

Comparing the Metaphorical Systems of the L1 and L2 in the Language Classroom

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1 Introduction

Studies concerning the use, prevalence, influence and indeed the inevitability of metaphor in language have been increasing in recent years and there is a need to examine the implications for language learners (Johnson, 1996; Low, 1988; Deignan et al., 1998). Metaphors present problems for learners (Lazar, 1997; Low, 1988; McCarthy, 1990) and a focus on metaphor in the language classroom may assist language learners in the recognition, interpretation and use of metaphors in the target language (Deignan et al., 1997; Deignan et al., 1998; Low, 1988; Willis and Willis, 1996a). This paper will examine and compare systems of metaphor used in two newspaper articles (one in Japanese and one in English), each containing text on roughly the same topic. Upon examining and comparing the various metaphorical systems found, implications for Japanese EFL learners are discussed.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Definitions and Descriptions of Metaphor

The following are a small selection of definitions of metaphor given by various authors:

Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else . . . (Aristotle, translation: Bywater, 1942 in Kaplan, 1958: 368).

Metaphor is a name for an utterance that suggests its referent through a transfer of meaning . . . (Brown, 1958: 211).

The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 5).

. . . the act or process of denoting one concept (the tenor) with a sign conventionally tied to another (the vehicle) . . . (Veal, 1995: 1.1.1).

Metaphor is used to refer to the phenomenon whereby we talk about one thing using words for another . . . the thing which is referred to by the metaphor is called the topic and the word used to refer to it is called the vehicle (Deignan et al., 1998: 62).

Though these definitions vary slightly, what different theorists are prepared to consider as metaphor varies considerably (Pettit, 1982) and drawing the exact boundaries of metaphor is likely to be 'theoretically impossible' (Low, 1988: 125). The focus in this paper is on a comparison of metaphorical systems and the description offered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is very useful for this purpose.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980), in defining metaphor (above) also make a distinction between two levels of metaphor. Conceptual metaphors are made up of a concept, traditionally written in upper case letters, for example, TIME IS MONEY, in which TIME is called the target domain and corresponds to topic/tenor (above), and MONEY is the source domain or the

vehicle (above). This metaphorical concept is represented at another level in everyday language by such expressions as 'How did you spend your weekend' and 'Getting lost cost us twenty minutes'. They go on to make further distinctions between types of conceptual metaphors as follows.

'Orientational metaphors' are concepts that are spatially related to each other as in KNOWLEDGE IS IN / IGNORANCE IS OUT represented by such expressions as 'being in the know' and 'being out to lunch.' This type of metaphor is represented in Japanese by such expressions as *uchimaku*, literally, 'inside the curtain' translated as 'inside information' and *Watakushi wa kaya no soto desu*; literally, 'I am outside the mosquito net,' but translated as 'I'm not privy to that information'.

'Ontological metaphors' are metaphors in which an abstract concept is represented as something concrete as in IDEAS ARE FOOD, realized in expressions, for example, in which ideas may be swallowed, chewed or regurgitated. This concept also exists in Japanese represented by an expression such as *Kangae ga nomikome nai* which is translated as 'An idea that cannot be swallowed'.

'Structural metaphors' are metaphors in which different but connected elements of an entire concept are expressed in terms of another concept as in A COMPANY IS A NAUTICAL VESSEL, seen in expressions such as 'Don't rock the boat with your complaints' and 'If we get that loan we'll be able to stay afloat' or 'A good manager runs a tight ship.' A good example of this in Japanese, and one that doesn't correspond with any English concept but is somewhat similar to the English IDEAS ARE BUBBLES, is the concept FUTURE HOPES AND DREAMS ARE BALLOONS in which hopes can be inflated with air, lose air or burst.

There are also 'dead metaphors' and novel, or new metaphors. The former, having once been novel or new, now represent an extremely limited

metaphorical system or none at all. Examples include 'the foot of the mountain' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 55) in English, and *fumo* (Kenkyusha, 1983) in Japanese, which originally meant 'hairless' but now simply means 'barren.' Novel metaphors are so new that they are not yet conventionalized and thus easily recognized as metaphor by average native speakers. A relatively recent metaphorical system having to do with computers and the Internet is rapidly becoming conventionalized in English as it is in Japanese as well.

2.2 The Importance of Metaphor

Though the study of metaphor has a long history, it has been considered to be of minor importance, and a relatively uninteresting, deviant or colorful form of language use. There is now a large and growing body of literature centering on the functions of metaphor in human learning, thinking and interaction, especially in the cognitive sciences (Roher, 1995). Metaphor is thought to play a part in the development of cognition (Brown, 1958) and is believed to influence behavior (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The work of many authors, but especially that of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), brought the importance of metaphor into clearer focus and has raised awareness of the central position that metaphor occupies in the development and structuring of language. Metaphor is seen to be so ' . . . central and universal in language use . . .' (McCarthy, 1990: 48) that its presence is inevitable and as Aitchison points out: ". . . the inevitability of metaphor is so high in some semantic fields that one cannot communicate without it" (1994: 149).

There has been much study of how metaphor is created on the one hand and interpreted or processed on the other. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1987) believe that the creation of much metaphor stems from

the manner in which the human mind and body functions both physically and cognitively. Metaphors that are created in relation to basic human existence in the world are thought to be universal in that they may exist, in some form, in every language, though this would be highly difficult to prove (Trim, 1997). Examples include metaphors that relate to gravity (up/down, heavy/light) or the sense of the body (in/out) or metaphors that are a result of physiological effects that emotions have on the human body, regardless of culture or language. There is supporting evidence of this in a study by Trim, in which he states that metaphorical concepts ' . . . do tend to have a cross-cultural structure if they are based on physiological concepts' (1997: 271) but he also mentions that there is distinct divergence at the linguistic level. This divergence can cause confusion for learners because while the concepts are the same cross-culturally, their linguistic representations may be arbitrarily different.

Knowledge of the world and culturally relative information are also sources for the creation of metaphor (Aitchison, 1994) and this same knowledge is necessary for the interpretation of such metaphors, thus presenting considerable problems for learners (Carter, 1987; Low, 1988; McCarthy, 1990).

2.3 Metaphor and Language Learning

2.3.1 Problems for Language Learners

Learners encounter metaphor regularly, given the pervasiveness of metaphor and the essential role it has in language, and there are problems for learners in the recognition, interpretation and production of metaphors (McCarthy, 1990; Low, 1988).

In relation to problems of recognition, conventional metaphors, which are used so much by native speakers that there is little awareness of their

metaphorical nature (McCarthy, 1990), may be either interpreted as novel metaphor by non-native speakers, as they were in a study by Schraw et al. (1988, cited in Johnson, 1996) or interpreted literally, not being recognized as metaphor at all. This misinterpretation of metaphorical use of language can lead to 'interlingual error' (Richards, 1971, cited in Larson-Freeman and Long, 1991). In addition, even if a learner successfully recognizes and correctly interprets metaphoric language, metaphorical systems have boundaries and not all parts of a metaphorical concept are used (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

An example of this is the Japanese conceptual metaphor THE STOMACH IS AN INDEPENDANT ENTITY in which the stomach can 'stand', indicating an angry reaction, and the stomach can 'sit' indicating that a decision has been made. However, a stomach does not walk, run or jump in conventional Japanese. These boundaries are arbitrary and need to be pointed out.

Other problems for learners involve the use of culture-bound metaphors that require specific cultural background knowledge, mentioned above, such as referring to a domestic relationship as a 'Punch and Judy show' (Qun, 1988, cited in McCarthy, 1990). McCarthy lists the following four major problem areas for learners:

1. recognizing metaphors
2. delimiting their boundaries in text
3. distinguishing conventional and creative metaphors
4. identifying relevant or prominent features of the entities compared in order to get at interpretation (1990: 30).

For another related comprehensive discussion of metaphoric compe-

tence and possible learner difficulties see Low, 1988.

2.3.2 The Advantages for Language Learners of a Focus on Metaphor in the Classroom

Aside from a need to assist learners in overcoming problems (above) with metaphor in the L2, there are other practical advantages for a focus on metaphor in a language classroom having to do with the study and retention of vocabulary and the potential use of metaphor as a communicative strategy.

One advantage of a focus on metaphor in the language classroom is that metaphorical systems provide a starting point for the teaching of vocabulary. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that most metaphors are part of a bigger, coherent conceptual system and whole sets of lexical phrases are often structured by metaphorical concepts. A focus on metaphors in the classroom may, among other advantages, yield an abundant, coherent source of lexical phrases for exposure to learners. These lexical sets provide a context in which to focus learner attention and raise awareness of the network of associations that words have. These associations may also assist learners in remembering vocabulary (Nattinger, 1988).

Metaphor is also important in relation to the study of vocabulary for the reason that it plays such a central role in language processing in creating and extending meaning (McCarthy, 1995; Veal, 1995). Of interest here, is the way in which metaphor assists us in understanding abstractions and complex situations (Lakoff, 1991) and provides a means of expressing perceptions that otherwise may be inexpressible (Benzon and Hays, 1987). Studies on first language (L1) acquisition indicate that children use metaphor as a 'language stretching' (Nerlich) communicative strategy for expressing words that their mental lexicon does not yet contain. This is a

valuable skill even for adults and can be seen to have implications for language learners if they are able to transfer this skill from their L1 to the target language (L2).

2.3.3 Approaches to the Study of Metaphor in the Language Classroom

Learners must not only be able to recognize and delimit the boundaries of metaphors they encounter but, given the pervasiveness of metaphor in language, must also use metaphors and metaphorical language and even create them in the L2. As Willis and Willis (1996 a) mention, if a teacher can assist in the development and expansion of this ability, the benefits for learners will be very long lasting. The consciousness raising (C-R) approach as described by Rutherford (1987) is useful for effectively focusing on metaphor in the classroom (Willis and Willis, 1996 a). Deignan et al., in advocating such an approach, state that “students . . . are likely to achieve more if they are encouraged to consciously reflect on the metaphorical nature of language” (1997: 353). (for design of C-R activities see Willis and Willis, 1996 a; Willis, 1996; for examples of classroom activities with a focus on metaphor see Deignan et al., 1997; Lazar, 1997; Low, 1988; McCarthy, 1995).

The purpose of this study is to find and compare specific metaphors and examine the underlying conceptual systems. Problems and implications for Japanese EFL learners will be discussed.

3 The Data

3.1 Examination of the Data: Procedure

The authentic texts examined were two rather dated newspaper arti-

cles. The topic in both articles concerned the nuclear tests carried out in one country, which had soon followed tests made by a neighboring country. The article in English was a regular news item and contained eight sentences. The Japanese article was longer, with 22 sentences, and was an editorial piece. Over 40 metaphors, taken from both articles, were found in total, and these were examined for underlying conceptual systems and separated into three groups corresponding to the Lakoff and Johnson (1980) sub-categories described above.

The metaphors found were then compared across languages at the conceptual level. In some cases they were subsequently mapped out by obtaining linguistic examples to give some indication of their boundaries and then compared again for cross-language similarities and differences. After each comparison, implications for Japanese learners are discussed with an emphasis on areas containing potential problems for learners, including those listed by McCarthy (above). Due to the large number of metaphors found, only a small selection have been chosen for this discussion.

This study is admittedly limited by a reliance on both English and Japanese native speaker intuitions. Concerning this, Halpern has cautioned that '... the popular meanings that are associated with a character by the average Japanese may differ considerably from the linguistic facts' (1990: 70a) and similarly, caution is wise concerning the reliability of the intuitions of average native speakers, of any language, on popular meanings and usage of words (Sinclair and Renouf, 1988). Therefore, the discussion of these data is meant to be representative, or as Lakoff and Johnson put it, 'suggestive and plausible' (1980: 14), rather than comprehensive or definitive.

3.2 Orientational Metaphors

The following phrases containing orientational metaphors representing the concept MORE IS UP were found in both articles.

- (1) a. Pakistan raised the ante . . .
b. . . . in an escalating arms race . . .

- (2) a. *kiun* / *no* / *takamari...*
momentum / genitive particle / rises up
'an increase in momentum'

b. *shochi* / *no* / *ue*
understanding / genitive particle / above
'thoroughly understood'

The concept of MORE IS UP is so well represented in both English and Japanese that further investigations of concepts using UP were carried out in an attempt to find possible areas of divergence between these two similar systems. The following systems, all corresponding with systems found in English, were found in Japanese:

-GOOD IS UP: example; *takami*, literally 'high+view', translated as 'excellent idea.' Also, various sub-systems; SOCIALLY ELITE IS UP, GOOD QUALITY IS UP and so on. English examples include, 'high society' and 'top quality' for example.

-HAUGHTY IS UP: example; *takaburu*, literally 'high+pride' translated as 'haughty.' In English this corresponds with 'being high and mighty' or 'being on one's high horse.'

-NORTH IS UP: example; *hokujousuru*, literally 'up+north+aux. verb', translated as 'to go up north.' Compare with the English 'down

south' or 'up in the Arctic.'

These conceptual systems correspond very closely to similar systems in English and do not seem to present any particular problems of interpretation for learners at this level. One rather limited concept was found that has no equivalent in English:

-TOKYO IS UP: Traveling toward Tokyo is *noboru* or 'to go up' even if the direction of movement is from north to south (Halpern, 1990) but is likely to appear most often in train schedules.

This 'dead' metaphor is not coherent with the NORTH IS UP concept in both English and Japanese. It might be useful to point this out to Japanese learners, more for an introductory discussion on metaphor in general, as a very clear, contrastive example of how these metaphors work, than for avoidance of interlingual errors. It is important for learners to recognize metaphorical use of language, as listed by McCarthy (above), and the metaphorical nature of orientational metaphors is not always conspicuous to the average native speaker.

Though the cross-language concepts above vary little, the delimitation of their boundaries and how they vary in expression at the linguistic level, is worth investigation. These differences are also important to know for purposes of production in the L2 and to avoid interlingual error.

3.2.1 In order to find differences at the linguistic level it was necessary to have a very narrow focus, thus for the purposes of this study, metaphorical usage of the word 'high+noun' were obtained in English and a selection of these were presented to a group of 15, intermediate level, college aged

Japanese learners using the following criterion.

They were asked to use their own intuition as native speakers of Japanese to decide whether the English combination of 'high+noun' would be normal in Japanese if the noun were directly translated and, with no intervening words, came after *takai*, the word for 'high' (polysemous meanings include 'tall' and 'expensive') in Japanese. Subsequently and alternatively they were asked to brainstorm examples of '*takai*+noun' in Japanese and submit these to the intuition of a native speaker of English (myself) using the same criterion. The class was divided into three groups of five students each and given five minutes, as a kind of competition, to see which group could produce the most examples in that time. About 30 examples of '*takai*+noun' were produced, however not all the examples were metaphorical usage. The metaphorical uses of *takai* were pointed out and discussed and then compared with English equivalents in a column on the board and a selection, including all the differences found, are as follows:

Figure 1. English 'high+noun' corresponding to Japanese 'takai+noun.'

| | English | Japanese |
|----|--------------------|---|
| 1) | O high temperature | O <i>takai ondo</i> |
| 2) | O high objective | O <i>takai mokuhyo</i> |
| 3) | O high voice | O <i>takai koe</i> |
| 4) | O high score | O <i>takai tensu</i> |
| 5) | XX high noise | O <i>takai oto</i> ('a high pitched noise') |
| 6) | O high society | XX <i>takai shakai</i> |
| 7) | O high rank | O <i>takai mibun</i> |
| 8) | O high quality | O <i>takai hinshitsu</i> |
| 9) | XX high name | O <i>takai meisei</i> ('a famous person') |

O-Conventional

XX-Unusual or novel

As can be seen above, the similarities outnumber the differences and, even at this level, the chances of making interlingual translation errors, within this particular lexical set, are very small. There are differences however, and what is useful for learners is to expose these confusing differences in a salient way, such as has been done above, since the differences and similarities can clearly be seen at a glance. A focus such as this can remove confusion in this area of difficulty for learners (Low, 1988). The degree to which this activity may have benefited the students involved (above) would need systematic investigation. Reactions from the students were positive, including surprise and interest in how 'high society,' (6, Figure 1.) would be used and willingness to answer my inquiries on 5 and 9 (Figure 1).

It is not suggested that data simply be presented to learners for discussion, but that the learner be involved in the exploration process, finding, organizing, judging and comparing the data. This type of cross-language exploration has been suggested by Willis and Willis and involves learners in classifying data and identifying particular patterns and forms. This helps learners to systemize what they know and also results in an '. . . increased awareness of, and sensitivity to, language.'(1996 a: 69).

3.3 Ontological Metaphors

The following are a selection of metaphors from both articles that represent ontological metaphorical concepts:

- (3) a. . . . approaching a perilous brink...
- b. . . . take the lead.

In 3a, the 'perilous brink' is referring to the danger of nuclear war and

there is a similar expression in Japanese, which is *Kiken no fuchi ni tatsu-tasareteiru*, meaning 'Standing on a dangerous cliff' and is used metaphorically in much the same way. The expression in 3b might be matched with the expression *seno ni tatsu*, or 'to stand on the top.' The metaphorical meanings of both expressions were easily accessed by Japanese native speakers after having been given the context of the article.

- (4) a. . . *namanuri / taiou* . . .
lukewarm / answer
'mild response'
- b. . . *kiken / wo* . . . / *harandeiru* . . .
danger / object marker / being pregnant
'pregnant with danger'

Again, there are similarities in English for both of these concepts. For 4a, the concept EMOTIONS ARE TEMPERATURES is well represented in English in phrases such as 'she gave me the cold shoulder' and 'hot kiss.' Expressions in English similar to 4b such as 'pregnant with emotion,' or 'pregnant with possibilities' in show the close similarity between both conceptual systems. Here again, the linguistic boundaries are unknown though the concepts are the same. Further investigation of the abstract concept 'danger,' for example, when examined for linguistic boundaries, revealed very few cross-language differences (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2. Selection of metaphorical uses of 'danger' with equivalent Japanese translation.

| 'verb+with+danger' | Equivalent Japanese translation |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) brush with danger | <i>kiken ni chokumen suru</i> |
| 2) cope with danger | <i>umaku taisho suru</i> |
| 3) flirt with danger | <i>*kiken wo mote asobu</i> |
| 4) *challenge with danger | <i>kiken ni idomu</i> |
| 5) meet with danger | <i>kiken ni deau</i> |
| | |
| 'danger+is+adjective' | |
| 6) the danger is small | <i>kiken ga chisai</i> |
| 7) *the danger is much | <i>kiken ga ooii</i> |
| 8) the danger is great | <i>kiken ga ookii</i> |
| 9) the danger is serious | <i>kiken ga judai</i> |
| | |
| DANGER AS CONTAINER | |
| 10) be in danger | <i>kiken ni naka ni iru</i> |
| 11) be out of danger | <i>kiken no soto ni iru</i> |

*Unusual or novel use.

The differences found above (3, 4, and 7, Figure 2), again reveal much more similarity than difference and since the few differences found do seem to be arbitrary, thus difficult to remember, it might be an advantage for a Japanese student of English to have these pointed out in associative lexical sets such as these to assist in memory as mentioned by Nattinger (1988).

3.4 Structural Metaphors

Phrases referring to countries as persons were found in both articles as follows:

above may present some difficulty due to a lack of cultural background information, even for some native speakers of English .

Here again, it is the corresponding existence and similarity of the concepts in both languages, rather than the differences, that are striking. It may be that some of this similarity, especially that in *kyousou kaku kai-hatsu* (6c, above) is the result of 'loan translation' or 'calque' (Yule, 1985 in Deignan et al., 1998) which is a metaphorical expression that has been directly translated from another language. This similarity could be an advantage for Japanese learners in interpreting such metaphors since they have the same structure in their own language and, if presented as a structured set, in an authentic context such as the English article used in this comparison, could raise confidence in their ability to deal with metaphorical structures in English.

Another potential problem for learners is the mixing that occurred in the first sentence of the English article as follows: 'Pakistan raised the ante in an escalating arms race . . . ' In this sentence, Pakistan is gambling at cards and participating in a race all at once. The metaphorical concepts are also layered in this same sentence with the THE STATE IS A PERSON and MORE IS UP. This mixing and layering of metaphors, whether acceptable or not, does occur regularly as Low (1988) mentions, and it would be wise to point this out for learners.

Overall, the examination yielded a relatively large number of examples of metaphors and metaphorical systems. Few metaphorical concepts were found that require special or cultural background knowledge. At the linguistic level there are differences in the way these concepts are expressed, supporting Trim's observation (above) and further examination of the boundary delimitations of the many concepts found would be useful for learners.

4 Summary and Conclusion

The centrality and pervasiveness of metaphor in language and the important role metaphor plays in facilitating the communication of abstract or complicated ideas and communication in general were briefly surveyed and literature on problems for learners when they encounter metaphors was discussed. Possible advantages for language learners and opportunities for language learning and teaching were presented concerning the lexical fields that are highlighted when metaphors are analyzed at the conceptual level, as they were in this study.

The cross-language comparison of two authentic texts was advantageous on various levels. The fact that so many metaphorical systems and forms were found in the short texts examined, demonstrates that metaphor is indeed pervasive in language as mentioned in the literature. Also, lexical fields are highlighted by these systems and provide opportunities for exploitation in the classroom.

The authentic texts examined in this study also revealed more similarity than differences at the conceptual level and, while admittedly arbitrary since another set may yield totally different results, the similarities could be advantageously pointed out to learners as well. A close look at the metaphorical systems found in both English and Japanese also provided insight into similarities between how metaphors work in either language. Also, in relation to theory, those similarities found, however limited and minute a sample, would seem to support claims of universality, especially those having to do with cross-language, orientational metaphors.

On a practical level, as a language teacher teaching EFL to Japanese learners, this comparison has generated raw material for use in my own classroom as a basis for C-R activities. There are many advantages.

Raising awareness of the nature of metaphors with the aim of helping learners reach a level of metaphorical competence is a clear advantage. The use of a pair of authentic texts from both languages, instead of a single one in English, is particularly appealing. By doing so, the students are asked to examine not only English but their own language, providing a real, personal connection to the texts leading to a very practical focus on language. Asking for their opinions as native speaker 'experts' can place learners in a position of more responsibility in the classroom and again enhance the focus on language. However, it is good to be cautious, since not all learners may want such responsibility.

An additional practical benefit is that a comparison such as this can also raise awareness in the instructor, if the instructor's L1 is different from that of the learners', and provide insights into their linguistic world. Lastly, a comparison of metaphors between an L1 and an L2 could be extended into other types of comparison or study. After a focus on metaphor, other aspects, such as style or tone of voice could be examined and compared in the same texts, having already been processed for meaning, and thereby maintaining the same practical focus on language that was generated during the initial focus on metaphors.

In closing, it may be worth mentioning that, given the centrality and pervasiveness of metaphor, there are relatively few examples, in the literature, of how metaphor has been introduced as a focus for study in the classroom and even fewer studies presenting evidence on the results of such a focus. Low (1988) mentioned the need for an increase in research and Johnson (1996), eight years later repeats it. Research on the phenomenon of metaphor itself may be in proportion to its importance in the language, but why second language pedagogical research in this area should be so disproportionately minute is a mystery. Further research on methods

for introducing metaphors to learners is needed. Also, research into the effectiveness of the use of metaphor as a communicative strategy in the L2, and how this may be taught would help teachers better serve their students in this difficult area of language study.

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