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Problem-Solution Texts: A conceptual metaphor approach to vocabulary instruction

Saturday 21 September 2024 11:10 (1 hour)

As problem solving is an integral part of many professional and academic fields, “problem-solution” is a commonly taught rhetorical structure in English for academic purposes courses (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). However, textbooks that feature problem-solution often neglect to provide a systematic account of the core vocabulary and how it is used (e.g. Koester et al., 2012, Swales & Feak, 2004). This presentation applies a novel approach drawing on the works of Lakoff and Johnson, applying their theory of conceptual metaphors to transparently explicate the metaphorical logic behind problem vocabulary. It also draws on Weirzbicka’s (1988) related work on the semantics of grammar to explain features which are often dismissed as arbitrary, such as preposition usage. The analysis reveals three major categories of vocabulary items used to describe problems in academic texts in economics and engineering, lacks, barriers, and constraints. It then continues the analysis to reveal how commonly collocated “solution” vocabulary logically fits into each category. The presentation ends by describing activities to reinforce the vocabulary items, their grammar, and collocations, and proposes other categories for further investigation.

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