Capstone Essay

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My Journey in Kingsborough Community College

I started my education journey on March,2021 at Kingsborough Community College. Soon after, my work-study experience led me to join CUNY Research Scholars Program (CRSP). During the 2021-2022 academic year, I analyzed dozens of articles, familiarized myself with new scholars, and examined their works which were related to our research about language and violent behavior. In this essay, I will go into the specifics of new concepts I learned such as language, metaphor, semantics, etc. And share the knowledge I acquired during my academic journey as an Honor student, and how this experience has been crucial for my growth and development no only as a student, but also as a person and future professional.

Language

Languages have always sparked my interest. Ever since I started learning English as a second language, I thought of it as a tool for human communication. Indeed, this cognitive activity is what distinguishes us from other animals in the Animalia kingdom; what makes our communication different from other animals is that Homo Sapiens (Humans) can connect indefinite meanings to definite symbols and speak through hypothetical situations, as well as to create metaphors and analogies. In the book "Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction" by Catherine Belsey, there is a statement that clearly identifies the importance of Language:

"…language and its symbolic analogies exercise the most crucial determinations in our social relations, our thought process, and our understanding of who and what we are"(Belsey, 2002, p.6). In our CRSP research titled "You already know how to live and speak peacefully! Don't we?" which focused on the relation between language and violent behavior, my viewpoint on languages changed; I realized that language is not just a tool or a "thing", but instead a process. A process that constantly goes through changes. It is the individuals who can alter it, as long as others adopt their changes (Belsey, 2002, p.7). Regardless of these constant changes, such as different languages having different symbols(words) for different concepts, there is one unit which seems to be universal and embedded in all languages: metaphors.

Metaphors

Metaphors are a vital part of the many languages. We often use metaphors and analogies in our speech unconsciously. I came to realize this constant usage of metaphors after getting familiarized with George Lakoff's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which interprets metaphors as linguistic expressions and thought processes (Kucheruk, 2013). But why are we so in need of these metaphors? Can't we just communicate without them? Answer seems to be no; because through language we are not just able to refer to concrete (physical) objects such as a glass, but also to talk about abstract concepts that lack physicality such as law. Metaphors enable us to extend meanings and treat abstract objects as concrete ones. For example, we can use the verb "to break" with both a glass and the law. While breaking a glass is used literally, breaking the law carries figurative meaning. As a result of this cognitive process, we consider the law as a thing, a concrete object that can be broken or bent (Jakubiec, 2022). This realization of mental concepts led me to dig into a new discipline in which metaphors appear to be a drop in the "knowledge" ocean: Cognitive Linguistics.

Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive Linguistics are another important concept I had previously never heard about, therefore I decided to learn more about it during my academic experience. After all the literature review I did for our independent study about law and language, I learned that Cognitive Science explains what mental representations are in our mind, and Cognitive Linguistics explain how these mental entities are expressed through language. Unlike metaphors, understanding the concept of mental representation was very challenging, especially when I tried to imagine mental representation of abstract entities. For example, if my understanding of law, thus mental representation, does not match with yours, how would we effectively talk about it? Unlike the word *glass and* its concreteness, *law is* impossible to indicate in space due to its abstractness. However, abstractness does not disqualify the concept to be used or expressed through symbols in language thanks to our cognitive capacity to create metaphors and apply them in this case.

As I mentioned, during this semester I had the chance to conduct an independent study about law in the legal world and how Kingsborough criminal justice students interpret law in everyday conversations. Even though one might wonder about the relevancy of these two topics, my literature reviews show that cognitive linguistics are embedded in the studies of law; as law cannot function without metaphors. Manzanares (2014) wrote that in our current legal system, this specific metaphor, Morality as Accountancy (Lakoff, 1996), is commonly implemented. He further explained: "if you do something good for someone, that person "owes" you, or is "indebted" to you. Equally, if you carry out an immoral action against someone, that someone can "make you pay" for it". Based to my observations in Criminal Justice class the "you get what you deserve" mindset is very common among students while discussing punishment for

crime. I concluded that, both students and our legal system think through the same metaphor in some cases.

However, there is another metaphor that encompasses the legal system. Kucheruk extensive study (2014) about Legal English showed that there are 4 domains that are used in the legal language. The most common metaphor is a war. For example, lawyers can use victory, defeat, attack or argument war in their legal process. I was not surprised by this finding, because my previous study about language and violent behavior also showed that we use war as a metaphor in everyday language (such as, immigration is invasion). In other words, legal language and discourses might possibly overlap with usage of our everyday language and legal language. Unlike everyday conversation, legal language is loaded with technical words and phrases.

Methodology

Learning about new concepts and doing literature reviews are not enough to conduct research. Methodology plays an important role in conducting research. In my experience, Powner's book about "Empirical Research and Writing" has been my guidebook, since I was not familiar with empirical research. Aside from mastering writing skills, I have learned about content analysis which is broadly applied in social science studies. This method is very practical in language-related studies as well. Powner(2015) defines this content analysis as a technique used to analyze and infer a variety of things from what people say or write (p.118).Additionally to content analysis, I learned about another methodology, word-frequency analysis, and how to apply it by using software program Atlas.ti. to conduct our research. This software program allowed us to construct the linguistic environment of a group whose speech or text we analyzed. Linguistic environment is a collection of all lexicons to which a group is exposed. Within that

environment, it is possible to reconstruct used metaphors in order to understand the target group. For example, in our study of relation between language and violent behavior, we were trying to understand linguistic environment of the January 6th insurrectionists and their supporters. First, I collected social media posts shared under certain hashtags such as #StopTheSteal, #BuildtheWall and etc. Linguistic environment of like-minded individuals shows that; a group of people who believe in the rigged election(2020 United States Presidential election) and supported the January 6th insurrection also believe in the "immigration is invasion" metaphor. With the help of software programs and content analysis, I was able to conduct that research and I plan to apply the same methodology for my future studies.

My experience in CRSP as an Honor student has played an enormous role in my growth and success. I would have never imagined having such a wonderful and eye-opening experience when I first came to KBCC, little did I know I would find myself enjoying the research and analysis as much, if not more, as my classes. It has allowed me to discover not just new research and study skills, but also many skills for daily use such as a more profound analysis of language, society, social justice issues and many other everyday situations. I plan to make use of these and the many other acquired skills to help me in what is left of my academic career, as well as my professional and personal life. Kingsborough and the CRSP program have given me many great experiences and taught me many things; from the professors to the many topics covered, there was always truly a lot of learning involved in and outside of the classrooms at any given time. I am looking forward to pursuing my academic goals such as transferring to a four-year institution and getting more research opportunities, so that I can get closer to my ideal job as a future academic.

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