Metaphorical creativity and EFL language

Prodromou (2007: 21) observes that "What is considered creative in the mouth of an L1-user is often seen as deviation in the mouth of even the most advanced successful bilingual user of the language." Judgement of acceptability is thereby attributed to who has the authority to say something rather than what is said. This paper sheds further light on perceptions of error and creativity in the language of EFL learners by focusing on the complex concept of metaphorical creativity.

I propose that an additional criterion dividing creativity from error in learner language concerns the degree of deviation from native-speaker English, rather than the merely the occurrence of deviation in and of itself. When deviation is wide, the metaphor has a better chance of being accepted as creative; when there is only a small degree of deviation, metaphor will more likely be perceived as error.

Novel metaphors written by advanced Norwegian learners of English provide support for this hypothesis. By way of example, consider the following, where the metaphorical embodiment of *message* results in an unconventional collocation with *stand*, rather than an alternative such as *endure*:

> …the methods might change but the message will <u>stand.</u>

Here, both Norwegian and English share an underlying conceptual metaphor which is linguistically encoded in slightly different ways, just enough to be perceived as somehow wrong, rather than creative – regardless of provenance, authorial intention or degree of interpretability.

This observation has important implications for the role of metaphor in EFL teaching. It has been suggested that learners be encouraged to "…produce what they perceive as 'creative' metaphor" (Littlemore 2009: 101) in an effort to make their English more closely resemble that native-speaker English. In so doing, however, EFL learners risk being judged linguistically incompetent due to unconventional phraseology (see e.g. Danesi 1993, MacArthur 2010, Philip 2006).

References

Danesi, Marcel (1993). "Metaphorical competence in second language acquisition and second language teaching: The neglected dimension." In *Language, communication and social meaning*. J. E. Alatis (ed.) Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 489-500.

Littlemore, Jeannette (2009). *Applying cognitive linguistics to second language learning and teaching*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

MacArthur, Fiona (2010). "Metaphorical competence in EFL: Where we are and where we should be going? A view from the classroom." In *AILA Review*, vol. 23, 155-173.

Philip, Gill (2006). *"Drugs, traffic, and many other dirty interests": Metaphor and the language learner*. Retrieved September 18, 2007 from http://amsacta.cib.unibo.it/archive/00002125/.

Prodromou, Luke (2007). "Bumping into creative idiomaticity." In *English Today*, vol. 23 (1), 14-25.