

Boot metaphor in the child's post-traumatic discourse of terrorism

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Abstract. The study focuses on the problem of metaphorical conceptualization of emotions by means of the boot metaphor. The analysis is based on the book of J.S. Foer “Extremely loud and incredibly close”. The paper examines the social and cultural context that shapes the interpretation of shoes in general and helps verbalize the post-traumatic discourse of terrorism by using the boot metaphor. The study comments on the metaphorical repertoire of J.S. Foer. The methodology includes a descriptive method and a continuous sampling method. The author concludes that the boot metaphor is productive in terms of describing various emotional states within the novel “Extremely loud and incredibly close”. Such boot metaphors are frequently used to describe negative feelings. Research implications lie in enriching the knowledge about the author's unconventional metaphors for describing emotional state. The findings may be used in the study of the intercultural communication, in the course text theory and the theory of cognitive metaphor.

Keywords: metaphor, metaphorical creativity, emotions, modern literature, discourse of terrorism

1 Introduction

Emotions motivate any person to apply cognitive activity to their life experience, especially to negative ones. Experiencing certain emotions, people try to understand and represent the unity of knowledge, referred to the particular concept, which might be understood by other people. The concept is seen as a mental structure or plainly the result of a person's processing of information. Usually, the concept accommodates one's knowledge and experience, represented by means of language, which is reflected in a generalized form [1]. The idea or phenomenon has a conceptual core, a central part and a periphery, represented by value-evaluative components. The structure of a concept is formed by systems of conceptual metonymy, metaphors, related concepts, cognitive scenarios [2].

As “emotional” is considered as a reflection of the objective world or the designation of feelings and experiences, it can be expressed by a number of linguistic means. Consequently, the experience of mankind in the cognition of emotions is fixed in linguistic units, used to identify ways to verbalize the basic common human emotional states of the psyche [3]. A. P. Sedykh notes that: “<...> considering the lexical techniques of verbalizing

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emotions, one can single out: a) direct verbalization of emotional state; b) indirect (mediated) verbalization of emotions; c) metaphorical verbalization of emotional states” [4].

The studies related to conceptualization of emotions are an emerging field in the linguistics of emotions and in metaphorology. However, the common discussion of core and productive conceptual metaphors in the expression of emotions “foreshadows” the presence of other creative images and metaphors. The best known and recognized in the scientific community are conceptual metaphors. According to the multiple works of Z. Kövecses, “anger is considered to be a hot liquid inside the container, love is seen as a fire, while happiness is estimated and verbalized in terms of height” [5].

It is known that some conceptual, emotion-related metaphors are not only culturally and socially conditioned, but they also reflect the mindset and experience of an individual. In this paper, we tend to believe that individuality and singularity of certain conceptual metaphors makes them even more interesting and important for further analysis. This is the major reason for us to focus on a “boot” metaphor. M. DeMello gives special consideration to exploring the changes in sociocultural background of footwear in the various societies [6]. It is claimed that such “boot” metaphors reflect the emotional state of the protagonist in the novel “Extremely loud and incredibly close” written by J.S Foer [7].

2 Materials and methods

In this paper, the image of the boot in the literary work of the American author J.S. Foer “Extremely loud and incredibly close” is being examined. The novel revolves around the experience and feelings of a child, Oskar Schell, who lost his father in a terrorist attack on 11th September 2001. To describe the emotions and feelings of the child, the author repeatedly mentions the state of “wearing/being in/the process of getting heavy boots”. Stylizing his narrative like a speech of an 11-year-old child, the author tries to verbalize the emotional state of the hero using a metaphor.

Z. Kövecses notes that the (potentially) universal bodily experiences can be captured in the conceptual metonymies associated with particular concepts. Specifically, in the case of emotion concepts, such as happiness, anger, love, pride, and so forth, the metonymies correspond to various kinds of physiological, behavioral, and expressive reactions” [2]. M.V. Ozingin has stressed that: “The most productive source of metaphorization may be a semantic field of artifacts, represented by tools and household items, as well as elements of clothing, shoes and their details” [8].

Conceptual metaphors such as BAD IS DOWN and EMOTIONAL IS DOWN can also be found in the work of J. Lakoff and M. Johnson. It partially agrees with the idea that negative emotional experiences (ANXIETY, GUILT, SADNESS), as well as additional emotions (COMPASSION and RELIEF) of the protagonist are concentrated “somewhere down”, to be more precise in boots [9]. This work uses the classification of the psychologist R.S. Lazarus. The classification of R.S. Lazarus singles out such emotional states as ANXIETY, GUILT, SADNESS, COMPASSION and RELIEF [10]. Such emotions as ANXIETY, COMPASSION, SADNESS are seen in this study as an “umbrella term”. That implies that the above-mentioned emotions can cover more specific emotions within their category. For example, ANXIETY combines such concepts as worry, stress, nervousness, and disquiet. COMPASSION covers feelings and emotions such as pity, sympathy, participation, empathy; SADNESS is the “umbrella term” for sorrow and depression.

Thus, the author compares the severity of the emotional state with wearing heavy boots. It is necessary to indicate that due to unconventional and rare usage of such metaphors as “HEAVY BOOTS/LIGHT BOOTS – A PARTICULAR EMOTION”, the Russian translator V. Akanov did not transfer the original “boot” image while translating; he

changed the metaphor “heavy boots” to a more comprehensible and a widespread one – “weights on the heart” (giri na serdtse).

In the course of the study, 20 metaphors containing the image of a boot and describing the state of the hero were selected by the method of continuous sampling.

3 Results

In view of the limited volume of the article, the analysis covers and comments on some of the most illustrative examples:

3.1 Heavy boots – anxiety

The first example covers the description of the emotional state when the protagonist is going to the cemetery.

I desperately wish I had my tambourine with me now, because even after everything I'm still wearing heavy boots, and sometimes it helps to play a good beat [7].

Another piece of evidence that the “heavy boots” metaphor can convey the feeling of anxiety, is demonstrated in the following passage:

I read the first chapter of A Brief History of Time when Dad was still alive, and I got incredibly heavy boots about how relatively insignificant life is, and how, compared to the universe and compared to time, it didn't even matter if I existed at all [7].

In the passage given, the author creates a state of anxiety by using a metaphor of “heavy boots” in protagonist’s reflection reflects on life in comparison to the universe and time.

3.2 Heavy boots – guilt

We consider metaphor “HEAVY BOOTS – GUILT” to be an isolated, yet peculiar example.

She was taking care of me when I was four, chasing me around the apartment like she was a monster, and I cut my top lip against the end of our coffee table and had to go to the hospital. Grandma believes in God, but she doesn't believe in taxis, so I bled on my shirt on the bus. Dad told me it gave her incredibly heavy boots, even though my lip only needed a couple of stitches, and that she kept coming across the street to tell him, 'It was all my fault [7].

The feeling of guilt was caused by the fact that the protagonist cut his lip. The emotional state is named explicitly in the course of the narrative – *'It was all my fault'*. However, the author makes an attempt to make his narrative closer to the speech of an eleven-year-old child, that is why the author writes that a split lip, a trip to the hospital, a blood-soaked shirt of the protagonist gave her (grandmother) incredibly heavy boots.

3.3 Heavy boots – sadness

Another state that the heavy boots metaphor can convey is SADNESS. The following describes a situation in which the main character comes to a woman’s house. When visiting a house, the main character sees many portraits, but does not dare to ask about the person in the drawings, as he is afraid that the answer will “give him heavy boots”:

I didn't ask who the man in the drawings was, because I was afraid the answer would give me heavy boots. You wouldn't draw someone that much unless you loved him and missed him. I told her, 'You're extremely beautiful [7].

In another case the main character talks about going to a psychologist:

On Tuesday afternoon I had to go to Dr. Fein. I didn't understand why I needed help, because it seemed to me that you should wear heavy boots when your dad dies, and if you aren't wearing heavy boots, then you need help. But I went anyway because the raise in my allowance depended on it" [7].

Thus, SADNESS is also expressed by the author's use of the metaphor "to be in heavy boots".

3.4 Heavy boots – compassion

The metaphor under study is also used to express COMPASSION. In the example presented below, the hero tells us about handmade bracelets. He lists the people who cause him a feeling of compassion (a homeless person, an elderly woman, a person in a wheelchair):

<...> And I had thought about giving it to Sonny, the homeless person who I sometimes see standing outside the Alliance Française, because he puts me in heavy boots, or maybe to Lindy, the neat old woman who volunteers to give tours at the Museum of Natural History, so I could be something special to her, or even just to someone in a wheelchair" [7].

Another example of how compassion is shown in a talk about the keys. The protagonist's interlocutor says that there are almost no key shops left due to the lack of buyers, but states that he will continue to maintain the store.

'I like keys.' I thought for a minute, and then I got heavy, heavy boots. 'Well, if people like me are a dying breed, then what's going to happen to your business?'" [7].

We agree that the example presented can represent both a feeling of sadness and a feeling of compassion. However, it is made more precise, that "to the ach emotion has its own characteristic signs, the catalog of which forms the semiotics of human emotions. <...> This correlation is not a simple one-emotion-one-style model" [11]. Moreover, unlike SADNESS, COMPASSION is always directed towards the feelings of another person or animal. Interpreting the work of J.S. Foer, we tend to believe that during the above-mentioned dialogue, the presented emotion can be defined as COMPASSION.

3.5 Light boots – relief

In addition to the "heavy boots" metaphor, the text also contains the "light boots" metaphor, the state of positive feelings and emotions. This metaphor is often used by J.S. Foer to show how the main character relieves his mental pain:

<...> I wanted to make him crack up, because if I could make him crack up, my boots could be a little lighter [7].

<...> A few weeks after the worst day, I started writing lots of letters. I don't know why, but it was one of the only things that made my boots lighter [7].

Having made someone laugh, writing a letter to important people, the main character is relieved, and his "heavy boots" become "lighter".

4 Discussion

The present study was designed to further investigate unconventional 'boot' metaphor used by J.S. Foer to convey different emotional states of the main character. As a result, several groups of footwear metaphors have been identified.

Generally speaking, they can be divided into two main groups: "HEAVY BOOTS – A PARTICULAR EMOTION" and "LIGHT BOOTS – A PARTICULAR EMOTION". Revealing in this study the confirmation of the 'boot' metaphor can be productive in self-

oriented discourse. Echoing K Kociołek and G. F. Kojo Arthur, we find that such fashion and apparel metaphors serve to deliver strong images of human's life [12, 13].

Our results indicate that 34 percent of metaphors analyzed relate of the emotion of anxiety, 30 percent are linked to sadness and 20 percent may be attributed to compassion. Perhaps the choice of negative or neutral emotions description is influenced by the dominance in the novel of negative emotions themselves. These results are in agreement with Rowe and Fitness J. and Francis et al. physiological studies on the role of negative emotions in different spheres [14, 15].

Additionally, from the passages provided, we were able to infer that the 'boot' metaphor can be followed by different verbs, such as "wear/give/be/make/put". Based on the result, it can be concluded that the choice of such verbs helps the author to objectify the main character: it is not he who decides what emotions and feelings to experience, they are given and the protagonist is being put in some position.

5 Conclusion

To summarize the study, it can be concluded that the metaphor of "heavy" and "light boots" exists in the discourse, particularly in the terrorism discourse. The author uses cognitive metaphor of boots for describing emotions and feelings like ANXIETY, GUILT, SADNESS, COMPASSION and RELIEF. The boot metaphor helps the author to represent more negative emotions and to describe a post-traumatic experience. It is noteworthy that the state of feeling GUILT has been described using this metaphor only once in our empiric material.

In general, we state that an object as footwear needs further study to enrich and enlarge the knowledge of its metaphorical usage. The study of unconventional metaphors will not only identify the author's metaphorical repertoire but will also shed light on other possible non-conventional ways of thinking and describing emotional states in modern American literature and in the discourse of terrorism.

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