

The Role of Context in the Travel of Metaphorical Idioms (Dissertation Project)

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Outline

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Research Question

- Which type of context plays the most important role in the travel of metaphorical idioms?
 - Types of context (according to cognitive linguistics):
 - situational
 - cognitive-conceptual
 - discourse
 - bodily
 - Travel of metaphorical idioms:
 - Idiomatic expressions usually came into existence as a result of an interplay of contextual factors in one variety of English, but gradually they become adopted by speakers of other varieties of English without any visible effort.
 - Assumption
 - Situational and bodily contexts play a crucial role in the production of metaphorical idioms while cognitive-conceptual and discourse contexts influence greatly the usage of these idioms in other varieties of English.

Theoretical Background

- Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (e.g. Kövecses, 2015; Kövecses, 2020)
 - can be best described in comparison with the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (e.g. Lakoff, 1980). In contrast to the CMT, it stresses the role of context in the comprehension of figurative language and calls for the shift of focus from the comprehension of figurative language to its production.
 - The notion of context was in the original CMT limited to bodily context.
 - Additionally, although the theories of figurative language comprehension have to a certain extent included context into their analyses, theories of figurative language production have completely ignored the notion so far (Kövecses, 2020).

Method

- Selection of 100 idioms of (say) American origin.
- Subcorpus of these idioms within the COHA language corpus.
- Analysis of contextual factors in different time periods (e.g. in the first half of the 19th century and at the end of the 20th century).
- Comparison of contextual factors in the selected time periods.

Example

“spin your wheels”

- **situational context**
 - reference to wheels comes from car-related situations (???)
- **cognitive-conceptual context**
 - previous existence of other idioms with damaged/useless machines standing for helplessness (???)
- **discourse**
 - use of the idiom in car discourse (???)
- **bodily**
 - lying on your back means helplessness

Challenges

- Not all idioms classify as metaphorical idioms.
- Not all metaphors are conceptual.
 - Different kinds of metaphor (e.g. conceptual, resemblance, primary, etc.) are being classified as conceptual.
- Lack of sufficient information for reliable contextual analysis in the COHA.

Sources

- Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2015). *Where Metaphors Come From. Reconsidering the Role of Context in Metaphor*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2020). “An extended view of conceptual metaphor theory”. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 18(1), pp. 112-130.
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Thank you.

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