Journey through the writing process: Metaphors of thesis writing experience

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Abstract

This paper aimed to investigate metaphorical images used by master's students in order to gain an insight into their schemata for thinking about the process of master's thesis writing. Semi-structured interviews on the topic of master's thesis writing with three students coming from humanities, social sciences and natural sciences served as a corpus from which the data were extracted. The paper analysed participants' unconscious use of metaphorical language in their narratives, mirroring their perception of the thesis writing process. The results revealed that the participants' personal experience revolves around the concept of journey as the central image they share and the journey metaphor, along with a group of related specific metaphors, serves to illustrate the complexity of the writing process itself.

Key words: writing process; metaphor; journey; master's thesis; writing experience.

1. Introduction

More than four decades ago, a number of researchers became interested in the specific relation between language and mind. Out of this interest and the works these researchers published on the topic, grew a branch of linguistics as a response to the then existing and prevailing approach that considered linguistic patterns solely internal and limited to language. While this traditional approach saw metaphor primarily as a poetic and rhetorical device, following a different line of research, a group of linguists (such as Lakoff, Langacker, Fauconnier, Talmy, etc.[1]) examined linguistic structures beyond and outside language. They claimed that the function of these structures is to express the meaning as the meaning is central to language. Therefore, in the 1980s, the research focus shifted from language to cognition and laid the foundations for a new theoretical approach to metaphor, i.e. a cognitive lin-

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[1] Lakoff worked on metaphoric reasoning (as early as 1980), Langacker on Space Grammar (1987, 1991), Fauconnier on mental spaces and with Turner on Blending theory, Talmy on Framing theory, etc.

guistic approach which defines metaphor as understanding one concept in terms of another or more specifically one conceptual domain in terms of another. Cognitive linguistics is committed to exploring the integrity between meaning and form as the language reflects cognition and is best studied in the context.

In 1980, the publication of the seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*, written by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, marked the beginning of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). According to CMT, metaphors are much more than merely ornamental ways of using language but rather ways of thinking and knowing. CMT focuses on cognitive processes and patterns behind linguistic representations claiming that metaphor is not simply an aspect of language but it is fundamental to human thought as "most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 56). In other words, metaphor is primarily a matter of thinking, since metaphorical structures underlie human thought and actions and they are secondarily a matter of language. This is evident in the way speakers use them pervasively in every type of discourse and regard them mainly as a conventional way of talking. Taylor (1984: 5) explains that "[f]ar from being a mere linguistic decoration, metaphor comes to be seen as a ubiquitous feature of our thinking and our discourse, the basis of the conceptual systems by means of which we understand and act within our worlds."

Every analysis of metaphors attempts to clarify and justify the use of certain metaphorical expressions. We live and think in terms of metaphors and even though we do this unconsciously their use is not a matter of chance but it indicates certain patterns of thought and perception. We do not use them as rhetorical tools but they represent the structures we cannot live, think and speak without. Building upon these new and original ideas of Lakoff & Johnson, abundance of research has been conducted so far, which confirmed, added and broadened their original assumptions. Metaphor research in the late 1990s and 2000 onwards observes the language of metaphors through the development of various discourse and corpus approaches which set the scene for the analysis of the use of everyday language in order to better understand metaphor. This resulted in a large pool of the existing research on the use of metaphorical language in various types of discourse and settings such as literature, politics, science, advertising, media, education, etc. (Cameron, 2003; Cameron & Deignan 2006; Kövecses, 2005; Semino, 2008).

Metaphorical thinking seems to play a highly significant role in conceptualization of learning and education in general. Elliott (1984: 39) states that "[m]etaphors are widely used in educational discussion and fulfil a variety of functions, such as introducing fresh perspectives, making illuminating comparisons and contrasts, picking out kinds of phenomena not yet named, emphasis, illustration, enlivening dull writing, and many others." As such,

metaphors are an integral part of everyday educational narrative be it produced by educators or learners or in Elliot's (1984: 39) words: "The vast majority of such metaphors are only transient waves in the sea of everyday educational reflection."

Education seems to be a very fertile ground for offering various perspectives on metaphor use and a significant number of authors have used the CMT in order to examine the use of metaphorical expressions in educational context investigating how both teachers and students negotiate figurative language in educational setting. Pavičić Takač & Molnar (2015), for example, investigated metaphors of teaching and learning processes unconsciously employed by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Massengill Shaw & Mahlios (2008) also looked at pre-service teachers to examine the metaphors of teaching and literacy. McGrath's study (2006), on the other hand, examined in-service Brazilian English language teachers' use of metaphors and similies related to their perceptions about the ELT books they used for teaching. Some studies focused on gaining insights into metaphorical language by using metaphor elicitation method (Seferoğlu et al, 2009; Paulson & Armstrong, 2011) while others concentrated on the examination of unconsciously expressed metaphors that appeared in educational discourse (Armstrong, 2007; Kim & Danforth, 2012; Northcote & Fetherston, 2006; Paulson & Kendall Theado, 2015). These studies deal with metaphor focusing on the issues such as instruction, supervision (from the perspective of both students and teachers), feedback, and cooperation, so as to enable the beliefs and ideas to be reflectively and critically examined, which in turn may help improve precisely these aspects of education. However, metaphors students use to express their experiences of writing a thesis seem to be, to date, underexplored and this paper therefore attempts to look into this aspect of writing and its conceptualization.

2. Methodology

This paper reports on a segment of a larger research study[2] which was aimed to explore the thesis writing process and all it entails, including its potential difficulties and rewards that come at the end. The research reported on in this paper focuses on the usage of topic-specific figurative language while describing the experience of writing a master's thesis. The systematic analysis is based on the metaphorical expressions used unconsciously in the narrative of thesis writers while describing their personal experience of the

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[2] The study was part of the COST project - COST Action IS1401 (Strengthening Europeans' Capabilities by Establishing the European Literacy Network).

writing process. Having examined the metaphors rooted in the thesis writers' everyday language, the analysis focused on the central concept i.e. conceptual metaphor that is dominant in the context of thesis writing process.

The data were gathered from the semi-structured interviews with three female participants who obtained their master's degree at different faculties of Tuzla University. The participants came from humanities, social sciences and natural sciences therefore giving the broadness to the study as writing a master's thesis in literature, for example, is rather different from writing the thesis in one of the natural sciences. The participants completed their master's degrees no longer than six weeks prior to the interview, which proved to be especially valuable in terms of the obtained data reliability and validity. The interview was designed to probe into the interviewees' personal experience of master's thesis writing process in its entirety. The subjects in the study were instructed to verbally describe every stage of the process of writing their master's theses including their actions and feelings. While doing so, the subjects heavily relied on metaphorical language. The metaphors were not elicited directly from the interviewees, as this was not the primary focus of the study, but surfaced as an interesting and valuable contribution. All interviews were recorded and transcribed resulting in a large pool of data. The data driven meta-linguistic analysis was then employed of the metaphors the participants unconsciously expressed while answering the specific open-ended questions targeting individual stages of their thesis writing. The analysis of the collected data consisted of the following steps:

- determining target domain;
- identifying metaphorical expressions in participants' narratives;
- classifying the identified metaphors and
- isolating and elaborating on the most prominent metaphor.

After grouping metaphorical expressions into metaphor themes, several concepts converged into the overarching concept of journey. Owing to space limitations, the analysis will be confined to the journey metaphor which stands out as the most prominent in the overall data.

3. Analysis

As this paper is an attempt to extend the existing research on the use of metaphorical language in educational discourse, the following part presents the analysis of the data. Due to the extensive amount of data extracted, various metaphors that surfaced in the interviews are realized by a significantly large number of metaphorical expressions, which consequently contributed to the complexity of the classification process. A detailed analysis of the transcribed material enabled us to monitor emergent concepts as the interviews unfolded. The CMT was applied in close examination of the meta-

phorical expressions that were made available as part of the participants' language repertoire when talking about a particular topic, i.e. thesis writing process. The entire thesis writing process includes more than the writing itself, the stages such as finding a topic, choosing a supervisor, conducting preliminary research, collecting and reading relevant literature, collecting data, drafting, revising, and finally completing the entire process with a defence. The stages themselves might be responsible for the emergence of one metaphorical concept that seems to run through all three interviews exhibiting that interviewees conceptualize the process of writing a master's thesis in terms of a journey.

Journey is based on the experience in a three-dimensional space and is therefore a common source domain in conceptual metaphors. It facilitates comprehension of complex processes such as that of a change that people undergo in life, which helps them prepare for potential future experiences. Thinking in terms of a journey gives people a sense of direction and enables them to predict, to a certain extent, what might occur next in this process of change. Journey as a source domain is commonly applied to the conceptualization of life in general as well as different stages and activities it encompasses. As the process of writing also encompasses different stages and activities which create the synergy of change, it comes as no surprise that the conceptualization of journey underlies the understanding of the writing process itself.

Metaphors facilitate the communication of ideas and are a powerful tool allowing for the interpretation of metaphors to be used in order to gain direct insight into the participants' thoughts and beliefs about the writing process. The data driven qualitative research of the collected corpus has shown that structured patterns of metaphorical thought can be identified and described in the discourse related to writing a master's thesis. Various conceptual metaphors involving different domains of physical experience were identified in the corpus but paramount is the domain of journey based on the source-path-goal image schema[3] which seems to be inevitable in the conceptualization of any process including the writing process itself. The source-path-goal schema serves as a basis for the mappings of the journey metaphor since the journey itself includes a source (a place from which we start), a path that we pass in a certain direction and our goal i.e. our destination. Pervasiveness of the journey metaphor in human conceptualization is best described by Lakoff & Turner:

> Our understanding of life as a journey uses our knowledge about journeys. All journeys involve travelers, paths traveled, places where we start, and

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[3] Hampe (2005: 1) defines image schemas as "directly meaningful ("experiential"/ "embodied"), preconceptual structures" grounded in human physical experience which can be mapped onto mental and intellectual human activity.

places where we have been. Some journeys are purposeful and have destinations that we set out for, while others may involve wandering without any destination in mind. To understand life as a journey is to have in mind, consciously or more likely unconsciously, a correspondence between a traveler and person living the life, the road traveled and the 'course' of a lifetime, a starting point and a time of birth, and so on. (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: 60–61)

This kind of conceptualization is general knowledge everyone possesses. It provides a foundation for various abstractions as it is skeletal and abstract enough not to exclude any particular kind of journey. This knowledge about journeys is structured and we are able to map constituent elements from the domain of a journey to other concepts and activities such as life and writing (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). A writing process as well as a journey is an act of exploration of the uncharted territory and it involves a certain amount of preparation. Every journey proceeds in stages and so does the writing process; one stage finishes and the other one starts.

In conceptualizing a writing process in terms of a journey, certain similarities between these concepts become evident. There is a set of correspondences between the elements of these two domains. Namely, writers are perceived as travellers on a journey while writing can be interpreted as a motion towards the goal. Physical activity invested in movement, which is an integral part of every journey, corresponds to intellectual activity invested in the process of writing. Moving along a path can be paralleled with any progress made in writing while facing certain difficulties in this process corresponds to obstacles encountered by travellers. As every prospective traveller bears in mind that they will reach the end of their journey, this is what every writer hopes to accomplish, i.e. to complete the writing process. In other words, they aspire to reach their final destination and achieve their desired goal i.e. to defend their master's thesis.

The corpus analysis reveals that the participants use similar metaphorical expressions while describing their writing process. They perceive this experience as a sort of a journey, which indicates that the journey metaphor provides a common frame of reference. Figurative language they use leads to a conclusion that they share metaphorical concepts and observe the writing process as entailing three main stages, namely source, path and goal. These stages served as an outline of the analysis presented below.

3.1 *Source*

Prior to undertaking a journey, travellers usually go through a certain level of preparation which includes collecting information about the destination chosen and often relying on someone else's experience. If we conceptualize the writing process in terms of a journey, a parallel can be easily drawn between the preparation for the journey and consulting previous research on a

specific topic conducted by different authors. Writers see preparation as an important segment of the writing process. They acknowledge the importance of starting off their WRITING JOURNEY while at the same time being confronted with the unknown. This initial stage is full of predicaments and the participants find themselves in a state of uncertainty and anticipation as they are trying to find ways to start their journey and paths to traverse. Example (1) is an illustration of a navigation problem encountered on a journey. At this point, the pre-existing knowledge is usually insufficient and proliferation of knowledge is expected and required. Uncertainty and confusion are frequently combined with optimism, eagerness and enthusiasm of starting a new and exciting journey, as evident in examples (2)-(4).

(1) *ne znate* **odakle** *vi tu zapravo* **da krenete** *'you actually don't know* **from where to set out'**[A]

(2) *ja sam* **na početku** *bila jako optimistična 'I was very optimistic* **at the outset'**

(3) *jedva sam čekala* **da krenem**, *da to ovaj počnem istraživati 'I couldn't wait* **to set out**, *to start with the research'*

(4) *jedva sam čekala da to* **sve krene** *'I couldn't wait for* **everything to set out'**

The participants perceive the starting point of the entire thesis writing process as a specific location from which they must start moving (example 5). At this point, there are two important concepts emerging in the transcribed material: selecting a topic and collecting relevant literature. The participants set selecting a topic as their first, minor goal, i.e. destination to reach (examples 6 and 7). This can sometimes depend on numerous factors and include a variety of decisions to be made as the writers often wander from one topic to another searching for the most suitable one (example 8). The participants also acknowledge when the right decisions regarding their topic selection are made by saying that they are on the right path toward their goal (example 9). Examples (5) – (9) are realizations of the metaphor MENTAL ACTIVITY IS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY whereby the physical activity referred to is motion.

(5) **trebalo mi je malo da se, da se snađem** **odakle da počnem** *'I needed some time to figure out from* **where to start'**

(6) **došla do ove trenutne teme** *'came to the topic I finally chose'*

(7) *u dogovoru s mentoricom* **došli smo do ideje**… *'in collaboration with the supervisor* **we came to the idea**…'

(8) **krenula na drugu temu** *'moved to another topic'*

(9) *da smo* **na pravom putu** *što se tiče moje teme ' that we are* **on the right path** *regarding my topic'*

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[4] Examples given are excerpts from the transcribed interviews and do not represent entire sentences. As the interviews were conducted in the participants' first language, all examples are immediately followed by the translations provided by the authors of the paper.

Reaching this goal in turn entails the beginning of a new stage, i.e. collecting relevant literature. Participants see this particular stage as the very onset of the writing process which is evident from their linguistic realizations and choices they make. This stage is also conceptualized as a kind of a journey itself with a clearly identified starting point. This is highlighted by the use of the verb SET OUT (*krenuti*) with regard to collecting data, consulting relevant sources and doing preliminary research (examples 10–12).

(10) *krenula sam sa samim istraživanjem odnosno prikupljanjem literature* '**I set out on** *research itself and collecting literature*'

(11) *zbog toga smo upravo* **krenule** *sa tim ispitivanjem* '*this is exactly why* **we set out on** *research*'

(12) *odmah sam* **krenula** *i sa istraživanjem literature* '*I immediately* **set out** *to read literature*'

Once the participants complete this initial stage of the writing process, they set out on the main stretch of their thesis writing journey, i.e. the path they have to traverse in order to reach their ultimate goal of defence. A successful journey requires meticulous planning and a clearly defined itinerary. This helps writers predict all possible obstacles they can encounter on their journey. In writing a thesis, a clearly defined outline will facilitate and expedite the finalization of the writing process, which is conceptualized as arrival to the destination point.

3.2. *Path*

As previously mentioned, the participants perceive the process of writing their master's thesis as having a starting and an ending point. The starting point is only the onset of a series of stages that unfold. Any progress they make is conceptualized as a motion along a path. They understand that this motion should proceed in a linear succession, as this would ensure the best possible outcome (examples 13 and 14) and highlight the motion on their path as an essential component of reaching their ultimate goal (examples 15 and 16). This is evidently an illustration of the MAKING PROGRESS IS A FORWARD MOVEMENT METAPHOR since the participants perceive any progress they make as a motion forward towards a set goal which is another landmark they have to reach and pass on their pathway.

(13) *mislim da sam* **išla** *onako* **po redoslijedu** '*I think* **I was going by the order**'

(14) *činilo mi se da* **to** *baš* **ide** *kako treba* '*it seemed to me that* **everything went as it should**'

(15) *to je bio period kad sam se osjećala da zapravo* **negdje idem** '*that was the period when I felt* **I was going somewhere**'

(16) **ideš, ideš prema tome** '**you go, go towards that**'

Considering that people think of every journey as moving from point A to point B, every significant event in the process of writing a thesis can be conceptualized as a location. The conceptualization of the path as three-dimensional with specific locations on it is evident from examples (17) and (18). The examples reveal that the participants see this sequential progress as a slow process of motion occurring in a step-by-step manner, which would eventually give them impetus for further research. They employ the notion of sequencing in order to emphasize the importance of strictly performing the activities as planned.

(17) *i kroz sve to tako,* **korak po korak, od jedne stavke bibliografije do druge** '*and* **through all that, step by step, from one bibliography entry to another**'

(18) **idemo dalje, idemo dalje,** *pa ćemo na kraju sve to protumačiti '***go on, go on**, *and we will interpret it all at the end*'

However, this progress does not occur without difficulties and on their path the participants encounter and recognize different kinds of obstacles that they have to cope with and overcome in order to proceed and reach the final stage and eventually achieve their set goal. As registered in the interviews, these obstacles are caused by a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that hinder the movement on this path such as change of direction, change of pace, or complete lack of movement.

Bearing in mind that the participants recognize the linearity as an essential component of their advancement, they clearly view the lack of linearity as a problematic situation that makes them stray from their goal. This in turn influences them, as travellers on their journey, to feel like not knowing where to go or having difficulties finding their path once again (examples 19 and 20).

(19) *period kada ja zapravo* **lutam u praznom** '*the period when I actually* **wander in emptiness**'

(20) *ne bih znala* **kako dalje** *da nastavim nešto da pišem 'I wouldn't know* **how to go further** *and continue writing*'

Pace is one of the key elements in every journey and its change can bring various positive or negative consequences. If the advancement on a journey does not occur according to the planned itinerary, it is perceived as influenced by a negative factor. As moving forward is an integral part of every journey, the lack of such movement prevents travellers to reach their destination. In the interviews, the participants focus on negative aspects and describe lack of advancement in their writing as slowing them down on their path, which can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation is exemplified in (21) and (22) where the author is explicitly seen as experiencing a slowdown, mapping the motion speed to the speed of the writing process. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation becomes evident in

example (23) which indicates that the writing process itself is conceptualized as a moving object slowing down under the influence of external force (the WRITING PROCESS IS A MOVING OBJECT METAPHOR).

(21) *tu sam imala malo poteškoća i **tu sam malo usporila*** 'there I had some difficulties and **there I slowed down a little bit'**

(22) *jedino mogu reći možda […]**da sam usporila*** 'I can only say that perhaps […] **I slowed down'**

(23) *tako da mi je **rad malo usporio*** 'so that **the thesis slowed down a bit'**

In addition to the change of pace, the participants also acknowledge the existence of an external factor affecting their motion, more precisely the manner in which the writer MOVES. This is conceptualized as an unsteady movement of the writer, which affects their balance causing inability to move properly along the desired path. The usage of the verb *ljuljati* ('rock') implies that the power of the natural force (possibly a storm or a strong wind) is mapped onto the writing process. This is achieved through the CAUSES ARE FORCES metaphor where the force directly affects writers making them feel incapacitated to proceed with their thesis in a satisfactory way and be productive as desired (example 24). Examples (25) and (26) also illustrate the presence of an external factor, in this case unspecified, causing the writer to stop moving, i.e. stop writing and the thesis to stop progressing respectively.

(24) *tako da **me** sve to malo **poljuljalo*** 'so all that **rocked me** a bit'

(25) *to **me** malo **zakočilo*** 'that **put a break on me** a bit'

(26) ***niko me nije stopirao** 'nobody stopped me'*

This negative change of pace can eventually lead to a complete stagnation which is illustrated by examples (27) – (32). A general notion of stagnation, as evidenced in interviews, can be viewed from two different perspectives. On their journey, the participants at one point experience a writer's block which is described as a complete lack of movement, most frequently lexicalized in their narratives by the words STOP, STAGNATION, and PAUSE. They verbalize explicitly their inability to continue writing and express dissatisfaction with such phases of inactivity which slow down or completely hinder their writing process. While doing so, they make evident that the factors leading to such slowdowns are intrinsically driven, seeing the writers as being immovable or standing still (examples 27 and 28). On the other hand, the participants also conceptualize the writing process as an object moving along the path. Consequently, they see pauses in their writing as the object that stopped moving. Examples (29) – (32) are additional realizations of the WRITING PROCESS IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor.

(27) *kad **sam** baš ono **stala** i šta ću sad, nemam dovoljan broj ispitanika* 'when **I** really **stopped** and what now, I do not have enough subjects'

(28) *i **stagnacije što sam imala** i kad sam pauzirala* 'and **stagnation I had** and when I paused'

(29) *i **sam proces je stao*** 'and **the process itself stopped**'

(30) *da ono malo **stoji*** 'that it[5] **is standing still**'

(31) ***to je** tako **stojalo** nekoliko mjeseci* '**it stood still** for a few months'

(32) *kao da **je stojalo na jednom te istom mjestu*** 'as if **it stood still in the exact same place**'

Thesis poses a challenge for writers and is very often accompanied by the notion of coping with the difficulties they face. Apart from the problems mentioned above, the participants explicitly refer to certain difficulties they encounter on their WRITING JOURNEY. Writers are aware of the fact that overcoming these difficulties will get them closer to attaining their goals and they perceive it as a sort of a quest. The external factors are here perceived as obstacles writers face and need to bypass on their path. This is clearly seen from examples (33) and (34) in which the participants lexicalize the moment of coming across a difficulty as a manifestation of the journey metaphor highlighting the element of motion as a requirement for every journey.

(33) *imala sam tu sreću da i **ne nailazim na prepreke*** 'I was lucky **not to come across any obstacles**'

(34) *poslije toga **nisam nailazila na neke veće poteškoće*** 'afterwards **I did not come across any greater difficulties**'

The participants are aware of the fact that some obstacles cannot be bypassed but must be overcome in order to pursue and eventually reach their goal. They draw on the origin and emergence of these obstacles explicitly describing in the narratives their coping strategies. Example (35) is an illustration of objective difficulties such as lack of up-to-date relevant literature, research subjects, or previous experience in conducting master's thesis research.

(35) ***prevazišla sam** time kažem, što sam, išla sam u biblioteku* '**I overcame this** by going to the library'

In example (36), in lieu of objective barrier, the obstacle is of abstract nature represented by fear as one of the primary and universal human emotions. From their narratives, it is evident that the participants conceptualize fear in terms of physical obstacles as hurdles they need to overcome. This speaks in favour of writers going through similar emotional experiences as they are afraid of being unsuccessful in both writing and completing their thesis due to their own insecurity or lack of confidence.

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[5] The pronoun IT refers to the writing process which can be seen from the following translation of the segment of the participant's narrative "before the period when I wasn't doing anything, when it was standing still, I faced the problem of the literature …"

(36) *imala sam strah,[...] (pauses) **strah od nepoznatog** (pauses) pisanja […] nakon tog prevaziđenog straha* **'I had this fear, [...], fear of unknown,** *of writing […]* **after overcoming this fear'**

(37) *imate jedan strah da ćete ipak romantizirati tu bolest… to jedno **hodanje po tankoj jednoj liniji** 'you have the fear of romanticizing the disease…it's **walking a thin line'***

While describing the process of writing their master's thesis, the participants frequently refer to the change of path in terms of upward and downward trajectory, directly relating it to positive or negative stages in their research.[6] The image behind the linguistic realizations in examples (38) – (43) below is that of verticality (one of the basic aspects of human life) which is used to mark the individual stages of the writing process as integral parts of a journey. Verticality is perceived as an axis where the upper part stands for success or achievement whereas the lower part stands for failure. Successful periods of writing are described as moving along the upward trajectory through the SUCCESS IS UP metaphor illustrated by examples (38) – (41).

(38) *sve je to kažem **išlo tom nekom uzlaznom putanjom** 'all that **went along this upward trajectory'***

(39) ***krenulo je to uzlaznom tom putanjom** 'it **started moving along upward trajectory'***

(40) ***moje znanje je išlo tom nekom uzlaznom putanjom** 'my knowledge **followed this upward trajectory'***

(41) *sve **je krenulo nekako uzbrdo** 'it all **started moving uphill'***

On the other hand, the participants also report on the lack of success which they describe as moving downwards on their path through the LACK OF SUCCESS IS DOWN metaphor. The metaphors SUCCESS IS UP and LACK OF SUCCESS IS DOWN might seem to clash everyday conception of JOURNEY as we perceive going upward, i.e. uphill as a difficult part of the journey ('an uphill battle') and going downwards i.e. downhill as significantly easier, which is paradoxical when compared to SUCCESS metaphors. The descending movement can sometimes be followed by a complete fall which can refer to the fall of productivity or confidence. This is evident in the participants' lexicalizations as they refer to the whole process as having ups and downs.

(42) *da je to **malo išlo nekom silaznom putanjom** 'that it **went** a bit **along the downward trajectory'***

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[6] During the interviews, the participants drew a diagram while verbally describing their writing experience. The diagram was divided into the Y axis (the intensity of experience and emotions) and the X axis (the duration of the writing process).

(43) *u međuvremenu **nije uvijek sve išlo ni produktivno**, […], možemo reći da je to bio i nekakav **pad produktivnosti**.* *'in the meantime, **not every-thing went productively**, […], we can say that it was **a kind of a fall of productivity**.'*

As every writing process poses a sort of a challenge for authors, writing a thesis increases this complexity to a higher level. In their narratives, the participants put emphasis on the starting point of the writing process which is usually difficult and full of unknown. As they move along on their writing path, they encounter a range of challenges seeking to resolve them in order to reach the ending point of their journey. Such challenges definitely include making a range of decisions regarding choosing a supervisor, topic, relevant literature, etc. and each is of paramount importance for the further course of the writing process. On their path, writers need to go around various obstacles which can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. All of this is further compounded by certain changes that occur along the path such as stagnation, different pace and trajectory. If all these stages are successfully finalized, the research gets closer to the ending point of the writing process which is their ultimate goal.

3.3. *Goal*

What writers pursue as the ultimate goal of the process of writing a master's thesis is defence. Defence is seen as the eventual outcome of the writers' effort and energy invested in the course of their work on the thesis. In their narratives, the participants show their awareness of reaching the final stage of the writing process i.e. the completion of the thesis and acknowledge that the defence comes at the very end of it, which is evident from examples (44) – (47):

(44) ***na kraju** samim tim odbrana* '***at the end**, subsequently, the defence'*

(45) ***na kraju** je sama odbrana magistarskog rada* '*the defence of the master thesis itself is **at the end**'*

(46) ***na kraju** odbrana* '*the defence **at the end**'*

What is also evident is that the participants, while talking about this final stage, reflect on the writing process and emphasize how it changed them. They perceive the process as being significant in terms of experience it brought them but also in terms of the knowledge they acquired and regard it as a benefit, a reward or success (example 47).

(47) ***na kraju** uspjeh* '***at the end** success'*

Writing experience is also described as an object exhibiting physical properties (such as size) which is located behind the writer, signalling the end of the writing process. This is directly related to the conceptualization of

time in terms of physical space with the concept of time treated as a spatial phenomenon (through the cover metaphor TIME IS SPACE). Specific events (times) are conceptualized as stationary points or locations on a path (on a journey); future events are conceptualized as being in front and past events as being behind which is illustrated by examples (48) and (49). In addition to physical properties attributed to the writing process, in example (50), the participants describe the writing experience as a moving object highlighting thus the aspect of passing. Here we find another metaphor at play WRITING IS AN OBJECT MOVING ALONG THE PATH. The metaphor is related to the WRITING IS THE JOURNEY metaphor as both imply motion along the path (based on the path schema) with additional features of a physical object assigned to the writing process.

(48) *veliko iskustvo iza mene 'big experience behind me'*
(49) *sad kad je **sve iza mene** 'now when **everything is behind me**'*
(50) *sada kad je **sve prošlo** 'now when **everything has passed**'*

In addition, the participants see the end of this process as opening door and laying foundation for further research. In other words, they recognize the potential for the process to continue. They realize that their present journey is completed but it does not necessarily have to be over as this awareness speaks in favour of the participants shifting their focus on distance covered and to be covered. In line with their perception, it is noticeable that there is a potential for continuing their academic journey or starting a new one.

(51) *nadam se da, za doktorsku disertaciju da ćemo to i **nastaviti** 'I hope that we would **continue** this for the PhD thesis'*
(52) *i da može se nastaviti i nakon odbranjene, jednog dijela tog rada, nakon završenog tog dijela da se može **nastavljati, nastavljati dalje i dalje** 'and that it could be continued after the defence, after one part of this research is completed, it could **continue, continue further and further**'*

All of the examples presented in the paper show that the writing process can be likened to a journey in many ways. One of the primary initial steps of every journey is defining a destination. What follows is finding ways to reach that destination in the most effective manner. In order to do that, writers must follow a certain path which depends on various factors including a number of actual difficulties as well as those individually perceived and emotion-related. Provided that the path unfolds successfully, travellers come closer to and eventually reach their destination.

4. Conclusion

It is a uniquely human endeavour to use figurative language to communicate a wide range of concepts. This research implies that metaphorical language proves to be useful for writers when describing their writing experience, which is manifested in the abundance of conceptual metaphors found in their narratives. The aim was to provide an insight into the individual's conceptions the interviewees had of their writing process. The basic assumption of this research is that their narratives display consistent patterns of figurative language production. All of the presented metaphors centre around one concept and this shared meaning can be labelled as JOURNEY as a central aspect of human experience.

The writing process is evidently perceived by the participants as a particular kind of journey. Their views support one of the basic assumptions, which is that the journey metaphor is of high importance in understanding the process of writing. This conceptual metaphor, used in participants' narratives, shapes their experience of writing and can influence developing perceptions of themselves as travellers. Writing a master's thesis is perceived as an assembly of different activities including selecting a topic, a supervisor, collecting relevant literature, and conducting the research, which can be seen as a parallel to various stages of a journey. The participants put emphasis on both the starting point of their journey (source) and the ending point (goal) of the writing process. The path is determined by destination and by the traveller but very often it is influenced by various factors that affect the nature of the path or the pace of the motion. Writing experience may be depicted as a curve changing from upward motion, associated with progress, to downward motion, associated with the shortage of advancement. This is very often caused by various corresponding events and moods encoded as metaphorical obstacles which can, at times, lead to a complete stagnation. Under such circumstances, writers must invest additional effort so as to overcome these obstacles, move forward and eventually reach their goal.

The shared usage of the journey metaphor registered in the participants' narratives demonstrates how they view the parallel between writing and travelling, a theme emerging most prominently in the data. This general metaphor, along with a group of related specific metaphors, serves to illustrate the complexity of the writing process itself. The findings provide nascent evidence of the students' profound, complex and shared views about the process of writing. These findings suggest that further research should concentrate on and examine other metaphorical concepts embedded in the narratives of the writers as well as their individual linguistic realizations in order to shed additional light on the underlying cognitive processes they employ while describing their writing experience.

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