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Anke Beger (Flensburg University)

Complementing discourse analysis with computer-assisted corpus analysis in the field of specialized languages: The case of ANGER metaphors in academic discourse

Applied research within the framework of Cognitive Metaphor Theory (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1993) mainly consists of two different methodological approaches. Apart from a few exceptions (e.g. Cameron & Deignan 2003, 2006), the examined data comprises either small corpora which allow a more detailed and discourse-oriented analysis (e.g. Low et al. 2008; Cameron 2003, 2007), or large corpora that are analyzed with special computer software (e.g. Deignan 1999; Koller 2002). However, in the field of specialized languages, a combination of these two methods is particularly valuable in order to compare metaphor use in certain genre with the occurrence of metaphors across genres. Thus, we analyze the application of ANGER metaphors in academia by contrasting them with the occurrence of ANGER metaphors in a large computerized corpus.

For our investigation, we compiled a corpus containing approximately 32,000 words. The data consists of four psychology classes about anger and aggression that were given at an American college. This corpus is small enough to be handsearched for metaphorical expressions and analyzed with regard to discourse features. To compare the application of ANGER metaphors in academia with the occurrence of metaphorical expressions for ANGER across a variety of genres, we searched the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), containing more than 410 million words, with the KWIC concordance program.

The results show that almost all ANGER metaphors in our handsearched corpus also occur across registers in the COCA. An exception is the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER. It is almost identical to the well-known metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER (cf. Kövecses 2000: 21) which is realized in metaphorical expressions in the COCA. Yet, metaphorical expressions instantiating ANGER IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER in the academic corpus do not feature the concept of HEAT, but rather communicate a “hydraulic” model of ANGER. Thus, ANGER IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER is a genre-specific metaphor. Additionally, the metaphors which occur in both corpora differ in the relative frequency in which they occur. While ANGER IS INSANITY is one of the most frequent ANGER metaphors in the COCA, it is one of the least frequently applied ones in our academic corpus.

In complementing a detailed discourse-based examination of ANGER metaphors in a small dataset of academic discourse with a computer-assisted analysis of a large corpus comprising different genres, we are able to point out the particularities of the use of ANGER metaphors in a certain genre. This attests the value of combining different corpora and methods to research the use of metaphors in specialized languages.

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