

A Corpus-Based Study of a Metaphor-Theoretical Approach to Figurative Meanings of Some Korean Lexical Items

Metaphor Theory (MT) in cognitive linguistics has proved itself a powerful theory for understanding and explaining figurative meanings of lexical items and grammatical constructions (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, Gibbs 1994, Kövecses 2002, Barcelona 2003, Dirven & Pörings 2003). MT claims that figurative meanings can be explained in terms of the mapping between the terms for abstract notions in the target domain and the terms for concrete objects in the source domain. In recent years, Deignan (2005) claims that many metaphors proposed in MT should be supported or modified by empirical evidence deriving from corpus-based research (cf. Stefanowitsch & Gries 2006).

In this line of research, the present research attempts to characterize figurative meanings of some Korean lexical items in terms of MT, arguing that metaphors should be proposed by examining the co-occurrence relations of the lexical items in question through analysis of corpus data. This study shows some metaphors deriving from the use of some lexical items in context through examination of the following lexical items in the Sejong Corpus: some body terms such as *meli* ‘head’ and *kasum* ‘chest/breast’, *tali* ‘leg’, basic color terms such as ‘white’, ‘black’, ‘red’, ‘yellow’, and ‘green/blue’, spatial adjectives for distance, height, and width, and other concrete nouns such as *ppwuli* ‘root’ in the Sejong Corpus. First, this study shows different frequency rates of literal vs. figurative meanings of the lexical items of the Korean lexical items, claiming the need for corpus-based research for the study of metaphor. For example, *ppwuli* ‘root’ is used literally with the frequency of 37.8% (173 cases), and figuratively with the rate of 60.7% out of the total of 458 tokens. The literal use of *kewul* ‘mirror’ amounts to 87.2% (588 cases), and the figurative use to 12.3% (86 tokens) out of the 674 tokens. The literal use of *tali* ‘leg’ amounts to 89.4% (758 cases), and figurative use to 1.6% (14 cases) out of the 848 tokens. These statistics show different degrees of the use of literal vs. non-literal meanings of the lexical items in question. Second, this research examines co-occurrence relations of the lexical items with predicates or modifying elements, showing examples of non-literal or figurative uses of the lexical items. Third, this research shows what metaphors are at work for the lexical items in question based on the examination of co-occurrence relations and mapping between source domains and target domains: (i) distance: *kakkapta* ‘near’ and *melta* ‘far’: TEMPORALITY, SOCIAL/FAMILY RELATIONS, GOALS AS PHYSICAL DISTANCE, (ii) HEIGHT: ABSTRACT NOTIONS (prices, temperature, voice, etc.) ARE PHYSICAL ENTITIES, (iii) WIDTH: ABSTRACT NOTIONS (mind, meaning, scope) ARE A CONTAINER/AN AREA, (iv) BLACK: BLACK IS EVIL, (v) YELLOW IS PALENESS, (vi) MIND IS A CONTAINER, etc. Fourth, this paper discusses some examples of conceptual metaphor through examination of some lexical items: (i) *ppwuli* ‘root’: ABSTRACT IDEAS ARE PLANTS, (TRADITIONAL/EVIL) CUSTOMS ARE ROOTS, FAMILIAL LINEAGE IS A ROOT, etc. (ii) *kewul* ‘mirror’: ABSTRACT NOTIONS (ie, mind, literature, media etc.) ARE MIRRORS, (iii) *tali* ‘leg’: ARTIFICIAL SUPPORTS ARE HUMAN LEGS, *tali* ‘bridge’: CONNECTION IS A BRIDGE, etc.

In sum, this paper argues for the need of corpus-based research as empirical evidence for

the application of metaphor theory to understanding and explaining the figurative meanings of lexical items properly, claiming that metaphors of any lexical items can be found and proposed when we examine authentic linguistic data.

References (Selected)

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