



Radmila D. Palinkašević¹

Preschool Teacher Training College “Mihailo Palov”, Vršac, Serbia

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English Language Learning from the Perspective of Students – Pre-service Preschool Teachers

Extended summary

Success in foreign language learning is connected to a large number of factors which influence the process of language learning. Learner beliefs regarding foreign language learning are a factor which influences the process of language acquisition in all of its phases (Mohebi & Khodadady, 2011). Since our mental system is inherently metaphoric, studies in the field of foreign language acquisition have started to explore the role of the metaphor in understanding the beliefs of language learners regarding foreign language learning (Ellis 2001, Oxford 2001, as cited in Caballero, 2006: 202).

The goal of this research was to explore the beliefs of the pre-service preschool teachers about the English language learning through the analysis of their metaphorical conceptualization of this concept. The starting hypothesis was that the analysis of the students' conceptual sphere on English language learning will map the areas which need to be improved in the college English language teaching. The data gathered from the students in the Republic of Serbia can contribute to other studies on the influence of cultural differences on the conceptualization of foreign language learning.

The data was collected using a questionnaire which consisted of one sentence which needed to be completed: *English language learning is like...* A total of 125 students participated in the study and 113 metaphors were collected.

The collected conceptual metaphors were categorized on the basis of the shared motifs. Within one group there are conceptual metaphors of various levels of complexity. The first exam-

¹ palinkasevic@gmail.com

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ple in the group is not necessarily the primary metaphor, but may rather be a complex metaphor which best describes the group in the results.

The results show that 72,5% of participants viewed English language learning as an active process, while 27,4% of participants viewed it as a passive concept. The majority of the participants (90,2%) viewed English language learning as a positive experience, while only a few (9,7%) viewed it as a negative experience.

The metaphors were divided into five groups on the basis of the common motifs:

1. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS: A JOURNEY, HIKING, EXPLORATION OF SPACE, SPACE (46 participants conceptualized English language learning in this way);

2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS: ACTION and PLAY (22 participants conceptualized English language learning in this way);

3. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS: A THING, FOOD and DRINK, A SONG (14 participants conceptualized English language learning in this way);

4. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS: PERSONAL GROWTH (6 participants conceptualized English language learning in this way);

5. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS: PAIN (4 participants conceptualized English language learning in this way);

The practical implications of the study refer to the metaphors that are proposed for usage in the classroom as a way of speaking about learning, so that positive and helpful beliefs are promoted. After the identification of the students with negative beliefs regarding language learning, the teacher should put an effort to lower the learners' anxiety, increase the learners' belief in themselves, and try to instill in the students some "healthier" conceptual metaphors through which language learning is understood. The conceptual metaphor proposed in this study for usage with all students in the classroom is ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS A JOURNEY. For students who have the negative metaphor ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS AN UNFAMILIAR SPACE the teacher can help them reformulate the metaphor into ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE UNKNOWN SPACE. Through this reconceptualization the teacher could talk to the students and help them form a better understanding of language learning through questions such as: *Do people go on explorations of unknown territories alone? Does someone with more experience help them prepare for the journey? Why do people explore unknown territories? How important is it to be well prepared for such explorations? Can complete success be expected immediately or are a few expeditions needed?* In this way the teacher can help the learners understand how they are not alone in the unknown space, that everyone needs help, that it is acceptable and even preferable to rely on others in the process (be that the teacher or other learners), that the experience of others can help them in the process and that all "missions are possible" with an adequate approach and preparation.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, students' attitudes, English language as a foreign language.

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