INVESTIGATING METAPHOR IN MODERN GREEK INTERNET MEMES: AN APPLIED APPROACH WITH L2 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

INVESTIGANDO A METÁFORA DOS MEMES GREGOS MODERNOS DA INTERNET: UMA ABORDAGEM APLICADA COM IMPLICAÇÕES PEDAGÓGICAS DA L2

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Abstract

Internet memes are a quite recent web-genre that makes use of metaphorical conceptualizations and humor. This paper draws on data from humorous metaphors in a small corpus of Greek memes posted on Facebook. The analysis suggests that common conventional metaphors underlie memes, such as EMOTIONS ARE FORCES, HUMAN BODY IS A MACHINE, and PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS; however, several novel conceptualizations arise, fused into conceptual blends: CORONAVIRUS IS WAR, LOW-PAID IS DISEASED, NATURAL FORCES ARE PEOPLE. The findings are interpreted in the light of the cognitive theory of metaphor and humor and they are discussed in terms of contextualizing metaphor and developing metaphoric competence or conceptual fluency within discourse-based L2 learning contexts.
Keywords: conceptual metaphor, conceptual blends, humor, Internet memes, second language teaching

Resumo

Os memes da Internet é um gênero da web bastante recente, que faz uso de conceituações metafóricas e de humor. Este artigo baseia-se em dados de metáforas humorísticas de um pequeno corpus de memes gregos postados no Facebook. A análise sugere que metáforas convencionais comuns fundamentam os memes, como AS EMOÇÕES SÃO FORÇAS, O CORPO HUMANO É UMA MÁQUINA e AS PESSOAS SÃO ANIMAIS; no entanto, surgem várias conceituações inovadoras, fundidas em mesclas conceituais: O CORONAVÍRUS É GUERRA, O MAL REMUNERADO É DOENTE, AS FORÇAS NATURAIS SÃO PESSOAS. Os achados da pesquisa são interpretados à luz da teoria cognitiva da metáfora e do humor e são discutidos em termos de contextualização da metáfora e do desenvolvimento da competência metafórica ou da fluência conceitual nos contextos de aprendizagem L2 baseados no discurso.
Palavras-chave: metáfora conceitual, mesclas conceituais, humor, memes da Internet, ensino da segunda língua.

Introduction

The notion of 21st century literacy is broadened to embrace an ever-widening array of critical, media, digital, and (re)creative aspects, thus departing from the monolithic view of acquiring basic read and write skills in formal, monocultural and monolingual settings (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2000). This change in literacy breadth and scope calls for a more pluralistic vision of genres in language pedagogy. Such a vision encompasses new web-mediated genres that have been born on the internet (VILLANUEVA et al., 2010, p. 1), some of which merely reproduce their print counterpart (CROWSTON; WILLIAMS, 2000, p. 1) and others display a hybrid (vernacular-formal, verbal-written) monomodal or multimodal orientation.

Being engaged in such a multiliteracies challenge, second language (L2) learners are facing a complex range of language demands in non-native contexts, so as to enhance their communicative, cognitive, academic, creative, and critical competencies. The employment of web genres in language pedagogy is regarded by many educators as a necessity in the Internet-defined communication era, the emphasis being mainly laid on genres of academic register (cf. TARDY, 2010). In a similar vein, L2 learners themselves often enough voice a desire to expand their language and genre awareness through web-mediated communication. However, they express their willingness to get acquainted with less conventional web genres, since understanding web-mediated authentic unconventional texts they are likely to encounter in social media is both a proof of their competence and a socializing practice in the new cultural setting.

Internet memes are listed among these new unconventional web genres. Scholarship lays the emphasis on their sharing pattern considering them to be "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by internet users, creating a shared cultural experience" (SHIFMAN, 2013, p. 367) or "artifacts of participatory digital culture" (WIGGINS; BOWERS, 2015, p. 1891). As iterative messages transmitted and diffused rapidly through the web, internet memes constitute a new language landscape (*memescape*, DYENS, 1994, p. 328) for users to construct, manage and negotiate their identities (WIGGINS, 2019). At the same time, they offer users a podium to interact, and thus, by engaging them in humor, to augment their social desirability and attractiveness (PENNINGTON; HALL, 2014, p. 2).

Internet memes rely heavily on humor but also on metaphor. After all, the term *meme* coined by Dawkins in 1976 "to describe the gene-like infectious units of culture that spread from person to person" (SHIFMAN, 2013, p. 362) is a "biological metaphor" by itself (p. 366). They actually make extensive use of what Attardo (2015) and Piata (2016) call a "humorous metaphor".

As can be drawn from the previous discussion, internet memes exhibit a structural, cognitive, pragmatic, and discursive complexity. Most scholars tend to (a) address the memes' hidden ideology and their potential in constructing and negotiating identities through the prism of ideology, semiotics and intertextuality (a.o. DICKERSON, 2016; YOON, 2016; WIGGINS, 2019), and (b) to analyze internet memes as a new humorous genre (DYNEL, 2016; PIATA, 2019). Few of them focus on memes as carriers of humorous conceptual metaphors (PIATA, 2016), and even less have carried out research on the use of memes within the L2 learning/ teaching context (KARIKO, 2012). However, in the case of L2 learning such a critical approach to the discursive power of the web genre is unachievable, unless the barriers in the conceptualization of metaphors and their related linguistic wordings are brought down.

Based on the previous assumptions, this paper furthers current knowledge on the conceptual metaphors traced across humorous Greek Internet memes.[1] It has a threefold objective: (1) to investigate conceptual metaphor in the digital *memescape*, (2) to reveal some of the stable parameters of meme conceptual metaphors that lead to generalizations and release humor, and (3) to suggest ways of strengthening the L2 learners' metaphoric competence or capacity in a contextualized way (a.o. DANESI, 1986, 2008; LITTLEMORE; LOW, 2006; CAMERON, 1996; ZANOTTO et al., 2008), by incorporating humorous metaphorical memes in the L2 classroom.

To fulfil these objectives, a small corpus of 200 (a) unimodal memes, wall posts restricted to linguistic content, and (b) multimodal memes, i.e. memes as image macros with captioned text was constructed, controlled for their metaphorical content and their degree of virality. The metaphorical language was analyzed in terms of the conceptual metaphors they utilize, as well as their source and target concepts. The analysis revealed common conventional conceptual metaphors such as LOVE IS A NATURAL FORCE, AMORAL IS DIRTY, etc. but also some less frequent ones, e.g. LOW-PAID IS DISEASED, NATURAL FORCES ARE PEOPLE, etc. In addition, both unidirectional conventional metaphors and conceptual blends were identified. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications for L2 learners who use social media on a daily basis. Finally, suggestions are made towards a strategic, contextualized, and critical instruction of humorous metaphor via Internet memes.
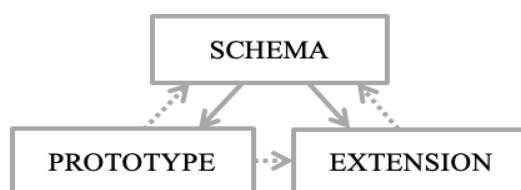
Metaphor and humor in Internet memes

Internet memes as conveyers of metaphors

Metaphor is a complex phenomenon of the human nature, thought, and experience. In the traditional view, it is signified as a figure of speech with poetic/rhetorical function, defined as "a deviation from a literal statement used to heighten style" (ROSS, 1987, p. 147). Fifty years ago, the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) opened new frontiers in understanding metaphor, by theorizing it as a cognitive tool, an inherently conceptual process.

Under a cognitive framework,[2] meaning is analyzed in terms of conceptual categories with prototypical and non-prototypical members (LANGACKER, 1991). Such a conceptualization builds a dynamic network model where different nodes represent the different meanings of a word and where inter-node connections exist (Figure 1). *Prototypes* can be extended, expanded or widened, thus reinforcing polysemy, by means of metaphor and metonymy. Both prototypes and their *extensions* are abstracted in *schemas* fully compatible with all the members of a conceptual category (LANGACKER, 1987).

Figure 1. Conceptual category

Source: LANGACKER, 1991, p. 271.

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1 It should be noted that, since the investigative focus of the research is placed on the humorous conceptual metaphors underlying Internet memes, a more elaborate distinction in memes and viral media, as discussed by Wiggins (2019), is not of vital importance. Thus, both mono-modal humorous quotes or jokes posted on the social media and image macros with captioned text are listed as memes.

2 Although the scope of this paper is confined to conceptual metaphor as a vehicle for humorous memes, a short overview of the cognitive approach on meaning and metaphor is given for reasons of clarity.

To illustrate such a cognitive architecture, let us examine the following examples:

(1a) *dirty shoes*

(1b) *dirty money*

(1c) *dirty woman*

The abstract schema for the conceptual category DIRTY has a prototypical member depicted in (1a), i.e. not clean shoes maybe after a mud run or a walk in the rain. Several extensions, though, can be traced, as in (1b) and (1c), where DIRTINESS signals ILLEGALITY and AMORALITY respectively. Such an expansion, of course, generates polysemy at a linguistic level, but also schematic expansion at a conceptual level. Thus, it is no wonder that polysemy acts as a mechanism that attracts metaphor (LUNDMARK, 2005, p. 64).

A cognitively-defined metaphor makes use of mappings between *conceptual domains* (the source domain and the target domain) at the level of thought, as a means of "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (LAKOFF, 1980, p. 5). When these conceptual correspondences become lexicalized, they can be articulated via metaphorical *linguistic expressions* (KÖVECSES, 1995, p. 4). In the examples (1b) and (1c), the conceptual metaphor MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1999, p. 307) is implied, which is further specified as AMORAL/UNETHICAL IS DIRTY (KÖVECSES, 2002, p. 210). For the metaphor to be constructed, DIRTINESS, the more concrete aspect of human experience (source domain) is mapped onto the abstract domain of MORALITY (target domain). In such a way, the complex and abstract concepts are understood through the physical concepts we live by (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980, p. 57), which means that metaphors are well-grounded into society and culture. It is also worth mentioning that the psychological validity of conceptual metaphors has been demonstrated by psycholinguistic research (GIBBS, 1994).

As conceptual metaphors are a graded phenomenon and a fuzzy area (LUNDMARK, 2005, p. 13), a detailed and elaborate analysis of the various postulates within the cognitive framework falls out of the scope of this work. What is really intended is to provide an as clear structure as possible, in order to identify the types of metaphors that are most often traced in Internet memes and their interplay with humor. Under such a perspective, the type of mapping between the two domains is especially relevant for the scope of this work. The cross-domain metaphorical mapping has to be partial; "if it was total, one concept would actually be the other, not merely be understood in terms of it" (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980, p. 13). Another interesting tenet of the cognitive theory on metaphors is that they can be placed on a scale of generality, which results into a hierarchical organization (KÖVECSES, 2002, p. 38-39). *Generic level metaphors* are high-level metaphors realized by *specific-level* ones, e.g. the higher-level metaphor MORALITY IS WELL-BEING (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1999, p. 292) is realized by the more specific ones MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS or AMORAL IS DIRTY.

As we move upwards in the scale, generic-level metaphors are considered to be culturally more common (LAKOFF, 1993, p. 222-225) or (near-)universal (KÖVECSES, 2002, p. 165). Common place metaphors with constant and effortless use by ordinary people for ordinary purposes are considered to be *conventional* (KÖVECSES, 2002, p. 29). Conceptual mapping is governed by the principle of *unidirectionality*, which means that the natural direction is from concrete domains to more abstract and complex domains (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980). Kövecses (2002, p. 24-25) gives illustrative examples, i.e. we can talk about the *heat of passion*, but the reverse direction, *the passion of heat*, is not generalized in our conceptual system; he also claims that in order for reversible metaphors to occur, specific stylistic shifts have to be pursued, but this is usually the case for isolated, not systematic linguistic metaphors that are not conceptualized.

After the previous discussion, a question that still remains under debate is what kind of metaphors are utilized in humorous Internet memes, whether they are conventional or novel ones. And if they are novel, what kind of process leads to their birth: is it the extension of the linguistic expressions that fall under a well-worn conventional metaphor, the elaboration of the source domain - as mentioned by Kövecses for poetic reworking of ordinary metaphors (2002, p. 47) - or any other process? Or is it the case that memes exhibit reversible metaphors to foster humor? In order to unpack the interplay between metaphor and humor and analyze metaphor as a means of creativity, a reference is made to conceptual blending.

Internet memes and humorous metaphors: conceptual blending

Humor is an essential element of Internet memes (PIATA, 2019).[3] However, it is not always an easy feature to handle with, especially for non-native language learners, who often enough escape the nuances, the linguistic, conceptual and cultural connotations it bears (BELL, 2009, p. 247, 252). This is justified by early semiotic contributions to the humor theory, according to which a humorous text "must not tell the 'entire story'", but is should be "metaphorically elliptic", handing the puzzle to the recipient to put together (MIZZAU, 1982, cited in ATTARDO, 1994, p. 181).

In this paper the emphasis is laid on the cognitive and semantic dimensions of humor. A prerequisite for such an analysis is the incongruity cognitive theory (cf. TSAKONA, 2004). Their basic postulate is that humor is based on a contradiction between two opposing conceptual schemata (scenarios, frames, or scripts)[4] that represent our cognition about the world and are mutually incompatible (RASKIN, 1985). As we process the humorous text, at first the most salient script is activated, but after a while a semantic obstacle fails the interpretation, the opposition is realized, and a semantic reanalysis is required; thus, the tension between the two scenarios is released into laughter (KRIKMANN, 2006, p. 27; COULSON, 2001, p. 32). What comes as a conclusion is that duality lies at the heart of both metaphor and humor: the former is based on a two-spaced cognitive model of conceptual mappings, whereas the latter on an opposition between two incongruent elements (KYRATZIS, 2003, p. 1-2).

However, metaphor research seemed to reach a dead-end, as it fell short to account for (humorous) metaphors that do not exhibit a direct mapping from source to target domain, but rather highlight a cross-space mapping where elements are blended (KÖVECSES, 2002; KYRATZIS, 2003; LUNDMARK, 2005; PIATA, 2016). A famous example in literature is the metaphor *My surgeon is a butcher*, in which the incompetent feature is absent from both conceptual domains (GRADY et al., 1999, p. 103-105).

The blending theory of metaphor (GRADY et al., 1999) aspires to fill this gap, having its roots in the seminal works of Turner (1985), and Fauconnier (1997). It postulates the existence of mental spaces instead of domains, i.e. "short-term constructs informed by the more general and more stable knowledge structures associated with a particular domain" (GRADY et al., 1999, p. 102). Blending requires a four-spaced model that includes: (1) input space$_1$, (2) input space$_2$, (3) a generic space, and (4) a blended space. The two input spaces stand for the source and target domains, the blended space represents the elements projected by/inherited from both input spaces, and the generic space displays the schematic representation of common structure, e.g. agents, events, instruments, etc. (GRADY et al. 1999, p. 104-105). It is worth mentioning that the blended space might not only be structured according to element-projection but also in regard to "emergent content of its own, which results from

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3   As the focus is humorous metaphor in an applied way for L2 teaching, it is not intended to put into test the quality of humor in memes.
4   For a comprehensive overview of humor theories, see Attardo (1994, 2017), Krikmann (2006).

the juxtaposition of elements from the inputs" (GRADY et al., 1999, p. 104). Thus, in the *surgeon-butcher* example, the input space$_1$ includes the concept of SURGERY and the elements related to it, e.g. the surgeon-patient relationship, the operating room, the goal of healing, the means of performing a surgery, etc., and the input space$_2$ includes the concept of BUTCHERY, the role of a butcher in an abattoir and the means of severing flesh. Within the blended space the incompetent feature appears, since "we have a surgeon attempting to attain their ends by butcher's means" (KYRATZIS, 2003, p. 6). Finally, the generic space exhibits schematic common information on agents, workplaces, instruments, etc.

The previous discussion on conceptual blending appears to be valuable for the analysis of humorous texts (cf. ATTARDO, 2015), and more specifically of Internet memes. Following Grady et. al. (1999) and Lundmark (2005), we take the stand that the conceptual metaphor theory and the blending theory of metaphor are complementary, since the former can account for conventional metaphors being exploited in memes, whereas the latter can be mostly used to explain novel metaphorical conceptualizations. In sum, blending process precedes the emergence of conventional metaphors, but also conventional metaphors are used in novel blending processes.

Since conceptual metaphors are usually centered around polysemous words, a last word should be added on metaphorical punning, a core type of humor (ATTARDO, 1994). Polysemy[5] is related to ambiguity, which makes it a perfect field for punning (ATTARDO, 1994). It should be mentioned, though, that most of the puns that appear in social media are considered to be "conscious puns that practice linguistic manipulation" (SHERZER, 1978, cited in ATTARDO, 1994). Punning is possible to center around a single polysemous word or idiomatic expressions; as two or more input spaces or domains are activated, the ambiguous element "fits both the literal and the metaphorical interpretation"; then, humor can be released by the "witty deautomatization of the metaphor" (KYRATZIS, 2003, p. 10), since among the meanings that coexist one becomes more salient, this usually being the literal one.

Research methodology

Research questions and data collection

In order to examine the playfulness found in Internet memes posted on Facebook, analyze them as constructs of humor and metaphor, and support their pedagogical handling in the L2 classroom, the following research questions were shaped:

RQ1: Which types of generic- and specific-level conceptual metaphors are found in Modern Greek Internet memes?

RQ2: Which cognitive processes govern the emergence of these metaphors? Are they conventional metaphors or novel conceptualizations accounted for by conceptual blending?

RQ3: In what way the complex cognitive process of decoding humorous metaphors of memes can be systematized to enter the L2 classroom?

Data collection

The data come from a small corpus of 200 Greek Internet memes collected on Facebook between January and March 2020. The humorous web texts satisfied the following criteria: (1) their humor orientation relied on metaphor (including puns), and (2) the humorous content exhibited a high virality level, being reposted from friends of the same Facebook account many times a day.

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5   Once more polysemy is conceived as a wide-ranging process in the cognitive framework (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 36).

Data analysis and results

The data analysis revealed that common and target domains, such as HUMAN BODY, ILLNESS (CORONAVIRUS), ANIMALS, MACHINES AND TOOLS (COMPUTER, INTERNET, THE WEB), BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION, GAMES AND SPORT, COOKING AND FOOD, FORCES, HEAT AND COLD, ECONOMIC TRANSACTION, MOVEMENT AND DIRECTION, LOVE, SEX and DESIRE, THOUGHT, (IM)MORALITY, (INTERNET) COMMUNICATION, ECONOMY, and HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.[6] It should be mentioned that all of them are listed between the common conceptual domains of conventional metaphors in Kövecses (2002).

However, the direction of the conceptual mappings exhibits variability.[7] Almost the two thirds of the collected memes were constructed by means of well-worn conventional metaphors, either generic- or/ and specific-level ones. The most common generic-level metaphors used in our sample were EMOTIONS ARE FORCES, PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS, PART OF A THING FOR THE WHOLE THING (metonymy), INAPPROPRIATE CONDITIONS ARE ILLNESSES, PROGRESS IS A MOTION FORWARD, THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING, LESS IS DOWN, SICK IS DOWN, MORALITY IS WELL-BEING, whereas the most common specific-level metaphors LOVE IS A NATURAL FORCE, DIFFICULT TO HANDLE THINGS ARE DOGS, LOVE IS DEATH, LOVE IS A DISEASE, CORONAVIRUS IS WAR, HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON (metonymy), IRRATIONALITY IS A DISEASE, HUMAN BODY IS A MACHINE, AMORAL/UNETHICAL IS DIRTY, A LUSTFUL PERSON IS A FUNCTIONING MACHINE. Even so, almost in any case, the projected elements from each domain or input space were fused into a blend, so that ambiguity could be reinforced, and tension could release into laughter. Let us take as an example the following meme from the corpus:

(2) *Tell me something dirty!*
Keyboard…

The resolution of the polysemous pun's incongruity involves a rather complex disambiguation process. The catchphrase *tell me something dirty* is uttered as a "chat-up line" to create sexual tension. Therefore, the first interpretation of *dirty* has to be the one associated with sexual thoughts and sexuality. Such an interpretation is consistent with the AMORAL/UNETHICAL IS DIRTY conventional metaphor.

Figure 2. Conceptual blending in the *keyboard* joke

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6　Memes with political content were excluded from the sample.

7　For reasons of brevity, clarity, and intelligibility only translatable humorous metaphors will be cited and analyzed.

However, as the text proceeds the punchline *keyboard* seems to deautomatize the metaphor, since the keyboard is literally something dirty, if one takes into consideration that the average 21st person spends most of his/her time at a keyboard, staining it with food, touching it with dirty hands, and so on. So, it seems that the literal meaning becomes more salient for the recipient, which leads to the resolution of the incongruity. At the same time, though, the metaphorical dimension is not discarded, as in the pandemic era the "keyboard" is a means of maintaining love relationships and sexual intercourse, as well as a medium for business transactions. Thus, the conceptual blending occurring is obvious (Figure 2).

Example (3) is also such a case, this time taken from a multimodal classical art meme:

(3) Lady: *Babe, I want you to adore me, I want you to be faithful to me, and never to leave by my side.*
Man: *Arf! Arf!*

Despite the fact that in the above example no linguistic expression signals metaphor except for the dog sound, humor is built upon the Animal Metaphor (LAKOFF; TURNER, 1989), according to which PEOPLE (target domain) ARE ANIMALS (source domain) and HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOR, and more specifically OBJECTIONABLE PEOPLE/ MEN ARE ANIMALS, and even more precisely MEN ARE DOGS through the male prism of female love expectations. Thus, by fusing elements from both input spaces with respect to the generic concepts of agents and action, the conceptual metaphor can be further specified and analyzed as a metaphorical stereotype on male conceptualization of female understanding of love, as the features of dogs, i.e. obedience, selflessness, ownership, possessiveness, etc., are mapped upon men, through an analogical reasoning process.

A similar fusion is observed in example (4). This is also a multimodal meme with two consecutive image macros: one of a couple kissing each other and below it another with Isaac Newton:

(4) Couple image macro/ Captioned text: *I love you with all my forces.*
Newton image macro/ Captioned text: *The sum of all forces is equal to zero.*

Again, the meme's playfulness hinges upon a blending process. The conventional metaphor underlying it is EMOTIONS ARE FORCES. And though loving somebody with all one's forces is a sign of strong love, humor is created by Newton's punchline, which shifts focus on the CAUSE FOR EFFECT meaning of *force* in Physics, thus neutralizing the actual strength of love by equating it to zero.

A conventional metaphor lies also at the heart of example (5):

(5) *The only way to build a relationship is to cement him.*

Once more, a well-worn metaphor is utilized, i.e. RELATIONSHIPS ARE BUILDINGS; however, several cues are merged into the blending space, having to do with male fear of commitment and their preference in free relationships.

Coronavirus spread and its implications was also a favorite subject in the collected sample. In many cases, the metaphorical effect of images was significant, as in (6) and (7):

(6)

(7)

Source: https://atakakiepitopou.gr/category/atakakiepitopou/koronoios/
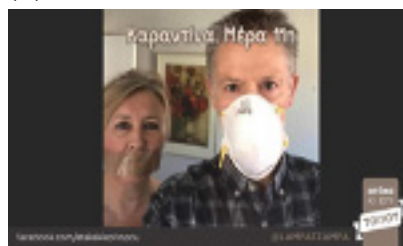
In (6) an association is attempted between the *Battle of Marathon* or *Thermopylae* and the coronavirus "battle of supermarkets" (CORONAVIRUS IS WAR), and in (7) the surgical mask is depicted as a means of protection for men, whereas for women a gag placed over the mouth will do the same job; in the latter case the adhesive tape works like a means of protection for men against the female verbosity, which becomes more intense as confinement at home is extended. In both cases, the captioned text reinforces the conceptual metaphor or blend: *The battle of Sklavenitis 2020 AC* (Sklavenitis is the chain of Greek supermarkets) instead of *The Battle of Marathon 490 BC*, and *Quarantine: 11th Day*.

An interesting finding that emerged from the sample analysis was the instantiation of reversible metaphors to foster humor. In example (8) NATURAL FORCES ARE PEOPLE (and not the other way around), we notice a reversed direction, since the natural direction is for abstract complex concepts to map onto concrete ones, whereas in (9) two common source targets (HUMAN BODY, MACHINE/TOOL/TECHNOLOGY) are mapped onto each other:

(8) *-The snow reached 2 meters.*
-You should enroll it in a basketball class.

(9) *The sounds my stomach makes remind me of the dial-up rooter sound.*

Moreover, a great bulk of novel *one-shot image metaphors* was found, where one specific mental image is superimposed on another (LAKOFF; TURNER, 1989). Their source of novelty is mainly the computer-/Internet-mediated era or the pandemic era.

(10) *More than 3 emoticons is considered a relationship.*
(11) *Babe, I will make you mine right now: Right click, save as…*
(12) *I got pooped on by a drone.*
(13) *Your grumbling reaches 8 degrees of the Richter Scale.* (coronavirus)
(14) *Who would expect that the biggest battle would be fought from our sofas…* (coronavirus)
(15) *-I see that there is a gap in your CV. What were you doing in 2020?*
-I was washing my hands.

Despite their complex structure, the previous humorous posts are based on more or less conventional metaphors, which are extended or specified, in order to fit the fused space favored by the current juncture. For instance, in example (12) drones are personified so as to function like birds; their pooping on people is a cue for their sudden increased use. Therefore, the instinctual behavior of an animal is attributed to a complex object. In a similar vein, the coronavirus lockdown and confinement at home is conceptualized in terms of laziness, unemployment, women grumbling, men acquiring household skills, etc.

Discussion: Implications for L2 teaching

The previous investigation of metaphor use in a small corpus of Internet memes suggests that both conventional and novel metaphors are used for the emergence of humor. The occurrence of conceptual blending seems to be unavoidable. Therefore, the employment of humorous metaphorical memes within the L2 classroom seems to be quite a crucial challenge, especially when the application of humor in L2 pedagogy is treated with skepticism (DAVIES, 2003).

This work can be counted among the proponents of the humorous metaphor-driven teaching approach. Firstly, incorporating Internet memes within the L2 course is promoted for humor-related reasons, as those posed by Bell (2009, p. 242) and several other scholars (TRACHTENBERG, 1979; HOLMES, 1980; DENEIRE, 1995; SCHMITZ, 2002; ASKILDSON, 2005): (1) the learners' desire to be taught by and through humor, (2) the usual reduced access to humorous texts within educational contexts, (3) the recent L2 acquisition research findings that playfulness facilitates language learning, (4) the social and psychological benefits from humor integration (socializing, relaxation), and (5) the appropriateness of the humorous texts for practicing the linguistic mechanics (phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax). Secondly, more literacy-related arguments are offered: (6) Internet memes constitute an unconventional web-mediated humorous genre, and as such it strengthens access to multiliteracies, and (b) access to multiliteracies paves the path for a more critical understanding of the memes' content, revealing its hidden ideology. Thirdly and most importantly for the scope of this work, (7) memes open a window to cognitive motivation in L2 teaching, so as to develop the learners' lexical and metaphoric competence.

Since Internet memes are considered to be a humorous genre, a few words should be said about the dilemma of treating humor as a pedagogical object. In this line, the developmental obstacles traced in integrating humorous texts in the L2 classroom have been a matter of debate. The main trend observed among scholars is that processing humor is demanding and should be attempted in higher levels of proficiency (a.o. BERWALD, 1992; DENEIRE, 1995; SCHMITZ, 2002). In a more scalar manner, Schmitz (2002) offers a graded approach, according to which elementary students can benefit from universal humor and some aspects of culture-based humor, whereas advanced learners can also cope with linguistic humor. The present work takes the stand that many forms of humor are accessible to learners at all levels of proficiency, being in line with Bell's recommendations (2009, p. 244). This becomes an even more urgent need for L2 learners/ netizens, who join the Internet to communicate and socialize.

The second highly demanding constituent of Internet memes is the conceptual metaphors or blends they incorporate. Scholars have devoted a considerable attention to ground the conceptual metaphor theory into L2 pedagogy, by supporting the development of metaphor awareness-raising skills and activities. Such an orchestrated pedagogical view of conceptual metaphor originates from the early works of Danesi (1986) and Low (1988) and points at the notion of *metaphoric competence* or, as modified later by Danesi (2008) at the *conceptual fluency*, "the ability to give appropriate structural form to all kinds of meanings, literal and non-literal, that constitute the semantic system of the L2" (p. 233). It falls out of the scope of this work to join the controversy in defining metaphoric competence, since its significance is well-acknowledged.[8] It is no doubt, though, that such a competence or fluency is central to the linguistic and communicative competence (ANDREOU; GALANTOMOS, 2009). This is a matter of quantity, since a great bulk of senses are used metaphorically, but also of quality, since the use of figurative language is a sign of advanced proficiency (TROSBORG, 1985), and the absence of metaphor in the learners' language production is a sign of non-native-like speech (DANESI, 1994). It is worth noting that up-to-date research verifies the correlation of proficiency and metaphorical density in written productions of EFL students (HOANG; BOERS, 2019).

8   For a comprehensive overview, see Hoang (2014).

Developing awareness of the conceptual structure of metaphors is also regarded as a means of facilitating vocabulary learning. Under such a perspective, Kalyuga and Kalyuga (2008) suggest teaching vocabulary in metaphorical chunks, Gao and Meng (2010) organize metaphorical expressions by theme, and Andreou and Galantomos (2008) propose the design of a conceptual syllabus for teaching metaphors in a foreign language context.

Moreover, several cognitive benefits from dealing with conceptual metaphors have been recorded. While processing the conceptual mappings presupposed in metaphors, learners "detect similarities at every level of abstraction, which in turn is a key to memory organization" (CHARTERIS-BLACK, 2000). Such a cognitive motivation strengthens associative connectivity in their mental lexicons and functions as a prompt for analogical reasoning. Hence, a more experimental direction has been lent to the pedagogical approach on metaphoric competence (a.o. BOERS, 2000; SKOUFAKI, 2008; LI, 2009). Such research highlights the finding that the metaphor awareness-raising activities lead to higher retention of vocabulary (BOERS, 2001). Special focus has been also placed on the universality of the conceptual metaphors (KÖVECSES; SZABÓ, 1996; YASUDA, 2010).

Without discarding the explicit enhancement of metaphoric competence in pedagogical contexts, for instance via metaphor lists, chunks and syllabi, this paper puts forward the claim that researchers and language practitioners should start orienting their applied practice towards wider approaches that treat metaphor within the social, cultural or global context that it emerges. This means that the emphasis should not only be laid on its detached, cut off conceptual or linguistic mechanisms, but also on the way that conceptual metaphors structure the discursive settings we engage in. Therefore, the contextualization of metaphor (cf. ZANOTTO et al., 2008) and its use as analytic tool in the contexts it arises can promote not only language pedagogy, but also cognitive, pragmatic, semantic, and sociolinguistic research.

To contextualize metaphor means to examine it in the authentic and genuine contexts it appears. Internet memes make a perfect field for such a contextualized study within the L2 classroom, providing learners with the necessary affective motivation: memes are humorous, and humor surrounds them; they also multiply through the web, triggering a viral effect, which is a means of keeping learners updated and helping them socialize in the various digital social networks they are or they want to be part of; as metaphorical humorous texts memes can be characterized by multimodality, which means that both metaphors and humor may be conveyed by audiovisual modes other than language (PIATA, 2016); the combination of humor, metaphor and multiple modes is exploited for constructing and negotiating identities.

Now, how about the cognitive complexity involved in (de)coding humorous metaphors? Would it be possible for learners of all levels to process conceptually complex blends? The feasibility of such a venture can be less questioned, provided that a more critical, discourse-/source-based, and strategic approach on metaphor instruction is followed. This means that several novel, conventional and unconventional genres that exhibit metaphorical use will enter the L2 classroom, e.g. memes, ads, texts of academic registers (politicians' posts, news in portals, etc.) and experimentation with them will be encouraged. These could be texts that either the learners choose to bring in classroom or the teacher. Although seemingly targeted to metalinguistic awareness, such an approach can incorporate different aspects of implicit and explicit learning as well as various learning strategies. Workshops on analyzing genres that exhibit ambiguity, polysemy, and conceptual metaphor or blending can be organized within the L2 language curriculum, where the learners try to discover the reason for the communicative breakdown they have reached (e.g. which word, phrase, idiom, concept, image, cultural stereotype is responsible for them not managing to decode the humorous metaphorical message).

While they are engaged in deconstructing the text, several strategies can be employed in a more self-regulated way, as proposed by Oxford (2016), i.e. *cognitive*, such as using the dictionaries to find the multiple meanings of words, designing mind/semantic maps that depict the conceptual mapping(s) involved, *metacognitive*, such as assessing their own work in terms of other authentic texts or the texts of their peers, writing the captioned text in image macro memes and testing its effectiveness, trying to figure out the inconsistencies between the same or different L1 and L2 mappings, keeping humor diaries (BELL, 2009) with several kinds of associations/explanations in L1 and L2, and *socio-cultural*, such as discussing with teachers, peers, and native speakers on the universal and cultural-specific concepts that generate metaphor. Of course, such an employment may stumble on conceptual misunderstandings, errors (DANESI, 2008) or deviations, especially when it comes for the learners' productive skills; however, its timely and systematic application, from the first exposure to the second language and up to advanced proficiency, can develop an integrated framework to understand the metaphorical world that surrounds us in essence.

In any case, more global conceptual mappings can form a basis of discussion, experimentation, and analysis, so that the blending found in humorous metaphorical texts can be interpreted and worded with the appropriate linguistic expressions more easily. It goes without saying that universality can easily become blurred; still there are cases easy to handle, like the *dirty-keyboard* example discussed previously. The same holds for the LOW-PAID IS DISEASED conceptual metaphor, which is extremely common in Greece during the last five years of the economic crisis, but also in many other citizens/ netizens of the global map.

Despite their memetic behavior as viral products, Internet memes are considered to provide L2 learning with genuineness, authenticity, conceptual breadth, humor, and a critical perspective. Their employment within the L2 classroom, though, is tightly connected to the renewal of teacher training, the admission that web-mediated less conventional genres are perfect means of developing multiliteracies in L2 contexts, but also to the development of Open Educational Resources that make creative use of them.

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