acknowledge the fact that English language has been the driving force in connecting people around the globe and hence the importance in the pedagogy.

Numerous studies in SLL have proven various theories which help us understand and improve our learning and teaching English as second language. This paper here is making an attempt to throw light upon the concept of metaphoric competence in learning L<sub>2</sub> (English). The concept is dynamic in nature which does not confine itself to just linguistics but generously involves other major fields such as applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, philosophy and so on. Metaphor comprehension is one domain which is so very inherent in our thought system that we use it most of the times without knowing it. When we understand one concept in terms of another concept we are conceptualizing it metaphorically in our brain. Hence the study of metaphoric competence is necessary to learn about the ways and means of our thought process. By learning this, we are moving toward knowing the concepts which help us explain how a language is perceived, especially by a second language learner.

We live in culturally diverse social set ups with diverse language structure. That is precisely why every L<sub>2</sub> learner learns English in a different manner and we need to learn the way they conceptualize the things. This paper will focus on the importance of metaphoric understanding in L<sub>2</sub> learning and teaching.

**Key Words:** SLL, Metaphoric Understanding, Culturally Diverse, L<sub>2</sub> Learning and Teaching.

**Introduction:** This paper elaborates upon the importance of cognitive approach to the teaching and learning methods and approaches of English. English is primarily a second language in India. Inclusion of this language in the curriculum today is of primary importance. But the approach to this language which is a second language to us needs some inputs in order to make the learning easier. This paper focuses on the prominence of psycholinguistic study of the learners and the teaching processes.

Many theorists have contributed to the field of applied linguistics and made studies in this field of cognitive concepts which hold metaphorical understanding at the centre. L<sub>2</sub> learning is a very pervasive domain at the present time and we need to be updated about the latest tools and techniques about it and in order to do so, we must first understand that like every theory, this too requires a proper ground work and a basic understanding. In this case it happens to be cognitive science. The connection between second language learning and cognitive approach (metaphorical understanding) may come across as a faint or a benign one at first glance. We may also feel that the stress for second language learning is confined to classrooms, but it is not so. It is more dependent on the communicative processes and metaphor comprehension is one such concept which gives a very prominent perspective in the genre of SLL and SLA.

The paper tries to present the problems of the second language learners in India and how the current ap-

proaches toward teaching might prove ineffective and inefficient. This paper refers to the lack of co relation between the teaching materials and the reference points for the learners. English language teaching in India requires different approaches unlike the traditional methods used for the native languages. With this in mind, we need to adopt more effective teaching approaches in order to improve the learners' capability in the language.

The text books that we have currently, pose difficulty in understanding the contexts of the British/Foreign literature for the students of India as the socio-economic and the cultural background is not the same. It proves more laborious to the students who do not come from urban background as they fail to make the connection to the outside world.

The whole concept of cognitive thinking which takes place metaphorically has been deeply borrowed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen (*Metaphors We Live By* 1980). The reason for this concept to have gained importance in the recent decades is its mere application of the theory which proves extremely useful for outstanding teaching and learning strategies globally. The revelation that the brain mapping is metaphoric in nature is the key behind understanding how we perceive things around us. Hence it can be said that metaphoric understanding of the things in our common everyday life is the same concept as learning about everything around us. By keeping this vital concept of comprehension of metaphors in the center

we can apply this theory to understand how the brain mappings occur during second language learning.

This concept will also contribute in making the second language learning more effective with its cognitive approaches. But in order to make this assumption more valid and more empirically acceptable, we need to understand how this concept works and how the metaphors are the key players in the cognitive system.

#### **Review of Literature:**

'Metaphors We Live By' by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson is one of the foundational works in the field of linguistics. It can be taken as a book which is rich in information about metaphors and metaphorical structures which happen to be the drive for this research paper. It is a detailed work on the structures of language and the means by which we comprehend it. The work supports in establishing the theory that all conceptual activities are metaphorical in nature. It is not as simple as it sounds at the first hearing it actually involves understanding a deep structure that our thought system operates on. The metaphorical concepts are systematic in nature and it differs in each culture and hence language becomes the only operating force to realize these dichotomies. What this book does not help us in is the degree and dynamics of understanding and applying this in various cultural dimensions.

Stephen D Krashen is one name who is offered reckoned with second language learning and second language acquisition theories. One of his sought after work is 'Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning' in which he describes the way our leaning capabilities respond to various methods of SLL and SLA. His views on conscious leaning and subconscious acquisition are coherent for readers and explain our qualms and help us understand the differences at the elementary level and progresses toward a list of complex viewpoints such as conceptual systems. He also emphasizes on the comprehensible input for making the L<sub>2</sub> learning more effective. We also come across many cases that he has acquired over the period of time which give the readers a lucrative idea as to how the learning works with the second language learning.

Cognitive learning should be considered at the beginning of a second language leaning or teaching mechanisms. The theories on SLL have in many ways swing in the direction of cognitive sciences showing us that they are densely connected. It is our mind, our conceptual system in our own language, in our culture that determines our perception or response toward any second language learning. Such ideologies were also upheld by Jeannette Littlemore in many of her books and her papers. One of her papers 'Metaphoric Competence, Second Language Learning and Communicative Language Ability' beautifully tells us

how conceptual metaphor is important in language learners to function conceptually and metaphorically. Throws light upon the difficulties of the non native speakers in untangling and understanding the standards of second language. And in order to do so they must get in deep with their target language and it requires more time. Her books have many practical implications in the classrooms too.

#### **Why The Need For This Concept?**

Lakoff explains how metaphors have been understood over the ages. He writes that in classical theory of metaphors, metaphor was seen more like a matter of language and not thought. According to the classical theorists metaphors were used as a part of figurative language and not beyond it. Only after the extensive studies of Linguists like Lakoff and Johnson, the theory of conceptual metaphors came to light.

Metaphor comprehension when simply put is the way of understanding/ perceiving an entity in terms of another. This is definitely not confined to the poetic language by to the core of comprehension itself. This conceptual domain acts in thoughts than in language. It is how we remember things are important in the process of learning. Learning anything demands understanding it and to do so, we use our brain mappings. These mappings help us understand and perceive and remember things. Hence the study of metaphors and metaphoric understanding is significant in nature.

The recent studies in L<sub>2</sub> learning/teaching have branched out into various innovative and productive theories in applied linguistics and also other fields of pedagogy like psycholinguistics, ELT and others. This particular metaphor comprehension concept came into light when Michael Reddy first mentions it and develops it into 'Conduit Metaphor' in his works. Then we see theorists like George Lakoff and Mark Johnson take up the concept. Through their application of the concept into various cognitive systems and language they throw light upon the fact (as they claim) that our own conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. Then we see a series of great and phenomenal works from Jeannette Littlemore and Graham Low and others who bring some innovative perspectives and add many layers to this conceptual study. It only proves that this domain of metaphor comprehension is needs more attention and more research application from pedagogy.

By now we should be well aware of the fact that metaphor comprehension is not just a figurative language understanding but much beyond that. It penetrates through many layers of our understanding systems and deep into the cognition level. It expands our knowledge on the understanding of a language by a non native speaker. Thus proving us that there is certainly a relationship between second language learning/teaching and the concept of metaphor compre-

hension. As Lakoff says that the very mundane details of our life are thought and processed in a metaphorical manner (1992).

Why this concept is so important? For one, it tells us about the language and culture. Yes it does. The example of "Time is money" (Lakoff, Johnson 1992) is not merely an expression but an expression which has hidden meaning in it. It is comprehended metaphorically. As in, the phrase represents a culture through language. "Time is money" explains to us about a culture which has time as more important priority than money and/or equivalent to money. Where the life is fast paced and the value systems are based on time. All this are mapped in the brains of a native speaker. It can be distinct or it can share the same meaning with other cultures. Hence it is important and vital to study thoroughly.

Michael Reddy talks about conduit metaphor where he explains that this metaphorical way of thinking highlights the important parts of the expression and hides the inconsistent part of the metaphorical usage. This can be understood better with plenty of references to cultural studies. It helps us in probing the basis of the issue (here, cultural traits). Cultural values are not just independent but are coherent with metaphorical systems. Different cultures hold different values and hence different languages and hence the metaphorical mappings too differ. Keeping this in mind, we can say that second language learners need to focus on these mappings in order to get a picture of a new language. The teaching domain needs to focus on this too as it is the foundational brick in second language teaching.

Metaphor comprehension theory if practiced right has the potential to sink into the minds of L<sub>2</sub> learners and project a picture of the whole thought process and contribute productively to the fields of teaching. If examples like "Jim is a shark" need to be understood perfectly by a SLL, metaphor comprehension theory is a more effective aid. Hence it would be beneficial to us in facing the challenges in the academic field.

**It Is A Necessary Domain!:** There have been plenty of experiments carried out by the language experts, linguists, theorists in a heterogeneous classroom and a foreign language classroom. It has been significantly brought up that the efficiency in communication is the prime need in a student. A student (SLL or FLL) is needs to communicate with ease is the major ask in this present day. Even the theorists agree to this demand and they too believe that a non native speaker needs to focus more on his/her communicative abilities (Krashen, 1981).

Meeting the souring demands for ESL teachers is a hard task and theories like metaphor comprehension are needed to fulfill such demands. According to David Crystal (1997), "Nearly 670 people use English

with fluency and competency and this figure is growing steadily ever since 1990". Such is the power of the English language that has prevailed globally. In India, English is taught with obsolete methods in most of the colleges with the same approach as for the native languages. The teachers/ facilitators need to adapt new methods and approaches to help the learners learn English. The learners are posed with many difficulties in the course of learning English. To make a mention of few:

1. We have a heterogeneous classroom set up. The classroom is composed of students of various socio-cultural and economic and ethnic backgrounds and many different mother tongues. We can expect no uniformity in our classrooms.
2. The methodology and the approach we have toward the second language leaning is very traditional and with the great influence of mother tongue. We teach grammar with rules and give references in native tongues. We also use translation method thinking it will help the students understand the text clearly.
3. While teaching we tend to ignore the fact that English is not our native language and begin the text without prior knowledge of the text or any background to it. The students (here), find it hard to relate themselves to the texts which have western/unfamiliar references in them. The cultural references here play a vital part and if they are not given properly, we see the brain mappings either happening in the wrong way or fail to happen.
4. Proper training to the teachers by the government institutions and the people who frame the syllabi are the people who play a major role in creating a healthy and appropriate syllabi design to suit the learners. And to train the teachers accordingly.

These are some of the problems encountered when we think of development for the better teaching and learning processes. Teaching is an area which keeps evolving and it needs innovation adapting to the "changes" taking place in the outside world. This paper proposes one such approach towards the teaching and learning areas. The paper presents the cognitive approach for making teaching and learning a second language easier. This approach talks about metaphor comprehension and how it helps in the betterment of the learners.

**Conclusion:** This paper provides substantial instances to display the concept metaphorical understanding in second language learners. To imagine these theories being applied in a country like India where we are still struggling to provide effective L<sub>2</sub> teaching ideologies could bring a sea change. As this an organic concept and connects us with a wide range of academic disciplines and helps us to connect on an intellectual level. We need more in depth analysis of this theory to adapt it to our cultural background in order

for it to work. Hence more involvement in concepts like this will reinforce the interest in second language teaching in our country.

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