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Uncovering metaphorical patterns in legislative texts on immigration: a corpus-assisted approach to a systematic analysis

Metaphor, like the law, is pervasive in almost all branches of discourse, reflecting the attitudes and values of the society that generates them. Following this dictum, this paper examines metaphor within its legal context, and the pragmatic and communicative role it plays within the highly specialized area of immigration law. I pursue the task by exploring a small corpus of legislative texts spanning the period 1999-2009, (400,000 words), subsequently divided into two sub-corpora of EU regulations and UK statutory laws. The work focuses on how metaphorical language is realized at a phraseological level, producing lexico-semantic and grammatical patterns which arguably reveal the underlying discourse of a government's ideology, policy and principles towards immigration issues. In addition, the study is to some extent experimental, in that, firstly metaphor analysis is not a standard methodology of legal discourse; and secondly it integrates specific applied techniques of cognitive linguistic (metaphor) theory with a corpus linguistic approach to legal discourse. The corpus linguistic techniques exploit the software, Wmatrix, (Rayson, 2003), used to retrieve lexical items from semantic (source) domains and the metaphorical expressions associated with those domains, (Hardie et al., 2005). This sort of procedure can reduce the risk of under-representing metaphors in a corpus. The investigation also integrates a metaphor identification procedure (MIP), (Pragglejazz, 2007), which helps decision-making on 'indefinite' metaphors, i.e. those which are not so easily distinguishable.

So far the findings are contrary to expectations, in that this particular form of legal writing, unlike the descriptive evaluative language of political or media discourse, appears neutral on the surface, and metaphorically constructed language seems to be incongruent in such fait accompli documents which do not aim to persuade, or incite emotion or judgement. Instead, this study has revealed that beneath the surface level of legal reasoning lie conceptual metaphorical schemas, the prominent ones being the NATION/EU AS A CONTAINER and the EU AS EDIFICE, which in turn produce smaller sub-level concepts, e.g. CATEGORIES ARE CONTAINERS (expressed through lexical units such as, *first class/second class/prescribed class of person*, etc.), or the EU AS PATH/ DIRECTION, (*with a view to, carry forward*, etc) and the MIGRANT AS OBJECT, (e.g. *automatic deportation*), (Charteris-Black, 2006). Furthermore the legal terminology familiar to the discourse community consists to a large extent of conventional metaphors of etymological (experiential) origin (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), which often go unnoticed, e.g. *miscarriage of justice, reflection period, burden of proof*.

References

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