Chapter 10
Metaphors in Meta-Communication

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ABSTRACT
This chapter is based on the claim that the metaphors as a new and powerful tool in different sciences especially including Information Systems and a number of sociological disciplines such as linguistic, education, and sociology can be used for the implementation and sustainability of the components of meta-communication for distance education. The meta-communication aims to move the intercultural components of metaphors to the distance education and its applications. Thereby, metaphors serve to the basic mission of distance education creating cross-cultural educational environments. In order to use metaphors with the meaning put forward by this claim, restructuring of metaphors with the contemporary metaphor theory, use of metaphors in computer systems and user interfaces, the intersection of metaphors and meta-communication and finally the power of metaphors in digital meta-communication for distance education are discussed below.

INTRODUCTION
Metaphors are quite old Linguistic structures. Until 1980s, metaphors that we use in almost every area of our daily lives were considered as a technique of using the language effectively and were defined as an art of using words without reference to their real meanings. However, in their study named “Metaphors we live by”, two cognitive scientists, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, mentioned the importance of cognitive aspects of metaphors. According to this new theory, later called contemporary metaphor theory, metaphors are structures that we use not only in a language but also in our thoughts and actions. To Lakoff and Johnson (1980), if our conceptual system is
largely metaphorical, then the way we think, our experience and what we do every day are very much a matter of metaphor.

The concept of guiding our thoughts and actions are not only mental. These concepts shape our everyday activities up to the most ordinary details and structure the things we perceive and the style of our communication. Therefore, our concept system has a central importance in the ordinary sense of reality. If we accept that our concept system is largely metaphorical, it is possible to say that metaphors are located naturally in almost every thought and action. Besides this, metaphors allow us to become aware of things that are otherwise left unseen and unfelt and thus enrich our experience of the natural world (Ashkenazi, 2006). Through the metaphors, we become aware of the meaning and structure of the complexity of the surrounding world.

Metaphors are affected by cultural differences. For example, the “discussion is war” metaphor could be translated as “discussion is dancing” in a different culture. However, the most prominent feature of metaphors is their potential to create an intercultural language. Use of visual and verbal metaphors in order to eliminate the need for the creation of common structures in computer systems is the best example of this situation. In the simplest term, the visuals and concepts related to the computer such as window, desktop, mouse, recycle bin, file, folder, page, document, loading, download, and memory are all old metaphors for new concepts (Firat and Kabakçı, 2010). Use of metaphors is one of the most appropriate ways of intuitively understanding computers. For this feature of metaphors, it is thought that appropriate metaphors can be used as a knowledge-creation tool for meta-communication applications in distance education. The reason is that the most important phase in building knowledge is using a meta-communicational element (Demiray, 2009). However, we need universal examples here rather than domestic ones like computer desktop metaphors.

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It has not been easy for metaphors to gain their current meanings. In order to become active in the interdisciplinary area and in daily language, metaphors had to wait for ages. In this process, metaphor perceptions had to be interrogated by the human mind and reshaped with a new comprehensive structure. Therefore, it would be better to clarify this transformation before going on with the multifaceted up-to-date structures of metaphors.

From Rhetoric to Contemporary Theory of Metaphors

The concept of metaphor is commonly defined as elocution or citation of a thing for the purpose of pointing out a similarity that cannot be explained straightforwardly. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors allow understanding or experiencing a kind of thing with the help of another kind of thing. In other words, metaphors are used to establish a relationship between such two concepts as “the brain is a computer” and “human body is a machine” and to do effective transfer from the source concept (brain, human body) to the target concept (computer, machine). In order to do this transfer between the dimensions of the concepts, similes are used, but in similes, generally, “like” or “as” are used to emphasize the transfer. In other words, simile includes explicit comparison in contrast with the implicit comparison made by a metaphor. Another concept related to this subject is the analogy frequently confused with the metaphor. According to the dictionary of Webster, the concept of analogy is defined as “a functional relationship or harmony between totally different organs or components” (WordNet, 2010).

The concepts of analogy and homology used in biology help understand the limits of analogy. Analog is used to define organs which have different origins yet the same functions, while homolog
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