Metaphors in L2 Norwegian highstakes exams

Abstracts:
Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory advances the view that metaphor is a fundamental cognitive process defining our understanding of reality: “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing [e.g. love] in terms of another [e.g. a journey]” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Such metaphors in thought (conceptual metaphors) are reflected as metaphors in language, i.e. by the words and expressions we produce (linguistic metaphors). Empirical research has since confirmed that linguistic metaphors are ubiquitous in both L1 and L2 language (see e.g. Nacey, 2013; Steen et al., 2010). Metaphor therefore necessarily plays a central role in language learning; indeed, Littlemore and Low (2006) argue that metaphor plays an important role in all areas of L2 communicative competence.

Previous research about metaphor and language learners has focused primarily on metaphor comprehension, interpretation and/or appreciation, with L2 studies frequently concentrating on metaphor in connection with vocabulary acquisition and retention. Much less work has been carried out on production of metaphor in the L2, with most of those studies that have been conducted investigating L2 English, rather than other L2 languages. This paper addresses that gap by investigating metaphor language in the Norwegian Second Language Corpus (ASK), mapping out and analyzing the metaphorical language produced by Norwegian L2 language learners in essays where they were required to interpret a Norwegian poem and actively incorporate its message into their own text.

The empirical data consists of 22 ASK texts written by L2 Norwegian learners as part of the Test i norsk – høyere nivå ['Test in Norwegian – higher level'], a high-stakes language test primarily intended for immigrants to Norway who need to document their language skills for employment or for admission to Norwegian universities and colleges. These texts – comprising roughly 10,000 words – were produced by informants with one of eight different L1s and from one of twelve different countries, in response to the identical task. They were instructed to write a text incorporating their own opinions and experiences of friendship with the message(s) in the Kolbein Falkeid poem Det er langt mellom venner ['It is far between friends'], a poem whose core is metaphorical simile.

This study identifies all linguistic metaphors in the L2 texts using the Scandinavian version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Amsterdam, which requires analysis of each word for metaphorical status (Nacey, Greve, & Falck, submitted). Subsequent analysis focuses upon metaphor density, as well as the role of both deliberate metaphors and metaphor clusters. The main goal of the chapter is to explore the ways in which these L2 learners use
their language resources to expand upon Falkeid’s metaphors and/or produce alternative metaphors in their responses. This chapter thus contributes to the knowledge base about the role of metaphor in L2 written production created in a high consequence, test-taking situation.

References:


