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COGNITIVE SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF  
ENGLISH IDIOMS THAT EXPRESS EMOTIONS

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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## Introduction

Our thesis is called Cognitive Semantics and Pragmatics of English Idioms that Express Emotions. It consists of two great parts, namely Part I- Cognitive Semantics of English Idioms that Express Emotions and Part II- Cognitive Pragmatics of English Idioms that Express Emotions. Part I of our paper consists of three great chapters - Chapter II. Aspects of Meaning; Chapter III. Idioms and Culture; Chapter IV. Idiomaticity and Cognition whereas Part II of the thesis Consists of Chapter V, called Pragmatics and Cognition.

The present thesis has in view the investigation of the idioms of emotion because these are considered as one of the most hidden features of the creation. Even so, one can notice the great authority they have upon our conduct, as they determine some particular ways of deciphering everything around and some specific ways in which our physical nature relates to them (Harkins & Wierzbicka 2001). The issue of the idioms of emotion has become one of the most challenging linguistic fields, being worthy of most linguists' attention (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, 1993, Gibbs 1994, Gibbs 2006, Johnson 1990, Kovecses 1986, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2006, McGlone 1996, 2007, Langlotz 2006, Ochs & Schieffelin 1989, Lutz 1986, 1988, Meier & Robinson 2004, Rosa E. Vega-Moreno 2003).

Our approach analyses the idioms of emotion both from a cognitive semantic and pragmatic perspective, attempting to demonstrate the fact the idiomatic language offers a

wide range of levels of discussion and debate (Lutz 1988, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Gibbs 2006, Marsen 2008, Evans & Green 2006, Carston 2002, Grice 1975).

The thesis constitutes a summation of the contributions which already exist in the fields of idioms of emotion debated upon from the level of their cognitive semantic and pragmatic richness. Our theoretical positions can be considered to be placed along the same line with the theoretical frames already instantiated in the research literature. We leave in our attempt to demonstrate that idioms of emotion bear a cognitive semantic basis and, in the same time, can be explained through cognitive pragmatic principles from some important, cornerstone theoretical positions (Lutz 1988, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Gibbs 2006, Marsen 2008, Evans & Green 2006, Bara 2010, Carston 2002, Grice 1975, Davies 2000, Dijk 1977, Rosa E.Vega-Moreno2003). We reveal the importance of these particular positions within the general context of Cognition, Semantics, Pragmatics and Linguistics, in general (Lutz 1988, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Gibbs 2006, Marsen 2008, Evans & Green 2006, Bara 2010, Carston 2002, Grice 1975, Davies 2000, Dijk 1977, Rosa E.Vega-Moreno2003). We draw a clear-cut distinction between the traditional (Chafe 1968) and the modern, up-to-date theories or data (Bobrow & Bell 1973, Hoffman & Honneck 1979, Cacciari & Tobossi 1993, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Johnson 1990, Gibbs 1994, 2006, Kovecses 2000, 2002). We offer many complementary theoretical positions, and we adopt this method in order to consolidate our persuasive attempt. At times we insert some contrastive approaches, their aim being that of revealing the dynamics as well as the complexity of the issues under discussion.

**The first chapter** of our thesis treats the most important principles of Cognitive Semantics and Pragmatics, having the role of rendering the theoretical premises on which we ground our analysis. With **the second chapter** we bring to light the problem of “meaning”, its relationship with many important linguistic key-concepts, reaching to discuss the issue of “the literal” and “the figurative language” (Marsen 2008, Lyons 1977, Halliday 1978, Cacciari & Tobossi 1993, Gibbs 1994, Zanotto, Cameron & Cavalcanti 2008). **The third chapter** renders the issue of the relationship between “idioms” and “culture” (Holland & Quinn 1987, Shore 1996, Teliya, Bragina, Oparina & Sandoromirskaya 1998, D’ Andrade 1997). The aspects of discussion within this chapter attempt to clarify some issues such as The Relationship between Language and Culture or

the Definition of Culture. This chapter also aims to clarify the problem of the social aspect of emotions, the interconnections between “the cultural” and “the social” when tackling emotions (Lutz 1988, Matsumoto, Nakagawa & Yoo 2008). **The fourth chapter** refers to Idiomaticity and Cognition. It aims to clarify the issues related to the Conceptual Metaphor and the interpretation of idioms expressing emotions. We also discuss the problem of representation of emotion concepts such as anger, fear, sadness, happiness, desire, surprise, pride, love. We also refer to the fields of manifestation of emotions. It ends up with some concluding remarks referring to the cognitive approach to idiomatic language (Gibbs 2006, Gibbs 1994a, Lakoff & Johnson 1980 a/b, Ortony & Fainsilber 1987, Robinson, Mitchell, Kirkeby, Meier 2006, Meier & Robinson 2004, Kovecses 2000, Kovecses 2002, Hauser, Carter & Meier 2009, Langlotz 2006, Apresjan 1997, Gibbs, Bogdanovich, Sykes & Barr 1997, Mc Glone 2007, Evans & Green 2006). **The fifth chapter** tries to render the fact that the English idiomatic language is governed much the same by the same norms as the literal language and we demonstrate the practical character of the cognitive pragmatic principles when applied to idiomatic language of emotions (Ochs 2002, Farina Albanese & Pons, Enfield 2009, Hoffman & Honneck 1979, van Dijk 1977a/b, Zegarac & Penington 2000, Gilbert 1997/1999, Wilson & Sperber 2004/2006, Bazanella 2004, Marmaridou 2000, Rosa E. Vega-Moreno 2003, Carston 2002, Wilson 1995, Grice 1975, Schnall 2005, Fraser 1996).

We specify the fact that our thesis does not pretend to be an exhaustive approach; actually, since language may be taken into account for its numerous aspects, it is clear that all the key-concepts it is related to may be characterized by multi-faceted levels of discussion and debate. Grounding our attempt on this methodology, our thesis approaches the, let us say, controversial issue of idioms of emotions, of affect, and the place these ones occupy within linguistic preoccupations. We debate the problem of English idiomatic language of emotion, which is deeply rooted in our cognitive abilities (Kovecses 2000, 2002, Gibbs 2006, 1994).

## 1. Methodology

The chapter offers the theoretical frames for our hypothesis. Within the present chapter we render the main linguistic (cognitive semantic and pragmatic) principles which guide and shape communication.

Principles such as “Embodiment”, “Conceptual Structure”, “Encyclopaedic Knowledge” and “Mappings” define what “Cognitive Semantics” means and shape the theoretical frames which place Cognitive Semantics among linguists’ most ardent preoccupations (Gardenfors 1999). “Body” is a complex notion within Cognitive Semantics, as it represents the determinant shaping our impressions about the external context (Marsen 2008, Gibbs 2006). “Conceptual Structure” claims that our impressions, which are rooted in reality, should be meaningful (Clausner, Kellman & Palmer 2008). In order to be understood and interpreted, notions should be the component of some developed mechanisms, defined in terms of “Encyclopaedic Knowledge” (Saenz 1999). “Mapping” is a meaningful factor since it reveals the way in which people associate ideas and notions (Krull et al. 2005).

“Cognitive Pragmatics” is governed by principles such as “Relevance Theory”, “the Cooperative Principle”, “Conversational Implicature” or “Cognitive Frames” (Wilson 1995, Wilson & Sperber 2004/2006, Rosa E. Vega-Moreno 2003). “The Relevance Theory” claims that the cognitive resources possess some complex attributes which determine the extraction, in a mechanic way, of what is pertinent around us (Vega-Moreno 2003). “The Cooperative Principle” is strongly connected to the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner (Grice 1975). Because of their complex nature Implicatures may have a great role in shaping “a theory of communication” (Zdrengeha 1990). “Frames” are seen as the patterns which consist of the characteristics and the attributes of the objects and notions around us (van Dijk 1977).

## 2. Aspects of Meaning

This chapter aims to render the complex, multi-faceted definitions of “meaning” and of “language” (Marsen 2008). It also aims to present the levels of language- “the descriptive, the social and the expressive ones” (Lyons 1977). Within it, we analyze the relationship between meaning and other important concepts, such as ‘language’,



‘culture’, ‘embodiment’, ‘emotions’, ‘truth’, ‘context’(Marsen 2008, Bazanella 2004, Gibbs 1994, 2006, Zanotto, Cameron & Cavalcanti 2008 ). The chapter also refers to the distinction between “the literal and figurative meaning” (Cacciari & Tobossi 1993, Zanotto, Cameron& Cavalcanti 2008, Fussell & Moss1998), describing “metaphors” and “idioms” from the point of view of their decorative value within communication (Lyons 1977, Vianu 1957). The last sub-chapter treats the issue of Idiomaticity between literalness and figurativeness (Marsen 2008, Lyons 1977, Shore 1996, Gibbs 2006, Zanotto, Cameron& Cavalcanti 2008, Prandi 2004, Swinney & Cutler 1979, Frisson & Pickering 2001, Giora 2002, Rosa E.Vega-Moreno 2001).

The problem of defining “meaning”, which is considered as the basis of interpretation of reality, preoccupied linguists to a great extent (Prandi 2004).

### 3. Idioms and Culture

This chapter deals with the cultural aspects of figurative language, mainly the cultural aspects of idiomatic expressions (Holland & Quinn 1987, Shore 1996, Teliya, Bragina, Oparina & Sandoromirskaya 1998, D’ Andrade1997).

“Culture” and “language” are strongly connected to one another since the former finds its manifestation through linguistic expression (Teliya, Bragina, Oparina & Sandoromirskaya 1998). Our practices are endowed with “cultural meaning” (Holland & Quinn 1987). It is this significance which reveals the manner in which we command the collectively accepted manners (Roy D’Andrade 1981, Holland & Quinn 1987).This code is called “cultural models” (Holland & Quinn 1987).

Within the present chapter we also treat the issue of culture in its strong connection to the social practices. It is culture which emphasizes the common aspects of humanity and which shape group relationships and practices (Ratner 2000). We ground our ideas on the theory according to which we use emotion language in order to judge the everyday aspects of our existence (Lutz 1988, Markus & Kitayama 1991). A conclusion that can be drawn from these premises could be that culture guides people’s conduct, making life meaningful (Matsumoto, Nakagawa & Yoo 2008).

#### 4. Idiomaticity and Cognition

The aim of this chapter is to emphasize the strong connections between the idiomatic language and cognition. We begin our attempt by claiming that “Body” is a complex notion because it reveals our comprehension of the external context and, at the same time, we suggest that the human conduct and the language that people use in their interactions are influenced by the way in which we interpret the surrounding reality (Gibbs 2006).

What we aim to illustrate within this chapter is the cognitive level of language. In doing so, we aim to demonstrate that the metaphoric, idiomatic language expressing affect has deep roots in or strong connections with people’s perceptions. We intend to reveal the way in which language may express affect- feelings, emotions- by making use of idioms related to “body”. This fact has strong cognitive implications which we explain and motivate in congruence with some cornerstone books and articles within this present chapter (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Gibbs 2006, Kovecses 2000, 2002, Wright 2002, Stoyanova 2009).

One of the major roles language plays is that of offering the adequate means by which people reveal the metaphorical implications of their daily practices. We also ground our presentation on the hypothesis according to which the idiomatic language bear metaphoric features, therefore it may be interpreted through some general, conceptual phrases (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Xiuzhi Li 2010).

In the present sub-chapters we offer an image of the way in which most important aspects of human life and activity are deciphered. Thus, “Life” is conceptualized in terms of a “journey” (Kovecses 2002; Murphy 1996). “Human beings” are interpreted in terms of properties of plants (Esenova 2007). “People” are also considered “liquids” (Wright 2002). “Problems” are conceptualized through “the puzzle” and “the chemical metaphors” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980b). “Human body” offers a wide range of idioms that express affect (Stoyanova 2009). We render idioms with “head”, “hair”, “heart”, “eyes”, “nose”, “mouth”, “lips”, “teeth”, “face”, “neck”, “shoulders”, “hands”, “thumb”, “blood”, “stomach”, “liver”, “bile”, “spleen”, “bowels” and “foot” which offer us both positive and negative emotions, attempting to demonstrate the wide range of idiomatic phrases that the English language provides in order for the people to express their

emotions, feelings and impressions . We also give some pertinent examples, taken from dictionaries and other reference books, and in doing so, we attempt to demonstrate the fact that idiomatic phrases are no longer a sophisticated mark of the language, but, instead, a commonly used device used in order to show people's involvement within their conversations (Fussell & Moss 1998).

We demonstrate the connections between “affect” and “taste” and those between “affect” and “the tactile sense”, leaving in our approach from Piaget & Inhelder who explain this that our experiences are related to our direct reactions and responses toward what happens to us in the world (Meier & Robinson 2004).

We also refer to the issue of the significance of the orientational “up” and “down” within daily life. According to Lakoff & Johnson, “orientational metaphors” play a major role within the system of the conceptual metaphors since they group objects and help us refer to them in their relation to other similar things or notions. We refer, along Lakoff & Johnson's line, to metaphors such as “Happiness is up/Sadness is down, Optimism is up/ Pessimism is down, Power is up/ Powerless is down, Having control or force is up/ Being subject to control or force is down, Moral is up/ Immoral is down, Virtue is down/ Depravity is down, More is up/ Less is down. Rational is up/ Emotional is down, Success is up/ Failure is down” which organize our existence and our attitude toward reality (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

We then approach the representation of emotion concepts. “Anger” is deciphered through the following: “Hot fluid in a container, Fire, Insanity, An opponent in a struggle, A captive animal, Trespassing (cause of anger), Aggressive animal behaviour, Physical annoyance, A natural force, Being a functioning machine, A superior” (Kovecses 2000). “ ***Fear / Being afraid***” is: “A fluid in a container, A vicious enemy, A tormentor, A supernatural being, Illness, Insanity, An incomplete object, An opponent in a struggle, A burden, A natural force, A superior” (Kovecses 2000). Kovecses lists the following metaphorical mappings for the concept of “*sadness*”- “***Sadness/ Being sad***” is: “Down, Dark, Lack of heat, Lack of vitality, Fluid in a container, Violent physical force, Violent natural force, Illness, Insanity, Burden, Living organism, Captive animal, Opponent” (Kovecses 2000). “***Happiness/ Being happy***” is: “Up, Being off the ground, Being in heaven, Light, Vitality, Warmth, Health, An animal that lives well, A pleasurable

physical sensation, Fluid in a container, A captive animal, An opponent in a struggle, A rupture/ high, Insanity, A natural force” (Kovecses 2000). Kovecses motivates idioms related to “love” through a wide register of “love metaphors”: “Love is a natural force, a game, a living organism, depth, a container, a captive animal. Love is fire, magic, a fluid, a flood. Love is a rupture, insanity, madness. Love is war, a wound, a disease” (Butler 2000).

Naz Kaya & Helen H.Epps suggest that colours render “emotions and feelings” (Naz Kaya & Helen H.Epps 2004). Based on this premise, our claim is that “Emotions are colours”. According to John Wright *Moods are weather* (Wright 2002).

Human relationships are rendered through metaphors such as ‘Complex abstract systems are physical objects’ (Kovecses), Emotions are plants. People are plants’ (Esenova 2007), “Argument is war. Office is a battlefield’ (Lakoff & Kovecses 1980b) or ‘Time is money’ (Lakoff & Kovecses 1980b, Wright 2002). Human relationships are also illustrated through the metaphor ‘Emotional affect is physical contact vs. Lack of intimacy is physical distance’ (Gibbs, Bogdanovich, Sykes & Barr 1997). We recall the principle according to which people get closer to pleasurable things and feel certain repulsion towards the things people look at reluctantly (Robinson, Mitchell, Kirkeby & Meier 2006).

Another aspect we treat in this chapter illustrates the occurrence of the vast repertoire of the English idiomatic phrases which concern “success”, “progress” and “failure”, because they influence our conduct, our reactions, to a great extent (Langlotz 2006). Metaphors such as “Purposeful activity is a game”, “Purposeful activities are ball games”, “Purposeful activity is a race”, “Purposeful activity is a struggle for life”, “Development is flourishing”, “Development is the processing of a machine”, “Failure is down” and “Instability/ insecurity is water” group some large amount of idiomatic phrases, very commonly used within daily conversations (Langlotz 2006).

## 5. Pragmatics and Cognition

This chapter reveals the strong connections between pragmatics and cognition (Ochs 2002, Farina Albanese& Pons, Enfield 2009, Hoffman & Honneck 1979, van Dijk 1977, Zegarac & Penington 2000, Gilbert 1997/1999, Wilson & Sperber 2004/2006,

Bazanella 2004, Marmaridou 2000, Rosa E.Vega-Moreno 2003, Carston 2002 a/b, Wilson 1995, Grice 1975, Schnall 2005, Fraser 1996). We intend to show the fact that human beings dispose of some common, unspoken rules which they use within communication (Rosa E.Vega-Moreno 2003). In order to be considered successful, communication has to respect some norms, such as “the Cooperative Principle” which designs the principles of linguistic expression (Rosa E. Vega-Moreno 2003, Grice 1975).

Within the present chapter we discuss the basic pragmatic principles, such as “the Relevance Theory”, “the Cooperative Principle”, “Truthfulness”, “Implicatures”, “Speech Acts”, “Deixis” and we also apply the theoretical framework to the case of idioms that express emotions. We then approach the issue of the idiomatic language of emotion in relation to Maxims of the Cooperative Principle. We also render some idioms expressing emotions.

### Concluding Remarks

Among the linguistic preoccupations the issue of the idioms of emotion is a very challenging one, as the idiomatic language that people use within their daily conversations stands as a proof that it is no longer a bookish mark of expression, but, instead, a spontaneous manner of communication. As it has begun to raise the linguists’ attention, idiomaticity occupies an important place among the linguistic branches. The modern direction of language takes idioms into consideration from the level of their decorative function within communication.

Our thesis aims to demonstrate the cognitive character of the idioms of emotion. People use idioms in order to express their attitudes toward the others around them as well as toward the aspects of the reality.

Idioms are considered some complex structures, which, due to their multi-faceted aspects, may be approached both from a cognitive semantic and pragmatic perspective.

Since the Cognitive Semantics is grounded on principles such as “Embodiment”, “Conceptual Structure”, “Encyclopaedic Knowledge” or “Mappings”, idioms are considered as some concentrated units, whose explanation lies in the complex cognitive mechanisms that people possess. From the cognitive semantic level of approach, our thesis treats the following aspects:

- metaphors are the most powerful figurative devices and idioms are governed by the metaphoric features
- in order to be understood and interpreted, and, especially used within daily conversations, idioms activate the complex, general knowledge which, to a great extent, stems from human practices
- people invest their practices with meaning
- “body” represents the main channel through which people perceive themselves in the world as well as their relationships with their fellows
- idioms are decoded through conceptual metaphors; thus, the complex or abstract notions are deciphered through some material objects
- the understanding, the making use of as well as the storage of idiomatic phrases is an effortless process

The Cognitive Pragmatics completes the semantic approach concerning the idiomatic language of emotion and it is totally justified to do so, because idioms, as structures which are used by people in their face-to-face conversations, may constitute the very object of Cognitive Pragmatics. From the level of discussion of Cognitive Pragmatics of English idioms expressing emotions, our thesis treats the following issues:

- idioms are strongly related to context. They express the involvement of the people within communication as well as the nature of their relationships
- because idioms mirror the speaker’s subjectivity, they are a linguistic mark bearing deictic features
- though a concentrated way of communication, idioms have the potential to express complex and developed notions or ideas, thus being associated by the researchers in the field with the Relevance Theory which refers to the pertinent nature of what people utter
- idioms are not considered as alterations of the linguistic norms; in contrast, they may reflect truthfulness and thus they may be used as much as possible in people’s conversations

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