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The Role of Mental Spaces in Building Metaphors: The Case Study of the *flądra* Nickname in Polish

ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to recognize the role of mental spaces in meaning construction of the nickname *flądra* in Polish [English: slut; literally: a flounder], received on the ground of the real discourse extracts retrieved from the Polish Corpus. The meaning of the nickname is obtained by examining the metaphors underlying it, which are motivated by various contextual factors, e.g. the speaker's gender and discourse registers. The results obtained in the study reveal that the meaning of the *flądra* nickname is based on five metaphorical dynamic structures organised hierarchically, from which the mental-spaces level provides for the novel meaning of *flądra*.

Keywords: animal, metaphor, mental spaces, discourse, corpus study

1. Introduction

One of the fundamental theses which delineate the Cognitive Linguistics paradigm sounds that *meaning is conceptualisation* (Evans, 2012, p. 131). This thesis refers to the interactions which occur, by means of various conceptual mechanisms, between the conceptual and semantic structures to build up a given meaning (p. 134). To clarify, from the cognitive point of view, the meaning of a given word is not only the result of the inherent properties of the word, but rather, or even mostly, the result of a certain construal of the word. It derives from the fact that language is treated not as an objective mirror of the world, but as “an integral part of human cognition” (Langacker, 1987, p. 12), which reflects the way we construe the world. We tend to conceptualise objects, entities, events as well as people, not according to the objectivist truth-conditional “disembodied, independent of human understanding” rules (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 196), but in a way driven by the nature of our thoughts and bodies (p. 19). Importantly, taken from the cognitive linguistic perspective, it is *metaphor* that is recognized as one of the essential construal operations, through which we can learn about one's cognitive abilities, thoughts, beliefs, views and emotions that are first born in human minds (as conceptual metaphors) and pronounced, e.g. in the discourse (as linguistic

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metaphors) (Kövecses, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors, especially the ones generated on the highly contextual and individual level of *mental spaces*, are seen as the essential mechanism for creating a new meaning of the multidimensional realities in our lives (cf. Kövecses, 2017b, p. 343).

In this light, our study concerns the contemporary meaning of a Polish animal-related nickname *flądra* [literally *flounder*], in its figurative reading, which can be translated into English as *slut*, *slattern*. The material data comprises discourse extracts (i.e. oral and written language production forms), retrieved from *Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego* [The National Corpus of Polish Language; henceforth: *NKJP Corpus*, prepared by Piotr Pęzik and referred to as Pęzik, 2012], in which the investigated nickname is placed. We choose metaphor as the methodological tool to obtain the meaning of the nickname under scrutiny. We assume that the meaning construction is the result of numerous factors that have to be taken into consideration. Hence, we claim, in line with Zoltán Kövecses (2015, 2020), that the metaphors underlying the nickname *flądra* are motivated by various contextual factors, e.g. speakers' gender and discourse registers in which the nickname is used.

In view of that, the aim of the paper is threefold: first, to specify different types of discourse retrieved from the *NKJP Corpus* of the Polish language in which the Polish nickname *flądra* is used by contemporary Polish adult (aged over 18–19) language users.¹ Second, to analyse the structure of the metaphorical mappings that occur between the domain of [A HUMAN BEING] and [AN ANIMAL], i.e. to determine the schematicity levels of these mappings, and the role of mental spaces in the construction of the meaning of *flądra*. Third, to discuss the so-received contemporary meaning of the nickname under scrutiny against the existing dictionary definitions of *flądra*. As it is assumed, the study will prove significant both for cognitive semantics and lexicography since a proposal of considering the meaning extension of the examined nickname is to be made.

The structure of the paper is as follows: having introduced the main concern and the detailed aims of the research paper, in section 2 we outline the hybrid theoretical framework, on the basis of which we intend to prepare the working theoretical model for our study. To clarify, we mean to combine the extended version of the Contemporary Metaphor Theory with Critical Metaphor Analysis, based on which we nominate metaphor as the working tool for meaning construction. Section 3 presents the preliminary results of our corpus search with

¹ Due to the fact that the corpus data includes the resource material up to 2012, we assume that at the very moment, in 2022, the lowest estimated age of the language users whose discourse is being investigated must be 18–19 now. By following the generally adopted age 20 as the beginning of adulthood, we treat our examined discourse speakers as *adults* now.

all the possible metaphorical entries of the nicknames *flądra* in Polish. Section 4 comprises a cognitive analysis of the context-dependent meanings of the nickname, constructed on the ground of the underlying metaphors, and compared against the existing dictionary definitions of the word. The discussion pertains to the levels of schematicity in meaning construction, as recently proposed by Kövecses (2017b, 2020). The closing section of the paper offers the conclusions that can be drawn from the results obtained in the study.

2. Hybrid theoretical working model

The theoretical and methodological framework of our study, set in the cognitive linguistic perspective, needs to be integrative and interdisciplinary in order to reach the already-specified goals. It combines a corpus study of animal (*flądra*) metaphors with a metaphor analysis. The foundation of the analysis is laid on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth: CMT), initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and developed by their followers. The theory defines conceptual metaphor as “a set of correspondences between a more physical source domain and a more abstract target domain” (e.g., Kövecses, 2010, 2014, p. 16; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). By means of metaphor, we may mentally represent, structure and delineate many concepts that are abstract or the ones we are less familiar with. In other words, metaphor here is treated not only as “a figure of speech, but [a]s a specific mental mapping that influences a good deal of how people think, reason, and imagine in everyday life” (Gibbs, 1996, p. 309; also Johnson, 1987, 1993; Kövecses, 2015, 2020; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

Nonetheless, the Lakoffian CMT is frequently criticised for the lack of real discourse material used in the study of metaphor. As a response to this demerit, we have decided to enrich the initial version of CMT with a combination of two metaphor-oriented approaches, namely, Jonathan Charteris-Black’s (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis (henceforth: *CMA*) and Zoltán Kövecses’s (2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) context-dependent version of CMT. The so-received hybrid theoretical framework is assumed to provide for our study an improved metaphor-oriented working model for meaning construction. To justify our proposal of the hybrid model, let us point out, first, that it is *CMA* that offers a “discourse model of metaphor” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 243) by drawing on “the insights of CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), pragmatics, and the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor” (Maalej, 2007, p. 132). Accordingly, instead of theorising within CMT and providing any invented examples of metaphor, *CMA* exploits metaphor in its real manifestations in *discourse*, i.e. various forms of language production. In fact, the pragmatic use of metaphor in discourse has been practised by some critical discourse analysts, to mention but a few, e.g. Charteris-Black (2004), Maalej (2007), Musolff et al. (2014), and Pawłowska (2019). A well-recognized discourse analyst, Teun van Dijk (2015, p. 474), notices that the real use of metaphor in

discourse is motivated by three mutually dependent elements which constitute a *communicative event*, where the process of construing reality happens. These components include: (i) social structure (the authorities and structures in power), (ii) our personal cognition, and (iii) immediate context in which a discourse is used.

Our second proposal to supplement the Lakoffian CMT is consistent with the first one and concerns Kövecses's (2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) context-dependent view on metaphor. Metaphor here is required to be studied within a given context, due to the reason that contextual factors usually prime a particular metaphor both in its contents and form (Kövecses, 2017a, p. 20). By investigating *linguistic metaphors*, which are the visible manifestations of conceptual metaphors which underlie them, we may learn about the characterization of the participants in terms of their roles and their evaluative stance on a given concept (cf. Deignan, 2017; Musolff, 2006, p. 27, 2016). Eventually, we can obtain a detailed meaning of the concept by investigating particular metaphors underlying it.

In this perspective, our working CMT-CMA hybrid model that we choose for the purpose of the study is based both on the discursive and critical view of metaphor after CMA and on the extended context-primed view of CMT. To clarify, in our research on the female nickname *flądra*, we plan to work on the real discourse, retrieved from the *NKJP Corpus*, in order to elicit any *flądra* metaphors that will contribute to the nickname's meaning. Since a nickname, as confirmed by Neil Larry Shumsky (2016), can be determined "by first understanding the social conditions within which the term emerged" (p. 133), we will also search for some etymological background of the word and contextual priming factors which motivate the meaning of the nickname in particular discourse extracts.

Finally, the analysis of the so-received contextually-primed metaphors is to be extended with Kövecses's (2017a, 2017b, 2020) recent observation, i.e. that metaphor does not involve only certain conceptual domains but rather entails a whole hierarchical system of conceptual structures built on the degree of schematicity, from *image schemas* – seen as the most schematic and conventional structures, through *domains* and *frames*, until *mental spaces* – defined as the least schematic and the most individual conceptual structures. As believed, such an analysis of metaphor, realised on different levels of schematicity, may help us understand the numerous meanings that the nickname *flądra* has been given by adult Polish language speakers so far.

3. Preliminary results of the corpus search

This section starts with explaining in detail the methodology of the study (in section 3.1) and proceeds to reveal the preliminary results of the corpus search for all possible metaphorical entries of the nickname *flądra* in Polish (section 3.2).

3.1. Methodology and data of the study

Having chosen the Polish nickname *flądra* in its metaphorical reading for our study, let us first explain the definition of *nickname*. Mieczysław Szymczak (1999) defines a *nickname* as “an additional, usually humorous name given to someone specific; a pseudonym” (p. 977). In addition to acting as a substitute for the proper name, some nicknames are a kind of derogatory name calling (the so-called *sobriquet*, *epithet*, or *moniker*) and may be used to express defamation of one’s character (the so-called *libel*, *slander*) (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d.; Doroszewski, 1969/1997). In short, the offensive feature of a nickname is what we refer to most in our working definition of the *flądra* nickname.

The reason behind choosing *flądra* for our research is that it derives from the intriguing world of nature and can be used colloquially as a derogatory nickname by human beings. Notably, this nickname is one of the best candidates for our study due to its long history. To be precise, the nickname *flądra* emerged as long ago as in 1860, when the very first list of the most common Polish nicknames appeared (cf. Stupnicki, 1890). At the present time, the nickname is registered on the list of bad words that are chiefly used in contemporary slang and colloquial speech, as given in *Miejski słownik slangu i mowy potocznej* [Municipal Dictionary of Slang and Colloquial Speech] (2022).

Importantly, we assume that the contemporary meaning of *flądra* has been recently extended, in comparison to its primary dictionary readings (due to be discussed in section 4.1), as a result of either the language speakers’ ignorance of its true meaning, or their conscious elaboration or blending to use the word purposely. Therefore, in our study we are to scrutinise the possible versions of the current figurative meaning of the *flądra* nickname by means of metaphors. Hence, metaphors underlying the examined word are taken as the tools to structure the word meaning.

Our study of the metaphorical nickname *flądra* in Polish comprises three main stages, i.e. (i) a corpus search, (ii) elucidating the dictionary definition of the word, and (iii) a cognitive discussion on the extracted *flądra* metaphors.

In the first stage of the research, presented in section 3.2, the nickname under scrutiny is checked in the *NKJP Corpus*² to find out its metaphorical use in real discourse. The main reason behind choosing this type of the Polish language corpus is its numerous collections of texts, including classic literature, daily newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals, transcripts of conversations, and a variety of short-lived and Internet texts. This diversity of texts complies with the variety of subject and genre of the discourse, as well as with a wide range of conversations that represent both male and female speakers, who are in various age groups and

² The corpus search is done via the PELCRA search engine, prepared by Piotr Peżik (2012) and available at <http://www.nkjp.uni.lodz.pl/collocations.jsp>, retrieved May 22, 2022.

come from many districts of Poland. Unquestionably then, the *NKJP Corpus* has been preferred by linguists as a reliable source and an essential tool for corpus research. By checking some further details in the corpus search, we are able to name some contextual factors in which the nickname is used in the discourse, and which may prime the specific use of the *flądra* metaphors. These contextual elements include: the number of occurrences of the nicknames, the register types in which the nickname *flądra* mostly appears as well as certain characteristics concerning the speakers who use the nickname.

In stage two of the study, elaborated in section 4.1, we will elucidate the existing dictionary definitions of *flądra*. Stage three, elaborated in section 4.2, aims at structuring the current meanings of the nickname under scrutiny, as received on the ground of the metaphors which underlie the nickname *flądra* in its metaphorical reading. As assumed, the metaphorical mappings behind the meaning occur between the domain of [A HUMAN BEING] and [AN ANIMAL], and can be realised on four different levels of schematicity, beginning with the most schematic *image schema*, through *domains* and *frames*, until the least schematic and most individual structures of *mental spaces* (Kövecses, 2017b, p. 323; Kövecses, 2020, p. 52). Then, some conclusions can be drawn as for possibly novel meanings of the investigated nickname.

In brief, all these three stages are interrelated and indispensable to obtain the results in the study. Indeed, our corpus linguistics approach can considerably enhance our understanding of *flądra* metaphors (cf. Deignan, 2010), which, in turn, will help us reproduce the contemporary readings of the nickname *flądra*.

3.2. The corpus study of the nickname *flądra*

The results obtained in the corpus search yield quantitative data for the entry word *flądra*. The received text extracts include the key word *flądra* in singular or plural forms, located either in the subject, object or adverbial position in a sentence. The text passages range from three words to several lines. The detailed results for the nickname *flądra* are displayed in (1) – (3).

Based on the results received from the *NKJP Corpus* and listed in (1), we can conclude that the noun *flądra* frequently appears in the contemporary discourse, with its total occurrence of 1250 times in 908 different texts. Half of the entries concerns the human surname *Flądra*; in 37 per cent the word is used literally to define a flatfish called *a flounder*; in 2 per cent it refers to art festivals (e.g. *Festiwal Fląder* [The Flounder Festival]), and in 11 per cent the word *flądra* is generated figuratively.

(1)

Total occurrence and metaphorical use of *flądra*:

Total occurrence: 1250 in 908 different texts

Literal use:	464	(37%)
Name:	635	(50%)
Other:	21	(2%)
Metaphorical use:	130	(11%)

(2)

Meaning distribution in the figurative use of *flądra*:

– **Reference to women’s provocative appearance**

and/or sloppy sexual behaviour: 71 out of 130 (55%)

- Reference made by women 18 out of 71 (26%)
- Reference made by men 45 out of 71 (63%)
- Unclear reference (by whom) 8 out of 71 (11%)
- Register types: literature 19 (27%),
journals 8 (11%),
Internet chats/blogs 44 (62%).

(3)

Meaning distribution in the figurative use of *flądra*:

– **Reference to women’s bad/annoying character**

traits: 59 out of 130 (45%)

- Reference made by women 19 out of 59 (32%)
- Reference made by men 35 out of 59 (59%)
- Unclear reference (by whom) 5 out of 59 (9%)
- Register types: literature 27 (46%),
journals 4 (6%),
Internet chats/blogs 28 (48%).

Taking the metaphoric use of *flądra* into consideration, as illustrated in (2), we can notice that in 55 per cent the Polish term *flądra* refers to women’s provocative appearance and their sloppy or/and sexual misbehaviour, which can be translated into English as ‘a slattern’ and ‘a slut’, respectively. In far more cases, this particular connotation is evoked by men, that is in 63 per cent by men, and only in 26 per cent by women, while 11 per cent of the *flądra* instances has unclear reference. This meaning is distributed most often in Internet chats and /or blogs (62%), sometimes encountered in literature (27%), and occasionally used in journals (11%).

Moreover, the metaphorical nickname *flądra* can also pertain to women’s bad/annoying character traits, in 45 per cent of its figurative use, as given in (3). This association is mostly made by men (59%), less frequently by women (32%), while some examples (9%) in the corpus remain unclear to determine the gender of the speaker. Internet chats and/or blogs in 48 per cent is the discourse type in

which this meaning of *flądra* is evoked. Then, in 46 per cent of the cases, the metaphorical character reference is made in literature books, and in 6 per cent it is encountered in journals.

In short, the corpus results concerning the metaphorical usage of *flądra* are significant and worth some further investigation. Unquestionably, it is the male speakers who in most cases prefer using this animal-related nickname, in order to call another woman. What is more, our results concerning the type of discourse in which the nickname under scrutiny occurs generally seem to confirm Maria Wojtyła-Świerzowska's (2014) thesis that "nicknames belong to the living, everyday sphere of the language in its lower register – they rarely enter the artistic language" (p. 107)³. Finally, despite the fact that the *flądra* nickname has its regular occurrence in the discourse of the so-called lower register (such as Internet chats/blogs and journals), some instances of *flądra*, particularly its reference to women's bad/annoying character traits, are seen quite repeatedly in literature books (in 46 per cent).

4. Meaning construction of *flądra* nickname

The aim of section 4 is to structure the metaphorical meaning of *flądra*. First, in section 4.1, the dictionary meaning of *flądra* is outlined. Then, in section 4.2, we will try to provide the whole range of the meanings of *flądra* that the contemporary adult Polish language speakers use. We will do so by drawing on linguistic evidence and examining the conceptual complexes taken from the *NKJP Corpus*. Our term *conceptual complexes* refers to the metaphoric complexes in Kövecses's (2017b, p. 323, 2020, p. 52) sense, which are realised on various levels of schematicity, from the most schematic *image schema*, through *domains* and *frames*, until the least schematic and most individual *mental spaces*.

4.1. Dictionary meaning of *flądra*

The word *flądra*, as provided by the Polish-English dictionary called *Wielki multimedialny słownik angielsko-polski i polsko-angielski PWN-Oxford* [The Great PWN-Oxford Multimedia English-Polish and Polish-English Dictionary] (2016/2018) (henceforth: *PWN-Oxford*), literally means a flatfish, called *a flounder*. In its figurative use, the word *flądra* is colloquial and offensive, pertaining to (i) a sloppy and / or (ii) misbehaving woman, with its English equivalent 'a slattern' and/or 'a slut' (*PWN-Oxford*). These readings of *flądra* are also available at one of the greatest online dictionaries, namely *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN* [The PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language], which derives from numerous dictionaries in Polish, such as: *Słownik języka polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish

³ The translation of the Polish citation into English is prepared by the author of this research paper.

Language] (edited by Bralczyk, 2005), *Wielki słownik ortograficzny on-line*, *Wielki słownik ortograficzny PWN* [The Great PWN Orthographic Dictionary] (edited by Polański, 2017), *Słownik języka polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish Language] (edited by Doroszewski, 1969/1997) and its online version. Unfortunately, not all dictionaries of the Polish language include these two figurative cases of *flądra*, focusing either on a female sloppy character or on a woman's sexual misbehaviour.

The etymological background of the Polish *flądra* traces back to the Lower German word *Flunder*, the name given to the flatfish ('pleuronectes'). Figuratively, the German word *Flunder flądra* has been transferred to people, and has become a scornful nickname of a "sloppy and harlot woman" (Brückner, 1927, p. 123).

Interestingly, the *Online Etymological Dictionary* (Harper, 2001-2022) elucidates that the English word *flounder* dates back to the 14th century, and derives either from the Anglo-French word *floundre*, or Old North French *flondre*, or from Old Norse *flydhra*, or Proto-Germanic *flunthrjo*, or Middle Low German *vlundere*, Danish *flyndemr*, or from Old Swedish *flundra* – all of which pertain to a flatfish. Importantly, the English verb *flounder* traces back to the late 14th century, meaning "to flop around; to struggle awkwardly and impotently; to struggle to maintain a position" (Harper, 2001-2022), which provides some clarification for the figurative reading of the word. Most likely, a misbehaving woman nicknamed *flądra* seems to struggle, as the flatfish does, in order to maintain her position.

4.2. Contemporary meaning of *flądra* retrieved from metaphors

The results obtained in the corpus search reveal that there are six main conceptual metaphors underlying the nickname *flądra* that can be elicited, as given in (4).

(4)

Six metaphors underlying the nickname *flądra*:

- A. A HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL
- B. HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS ARE ANIMAL CHARACTERISTICS
- C. WOMAN WHO IS / LOOKS SLOPPY IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER]
- D. A WOMAN'S OBJECTIONABLE BEHAVIOUR IS FLĄDRA'S [English: A FLOUNDER'S] BEHAVIOUR.
- E. X (FEMALE INDIVIDUAL) WHO IS / LOOKS / IS DRESSED INAPPROPRIATELY (E.G. STUFFS HER BREASTS WITH COTTON WOOL) IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER],
- F. X (FEMALE INDIVIDUAL) WHO BEHAVES IN AN INAPPROPRIATE WAY (E.G. PROVOKES SEXUALLY / IS LAZY AND STUPID) IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER].

While the first metaphor represents the primary and most simplistic metaphor, based on the links in the Chain of Beings and occurring between a human being and an animal, the metaphors in b. – d. result from the metonymic relation +PART FOR

WHOLE+, i.e. when concept A that represents PART stands for B that is THE WHOLE. The metonymies from our study include: THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE (CHARACTERISTICS) (ONE'S LOOK OR WAY OF ACTING) OF A HUMAN BEING STANDS FOR THE HUMAN BEING, and THE ACTING OF A FLĄDRA [FLOUNDER] STANDS FOR FLĄDRA [FLOUNDER]. All the cases of *flądra* metaphors have numerous linguistic realisations, as given in the *NKJP Corpus* and exemplified in (5a) – (5f).

(5)

Linguistic realisations of the main four metaphors which underlie **the present corpus entry of *flądra***:

- a) Co? Józek z tobą na randce? Nie bądź śmieszna [...]. A myślisz, że on nie wie, że biust sobie watą wypychasz jak jaka *flądra*? [What? Józek with you on a date? Don't be funny [...]. And you think he doesn't know that you stuff your breasts with cotton wool like some kind of *slut* (literally *flounder*)?] ⁴
- b) Rozpustnik! Wiesz, gdzie on teraz jest?! W łóżku u tej *flądry*! Masz go zaraz wyrzucić z mieszkania, oszusta! [Libertine! Do you know where he is now?! In bed with that *slut* (literally *flounder*)! You are about to get him out of the apartment, the trickster!]
- c) Nie mogę patrzeć, jak ta *flądra* cię podrywa, a ty jej jeszcze na to pozwalasz! [I can't watch this *slut* (literally *flounder*) is courting you and you still let her!]
- d) Wieki upływają, zanim *flądra* w recepcji podniesie słuchawkę. [It takes ages for the *slut* (literally *flounder*) at the desk to pick up the phone.]
- e) Czy poinformowałaś swą narzeczoną i przyszłą teściową, że aż tak je nienawidzisz, że posuwasz się do nazywania ich [...] głupimi *flądrami*? [Have you informed your fiancée and future mother-in-law that you hate them so much that you go so far as to call them [...] stupid *fluff* / *slut* (literally *flounder*)?]
- f) Poczekajcie, moje damy, pomyślałem zgryźliwie, zimna *flądro* i ruda wydro, jeszcze do mnie przybiegniecie z prośbą o pomoc.
- g) [Wait, ladies, I thought harshly, you cold *slut* (literally *flounder*) and red otter, you will come running to me asking for help.] (*NKJP Corpus*)

As seen on (5a) – (5c), the metaphorical reference to *flądra* in Polish is offensive and concerns the cases when a speaker recognizes a woman as sexually

⁴ The translation of the Polish citation into English is prepared by the author of this paper.

misbehaving or /and being sloppy. These instances confirm the already-existing dictionary meaning of *flądra*, discussed in section 4.1.

Significantly, our more detailed analysis of the discourse extracts from the contemporary corpus lets us claim that, in addition to the common dictionary meaning of *flądra*, there is some novel meaning of the term, namely a reference to a woman in order to offend her, as illustrated in (5d) – (5f). We may only assume that the behaviour of the woman is either bad or annoying, which provides some logical reason to insult her. Still the reasons may be numerous, e.g. a woman's laziness (5d) stupidity, annoying character or ugliness (5e), and lack of compassion and love (5f).

In fact, after a deeper search, we have found out one dictionary project which refers to this uncommon meaning of *flądra* and which defines it as: “a woman to whom the speaker has a negative attitude and wants to express it” (*Wielki słownik języka polskiego* [Great Dictionary of the Polish Language], 2018). Importantly, even though this novel definition attributed to the *flądra* nickname is not placed in most dictionaries of the Polish language, it is represented quite numerously in the corpus, by occurring in 59 extracts out of 130 (which is 45 per cent), as summarised in (3).

Furthermore, all the six *flądra* metaphors generated on the ground of the figurative cases and listed in (4a) – (4f), as retrieved from the contemporary discourse available in the *NKJP Corpus*, are presented in Figure 1, which classifies the metaphors according to the levels of metaphorical schematicity.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the nickname *flądra* in its contemporary usage is motivated by the six main metaphors, which involve conceptual structures (complexities) on various levels of schematicity. Following Kövecses (2017b, p. 323), we distinguish four such levels, namely, the level of image schemas, the level of domains, the level of frames, and the level of mental spaces.

The metaphor A HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL, as the most basic and schematic one, is realised on the level of image schema. *Image schemas* are generally defined as the prevalent structures organised in human cognition, which arise from our bodily and social interaction with the environment at a preconceptual level (Johnson, 1987, p. 65; Lakoff, 1987, p. 106), and which “imbue experience with meaning” (Kövecses, 2017b, p. 324). In the same vein, on the ground of the LINK image schema, our most schematic metaphor is generated. To clarify, we usually, by some analogue pattern, may compare human beings with animals due to their misbehaving. In image schema, we rely on our first rough associations that occur between a person whose behaviour or activity is primitive, bad or detrimental, and an animal, e.g. a flounder, which flops around to maintain its position, often hidden in the silt lying on the seabed.

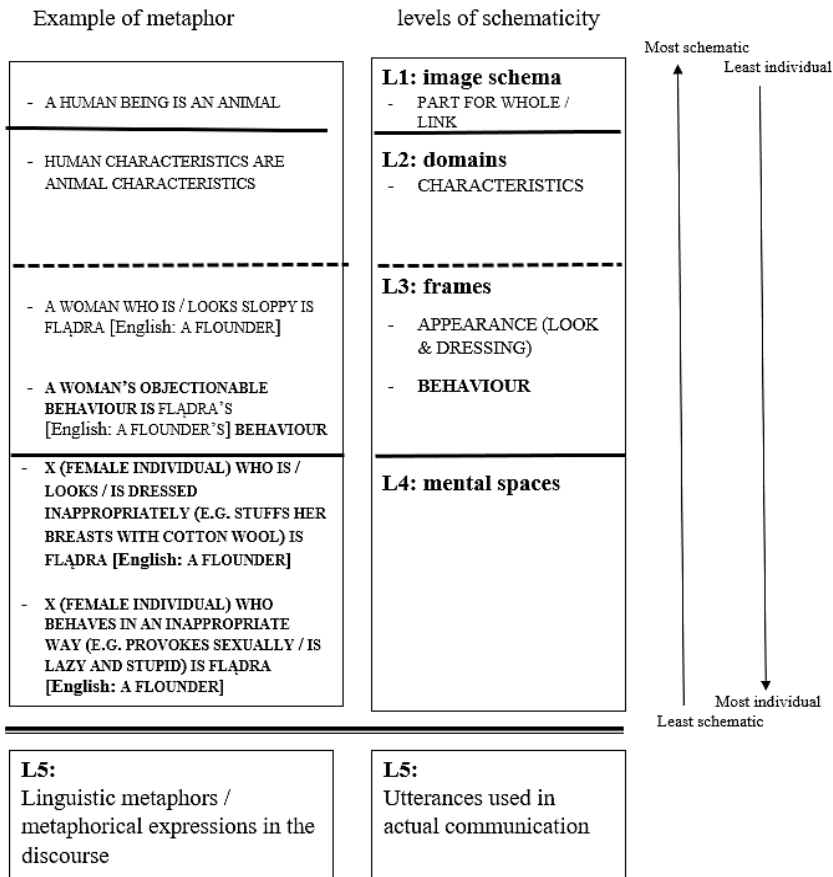


Figure 1: Levels of metaphoricity for six metaphors with the source domain of *flądra* (a flounder) (own source, based on Kövecses, 2017b, p. 323)

Domains and *frames*, placed at the lower levels of schematicity, as seen in Figure 1, are treated by Langacker (1987) likewise, as “a coherent area of conceptualization relative to which semantic units may be characterised” (p. 488). In contradistinction to image schemas, domains and frames are less schematic, and represent a level immediately below image schemas. In our scheme in Figure 1, the lower-level conceptualizations on the domain and frame levels are generated by adding details to the image schema. Hence, under the image schema of PART FOR WHOLE/LINK, the domain of CHARACTERISTICS OF LIVING ORGANISMS can be recognised. This domain refers both to ANIMALS and HUMAN BEINGS. At the level of the given domain, the following metaphors can be triggered: HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS ARE ANIMAL CHARACTERISTICS.

Furthermore, having adopted the claim of Kövecses (2017b, p. 325) that frames “involve more conceptually specific information than domains” and

“elaborate particular aspects of a domain matrix,” we assume that in the case of our metaphors concerning the nickname *flądra*, under the said domain of CHARACTERISTICS, more specific structures of frames can be distinguished, namely the APPEARANCE (LOOK and DRESSING) frame as well as the frame of BEHAVIOUR. While the former frame is already conventionalized in the dictionary, the latter is a novel frame associated with the nickname *flądra*. The domain of HUMAN BEINGS is represented by WOMEN, while the domain of ANIMALS is at this level elaborated into the frame of FLĄDRA [flounder]. The level of these frames seems to generate the following metaphors: A WOMAN WHO IS / LOOKS SLOPPY IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER] and A WOMAN’S OBJECTIONABLE BEHAVIOUR IS FLĄDRA’S [English: A FLOUNDER’S] BEHAVIOUR.

Finally, on the level of *mental spaces*, the domain and /or frame structures are enriched with more specific details, which follows from one’s personal experience and a given context. Mental spaces, defined as partial assemblies constructed by frames and cognitive models, “as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action” (Fauconnier, 2007, p. 351), fill the roles with particular values in actual discourse in specific communicative situations (Kövecses, 2017b, p. 326). In this view, both Langacker’s (2008) term *current discourse space* and van Dijk’s (2015, p. 474) *communicative event* seem to comply with the level of mental spaces. Seen from this perspective, it seems that the level of mental spaces in the case of the investigated metaphors that underlie the nickname *flądra* is represented by numerous instances of metaphor which provide further specifications of any of the already discussed frames (cf. Kövecses, 2017b, p. 341 and his example of mental space for the frame BUILDING). For example, an elaboration of the APPEARANCE frame would be the mental space related with the sentences given in (5a), which refer to the physical look and way of dressing of the women described in the following sentences: “Co? Józek z tobą na randce? Nie bądź śmieszna [...]. A myślisz, że on nie wie, że biust sobie watą wypychasz jak jaka *flądra*? [What? Józek with you on a date? Don’t be funny [...]. And you think he doesn’t know that you stuff your breasts with cotton wool like some kind of *slut* (literally *flounder*)?].

Another elaboration at the level of mental space concerns the BEHAVIOUR frame, which, as we have already noticed, is some kind of an extension of the conventionalized meaning of the nickname *flądra*. This may be illustrated by the examples given in (5b) and (5c), which refer to some offensive and sexually intriguing behaviour of a woman. The novelty in the meaning of *flądra* seems to start at the frame level and continues at the level of mental spaces, as exemplified by the sentences given in (5d)–(5f), which pertain to a woman’s laziness as in (5d); stupidity, annoying character or ugliness as in (5e); and lack of compassion and love as in (5f).

What is common in all the listed examples at the level of mental spaces is that they point to a specific female individual who either looks or behaves in an inappropriate

way. These details are not included in the more schematic APPEARANCE or BEHAVIOUR frames. Thus, in fact, we can extract several metaphors underlying the sentences at the level of mental spaces. However, there seem to be two main patterns of the metaphor at this level: (i) X (FEMALE INDIVIDUAL) WHO IS / LOOKS / IS DRESSED INAPPROPRIATELY (E.G. STUFFS HER BREASTS WITH COTTON WOOL) IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER], and (ii) X (FEMALE INDIVIDUAL) WHO BEHAVES IN AN INAPPROPRIATE WAY (E.G. PROVOKES SEXUALLY / IS LAZY AND STUPID) IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER].

In our novel metaphor, A FEMALE INDIVIDUAL WHO BEHAVES IN AN INAPPROPRIATE WAY (E.G. IS LAZY AND STUPID) IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER], which has not been instantiated in most dictionaries yet, but rather functions ‘unconventionally’ in the contemporary discourse, needs to be analysed on the level of mental spaces. It is this level which deals with unconventional cases, seen as online representations of our understanding of experience in working memory. Frames and domains, in turn, are treated more as conventionalized knowledge structures in long-term memory (Kövecses, 2017b, p. 326).

Remarkably, as explained by Kövecses (2020), apart from these four levels, which pertain to conceptual structures of image schema, domain, frame and mental spaces, and are realised in different schematic hierarchies, “there is of course the level of communication, Level 5, where speaker and hearer use some symbols [linguistic or otherwise] that make manifest, or elaborate, the content of particular mental spaces” (p. 55). Hence, in the case of our nickname *flądra*, particular extracts retrieved from the corpus constitute Level 5, at which communication, not conceptualisation, happens.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, metaphor is a successful construal which helps us to capture the depth and intensity of the phenomenological experience (cf. Gibbs, 1994, p. 125). It seems clear that the chosen hybrid theoretical model, based on *CMA* and Kövecses’s (2017b, 2020) view of the contextual dependence of metaphor, has enabled us to understand the role both discourse and context play in reconstructing the meaning of the *flądra* nickname.

The results obtained in the study reveal that all the three most schematic structures (image schemas, domains and frames) do provide us with all the offline knowledge about the meaning of the *flądra* nickname and are still well acknowledged both in dictionaries and in the discourse. Nevertheless, these conceptual structures do not expose the whole range of the meaning of the *flądra* nickname that is present in today’s discourse. Making use of Kövecses’s (2017b, 2020) claim that, in order to gain the complexity of metaphorical meaning, natural social discourse is required, we have exploited the discourse extracts available in the *NKJP Corpus*. This has enabled us to receive the online understanding of the nickname, realised on the level of mental spaces. Indeed, it is on the level

of mental spaces, during the actual communicative situations, where online two-domain mapping happens. Supposedly, the mapping on the level of mental spaces may also include conceptual integration since integration networks, as claimed by Fauconnier and Turner (2008), are “far richer than the bundles of pairwise bindings considered in recent theories of metaphor” (p. 53). This claim seems to account for our novel *flądra* metaphor, A FEMALE INDIVIDUAL WHO BEHAVES IN AN INAPPROPRIATE WAY (E.G. IS LAZY AND STUPID) IS FLĄDRA [English: A FLOUNDER], not only in the HUMAN BEING-ANIMAL pairing, but also for the emotional element which is blended with the pairing. The emotional labelling that is integrated here involves the speaker’s personal desire to offend some woman, inform her about the speaker’s negative approach and let her feel disrespected. This observation is consistent with the very definition of nicknames, in which the emotional category is an indispensable element (cf. Grochowski, 1996, p. 12).

Finally, the aim of our study of the *flądra* nickname was not only to highlight the role of mental spaces in meaning construction, but also reveal the contemporary ways of thinking about reality, systems of ordering and evaluating the world (cf. Pajdzińska, 2001, p. 34). We hope that the novel meaning of *flądra*, which has not been instantiated in most dictionaries yet, but seems to be significantly present in the awareness of adult users of the Polish language, will be added to the meanings of the nickname. This way, as we believe, our research will contribute to both cognitive semantics and lexicography.

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