

READING LITERATURE OUT OF THE BOX: SPIRAL APPROACH THROUGH CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR RECOGNITION

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1. Using the cognitive science enterprise to approach reading.

Most students have never questioned the way they approach reading. They read the way they are supposed to in their cultural settings (mostly occidental). The Generative Model initiated by Chomsky in the sixties proposed the existence of a mental module specialized in language which consisted largely of abstract formal rules devoid of connection with meaning. Language was understood as an *autonomous* cognitive faculty totally independent of other ones. The Cognitive Linguistic paradigm, by contrast, understands language as a route to inspect the mind since it allows recreating the cognitive constructions that our brain makes of reality, as a product of physical interaction with the world. The structure of language mirrors the interaction between all the other general processes of human cognition, thus eradicating Chomskyan autonomist hypothesis. The study of language allows researchers to shed some light upon the cognitive architecture of the brain.

Cognitive Science appears as a point of union between the Humanities and the Natural Sciences given that includes in the same network of study fields as neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, artificial intelligence among others. Before the emergence of this cognitive approach, each object of study was explored in an *isolated* way, thus preventing researchers to enrich their work with the scientific advances that other theories had already formulated. Now this interdisciplinary perspective has enriched our knowledge on how to conduct effectively a literary course. The present work is framed within a subordinate category of the cognitive paradigm, namely Cognitive Linguistics (CL). It has developed principles and models of conceptual mapping to explore meaning construction (that is conceptual structures) and world knowledge construction (representation and conceptualization

processes). Students dissect the linguistic material and the conceptual constructions derived from any type of text either simple or complex, as a first step into the life as lived in the period.

We provide students with the basic analytical cognitive tools necessary to learn how to scrutinize the linguistic phenomena and how to recognize the conceptual machinery underlying the linguistic artifice of the text. This methodology is compatible with the principles of the new alliance between natural and human sciences and the future of the European Space of Higher Education and Culture.

2. Why a spiral procedure?

Because it invites students to experience the real dynamics of language as it could be experienced when entering the Guggenheim's rotunda in Bilbao. Language can be best understood in terms of a dynamical system. The procedure takes participant from a structural reduced center to an expansion of their cognitive environments. We think the world in all areas in which we experience it, including the different ways we use our senses no matter which one. It is not an outside-inside process, but an inside-outside one. It takes readers from an autonomous lineal static approach to texts to a collaborative non-lineal dynamic approach.

A crucial feature of a dynamical system is its balance between stability and variability – in linguistic terms we strongly agree that “variability in metaphor performance like many aspects of human behavior, is best understood in dynamical terms” (Gibbs & Cameron, 2008, p. 68). Part of the applicability of this “dynamic-emergent approach is that all scales of a system are amenable to explanation through the same general principles of change, self-organization and emergence” (2008, p. 68-69). This dynamical dimension represented in a spiral shows how “various forces (cognitive, linguistic, social and cultural) simultaneously shape, along different time scales, people's use and understanding of metaphoric discourse” (2008, p. 74).

Like Martin Chirino's *Wind Spiral* the procedure invites students from a structural reduced center to an expansion of their cognitive environments. Its dynamic movement represents the procedure applied in class daily throughout the term. Attendance is not only required but essential; otherwise students have no possibility to pass the course since we avoid using the informational approach. In this continuum process we can find some of the properties also attributed to spirals, for instance: roundness, fairness, locality, continuity and extensionality. It

is found in structures as tiny as the double helix of DNA and as large as the spiral structure of a galaxy, and it is also known as a symbol of the process of dialectic. Among the properties in our interactive spiral we would highlight 'extensionality' in which we mostly focus our attention on. Our intention is not to "duplicate thought, but to enlarge mutual cognitive environments" (Sperber & Wilson, 1986. P. 93). Students would be able to apply such approach to any kind of reading and text they wish.

3. Detailed procedure

Now, we will briefly outline the procedure and provide an explanation of each step. The seven step spiral procedure outline:

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1. **Non-guided reading and text analysis**
 2. **Text awareness development**
 3. **Conceptual Metaphor Identification Introduction**
 4. **Conceptual Construction Identification**
 5. **Guided reading**
 6. **Organize results to tutorial sessions**
 7. **Final written paper**
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3.1. Non-guided reading and text analysis

This is what we call the initial evaluation. Students are in their third or fourth degree year so we suppose that most have got a basic understanding of literary text analysis so far; therefore, in our first week we hand out a text for them to read and analyse in class. We do not give them any specific guidance. We just ask students to read and write an essay (as long as they might consider) analysing the English 17th/ 18th century selected text. They have got four hours to accomplish the task. You can either hand out the same text for every student or a different one. The essay should never extend a page long. Text will be taken from the course reader provided to students which already has got a selection of the epoch most relevant works.

Their written assignment will not be graded, but it will be kept by the teacher throughout the term to compare with their final term assignment. Those essays will be read by the teacher to get acquainted with students as an initial evaluation tool to keep record of their different approaches if there is any clear one. Students that remain the whole term will get the essays at the end of term to compare and reflect upon changes in their text reading and analysis. We have observed that 98 % of students read the text and basically explain it with their words trying to find hidden and universal meanings. Once the term is over they

compare their first analysis to the second one and we all agree there is an abyss between both.

In the following steps we will apply and briefly explain how the theoretical framework provided by cognitive linguistics could be a helpful tool to get into a deeper level of teaching literature in our universities. We must take into account “[...] to what extent language can influence thought processes” (Reddy 1993 [1979]: 175) and to what extent have we changed the traditional paradigms on teaching so rooted in our language understanding and production. **Concepts such as communication and teaching are largely determined by semantic structures of the language itself.** For instance, English as well as Spanish languages have got a preferred framework for conceptualizing communication, the so-called *conduit metaphor* (Reddy 1993 [1979]:165). We will explain it in next section.

3.2. Text awareness development

In this second step we will confront students understanding of what a text is and how does it work. We will question the traditional vision of texts and will provide a new perspective of texts shown in last research. Traditionally, students move towards texts from a very conventional (generativist school) vision of language. In which texts are understood as a closed work (finished and established), product of conscious action and inspiration of one specific author. The reader should access the well-defined sense intended by the producer. But with the latest developments in the theory of cognition this vision of text and language is not adequate (Bernárdez, 2003, p. 8). The text is not unique and its form is not a final one, it's an open work. The individuality of the text is but a myth. Readers will not passively interpret the text, but make a collective activity. “Meaning is not transmitted by the producer, and then interpreted by the reader, meaning is built collectively” (Bernárdez, 2003, p. 9). Regina Blass proposed that the text should be considered as “a set of instructions or stimulus where the receiver can reconstruct it and make it new” (qtd. in Bernárdez, 2003, p. 16).

At this stage we can perceive that the traditional model deeply rooted in the *folk vision* of mind as a container and of communication as transmission of information, remains present at the core of people's cognitive processes. There is a pervasive framework for conceptualizing communication with the so-called *conduit metaphor* (Reddy 1993 [1979]: 165). The *conduit metaphor* pictures the mind as a container in which ideas, understood as objects, are taken out of a person's mind and send to a different one during any communication act. With

this in mind, it is easy to reduce and understand texts as the transmission of ideas. The writer sends the ideas contained in his mind to the reader's minds. But this is a misleading understanding of what language is all about, and that is exactly, where the pedagogical problem dwells. In Facounnier's words "Language does not carry meaning, it guides it" (1994, p. 22). Language guides toward meaning which is then constructed according to the users bodily experience, context and culture conventions.

At this point we have found to be an effective pedagogical tool to draw a convenient distinction between the linguistic and the conceptual levels found in language use (Guerra et al, 2009). Facounnier himself asserts that "language is only the tip of a spectacular cognitive iceberg" (1997, p. 1). Whenever we use language we activate cognitive processes of which we are not directly aware. We raise students' awareness that the linguistic expressions are the material evidence we have to recreate the internal cognitive processes. Language in any of its forms can serve as linguistic material liable to be explored. Just as an intern in a laboratory analyzes chemical substances or investigates bacteria microscopically, the purpose of our course is for modern languages students to examine the linguistic components of a text and not just interpret what we think as teachers that it means (Guerra et al, 2009). The texts provided and studied with such approach gave us real rigorous information on the dynamics of meaning construction. We can say that texts speak for and in us. We target at developing students' linguistic ear through this procedure, and introduce them the sound/voice of each work studied.

The analytical tools provided by CL allow us to instruct students that linguistic forms are capable of prompting culture-specific cognitive constructions that may differ from theirs own. We explain students using a variety of examples that words are let's say meaningless, but there is a huge collection of pre-existing knowledge in the brain of people which triggers meaning construction in the form of conceptual structures. A conventional theory of language would defend that meaning is enclosed within words, because what we immediately perceive is that when a word is uttered, a specific meaning is directly assigned to it, with no awareness of all the underlying mental operations. This stress on the form/meaning polarity derives from structuralism heritage. It is reasonable to study linguistic structures, but meaning should not be forgotten, because many grammaticality judgments do not only depend on morphosyntax but also on context and usage.

This is an encyclopedic understanding of language dynamics and not a dictionary one. We continuously practice taking students from the linguistic form to the conceptual structure for them to see the connection avoiding the form/meaning polarity (Guerra et al, 2009). Our students will be able to understand the interdependent relationship between linguistic form and meaning. Our main goal is to guide them to identify the key concepts of the 17th and 18th literary texts and for them to know how those concepts were constructed and how those have constructed us. The linguistic signs do not 'contain' something, but rather they 'do' something, they activate radial semantic networks always linguistically motivated.

If meaning is embedded in the text, the reader's responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out; but if meaning develops, and if it develops in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions, these activities (the things the reader does) are not merely instrumental, or mechanical, but essential, and the act of description must both begin and end with them. In practise, this resulted in the replacing of one question- What does this mean? - by another- What does this do? (Fish, 1980, p.2).

Students' awareness is being built at this step about texts dynamics, language and thought. They would gradually identify the linguistic elements found in simple everyday texts and then in complex literary ones. We will examine the linguistic elements as material evidence of living language in all possible levels that they have already study in their degree: (i) phonetic-phonological level, (ii) lexical-semantic and (iii) morpho-syntactic level and on the other hand they will connect the cognitive or let's say 'abstract' element at work in the meaning construction dynamics of the texts under study.

3.3. Conceptual Metaphor Identification Introduction

Once we have confronted the widely spread tendency to go directly to the ideological load of the text mostly mediated by the teacher's interpretation or literary critic, and once it is fairly understood that such tendency is, in fact, a visible product of the hermeneutical perspective that has pervaded our literature courses in Spain. We star applying the tools provided by Cognitive Linguistics giving more importance to the linguistic constructions and the semantic construals derived from those lexicalizations. The text becomes an open field of discoveries not restricted by a superficial interpretation, but open to talk through its linguistic-conceptual constructions.

Among all the cognitive tools provided by the cognitive paradigm we have applied the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT) developed by researchers within the field of cognitive linguistics. It became widely known with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By*, by Lakoff and Johnson, in 1980. The theory does not conceive metaphor as a matter of language or as a rhetorical figure with main ornamental functions. Metaphor is understood as a matter of thought and as a daily essential mechanism of meaning construction. Students will receive basic formal instruction on CMT, understanding metaphor in the sense of Evans: “a form of conceptual projection involving mappings or correspondences holding between distinct domains” (2007, p.136).

Metaphors are present in our everyday language to talk about concepts that are somehow intangible, and may be hard to associate directly. Many of the common metaphors are based in pre-conceptual schemata and are related to our physical experience of the world. We use terms from a familiar field “source domain” to describe an unfamiliar or abstract domain “target domain”. CMT’s main concern is to identify how we structure thought.

For instance, we borrow our knowledge of journeys to structure our understanding on such an abstract concept as life. We have two ‘conceptual domains’, what is to say, two ‘packages of knowledge’ one for LIFE⁷⁴ and another for JOURNEY. Sentences such as: ‘*He is without direction in life*’, ‘*Look how far we’ve come*’, ‘*She’s at a crossroad*’, ‘*They have gotten off the track*’, ‘*He has gone through a lot*’ are used in class to introduce the CMT. The ‘source domain’ (the journey) is the field from which we take the metaphorical linguistic material to refer to the ‘target domain’ (life). Our experiences with the physical world serve as a natural foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domains. We talk about complex entities like LIFE and LOVE in terms of concretely experienced realities like JOURNEY, about THEORIES in terms of BUILDINGS, about IDEAS in terms of FOOD and many others (Kövecses, 2002, p. 5).

Our objective is not to focus on conceptual metaphor finding, but to get in contact with such meaning construction mechanism that will help students to examine not the particular meanings of the literary works, but most importantly, the dynamic processes which create the new literary and cultural outstanding concepts of the Enlightenment period.

⁷⁴ As is the convention in Cognitive Linguistics, we write small capital letters when we refer to concepts.

We work with a variety of activities starting from everyday expressions, to written contemporary text such as postcards, advertising, political speeches, songs and poetry. From there we gradually take them to the highly complex texts compiled in our reader.

3.4. Conceptual Construction Identification

Here we basically join what they have learnt about language, thought and meaning construction mechanisms to the conceptual construction in the 17th and 18th centuries in England. One of the main targets of our course is getting as close as possible to the writer's thoughts. To do this, we applied the new conceptual mappings of cognitive metaphors to unmask the way writers experienced the highly changing reality of their everyday lives in the 17th and 18th century England, and to discover the difference with the way Spanish tertiary education students think about it during the reading process.

What is new in the conceptual metaphor theory as a model to apply to the study of a literary text is that it is a comprehensive, generalized, and empirically tested theory. As such, it has become one of the most outstanding contemporary approaches to literary studies from the 90s centred on a dynamics of meaning construction, and of knowledge of the world construction that allow us here to be aware of the complex way writers think. We use power point presentations to outline salient historical, social and cultural events during the period. We show portraits of studied authors while we read their texts, we watch videos on fragments of plays and historical events and every teaching aid provided by the public worldwide network system.

We build the class upon prior subjects completed in the degree by the students integrating all that knowledge to texts analysis. Students progressively get familiar with the analytical tools provided by the conceptual metaphor methodology to inspect the literary texts in a completely unfamiliar way. Students explore the cognitive constructions that those authors made of reality through the language route. Our goal is achieved when students identify the key concepts of the epoch studied and how those concepts are constructed in the texts. The analysis of individual texts will also provide access to everyday human mechanism of meaning construction and concept building. Most class work promotes collaborative work of meaning construction and situated world knowledge. We want to emphasize that step two, three and four are the most difficult and the most time consuming ones. We keep working those steps during the whole term using the material found in the reader as well as extra material used on an everyday basis as a warmer or support activity. Steps five

through seven are designed to help students in their process toward final paper assignment completion.

3.5. Guided Reading.

At this stage students have already chosen a text from the reader to analyze individually as homework for their final paper assignment. This step is divided in four acts:

(i) Natural reading: Students read the fragment selected for a period of one week to grasp the linguistic 'voice' of such author. (ii) Second reading: Once the week period has concluded they re-read it and underline salient expressions. (iii) Third reading: Students discern concepts being constructed and decide which one are the main ones. (iv) Fourth reading: Pick main one and provide evidence from the text grouping expressions in field domains.

3.6. Organize results to tutorial sessions.

Students will organize their findings in a brief summary (outline wise) that will include:

- A. The linguistic level analysis that includes the: (i) phonetic-phonological (ii) lexical-semantic and (iii) morpho-syntactic aspects at work.
- B. The cognitive level analysis: In which they must explain how all the linguistic aspects previously observed are involved in the meaning construction on concepts such as, for instance, MAN, NATURE, SCIENCE, GOD, STATE, DEMOCRACY thus exploring the cognitive level or let's say 'abstract' elements at work using the Conceptual Metaphor as an analytical tool. The goal is to take students closer to the dynamics of meaning construction and of knowledge of the world construction.
- C. The non-linguistic elements (illustrations, format, font size, etc.) must also be included as meaning construction elements worth studying as text gestalts.

We are interested to share some sense of the hypothetical nature of knowledge, its uncertainty and its invitation to further thought in the literature arena.

[...] Miss Orcutt was inviting me to extend my world of wonder to encompass hers. She was not just informing me. She was, rather, negotiating the world of wonder and possibility. Molecules, solids,

liquids, movement were not facts; they were to be used in pondering and imagining (Bruner, 1986, p.126).

We monitor the whole process as much as possible in class debate and through individual tutorial sessions. A schedule of different days and hours will be posted for students to meet the professor in a 25' tutorial session. They will bring their first draft outline to solve any kind of difficulty found or correct possible anomalies before final paper presentation.

3.7. Final Written Paper.

We could say that the final project serves as a consolidation of all the practice and group work done throughout the term. This final paper would be a demonstration of the student's developed abilities to carry out an in depth exploration of a literary text individually. We consider this to be an inspiring challenge for our students, since for most of them it is the first time to face such type of an analysis. The outline of the final paper consists of:

(i) A brief introduction presenting some details about the author and the socio-historical context in which the work was written.(ii) A deep linguistic and metaphorical analysis of the text chosen by the student, and (iii) a conclusion in which the student gives an interpretation on the basis of the previous analysis.

4. Conclusions

Overall students' attitude towards this spiral approach was extraordinarily positive, since their proficiency to read any text was expanded through the Conceptual Metaphor methodology. There was a mutual awareness of the validity of Cognitive Theory, manifest mainly through direct reading and active dialogue. We observed that teacher talking time was reduced and students' involvement increased, in line with the recommendations of the Bologna Process. Participation was much promoted in class and students progressively got familiar with the analytical tools that would allow them to inspect the literary text in a completely novel way. In conclusion using the Conceptual Metaphor methodology in teaching literature has proved to be considerably successful and rewarding. Students learnt to read literature through a different lens and their proficiency largely improved.

Nevertheless we want to stress that some students at the beginning of the term presented a noticeable resistance toward this methodology because they were experiencing an important change of perspective toward literature and

language in general. This situation caused a cognitive conflict or dissonance in students' pattern of reading and thought.

Most felt very strange with the new perspective and felt lost at the first stages of the process; which by the way, we consider essential to reach any meaningful teaching. Their prior conceptions of what text, language, reading and literature was about crashed with the new conceptions we confronted them with. A considerable term time was invested in steps 2 to 4 of the spiral since those are the most difficult steps for students to understand and to get used to. Once this avoidance period was overcome they started taking the first movements toward text reality dynamics comprehension. We consider two terms would be better to consolidate such a huge amount of new knowledge.

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