

Illumination of Cognitive Metaphors on the Reform of College English Teaching

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Abstract. Metaphor which is an important rhetorical device exists everywhere in our life. It is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cognitive phenomenon which is a cognitive activity that humans use in one field to explain or understand the experience of another field. This paper combines cognitive metaphor with the reform of English teaching to research. It studies the metaphor's influence on the reform of English teaching according to the application of orientational metaphors, structural metaphors, ontological metaphors. Use metaphor to teach, cultivate the students' metaphorical competence and change the students' thinking methods to improve their reading and writing abilities. And then promote the development of the reform of English teaching.

Keywords: metaphor, cognitive, the reform of English teaching.

1. Introduction

Under the background of global education reform, English education in the college should be in line with international standards, so the English teaching reform which is an important part of higher education teaching quality is imminent. At present, more and more experts begin to study metaphors to promote the development of the reform of English teaching.

2. The Metaphor

As a rhetorical device, metaphor has a very important role in language learning. It is the essence of various languages. Recently, with the development of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded as a way of thinking in a language rather than a single modification. Researchers in cognitive linguistics have further pointed out that metaphorical competence which is finally reflected in the communication of language refers to the ability to recognize and apply new metaphors when applying the language. Language learning is not only to learn the words simply but to understand its cultural connotation by metaphor.

2.1 The Definition of Metaphor

“A metaphor is the understanding itself of one concept in terms of another.” defined by Lakoff and Johnson. [4] Metaphor refers to a comparison between unlike things without the use of “like” or “as”. This comparison is done between two things that are basically different but have something in common in some significant ways.

According to contemporary metaphor theory, metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a cognitive tool for thinking. Human beings can use their known experiences in the field of B to understand their unknown or unclear experience in the field of A, which can be called the projection or mapping between different concept domains. Different conceptual metaphors can together form an interconnected system. Therefore, consciously developing the metaphorical ability of language learners will develop new paths for the promotion of the English teaching reform.

2.2 The Classification of the Metaphor

Metaphors can be divided into three types which involves orientational metaphors, structural metaphors and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphor is defined as one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. Orientational metaphor is the one that does not structure one concept in terms of another but instead organizes a whole system of concepts with

respect to one another. Ontological metaphor contains two parts: container metaphors and entity and substances metaphors. It is a figure that provides ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas and so on.

3. The Application of Metaphors in English Teaching

3.1 Structural Metaphors

The structural metaphor is actually a conceptual framework, that is, through a concept A (source domain) that people are familiar with, to construct another concept B, which is relatively strange and vague. There must be many similarities between the source domain and the target domain. With their similarities, we analyze the concept B by the concept A. For example, the sentence “time is money”. “Money” is in the figurative field, money can be used for expenses, some people can waste money, and money can be arranged or distributed. People are familiar with the concept of money. And then by the features of money, we can explain “time”. Then we know time can also be spent, wasted, planned, or distributed. After the source domain is projected (constructed), even if the cognitive domains of the two structures are different, their structure remains the same, thus making the similar expression of “time is money” can be called structural metaphor [6]. The use of this metaphor not only makes the language imagination vivid, but also gives people deep impression.

3.2 Orientational Metaphors

Spatial orientation is one of the fundamental concepts of human existence, and its main source is the result of the interaction between humans and nature. The orientational metaphor is constructed with the spatial orientation as a reference. The spatial metaphor is mapped to the person's emotions, physical conditions, social ranks, etc., so that the concept of abstraction is represented by the positional words. The orientational metaphor is not imagined by people, it must have a relevant real-life experience. For examples: Happy is up; sad is down. Health and life are up; sickness and death are down. Up is for good (good mood, good health, etc.), down is for bad (bad mood, poor physical condition, etc.). Here, the "up" mapping is "good" and the "down" mapping is "poor". The simple concept of orientation is used to express abstract concepts, and students will understand it much easier.

3.3 Ontological Metaphors

The ontological metaphor is also called the physical metaphor. The human experience is the basic part which is the “real body” to express the abstract concept. The ontology metaphor provides a better way for people to understand because its theoretical basis is based on people's empirical perceptions of objects and matter in the real world. The basic way to understand abstract, obscure, or ambiguous things with ontological metaphors is to understand and construct through the most specific, most common, and well-known concepts or characteristics associated with our daily life. For example: You can use the following expressions to express inflation: Inflation is an entity. Inflation is lowering our standard of living. Inflation is hacking us into a corner. In the above expression, the concept of inflation that people are not familiar with is regarded as a kind of object, an enemy, and people use it. Words such as "lowering" "combat" "hacking" quantify them. The use of this kind of conceptual metaphor makes people print deeper and more vivid when they understand inflation. It seems that people face the real objects.

4. Cultivate the Metaphorical Competence in the Reform of English Teaching

4.1 The Importance of Cultivating the Metaphorical Competence

Danes first proposed the concept of metaphorical competence and developed the application of metaphor in the field of foreign language teaching. He believes that metaphorical competence is the ability to understand and use metaphor in natural communication; metaphorical expression of discourse is the basic feature of the ability of learning native expression. It should be different from

the traditional grammatical and communicative abilities. [1] Human thinking, behavior and communication are mainly based on the conceptual systems, and embedding metaphor is a key feature of native language ability. Danesi believes that there is a lack of metaphorical ability. "The learner's foreign language expression is acceptable, not wrong, but lacks the authenticity of native speakers". Metaphors are ubiquitous, but metaphorical abilities are not innate and require conscious development and exercise. Teachers play an important role in this process.

As a special cognitive activity, foreign language learning is a process of re-cognizing, understanding, constructing and applying the target language concept system. As a metaphor of cognitive style, it will inevitably play a very important role in foreign language learning. However, different ethnic groups have different natural environments, humanistic environments, and cultural psychology, and thus different ways of thinking. These differences in thinking will create significant obstacles in the learning process of language learners. As a cognitive way of human survival, the acquisition of metaphorical thinking is beneficial to language learners to remove these obstacles. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to cultivate college students' metaphorical ability in the process of college English teaching. And through the whole teaching process, the students are actively guided and inspired. Let the students realize that the metaphorical language is universal, and let them understand the importance of acquiring metaphorical abilities for their English learning.

4.2 The Methods of Cultivating the Metaphorical Competence

4.2.1 Cultivate the Metaphorical Competence in the Vocabulary Teaching

Vocabulary is the foundation of English learning and the central task of language acquisition. Most of the English words are polysemy, and metaphor theory can explain the development and formation of the polysemy phenomenon. It can help explain the relationship between words and words, then it can help the students to remember the words easily. Sun Lan has ever pointed out that "using metaphors to teach vocabulary helps to make efficient learning."

Durrant once said: "The problem that language teaching research has always been lingering is how to best organize and teach vocabulary." [1] In order to teach vocabulary efficiently, teachers can gradually introduce metaphors to students in college English vocabulary teaching. Combine cognitive mechanism and other conceptual metaphorical theory with vocabulary teaching to cultivate students' metaphorical ability in vocabulary learning. For example, the word "buddy" has a prototype meaning "positive sprouting". On this basis, the teacher can extend the meaning of other words through the cognitive mechanism of metaphor. For example, in the "buddy romance", the meaning of the word "budding" is no longer the germination of plants, but the beginning of love. Teachers can guide students through the cognitive mechanism of cross-domain mapping of conceptual metaphor according to the prototype meaning of the word. To associate with other meanings, realize the similarity between these meanings, and thus deepen the students' understanding and memory of the meaning of the word "budding". Therefore, teachers should consciously introduce relevant knowledge of conceptual metaphor theory in vocabulary teaching.

4.2.2 Cultivate the Metaphorical Competence in the Reading Teaching

On the basis of mastering the cognitive style of metaphorical vocabulary, teachers can also cultivate the metaphorical ability throughout the college English reading teaching. Traditional reading teaching pays too much attention to the analysis of grammar and words in discourse. However, this single grammatical sentence analysis is easy to make students feel boring and does not have a good effect on students' reading ability. The metaphorical language that exists in the textbooks is also a major obstacle to the improvement of students' reading comprehension ability. It is especially important to eliminate this obstacle and to develop students' metaphorical ability.

In college English reading teaching, teachers can first guide students to realize that metaphor is universal in language, and at the same time gradually introduce the relevant theoretical knowledge of conceptual metaphor to the students to let them have a metaphorical consciousness. Second, the teacher can use the textbook which contains the metaphorical language as the material to analyze the

metaphorical language appearing in the text. In this process, the students learn to analyze the discourse with their metaphorical abilities.

5. Metaphor's Influences on the Reform of College English Teaching

5.1 The Influences on the Teaching Methods

With the in-depth study of cognitive metaphors, the English teaching methods in the process of college English teaching have undergone significant changes, which can better promote the development of teaching and the ability of students to acquire language.

5.1.1 Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) means that the teacher first designs the planned teaching content into a series of instructions. During the teaching process, the students respond to the instructions and give the actions. The teacher first gives the examples by expressing the requirements accompanied with the body language. And then the teacher gives the requirements without the body language, but the students do it. Finally, the students are encouraged to give instructions, and the teachers and other students do the exercises. This injects vitality into the teaching and enables learners to recognize and experience learning in a real context. This also helps establish a mapping between students' senses and learning.

5.1.2 Situational Language Teaching

Situational Language Teaching was developed by British linguists in the 1930s and 1960s. It refers to organize the teaching process in a certain emotional way. Vivid scenes are used to stimulate students' attitudes and experience, to help students understand textbooks and develop psychological functions. In essence, the situational teaching method promotes students' cognitive activities by stimulating students' emotions. It helps to establish a mapping between the environment and student learning.

5.2 The Influences on the Thinking Methods

The language of each nation is the ultimate result of the long-term cognition and experience of the nation. Learning a certain foreign language is the process of cognition of the nation. In the actual teaching process, students should be fully aware that metaphor is ubiquitous in language learning, and cultivate their habit of using metaphors to think about things, bringing this good habit to learning. The abstract concept is mapped to the specific image and the well-known things of the public, then it helps to stimulate the association of the students and inspire their thinking methods. According to this method, the students can obtain new cognition easily and happily.

Horizontal contrast is achieved through metaphorical thinking with multi-modal perception and flexibility, which allows students to see structural similarities between two concepts with different representational features. As Lakoff pointed out, the main mechanism by which we can understand abstract concepts and abstract reasoning is metaphor [6]. For relatively abstract concepts, comparative analysis through more familiar and specific metaphorical language helps students to realize the similarities between the two phenomena, thus helps students understand other people's views, and then get dialectical reasoning and argumentation ability.

6. Summary

Metaphors play an important role in the reform of college English teaching. It helps to construct the relations between the abstract concepts with the specific concepts. The pragmatic roles of metaphors are helpful to the language's learners. For language teaching, it cannot be limited to a single vocabulary or a single sentence. It must be based on the context of the general meaning, that is, using the metaphor to explain the context and it helps to understand some non-verbal contextual factors such as special periods, social and cultural backgrounds, etc.

In comprehensive English teaching, teachers are not only teaching language but also teaching strategies and methods. Teachers can start from the experience of life and the level of cognition, stimulate students' interests in learning. Teachers should metaphorize complex discourse knowledge into vivid social situations or other specific things, and use metaphor knowledge to build students' knowledge framework and learning methods. Under the background of metaphor, new requirements are put forward for the reform of college English teaching. In the process of teaching, teachers' pay attention to the use of metaphor knowledge to guide students to think and establish the relationship between knowledge. Metaphor has a very important influence on teaching methods and strategies.

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