



## Understanding Conceptual Metaphors in Dual Language Immersion and English as a Second Language Classrooms

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### Abstract

*This study focuses on communicative language patterns, specifically conceptual metaphors (CMs), as a critical component of everyday language in dual language immersion (DLI) and English as a Second Language (ESL) settings. Conceptual Metaphor Theory introduced by Lakoff and Johnson [1], explained CMs as going beyond basic language issues to influencing perspectives, orientations, and experiences in a person's life. In this study, natural DLI and ESL classroom discourse was studied to address how CMs were used among teachers and students in Spanish-English classrooms. We asked how the use of CMs supported or disjointed meaning and how these moments empowered or disempowered the students' learning experiences. We viewed conceptual metaphors through a Vygotskian [2] sociocultural lens to provide more insight into what identity roles, participation, and comprehension challenges occur for second language learners, as CMs are often the last part of a new language to be understood [3] [4]. Studies in this area show promise for how understanding CMs can increase learning gains for students [5] and can be both cross-cultural and languacultural specific [6] [7] [8]. In this study, elementary English and Spanish teachers were video recorded for natural conversations with their students. Language patterns, conversations, and mis/understandings were analyzed and evaluated through mediated discourse analysis [9]. Findings and conclusions demonstrate CM challenges that English and Spanish learners encountered. Results included empowering and disempowering discourse for all students with specific and critical challenges for Latino/a minority students.*

**Keywords:** *Conceptual Metaphors, Bilingualism, Sociocultural Theory, Inclusion*

### 1. Introduction and Literature Review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) introduced by Lakoff and Johnson [1] provides explanatory and critical insights for natural everyday discourse and language patterns in classrooms. Conceptual metaphors (CMs) are found in all languages and are metaphors which can carry and transfer their meaning in one domain to other domains (differing contexts). They have been found to influence a person's life perspective, which includes that diverse languacultures understand concepts differently [10] [11].

DLI and ESL programs are understood to be scalable models that provide educational equity, including a variety of benefits that can come from bilingualism concerning executive functions such as control, task switching, and working memories to succeed in academic tasks [12] [13]. Also, positive social perceptiveness-taking skills, metalingual awareness, and ability to acquire additional languages have been found to be more effective [14].

An issue for this study is that many abstract concepts are often shared as conceptual metaphors during instructional conversations in the classroom. Teachers often exhibit conventional expressions where one domain of meaning represents another domain differently depending on the context. CMs are figurative yet very concrete metaphors that are naturally embedded in our language. They carry culturally and socially accepted meanings, typically using one colloquial domain to understand another target domain (i.e., differing concepts).



The phenomenon of teaching first and second language in the classroom does not operate alone in isolated systems or modalities but instead are larger configurations of mutually interacting meaning-making resources [15], which includes gesture in second language settings [16] [17]. The use of multi-semiotic resources (e.g., texts, classroom object/artifacts, gestures, speech, technology tools, and other modalities) by participants are important to study as they can provide new understandings of how teachers and students contextualize each other's perspectives and comprehend CMs during conversational instruction [18].

## 2. Research Problem Statement

Understanding how K-12 students and teachers use and comprehend CMs when addressing vocabulary, instruction, and curriculum content during DLI and ESL classroom conversations need further study, especially in relation to the issue of identity [19] and second language learning [20]. To gain further insights concerning authentic language use in classrooms, Vygotsky's [2] cultural-historical/sociocultural theory (SCT) was implemented, following the pattern of similar studies in elementary second language settings [21] [22]. Such a theoretical lens considers meaning-making and understanding to be central to learning and development in second language classrooms [3] [23].

Studying CMs in classrooms provides researchers, teachers, and students an indirect method for assessing and understanding what participants understand or misunderstand during conversational instruction. In addition, this topic of study provides insights concerning what types of CMs, including their presuppositional messages, are used during classroom tasks and lessons. Identifying and describing the CMs can provide insights as to whether their production provides perceptive and accessible ways for understanding complex terms or activities for the second language learners. Contrastingly, CMs may be taken for granted by the teacher's traditional practices and/or the dominant languaculture [6] of the classroom and when left decontextualized, they may create misunderstandings and disassociation for ELs during the learning task. In essence, CMs embedded in classroom discourse might support and empower students while learning a second language or some might be presented without support and disempower English Learners.

## 3. Methodology

For this study, the researchers selected classroom scenes from K-6 elementary Spanish-English bilingual and dual language immersion sites to analyze conceptual metaphors during conversational instruction by the teachers. The analyses included how verbal and non-verbal expression demonstrated particular insights of understanding about the tasks and the procedures in the classrooms.

Data collection included the following: videorecording classroom conversations, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Classroom data were analyzed for prosodic, gesture, and verbal language patterns that were identified as ways of mapping ideas during conversational instruction (i.e., a way for teachers to create a visualization or some type of pattern of action or expectation in the classroom). Mediated discourse analysis (MDA) [9] [24] was considered an appropriate way for addressing the qualitative questions of how CMs were used in the classroom, what understandings or misunderstanding occurred from them and whether this created inclusion or marginalization for the English Learners.

## 4. Analysis and Findings

This study examined CMs in multiple K-6 classrooms (i.e., DLI, Sheltered-Content, integrated) focusing on English and Spanish instruction. Classroom tasks of teaching math, read-alouds, and procedural instructions were analyzed. While many conceptual metaphors were identified, multiple patterns concerning tone-pitches, gestures, turn-taking, and individualism-control concepts emerged as important and repeated representational mappings of how the teachers thought and conversed through the content and instructional conversation. All four pattern types were identified independently and together by multiple researchers.



In the math lesson, tone was identified for its repeated use concerning the teacher's approval or disapproval of the students' answers regardless of whether they were technically correct or not. In the read-aloud, co-speech gestures were used to portray the teacher's meaning concerning individualism and togetherness. In multiple scenes, turn-taking occurred in what might be deemed "expected" or "traditional" ways produced by the teacher but not necessarily clearly understood or responded to by the students. At times some CMs seemed familiar to students; whereas some were unfamiliar, and the teacher repeated her mappings hoping to get students to act in her desired way.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on the use of conceptual metaphors by teachers working with Spanish-speaking students learning English. CMs were typically employed without conscious or specific awareness by the teachers but provide insights concerning their "mapping" for how practices in the classroom work. To illustrate, while the teachers' conversations sometimes contained multiple examples and contexts to support their instructions, there were multiple metaphors that challenged the students' abilities to participate and understand directions. At times, regardless of the answer's correctness, students were sent a preliminary message of whether their answers were acceptable, through a high pitch response by the teacher or dismissed or unvalued through her low pitch responses. Such repeated mappings by the teachers empowered or disempowered students in their attempts to continue with their ideas or whether to abort their answers. Also, these mappings reinforced the teacher's position as controller of whether answers were acceptable, sometimes negating that some students found correct answers in different and unexpected ways. Turn-taking and participation was another repeated pattern where English Learners struggled to read the teacher's metaphoric mapping or expectations. In such instances, participation was aborted or abbreviated when the students didn't understand the teacher's CMs.

Also of interest were the CMs and mappings sent by the teacher during read-alouds. In one excerpt, the content of the children's literature book focused on the concept of sharing and togetherness. However, during much of the practice, the teacher demonstrated and reinforced an individual-positioning perspective, exhibiting metaphors that she owned the lesson, and the students were not full participants in it. Implication of the United States cultural emphasis of ownership and individualistic control of resources was identified.

Overall, the study of conceptual metaphors through a sociocultural theoretical perspective provided a way to understand how teachers mapped certain ideas, instructions, and expectations through their lessons. The study of CMs demonstrated evidence of how students understood or misunderstood them during conversations. At times, the miscommunication created a lack of participation, disempowering the English Learners' abilities to understand and respond to the instruction - demonstrating a lack of inclusion. Some implications include that such practices may be a continued form for marginalizing students whose first language is not English. Further study of CMs in the classroom should be made if we are to understand the types that are used and how they are understood or misunderstood by minority language speakers.

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