

A Metaphor Analysis of Student Beliefs About Academic Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

Although learner beliefs have long been a major area of research within the field of second language (L2) learning and teaching, investigations into such a latent and complex construct can be challenging because beliefs are held subconsciously and can be difficult to articulate. In view of this, scholars have recently attempted to access and capture the complexity of beliefs through the lens of metaphors. However, many metaphor studies have focused on learners' general beliefs about language learning, with very little attention paid to L2 vocabulary acquisition. Accordingly, this paper reports on a study that explored learners' beliefs by analysing the metaphors they used to conceptualise and represent academic vocabulary learning. Data were collected from 193 undergraduates at a Hong Kong university via a metaphor elicitation task and follow-up interviews as part of a larger survey on learners' beliefs and practices regarding academic vocabulary learning. Results revealed that although the students generally conceived of academic vocabulary learning as beneficial, and they were aware of its incremental nature, they found it difficult, unpredictable, and time-consuming. Future research directions and implications regarding academic vocabulary learning and teaching, as well as the use of metaphor elicitation in research about beliefs, are discussed.

Keywords: English for academic purposes, general academic vocabulary, higher education, language learner cognition, metaphors