Conceptualizing FEAR in New Englishes: A corpus-based study of metaphorical variation

Name: Barbara Ann Güldenring
Affiliation: Philipps University Marburg

Abstract:
The study of emotion concepts has been a prominent feature of cognitive linguistic inquiry, especially at the level of metaphor. Emotions present not only a “superior target domain” for metaphorical study because they represent some of the most common abstract concepts that are fundamentally comprehended via conceptual metaphors (Kövecses 2010: 23), but they also offer an ideal opportunity for investigating the extent to which metaphorical systems can be viewed and characterized via the notions of universality and variation (cf. Kövecses 2005; Kövecses 2000). The present paper outlines a comparative study of emotion metaphors attributable to institutionalized second-language varieties of English, commonly known as New Englishes and, in doing so, aims at pinpointing the commonalities and potential differences that emerge from a usage-based investigation of New English emotion metaphors. Along with the major theoretical insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), this investigation has been informed by previous work into cultural conceptualizations (cf. Sharifian 2011) as well as cognitive sociolinguistic approaches to World Englishes (cf. Wolf & Polzenhagen 2009).

By assuming that metaphorical variation can be primarily viewed in light of a respective variety's preference for certain source domains, the main question at the core of this study relates to what source domains are preferentially employed by New Englishes to conceptualize an emotion concept like FEAR. This study makes use of a corpus-based approach to metaphorical analysis informed by Stefanowitsch's Metaphorical Pattern Analysis (2006) and examines four Asian and African New English varieties, namely Hong Kong, Singapore, Ghana and Nigeria, which are represented by their respective components of the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) (Davies 2013). By employing authentic corpus data, it is possible to create variety-specific metaphorical profiles that highlight source domain preferences for FEAR. These profiles can, in turn, be used as a means of comparison with other New English varieties, which indicate to what extent a contact-induced variety has developed similarly to or differently from its more traditionally norm-providing variety, i.e. British English. In this way, analyzing New English metaphorical profiles for FEAR demonstrates how source domain preferences can be used as an index for metaphorical variation.

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