

L2 Metaphoric Competence: Moving from classroom task to assessment tool

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This poster presents:

- 1) Background/literature review
- 2) The development of a Metaphoric Competence test battery as part of my PhD study
- 3) The test battery's usefulness as an alternative form of assessment for EFL practitioners
- 4) Practical considerations and challenges (e.g. scoring, test administration)

1) Background and literature review

The ability to comprehend and use metaphor in a second/foreign language (L2 Metaphoric Competence) has long been recognised as an important part of L2 language competence. To achieve mastery of a second/foreign language, learners need to hone very specific metaphor related skills, ranging from *knowledge of the boundaries of conventional metaphor*, *multiple layering* and *use of hedges* (Low, 1988) to *control of ideational, heuristic* and *imaginative functions* (Littlemore & Low, 2006). It should, however, be remembered that increased *conceptual proficiency* (Danesi, 1994), or becoming competent with the concepts of a particular language, does not necessitate *phraseological proficiency* (Philip, 2010), or being proficient at understanding and using actual 'metaphorical' words phrases (i.e. linguistic metaphor).

The upshot of this is that the foreign language learner who understands and can explain that **ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER** (Kövecses, 2010) would not, of a necessity, automatically understand and use the phrases 'blow one's stack', 'explode with rage', or 'simmering with anger', which might need to be taught separately:



Photograph: Targa/Zefa/Corbis

Consequently, questions on teaching metaphor that arise for foreign language teachers can be grouped into three main areas:

Table 1.1. Questions on teaching metaphor

1) CONTENT related: 2) METHOD related: 3) ASSESSMENT related:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which metaphors (and related functions) should I teach? • Where can I obtain this content? • To what extent should I consider the learners in determining content? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of tasks can be used to teach these metaphors (and related functions)? • Should the content taught be integrated into other material or taught separately? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can one's (L1, L2, L3 etc.) metaphoric competence be assessed? • How can improvements in learning be assessed? • How can assessments be evaluated? |
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2) Development of a Metaphoric Competence test battery

a) Key information:

- Computer based (written) test containing 144 questions organised into 9 sections
- Developed as a testing instrument used in my PhD study
- Test administered to 112 Non-native speakers of English (L1 Chinese) and 31 Native speakers of English.
- Short question types (multiple choice, explain the meaning, acceptability rating, limited production)
- Questions measured receptive and productive knowledge
- Piloting and think aloud protocols conducted to maximise the effectiveness of questions, distractors, instructions etc.
- Participants either completed the test in a group session or at home
- Various scoring criteria used. Responses scored to productive questions scored by three judges (see inter-rater reliability statistics)
- Data analysis (in relation to research questions) currently underway

b) Development phases:

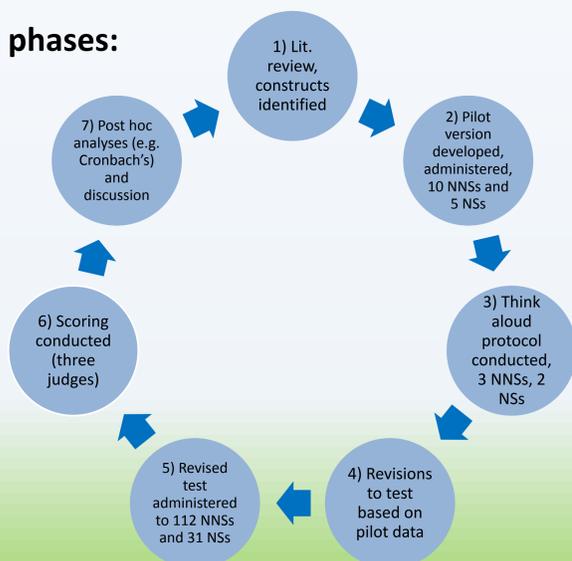


Figure 2.1. Development phases of the Metaphoric Competence test battery

c) Overview of the MC test battery

Table 2.1. Overview of the Metaphoric Competence test battery

Section	Part	Rec / Prod	No. Qs	Receptive / productive test of ability to:	Questions type	Scoring	Notes
1	A	R	10	recognise a metaphorical phrasal verb particle	Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Correct answer (0,1)
	B	P	10	recall a metaphorical phrasal verb particle	Limited production	Right/wrong	Correct answer (0,1)
2	A	R	6	a) understand the meaning of a Vehicle term	a) Limited production	Partial credit	Written responses marked (0,1,2)
	R	6	b) recognise the most relevant feature of the Vehicle that applies to the Topic	b) Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)	
	B	R	6	recognise the correct ending of a garden-path sentence (figurative to literal)	a) Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
3	C	R	6	recognise the correct ending of a garden-path sentence (figurative to figurative)	a) Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
	/	R	16	rate the acceptability of different exploitations of the Vehicle Y	Rating scale	Right/wrong	Correct answer (0,1)
4	R	12	rate the acceptability of Vehicle terms across different word classes	Rating scale	Right/wrong	Correct answer (0,1)	
	A	R	6	Rank and rate the acceptability of different Topic and Vehicle combinations in the framework of an analogy	Rating scales	Partial credit	Same rank 1 as NNS (0,1), within 1 S.D. of NSs rank 1 (0,1)
5	B	P	6	produce a Vehicle for a given Topic in the framework of an analogy	Limited production	Partial credit	Meaning (0,1,2) and grammar (0,1)
	A	R	6	recognise proverb/idioms in topic transition in interactive discourse	Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
6	B	P	6	produce proverb/idioms in topic transition in interactive discourse	Limited production	Partial credit	Meaning (0,1,2) and grammar (0,1)
	A	R	6	recognise similes used to perform heuristic functions	Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
7	B	P	6	produce similes to perform heuristic functions	Limited production	Partial credit	Meaning (0,1,2) and grammar (0,1)
	A	R	6	recognise metaphors used to convey information and feelings about that information	Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
8	B	P	6	produce metaphors to convey information and feelings about that information	Limited production	Partial credit	Meaning (0,1,2) and grammar (0,1)
	A	R	6	recognise possible extensions of idioms	Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
9	B	P	6	produce possible extensions of idioms	Limited production	Partial credit	Meaning (0,1,2) and grammar (0,1)
	A	R	6	recognise coherent continuation of metaphorical discourse	Multiple choice	Right/wrong	Best answer (0,1)
9	B	P	6	produce coherent continuations of metaphorical discourse	Limited production	Partial credit	Meaning (0,1,2) and grammar (0,1)

d) Example questions from the MC test battery

Q.5.2.
Speaker A: We went to a small village in France last month.
Speaker B: Oh that's great, what did you do?
Speaker A: Well, we really tried to enjoy the French culture and fit in with the locals. We drank fresh coffee and read a newspaper in the mornings, then ate lunch with wine, and in the evening walked the streets listening to live music playing in the restaurants. We really started to feel French!
Speaker B: Great, well you know what they say,

Please choose the best expression to finish the conversation:

- Rome wasn't built in a day!
- Nero found Rome built of bricks and left it clothed in marble!
- Even the Romans couldn't conquer the blue skies!
- When in Rome, do as the Romans do!

Figure 2.3. Recognising a proverb/idiom in topic transition (section 5)

Q. 3.16:
 She turned orange as she started shouting at him.
 Acceptability rating:

0 = not acceptable, 100 = perfectly acceptable:

Figure 2.2. Vehicle Y exploitation acceptability rating task (section 3)

Q8.10.
 (Original idiom: to make a mountain out of a molehill = to make a small problem seem very dramatic or important)
 Please extend the idiom:

Extended idiom: He made such a mountain out of a molehill that _____!

Figure 2.4. Idiom extension production task (section 8)

3) The Metaphoric Competence test battery as an alternative form of assessment for EFL practitioners

As W. Edwards Deming is often misquoted as saying, "you can't manage what you don't measure!" (Wikipedia). In cases where EFL teachers seek to teach metaphor and metaphor related functions (cf. Macarthur, 2010), it would also be appropriate to use low stakes tests to attempt to assess the effectiveness of this teaching. Not only would this allow teachers to go beyond impressionistic observations of progress to measured improvement, it would also help them justify teaching metaphor to managers, course designers and most importantly, the students themselves!

The table below outlines the usefulness of the Metaphoric Competence test battery and the research it is being used to conduct to EFL practitioners:

Table 3.1. Usefulness of Metaphoric Competence test battery to EFL practitioners

The MC test battery/research has revealed:	EFL practitioners could use this to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General tendencies and scores of the NNS and NS participants. • Which test items 'hang well' together in terms of their internal consistency • The extent to which judges were in agreement when scoring the productive sections of the test • How participants' Metaphoric Competence relates to their size of vocabulary knowledge (measured by Meara's V-YesNo test), their depth of vocabulary knowledge (measured by Read's Word Associates Test), their general L2 proficiency (measured by the Oxford Placement test and reported IELTS scores) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understand which metaphors and metaphor related functions might pose problems for learners at the level of phrase and concept • Develop shorter, more practical measures of metaphor related skills • Improve their understanding of the role subjectivity when scoring the quality of a student's metaphor production. • Better understand: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) how developing student's metaphoric competence relates to development in the areas of vocabulary knowledge and general proficiency b) how effective measures of metaphoric competence, vocabulary knowledge and general proficiency are as predictors of one another

4) Practical considerations and challenges

Content selection

Here, there was the challenge of determining which skills/competencies from Low (1988) and Littlemore and Low (2006) were most important (and worthy of inclusion in the battery), and which a meaningful test could be devised for.

Scoring

As a process involving three judges allocating responses into one of three categories (roughly analogous to 'not acceptable', 'somewhat acceptable' and 'acceptable'), scoring the productive data proved challenging and time consuming.

Test administration

Time taken – The test battery in its current form is rather lengthy (1 hour +) and would need to be shortened for better practicability

Mode – Qualtrics software used to control administration, keep track of scores, time taken, tests in progress etc.

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