Going beyond war metaphors:
A metaphor menu for climate change by EFL learners

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This study is situated within the context of an educational intervention that aimed to raise EFL learners' awareness of the significance of metaphorical framing in public-interest contexts. The participants in the study were twenty first-year students majoring in English at a Greek university and taking a compulsory course aimed at developing students' EFL skills through a focus on the descriptive/narrative genre. The intervention was informed by cognitive linguistic research on metaphorical framing (e.g. Steen 2017), and war metaphors, in particular, which have been widely used in relation to various topics such as cancer (e.g. Demjén & Semino 2017), Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Semino 2021), climate change (e.g. Koteyko & Atanasova 2017), and political issues like drugs, crime, poverty (e.g. Flusberg et al. 2018). A series of frame-inspired task-based lessons (Dalpanagioti 2023) were integrated into the course with a view to encouraging learners to notice and appraise war metaphors in different contexts. A follow-up group project involved learners in revisiting war metaphors and generating new ideas to communicate a global issue, climate change, more effectively. The students were asked to work in pairs and present their own alternative to the war metaphor for communicating climate change.

The project was organised into three stages: (a) writing a short news article (300-350 words) to demonstrate their own (metaphorical) perspective on climate change; (b) presenting their article in class and explaining their metaphor as well as their intention; (c) expressing their opinion (orally) about the other groups' proposal. In this way, metaphorical framing was seen from a productive and receptive perspective. The productive part of the project, which in fact involved students in creating a metaphor menu for climate change, was inspired by projects like the 'Metaphor Menu for People Living with Cancer' and '#ReframeCovid' (Semino 2021: 51-52); the idea of creating a collection of alternatives to war metaphors was thus used with a different issue (climate change) and in a different context (foreign language learning). The receptive part of the project involved students in a peer assessment process through which they got a glimpse into unpacking and critically interrogating the meanings and implications of metaphorical framings.

The presentation will report on the alternatives to the war metaphor that the students proposed for the conceptualization, expression and communication of climate change. Their perceptions of each other's metaphors and their evaluation of the overall learning experience will also be discussed.

References

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