

UNDERSTANDING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN EFL TEXTBOOKS (WITH A VIEW TO TEACHING IT)

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ABSTRACT

We undertook this study because we consider that any effort to put together an efficient textbook for teaching English as a foreign language is in vain unless we make sure that the use of the figurative language (idioms and metaphors) is included as an integral part of this process. We know that idioms give the specific character of English and thus they should be included early in the materials used for teaching. But in order to be able to do this we decided to analyse the type of genre to which these textbooks belong, and then we moved on to a detailed (we hope!) analysis of idioms and later on of metaphors.

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Furthermore, if one cannot conceive of the history and growth of language systems, the structure and physiology of language, or the dynamics of cognitive processes addressing how we fit in this world without invoking metaphor in one form or another, then metaphorical mechanisms, one can safely assume, are without doubt essential in our existence as human beings and speakers of one or several languages. The impact of this outstanding ramification of metaphor implications and applications has generated profuse reflections on the topic ranging from writings or rhetoric, philosophy, sociology, science, poetry, literary criticism, humour, to modern age advertising and linguistics.

Faced with such a long history and wide audience, figurative language could not probably claim it has been overlooked. For all its fame, and on account of its nature, it still leaves room for further thought and research, particularly since all the successive theories so far managed to display only partial truths about it. Applied linguistics, which hosts the methods and analysis of the present thesis, is only one of the domains in which idiom and metaphor research is still young. Preoccupied with the recognition of figurative language studies in this field, Cameron and Low (1999b:xii) admit that “curiously, what can only be described as an explosion of research activity over the past twenty or so years, in a whole series of different disciplines, seems largely to have passed applied linguistics by”.

Motivated by this patchwork of incipient research pieces, the present thesis is organized around the general objective of modestly attempting to rectify the current situation by foregrounding one area of applied linguistics, namely that of language in use in the classroom. It does so by promoting an interdisciplinary approach in theory and practice: it merges the main assumptions of the Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), also known as Conceptual Metaphor Theory, with quantitative and qualitative research procedures pertaining to corpus linguistics, it connects with a critical discourse analytic scrutiny of Languages for Special Purposes (LSP) and it doubles the main investigation focused on English discourse with insights into parallel metaphorical phenomena in Romanian.

The general purpose of this thesis is to explore the world of idioms and metaphors in textbooks. To achieve this, I have chosen to work within the cognitive linguistics framework enabled by corpus linguistic tools and aiming at filling research gaps in LSP. These main areas that lay the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study are briefly surveyed, and the reader is introduced to a number of previous similarly-focused studies hosted by the niche of idiom and metaphor in LSP research.

This study aims at realizing an analysis of figurative language as it is presented in EFL textbooks in general and it pays special attention to the Romanian context (as seen from the first chapter). These textbooks constitute a specific genre having its own features which we try to highlight in our study. We analyse, from the applied point of view, to what extent EFL textbooks can be better used in the benefit of those trying to learn the communicative English. We also aim at raising awareness of the existence of a well-established Romanian ELT discourse community that makes use of its own genres and sub-genres in order to communicate and accomplish its professional purposes. One of these genres is represented by the Romanian EFL textbooks.

People whose primary languages are not widely used outside their own area need an LWC (i.e. language of wider communication) for purposes such as foreign trade or in order to gain access to scientific, technical and literary materials that do not exist in their own languages. Being an LWC, English plays an overwhelmingly predominant role in the international world of research, economy, trade, tourism, etc. This implies that the coming generations need to acquire adequate skills in the English language if they want to make their way without linguistic disadvantage in its chosen world. Communication and progress in so many fields of human activity depend on the knowledge of English.

In this context, it is worthwhile remembering that in the average world of English as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL), the highest expectations of an institutional program is to raise the level of the students' language proficiency to somewhere fairly close to that of a native speaker. This means that acquisition of idiomatic English is a must.

This need to acquire good English can be noticed in Romania as well. EFL has been taught in our country for more than a century as part of the national curriculum, but recently it has become of vital importance to all those involved in education for the new millennium. As a result of this view, efforts have been made in order to elaborate new, more efficient textbooks for the learning/teaching of English in Romanian schools. Now Romanian English teachers have the privilege of choosing from a wide range of sets of textbooks approved by the Ministry of National Education. These textbooks are designed either by English textbook writers, and used all over the world, or by Romanian English teachers/textbook designers.

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In our study we try to establish the theoretical background and that is why we concentrate upon defining discourse analysis and genre analysis at the same time motivating our choice. Rhetorical styles, types of discourse, adequate procedures of describing and investigating discourse and discourse community are some points we tackle in our study.

By investigating this direction of linguistic research we hope to find proper answers to the question: Why discourse analysis plays an important role nowadays in designing foreign language textbooks? Within linguistics, particularly within discourse analysis, discourse is used to describe a structure which extends beyond the boundaries of the sentence and this means a lot for the course designers. Language textbook writers have realized that elaborating teaching materials which only seek to offer perfect models of language, without any connection to communication in real life situations, is not enough when the aim they seek to accomplish is to create proficient users of English. And here the idiomatic language plays an important role and that is why we decided to study in detail idiomaticity and also the metaphoric elements.

We also underline the idea that 'genre' has been a field of investigation for mankind for centuries and discussing about genres means discussing about a classificatory activity. Typologies have been developed in all fields of knowledge and in different communities. But consensus on any typology seldom exists, and that is why there are problems in identifying genres. The modern genre theory starts from the *European Romantic Movement* during which

literary works were divided into static genres, then becomes more consistent with the *Russian formalists* who relied on the linguistic technique of Ferdinand de Saussure, the *Symbolist notion* concerning the autonomy of texts, *the Bakhtin Circle*, for which genres are ways of conceptualizing reality, *the Social Factor* in which genres are institutionalized mediators between individual and society.

We also try to define discourse analysis and genre analysis in order to find the connection between the two from the point of view of the linguistic concept of analysis. The purpose of this endeavour is to increase understanding of the applied genre analysis concept and to bring into stronger relief other genre analysis perspectives with a view to explaining the role idiomaticity plays in the institutional context represented by school.

Swales (1990) offers a framework for developing academic English courses which suggests that ethnographic work leads to characterisations of discourse communities, while discourse analysis leads to characterisations of genres. In textbooks, tasks are seen as having communicative outcomes, just as genres are seen as having communicative purposes and discourse communities, communicative goals. As a development of discourse analysis, the genre-analysis approach seeks to see text as a whole rather than as a collection of isolated units.

Language programmes tend to vary according to whether they stress (a) *language content*, or the specific matter to be included, (b) *process*, or the manner in which language content is learned, and (c) *product*, or outcomes such as the language skills learners are expected to master. Communicative goals have produced changes in these three dimensions of a syllabus. In language content, the shift has been marked by an enlargement in the scope of the entire area. The process zone has been emphasized through attention to global, cognitive, and creative practices. The product area has reflected re-emphasised interest in the language skills, particularly reading and writing. Although the communicative approach may not always create radical changes, it has affected our view of the way in which course outcomes are presented, defined and evaluated.

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Specific text types or 'genres' serve conventional social uses and functions. That is, particular kinds of texts attempt to 'do things' in social institutions with predictable ideational and material effects. These include functional written texts (e.g., business letters, forms, policies, textbooks), spoken face-to-face interactions (e.g., clinical exchanges, service

exchanges, classroom lessons), and multimodal visual, electronic and gestural texts (e.g., internet home pages).

Taken as historically and culturally specific social actions, genres are dynamic and continually subject to innovation and reinvention. They remain affiliated nonetheless with particular conventionalised discourses. For example, business letters are likely to feature discourses of finance and business; tabloid news reports would be sites for discourses of romance and sexuality. As conventional forms, then, genres and sub-genres thus both constrain and enable meanings and social relations between speakers and listeners, writers and readers.

All genres can be analysed in terms of their sequenced structures of propositions, their textual macro-structures. The structures of spoken and written narratives have identifiable segments, movements or 'chunks'. In the case of, for example, children's reading or science textbooks, the sequencing and montage of key actions, portrayals and claims follow an identifiable order. The resultant text structures tend to operate as large scale 'grammars' of actions and events chained together, as expressions of a 'cultural logic' and taken for granted assumptions about historical and human agency, social and natural causality. The study of narrative structures has been used to study the representation of gender relations, cultures and cultural groups, wars and other major historical events, and civic and political structures in textbooks.

Studies of United Kingdom, United States and Australian classrooms have focused on how classroom talk can shape and reshape what will count as knowledge, subjectivity, legitimate social relations and textual practices. Classroom talk is a primary medium through which teachers and students construct 'readings' of textbooks, in effect reshaping text structures, features and knowledge into authoritative interpretations.

The turn-taking structure of classroom lessons and other spoken texts can be analysed for its topic and propositional macro-structure, to document patterns of who can speak, when, about what topics and with what officially recognised authority and force. As noted, ethnomethodological studies of classroom talk detail many of the typical discourse moves and techniques with which teachers regulate classroom knowledge. Recent studies of gender and cultural identity document how students' resistance can reshape school knowledge and social relations (see Gutierrez, Larsen and Kreuter, 1995).

Critical discourse analysis also focuses on sentence and word-level analysis, drawing

analytic methods from systemic functional linguistics. A range of other descriptions of language functions have been developed. By establishing reading positions, texts can interpellate readers, situating and positioning them in identifiable relations of power and agency in relation to texts. The study of subject positions of textbooks has focused on selective traditions of values, ideologies, 'voices', and representations.

In addition to describing the cultural assumptions expressed in the text macrostructure, analysis can describe particular lexical choices (e.g., 'wordings', 'namings') and the grammatical representation of agency and action (e.g., transitivity, mode and modality). The use of an active or passive voice in a history textbook description of the 'colonisation' of the Americas, for example, may have the ideological effect of foregrounding or backgrounding Anglo/European agency. The lexical choice of 'colonisation' rather than 'invasion', and the verbs and adjectives affiliated with indigenous people would represent a particular version of the historical event. Critical discourse analysis thus can document how the world is portrayed, how human, biological and political actions are represented, sanctioned and critiqued in the official texts of educational institutions (see, for example, Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997).

At the same time, texts can be analysed in terms of how they structure and stipulate social relations between human subjects. As noted, teachers and students in classroom talk tend to reconstruct text features and knowledge, often in resistant and idiosyncratic ways. However, educational texts hail readers, and position them in ideological relations through various lexical and grammatical devices. Texts operate pragmatically through the use of pronominalisation, modal auxiliaries, and the selection of speech acts such as questions and commands, orders and injunctions.

The lexical and grammatical choices build differential relations of power and agency between readers and writers, between students and textbooks. Critical discourse analysis, thus, employs interdisciplinary techniques of text analysis to look at how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships. This has already enabled the detailed study of policy texts, official curriculum documents, textbooks, teachers' guidebooks, and student writings. It has also been used to look at a range of formal and informal spoken texts, including classroom talk, administrators' public talk, staff-room talk and parent-teacher interviews.

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The purpose of this chapter is to define the textbook as genre and within this genre the specificity of the textbook genre used by the Romanian ELT discourse community, which proves

to be the *Pathway to English* set of textbooks. We also offer examples taken from the *Pathway to English. Student's Book* that, we consider, besides making learners aware of the form and content of different genres, aim at developing genre skills.

In Romania we can define a well-established English Language Teaching (ELT) discourse community. This discourse community has the characteristics described by Swales in his theory of genre analysis: "*A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals*". Swales asserts that this set of common goals may be formally inscribed in documents or it may be more tacit. In Romania the ELT discourse community has a range of public goals. Most of these public goals are formally inscribed in the documents of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research and Youth (MECT).

The political and public interest in the teaching/learning of English makes the existence of a well-defined discourse community possible. At the level of the Ministry of National Education English teachers are represented by a director. The hierarchy goes top-down with regional inspectors for English and, in schools with heads of department of foreign languages or even of English (where there are more teachers of English in the same school). The existence of recognised teachers' associations is an even better argument for the existence of a Romanian ELT discourse community. Swales also mentions that "It is commonality of goals, not shared object of study that is criterial" (1990: 25) in defining a discourse community. In our case it is the existence of the common public goals of the Romanian ELT discourse community that gives them unity and not the fact that most of them teach English.

The general 'picture' of the Romanian ELT discourse community would not be complete if we forgot to include the learners. Would there be teachers unless there were learners to listen to them? This inclusion is justified by the policy of our educational system in general that makes the learner responsible for his/her own instruction and development. This is also justified by the fact that we may think of some of these learners as future teachers of English as well. We are entitled to include them in the discourse community also because our English learners share, to some extent, the common public goals with their teachers. Let us not forget that the textbooks - as a sub-genre - they both use (teachers and learners) have linguistic and non-linguistic features whose understanding has to be common to both teachers and learners.

Genre analysis, which leads to the elaboration of a scientific strategy of teaching genre skills through the textbooks, proves to be of very much help in raising learners' awareness of the existence of different genres, specific to different discourse communities. Foreign language textbooks represent themselves a well-defined genre which is one of the many ones used in accomplishing the communicative goals of the foreign language teachers' discourse communities. Within this large discourse community we identified, in our study, the Romanian ELT discourse community, which uses its specific genres in accomplishing its communicative purposes.

The purpose of our study is to characterise one of these genres: the specific Romanian EFL textbook genre with its own sub-genres. The Romanian EFL textbook genre is well represented by the *Pathway to English* set of textbooks. Within this genre we identified 'The Student's Book' and 'The Teacher's Book' sub-genres and described their features which we tried to make as evident as possible, by giving as many examples as we thought relevant.

Being influenced by the socio-political and cultural conditions under which it was produced, this set of textbooks represents a well defined genre which differs, to a certain extent, from other EFL textbook genres designed to be used all over the world. The literature component of the textbook represents, in a way, its singularity and national 'seal'. This fact draws the *Pathway to English* set of textbooks nearer the Romanian language and literature textbook, which we also presented in our study, and for which the English textbook was, probably, one of the models to follow.

Taking into consideration the applied genre analysis aspect of our paper, we also brought evidence of the presence of a large range of genres inside 'The Student's Book' of the *Pathway to English* set of textbooks and justified their presence by the fact that textbook designers had a permanent preoccupation to raising learners' awareness of their presence and the concern of developing genre production skills. The textbook designers made it their aim to create competent users of the English language, capable to distinguish differences in genre construction, a skill which the Romanian EFL learners are going to use in their after graduation period, when they follow a profession.

Nevertheless, by the fact that they aim at developing genre recognition skills, the textbook writers succeeded to surmount this limitation by elaborating challenging tasks for the learners. The age, fields of interest and learner's motivation were, probably, criteria textbook writers considered when deciding upon which genre types to include in the 'Student's Book'. We are aware of the fact

that our study is not exhaustive and there are still a lot of other aspects to be considered. Among them aspects of critical discourse analysis which would analyse matters to do with the empowerment of the teacher in the class, relationships between teacher and learner, between learners and also between teachers and the hierarchical factors involved in the field of education on a national scale.

Thus, we consider that genre analysis is a discourse analysis aspect that allows the identification of text types and which helps young learners, no matter what profession they follow, to better integrate in the discourse community or communities they are going to become part of. The EFL textbook as genre needs to be analysed not only for the reason that genres in general are dynamic structures and textbooks run the risk of teaching the learners static forms of genre that the respective discourse communities no longer use.

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The next chapter defines the concept of discourse making the necessary distinction between discourse and discourse analysis and establishing the place of discourse and discourse analysis in the general linguistic theory. The chapter consists of two sub-chapters: 'Discourse and Discourse analysis' and 'Linguistics and Discourse analysis'.

By investigating this direction of linguistic research we hope to find a proper answer to the question 'why discourse analysis plays such an important role nowadays in designing foreign language textbooks?' Within linguistics, particularly within discourse analysis, discourse is used to describe a structure which extends beyond the boundaries of the sentence and this means a lot for the course designers. Language textbook writers have realised that elaborating teaching materials which only seek to offer perfect models of language that stop at the limit of the sentence and have no connection with communication in real life situations, is not enough when the aim they seek to accomplish is to create proficient users of a language.

We begin this chapter by describing the multitude of fields of scientific investigation in which discourse is used (for example, conversational analysis, critical linguistics, ethnographic based, cognitive psychology based, etc.) and then narrow the perspective to get to the purely linguistic area of study. The use of discourse analysis in linguistics is (as Slembrouck, 2003), proper to the following fields of investigation: *a. Structural linguistics*, *b. Text linguistics*; *c. Pragmatics*.

It would have been nice if we had been able sum up what we know about discourse into a handy definition. Unfortunately, this is not possible as is also the case for such related concepts as 'language', 'communication', 'interaction', 'society', and 'culture'. Van Dijk (1997) notices that "*As is often the case for concepts that stand for complex phenomena, it is in fact the whole discipline, in this case the new cross-discipline of discourse studies (also called 'discourse analysis'), that provides the definition of such fundamental concepts*" (van Dijk, 1997: 1)

A point of departure in defining discourse analysis could be the one provided by Stubbs in his *Discourse Analysis: The Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (1983:1), in which he refers to attempts to study the organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers. Discourse analysis foregrounds language use as social action, language use as situated performance, language use as tied to social relations and identities, power, inequality and social struggle, language use as essentially a matter of 'practices' rather than just 'structures', etc.

A discussion of genres is a discussion of classificatory activity -specifically, of the division of some whole thing into the kinds or types of the thing. Typologies have been developed routinely in all fields of knowledge and in different communities. Different modern analyses of general text types, for example, have used the communicative purpose of the text as a characteristic of division to divide all texts into several sets. Each set contains a 'narrative' category, but the sets differ markedly on the remaining categories. Since identification of genres entails the use of classification, all the methods and criteria for a viable classification system come into play. Sorting a whole set of things into genres should ideally conform to the accepted desiderata of mutual exclusivity and joint exhaustivity. That is, the genre categories should not overlap with each other, and all possible instances should be accounted for and accommodated in the groupings. These ideal conditions may not be possible to achieve in any classification or in any domain. It is clear, for example, that sorting text types into sub-types on the basis of their purpose poses special problems because each text can contain elements of more than one purpose. In the first example above, for instance, a conversational text can also be a

description, a narration and/or an argument, or a poetic text may also have a didactic and/or a narrative purpose.

Adding to the problems of identifying genres is the further complexity that genres may also be identified on the basis of some characteristic of division other than communicative purpose. A further problem for identifying genres is that even the most familiar ones are unstable, changeable and can divide, fuse and/or mutate to form different kinds of hybrid texts. New names are often coined for these hybrids, such as non-fiction novel, infomercial or prose poem. According to this perspective, the ideal of mutual exclusivity is sacrificed in order to ensure joint exhaustivity of the classes. But the necessity of adding new classes dynamically undermines the stability of the typology and confounds reader expectations for the content(s) and structure(s) of the genres.

In this chapter we also concentrate upon finding the connection between discourse and genre from the point of view of the linguistic concept of analysis. The purpose of this part of our study is to increase understanding of the applied genre analysis concept and of its connection to other genre analysis perspectives in an endeavour to, later on, explain the role it plays in the institutional context represented by school. In this chapter we tackle the following issues: 'Defining Discourse Analysis and Genre Analysis', 'A Sociocognitive Viewpoint on Genre Analysis' and 'Applied Genre Analysis'.

In conclusion, genre analysis is a part of discourse analysis which focuses on the regularity of structure that distinguishes one type of text from another. The results of genre analysis focus on the differences between types of genres. Genre analysis is an important development of linguistics because it combines socio-cultural and psycholinguistic aspects of text construction and interpretation with linguistic insights. The goal of a genre based approach is, on the one hand, to make people aware of discourse organisation in real world and on the other hand, to help textbook writers and course designers elaborate language learning and development activities which have appropriate shape and purpose.

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"Cognitive Pragmatics" is considered the discipline responsible for the study of human relationships, which are patterned by people's internal resources (Bara, 2010: 14). In order for the communicative activity to be meaningful, both the speaker and the listener should be attentive to the way in which they externalize themselves. Sophia Marmaridou suggests that

"cognition" and "language" are related to one another, as it is "language" which reveals and also externalizes both our inner resources and the mechanisms that support group relationships (Marmaridou, 2000: 3).

In his opinion Carston (2002b:128), considers that "From the cognitive point of view, "pragmatics" may be defined as a capacity of the mind, a kind of information-processing system, a system for interpreting a particular phenomenon in the world, namely human communicative behaviour". Relevance Theory is grounded in the idea that our cognitive systems have evolved in the direction of increasing efficiency and are now set up so that they tend automatically to maximize relevance" (Vega-Moreno 2003: 307). The author continues by saying that "the human mind, which is based largely on our perceptual system, possesses the feature of being able to recall and activate the assumptions which are potentially relevant in the context". Moreover, the author appreciates, "Our inferential systems tend to draw the greatest possible cognitive effects from the combination of the new information with the context" (Vega-Moreno 2003: 307).

The author continues, by saying that "The mental processes at work in deriving cognitive effects involve the expenditure of processing effort so that the more processing effort expended the less the relevance" (Vega-Moreno 2003: 307). According to this idea, in producing a certain utterance, the speaker tends to take for granted what background assumptions the hearer is likely to use, what inferences he is likely to draw. Since she can predict to some extent the line of thought the hearer is likely to take in processing her utterance and so what information is likely to be relevant to him at that moment, she will produce, according to her own abilities and preferences, an utterance which will enable the hearer to derive the intended effects for the investment of as little processing effort as is compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences. On the assumption that the speaker is aiming at optimal relevance, and is competent to achieve it, the hearer is entitled to follow a path of least effort in deriving cognitive effects and to take the first interpretation that satisfies his expectations of (optimal) relevance to be the one the speaker intended (Vega-Moreno 2003: 308).

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In what follows we try to emphasize the importance the concept of "meaning" plays within language. The problem of defining meaning, which is considered as one of the most important key-concepts in linguistics and in the same time a basis of interpretation of reality,

preoccupied linguists to a great extent. Operating with "meaning" involves the explanation of some complex processes. The structure of the chapter concerns the definition of "meaning" in its relation to other key-concepts such as "language", "culture", "embodiment", "emotions", "truth" and "context". These factors determine the multifaceted nature of "meaning" (Marsen 2008: 47).

The present chapter also aims to emphasize the distinction between "the literal" and "the figurative language". Literalness deals with "objectivity and precision", whereas figurativeness shows people's capability of using language creatively (Zanotto, Cameron & Cavalcanti 2008: 13). "Emotions" seem to be better rendered by figurative (idiomatic meaning) since "idioms" and "metaphors" translate "people's active involvement in conversations as well as their liveliness and vivacity". The fourth part of the chapter brings to light the problem of the literal or figurative interpretation and understanding of idioms. We mention some remarkable linguists who approached this topic in their studies.

Ortony & Fainzilber (1987: 181) suggest that there are three communicative functions that metaphor might serve. First, they might allow one to express that which is difficult or impossible to express if one is restricted to literal uses of language. The claim would constitute encouraging support for the necessity-of-metaphor view. A second possible function of metaphors is that they may constitute a particularly compact means of communication. Finally, metaphors may help capture the vividness of phenomenal experience. "As a general tendency", "metaphor" is considered by many linguists a device which "deviates from the literal truth", "a device that leads to ambiguity in language" (Hoffman & Honneck 1979: 321).

Knowles & Moon (2006:7) argue that it is pointless to intend to replace "metaphors" with "literal" devices, because the result would be a meaningless one. Many authors consider "metaphors" among the most puzzling devices while appreciating that the command of metaphoric language is placed among the greatest capacities of the humankind. According to this position, "the metaphor" is a thorny topic of discussion as the concept involves complex skills.

The ideas presented so far deal with the creative dimension of metaphors. The other important dimension that the literature in the field debated to a great extent concerns the attribute of the metaphorical phrases to translate abstract notions into more accessible words. Another dimension in the discussion related to "metaphor" is its relationship to "culture". "Culture" symbolizes the sum of all the human practices (Kovecses 2006: 283). "Metaphors" are important because they enhance the understanding of the surrounding reality. Metaphors possess both

symbolic and mental attributes. Metaphor lives within "culture", "cognition", "linguistics" and may be a summation of all these.

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"Phraseology", and, more specifically, the issue of the idiomatic language, gained an essential place among the linguistic preoccupations. All the studies conclude the problem of idiomatic language by revealing their complex nature and strong connections with everyday life.

Aiming to reveal the importance of "idiom studying and learning", Sophia Zevgoli (1998:222) presents the reasons why "idioms" are interesting in language. According to her "languages" hold a vast repertoire of set phrases which are made use of in "communication"; idiomatic phrases are generally taken into consideration from the angle of their decorative nature and from the fact that they translate our feelings; idiomatic phrases are considered some exceptional instances in "language"; the idiomatic language is the means which unites language and "culture". Studying idioms brings a unique opportunity for looking into the target culture's notions about the world". By getting awareness of language idiomaticity, people may seem to command the fluency of that particular "language".

The matter of characterizing "idioms" and "idiomaticity" is a peculiar one, because the meaning of idioms has nothing to do with logic; if natural language has been designed by a logician, idioms do not exist. They are a feature of discourse that frustrates any simple logical account of how the meanings of utterances depend on the meanings of their parts and on the syntactic relation among those parts. Speakers use idiomatic expressions as though they were words/phrases that have become frozen into a single form with a special meaning. Somewhere in the mind, these expressions are stored as exceptions" (Cacciari&Tobossi 1993: VU).

The metaphoric nature of idioms is also stressed by other linguists. The active exercise of idiomatic phrases in our conversations may be a proof of our proficient command of "language" and, at the same time, it may reveal the fact that we practise that particular "language" in its very context. Hirsch et al. compare the idiomatic language with "a unique signature... of the language" (Hirsch et al. 2002: 59). Figurativeness has gained a priority among linguists' preoccupations thanks to the new approach that sees the substratum of figurative expressions in people's cognitive structure. Idioms, in many linguists' acceptance, are strongly related to metaphors; metaphors are considered the most prominent form of figurative language. The figurative language was taken into consideration as a "homogenous topic" and the authors' explanation for

this can be explained through the fact that idioms are very elusive and the difficulty of exactly characterizing them is one of the reasons why relatively little attention has been accorded to these expressions, in spite of their uniqueness in language. The linguists acknowledge the various situations when they are used in language and even quote Searle's informal rule of conversation "Speak idiomatically unless there is some good reason not to do so".

"Idioms" are defined as units being characterized by the fact that their meaning is not a direct function of the meanings of their constituent words. They (idioms) arise in the natural use of natural language. They are synonymous with the creative use of language. People bear a complex skill, that of inventing new and new significances. "Speakers invent words and phrases to make us pay attention, to amuse us, to astonish or to challenge us. They create new ways to convey old meanings for the sheer joy of invention. The creation of idioms reflects new conceptions of the world, new ways in which individuals construct mental models of the world and new ways in which to convey their contents vividly. It is through idioms that the truly creative nature of human expression reveals itself.

Idiomatic expressions create a significant portion of our everyday communication. An idiomatic unit comes into existence from a figurative expression describing situations, phenomena, or human traits that usually exceed the neutral perceptions. Idiomatic images enable the speaker to cover sensitive pictures and phenomena, holding the unpleasant and undesired positions of everyday life expressed by linguistic means. In other words, idiomatic units can grasp the meaning of complex positions of life in a more refined communicative manner. People use idioms to politely communicate subjective opinions and so in an indirect manner avoid responsibility for what is communicated. Idiomatic expressions convey a sort of aphoristic truth about the referred affairs. The speaker's expressive commitment to the discussed matter via figurative approximation with an emotional evaluative aspect of the phenomenon is more than a mere stating about the matter of fact.

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The crucial linguistic issue addressed in the present thesis - metaphor - is situated within the province of Cognitive Linguistics, a rapidly expanding field at the interlace between linguistics, psychology and cognitive science. First we intend to make a short introduction to the Cognitive Linguistics (CL) background.

During the past fifty years or so, the term *cognition* has undergone a change in

meaning: from the dichotomy *rational and level-headed* versus *emotional and impulsive* aspect of mental activity, it has reached a stage where it is used to refer globally to any information-processing activities in the brain, from the analysis of immediate stimuli up to the rendering of subjective experience. Contemporary terminology does not exclude from the generous meaning of *cognition* phenomena as varied as perception, memory, attention, problem-solving, language, reasoning and mental representation. This virtually all-inclusive meaning of the term pervades the very premises of the Cognitive Linguistics framework.

Cognitive linguistics is a school of thought and research whose origins are to be discerned in the discontent experienced by linguists in the early 1970s as a reaction to the formal approaches to language. The 1960s and the 1970s witnessed the rapid propagation of in-depth studies concerning categorisation and a revival of *Gestalt* psychology. The results in these areas of scientific interest, in turn, gave a strong impetus to the burgeoning cognitive sciences, so that by the 1990s there was a considerable amount of research done in the newly established field of cognitive linguistics. The birth certificate of this new branch of cognitive science, one could say, was signed in 1989/1990 on the occasion of the formal establishment of the *International Cognitive Linguistics Association* (ICLA), together with its own journal, *Cognitive Linguistics*. Ever since, the ICLA has been receiving new members, has been constantly involved in pursuing new research and connecting linguists from all over the world by organising or sponsoring thematic conferences.

CL marks a turning point in language studies. In the 1970s, most studies followed in the steps of Chomskyan linguistics, in which meaning was simply attachable to and detachable from the syntactic structure. The study of syntax reigned supreme on the grounds of syntactic structures independently functioning according to language-internal rules and parameters. The main tenets of CL, opposed to such an assumption, derive from the following major premises: the denial of any autonomous language faculty in the mind; the assertion of language knowledge arising out of language use; the claim that grammar itself is to be explained in terms of conceptualisation.

Departing from the generative grammar tradition, some linguists profited by insights into the relation between language and mind and started to question the prevailing Chomskyan theses. Some linguists stressed the communicative dimension of language and thus laid the foundations of *functional linguistics*. Functional linguistics later developed into *discourse-functional linguistics* and *functional-typological linguistics*, both supporting inquiries into the nature of language as it is always and naturally integrated into a social setting, a cognitive environment

and an experiential context. Strong believers in the centrality of meaning and conceptualisation in the study of any language, other cognitive linguists adopted their own angles of language description and looked into various language phenomena, albeit from a common theoretical ground. They no longer lost sight of the associations between language form and language meaning and thus, in their work, semantics and grammar were assigned a new role.

With CL, the main focus is on the relationship between language and cognition, and on language and the human mind in a broader perspective. Cognitive Linguistics research shares natural interdisciplinary links with *Cognitive and Social Psychology*, *Philosophy* (particularly the interest in categorisation), *Sociology* and *Anthropology*. Much research into child language acquisition needs also to be acknowledged as a stepping stone towards putting forth cognitive linguistics hypotheses. These being the interdisciplinarity and networking connections strongly associated with the field of cognitive linguistics, one can attend to the generosity of the term as well as of the science: they necessarily connect related but distinct approaches, they may even point to autonomous and competing claims. On such grounds, linguists rightfully assign CL to an 'enterprise' that assumes that language creation, usage and learning share a focal point, human cognition, rather than to a specific theory.

For all the heterogeneity of the cognitive linguistics theoretical and practical proposals, there are two theoretical pillars that are claimed to support this school of thought and are shared throughout the whole field. These fundamental assumptions have been theoretically framed in a significant 1990 article published by George Lakoff, whose brainchild is the cognitive semantic outlook on the metaphorical phenomenon. He correlated cognitive linguistics with two chief commitments: the 'Generalisation Commitment' and the 'Cognitive Commitment'. The former reestablishes the positioning of the language modules within the boundaries of a unique structure with ubiquitous governing principles, whereas the latter reconsiders language principles in the light of universal cognition processes. Drawing on additional claims put forth in the literature, to these I have added a series of other key commitments that mesh with the previous ones and provide further theoretical foundations to the CL enterprise: the reconsideration of motivation in language, the construal commitment, the embodiment commitment and the re-examination of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.

According to the classical theory of idioms, the pairing between the idiomatic expression and its opaque meaning is absolutely arbitrary, leaving learners no other option but to learn the idioms of a language by heart. CL argues that, in a considerable number of instances, there is a case for motivation replacing traditional arbitrariness.

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The fact that we conceptualise linguistic form in spatial terms entitles Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 126) to surmise that the relationship between form and content is not arbitrary at all, and they explain why there is an interdependency between them: “Because we conceptualise linguistic form in spatial terms, it is possible for certain spatial metaphors to apply directly to the form of a sentence, as we conceive of it spatially. This can provide automatic links between form and content, based on general metaphors in our conceptual system.” These cases as well as other instances pinpoint subtleties of meaning that do not originate in the syntax of the sentence, but come about in a principled connection with metaphors that are stocked in our conceptual system, and are naturally retrieved and applied to linguistic form as well as to the semantic realm.

In the same vein, the two cognitive semanticists claim that metaphor is a linguistic means by which we understand 'one thing in terms of another' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). Their fundamental regeneration of this foregoing conceptual trend consists in pointing out the primary conceptual nature of metaphor, over and beyond a possible linguistic form: “Metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic, in nature.” (Lakoff, 1993: 244)

These two elements support the concrete formulation demarcating conceptual metaphor. The two entities that make up a metaphor are claimed to be knowledge structures and are considered to represent concepts or *gestalts*. In cognitive semantic terms, they are *conceptual domains*, and the specific preferred terminology available for each of these entities is SOURCE DOMAIN and TARGET DOMAIN, respectively, though *Topic* and *Vehicle* are also used. The relation between these two domains, as licensed by metaphor, is one of mapping, or correspondence, between the respective concepts, and is expressed by convention as TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN or TARGET DOMAIN AS SOURCE DOMAIN. Metaphor turns out to be precisely the cognitive mechanism whereby one conceptual domain, the SOURCE, is partially and in a culture-specific manner projected onto a different conceptual domain, the TARGET, in such a cognitively significant way that understanding the TARGET via the SOURCE

is obtained.

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As we have seen a communicative approach to teaching English implies a careful presentation of figurative language in English (idioms and metaphors) in the EFL textbooks which is improved by a discourse analysis perspective. We tried to draw attention upon directions of discourse analysis that refer to the educational environment in general. The results of such an investigation help us understand and, as far as possible, prevent problems that appear in this highly formal environment. From this macro aspect of discourse study we passed to an inside EFL textbooks presentation of discourse structures and tried to justify their role in developing the learners' ability to communicate efficiently in English.

In contemporary education disjunctions have appeared between: community and school cultures; the appropriateness of curricular, instructional models for new student population; the practical requirements and challenges of new workplaces and civic spheres where these students live and work. Discourse analysis, seen within this context, describes an interdisciplinary family of methodologies and approaches to the study of language and text that draws variously upon linguistics, literary theory and cultural studies, philosophy of language, sociology and psychology. The application of ethnomethodological approaches to the study of classroom talk showed how normative categories of gender were constructed in the exchange structures of themes of classroom talk.

We agreed with the critical discourse analysts who are of the opinion that systematic asymmetries of power and resources between speakers and listeners, readers and writers can be linked to their unequal access to linguistic and social resources. In this way, the preposition of critical discourse analysis is that institutions like schools act as gatekeepers of mastery of discursive resources: the discourses, texts, genres, lexical and grammatical structures of everyday language use.

The analysis of 'units' within textbooks has enabled us to identify microstructure features with reference to context, cultural and ideological principles as well as teaching techniques which are drawn from discourse community and enhance discourse community in their turn. Genre analysis helped us to better understand how language is used within an important discourse community – that of the Romanian ELT. This is a model of applied linguistics in its best sense – it draws on linguistic and sociolinguistic theory to clarify the

nature of the language learning in an educational setting.

What makes textbooks be characteristic manifestations of a genre, among others, is the fact that a certain discourse community uses them in order to accomplish a great part of their common goals. Foreign language textbooks represent themselves a well defined genre which is one of the many ones used in accomplishing the communicative goals of the foreign language teachers' discourse communities. Within this large discourse community we identified, in our study, the Romanian ELT discourse community, which uses its specific genres in accomplishing its communicative purposes.

In order to be able to describe the idioms and metaphors that must be a part of ELT textbooks, we also tried to emphasize the strong connections between idiomaticity and cognition. We stressed the cognitive level of language trying to prove that the metaphoric, idiomatic language has deep roots in or strong connections with the impressions that people have about reality. This fact has strong cognitive implications which we explain and motivate in congruence with some cornerstone books and article. The concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) point out the metaphor theory is based on the assumption that idioms as an important part of language also take on the feature of metaphor. Based on some English idiomatic expressions, we found that many idioms are generated from conceptual metaphors.

We studied the issue of the idiomatic language in relation to the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and then we rendered some idioms expressing positive/negative feelings and moods.

This study constitutes a summation of the contributions which already exist in the field of idioms debated upon the level of their cognitive semantic richness as well as from the field of cognitive pragmatics. Our theoretical positions can be considered to be placed along the same line with the theoretical frames already instantiated in the research literature. We tried to show that idioms bear a cognitive semantic basis and, in the same time, can be explained through cognitive pragmatic principles from some important theoretical positions. We revealed the importance of this position within the general context of Cognition, semantics, pragmatics and linguistics, in general. We also presented the place it occupies within the research literature. We often drew a clear-cut distinction between traditional and more modern,

up-to-date theories. We offered many complementary theoretical positions, and we adopted their method in order to consolidate our persuasive approach.

We also tried to bring to light the problem of meaning, its relationship with many important linguistic key-concepts, reaching to discuss the issue of literal and figurative language. That is why we studied the relationship between ‘idioms’ and ‘culture’. The thorny aspects of discussion were explained in order to clarify issues such as ‘the relationship between language and culture’, and ‘the definition of culture’, the interconnections between ‘the cultural and the social’, and the relationship between culture and the social meaning of emotion language.

In addition we clarified the issues related to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the interpretation of some idioms. We ended up with some concluding remarks referring to the cognitive approach to idiomatic language. We came to the conclusion that English idiomatic language is governed much the same as the literal language and we proved the practical character of the cognitive pragmatic principles when applied to idiomatic language in order to make it clear how it must be introduced in EFL textbooks. We debated the problem of English idiomatic language which is deeply rooted in our cognitive abilities and the place they occupy within ELT textbooks.

We are aware of the fact that the aim and objectives set by the teacher should fulfill one common goal: to develop in their students linguistic competence, that is, to enable the students to understand, think and speak in the foreign language, to master the four basic skills, to communicate in the language orally and in writing. In formulating his objectives any teacher/course designer has to be aware that objectives in foreign language teaching may be changing, consequently he/she has to continually adapt his/her methods and techniques, be aware of priorities and objectives, otherwise his/her teaching may become anachronistic and irrelevant for the young people. Teaching idiomatic English language is obviously part of the new approach to teaching a foreign language.

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