The Use of Metaphors to Express the Concept of 'Happiness' and 'Unhappiness' by Non-Native English Speakers

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ANNOTATION

This article highlights the characteristics of the metaphors denoting the concepts of happiness and unhappiness used by non-native English speakers. It also shows the problems that arise while using metaphors in expressing emotions and compares some examples of metaphors that were gathered from Uzbek students who are learning the English language and the examples taken from the British National Corpus that is available online.

KEYWORDS: concept, metaphors, structural metaphors, emotion, happiness, unhappiness, verbalization, conceptualization.

Introduction

Happiness and its anti-concept, unhappiness/sadness, can be verbalized through linguistic units in all layers of the language, and they combine to form a semantic field. These verbalizers are synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, and hypernyms at the lexical level, and metaphors, proverbs, and sayings are considered at the higher levels. It would not be a mistake to say that the most common among them are metaphors. The reason is that, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) said, metaphors have already become an integral part of our speech (p.256).

Materials and Methods

Conceptual metaphors, as noted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) or Kovesces, are a more complete and accurate explanation to the listener of using an abstract conceptual target domain from another concrete domain, taking into account their similarities.

To convey complex ideas or emotions in a way that is more relatable and understandable, we all human beings use metaphors in different ways. Metaphors allow people to express abstract concepts in a concrete and tangible way. They can also add depth and richness to language, making it more interesting and engaging. Additionally, metaphors can be used to create vivid imagery and evoke strong emotions in the listener or reader. So people call metaphors a powerful tool for communication and expression.

Metaphor, which allows writers to convey vivid imagery that transcends literal meanings, creates images that are easier to understand and respond to than literal language. Metaphorical language activates the imagination, and the writer is more able to convey emotions and impressions through metaphor.

However, the use of metaphors by native and non-native speakers can differ from each other and these differences should be explained. Such kind of research has been done by Goutéraux (2017) in France. 44 students of the University of Paris-Diderot, native speakers, speakers of English as a foreign language, and bilingual students were selected, and their unexpected reactions to the art, especially the feeling of surprise and other emotions related to it, were recorded, then the use of metaphors and idioms in these responses were examined.

In his research, Goutéraux (2017) stated that natives, bilinguals, and learners with sustained exposure to English as a foreign language are more metaphorically proficient than academically advanced learners. Natives and bilinguals prove creative while learners tend to produce repetitive adjectival forms and conventional collocations.

For non-native English speakers, it is difficult to sound natural by using metaphors, so we will analyze the characteristics of the usage of metaphors to express the concept of 'happiness' and 'unhappiness' by non-native English speakers living in Uzbekistan.

The characteristics of the usage of metaphors to express the concept of 'happiness' and 'unhappiness' by non-native English speakers may include:

The first reason for unnatural ways of using metaphors is cultural influence. As non-native speakers of English, people tend to use metaphors which is only common to their own culture or language to express their positive and negative emotions. For example, one of our survey respondents used the metaphor "Happiness is a sunny spring which can melt winter's snow and ice, which brings colors to nature" to describe happiness. The expression of 'sunny spring' is common in Uzbek culture where people usually associate spring with positive events.

The next reason could be a literal translation. Non-native English speakers tend to translate phraseological units and metaphors from their own native language directly into their foreign languages, which may result in awkward and unnatural ways. In the following example where the respondents were asked to show sympathy for their unhappy friends who failed an important exam, one of them write: "I felt myself like you. But I believe you, you will pass next time". The respondent wanted to use the metaphor "I can put myself in your shoes" but just directly translated the meaning that this metaphor applied from Uzbek into English.

Another reason for expressing emotion with difficulty is the lack of vocabulary and variety of grammar structures, which may result in the overuse of certain phrases, idioms, and metaphors and the repetition of simple syntactic structures. As an example, we can say the phrase 'on top of the world' which is often used by non-native English speakers to express happiness repeatedly.

The final reason could be a personal experience. As a non-native speaker of English, one can use metaphors based on their personal experience to express happiness and unhappiness. For example, a person who loves gardening may use the metaphor "like a blooming flower" to express happiness.

Results and Discussions

In the following paragraphs, the metaphors that have been created and used by non-native English speakers in Uzbekistan have been provided. The most common type of metaphors in our survey data was structural metaphors which are "those where a complex concept, usually of an abstract nature, is presented in terms of another concept, which is usually more concrete". Some respondents stated that happiness is "…when you feel your inner peace", "…is peace inside us", "…is the peace in soul when you have nothing to worry about", "…is peace", and "…is appeasement". In all these examples, the word "peace" has been used. To check the frequency of word association of happiness with the word "peace", we used a corpus of British National Corpus, and the result was 35 matches in 30 different texts (frequency: 0.312 instances per million words). However, happiness was metaphorized by using the word "peace" in only one example:

*We have also looked further back, to the roots of our culture in the classical period when philosophers first interpreted **happiness as peace of mind*** [5].

In most of the examples, the words "peace" and "happiness" come together with the conjunction "and":

*Prayer Let us pray that we may find the contentment which comes from living our lives to the full and being concerned and thoughtful in our dealings with others. May we find **an inner peace and happiness** which is beyond the price of money* [5].

*The history of these is one of utter failure to bring **peace and happiness** to humankind* [5].

Conclusion

With the above-mentioned examples, we can conclude that Uzbek students as non-native English speakers used metaphors according to their own cultural background and with their prior knowledge. Some of them directly translated metaphors from Uzbek into English which as a result may sound unnatural in English conversations.

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