

HOW ANGRY ARE YOU? ON CONCEPTUALISING ANGER IN POLISH AND ENGLISH (A DIDACTIC PERSPECTIVE)

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1. Introduction

Studies in the field of cognitive linguistics developed by such linguists as Lakoff or Johnson emphasize the importance of the universality of human experience and its reflection in the languages as well as the importance of being sensitive to how and why we say certain things. The universality of human experience refers here to the importance of the basic phenomena in our life, such as our bodies, how they function and respond to life experiences, and the influence of environmental phenomena on how we shape our thoughts by means of language. By assuming the importance of the universal, cognitive scientists do not intend to eradicate the role of cultural patterns expressed by language. But the awareness of what we have in common as human beings, what we share and what is expressed by our languages which in fact are not so different in their conceptual framework, allows us to facilitate development of multilingualism and intercultural communication.

The present study looks at the field of emotions and more precisely ANGER, as expressed in two different languages, Polish and English, and asks the question how the cognitive understanding and interpretation of language patterns can contribute to the development of lexical competence in multilingual language users, especially in the context of formal language instruction, i.e. foreign language learning in a classroom context. The study focuses on what is commonly understood as language awareness on the level of cognition (awareness of language patterns) and its role in foreign language development. I believe that although the focus is on the semantic field of ANGER, the main ideas presented apply to a wide range of concepts expressed by the language(s) we use.

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Cognitivists define emotions as cognitively based feelings reflected by bodily reactions, operating at different levels of perception: reactions which can be observed externally, felt internally and those which are imagined (Wierzbicka, 1999: 294-302). As such, ANGER is understood as emotion expressed:

- *through external bodily symptoms that are observable, such as redness, sweat, etc.;
- *through sensations felt in the body, such as the heat, increased blood pressure etc.;
- *through imagined internal bodily images, such as the state of bursting out (with anger).

The universality of the above-described manifestations of the feeling of ANGER show it as a semantically coherent concept that can be categorised and structured, irrespective of the linguistic system in which it is being expressed. Additionally, it can be assumed that the conceptual universality is reflected in the formal equivalence of expression of ANGER in different languages.

2. Description of the study

2.1. Research questions

The data collected for the purposes of the present study serve a double research purpose. First of all, the expressions of ANGER are being compared cross-linguistically to describe similarities and differences between Polish and English ways of expressing anger. The degree of universality and culture-specific aspects of language are being looked at in a mini corpus of most frequently used collocations collected both from the native speakers of Polish and English as well as from dictionary sources.

Secondly, the data aims at showing and evaluating the subjects' awareness of the conceptual structure of ANGER, both in Polish (subjects' mother tongue) and in English (their foreign language).

2.2. The subjects used in the study

The native speakers of Polish used as informants in the data collection were a group of students, who were bilingual language users, whose second language was English at the advanced level. All of them were the final year students of the Institute of English at the University of Silesia. They were all pretty homogenous in terms of their language competence as well as their educational background and learning history.

They could be described as linguistically aware and familiar with the concepts of cognitive linguistics.

The native speakers of English were two English university lecturers with no language competence in Polish and corpus collected by Deignan (1995).

2.3. The data collection tools

The description of similarities and differences between Polish and English ways of expressing ANGER, i.e. the cross-linguistic part of the study was based on the language elicitation tasks described below (for Polish language expressions). For English, a dictionary search and the native-speaker informants data were collected over a period of time.

To describe and evaluate learners' cognitive language awareness three types of language tasks were prepared and carried out in three consecutive sessions:

Type 1: production and explanation (session 1)

Type 2: recognition and explanation (session 2)

Type 3: conceptualisation (session 3)

The three sessions followed the sequence:

production (L1 & FL) → recognition (FL & L1) → conceptualisation

In session 1 the subjects were given a task in which they were to produce examples of ANGER expressions in their L1 (Polish) and L2 (English) and explain their origin (task 1 example)

Task 1

Give examples of phrases expressing ANGER and explain their origin (e.g. Polish: "byc czerwonym ze zlosci", or English "boil with rage"):

A. *Examples in Polish and their explanation :*

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B. *Examples in English and their explanation:*

.....

In session 2 the subjects were supplied with a set of ANGER expressions in English and were instructed to explain their origin, translate them into Polish and explain the origin of the Polish translation equivalents (task 2 example).

Task 2

Translate the following examples into Polish and explain their origin both in English and in Polish:

1. "Don't get hot under the collar". Explanation:

 Polish translation.:
 Explanation:
2. "I was so mad I couldn't see straight". Explanation:

 Polish translation:
 Explanation:

The last session (session 3) required the informants to think about the concept of ANGER, define it and describe its symptoms (task 3).

- Task 3
- a. Define ANGER:

 - b. What are the symptoms and descriptive qualities of ANGER?
 *bodily:

 *behavioural:

3. Data presentation and comments

3.1. "How" angry are you in Polish and English: a cross-linguistic comparison

As already mentioned, a cognitive dimension of any concept embraces its universal character (core) and its culture- specific (peripheral) aspects, which operate on literal and figurative (metaphoric) levels. In the case of ANGER, the metonymies expressing it could be classified as:

- a. literal (observable):
 - *expressed by means of bodily sensations: BODY HEAT,
 - *expressed by external bodily symptoms: REDNESS, AGITATION
- b. figurative (imaginable):
 - *expressed by internal bodily images: BLOOD PRESSURE
 - *expressed by internal bodily images: LOSS OF PERCEPTION

The examples of language expressions for each of the metonymies are presented in Table 1. What can be observed here is a full synonymy between the two languages, both in the case of the literal and figurative expressions.

The below metonymies reflect how bodily symptoms and sensations which accompany the states of agitation and alert, such as in this case the state of being angry, constitute a vehicle of language expression.

Metonymies for ANGER	Polish	English
BODY HEAT	<i>goraca glowa</i> <i>zrobic sie komus goraco</i>	<i>Hothead</i> <i>hot under collar</i>
BLOOD PRESSURE	<i>podnioslo mi sie cisnienie</i>	<i>burst a blood vessel</i>
REDNESS (face, neck)	<i>Poczerwieniec ze zlosci</i>	<i>to be red/flushed with anger</i>
AGITATION	<i>trzasc sie ze zlosci</i> <i>miotac sie ze zlosci</i>	<i>shake / quiver with anger</i> <i>hopping mad</i>
LOSS OF PERCEPTION	<i>zaslepiony z gniewu</i> <i>nie widzialem jasno</i>	<i>blind with rage</i> <i>couldn't see straight</i>

Table 1. Metonymies for ANGER and equivalence of Polish and English expressions.

Looking closer at the semantic field of ANGER described by a set of metaphors, we can observe the underlying conceptual base. This conceptual base is the human body and the way it functions. It is environmental phenomena such as the existence of other species, for example animals. It can also include activities a man is involved in, such as fighting and war.

The following examples of metaphors show the correspondence between Polish and English expressions of ANGER.

1. Metaphor: ANGER IS HEAT

Polish: *zagotowalo sie we mnie, kipiec ze zlosci, plonac z gniewu, spalac sie (ze zlosci)*

English: *boil with anger, to burn with rage, to smoulder with rage, to fume with rage*

2. Metaphor: THE BODY AS CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS

Polish: *wybychnac, krew mnie zalala, wyprowadzic z rownowagi, krew uderzyła do głowy, wyjść z siebie*

English: *explode, let off steam, lose one's balance /temper, to burst out (of/with rage), be outraged, hit the roof, be beside oneself*

3. Metaphor: ANGER IS ILLNESS (INSANITY)

Polish: *byc wscieklym, cholera mnie bierze, wpasc w szal, zwariowac ze zlosci, dostac apopleksji, miotac sie*

English: *be enraged, fall into rage, go mad beserk, go spare, be apoplectic with rage*

4. Metaphor: ANGER IS AN ANIMAL

Polish: *byc zlym jak osa / wilk, toczyc pianę, miotac sie*

English: *frothing/foaming at the mouth*

5. Metaphor: ANGER AS AN OPPONENT

Polish: *zacisnac piesci, opanowal mnie gniew*

English: *clench one's fists, be overcome by anger, go ballistic*

The above examples show almost full synonymy existing between Polish and English expressions of ANGER.

Apart from the bilingual version of ANGER expressions in Polish and English quoted above, there is the whole range of expletives in both languages which express ANGER, but these constitute a separate field for analysis.

3.2. Cognitive language awareness of the subjects (comments)

One of the aims of the present study is not only to elicit the language data from the subjects, but evaluate their ability to comment on the concepts from which the expressions produced come. In the detailed analysis of the data received from the subjects it could be observed that the informants were in the majority of cases unaware of the metaphorical character of the phrases produced by them (see task 1) or the phrases to be recognised (see task 2). Instead of an explanation they tended to provide a synonymous expression, for example:

To be blind with rage, would be explained by means of the expression *couldn't see straight*, synonymous with the former one and equally metaphoric in character. In some cases explanations were not given at all. This could be observed mostly in the context of L1 (Polish) expressions. It may be assumed that the intuitive nature of mother tongue use makes for a low degree of cognitive awareness. It was more commonly observed in English (FL) collocations that the subjects tried to conceptualise the expressions, however even, in this case the task was not fully satisfactorily achieved.

Apart from production, recognition and explanation, the subjects were asked to conceptualise ANGER as a phenomenon, by defining it and describing its symptoms and characteristic qualities (task 3). The definitions provided considered various levels of experience of the feeling of ANGER, both bodily, i.e. non-verbal symptoms and verbal, i.e. language behaviour.

ANGER was defined as (Gabrys, 2002: 31):

ANGER is:

a feeling towards a person, animal or thing

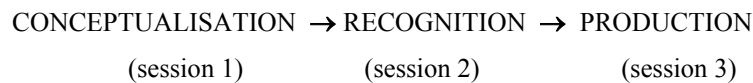
an emotion expressed in the form of control loss and irritation

a demonstration of dissatisfaction leading to stress and revenge

a cause of discomfort and distortion of balance

The first and the second sessions were evaluated as poor both in terms of the inadequate number of ANGER phrases produced and the inability to explain their etymology (especially in L1). The third session, of conceptualisation of the feeling of ANGER as a physical and emotional phenomenon was fully successful.

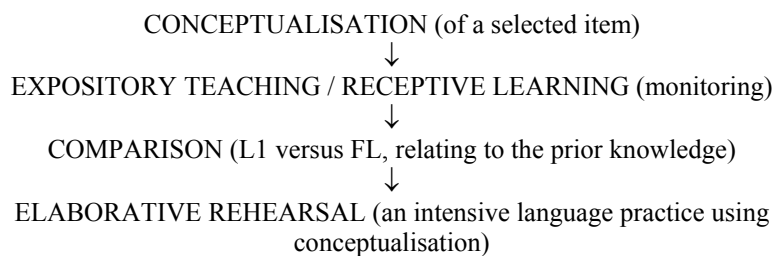
What seems to be apparent in this study is the already mentioned subjects' lack of ability to discover the relationships between the underlying conceptual base and the language. It may be possible to bridge this gap by introducing a reversed order of instruction:



Such an order would fulfil all the conditions of meaningful learning which consists in:

- a. discovering the relationships between the ideas (here: conceptualising L1, e.g. physicality of the body and its verbal manifestation and positive transfer to FL);
- b. prior knowledge (here: so-called general knowledge, conceptualising universal phenomena);
- c. expository teaching, i.e. the framework, the selection of the activities and monitoring performed by the language instructor (the teacher).

Based on the above principles the lesson scenario should follow the stages (Gabrys, 2002: 32):



I strongly believe that a cognitive approach to language teaching opens new possibilities and not only in the area of lexis. It opens new ways for both language instructors, ie. us teachers, and for our students and individual language users. It turns language instruction/teaching/use into a much more exciting adventure of discovery not only about language itself but it also provides ourselves as human beings with deeper understanding of how we function in the world around us.

Bibliographical references

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