

UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH HUMOUR THROUGH COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN MIXED METAPHORS AND MALAPHORS

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"To Err Is Human; To Study Error-Making Is Cognitive Science."
[Hofstadter, 1989]

Mixed metaphors and malaphors (*rocket surgery; when the cookie bounces*) in contemporary English have been considered as a source of cognitive dissonance since the appearance of Festinger's theory [Festinger 1957]. Traditionally perceived in linguistics as a faulty usage of metaphorical expressions, nowadays these malapropisms are given cognitive treatment. The last decade has brought about dramatic changes into cognitive linguistics by developing the cognitive paradigm and, accordingly changed the view of the status and the origin of mixed metaphors and malaphors [Semino 2016]. The change in the linguists' attitude towards mixed metaphors, where a mixed metaphor is defined as a cluster of metaphors which appear in close contextual adjacency but have different cognitive basis [Kimmel, 2010], started gaining momentum after the book "Metaphors we live by" by Lakoff and Johnson was published in 1980.

The phenomenon of a "malaphor", a term coined by an American scholar Lawrence Harrison in 1976 in his article 'Searching for Malaphors' for the Washington Post, is understood in this work as a blend of two (or more) idioms or clichés in modern English discourse, usually used to express speaker's creativity and their intention to create a humorous effect in a text or speech (e.g. *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*).

The reevaluation of these phenomena in modern linguistics, i.e. a deliberate usage of hybrid structure within a stretch of a sentence or text, taking into consideration its creative nature and intentional usage by a speaker, requires special attention from linguists. The authors exploit the theory of cognitive dissonance [Festinger 1957] and apply the principle of cognitive consistency as a way to overcome disharmony in understanding modern British humour expressed in mixed metaphors and malaphors (e.g. *Don't put all your chickens in one basket before they are hatched*).

A linguistic-cognitive experiment that was carried out in order to check that, showed that malaphors produce low level of cognitive dissonance, and their humorous nature is better understood in the following cases:

- if a recipient knows the meanings of the constituents of a blend;
- if he or she can guess the equivalent expressions (cognates) in their native language;
- if the conceptual bases of both constituents of the target mixed metaphor / malaphor are the same.

Key words: mixed metaphor, cognitive dissonance, blend, humour

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