

Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Comparison between Czech and English

Metaphors. A term you have probably once heard in your literature class. But of course, time flies, and it might have easily slipped your mind. If that is your case, read the previous sentence again. Now, did you catch the hint(s)?

You may be used to thinking about metaphors as a matter of famous poems or Shakespearean drama. But as you saw in that tricky sentence, it isn't the only way. In fact, I can tell with certainty that you alone use metaphors on a daily basis. Does it sound quite hard to believe? Let me introduce you to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory!

Where did it come from? A brief introduction

Linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson came up with this theory around 1980. They found out that in language, we often describe some idea in terms of another concept. These terms occur in systematic patterns, which tells us a lot about how our cognitive thinking works.

The different ideas are called conceptual domains. We can take the hidden example from the beginning of this article: time flies. If we did not know the idiom, we might as well assume that *time* is a *flying object*. So in this case, our source domain (the term we „borrow“ from a different field) would be *a flying object* and the target domain (the concept we want to describe) would be *time*.

Plot twist: Different languages are interrelated

Well, what we described above sounds lovely but that's just how metaphors work, am I right? Don't worry, the most interesting part is yet to come (technically, I've already spoiled it in the headline). Anyway, the surprising truth is that we can find similar source domains across different languages.

Not only we have *time flies* in English, *el tiempo vuela* in Spanish and *čas letí* in Czech. Many languages understand time as a horizontal line or path. We use expressions such as *back in the day* and *the future lies ahead*. But did you know that Mandarin Chinese speakers understand the progression of time in a vertical manner? They refer to the future as somewhere „down“ (e. g. the next month is the lower month) and the past as „up“.

English vs. Czech: Is there a connection?

Let's leave other languages aside and look straight at English and Czech. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory has been explored amongst many languages. However, Czech and English

comparison can be found only in a couple of bachelor theses on the internet. If you don't want to wade through dozens of pages of academical text, I have made a summary of the most interesting interlingual connections.

The perception of emotions

We can find many similarities in idioms connected to emotions. Both Czech and English for example consider anger in terms of the source domain *heat*, and, in opposition, calm in terms of *cold*. Thus, we use collocations such as to *heat someone up*, to *explode with anger*, to *cool down*, and in Czech *oči mu plály hněvem* (his eyes were burning with anger) or *zachovat chladnou hlavu* (keep your head cool).

Both languages also use the directions „up“ and „down“ to describe one's mood. If you are happy, your mood goes up. In English, you *cheer up*, and, when it is more intensive, you *feel high*. On the other hand, when you are not feeling well, you *cheer down*, or, even worse, *hit the bottom*. In Czech we often say *hlavu vzhůru* (head up) when someone is *skleslý* (downcast).

We sometimes refer to emotions as some kind of containers or pits a person falls in. But there is a slight difference in English and Czech perception. In English, we can *fall in love* as well as *fall in despair*. In Czech we use these metaphors only in a negative sense, as if we fell in a trap: *upadnout do deprese* (fall in depression), *vyhrabat se z těžké situace* (to dig oneself out of a difficult situation).

The perception of time

Except for the „flying time“ example which we've had enough of, time is also perceived as money or wealth. Do you *spend your time* wisely or do you thoughtlessly *waste* it? In Czech, when something costs a lot of time – *stojí hodně času*, are you willing to *investovat* (invest) it?

Time can metaphorically be a general possession, too. A person can „manage it on his own“. *How much time do you have for me?* I can't *lose another hour*. *Věnuj mi chvíli svého času* (give me a part of your time).

Let's wrap it up

If you're *running out of time*, don't worry, I have only a few words to add. We have learnt about some of the related language metaphors between Czech and English. This was only a brief acquaintance with the topic and if it *caught your attention* (you see? another great

reference!), I highly recommend you to discover more on your own. You can investigate your native language or compare other languages that you know.

Don't forget to share your insights in the comments and I hope you will stay in a *great frame of mind!*