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METAPHORICAL AWARENESS OF THE NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH IN THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF HAPPINESS

The notion of meaning has always been high on the agenda of linguistic studies. However, meaning receives special prominence in Cognitive Linguistics: cognitive linguists, among whom the outstanding theoretical figures are Ronald Langacker¹ and George Lakoff², put a lot of emphasis on the semantic unit. According to them, meaning can be expressed by means of conceptualisation and metaphorical extension.

The concepts that can be partially understood and viewed via metaphorical mappings seem numerous. In fact, the emotional domain turns out to be an abundant source of conveying meaning by dint of conceptualisation. In particular, the concept of HAPPINESS, as the one that is universally acknowledged, appears extremely interesting and adequate to be analysed and assessed on the basis of cognitive criteria and metaphorisation processes (Davitz 1969).

Furthermore, the analysis of the concept of HAPPINESS presented in this paper is made in comparison with the definitions of HAPPINESS offered by ordinary dictionaries such as *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* or *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. To be more precise, conceptualisation of HAPPINESS is based on the definitions given by thirty native speakers of English³ aged sixteen plus subjected to the survey⁴ which was conducted in London, England, in November 1999.

It must be stressed that the reasons for taking such an approach to the problem of meaning in general and metaphor in particular highlighted on the grounds of the conceptualisation of HAPPINESS are many. Firstly, the

¹ See Langacker (1987).

² See Lakoff (1980), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff and Turner (1989).

³ See Appendix 1.

⁴ See Appendix 2.

experiment is devised to elicit whether or not metaphor is grounded⁵ in people's minds. Secondly, the survey allows to analyse how people understand the concept of HAPPINESS and whether or not they possess the cognitive abilities and skills at defining the concept. Thirdly, it is hoped that the experiment will permit to measure people's perception of the world through metaphor. Finally, the analysis is supposed to reveal the deficiency of ordinary dictionary definitions.

Let us now proceed to carry out a linguistic analysis of the concept of HAPPINESS based on the survey, and bearing in mind the definitions of the concept offered by ordinary dictionaries. For example, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* gives the following definition of HAPPINESS: it is 'the state of having feelings of pleasure, for instance because something good has happened to you; the state of being satisfied or not worried'.

To the contrary, here are the definitions of the concept of HAPPINESS provided by the English respondents, according to the questions in the survey:

a) What is HAPPINESS ?

'a feeling of deep contentment or bubbling joy', 'love', 'a positive emotion', 'having a good time', 'enjoying life', 'spending time with friends', 'comfort', 'feelings of achievement', 'a feeling of peace with the world', 'a bubbly feeling', 'going out with my boyfriend', 'what I feel on a sunny morning', 'joy', 'gladness', 'gaiety', 'great joy', 'a feeling of rightness', 'what everyone seeks', 'a state of mind', 'emotional riches', 'enjoying life to the full', 'a good life', 'doing something you enjoy', 'a light carefree feeling', 'living a lifestyle you enjoy', 'a very nice feeling', 'chocolate', 'being alive', 'feeling content in a comfortable way', 'when everything is good', 'a family', 'true contentment';

b) What do you associate HAPPINESS with ?

'love', 'freedom', 'friendship', 'a family', 'being with special people', 'smiling faces', 'sunshine', 'warmth', 'contentment', 'chocolate', 'sex', 'shopping', 'being with my family and friends', 'health', 'financial security', 'life', 'friends', 'laughter', 'smile', 'fun', 'satisfaction', 'summer', 'going out with my boyfriend', 'a song', 'peace', 'holiness', 'blessings', 'harmony', 'money in my pocket', 'sharing', 'my home', 'a sense of being useful and helpful';

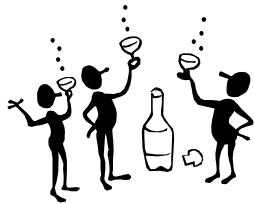
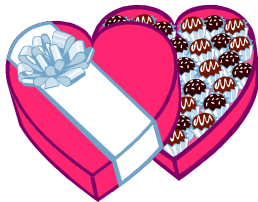
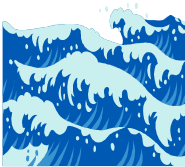
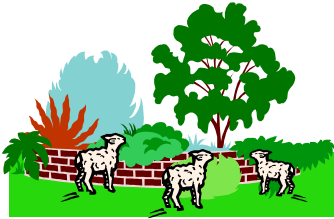
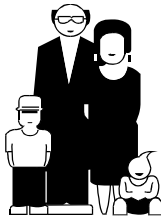
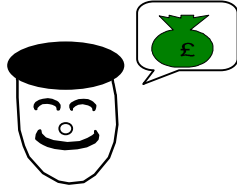
c) HAPPINESS is:

'warmth', 'beauty', 'a family', 'greatness', 'enjoying life', 'spending time with friends', 'perfection', 'a positive emotion', 'doing God's will on earth', 'a

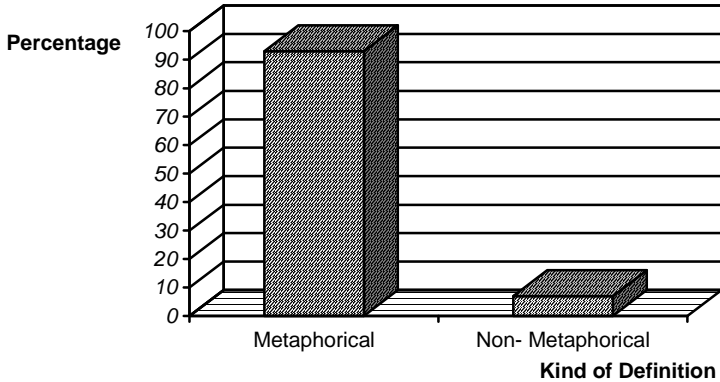
⁵ The term applies to the cognitive definition of metaphor and puts emphasis on the fact that metaphorical mappings are generated and stored in people's minds. Moreover, metaphors are used with little or no consciousness as the upshot of people's reactions to various kinds of life encounters.

warm sun in winter', 'going out with my boyfriend', 'loveliness', 'elusiveness', 'all that is wanted in life', 'feeling better than good', 'love', 'enjoying oneself', 'being with someone special', 'the most important part of your life', 'contentment', 'being with people you want to be with', 'a brilliant feeling', 'a bath full of chocolate', 'one of the most wonderful, almost perfect feeling', 'contentment with life', 'smiling for no reason';

d) How would you draw HAPPINESS ?



The definitions provided by the respondents show that the English think metaphorically and, as a result, define HAPPINESS by dint of metaphorical concepts. Furthermore, metaphorical definitions are about 93 per cent of all definitions given by the respondents. This can be demonstrated by the following graph:

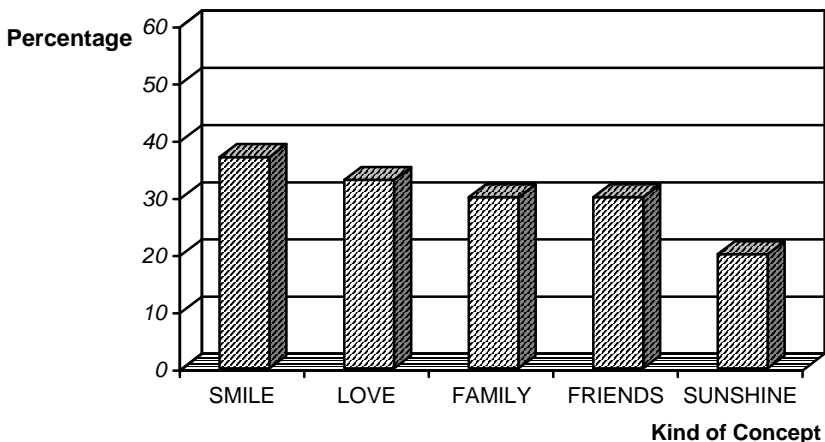


Here are the ways of how people view HAPPINESS metaphorically:

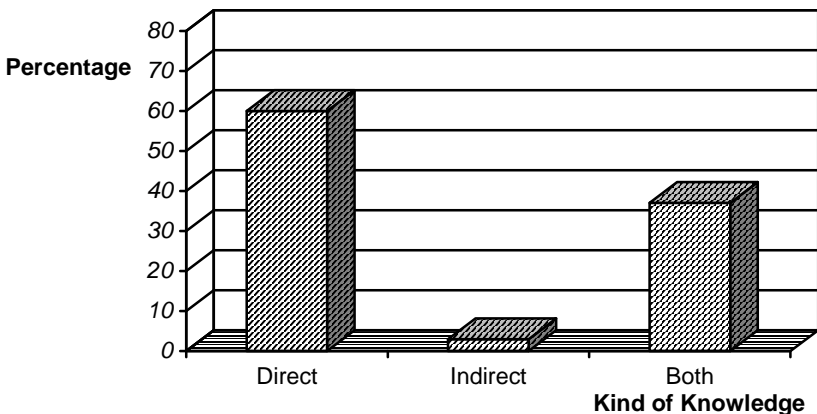
HAPPINESS IS BUBBLING JOY, HAPPINESS IS LOVE, HAPPINESS IS HAVING A GOOD TIME, HAPPINESS IS ENJOYING LIFE, HAPPINESS IS SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS, HAPPINESS IS COMFORT, HAPPINESS IS GOING OUT WITH MY BOYFRIEND, HAPPINESS IS JOY, HAPPINESS IS GLADNESS, HAPPINESS IS GAIETY, HAPPINESS IS GREAT JOY, HAPPINESS IS EMOTIONAL RICHES, HAPPINESS IS ENJOYING LIFE TO THE FULL, HAPPINESS IS A GOOD LIFE, HAPPINESS IS DOING SOMETHING YOU ENJOY, HAPPINESS IS CHOCOLATE, HAPPINESS IS BEING ALIVE, HAPPINESS IS A FAMILY, HAPPINESS IS TRUE CONTENTMENT, HAPPINESS IS FREEDOM, HAPPINESS IS FRIENDSHIP, HAPPINESS IS BEING WITH SPECIAL PEOPLE, HAPPINESS IS SMILING FACES, HAPPINESS IS SUNSHINE, HAPPINESS IS WARMTH, HAPPINESS IS SEX, HAPPINESS IS SHOPPING, HAPPINESS IS FRIENDS, HAPPINESS IS HEALTH, HAPPINESS IS FINANCIAL SECURITY, HAPPINESS IS SMILE, HAPPINESS IS FUN, HAPPINESS IS LIFE, HAPPINESS IS LAUGHTER, HAPPINESS IS SUMMER, HAPPINESS IS HOLINESS, HAPPINESS IS A SONG, HAPPINESS IS PEACE, HAPPINESS IS BLESSINGS, HAPPINESS IS MONEY IN MY POCKET, HAPPINESS IS SHARING, HAPPINESS IS HARMONY, HAPPINESS IS MY HOME, HAPPINESS IS BEAUTY, HAPPINESS IS GREATNESS, HAPPINESS IS PERFECTION, HAPPINESS IS LOVELINESS, HAPPINESS IS ELUSIVENESS, HAPPINESS IS ENJOYING ONESELF, HAPPINESS IS A BATH FULL OF CHOCOLATE, HAPPINESS IS

SMILING FOR NO REASON, HAPPINESS IS A WARM SUN IN WINTER, HAPPINESS IS DOING GOD’S WILL ON EARTH, HAPPINESS IS BEING WITH SOMEONE SPECIAL, HAPPINESS IS BEING WITH PEOPLE YOU WANT TO BE WITH, HAPPINESS IS SAFETY, HAPPINESS IS A PINT OF BEER, HAPPINESS IS £ 1.000.000, HAPPINESS IS A MOTHER AND HER CHILD, HAPPINESS IS A BIG SMILE, HAPPINESS IS LAMBS IN SPRING, HAPPINESS IS SUN AND MUSIC, HAPPINESS IS A BRIGHT SPRING DAY, HAPPINESS IS WINNING A LOTTERY TICKET, HAPPINESS IS TOGETHERNESS, HAPPINESS IS PEOPLE DANCING AND SINGING IN BEAUTIFUL SURROUDINGS.

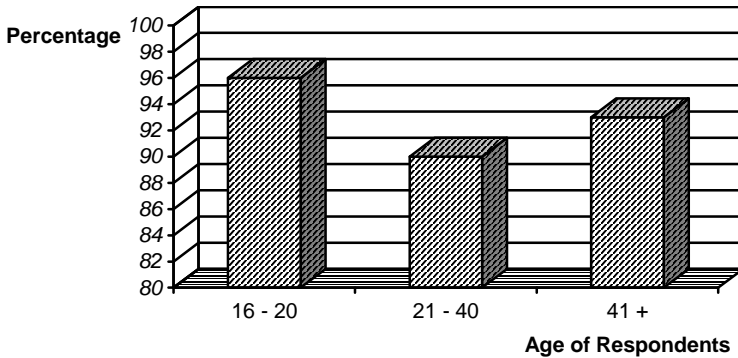
In addition, the following graph indicates which metaphorical concepts of HAPPINESS are most common among the respondents:



The survey also shows that people conceptualise HAPPINESS based on their own experiences (60 per cent), on what they have indirectly acquired (3 per cent), and in both ways (37 per cent). This can be illustrated as follows:

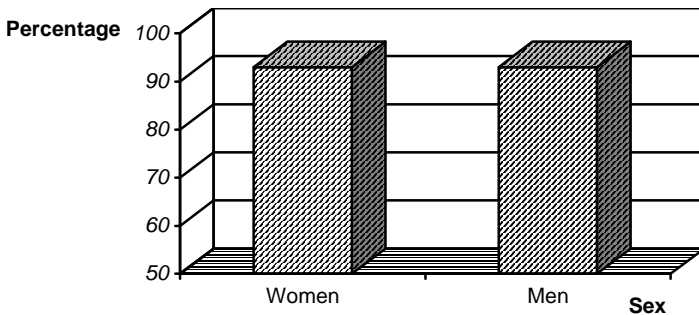


Moreover, the survey reveals that people use metaphorical concepts while defining the concept of HAPPINESS irrespective of age: 96 per cent of teenagers conceptualise HAPPINESS via metaphor; so do 90 per cent of people aged 21–40; about 93 per cent of the respondents who are over 40 define the concept by dint of metaphor. This can be demonstrated by the following graph:



To summarise, the English respondents define the concept of HAPPINESS generating such metaphorical expressions as: HAPPINESS IS LIFE, HAPPINESS IS HEALTH, HAPPINESS IS WARMTH, or HAPPINESS IS A FAMILY. Nevertheless, each of the three groups creates metaphors that seem to be distinctive of the given age: the teenagers view HAPPINESS as A BATH OF CHOCOLATE, MONDAYS, GOING OUT WITH A BOYFRIEND, or SUMMER; more experienced people see the concept through PERFECTION, HARMONY, SMILE, or FRIENDS; finally, those over 40 depict HAPPINESS via TOGETHERNESS, A SONG, PEACE, or BLESSINGS.

Also, it should be emphasised that both women and men tend to conceptualise HAPPINESS by means of both generic and specific metaphorical concepts: for example, women understand HAPPINESS as A FAMILY, LOVE, CHOCOLATE, or SUNSHINE; whereas men perceive the concept as FRIENDS, SMILE, A PINT OF BEER, or LAMBS IN SPRING. In addition, the number of women and men who make use of metaphor in defining HAPPINESS is exactly the same, as the following graph indicates:



To sum up, the experiment shows that the English depict HAPPINESS via a large number of metaphorical concepts producing such metaphorical mappings as: HAPPINESS IS LOVE, HAPPINESS IS A FAMILY, HAPPINESS IS SMILE, HAPPINESS IS FRIENDS, HAPPINESS IS SUNSHINE, HAPPINESS IS HEALTH, HAPPINESS IS A PINT OF BEER, HAPPINESS IS WINNING A LOTTERY TICKET, etc. Furthermore, two factors are found to affect their understanding of the concept of HAPPINESS, namely their personal encounters and what they have indirectly experienced. More interestingly, the only criterion that makes a distinction among the respondents' definitions seems to be the age. However, the definition of HAPPINESS turns out to be founded on neither sex nor education of the respondents.

Obviously, the experiment proves that, to a large extent, the English think metaphorically and, consequently, conceptualise HAPPINESS by dint of metaphorical concepts. Moreover, the analysis substantiates the pervasiveness of metaphor in everyday experience and, therefore, receives a valuable practical dimension. Thus, it appears clear that people tend to make use of metaphor regardless of the age, sex and education, which supports Ortony's conviction of the omnipresence of metaphor in people's experiences (Ortony 1993).

All in all, the paper highlights the importance of the metalinguistic definition for the need of providing a full understanding of a given concept; as a result, the analysis confirms the insufficiency of the dictionary definition and exposes many contributions to the linguistic study made by non-linguists and non-cognitivists, suggested by Skrzypczak (1997). Besides, focusing on the Cognitive Approach to meaning, it is believed that the paper contributes to the subtle problem of the semantic unit in general and intriguing question of metaphor as a powerful cognitive device in particular.

Appendix 1

Description of the English Respondents:

Number	Name	Age	Sex	Education
1	Alison	16	female	GCSE
2	Ann	16	female	GCSE
3	Jane	18	female	GCE
4	Jennifer	18	female	GCE
5	Linda	19	female	GCE
6	Alan	17	male	GCSE
7	Ian	17	male	GCSE
8	Kevin	17	male	GCSE
9	Mark	18	male	GCE
10	Martin	19	male	GCE
11	Barbara	23	female	higher
12	Diana	29	female	GCE
13	Fiona	34	female	GCE
14	Jo	35	female	higher
15	Nicola	38	female	GCSE
16	Andrew	24	male	higher
17	David	25	male	higher
18	James	32	male	higher
19	Michael	35	male	GCSE
20	Richard	39	male	GCE
21	Caroline	44	female	GCE
22	Clare	46	female	GCSE
23	Emma	51	female	higher
24	Mary	56	female	higher
25	Rose	66	female	GCSE
26	Charles	45	male	GCSE
27	George	46	male	GCE
28	John	55	male	higher
29	Peter	56	male	higher
30	William	62	male	GCSE

Appendix 2

SURVEY

1. Please answer the following questions:

a) What is **HAPPINESS** ?

.....

b) What do you associate **HAPPINESS** with ?

.....

c) **HAPPINESS** is

d) How would you draw **HAPPINESS** ?

2. Please complete the following :

2.1. Your definitions of **HAPPINESS** in a), b), c), and d) are based on* :

a) what you have directly experienced,

b) what you have learnt (from books, at school, etc.),

c) both.

2.2. Personal information :

a) age –

b) sex –

c) education –

* Circle the appropriate answer.

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