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## **The teacher as a guide: a discourse-based analysis of conceptual metaphors used by foreign language teachers describing areas of their professional activity**

The aim of the article is to analyse the role of the teacher as a guide, which is gaining attention in the teaching community. In order to provide the theoretical framework for the analysis, a short overview of teacher-student roles is included. The paper presents conclusions from the original research carried out according to the theory of conceptual metaphor, and it intends to provide insight into the ways in which the perception of the teaching profession is reflected by the language that educators use. The source material was gathered during interviews with practising teachers. The analysis of teacher discourse may serve as a first-hand source of information about the profession, in keeping with the assumption that language reflects people's perception of the world. Thus, although the research was conducted within the field of cognitive linguistics, educators at large might be interested in reading the conclusions and taking a more conscious perspective on their own language.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, guide, teacher discourse, the teacher's role

### **Nauczytel jako przewodnik: analiza metafor pojęciowych używanych w dyskursie nauczycieli języków obcych opisujących obszary swojej aktywności zawodowej**

Artykuł ma na celu przeanalizowanie roli nauczyciela jako przewodnika, która wydaje się zyskiwać ostatnio coraz większe zainteresowanie wśród nauczycieli. Podstawę teoretyczną do analizy stanowi krótki przegląd ról nauczyciel – uczeń. Artykuł przedstawia wnioski płynące z badań przeprowadzonych zgodnie z teorią metafory konceptualnej i ma na celu pokazanie, w jaki sposób postrzeganie zawodu nauczyciela znajduje odzwierciedlenie w języku używa-

nym przez nauczycieli. Materiał źródłowy został zebrany podczas wywiadów z aktywnymi zawodowo nauczycielami. Analiza języka może stanowić cenne źródło informacji o postrzeganiu tej profesji przez samych nauczycieli zgodnie z jedną z zasad językoznawstwa kognitywnego, zakładającą, że język odzwierciedla sposób, w jaki ludzie postrzegają otaczający ich świat. Mimo że badanie zostało przeprowadzone w obrębie językoznawstwa kognitywnego, świadomi nauczyciele mogą być zainteresowani zapoznaniem się z jego wynikami i refleksją nad własnym językiem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** językoznawstwo kognitywne, metafora konceptualna, przewodnik, rola nauczyciela, dyskurs nauczycielski

## Introduction

Conscious educators might have observed the rising interest in the topic of teachers' roles, tasks and responsibilities on popular blogs and websites devoted to education-related topics. The role gaining a significant amount of attention recently is that of the teacher as a guide (Edutopia, EducationWeek, MindShift). One of the reasons for its recent popularity may be glottodidactic and psychological findings that have contributed to teachers' professional activity and duties having been redefined. Bearing these observations in mind, it seems justifiable to compare the scientific and theoretical backgrounds with first-hand experiences of practising teachers. The main objective of this article is to examine the language teachers employ while talking about education in order to check whether teacher discourse reflects the perception of the teacher's role presented in literature and other sources of information available to teachers. The research will be conducted in accordance with the theory of conceptual metaphor being one of the cognitive linguistic tools used to analyse language.

## The changing perception of teacher-student roles

According to Czesław Kiński (2023, pp. 450–452), in the history of modern education, the perception of the teachers' roles was inextricably linked to the psychological theories introduced in the particular periods of time. It has to be mentioned that until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, educational psychology had been equated with general psychology. Focused primarily on adapting and adjusting general psychological theories to education, educational psychology had not been perceived as a separate field of study (Kiński, 2019, p. 20). In effect, the prevalent understanding of the nature of learning in general and the teacher's role in particular was largely affected by the main psychological theory of a particular period.

As far as early behaviourism is concerned, the teacher is expected to perform one task – to “provide” the appropriate stimulus to which the student has to respond (Kiński, 2019, p. 21). However, it is worth mentioning that the further advancements in behaviourism contribute to the development of the teacher’s role. Not only does the teacher concentrate on providing stimuli, but also recognizes each student as an individual with their own drive and habit strength (Hull, 1943, pp. 66, 124), and rewards desired behaviours by offering appropriate reinforcement (Skinner, 1953, p. 65). As John Woollard (2010, p. 80) points out, reinforcement helps the teacher “shape” the student’s behaviour, which should always be preceded by “modelling”, i.e., showing the example.

Convinced that behaviourism did not provide a comprehensive explanation of the reasons why students expanded their knowledge, psychologists and educators shifted their attention to cognitivist theories. Focusing primarily on observable behaviour, behaviourism ignores the ways in which learners acquire, organize and process new information. By contrast, the cognitive view perceives the learning process as a mental activity, the main aim of which is to discover the meaningful connections between prior experiences and new information through conducting experiments and interacting with the environment (Kelly, 1955). In consequence, the teacher gains a new role that is based on creating the necessary environment, in which the student is exposed to learning opportunities from which they can actively build their knowledge (Kiński, 2023, p. 450).

When it comes to social constructivism, which highlights the importance of the social aspect of cognition, the role of the mediator is introduced (Vygotsky, 1934). It focuses on adjusting knowledge to the student’s age, level of competence and needs and presenting it through social interaction. Since the teacher is more competent, knowledgeable and experienced, they assist the learner in the learning process and “facilitate” gaining new competences by selecting materials appropriate for the level of the student (Kiński, 2023, pp. 450–451). Additionally, the teacher’s role is to organize a Mediated Learning Experience, which is essentially a meaningful educational opportunity allowing for experiential and structural change happening in the learner during the learning process (Feuerstein et al., 2010).

Humanistic approaches emphasize the role of the learner’s thoughts, feelings and emotions and give prominence to the individual’s inner world (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 30), the teacher’s role being to provide appropriate assistance, often perceived in terms of a counsellor – client or an older brother – younger brother relationship. According to Abraham H. Maslow (1943, p. 382), this assistance is necessary to help an individual achieve the main aim of education, i.e., self-actualization. By providing their support, the teacher may help the learner become “the best human being they could be” (Kiński, 2019, p. 40). The humanis-

tic theory emphasises the fact that certain basic human needs have to be fulfilled for learning to take place, which is possible only in a “growth-promoting climate” that the teacher needs to create (Rogers, 1967, pp. 297–313).

Having analysed the role of the teacher in the abovementioned theories, one may conclude that it has undergone a change from “the research scientist” being in the centre of the educational process into “the mediator” providing guidance and assistance to the student. It has to be stated that this shift should not be seen as the reduction of the teacher’s role, but as a result of the student being perceived as an active participant in learning. Kiński concludes that in the new perception of the educational process, the teacher should be referred to as “the gentle guide” (2019, p. 54).

## The theory of conceptual metaphor

It is worth mentioning that the traditional and novel approaches to metaphor differ significantly. In the classical approach, metaphor is regarded as a rhetorical device and part of figurative language mainly used in poetry and literature because of its aesthetic value (Baldick, 2001, p. 153). According to Geoffrey G. Abrams, metaphor “serves mainly to enhance the rhetorical force and stylistic vividness and pleasantness of a discourse” (1999, p. 155). Contrary to the traditional perception of metaphor as a figure of speech, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that it is a conceptual tool that determines how people behave, communicate and comprehend various ideas and concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3–6). Since language and thoughts are rooted in the same conceptual system, metaphors have to be prevalent in ordinary, everyday communication and all kinds of human activity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson conclude that although metaphors are an inseparable part of human behaviours, utterances and interactions, they are used unconsciously and automatically as people are not normally conscious of the structure of their conceptual system. Zoltán Kövecses defines metaphor as “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain” (Kövecses, 2002, p. 4). The main aim of metaphors is to enable people to comprehend one concept in terms of another object or phenomenon.

Metaphors always consist of two coherently organized conceptual domains (Kövecses, 2002, p. 4). Conceptual domain A (target domain) and conceptual domain B (source domain) are built on the experiences and knowledge that people have about various concepts. It is worth mentioning that these might be based either on folk models or scientific models (Lakoff, 1987, p. 118). While the former represent ordinary people’s knowledge, the latter are established on the basis

of scientific expertise, research and experiments. The source domain is perceived as well-delineated and perceptible, so it provides metaphorical linguistic expressions that are used in order to understand the target domain, which is considered less tangible. To illustrate this point, Lakoff and Johnson provide an example of the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, in which the target domain ARGUMENT is conceptualised in terms of the source domain WAR, which results from arguments being perceived as less physical or more abstract and people using the structure of the concept of war to comprehend the process of arguing (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). It needs to be stated that in keeping with the convention, capital letters will be used with reference to the following: the names of the metaphors as well as the target and source domains.

### **Research aim**

The purpose of the study was to examine the language that teachers of English as a foreign language use while answering questions concerning education-related topics. The analysis aimed at establishing roles that teachers perform in the classroom on the basis of the metaphorical linguistic expressions gathered during the interviews.

### **Research procedure**

The interviews were conducted between October 2022 and January 2023, with individual meetings organized either at the educational institutions where the teachers were employed or scheduled on Zoom, depending on the interviewees' preferences and availability. The study was attended by forty teachers of English as a foreign language working in both primary and secondary schools. Intending to talk to inspiring and highly motivated teachers, who were satisfied with their profession and willing to share their reflections, the author decided to contact one of the well-recognisable teachers' trainers and ask him for recommendation. In accordance with the main assumptions of snowball sampling, each successive person recruited another teacher or teachers, depending on their connections and willingness to help (Thompson, 2002). Having interviewed forty attendees, the author realised that the latest conversations had not yield new results or observations, so she decided not to continue to study as it was unnecessary, in keeping with the saturation principle. The participants were asked eleven questions regarding the educational process. In order to comply with the ethical standards

of conducting research, the interviewees were informed before the beginning of the conversation that those would be recorded.

The questions used in the interviews were formulated on the basis of the author's own observations of the recurring topics raised by teachers on popular blogs and in the literature devoted to both teaching and learning foreign languages. The questionnaire consisting of eleven open-ended questions was intended to provide the teachers with space for sharing their reflections, voicing their opinions and defining certain elements of the educational process without evoking a feeling that any specific answers were expected.

The participants were asked the following questions:

1. What do you think education is?
2. What do you think the purpose of education is?
3. How do you see your role in education?
4. Do you feel that your role changes depending on the age of the students you work with? (If so, what do these differences consist of? What (other) factors might influence this change?)
5. What do you think a good lesson (lesson organisation) consists of?
6. How would you describe the relationship between you and your students?
7. What problems or difficulties do you face in the classroom on a daily basis?
8. What is the most difficult aspect of being a teacher?
9. What is the most rewarding part of being a teacher?
10. What do your students expect from you? What about their parents? (Are these expectations the same? Are there any similarities/differences?)
11. Have you ever experienced any difficulties stemming from the differences in the way your role and your tasks are perceived by you, your students and their parents?

The analysis of the scripts of the interviews allowed the author to establish 18 metaphors illustrating the roles that teachers perform in the classroom. They were divided into three groups, namely: metaphors related to upbringing, metaphors related to the organisation of the educational process, and metaphors related to teaching. However, due to the length limitations of the present article and the current interest in the role of the guide, only examples illustrating A TEACHER IS A GUIDE will be presented and examined.

## Analysis

This section provides relevant samples of interview transcripts referring to A TEACHER IS A GUIDE metaphor, together with the discussion of the presented material.

- 1) I am a leader, a *guide* and a mentor – I don't impose anything. I support and *guide* – not as a dictator, but as a person who inspires and motivates – someone who young people want to *follow* – *follow this path and reach the next stages*.
- 2) When students are not well-prepared and reasonably *guided*, they *go astray* – in the school context, they stop learning, and in the broader context, they struggle in life.
- 3) Young people feel *lost* these days, so I need to show them different paths. I often have to be a psychologist for them. I talk to them a lot and listen to what they want to say.

Example (1) demonstrates that the teacher can be a person who is able to spark curiosity and interest and provide their students with inspiration for learning and extending their knowledge, in the same manner as a tour guide presents attractive buildings and landmarks, leads sightseers through various areas and tells compelling stories about different places in order to encourage tourists to explore the world. What is more, the word “follow” refers to students being inspired by their teachers and feeling supported by them, thus being receptive to their suggestions, instructions and advice, which may facilitate the development of their competence or acquisition of new skills. This process may be compared to the guide attracting customers by their knowledge and reliability and tourists willingly following them to reach their destination successfully. The example in question also emphasises the fact that education is a long-term process consisting of many stages, and each of them has to be completed for one to be qualified to start the next one. Instance (2) focuses on the responsibility that the teaching profession involves, showing that sometimes teachers may not be sufficiently competent, skilled and effective at work, which results in students not receiving the support they need, neglecting studying and their development being hindered. Learners who do not receive enough help resemble tourists who “go astray” because they have not been given clear directions. What is more, example (3) highlights the fact that students may also need the teacher's guidance regarding psychological, social or emotional areas, which demonstrates the complexity of the occupation and stresses a wide range of competences that educators are expected to gain.

- 4) Education is also about pointing out what and how to learn, *guiding* and *directing* the student.
- 5) I am here to show what is important, what is less important, *direct* the student towards the *destination*.
- 6) Education is *guidance*, indicating the *direction* in which the student should develop.
- 7) Students need *signposts*. They have to know what they are doing right, what they are doing wrong. And this is my role to provide them.

Examples (4–7) indicate that both teaching and guiding are not limited to establishing the aim, but they also require a detailed explanation of how the goal may be accomplished. While guides provide travellers with “directions” where they need to go, which paths they have to follow or lead them through unfamiliar places, the teachers’ role is to explain to their students what skills they must develop, how they can absorb new information, and draw their attention to the most important aspects of the educational process. Being more experienced, educators help their students establish their both short-term and long-term goals (“destination”) and monitor whether they are making progress, which leads to accomplishing the desired effects. The word “signposts” in instance (7) refers to the teacher’s feedback with which learners should be provided regularly in order to know if they are making progress or what areas they should be concentrating on to improve their results.

8) Education is a *road, a journey, a journey to the unknown*. I always tell my students that even though I am supposed to be higher in this hierarchy, we are still *companions*. We start at a certain point together, and we never know where we will end up because we never know what will be added *along the way*. This is a *road* with adventures and obstacles. Sometimes you have to go back or stop because you don’t know where to go next.

9) Learning is a complex and complicated process. Sometimes you see the results immediately, but usually it’s a long *road* full of *obstacles*. Students’ problems, unwanted habits. But honestly, while immediate effects are impressive and give you a lot of satisfaction, helping weaker, unmotivated students *arrive at their destination* is the best thing in this job.

10) Sometimes you have to accept that you’ve hit a *dead end*. If you see that something is not working, you need to find a new strategy. But sometimes you just have to accept that you can’t do more. You can’t teach someone who doesn’t want to be taught.

As it can be observed in example (8), portraying the teacher in terms of a guide is part of a more complex metaphor, *EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY*. It is worth noticing that although teachers formally occupy a higher position in the educational hierarchy, some of them still perceive themselves as guides who assist and accompany (“companions”) their students in their effort to achieve their shared goals. The examples above show that despite the educator’s engagement and preparation, there exist various unpredictable and unexpected situations that can disrupt the educational process. While travellers encounter certain obstacles on their way, which sometimes results in them reaching their destination later, teachers have to be aware of the fact that the problems that their students struggle with may affect their cooperation to a large extent. Considerable differ-



ences between students' competence, intellectual capacity and their willingness to study may hinder their development, often forcing the teacher to reorganize their courses and reflect on the reasons why the strategies implemented in a given context do not provide the desired effects (10). However, example (10) also highlights the fact that the success of the educational process depends on mutual engagement. If students remain reluctant to cooperate in class and develop their skills in spite of their teacher's effort and encouragement, the latter has to accept this fact, which can be compared to the situation in which travellers reach "a dead end" and they cannot proceed regardless of their initial intentions and plans.

11) A coursebook is like a *map*, but you have to remember that something may have changed since it was published. Your students are different, they have different interests and needs.

12) The lesson must be well thought out and planned by the teacher. We start at *point A* and we need to know where *point B* is, but the truth is that a lot may happen *on the way*. You need to be flexible in this job and accept that we may not be able to *reach this final point*.

Examples (11) and (12) concentrate on flexibility, which seems to be a pre-requisite for working as a teacher. As may be noticed in instance (11), coursebooks are perceived as maps since both offer guidelines and facilitate achieving educational aims and destinations, respectively. However, they have to be used wisely and their content needs to be modified or adjusted to students' current needs. The examples emphasise the fact that since the teacher is in charge of the educational process, they have to be capable of reacting to different circumstances accordingly. Example (12) shows that not only education in its general sense, but also an individual lesson can be perceived as a journey consisting of a few stages. From this perspective, the flexibility required from the teacher during the organization of the whole educational process is also expected of them while teaching an individual lesson. This perception provides a worthwhile insight into understanding each particular lesson as education in microscale, stressing the tension between planning and spontaneity, and emphasizing the partial unpredictability of the educational process and the need to adjust and reorganize the teaching aims accordingly.

13) A human needs to develop in different directions; my role is to *broaden students' horizons*.

14) Education is not only about transferring knowledge, but it is also about *broadening horizons*, which can be done by sparking curiosity in students, inspiring them.

The phrase “broadening horizons” used in instances (13) and (14) refers to encouraging learners to explore new ideas, concepts and topics. Teachers motivate students to expand their interests and expose them to opportunities and possibilities that they have not discovered yet, in the same manner as guides provide travellers with opportunities to experience new cultures, customs and cuisines. The examples indicate that the educational process can be an extremely enriching experience that makes a positive contribution to students’ holistic development.

15) I would like my students to be able to learn independently, have the pleasure of *discovering*, *exploring* and acquiring knowledge. But this is my role to show them how they can achieve that.

16) Education is the process of *self-discovery*. The teacher has to *open the door to the world* for these young people.

Having been equipped with certain knowledge and skills, students are ultimately expected to become autonomous and independent learners. The above-mentioned examples show that the teacher’s role should be limited since the main aim of education is to empower students and help them take responsibility for their own learning. This transformation can be compared to the situation in which travellers become sufficiently confident and well-prepared to explore the world on their own after having been guided for a substantial amount of time. “Opening the door to the world” may be understood in terms of teachers guiding their students successfully and students gaining sufficient competence to engage in the process of self-discovery as the ultimate goal of learning. Examples (15) and (16) both draw attention to the need for developing learner agency and autonomy, desired during the educational process, but definitely required for learning to continue once the student’s formal education has been completed.

In order to establish a relation between target and source domains, it is necessary to distinguish a set of constituent properties and qualities of conceptual domain B that correspond systematically to the constituent elements and features of conceptual domain A (Kövecses, 2002). This process of connecting entities of the source domain with their equivalents of the target domain is known as mappings (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Having analysed the examples presented above, one may conclude that there exists a following set of correspondences between the target domain *TEACHER* and the source domain *GUIDE*:

Table 1

*The mappings in the metaphor A TEACHER IS A GUIDE*

SOURCE DOMAIN: GUIDE	TARGET DOMAIN: TEACHER
journey	education; a lesson
travellers/tourists/sightseers	students
companions	fellow students
stages	levels of education; competences; skills
vehicle	classroom; classes
destination	completing a given stage; acquiring a new skill
to broaden horizons	to show new possibilities
guidance	support/help
map	coursebook; syllabus
obstacles	learning difficulties; mistakes; problems
signposts	teacher's feedback

## Conclusions

It needs to be observed that although the article originally stemmed from the field of cognitive linguistics, the conclusions emerging from the analysis of teacher discourse may be within the professional interests of conscious educators. Bearing in mind the fact that language analysis may reveal information about how people perceive particular subjects, the implications of this study may contribute to teachers reflecting on their own perception of the teaching profession and the professional activities that they undertake as part of their work.

Having analysed the examples of *A TEACHER IS A GUIDE* metaphor, one may observe that there exist many similarities between the role of the teacher and the role of the tour guide. It can be concluded that the metaphor highlights the significance of the teacher as a person that students can draw inspiration from, rely on and ask for help and advice. It needs to be stated that the metaphor emphasises the influence of the educator's expertise and linguistic competence on the effectiveness of the educational process. However, it also shows that the success does not entirely depend on the educator, concentrating on the student's engagement, preparation and willingness to study being a precondition for learning. Moreover, according to the examples analysed above, the teacher's role focuses on exposing learners to new possibilities, providing them with information regarding

their progress and explaining to them how they can achieve their intended goals. The metaphor also highlights the importance of teachers providing constructive feedback as a source of information for students to help them recognise areas for improvement. It is worth observing that comprehending the teaching profession in terms of the guide's everyday activity gives learners a sense of active agency resulting from educators trying to support, advise and guide, encouraging, but not forcing, students to follow their guidelines. The conceptualization of teachers in terms of tour guides promotes the idea of lifelong learning and education that extends beyond formal contexts. The metaphor emphasises the fact that while students need the teacher's guidance and support for a particular period of time, the main aim of education is to equip students with such knowledge and tools that will enable them to develop and learn independently in the future.

## Reflections

Having considered the conclusions presented above, one may assume that practising teachers may be interested in examining their own language to see what information about their role in the classroom it conveys. What is more, some educators might find it beneficial to analyse student discourse to compare the findings and check whether the expectations in the two groups are consistent or not. It has to be understood that certain metaphors may contribute to misunderstandings and misconceptions of the educational process. For example, one of the metaphors established during the interviews is A TEACHER IS A TRANSMITTER OF KNOWLEDGE metaphor, in which knowledge is presented as a static entity that can be imparted on students without their involvement and intellectual effort. The obvious consequence of employing such a metaphor is praising the teacher for their students' accomplishments or criticising for the lack of development, attributing the entire responsibility for the effectiveness of the educational process to teachers. Bearing in mind the fact that metaphors reflect people's perception of particular concepts, the results of such an experiment could contribute to teachers and students discussing their roles and responsibilities and establishing more realistic expectations towards the educational process. It is worth mentioning that such an experiment does not require large samples and it can be conducted within each class since each class can be perceived as a separate educational environment. Consequently, the result of each particular study may be of relevance to understand the functioning of the specific group of students and their teacher.

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