

“ATEACHERISAGARDENER”: METAPHORIC CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF “TEACHER/ TEACHING” IN INTERNET MEMES AND METAPHOR NICHES

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a reflection on the argumentative effects of metaphor, from the overall perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. The focus is on the way in which a given cognitive-discursive orientation can be approached in this area of study, which contemplates the interweaving between the cognitive and discursive dimensions of metaphorical language. To explore this goal, we have analyzed a corpus formed by internet memes and metaphor niches about teaching and education, in which figurative language is characterized by situated metaphors, intertwined with frames and conceptual metaphors. The analysis seeks to identify the elements of the online dimension of cognition (vehicles and situated metaphors) and those of the off-line dimension: conceptual metaphors and underlying frames. The results seem to corroborate the hypothesis that the cognitive-discursive thread woven by the articulation between stable and unstable instances of cognition conducts, with clear rhetorical force, a certain way of looking at the target domain, according to the intended point-of-view.

Keywords: Metaphor; Mappings; Cognition; Argumentation.

RESUMO

Este artigo propõe uma reflexão sobre os efeitos argumentativos da metáfora, a partir da perspectiva da Linguística Cognitiva. O foco está em como uma determinada orientação discursivo-cognitiva pode ser abordada nessa área de estudo, de forma a contemplar o entrelace entre as dimensões cognitiva e discursiva da linguagem metafórica. Para explorar esse objetivo, analisamos um corpus formado por memes da internet e nichos metafóricos sobre ensino e educação, nos quais a linguagem figurada é caracterizada por metáforas situadas, entrelaçadas com frames e metáforas conceptuais. A análise busca identificar os elementos da dimensão online da cognição (veículos e metáforas situadas) e aqueles da dimensão off-line (metáforas conceptuais e frames subjacentes). Os resultados da pesquisa parecem corroborar a hipótese de que o fio cognitivo-discursivo tecido pela articulação entre instâncias estáveis e instáveis da cognição conduz, com clara força retórica, a uma certa forma de olhar o domínio alvo, de acordo com o ponto de visto pretendido.

Palavras-chave: Metáfora; Mapeamentos; Cognição; Argumentação.

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INTRODUCTION

The classical cognitivist approach to metaphor shifts its *locus* from language to thought, which characterizes the very notion of 'conceptual metaphor'. Thus, within a more orthodox cognitivist view, metaphor in language use seems to play a secondary role in the production of meaning. More recent research, however, has shifted, again, the focus of metaphor studies from *system* to *use* (STEEN, 2006), always seeking, however, to establish a link between these two levels of meaning. Within this perspective, this paper aims at exploring some of the issues that arise from a theoretical and empirical articulation between the cognitive and discursive dimensions of metaphor, aligning itself with research which follows what can be regarded as the cognitive-discursive trend in metaphor studies (LOW et al, 2010; SEMINO, 2008; ZANOTTO et al, 2008; CAMERON; MASLEN, 2010).

In the present research, I argue for a multi-dimensional interaction (involving, in some cases, *continua* of different nature) to understand metaphor in use. The focus is on the interaction between:

- a) language and thought
- b) system and use
- c) emergence and stability and, more fundamentally;
- d) the socially, culturally and discursively constructed dimension of the individual as a member of a discourse community, on the one hand, and their individual, partly creative, partly reverberating use/production of metaphorical language for argumentative purposes.

Studies within this recent trend have often been developed, theoretically and analytically, on the basis of concepts and units of analysis, such as *systematic metaphors* (CAMERON; MASLEN, 2010), *metaphorical niches* and *situated metaphors* (VEREZA, 2013a, 2013b, 2016), which seek to break with the certain rigidity of the founding concept of the cognitivist approach: the conceptual metaphor; without, however, losing sight of it.

Within this perspective, this paper aims at investigating situated metaphors in a corpus consisting of internet memes about teaching/teacher (the target domain), in which figurative language is characterized by new or conventional metaphors, intertwined with frames and underlying conceptual metaphors. The analysis sought to identify in the corpus elements of the *online* (more unstable) dimension of cognition: metaphorical vehicles and situated metaphors; and those pertaining to the *off-line* (more stable) dimension: conceptual metaphors and underlying frames.

1 SITUATED METAPHORS

Situated metaphors (VEREZA, 2013a, 2016), as well as systematic metaphors (CAMERON & MASLEN, 2010), belong to the cognitive-discursive dimension of figurative language in use, since they are phenomena pertinent to a specific discursive event. However, unlike systematic metaphors, situated metaphors are deliberate and can be approached as a powerful argumentative tool in the construction of the 'object of discourse' (MONDADA & DUBOIS, 2003).

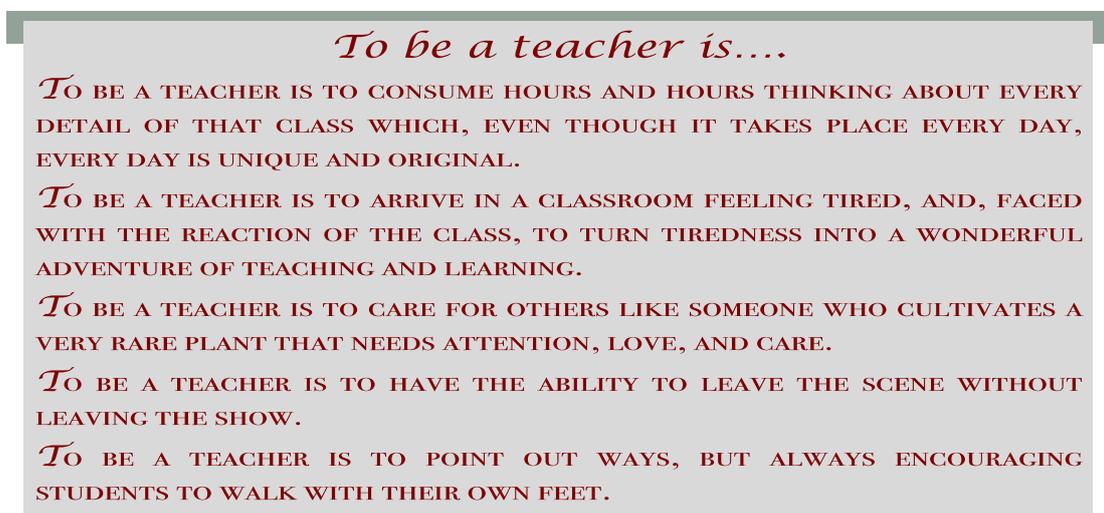
To what extent a metaphor can be considered ‘deliberate’ has been the subject of heated debate among experts in metaphor, particularly Gibbs (2011) and Steen (2011). While the former questions the very existence of the deliberate metaphor, raising the possibility that it is not different from other types of metaphor, the latter suggests that when a speaker or writer uses a metaphor deliberately, i.e., uses a metaphor to make the interlocutor deliberately understand a thing in terms of something else, the sender forces the recipient to perceive the source domain as a domain outside the current sphere of speech and, consequently, see the target from that perspective (STEEN, 2011). By ‘deliberate’, in the case of situated metaphors, it is meant that the use of figurative language is the focus of a metalinguistic or metadiscursive strategy, which constructs the object of discourse with reference to another domain of experience (the source domain), establishing an argument by analogy. This characteristic of the situated metaphors is, as Steen (2011) suggests, a characteristic of all deliberate metaphors. Such a strategy is often employed to develop, discursively and cognitively, an argument or point of view on a particular topic (the target domain), leading the reader / listener to “see the target from that perspective” (ibid, p.55).

Situated metaphors can be implicit or explicit, that is, linguistically evident or not. Cognitive mappings (source domain elements mapped upon target domain elements) that emerge from situated metaphors can be textually developed in short texts or metaphorical niches, that is, longer passages inserted in a text (usually in the form of paragraphs), or even constituting an entire text. A metaphor niche (VEREZA, 2010, 2013a; 2013b) would be an example of a text that is constructed metaphorically by exploring a situated metaphor through the development of local mappings. In the present study, situated metaphors are investigated in shorter but pragmatically complete communicative acts (phrases found in internet memes), as well as in two metaphor niches.

2 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The selection of the corpus analysed was motivated by a card (Figure 1) which was given to a teacher, a member of the author’s research group, by one of her secondary school students, on teacher’s day.

Figure 1- Teacher’s day card



The message of the card consisted of five sentences, all extolling the attributes or qualities of a teacher. Four of these sentences use figurative language to describe such positive qualities:

- a) To be a teacher is to arrive in the classroom feeling tired, and, faced with the reaction of the class, to turn tiredness into a wonderful adventure of teaching and learning.
- b) To be a teacher is to care for others like someone who cultivates a very rare plant that needs attention, love and care.
- c) To be a teacher is to have the ability to leave the scene without leaving the show.
- d) To be a teacher is to point out ways, but always encouraging students to walk with their own feet.

On the basis of the underlined vehicle terms, the following metaphoric uses of language were identified in each of these sentences:

In (a) teaching and learning are explicitly framed as “a wonderful adventure”, which takes the place of tiredness through the action of a (good) teacher. In (b), through the use of the comparing term “like”, it can be inferred that a teacher is metaphorically portrayed as a (loving and caring) gardener: a person who *cultivates a (rare) plant*. In (c), a teacher is discursively and cognitively constructed as an actor/actress (who *leaves the scene / the show*). Finally, in (d), it can be inferred that teachers are conceptualized as guides, as they *point out ways* and *encourage students* (travellers/ walkers) *to walk with their own feet*.

The situated metaphors, thus, which emerge from these local mappings are:

- a) *Teaching is an adventure*
- b) *A teacher is a gardener*
- c) *A teacher is an actor/actress*
- d) *A teacher is a guide*

To explore these situated metaphors and verify their productivity as evidenced in Internet memes, adopting the methodological procedures suggested in Vereza (2018), a Google web search was conducted, with the following search terms, structured in a simile format: ‘a teacher is like a gardener’, ‘a teacher is like an actor’ and a ‘a teacher is like a guide¹. The same procedure was followed with the Google Images option, where Internet memes with the same situated metaphors could be searched.

Examples of the results of the Google search, identified in memes and metaphor niches focusing on the situated metaphor (b), *A teacher is a gardener*, are analysed in section 3.

¹ The situated metaphor in (a), “teaching is an adventure”, was discarded as it was found to be too vague and perhaps even too abstract to be approached as a source domain, with clear elements to be mapped upon target domains. The first definition of adventure from The Merriam-Webster online dictionary is “*an exciting or remarkable experience*”. Adventure’, thus, implies a highly evaluative sense, but not a clearly metaphorical one – or at least, not deriving from a well-defined source domain (which could be simply “an adventurous journey” or an “exciting and remarkable” bodily experience).

3 TEACHERS AS GARDENERS

The situated metaphor *a teacher is a gardener* was found to be quantitatively the most productive one, as it was used as the focus of several Internet memes (approximately 30), which explored it with slightly different local mappings. Figures 2, 3 and 4 are examples of such memes.

Figure 2²- Meme 1

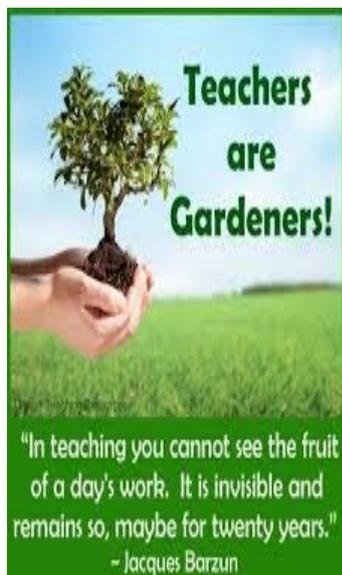


Figure 3³ - Meme 2

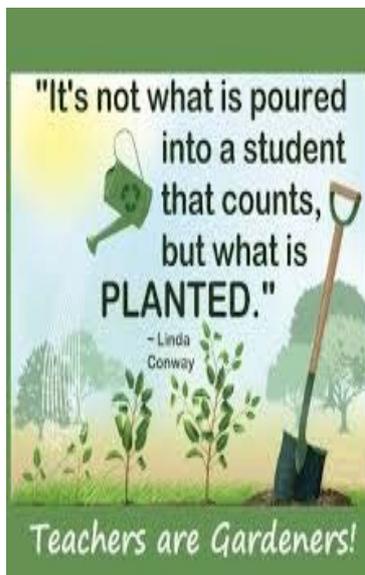
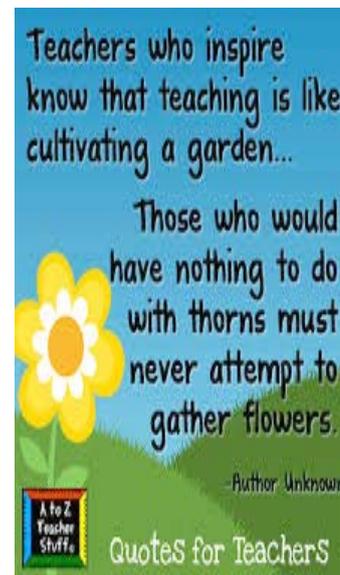


Figure 4⁴ - Meme 3



In Figure 2, the elements from the source domain which are mapped upon the target domain are *fruit* and the *gardener's long wait to see the fruit growing*. Through analogy, it can be inferred that the fruit is the expected result of teaching, which is learning. By the same token, the gardener's wait to see the outcome of his/her work (teaching) is metaphorically transferred to the domain of education: the teacher does not see the impact of his/her teaching immediately, as this will only flourish during the student's (the plant's) adult life - in twenty years time.

In Figure 3, another mapping is proposed, as students are seen not as plants, but as the soil where these will be planted. The image schema (JOHNSON, 1987) of 'recipient' is evoked, as water maybe *poured into de soil* (students' minds). However, as teachers are gardeners, they do not just pour water into the soil; instead, they place seeds in it, i.e., they plant. A soil with water is bare; a soil with seeds, on the other hand, is fertile, allowing for the growth of plants. An entailment (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980) of this metaphor is that learning is the plant that will grow in students' minds as a result of the gardener's (the teacher's) action.

Finally, in Figure 3, the mappings constructed cognitive and discursively, on the basis of the situated metaphor *a (an inspiring) teacher is a gardener*, seem to be of a more complex nature, probably requiring more inferential work on the part of the reader. A gardener, dealing with the

2 From: < <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/472948398350015590>>. Access 15 Sept. 2018.

3 From: < <https://vigornotrigor.wordpress.com/2014/07/08/teachers-are-like-gardeners/>>. Access 15 Sept. 2018

4 From: < <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/217087644508394454/>>. Access 20 Sept. 2018.

plants he/she cultivates, should not ignore their thorns if the ultimate aim of his/her work is to gather flowers. It is reasonable to suppose that it is part of common sense that a rose, a likely candidate for being the prototype (ROSH, 1973) of a flower, has thorns, which, despite their potential for causing minor wounds, do not affect the beauty and splendour of the rose. Roses and thorns are interconnected: in order to gather roses, a gardener must account for their thorns. In the domain of education, when conceptualizing a teacher as a gardener, the negativity of the thorn and its connection with the flower are mapped upon the target element 'difficult situations' or, possibly, the more specific element 'difficult student', which are highlighted in the mapping. In the domain of education, the positive gains of teaching, or possibly the good students (*the flowers*), are not disassociated from the apparently more challenging situations or students (*the thorns*).

The metaphor niche in Text 1 explores, textually and cognitively, the situated metaphor *a teacher is a gardener*.

Text 1⁵- Metaphor niche *a teacher is a gardener*

Being a good teacher is a lot like being a good gardener. Good gardeners are optimistic and patient. They are able to see the potential in those struggling young seedlings and enjoy watching them grow, develop and bloom. They give special tender loving care to those few plants that are struggling and not thriving.

They don't blame the plant when it's not performing well; they check the growing conditions. Is the soil the plant is growing in suitable or does it need amending? Does the plant need more water; does the plant need less water? Does the plant need more sunshine; does the plant need less sunshine.

Good gardeners are good problem solvers, but realize that sometimes no matter what you do, the plant still will not grow the way you would like it to."

The local mappings identified in this niche somehow explain the metaphor explicitly stated in the beginning of the niche: *being a good teacher is a lot like being a good gardener*. The situated metaphor specifies the type of gardener who should serve as a model to a teacher: a *good* gardener (not any gardener). In other words, the situated metaphor has a prescriptive, and therefore, evaluative, and not just a descriptive character. The textual development aims at describing the elements of the source domain - the attributes of a good gardener and what they should do -, which are highlighted through the mapping.

The local mappings developed in the niche, thus, are the following: the source element *gardener* is projected upon the element *teacher*; the element *plant/seedling* is projected upon the target element *student/pupil*, and the frame elements *soil, growing conditions, water and sunshine* upon the target elements *favourable learning conditions* and *effective teaching initiatives*, as shown in table 1:

5 From: <<https://vigornotrigor.wordpress.com/2014/07/08/teachers-are-like-gardeners/>> Access: 20 Sept. 2018.

Table 1: mappings from source to target elements (teacher as gardener- 1)

Source domain	Target domain
Garden	Classroom
Gardener	Teacher
Seeds/plants	Pupils
Plants which struggle and not thrive	Pupils with learning difficulties
Soil conditions; water; gardeners' positive assessment and intervention	Learning conditions; Effective teaching initiatives
Growing	Learning

An interesting feature of this particular metaphor niche is that the mappings between source and target domains are all inferred on the basis of the situated metaphor made explicit in the opening sentence. (*Being a good teacher is a lot like being a good gardener*). Apart from this sentence, the elements of the target domain *teacher* (within the overall frame *education*) are all implicit and have to be inferred cognitively, as there is no explicit mention of them in the co-text. The author, then, relies on the reader's inferential skills to establish the mappings from source to target elements, counting, therefore on distributed cognition (sociocultural sharing of frames (FILLMORE, 2006)), in this case, the frames of *gardening* and of *education*).

Text 2⁶- Metaphor niche: teachers as carpenters and gardeners

Carpenters have to work in a controlled environment. Their job is to use their tools to shape each product to a predetermined design and function. [...]. Mistakes are to be avoided and taking risks is dangerous to say the least. The finished products are perfected to fulfil a specific job/specialism for life making it obsolete once future requirements change. The carpenter's workshop is a perfect analogy for the needs of the 20th century and its classrooms.

The Gardener's life is messier but just as fulfilling. [...] Humans' long childhood lends itself to the gardener's approach and should lean [...] teachers to a role, like the gardener's, of planning and nurturing a nourishing and dynamic space where any number of variables might impact on progress but children learn to adapt and find their space in a ever-changing ecosystem. The gardener is a great analogy for a 21st century teacher. [...] Educators in 2018 must realise that the 21st century world is constantly challenging everyone with new and unpredictable variables at an increasing rate. [...]Plants look after their own growth within a nurturing environment and it should be the same from school-goers.

In Text 2, there are, in fact, two guiding situated metaphors: *teachers are carpenters* and *teachers are gardeners*. Each one might be seen as a separate metaphor niche, but, argumentatively, the former, the carpenter metaphor, seems to be explored, in a rather indirect way, as a paradigm of what teachers, nowadays, should not be like or should not do. What they, instead, should be like and should do is presented through the development of the gardener metaphor.

6 From: <<https://eduwells.com/2017/12/18/why-teachers-are-now-gardeners-not-carpenters/>>. Access 15 Sept. 2018.

The contrast between the two metaphors reinforces the advisability of following the gardener, not the carpenter model: controlled environment Vs. a nourishing and dynamic space where any number of variables might impact on progress, on the one hand, and, on the other, to use tools to shape each product to a predetermined design and function Vs. to look after one’s own growth within a nurturing environment. In the gardener niche, what is highlighted in the source domain are the elements which, together, weave the point of view intended: “*the gardener is a great analogy for a 21st century teacher.*” In other words, the gardener’s attributes (frame elements) are selected to the extent they fulfil or not the author’s argumentative purpose. Following Vereza (2016), this would be a clear example of ‘selective mapping’.

Leaving aside the carpenter metaphor, and the argumentative contrast established through it, the mappings from source to target domains in the gardener metaphor - the focus of the present analysis - are established as shown in table 2

Table 2- mappings from source to target elements (teacher as gardener- 2)

Source domain	Target domain
Gardener	Teacher
Nourishing	Educating/teaching
Nourishing environment	Classroom
Unpredictability in the ecosystem variables	Unpredictability in the classroom variables
Plants looking after themselves	Pupils autonomous learning (inferred)

4 THE PERVASIVENESS OF THE TEACHER AS GARDENER METAPHOR: ONLINE AND OFF-LINE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

The large number of examples of different instances of the situated metaphor *a teacher is a gardener* (or, in a broader sense, *teaching is gardening*), found in several texts of different genres (memes, phrases, self-help texts), seems to evidence the pervasiveness of this metaphor in the English language. This seems to corroborate a hypothesis that *gardener*, as a metaphor for *teacher*, is in fact a conceptual metaphor (A TEACHER IS A GARDENER), which licences a great number of different local mappings, developed on the basis of the situated realization of the conceptual metaphor. The situated metaphor (*a teacher is a gardener*) explored in the cases analysed, thus, coincides with its conceptual counterpart.

Another hypothesis is that there is a conceptual metaphor with a higher degree of generality, EDUCATING IS GARDENING, whose comprehensiveness goes beyond the classroom scenario. Baptist’s situated conceptualization of the curriculum as a garden is an example of the situated exploration of this metaphor:

Gardeners speak of the process of making gardens as an act of trust and possibility. Each season brings different climatic conditions, opportunities to experiment, and new varieties to seed. If the gardener attempts to completely control the “event” of the garden, these possibilities may never emerge, rather, they become lost in intent. The metaphoric possibilities ignited by the idea of garden as a metaphor

for curriculum and for curriculum inquiry reaches into the future with a promise of what could otherwise be restructuring habitual patterns of knowing and seeing. (BAPTIST, 2002. p. 25)

The brief analyses carried out earlier in this paper focussed on different mappings to the target domain *teacher/teaching*. The *gardener/gardening* metaphor, according to Wegner and Nuckles (2015), is, likewise, recruited in the conceptualization of the conventional counterpart of teaching, which is *learning*:

Metaphors seem to be a promising research tool which should receive further attention for research on conceptions of learning, because it seems indeed to matter whether students see learning as a matter of training their brains or tending their garden. (WEGNER; NUCLES, 2015, p. 107).

In their reasearch on metaphoric conceptions of learning, the authors have found that some students see learnig as “a plant that is growing, because you thrive and prosper inside.” (ibid., p. 102)

The conceptual metaphor EDUCATING IS GARDENING also seem to apply to education within the family scenario, transcending the school domain, referring more specifically to parenting (raising a child). The coherence of the metaphor, in both cases (parenting and teaching), is established through similar mappings, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5⁷- Parenting is gardening (1)



Figure 6⁸- Parenting is gardening (2)

NURTURE YOUR BLOSSOM WELL...

Parents are to children what gardeners are to flowers. The flower has to blossom one day to beautify the garden...but it does need that gentle touch of love and care you know



7 From: < <https://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/mrsfunnybones/why-good-parenting-is-like-gardening/>>. Access 20 Sept. 2018.

8 From: < <https://www.slideshare.net/Arjumand01/good-parenting>>. Access 20 Sept. 2018.

The situated metaphor explored in both memes (Figures 5 and 6), *parenting is gardening*, seems to be coherent with the one explored in the memes in Figures 2, 3 and 4, as well as in texts 1 and 2: *teaching is gardening* (or *a teacher is a gardener*). They both seem to be anchored by the superordinate conceptual metaphor education is gardening, a more stable, *off-line* cognitive representation. By the same token, all the local mappings developed from the situated metaphors discussed here are also nurtured by (and interact with) frames of an *off-line* nature. After all, these mappings, in most cases, require inferences which resort to shared cultural frames. Metaphoric language in use in the examples analysed, thus, relies quite heavily upon the activation of the frames of gardening, on the one hand, and of teaching and parenting, on the other. This interaction between the episodic and the more stable levels of cognition, therefore, is a paramount condition for the production of figurative meaning in language use.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

A relevant issue which emerges from the brief analyses and discussion carried out in this paper is the articulation between the local metaphorical construction of the object of discourse (*teaching is like...*) and the more stable cognitive instances (such as conceptual metaphors and frames). It is our contention that a cognitive- discursively oriented study of metaphor in use can benefit, theoretically and analytically, from considering the way these two levels of cognition (*online* and *off-line*) are interwoven in discourse.

The argumentative dimension of metaphoric language in use is another issue worth investigating, particularly in cases like those studied in this paper, in which situated metaphors are explored through local mappings. In the metaphoric development of a particular argumentative orientation, the process of highlighting and hiding elements of the source domain, typical of both metaphor and analogy (FERREIRA, 2018), is used as a cognitive-discursive resource of great rhetorical effect. The characteristic of metaphor, described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), of selecting specific elements of the source domain, and hiding others can be identified in our analyses as the rhetorical mechanism and cognitive propeller of a particular point of view (an argument or a stance) woven textually and cognitively through local projections or mappings.

All the examples from our corpus put forward a particular view of teaching, of education, of parenting. The 'nurturing' element in the source domain of gardening seems to be highlighted in most cases, which has obvious implications for the conceptualizations of these areas of human experience and, therefore, for the way a society or particular groups within society act upon them. What is being promoted in this case is the view of a *nurturing* teacher or parent, one who does not avoid the thorns of the flowers in their garden, who is patient enough to wait for the plants to grow on their own, who cares for the conditions in which plants will grow without interfering directly in their growth and one who does not simply pour water into the plant without caring for the quality of the seed, the soil and the light. This particular view of teaching and parenting, explored through the gardening metaphor (and others, such as the *lighthouse*, *light* and the *guide*⁹ metaphors) seems

9 Example: A good *teacher is like a guide*. They have been down the road before and will show you where to go next. From: <<https://doublebassblog.org/2016/06/good-music-teacher.html>> Access 30 Sept. 2018.

to be particularly fertile in memes, phrases and short texts found in the Internet, most belonging to the self-help trend of our era.

Figure 7¹⁰ - Example of lighthouse metaphor

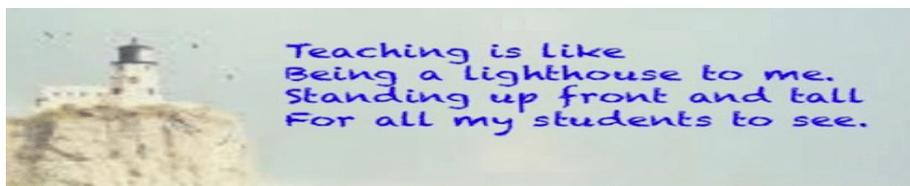


Figure 8¹¹ - Example of lighth metaphor



Within this perspective, the exploration of situated metaphors in discourse, through selective mappings and in constant dialogue with more stable cognitive representations, plays a powerful argumentative role in both constructing a point of view, guiding a stance and/or reinforcing (or challenging) well-established conceptualizations. It is hoped that these insights, no matter how modest they might be, may throw a few seeds in the already fertile soil of research on metaphor in use.

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