

Dr Jeannette Littlemore

Dr Jeannette Littlemore, Lecturer at the University of Birmingham's Centre for English Language Studies, discusses her research interests.

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My name is Jeanette Littlemore and I work in the English Department at Birmingham.

My research interests are metaphor and metonymy in language learning.

I think everyone pretty much knows what metaphor is. It's when you describe one thing in terms of another.

So if you say, 'That Jeanette, she's a real witch'. It doesn't mean that I'm literally a witch, but it might mean that I'm quite hard and a little bit nasty and mean. It doesn't mean that I travel to work on a broomstick for example.

Metonymy is a related trope. Whereas metaphor involves comparing different things to one another, metonymy involves comparing similar things to one another.

We might say that 'Downing Street has issued a statement'. It doesn't actually mean that Downing Street has issued a statement, but that the government or prime minister of the time has.

These are two things that can present problems to language learners. Partly because they don't work in the same way across all languages, even though they do exist in all languages.

For example, in English, the seat of the emotions is often the heart, whereas in Malay it's the liver. There's difference in the language there, potential problems for learners.

Again, with metonymy, in English we can talk about tabling an item for the agenda at a meeting. That use of table doesn't work in French. In French, it's more common to say something like he or she does a good table, which means that he or she is a good cook. It sounds a little bit odd in English, even though we'd probably understand it.

I'm interested in these issues, these differences across languages, and how language teachers deal with them in the classroom.

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