

Metaphor Interpretation: a Quest for Cross-cultural Variation

Aleksandra Sopina
St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University
alsopina@gmail.com
Elaine Ribeiro Sigette
Fluminense Federal University
elainesigette@gmail.com

Xiaoben Yuan
Tohoku University
yxben2011@gmail.com
Fabio Krykhtine
Labfuzzy COPPE UFRJ
krykhtine@labfuzzy.coppe.ufrj.br
Aleksandr Volosiuk
St. Petersburg Electrotechnical University
7986337@gmail.com

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, cultural variation, metaphor interpretation

This cross-cultural study, on a more general level, aims at developing a framework to research metaphor interpretation, i.e. how people specify metaphorical meanings. At a more specific level it attempts to reveal some cultural variation in metaphors of Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, South African English and potentially other languages and cultures.

The study is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and its more recent advances on cultural variation (Kövecses, 2005, 2015; Musolff, 2016). It has been noticed that social and cultural specificities in metaphor can be found on all its levels. However, there is still considerable uncertainty with regard to a methodology for identifying those variations.

To reveal the impact of culture on ways people understand metaphorical meanings, the authors chose three common metaphors that appear in all studied languages, *life is a journey*, *life is a game* and *life is a battle*, and designed a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 3 metaphors and 13 5-level Likert items. The items named 13 descriptive adjectives that could potentially characterize the target domain alternative to the metaphoric expressions. The adjectives commonly used to characterize Life were chosen from collocation dictionaries in a way that they reflect both positive and negative attitudes and various types of emotions.

The questionnaires were offered to subjects in their native languages. For each studied language at least 20 subjects (university students) answered the questionnaire. The answers were subjected to computer-aided statistical analysis, including a comparison of the average mean values, ANOVA tests and post hoc analysis. As an alternative to the statistical analysis authors also explored an approach where the levels of Likert items are viewed as fuzzy sets (Zadeh, 1972) and can be modeled and interpreted with fuzzy logic principles.

The analysis results showed, firstly, the applicability of the proposed framework to study metaphor interpretation; and, secondly, a significant difference in how the concept Life within the metaphors *life is a journey*, *life is a game* and *life is a battle* is viewed in different cultures.

References

- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (2015). *Where Metaphors Come From. Reconsidering Context*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Musolff, A. (2016). *Political Metaphor Analysis. Discourse and Scenarios*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Zadeh, A. (1972). *Fuzzy-set-theoretical Interpretation of Linguistic Hedges*. *Journal of Cybernetics* 2(3) : 4-34.