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Influence of the mother tongue on the use of metaphor in English as a second language

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, metaphor serves as a basic mental operation, as a way of perceiving, structuring, and explaining the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). It also serves as a medium of the mental processes based on cultural and social interaction with the world (Gibbs, 2006; MacArthur, 2010). People do not only express their thoughts with the help of metaphors, but also normally think metaphorically. Therefore, it is important for language learners to use metaphors in the target language appropriately. The present study focuses on the analysis of the influence of the mother tongue in the use of metaphors in essays written by Spanish learners of English. To carry out this study it was decided to focus on metaphors that were not used correctly by Spanish learners with the aim of identifying the cause of this linguistic failure. Three corpora were used for this study: the experimental corpus contained 40 essays of Spanish-speaking learners of English, 20 with a B2 level and 20 with a C1 level, following the description of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of the European Council (2001). The other two corpora were used as reference corpora: one was compiled from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the other one from the Spanish Corpus CREA. In the following step, after compiling the experimental sub-corpus, it was adopted the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) approach to identify metaphors (Steen et al., 2010). The results of our analysis are especially helpful for learners and teachers of English as a Foreign Language as well as for testing researchers.

References

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