

Second Language Figurative Proficiency: A Comparative Study of Malay and English

JONATHAN CHARTERIS-BLACK

University of Surrey

This paper explores the potential of cognitive linguistic notions such as conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonym for comparing the figurative phraseologies of English and Malay and anticipating second language learner difficulty. A comparative analysis is undertaken that identifies six types of relationship between figurative expressions in the two languages. It is suggested that identification of linguistic and conceptual similarities and differences in figurative expressions enable us to anticipate the types of problems that may be encountered by Malay-speaking learners of English in the acquisition of English figurative language. A comparative analysis is used to develop a set of production and comprehension tasks that aim to measure figurative proficiency. This is tested with a group of 36 Malay-speaking tertiary learners of English. It is found that figurative expressions with an equivalent conceptual basis and linguistic form are the easiest. The most difficult are those with (1) a different conceptual basis and an equivalent linguistic form and (2) culture-specific expressions that have a different conceptual basis and a different linguistic form. There is some evidence that learners may resort to the L1 conceptual basis when processing unfamiliar L2 figurative language. There is also evidence of intralingual confusion between higher and lower frequency L2 figurative expressions. It is more advantageous to draw learners' attention to the conceptual bases of L2 figurative expressions in circumstances where they differ from those of the L1 than when the conceptual bases are similar (especially where learners' L1 is unrelated to their L2).

INTRODUCTION

Figurative language has become of increasing interest to applied linguists during recent years. This has been partly because of a growing awareness that phenomena such as metaphor and figurative idioms are very frequent in everyday situations of language use. In addition, figurative language is potentially challenging for second language learners and teachers because it is often more difficult to approach systematically in second language classrooms. This is because figurative meaning typically arises from the role of phrases in discourse (rather than from the sum of their grammatical and lexical parts). It is hoped that a combination of contrastive and cognitive linguistic approaches may provide insight into the underlying meaning of figurative language and encourage a more systematic pedagogic treatment.

Developments in cognitive linguistics have led to improvements in descriptions of figurative language and facilitated our understanding of the interrelationships of many figurative expressions (i.e. metaphoric and metonymic ones). English expressions such as *to spill the beans*, or *to let the cat out of the bag* have been accounted for with reference to an underlying CONDUIT metaphor in which THE MIND IS A CONTAINER and IDEAS ARE ENTITIES (cf. Reddy 1979, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987). A number of researchers have argued that improvements in figurative language description have the potential to carry over to the second language classroom (e.g. Kövecses and Szabó 1996; Boers and Demecheleer 1998; Cameron and Low 1999a, 1999b; Boers 2000a, 2000b; Charteris-Black 2000a, 2001a). There has also been some empirical research into the transfer processes involved in the learning of L2 figurative language and idioms (Kellerman 1977, 1978, 1986; Jordens 1977). Growing understanding of the metaphorical systems of languages other than English offers the potential for comparative studies and raises the possibility of drawing on L1 conceptual knowledge in the interpretation of L2 figurative language. As Danesi comments:

an important question for future research would thus seem to be: to what extent do the conceptual domains of the native and target cultures overlap and contrast? . . . what kinds of conceptual interferences come from the student's native conceptual system (*interconceptual interference*) and how much conceptual interference is generated by the target language itself (*intraconceptual interference*)? (Danesi 1994: 461).

If learners come to the L2 classroom with knowledge of the metaphorical system of their L1 we may well ask ourselves whether it is possible to speak of metaphorical or figurative competence as a component of language proficiency and if so of what it may be comprised? While contrastive and comparative approaches towards second language acquisition have been undertaken in areas such as grammar and syntax, phonology, lexis, discourse, and rhetoric (e.g. James 1980; Odlin 1989; Connor 1996; Swan 1997) less work has been undertaken as regards figurative language; a review of this work is provided in the section entitled 'Learning L2 figurative language'. For this reason we are at present unable to answer such questions as: how far are learners able to access L1 figurative knowledge in either comprehension or use of L2 figurative language? And, to what extent would it be beneficial if they could?

The description and empirical research in this paper begins to provide answers to such questions—if only by illustrating one possible way in which they could be investigated. Initially, after surveying the literature, I contrast some of the conceptual and linguistic characteristics of English and Malay figurative phrases in order to arrive at a contrastive, descriptive model based on their similarities and differences. This model is used to devise a research instrument that aims to investigate the ways in which English figurative

language is, or is not, accessible to Malay speaking learners of English. This is then implemented in a small-scale piece of empirical research with a sample of tertiary level Malay speaking learners of English. Proficiency with figurative language is measured in terms of the comprehension and production of L2 figurative expressions and understanding of their connotations. The findings—although constrained by the limited data available—show evidence that learners encounter greater difficulty with English figurative phrases that have a different conceptual basis from that of Malay. However, if they could be confirmed by further larger scale research (using the same or a similar model and including other languages) they would support the view that learners share a general conceptualizing capacity regardless of differences in language and culture.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

This study assumes that the distinction between literal and figurative meaning is cross-linguistic; for example, words and phrases referring to physical bodily knowledge are often used to convey mental or abstract meanings in different languages. In English we can describe someone as *kind-hearted*, or *big-mouthed*, or as *doing x in cold blood*, or *turning a blind eye to something*. Similarly, in Malay someone may be described as *lembut hati*—soft liver—‘kind-hearted’ or as *berat mulut*—heavy mouth—‘having difficulty in speaking’ or ‘tongue-tied’. Behaviour in which ‘someone interferes unnecessarily’, or ‘meddles’, is referred to in Malay as *campur tangan*—mix hand—and *makan angin*—eat the wind—means ‘to travel for the sake of enjoyment’. In both languages speakers draw on experiences and beliefs about the human body to evaluate various social phenomena. Even though the actual body parts and actions referred to, and the senses of these expressions, do not necessarily correspond in the two languages, the same distinction between literal and figurative applies, as does the same discourse function of speaker evaluation. This is because of a tension between the denotations of words and their connotations in particular discourse contexts; literal meanings are typically referential while figurative ones are usually expressive.

The distinction between literal and figurative meaning may be traced to traditional semantic perspectives whereas a desire to conflate them reflects the increasing influence of pragmatics and cognitive linguistics. Indeed, many cognitive linguists (e.g. Gibbs 1984, 1994; Johnson 1987; Kittay 1987; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Langacker 1987; Ortony 1979) challenge the premise that there is a fundamental distinction between literal and figurative language. Gibbs (1994: 78) states the case strongly: ‘There is only a remote chance that any principled distinction can be drawn between figurative and literal language’. Contrary to the classical view, this view argues that most language exists somewhere between the truly literal and truly figurative.

While a full discussion of cognitive linguistics is beyond the scope of this paper, we should recall that cognitive linguists are primarily interested in

underlying cognitive motivations for language and for this reason are likely to emphasize the absence of any clear cut distinction between literal and figurative language. Yet without the notion of literal language it would be problematic to identify linguistic or conceptual metaphors (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987) because the very notion of metaphor itself assumes a distinction between primary, literal senses and secondary, figurative ones. In fact metaphor *relies on* a distinction between a source domain in which words have normal or unmarked senses and a target domain in which the same words have less common or marked senses. Admittedly, it can be difficult to establish 'normal' senses—are they the original senses, or those that a corpus has shown to be the most frequent (cf. Cruse 2000: 199–200)? But if we lose the distinction between 'literal' and 'figurative' language we lose a primary source of data on cognition.

In addition, as I hope to demonstrate, the cognitive linguistic notions of conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonym are valuable in undertaking contrastive studies of figurative language. A conceptual metaphor is a generalization that can be inferred from diverse surface forms of language to inferred systems of thought (Cameron and Low 1999a: 18). They originate in underlying physical experiences of containment (e.g. IN/OUT), and bodily orientation (e.g. UP/ DOWN, FRONT/BACK). While evidence for conceptual metaphors is found in clusters of figurative expressions, such generalizations can only be tested through introspection and judged on the basis of their explanatory power: do they accord with our experiences in a way that is insightful? The notion of conceptual metaphor (and related notions such as conceptual metonym) allows the identification of degrees of similarity and difference in the ideas underlying the surface forms of figurative phrases and therefore can facilitate their comparison—both within and between languages. It can help identify the situation when two figurative phrases share an equivalent surface form but have quite different conceptual bases. Some conceptual metaphors, such as those based on shared physical experiences, may overlap two (or more) languages while others are characteristic of a culturally based language encoding (cf. Charteris-Black 2000b, 2001a, 2001b).

This work, therefore, accepts a distinction between figurative and literal language because it is potentially important to language learners, and I will treat figurative language as a very important source of insight into the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs shared by speakers of a language. Figurative language will be defined as language in which the senses of words are believed to differ from their primary established senses (those that are most closely related to basic human experience) and therefore—at some stage in its development—creates an incongruity between original and novel contexts of use. For example, in the case of the human body parts, the primary senses refer to the parts of the body, whereas figurative extensions may refer to objects, or parts of objects that resemble the human body in terms of location, appearance, shape, etc. (*the foot of a hill, the eye of a potato*, etc.). Innovative figurative senses may become established and congruent over time (for

example 'germ' originally denoted 'seed', and 'villain' originally denoted 'a low social level'). I will define a figurative unit as a short phrase in which the senses of words differ from their established senses. This is to avoid using problematic terms such as 'idiom' (cf. Cowie 1998) which are likely to be especially problematic in a contrastive study. While all definitions of metaphor and figurative language are likely to be problematic, the one adopted here has the advantage of indicating that perception of what constitutes figurative use depends on contexts of use and on individual knowledge rather than on any fixed semantic property. Ultimately, figurative language is a feature of discourse rather than of grammar or lexis.

LEARNING L2 FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

From an applied linguistics perspective, we should also consider the implications of the distinction between figurative and literal language for second language learners. Much of the work on the cognitive processing of metaphor in psychological research is based on native speaker informants who are exposed to figurative language within experimental research settings (e.g. Blasko and Connine 1993; Gibbs 1992; Nayak and Gibbs 1990). Yet it is likely that second language learners will be presented with, initially, the core senses of words—those, for example, that are listed first as the headword in dictionary entries. For example, it is likely that learners will learn *eye* referring to the organ of sight prior to learning *the eye of a needle* or a complex lexeme such as *eye-catching* or a phrase such as *to pull the wool over someone's eyes*. This may explain why Kellerman (1978) found that learners were more prepared to transfer core meanings of words; for example, they accepted *she broke his heart* as a possible translation from Dutch into English more readily than *some workers have broken the strike*—even though both translations are equally acceptable. Swan (1997: 157–60) describes a number of different patterns of relationships between words in different languages highlighting the importance of similarities and differences in their conceptual basis.

Arnaud and Savignon (1997) point out that even advanced learners may experience particular difficulties with complex lexical units and rare words. Native speakers may not distinguish between literal and figurative meaning, instead relying on general pragmatic knowledge when processing dead or inactive metaphors. Conversely, second language learners—when dealing with unfamiliar senses of words—are likely to look initially for literal readings based on their knowledge of established senses rather than on pragmatic knowledge. Kellerman (1977) argues that this is particularly the case where learners perceive a typological distance between the L1 and L2. He found that Dutch learners were more likely to accept Dutch-like idiomatic expressions in German as compared with English because of the perceived greater distance between Dutch and English.

A further problem with over-reliance on literal readings is that this may lead learners to overlook speaker evaluation or connotation of figurative

language. In second language learning contexts, it is often the case that semantic and pragmatic meanings are initially separate and it may well be one of the goals of advanced vocabulary instruction to ensure their convergence. This is to encourage the type of competence with figurative language that is possessed by native speakers (Carter and McCarthy 1988). As Johnson (1996: 237) suggests:

Broader inclusion of figurative language in L2 instruction would enhance the communicative proficiency of L2 students and provide them with insight into the conceptual systems of the L2 culture.

The identification and description of a set of underlying concepts that motivate a number of frequently occurring figurative units may have the potential to reduce the extended period of exposure normally necessary for a second language learner to acquire familiarity with figurative language. In this respect, a conceptual metaphor such as ARGUMENT IS WAR may help them to understand figures of speech such as *to defend an argument*, *to launch an assault on*, etc. However, we may also need to consider the level of learner for whom such knowledge may be relevant, since for beginner and elementary learners figurative senses may best be treated as if they were established literal ones—particularly in the case of conventional metaphors.

A number of researchers have followed Stevick (1982: 35–6) when he proposed that metaphors and analogies should be exploited in the teaching and learning of languages. Irujo (1986) addresses the topic of transfer and found evidence among Spanish learners of L2 English idioms of both positive and negative transfer. However, since Irujo's study makes no distinction between the lexical and conceptual content of idioms it is never clear whether transfer is taking place at the level of form or meaning or both. Low (1988) argues for the centrality of metaphor, identifies a number of candidate elements for metaphorical competence, suggests some difficulties learners may encounter with metaphor and some pedagogic solutions to them. He also notes the importance of metaphor as an interactional strategy for dealing with emotionally charged subjects and its role in what Lerman (1983: 4) refers to as 'a shielded form of discourse'. Danesi (1994: 454) argues that the unnaturalness of much learner speech is the result of its literalness and argues for the development of 'conceptual fluency'; by this he means knowing how a language encodes concepts on the basis of metaphorical reasoning. He argues that different languages reflect different underlying conceptualizations and argues for a conceptual syllabus that would be designed around the conceptual system of the target language; in addition, pedagogy should address conceptual transfer as a source of L2 error.

MacLennan (1994) describes how metaphor is systematically embedded in a language and argues for the need to identify systemic metaphors and correspondences between the L1 and L2 metaphor systems. Johnson (1996) argues that a notion she describes as 'metaphorical competence' is based on a general conceptualizing capacity that exists distinct from language proficiency.

This is a significant claim since L1 knowledge of metaphor exists prior to L2 knowledge and implies the potential for positive transfer of metaphorical knowledge. However, she also argues for explicit instruction in the conceptual system of the target language when conceptual systems are different, for example in Japanese ‘the belly *hara* is the locus of the thought and feeling’ (Johnson 1996: 230).

However, only recently have researchers begun to take on an important question, which Low (1988: 141) formulates as follows: ‘whether it is preferable to teach metaphor completely inductively, or whether exploitation material can profitably be supplemented by analytic discussions about underlying metaphors’. Kövecses and Szabó (1996), Boers and Demecheleer (1998), and Boers (1997, 2000a, 2000b) present some empirical data in favour of teaching the conceptual metaphors of the target language. For example, the conceptual metonym HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL can help learners to understand expressions such as *in hand*, *to have a hand in*, *to take in hand*, etc. (Kövecses and Szabó 1996: 343). These small-scale studies tend to support the view that systematic presentation of L2 conceptual metaphors can enhance the learning of L2 non-compositional lexis such as phrasal verbs and prepositions respectively. However, their approach does not cover expressive meaning and this is a limitation, because figurative language is typically expressive and conveys some type of evaluation; for example, a situation that is ‘taken in hand’ is usually evaluated as negative (cf. Charteris-Black 2001b). In addition, there may be some circumstances where the teacher deliberately refrains from teaching a conceptual metaphor—for example where the differences between figurative expressions in two languages are linguistic rather than conceptual.

In this respect, a useful descriptive approach is offered by Deignan *et al.* (1997) who suggest that a comparative analysis of conceptual metaphor can lead to the identification of four possible types of variation between two languages. These are: the *same* conceptual metaphor and *equivalent* linguistic expression; the *same* conceptual metaphor but *different* linguistic expression; *different* conceptual metaphors; and words and expressions with the *same* literal meanings but *different* metaphorical meanings. While I would agree with the broad elements of a model that distinguishes between a surface linguistic level and an underlying metaphorical or conceptual one, I will suggest some modifications to the model because it seems that there is not always a clear-cut distinction between ‘equivalent’ and ‘different’. I will suggest that the model can be improved by introducing the notion of ‘similar’ at a mid-point between these two poles.

This new element in the model can be used in situations where there is the same conceptual metaphor but only part of the figurative phrase has an equivalent linguistic expression. This is helpful because figurative units are typically phrasal and some parts of phrases in two languages may bear a closer linguistic resemblance than other parts. For example, the English expression *to look down one’s nose* has some correspondence with the Malay expression

hindung tinggi ‘nose high’ which shares a similar meaning. While conceptually equivalent, in terms of linguistic expression the English expression refers to the perspective of the agent of ‘looking’, whereas the Malay refers to that of the patient who observes the position of another’s nose. For this reason the same meaning is lexicalized using words with nearly opposite meanings ‘down’ and ‘high’—therefore these expressions are not readily classifiable using Deignan’s model because the linguistic expression is not equivalent, but nor is it different as they both contain a word for ‘nose’. In my model such figurative units will be described as having a similar linguistic form and an equivalent conceptual basis.

In summary, a number of important general points may be made from considering the above studies of figurative language, language comparison, and second language learning. First is the awareness that figurative language is rooted in conceptual systems. Secondly, it is highly unlikely that there will be an exact fit between the L1 and L2 conceptual systems. This is because when we consider the connotations of language used for evaluation we find evidence that language encodes a culture—if only in terms of certain prototype notions (Hadley 1997). Even where languages share a common etymology (or partially share one), this does not imply identity of cultural experience. Thirdly, where there are differences between L1 and L2 conceptual systems and cultural meaning there are likely to be difficulties in comprehending L2 figurative language. This can be because of:

1. the existence of unfamiliar conceptual metaphors;
2. the existence of different, or partially different, linguistic expressions—that is even where there is overlap between the conceptual systems of the L1 and L2;
3. because equivalent figurative phrases (i.e. conceptually and linguistically) have different connotations in the two languages (for cultural reasons).

To the extent that figurative language represents language specific ways of thinking (though we need not assume that it necessarily does) it is likely to present particular problems for language learners.

BACKGROUND ON MALAY FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

As the contrastive model proposed in the section entitled ‘Selection and comparison of data’ is illustrated with reference to Malay and the subjects for the study described in the section entitled ‘The study’ are Malay learners of English it is relevant to consider some of the characteristics of Malay figurative language. Figurative language is central to the oral tradition of Malay culture and is one of the main means through which characteristic beliefs and attitudes are transmitted between social groupings. As with many cultures and societies where communication is primarily based on the spoken word, the use of appropriate figurative expressions within a particular situational context is considered to be a hallmark of intelligence, quick-wittedness, and

education. Enormous importance is placed on figurative meaning both in the definition of phraseological categories and in the ability to interpret figurative language:

The Malays stress the element of *kiasan* (analogy, simile, metaphor, allusion, moral) and the two *lapis* (layers or levels of meaning—i.e. the literal and the figurative) in such sayings (Winstedt 1981: 6).

It is likely that it is the distinctiveness of the image that has given certain recurring phraseological patterns an institutionalized status within the culture. This can be illustrated in the following examples:

The phrase *hindung belang* to mean a ‘casanova’ uses the words *hindung* (nose) and *belang* (striped) as a more gentle way of calling the person a ‘skirt-chaser’ or ‘a woman-chaser’ the more direct way of saying it would have been *kejar wanita* (to chase after women) (Hasan Muhamed Ali 1996: 6–7).

In fact, the pattern whereby a human body part is combined with an adjective or a noun to mean a particular type of behaviour is one which can commonly be found in the two word Malay figurative units known as *simpulan bahasa*:

Mulut bocor—mouth rotten—‘someone who cannot keep secrets’

Kepala batu—head stone—‘someone who is stubborn’

Kaki botol—foot bottle—‘an alcoholic’

Mata telinga—eye ear—‘a hope for the future’

Tangan dingin—hand cold—‘someone who has “green fingers”’

These provide clear illustrations of the institutionalized status of non-compositionality in Malay figurative expressions. In each of these examples, knowledge of the culture-specific symbolic or semiotic significance of the parts of the human body is central to accessing the figurative sense. Such cultural knowledge is a necessary prerequisite for full participation in a Malay speech community.

When comparing English and Malay there are some basic concepts, such as spatial relations, which share expressive meaning; for example, ‘right’ *kanan* connotes positively, and ‘left’ *kiri* connotes negatively in both languages. Similarly, *atas* ‘above’ and *bawah* ‘below’ connote positively and negatively respectively in Malay as do their counterparts *up* and *down* in English. However, there are also differences; for example, sense data such as *soft/hard* and *hot/cold* do not necessarily share the same connotative meaning: the Malay *lembut hati* (‘soft liver’) translates better as ‘kind hearted’ than ‘soft hearted’—because *soft* has a negative connotation in English when applied to personality. Similarly, in English, *cold hearted* has a negative connotation whereas in Malay *hati sejuk* (‘cold liver’) has a positive connotative meaning ‘a feeling of relief about something’. We see this also in the Malay idiom *tangan dingin*—hand cold—‘to have green fingers’. In English, *cool* has a positive connotation but *cold* does not.

Dobrovolskij (1998) observes:

If the words denoting the same concept and exploited as idiom constituents in L1 and L2 make a different semantic contribution to the meaning of a given idiom as a whole, then it means that the same entity was conceptualised in different ways by the linguistic and cultural communities of L1 and L2. Solving problems of this kind is one of the most crucial aims of conceptual analysis and semiotics of culture (Dobrovolskij 1998: 138).

For example, Charteris-Black (2001b) explains how words denoting approximately the same body part in each language in the English phrases (e.g. *in hand*, *to get a grip*) and the Malay phrases (e.g. *dalam tangan*—in hand—‘in hand’, *campur tangan*—mix hand—‘interfere’) exploit the same conceptual metonym HAND FOR CONTROL. However, they do not have meaning equivalence in figurative language because corpus examination shows that these English phrases typically evaluate the agent of control positively, while the Malay phrases typically evaluate the agent negatively.

The problem for L2 learners is how to access the semantic contribution of words with figurative senses: this can only be through accessing the cultural and linguistic knowledge that underlies figurative units. In this view, understanding how to approach figurative language in the L2 requires a model for conceptual and linguistic description. We cannot understand Malay idioms, say, in the semantic field of the human body without understanding that anatomical parts such as *kaki* ‘foot’, *hati* ‘liver’, or *mata* ‘eye’ are instances of synecdoche in which a part of the body may represent the whole person. The linguistic evidence shows how they are conceptualized in a language and therefore may provide evidence of cultural factors. For example, in English we also use body parts such as ‘mouth’ and ‘head’ to refer to people, as in the expressions *loudmouth*, and *a few good heads*. However, we cannot use ‘foot’ to refer to a person in English whereas this is possible in Malay (e.g. *kaki judi*—foot gamble—‘someone who is addicted to gambling’—Charteris-Black (2000b: 294) gives other examples of synecdoche for this body part). It is my hope that developing a model for comparing figurative phrases that is based on linguistic and conceptual elements will assist in developing both a research and a teaching methodology for investigating the semiotics of culture.

SELECTION AND COMPARISON OF DATA

Initially, 80 figurative units were selected from standard reference works: 40 English units were selected from the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms* (1995) and 40 Malay *simpulan bahasa* were selected from *Kamus Besar Bahasa Melayu* (1995). The items were selected according to the correspondence, or absence of correspondence, of linguistic form and conceptual meaning of the 40 items from each language; two Malay native speaker informants assisted with this

task. The underlying conceptual basis or idea was identified on the evidence of related surface forms. For example, there is evidence of the idea: THE STATE OF THE FEELINGS IS THE MATERIAL STATE OF A VITAL ORGAN in English expressions such as *broken hearted*, *soft hearted*, *a heavy heart*, *a heart of gold* and in Malay expressions such as *patah hati*—broken liver—‘broken hearted’, *lembut hati*—soft liver—‘to be kind to others’, *berat hati*—heavy liver—‘to be reluctant’, *kecil hati*—small liver—‘to be upset’, etc. The conceptual basis accounts for the relatedness of these expressions and is justified to the extent that it explains their motivation or the way they are all related to a common underlying idea.

The English and Malay figurative units were then confirmed with reference to two corpora to ensure that there was evidence of their occurrence in the contemporary language. No minimum frequency levels were set, although frequency was taken into account when interpreting the findings. For this purpose the English figurative units were checked in the Collins Cobuild Bank of English and Malay figurative units were checked in a corpus held by the Malaysian Language Planning Agency in Kuala Lumpur.

The figurative units were then analysed, classified, and compared according to their linguistic and conceptual similarity. A comparative analysis of the figurative units in the two languages revealed that there are six types according to whether there is (1) correspondence of surface lexis and conceptual metaphor between the two languages and (2) whether they are culture specific (i.e. opaque) or universal (i.e. transparent). Table 1 aims to summarize these types. The figurative units, and the conceptual bases that provide the rationale for their classification are shown in Appendices 1–6.

In the following paragraphs I will consider each of these types with reference to examples of the test items that were used in the study to be described in the section entitled ‘The study’. Type One figurative units are those with an equivalent conceptual basis and an equivalent linguistic form (see Appendix 1). Example one shows a test item for such figurative units:

Table 1: Summary of contrastive model for figurative units

Category	Linguistic form	Conceptual basis
Type 1	=	=
Type 2	~	=
Type 3	=	#
Type 4	#	=
Type 5	#	# + Transparent
Type 6	#	# + Opaque

= equivalent; # different; ~ similar

Example 1

Anna leaned up against her mother. 'I just want to die, Mom.' Mary kissed her. 'You won't die, darling. You'll just suffer from a *broken heart* for a while and then it will go away. Only two more days and he will be out of your life for ever.'

A *broken heart* means:

- (a) have a serious operation
- (b) be very upset
- (c) have an upset stomach
- (d) I don't know

In type 1 units, senses may be taken as equivalent in the two languages because there is a very close correspondence of both linguistic and conceptual content. The only adjustment required in understanding this group of figurative units is an understanding of cultural differences in folk belief as regards the correspondence of mental/affective experience and body part. For example, in Malay, the psycho-affective domain is located in *hati* 'the liver', whereas in English, feelings are located in the heart; this accounts for the lexical difference involved in the substitution of 'heart' for 'liver'. For the second language learner a literal translation of the Malay figurative expression carries a very similar sense to its English equivalent. We may well anticipate that if L1 conceptual knowledge were accessed in L2 processing, learners would encounter little difficulty with this type of figurative unit and that it may, therefore, be suitable for introduction to elementary learners.

Type 2 figurative units are those that have an equivalent conceptual basis and similar linguistic form (see Appendix 2). Example 2 shows a test item for this type:

Example 2

'Your wife. Why did she leave you?' 'Oh nasty,' replied Forbes. 'Which *big-mouthed* ex-mate do I have to thank for that?'

big-mouthed means:

- (a) someone who can't keep a secret
- (b) a person with a large mouth
- (c) someone who tells lies about other people
- (d) I don't know

It will be recalled that 'similar' here means that part of the phrase is equivalent in each language but part is not. Therefore a literal translation into English only partially provides an identical sense to the Malay and another word (or words) require(s) a slight modification to arrive at an English figurative unit with an equivalent sense. For example, *big-mouthed* is similar to

the Malay *mulut tempayan* ‘mouth a big jar used for storing water’ in that *mouth* is equivalent to *mulut* and they both place a negative evaluation on ways of speaking. The difference is that the English phrase implies boastfulness while the Malay phrase implies revealing more in one’s speaking than is appropriate; the linguistic forms are therefore similar and the meanings related but not identical.

It is difficult to make predictions as regards type 2 items; however, if we compare figurative language on a scale, then type 2 items are likely to be more difficult than type 1 items—but not, as we will see, as difficult as type 3 items. The fact that literal translation of part of the figurative unit provides a clue to the L2 sense would suggest they should be easier. However, the issue is not clear cut; for example, Irujo (1986) found that similar English idioms presented Spanish learners with as many difficulties as different ones because they recognized the similarity and assumed that they could transfer an L1 sense when in fact this was not always appropriate. There may also well be individual variability in the mental processing of figurative units of this type.

Type 3 figurative units are those with a similar linguistic form in English and Malay but that have a completely different conceptual basis and hence a different sense (see Appendix 3). Example 3 shows a test item for such figurative units:

Example 3

When they arrived at the house to do the job, *they got the wind up* and decided to return home as soon as possible.

they got the wind up means

- (a) they were afraid
- (b) they were angry
- (c) the weather changed
- (d) I don’t know

In this example for English I propose a conceptual metaphor FEAR IS WIND. Evidence for this comes from other expressions such as *put the wind up* (either because of the effect of fear on the body’s digestion, or because of the association of wind with storms). However, in Malay the conceptual metaphor is ANGER IS WIND—perhaps because wind is a metaphor for the loud words that are exchanged when one is angry or because wind is associated with storms, that are, in turn, associated with God’s anger. We can see evidence for this in the phrase *angin-angin*—wind wind—‘easily-angered’. While wind is associated with negative emotions in both languages, phrases with equivalent surface forms refer to different emotions. Type 3 figurative units may pose a problem for the language learner since similarity of surface form has the potential to encourage negative transfer of the L1 meaning (if this is accessed in L2 processing). Therefore, difference in conceptual basis

accounts for the different connotations of phrases with equivalent surface forms and, as a result, translation of the L2 figurative unit to the nearest L1 form is likely to cause misunderstanding.

Type 4 figurative units are those that have completely different surface forms but a shared conceptual basis originating in common encyclopaedic knowledge (see Appendix 4). For example, *a windbag* in English may translate into Malay as *tong kosong* ('empty bowels'). Example 4 shows a test item for type 4 figurative units:

Example 4

For, in the last analysis, Churchill and his Party were at one in the Prime Minister's assessment of Beveridge as 'an awful *windbag* and a dreamer'

windbag means:

- (a) He often breaks wind
- (b) He is over-weight
- (c) He talks too much
- (d) I don't know

While there is no literal translation possible at the surface level, there is shared conceptual knowledge that if the body is conceptualized as a container then its contents may be of no value if they have no substance (i.e. because they are filled with wind). I propose a conceptual metaphor VALUE IS SUBSTANCE; for example, if we refer to a cup as being either 'half full' it has a positive connotation because it highlights the substance, whereas 'half empty' has a negative connotation because it implies absence of substance. Evidence of this conceptual metaphor is found in other English phrases such as *a bag of hot air* (i.e. full of the insubstantial) or the proverb *empty vessels make the most sound* (i.e. not containing substance). It is also found in a Malay figurative unit:

gendang raya bunyi deras, tak tahu dirinya berongga
the drum makes a big sound but it doesn't know that it sounds hollow

From a second language learning perspective, if L1 figurative knowledge is accessed while processing, one would anticipate that this type of figurative unit would be easier than type 3 figurative units. However, since learners may encounter only the surface form of the L2 figurative unit they may not access the conceptual basis that is common to both languages unless this was explained. Type 4 figurative units may, therefore, be particularly amenable to second language instruction and learners may need to be assisted to encourage positive transfer from the L1 conceptual metaphor.

Type 5 figurative units are those that have completely different surface forms and completely different conceptual bases—but that may, none the less, be transparent because they are readily accessible on the basis of knowledge

that is culturally neutral (see Appendix 5). Example 5 shows a test item for this type:

Example 5

You're now a free man. You can *turn your back on* us and walk out on us. But you won't do that, Gingy, because you know that after today you're dead if you do that.

Turn your back on means:

- (a) leave us for a short time
- (b) reject someone
- (c) face the other way
- (d) I don't know

It is evident—irrespective of culture—that when you *turn your back* on someone you are no longer facing them, so a Malay speaker encountering this figurative unit may infer that intentionally avoiding facial contact implies 'rejection'. It is culturally neutral knowledge of the prototypical functions, properties, and positions of body parts that can be used to interpret such figurative units in another language. Nevertheless, it may very well be that formal second language instruction may be necessary before such figurative units become transparent. For example, if learners are alerted to a conceptual metaphor NOT FACING IS REJECTING they may understand an expression such as *turn your back on*.

Type 6 figurative units have a completely different conceptual basis in both languages and are opaque in so far as the conceptual basis reflects the encoding of a culture specific meaning (see Appendix 6). Example 6 shows a test item for this type:

Example 6

She sank to her knees behind the locked door and *wrung her hands*. The stone floor was cold and damp, and a cockroach scuttled across the hem of her skirt.

wrung her hands means:

- (a) she felt sad and worried
- (b) she felt angry
- (c) she clapped
- (d) I don't know

A particular characteristic of many opaque English phrases is that they are verbal and refer to actions that reflect the culture specific senses arising from gestures such as wringing the hands; this suggests at least the potential for teaching the semiotics of gesture using methods such as drama. Malay idioms may be equally opaque; for example, it is unlikely that we would be able to

infer the meaning of *makan angin* (eat wind) ‘to travel for fun’ from any equivalent English expressions. To some extent conceptual knowledge depends on the range of our own subjective experience of life; there are varying layers of transparency within this type that makes it an especially rich one in which to search for cultural icons. Further research is necessary to determine whether type 6 figurative units need to be formally taught or whether they are best learnt inductively as they arise in learning contexts.

THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to establish whether there was any difference in learner performance between the different types of figurative unit that were established by the contrastive analysis and that has been described in the section entitled ‘Selection and comparison of data’ above.

Procedure and scoring

A research instrument was developed to investigate L2 figurative proficiency based on the analysis and comparison of linguistic form and conceptual meaning. The research instrument was designed to measure knowledge of the items illustrated in Appendices 1–6. In this respect, it was considered necessary to measure both receptive and productive knowledge of these items although results were combined in the statistical analysis. For comprehension a 24-item multiple choice task was used (see Examples 1–6 above) comprised of attested short contexts taken from the Bank of English. For production a 22 item cued completion task was used. In most cases different figurative units were used for the productive and receptive tasks so as to reduce the risk of a priming effect; however, in six cases the same figurative units were randomly selected for the production and reception tasks so that results could be compared.

The multiple-choice items (see examples 1–6 above) were devised along the following lines: one correct paraphrase, a primary distractor, a secondary distractor, and one *don't know* option. Subjects were requested in the rubrics to select the option *don't know* so as to reduce the influence of chance. This was not because guessing is not an important strategy in comprehending idioms (it may well be), but because it would introduce a random probability factor that would be too high—given that there would be a 25 per cent probability of selecting the correct item by chance. The distractors for the type 3 figurative units were related to the meaning of the Malay item rather than the English item. In example 3 above, option (b) was intended to introduce the possibility of transfer of the concept for the L1 figurative unit *naik angin*—rise wind—‘to lose one’s temper’ to the English figurative unit *to get the wind up*. This is because if L1 metaphorical knowledge were employed when comprehending English figurative units, then we would expect Malay speakers to select this option rather than the correct one ‘to be afraid’.

It would be possible to measure L2 figurative proficiency with reference to a scale of certainty by which informants might indicate how sure they were of the meaning of a particular figurative item. This would have the advantage of reducing the chance element but might introduce other difficulties—since in type 3 cases learners may be quite sure of an incorrect meaning because of the existence of a similar linguistic form in the L1.

For the production task each of the figurative units was presented within a short context taken from the original Bank of English corpus. This is because since figurative units are invariably encountered in context it seems a more effective way of eliciting data on their comprehension. Two prompts were included to avoid the use of alternative phrases: a one word prompt (in brackets) and an indication of the number of words in the correct response as in example 7:

Example 7: Production Task:

Clue: *not wait for one's turn.* (queue)

In some countries there are twenty sets of parents chasing each local child. So people pay more. Some people decide to buy from abroad and _____ (3) by finding someone who will get round the rules and regulations

(Answer: jump the queue)

No formal hypotheses were formulated because of the small scale of the empirical study. However, it was anticipated that if conceptual knowledge of the L1 was accessed when dealing with L2 figurative language, then those figurative units in which there was the equivalent conceptual basis in the two languages (i.e. types 1, 2, and 4) would be easier than those for which there was a different conceptual basis (e.g. type 3). They would be even more easily understood when an equivalent linguistic form is shared (i.e. type 1). In addition, figurative units that could be interpreted with reference to universal encyclopaedic knowledge (i.e. type 5) would be easier than those for which the conceptual basis was rooted in knowledge that is specific to a culture (i.e. type 6).

Subjects were given as much time as they liked to complete the tasks but without consultation or the aid of a dictionary.

One mark was given for each correct answer and in the production task a half mark was awarded for evidence of the correct concept even if there was a problem with the linguistic form. For example, 'lend their hands?' for *lend a hand* and 'talk sweet?' for *sweet-talk* were each given a half mark. A one-way ANOVA was used (SPSS version 9) to compare the means for the six different types of task in order to establish whether the subjects scored differently on the different types of task using the above model for comparison of figurative units. ANOVA was chosen as a statistical test because it enables us to compare

whether or not the variation *between* the scores for different types of figurative unit (i.e. types 1–6) is significantly different from that of items *within* each of these types. The ANOVA was calculated using the combined scores for the comprehension and the production tasks. This was because of the small number of items for each type of figurative unit; with a larger sample it would be possible to calculate differences in performance on the two types of task. A post-hoc Tukey test was then performed so as to locate where the significant differences lay.

Informants

It was originally intended to investigate figurative proficiency with reference to around 200 Malay tertiary level learners; however, as a result of practical research difficulties in data collection it was only possible to use 36 female Malay speaking informants who agreed to participate in the study. These were third-year English undergraduates at the National University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur; their average age was 23. All were fluent speakers of Malay but the most commonly spoken languages at home were given as Malay (15), Chinese (11), English and another language equally (5), English (3), other indigenous language (2). Subjects were asked to rate their knowledge of English idioms using a five-point Likert scale and their answers were as follows: very good (0), good (6), average (20), weak (9), and very poor (1). The self-ratings were generally accurate in terms of the apparent ease/difficulty with which the receptive and productive tasks were completed.

FINDINGS

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for each type of figurative unit.

The results of the ANOVA were found to be significant at the .000 level ($F = 7.095$; 45 degrees of freedom). Using a significance level of < 0.05 the Tukey test showed that significant differences were between type 1 and type 3

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Type of figurative unit	N	Mean score on both task types	Standard deviation
1	7	28.43	4.79
2	9	21.94	7.89
3	7	11.21	6.99
4	7	25.78	5.74
5	8	21.75	8.20
6	8	14.13	5.36

(< 0.000); type 1 and type 6 (< 0.002); type 2 and type 3 (< 0.032); type 3 and type 4 (< 0.003) and finally between type 4 and type 6 (< 0.020).

Tables 3–8 summarize the scores for each of the items tested.

As anticipated, figurative units with shared conceptual basis and equivalent linguistic form proved the easiest: all items scored at least 80 per cent correct on the receptive task and an average of 66 per cent on the production task. The combined score for receptive and productive tasks was significantly higher than for types 3 and 6. This provides evidence of activation of both first language conceptual and linguistic knowledge in dealing with figurative units of this type and I would, therefore, anticipate less learning difficulty for type 1 figurative units. However, evidence from a larger sample of both subjects and figurative units would be needed to confirm these findings. As far as pedagogy is concerned it would seem unnecessary to teach the conceptual basis since the focus will be on explaining the L2 linguistic equivalents for L1 figurative units.

The combined score for type 2 figurative units was only significantly higher than for type 3 figurative units. For reception there is little difference from type 1 items; however, for production it appears that non-equivalence of linguistic form leads to some difficulties—particularly at the level of grammar. For example, a number of subjects substituted ‘naked eye’ or ‘naked eyes’ for ‘the naked eye’; similarly, others substituted ‘close to heart’ for ‘close to the heart’. In these cases there appears to be difficulty with the grammatical requirement of the definite article in the English figurative unit rather than the underlying concept. However, the surface grammar was not a problem in the receptive task suggesting some activation of the first language concept. The implication is that for this type there is no need for

Table 3: Scores—Type 1 (equivalent conceptual basis, equivalent linguistic form)

English figurative unit	Receptive task (<i>n</i> = 36)	Productive task (<i>n</i> = 36)
Change hands	32	
In hand	34	
A broken heart	33	
To steal someone’s heart		24
Soft/kind hearted		22
Big-headed	29	
Black sheep		25
Total	128 (89%)	71 (66%)
Mean	28.43 (79%)	

Table 4: Scores—Type 2 (similar linguistic form and equivalent conceptual basis)

English figurative unit	Receptive task (n = 36)	Productive task (n = 36)
Iron fisted		9.5
To be caught red handed		18
To see with the naked eye	26	22
Big mouthed	30	
Look down one's nose	29	
Two-faced	32	
Close to one's heart		13
Sweet talk		18
Total	117 (81%)	80.5 (45%)
Mean	21.94 (61%)	

explicit treatment of the conceptual basis but there is a need for explicit focus on linguistic form.

There was also some evidence of intralingual transfer in the responses to the item that was intended to elicit *iron fist*: there seemed here to be activation of other collocational patterns that were associated with 'fist'; for example, several of the responses for this item were *clenched fist*. Clearly, here learners were encountering difficulty with the lexical item *fist* and to some extent this impeded activation of the first language concept but activated other related L2 collocations for *fist*. Howarth (1998: 37) finds similar evidence that collocations are predicted by analogy with other collocations. One suspects that this is more likely to be a problem in production as compared with reception. Unfortunately, it was not possible—given the small number of figurative units—to undertake statistical tests comparing performance on reception and production, and this remains an area in need of further enquiry.

As anticipated, type 3 figurative units scored the lowest for both task types as compared with other types of figurative unit. The combined score was statistically significant when compared with types 1, 2, and 4. In the receptive task difficulty with this type of figurative unit arises because a difference in conceptual basis causes a problem when combined with equivalence of linguistic form. Literal translation of the linguistic form may tempt learners into activating a first language conceptual basis that is of little assistance in correctly interpreting the L2 figurative sense. For example, over half the subjects chose one of the options with a negative sense for the item measuring 'new blood'. An additional factor that may have influenced the findings was

Table 5: Scores—Type 3 (equivalent linguistic form but different conceptual basis)

English figurative unit	Receptive task (n = 36)	Productive task (n = 36)
New blood	16	–
Eat your heart out	15	16
To get the wind up	8	1.5
Hard hearted	19	–
A cat nap	–	3
Total	58 (40%)	20.5 (14%)
Mean	11.21 (31%)	

the frequency of the figurative unit; for example: *get the wind up* only occurs once every 30 million words in the Bank of English corpus. Conversely, *new blood* occurs over once every 1 million words and *eat your heart out* occurs once every 2.3 million words. It is likely, that a combination of low levels of exposure and transfer of the L1 concept cause difficulty with comprehension of this type of figurative unit—especially for learners, such as in this sample, of average or below average ability.

Difficulty with low frequency figurative units was also a problem in the production tasks. This is because learners may prefer an alternative, better known L2 figurative unit. For example, only one subject provided the correct form for the low frequency *get the wind up*, however, four subjects wrote ‘get cold feet’. This figurative unit occurs around once every 3 million words—which is around 10 times higher than the frequency for *get the wind up*. Difficulty was also encountered with the low frequency *a cat nap* (once every 40 million words), whereas the higher frequency *eat your heart out* scored more highly on the production than on the receptive task.

As regards comprehension, second language pedagogy should aim to guard against the inter-lingual strategy of transfer of the first language concept and, as regards production, it should guard against the intra-lingual strategy of transfer of an alternative L2 figurative unit as well. There is evidently a need for systematic attention to the differences in L1 and L2 conceptual bases for type 3 figurative units. In addition, plentiful exposure to them reduces the effect of both inter-lingual and intra-lingual transfer and other causes of error such as a simple lack of familiarity.

The combined score for type 4 was the second highest after type 1 figurative units; and it was significantly higher than for type 3 and type 6 figurative units. This type was easier than were those with different underlying concepts and similar linguistic forms, and opaque figurative units. This corresponds with Irujo’s (1986) claim that similar idioms (i.e. in

Table 6: Scores—Type 4 (different linguistic form, equivalent conceptual basis)

English figurative unit	Receptive task (<i>n</i> = 36)	Productive task (<i>n</i> = 36)
Poke one's nose into	31	
A windbag	21	
Pickpocket	35	
To have a loose tongue	25	
Tongue tied		24.5
To jump the queue		18
To lend a hand		26
Total	112 (78%)	68.5 (63%)
Mean	25.78 (72%)	

linguistic form) were just as difficult as different ones. However, where linguistic forms are quite different, activation of an equivalent first language conceptual basis does not always lead to the correct L2 linguistic form. For example, in the responses to the item intended to elicit *jump the queue*, four subjects wrote 'cut the queue?' Evidently this is a direct translation of the Malay verb *potong* 'cut'; this verb occurs in the Malay expression *potong trick orang*—'cut trick man'—which has a similar meaning of gaining an unfair advantage over others. It is possible that direct translation may also be encouraged by the code switched medial element *trick* in the Malay expression.

This would tend to argue in favour of focusing on conceptual differences in second language pedagogy where there is evidence of differing conceptual bases (type 3 and type 6 figurative units), but focus only on linguistic differences where there is evidence of a similar conceptual basis (type 1 and type 4 figurative units). As Johnson proposes:

Successful communication will depend on several aspects, including the extent to which the L1 and L2 cultures share similar conceptual systems, the extent to which the L2 speaker has knowledge of the relevant L2 conceptual system, and the extent to which the metaphorical meaning is motivated by experience common to the two cultures (Johnson 1996: 236).

In cases where conceptual similarities are shared it is unnecessary in the first instance to point this out, at least with beginning and elementary level learners, but doing so at a later stage may enhance confidence with using L2 figurative language.

No significant differences were found between type 5 and the other types

Table 7: Scores—Type 5 (different linguistic form, different conceptual basis—transparent)

English figurative unit	Receptive task (<i>n</i> = 36)	Productive task (<i>n</i> = 36)
Have your back to the wall		7
Turn a blind eye to	34	20
Turn your back on	26	
Put your feet up	22	29
Put your finger on	19	17
Total	101 (70%)	73 (50%)
Mean	21.75 (60%)	

identified implying that there is no particular learner difficulty with this type of figurative unit. So there is no statistically significant evidence that, for example, there is a distinction between transparent and opaque conceptual bases in terms of learner difficulty. However, given the higher scores on both tasks for transparent figurative units—particularly considering the high frequency of many of the opaque figurative units—there remains a possibility that types 5 and 6 are two distinct types of figurative unit. It is interesting to note that *put your feet up* scored more highly on the productive than the receptive task. This may be because of the effect of one of the distractors for the multiple choice task; one-third of the subjects chose the option ‘go to sleep’ rather than the correct answer ‘sit down and relax’. This may be because it is normal for this cultural group to go to sleep when they put their feet up. Cultural practice, therefore, forms an important element in encyclopaedic knowledge and determines the relative extent to which particular figurative units are ‘transparent’ or ‘opaque’.

Significant differences were between type 6 and type 1 and type 4 figurative units; this indicates that, as we may expect, figurative units with equivalent linguistic forms and conceptual bases are easier for second language learners than those with completely different linguistic forms and conceptual bases. The implication is that particular pedagogic attention should be given to conceptual bases where these are shown to *differ* or to *be absent* in the L1. This is all the more so when we consider the frequency with which figurative units based on a culture specific gesture occur in English. All the above figurative units are classified as high frequency in the Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms (1995) (i.e. > once per 2 million words of the Bank of English Corpus). For example, *scratch one’s head*—which only four subjects scored correctly—occurs as frequently as once every 2 million words of the Bank of English corpus; yet the majority of respondents wrote ‘shook his head’ suggesting preference for a more familiar gesture. Clearly, then, there

Table 8: Scores—Type 6 (Different conceptual basis and different linguistic form: Opaque)

English figurative unit	Receptive task (<i>n</i> = 36)	Productive task (<i>n</i> = 36)
Tongue-in-cheek	12	
Turn the other cheek		14
Wring your hands	18	
Find your feet	23	
Fly in the face of	14	
Point the finger at		14
In cold blood		14
Scratch one's head		4
Total	67 (46%)	46 (32%)
Mean	14.13 (39%)	

is evidence in favour of including such culture specific gestures in the second language syllabus, as they are likely to be problematic for learners. They are also particularly amenable to illustration through the use of mime and drama techniques.

CONCLUSION

This study has illustrated how a systematic comparison of figurative language based on a theoretical comparative model can be of use in anticipating the type of figurative units that will cause more and less difficulty to second language learners who share a common language background. It may also be useful in interpreting and accounting for difficulties with figurative units in the target language. However, it needs further research to explore the full practical implications of this comparative model. Such research could be based on the fundamental assumption of this study: that systematic comparison of the figurative expressions of different languages offers both linguistic and conceptual insights.

In this small-scale study, figurative units that have an equivalent linguistic form and an equivalent conceptual basis were the easiest; the most difficult were those that have an equivalent linguistic form but a different conceptual basis. Those with a different linguistic form and a different conceptual basis were also difficult when they reflected culture specific behaviour such as gestures. However, there are other factors that also influence how far learners encounter difficulty with L2 figurative language; these include the frequency of exposure to L2 figurative units and the strategy of intra-lingual transfer that

can cause confusion between different L2 figurative units. This is because where there are shared linguistic elements, learners prefer the figurative unit with which they are more familiar—probably because it is more common—irrespective of whether it fits in a particular context. Further research could explore further the relationship between the frequency of figurative units and ease of learning; for example, as to how much exposure to figurative units with a different conceptual basis is required before they are learnt.

These findings argue in favour of a pedagogic strategy of identifying conceptual metaphors in circumstances where they are different in the L1 and L2 but focusing on linguistic—rather than conceptual—differences when comparative analysis shows evidence of similar conceptual metaphors in two languages. Learners should also be made aware of the connotations of figurative units in the target language and advised to avoid paraphrasing L2 figurative units with translations from L1 figurative units that ignore these connotations. A comparative conceptual metaphor approach is likely to be particularly effective with learners who come from a language background—such as Malay—for whom explicit instruction is provided in L1 figurative language. It is also likely to be effective for learners who may perceive a typological distance between their L1 and English. While figurative language should continue to be an important area of second language instruction, further descriptive studies are needed on the correspondences—both linguistic and conceptual—between languages. There is also a need for empirical studies into the effect of formal instruction in conceptual metaphor on the acquisition of figurative language by particular groups of learners.

(Revised version received June 2001)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express his thanks to Hadzidi Abdul Hamid for assistance with data collection, to *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* in Kuala Lumpur for permission to access the Malay database and to Cobuild for access to the Bank of English. He would also like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board of the British Academy for financial support and the four anonymous referees for their academic support.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Type 1—Equivalent conceptual basis, equivalent linguistic form

ENGLISH	MALAY + LITERAL TRANSLATION	FIGURATIVE MEANING	CONCEPTUAL BASIS
Change hands	<i>pindah tangan</i> change hand	A change in ownership	HAND FOR THE PERSON
In hand	<i>di tangan</i> in hand	Under control	HAND IS CONTROL
A broken heart	<i>patah hati</i> broken liver	To feel very upset	THE STATE OF THE FEELINGS IS THE MATERIAL STATE OF A VITAL ORGAN
Soft/kind hearted	<i>lembut hati</i> soft liver	To be kind and considerate towards others	THE STATE OF THE FEELINGS IS THE MATERIAL STATE OF A VITAL ORGAN

Table A2: Type 2—Similar linguistic form, equivalent conceptual basis

ENGLISH	MALAY + LITERAL TRANSLATION	FIGURATIVE MEANING	CONCEPTUAL BASIS
iron fisted	<i>kuku besi</i> claw/nail iron	To control using force rather than consent	BEHAVIOURAL ATTRIBUTES ARE MATERIAL ATTRIBUTES + HAND FOR PERSON
To be caught red handed	<i>tangkap basah</i> catch wet	To be found in the act of doing something not permitted	Encyclopaedic knowledge you 'catch' someone who has done something wrong + EFFECT FOR CAUSE
Big mouthed	<i>mulut tempayan</i> mouth big jar	Someone who is boastful or can't keep secrets	MOUTH FOR PERSON + BEHAVIOURAL ATTRIBUTES ARE MATERIAL ATTRIBUTES
Look down one's nose	<i>hidung tinggi</i> nose high	To consider oneself better than others	PHYSICAL POSITION IS MENTAL ATTITUDE

Table A3: Type 3—Equivalent linguistic form, different conceptual basis

ENGLISH	MALAY + LITERAL TRANSLATION	FIGURATIVE MEANING	CONCEPTUAL BASIS
New blood	<i>darah muda</i> blood new	English: new people who are brought in to improve an organization Malay: impetuous	BLOOD FOR LIFE FORCE (both languages) + VITAL IS NEW (English) INEXPERIENCE IS NEW (Malay)
Eat your heart out	<i>makan hati</i> , eat liver	English: an invi- tation to someone who is famous to be jealous about the speaker. Malay: to feel very depressed	VITAL ORGAN FOR FEEL- INGS (both languages) EATING IS DESTROYING (English) EATING IS FEELING (Malay)
Hard hearted	<i>keras hati</i> hard liver	English: to be unfeeling. Malay: someone who refuses to compromise	THE STATE OF THE FEEL- INGS IS THE MATERIAL STATE OF A VITAL ORGAN (both languages) EMOTION IS TEXTURE (English) TEMPERAMENT IS TEXTURE (Malay)
To get the wind up	<i>naik angin</i> Rise wind	English: to be afraid Malay: to lose one's temper	FEAR IS WIND (English) ANGER IS WIND (Malay)

Table A4: Type 4—Different linguistic form, equivalent conceptual basis

ENGLISH	MALAY	FIGURATIVE MEANING	CONCEPTUAL BASIS
Poke your nose in	<i>campur tangan</i> mix hand	To interfere	Knowledge: intrusion involves physical movement of a body part
A windbag	<i>tong kosong</i> empty bowels	Someone who talks a lot but without saying much of importance	THE BODY IS A CONTAINER + VALUED MEANING IS SUBSTANCE
Pickpocket	<i>panjang tangan</i> long arm	Someone who steals by sleight of hand	Knowledge: Thieving is done with the hand
To have a loose tongue	<i>mulut murai</i> sparrow mouth	Someone who lacks caution in what they say	TONGUE/MOUTH FOR SPEECH + Unguarded movement indicates carelessness

Table A5: Type 5—Different linguistic form, different conceptual basis: Transparent

ENGLISH	CONCEPTUAL BASIS	MALAY	FIGURATIVE MEANING	CONCEPTUAL BASIS
Have your back to the wall	Knowledge: no further retreat is possible	<i>anak kapal</i> son ship	crew	A SHIP IS A PARENT
Turn a blind eye to	NOT SEEING IS NOT KNOWING	<i>angkat kaki</i> transport foot	leave	FOOT FOR ACTION
Turn your back on	NOT FACING IS REJECTING	<i>cakap besar</i> Speak big	exaggerate	BEHAVIOURAL ATTRIBUTES ARE MATERIAL ATTRIBUTES
Put your finger on	TO TOUCH IS TO LOCATE	<i>ringan tangan</i> Light hand	Quick to strike or to slap	BEHAVIOURAL ATTRIBUTES ARE MATERIAL ATTRIBUTES

Table A6: Type 6—Different conceptual basis, different linguistic form: Opaque

ENGLISH	CONCEPTUAL BASIS	MALAY	FIGURATIVE MEANING
Turn the other cheek	Culture specific gesture	<i>Telinga nipis</i> thin eared	quick to lose one's temper
Scratch one's head	Culture specific gesture	<i>Hati sejuk</i> liver cool	to feel relieved
Tongue-in-cheek	Culture specific gesture	<i>Makan garam</i> eat salt	knowledgeable through wide experience of life
Wring your hands	Culture specific gesture	<i>Kecil hati</i> small liver	to feel hurt
Point the finger at	Culture specific gesture	<i>Makan angin</i> eat wind	Travel for fun

REFERENCES

- Arnaud, P. J. L. and S. J. Savignon. 1997. 'Rare words, complex lexical units and the advanced learner' in J. Coady and T. Huckin (eds): *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 157–200.
- Blasko, D. G. and C. M. Connine. 1993. 'Effects of familiarity and aptness on metaphor processing.' *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 19: 295–308.
- Boers, F. 1997. 'No pain, no gain in a free market rhetoric: a test for cognitive semantics?' *Metaphor and Symbol* 12/4: 231–41.
- Boers, F. 2000a. 'Enhancing metaphor awareness in specialised reading.' *English for Specific Purposes* 19: 137–47.
- Boers, F. 2000b. 'Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention.' *Applied Linguistics* 21/4: 553–71.
- Boers, F. and M. Demecheleer. 1998. 'A cognitive semantic approach to teaching prepositions.' *ELT Journal* 52/3: 197–204.
- Cameron, L. and G. Low. (eds) 1999a. *Researching and Applying Metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, L. and G. Low. 1999b. 'Metaphor.' *Language Teaching* 32: 77–96.
- Carter, R. and M. McCarthy. 1988. *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2000a. 'Metaphor and vocabulary teaching in ESP economics.' *English for Specific Purposes* 19: 149–65.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2000b. 'Figuration, lexis and cultural resonance: a corpus based study of Malay.' *Pragmatics* 10/3: 281–300.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2001a. 'A comparative study of metaphor in Spanish and English financial reporting.' *English for Specific Purposes* 20: 249–66.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2001b. 'Cultural resonance in English and Malay figurative phrases: the case of "hand"' in J. Cotterill and A. Iffe (eds): *Language Across Boundaries*. London: Continuum, pp. 151–70.
- Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms. 1995. R. Moon (ed.). London: Harper Collins.
- Connor, U. 1996. *Contrastive Rhetoric*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cowie, A. P. (ed.) 1998. *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis and Applications*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Cruse, A. 2000. *Meaning and Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Danesi, M. 1994. 'Recent research on metaphor and the teaching of Italian.' *Italica* 71: 453–64.
- Deignan, A., D. Gabrys, and A. Solska. 1997. 'Teaching English metaphors using cross-linguistic awareness raising activities.' *ELT Journal* 51/4: 353–60.

- Dobrovolskij, D. 1998. 'Contrastive idiom analysis (Russian and German idioms in theory and dictionary).' *Third International Symposium on Phraseology*. University of Stuttgart.
- Gibbs, R. W. 1984. 'Literal meaning and psychological theory.' *Cognitive Science* 8: 272-304.
- Gibbs, R. W. 1992. 'What do idioms really mean?' *Journal of Memory and Language* 31: 485-506.
- Gibbs, R. W. 1994. *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative thought, language and understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hadley, G. 1997. 'Lexis and culture: bound and determined.' *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 26/4: 483-96.
- Hasan Muhamed Ali. 1996. *Malay Idioms*. Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International.
- Howarth, P. 1998. 'Phraseology and second language proficiency.' *Applied Linguistics* 19/1: 24-44.
- Irujo, S. 1986. 'Don't put your leg in your mouth: transfer in the acquisition of idioms in a second language.' *TESOL Quarterly* 20/2: 287-303.
- James, C. 1980. *Contrastive Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Johnson, M. 1987. *The Body in the Mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination and reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, J. M. 1996. 'Metaphor interpretations by second language learners: children and adults.' *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 53: 219-41.
- Jordens, P. 1977. 'Rules, grammatical intuitions and strategies in foreign language learning.' *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin* 2/2: 5-76.
- Kamus Besar Bahasa Melayu 1995. H. Z. A. Safarwan (ed.). Selangor: Percetakan Kum Sdn. Bhd.
- Kellerman, E. 1977. 'Towards a characterization of the strategy of transfer in second language learning.' *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin* 2/1: 58-145.
- Kellerman, E. 1978. 'Giving learners a break: native speaker intuitions as a source of predictions about transferability.' *Working Papers on Bilingualism* 15: 59-92.
- Kellerman, E. 1986. 'An eye for an eye: crosslinguistic constraints on the development of the L2 lexicon.' In E. Kellerman and M. Sharwood-Smith (eds): *Crosslinguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Kittay, E. F. 1987. *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kövecses, Z. and P. Szabó. 1996. 'Idioms: A view from cognitive semantics.' *Applied Linguistics* 17/3: 326-55.
- Lakoff, G. 1987. *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors we Live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Langacker, R. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. Vol. 1: *Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lerman, C. L. 1983. 'The functions of metaphor in discourse: masking metaphor in the Nixon conversation'. Paper presented at the 1983 Whim conference 'Metaphors be With You: Humour and Metaphor'. (Mimeo). English Department, Arizona State University, (short version published in D. L. F. Nilsen (ed.): *Whimsy* 2: 133-48.
- Low, G.D. 1988. 'On teaching metaphor.' *Applied Linguistics* 9/2: 125-47.
- MacLennan, C. H. G. 1994. 'Metaphor and Prototypes in the learning/teaching of grammar and vocabulary.' *IRAL XXXII/2*: 97-110.
- Nayak, N. P. and R. W. Gibbs. 1990. 'Conceptual knowledge in the interpretation of idioms.' *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 119/3: 315-30.
- Odlin, T. 1989. *Language Transfer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ortony, A. 1979. *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reddy, M. 1979. 'The conduit metaphor: a case of frame conflict in our language about language' in A. Ortony (ed.): *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 284-324.
- Stevick, E. W. 1982. *Teaching and Learning Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swan, M. 1997. 'The influence of the mother tongue in second language vocabulary acquisition and use' in N. Schmitt and M. Murphy (eds): *Vocabulary Description Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 156-80.
- Winstedt, R. 1981. *Malay Proverbs*. Singapore: Bush.