Metaphors for Learning

Edited by
Erich A. Berendt

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Cross-cultural Perspectives

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Seisen University, Tokyo

Metaphors for Learning: Cross-cultural Perspectives

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Metaphors for Learning. Cross-cultural Perspectives
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Introduction

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What this volume of papers proposes to do is to focus on an essential domain of human discourse, the domain of **learning**, and to do so from the multiple roles of **metaphoric language,** in particular in the various types of discourse which are used in and about learning which shape our understanding of how we learn. Education is a crucial aspect of societies and learning is an essential of human life. Without learning, the survival of humankind would be in jeopardy and the significant experiences which provide meaning to our selves and identities, our values and associations would atrophy, if not die away.

Edward T. Hall (1959) and George L. Trager (1966) in their model of "culture as communication" argued for ten bio-basic message systems which form the basis of all human cultural activity. Learning is one of these, together with interaction, association, subsistence, bisexuality, territoriality, temporality, play, defense, and exploitation. What is useful for us here is that all of these primary message systems are interlinked in the permutations of our cultural experiences which are realized in the myriad compositions of various languages and cultures. They further analyze these domains of cultural experience from three attitudinal perspectives: informal, technical and formal awareness. An introduction to that processual analysis of culture can be found in E.T. Hall's *Silent Language.*

The papers in this volume represent a broad spectrum of these attitudes toward and types of learning. Issues of historical change in societies' conceptualization, the challenges to traditional formal values, contemporary social values in regard to learning, expectations in technical learning and planning for future changes in education are included. All such aspects of learning are approached through the analysis of metaphoric conceptualization.

Technical Learning is described by E.T. Hall as preceded by logical analysis and proceeds by system or structural knowledge where techniques can be applied to deal with observable data. *Formal Learning* depends on the transmission of tradition, of precepts and admonition and is largely received knowledge in a society. It looks to the past and assumes that as a given. Formal awareness is usually accompanied with

strong emotion about what constitutes proper behaviour. *Informal Learning* depends primarily on a *model for imitation*. Often the knowledge that is being learned and patterns or rules of behavior are out-of-awareness. Learning is more by observation. Systems of behavior made up of many details are passed from generation to generation which we only become cognizant of when rules are broken.

> The formal is a two-way process. The learner tries, makes a mistake, is corrected.
> …Formal learning tends to be suffused with emotion. Informal learning is largely a matter of the learner picking others as models. Sometimes this is done deliberately, but most commonly it occurs out-of-awareness. In most cases the model does not take part in this process except as an object of imitation. Technical learning moves in the other direction. The knowledge rests with the teacher. His skill is a function of his knowledge and his analytic ability. If his analysis is sufficiently clear and thorough, he doesn't even have to be there. He can write it down or put it on record. In real life one finds a little of all three in almost any learning situation. One type, however, will always dominate. (E.T. Hall *The Silent Language* 1959 :72)

In the conceptual experience of culture, the West in its Greek roots developed a dichotomy between *mythos* and *logos*, the latter the rational discourse which claimed to represent an objective view of nature and the cosmos, and the former the discourse of imaginative and transcendental experiences, such as expressing religious and social values deemed to give insight to our lives, often in poetic forms and proverbs.

Figurative and symbolic language occurs very early in human culture along with the contractual discourse of mundane social affairs. The Sumerians, as did the Greeks later, used language for descriptive and promissory discourse along side the poetic and symbolic discourse in their epics. The modern discourse of scientific rationalism is seen in the West to be superior to *mythos,* because it has enabled the astonishing developments in science and technology which we benefit from today. The effectiveness of *logos* discourse is that it is assumed to relate to facts and correspond to external realities which can be verified, that is, expressed in our technical awareness.

The *mythos* of human experience was not supposed to be pragmatic but to give contexts of meaning to make our mundane lives worthwhile. The Greek analysis of the expression of nature and human realities and their relation to language developed into the comparative entities of **metaphor** and **metonym**. The Western World has pursued its comparative analytical discourse in this mode of communication to delineate various types of figurative language where the verbal and conceptual aspects of communicating come together: similes and varieties of metaphors and tropes of all kinds, allusions and innuendo, allegory and proverbs, irony, rhetorical devices, etc. These inevitably follow the actual praxis which peoples throughout

their histories have made of their experiences of the mind, both intuitive and rational. The narratives of myths work well in the inner world of the psyche and are maintained by our formal learning modes but the Western world has evolved a rational discourse which has been applicable to the technical processes.

The reliance on reason which predominated from the 17th century, however, was challenged by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). He claimed it was impossible for human beings to be certain of the order we think we see in nature as having any relation to external reality. The "order" we discerned was just the creation of our minds. The information from the physical world which we receive through our senses must be reorganized in terms of our internal structures of the mind. Kant had no doubt about the ability of human beings to create a rational vision but his critique was to show that there was no absolute truth. He in effect showed the limits of Cartesian rationalism.

The contribution of George Lakoff *et al.* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, Lakoff & Turner 1989) to the debate on the cultural values of "objectivism versus subjectivism" has focused our attention on the nature of how language and the conceptualization patterns underlying its use shape our understanding of our experiences of the mind. His work has subsumed the overtly figurative aspects of language with the power of conceptual schemata which permeate our daily communications.

Raymond Gibbs (1994) has effectively argued that our basic metaphorical conceptualizations of experience constrain how we think and express our ideas in both our everyday, technical and literary discourses. He argues that metaphoricity characterizes our rational discourse "the belief that literal language is a veridical reflection of thought and the external world" (Gibbs 1994 :20) as much as the figurative and creative use of language. He concludes that "there is no independent stable account of literality for either concepts of language" (Gibbs 1994 :19–20). Gibbs' review and evaluation of the conceptualization roles of figurative language in cognitive sciences, everyday speech and thinking, verbal metaphor, conventional metaphor and metonymy, irony, proverbs as well as research in the question of consciousness in the interpretation of such language informs the work of the papers in this volume on the **metaphors of learning**. In a collection of papers (Steen and Gibbs 1997) the interplay of linguistic metaphors and conceptual metaphors and how conventional metaphors reflect the pervasive conceptual metaphors in our discourses is further explored.

> "(O)rdinary speakers/listeners often make do with incomplete and partial representations of linguistically and culturally shared metaphorical concepts. As a result, there may be a social division of labour between ordinary speakers in a specific community: every speaker may possess a partial, yet still coherent,

representation of what linguists have revealed to be a rich, complex conceptual metaphor. A complete conceptual metaphor may only emerge from examination of the communication between, or across, participants in some community." (R.W. Gibbs & G.J. Steen (eds.), *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics*, 1997 :3)

I would further recommend the volume by Lynne Cameron and Graham Low (1999) *Researching and Applying Metaphor* as well as the several volumes referred to above by George Lakoff *et al.* on how metaphoricity shapes all our discourses.

The conceptual metaphoric frameworks a la George Lakoff et al. in the domain of learning is the primary perspective of most of the papers in this volume, but the multiple roles of figurative language in education, the classroom, rhetorical studies and academic discourse as well as how it shapes socio-cultural values is represented. The languages represented include Arabic, Chinese, English, Hungarian, Japanese, Malay, Polish, and Russian plus the cultural area of South Africa.

The papers in this volume have been divided into four groups, although there is overlap in both the aspects of the domain of learning dealt with as well as the type of roles of the metaphoric language in them. The first two papers examine the historical shift in academic metaphors, of the West by J. Turner and of Japan with its Chinese roots by K. Yamanaka, and how they have impacted academic discourse and teaching. These opening papers are a reminder that the rhetorical language we have become accustomed to is not a fast fixed entity but that the historical shifting can reorient the conceptualization in our discourses. Joan Turner details the transformation in the conventional and conceptual metaphors used in academic discourse from the late Renaissance through to the contemporary scientific discourse in English in the shift from metaphors of TOUCH to SIGHT and how this has impacted the rhetoric of rationality as well as implications for teaching academic discourse. Keiiti Yamanaka's paper presents the Chinese tradition in figurative language analysis, how it developed in the Japanese culture and how the introduction of Western concepts of figurative language with the introduction of Western rhetorical education has affected academic discourse. It is significant that the Western tradition has not taken deep root in the contemporary academic rhetoric of Japanese academia, an issue heretofor largely unexplored in Japanese discourse. There has been a dearth of studies in the international context of alternative cultural traditions on the study of figurative language which this paper helps to rectify. Yamanaka notes the divergent aspects of the East and West in their classifications and concludes with a conceptual metaphoric analysis of the metaphors in Japanese classical poetry to illustrate the transformation and merger of these traditions in academic discourse in Japanese university education. These two papers illustrate how our conceptual patterns and their technical analysis as well as

the formal roles in cultures can shift with significant impact in shaping our learning cultures. This background is also relevant to the difficulty of translating academic papers where the style of academic discourse is divergent and the resulting conceptualization patterns can become incongruous.

The second group of papers focuses primarily on socio-cultural values which the conceptual metaphoric analyses elicit in a variety of languages, East and West. The first by Masako Hiraga is an analysis of the conceptual metaphoric patterns used in the discourse of learning in the Japanese language. She argues that three traditional conceptual patterns and one modern one characterize Japanese concepts of learning: LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, LEARNING IS IMITATING A MODEL, THE TEACHER IS A FATHER, and EDUCATION IS WAR.

The significance of the visual/iconic nature of the semantics of the Chinese characters/*kanji* is an important feature of this paper and also is related to several others dealing with Chinese and Japanese data in this volume. The etymological implications illustrated in the *kanji* are discussed. The visual/iconic representation, that the characters have, plays a unifying role in the Japanese and Chinese semantics as there are often two or more readings for the same character. For example, the basic character for **learning** 学 can be read as *mana(bu)* but in various compounds becomes *gaku* as in 学習 *gakushuu* (学 *study* plus 習 *learn*). The latter character is read by itself as another verb for 'learn' *nara(u)*. Each of these basic verbs, however, reflects a different conceptual pattern. Each of the characters not only has it own semantic focus with its etymological roots but has an added visual or iconic dimension to the recognition of its underlying meaning. Further there is a semantic syntax of the component parts of each character, which further adds complex semantic and visual associations to each ideographic character's meaning. A detailed exploration of the written Chinese characters/*kanji* and the roles of such icons with metaphoric language is made in M. Hiraga's book *Metaphor and Iconicity: A Cognitive Approach to Analysing Texts* 2005. This iconic aspect of the underlying meanings is largely absent from alphabetic writing. These are illustrated in Hiraga's paper but are relevant also to other papers based on Japanese and Chinese data (Yamanaka, Berendt, Hidasi, Jin/Cortazzi and Radwanska-Williams). For these reasons the original scripts of the language data are included in each paper. The characters in their written evolution also reveal visual etymological origins derived from underlying conceptual metaphors similar to the etymologies in Western languages which often inform the contemporary usage. For example, the English verb *educate* < Latin *educare* (guiding/leading someone) is based on the LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, so that in modern standard written English the verb can only take an animate object "educate some<u>one</u>". Whereas the verb *learn* related to *lore* has its root meaning of "get the knowledge of some<u>thing</u>", that is, "learn some<u>thing</u>", linking it to the conceptual metaphor of LEARNING IS AN

ENTITY. These etymologies are relevant to the contemporary syntax of the verbs and the underlying concept unconsciously shaping our discourse. See also Sweetser 1990 on this.

Erich Berendt's paper faces the challenges of doing a systematic cross-cultural comparison of the underlying conceptual metaphors in the domain of learning for English and Japanese. To do so, comparable blocks of data of representative genre related to the expression of learning were made. The data base in English and Japanese included the discourse types of technical writing, essays, and conversation. A complete analysis of every and all expressions related to learning into conceptual metaphoric patterns was carried out. Making such a complete and cross-cultural analysis posed critical issues of the placement of data, the selection of features which were to be highlighted into conceptual groups as well as conventional metaphoric types. This also affected the labelling of various sub-groups and their entailments. Goatly (1997 :2) commented "This highlighting and suppression of aspects of experience is obvious in the case of metaphor. But the ignoring of differences and highlighting of selected similarities is, in fact, absolutely necessary in any act of classification and conceptualization". This is true within one language research but even more so in the comparison of two languages. Some conventional metaphors were readily linked to the more universal experiential typologies both within each language as well as across them (PATH/JOURNEY, ENTITY, CONTAINER). Others of a structural nature reflected divergent cultural experiences, as in aspects of nature (BIRDS, PLANTS) or WAR/HUNTING concepts. The alignment of patterns between English and Japanese particularly posed problems of the latter type. The greater the abstraction of the relationships the weaker the representation of the appropriate cultural values inherent in them becomes. E.T. Hall (1976 :49) has noted in another context that the greater the abstraction the less truth is expressed. Discussion of the analytical issues as well as the implications of the cultural values in the respective languages in regard to the discourse of learning is made in Berendt's paper.

The Hungarian language with its Asian roots as it was transformed in the European cultural matrix is contrasted with the Japanese socio-cultural values through a study of the proverbs of education in the respective languages in Judit Hidasi's paper. She finds the similarities striking not so much on the levels of conventional metaphors or underlying conceptual patterns but in the socio-cultural values being inculcated regarding learning (acquiring knowledge) and teaching (transmitting knowledge). Her data is a study of relevant proverbs in learning in which the cultural specifics in the structural types of conventional metaphors predominate. Proverbs which reflect the traditional values of a society are representative vehicles for the formal attitudes in the domain of learning. Hiraga, Jin and Cortazzi, and Maalej also utilize proverbs, which reflect the formal attitudes in

their respective cultures of learning, and the implications of the conceptual patterns they contain.

From a contemporary newspaper-based corpus Imran Ho-Abdullah analyzes five key generic roots for 'teaching and learning' in the Malay language: *latih, asuh, bombing, didik, ajar*. These are examined in their contexts of use and lexical collocations. How these reflect socio-cultural values in the goals and types of learning are examined from their links to conceptual metaphoric typologies. The effects on language planning in Malaysia are also discussed. The impact of Islamic formal traditions in learning and the needs of modern technical education can be seen in the implications that the conceptual patterns found in Malay have. The topic of language planning and the roles of cognitive conceptual patterning are extensively focused on in the papers in part four (Maalej and Finlayson et al.). The potential conflict from contact between the formal, technical and informal modes of learning in cross-cultural contact and cultural transformations in contexts of time and place are seen in the conceptual metaphors utilized.

An important issue in second/foreign language learning is the role of the so-called "native speaker" and the implications for criteria in regard to what constitutes the language competence for this role in teaching as well as implications for judging the levels of performance of learners. Joanna Radwanska-Williams argues through a cross-cultural contrast that "native speaker" is a metaphoric construct and does so by examining the vocabulary related to it as well as the assumptions inherent in it by contrasting Polish and Russian with English and Chinese. She argues that the distinctions among the assumptions made in regard to birth, identity and language acquisition play out in different configurations among these languages. The impact of such assumptions are reflected in the formal level of awareness we bring to our expectations in the language learning domain. Jin and Cortazzi in their paper also take up the issue of student and teacher images of their roles in learning.

Of the two papers in part three on the roles of metaphor in the classroom, Lynne Cameron's focuses on the discourse roles of conventional metaphors in the British primary school classroom. Her study is based on data (taped classroom interaction and observation notes) from a six-week period of English 9 to 11 year olds in class. Figurative language use (types and functions) and the systematic (conventional) metaphors in the classroom, such as JOURNEY, are analyzed with instructional and interactional implications for learning in the classroom. Cameron argues from her analysis that the use of metaphor has a significant influence on "access to lesson agendas, subject area content and language, learning from a teacher's feedback on performance and recognizing appropriate behaviour and participation" in learning opportunities. In her earlier work *Metaphor in Educational Discourse* 2003 she has explored the use of metaphoric language in the