

Metaphor comprehension and production in a second language

Susan Nacey (Hedmark University College)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 1980 publication of Lakoff and Johnson's 'Metaphors We Live By' on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) marked a paradigm shift in metaphor studies, advancing the view of metaphor as a fundamental cognitive process (see chapter 2). Rather than merely being an optional and ornamental element in discourse, the metaphors we produce in language are viewed in CMT as mirroring the way we conceive of the world around us. Metaphor operates primarily on the level of thought, through 'conceptual metaphors' that help define our understanding of reality. With the conceptual metaphor *TIME IS MONEY*, for instance, we map some of the properties of a 'source' domain (money) onto a 'target' domain (time); time is in some way compared to and understood in terms of money. Such conceptual metaphors are, in turn, reflected in language by the actual words and expressions we produce — so-called 'linguistic metaphors', exemplified by the lexical verb in *we're wasting time*. In brief, metaphor is intrinsic to language because metaphor is intrinsic to thought.

Studies exploring metaphor acquisition in children developing their first language (their L1) indicate that children may begin to make sense of the world through metaphorical reasoning as early as infancy, a competence which grows with age and experience (cf. Wagner *et al.* 1981; Winner 1988). Being inherent in human nature, it stands to reason that such 'metaphoric competence' necessarily also plays an important role in the acquisition of subsequently learned languages, not just the L1. This chapter explores various ways in which metaphor relates to second/foreign language (L2) development, along with many of the central issues and questions addressed by recent research (see also chapter 20 about metaphor in education and chapter 31 on teaching metaphor in an L2). Section 2 first elaborates upon the concept of metaphoric competence, presenting an overview of different perspectives concerning its definition and potential significance for L2 learners. The subsequent sections explore studies examining L2 metaphoric competence: the extent to which learners comprehend the metaphors of the target language (Section 3), and the types of metaphors they produce in discourse (Section 4). Section

5 then discusses one of the burning issues in this field — namely, the practical pedagogical implications of L2 metaphoric competence, while Section 6 presents some preliminary analysis from ongoing research in the field. Finally, Section 7 rounds off the chapter by discussing possible directions for future research.

2. METAPHORIC COMPETENCE

More or less concurrently with the development and later expansion of the CMT, applied linguists gradually began exploring the practical implications of the theory for language learning and teaching. In 1988, Low wrote what turned out to be a landmark paper, being among the first to extend the view of the centrality of metaphor to L2 language learning. He proposed a reformulation of CMT in terms of ‘metaphoric competence’: ‘a number of skills related to metaphor which native speakers are frequently expected to be good at, and which learners need to develop to some degree if they hope to be seen as competent users of the language’ (Low 1988: 129). His suggested list of skills includes the ability to interpret seemingly anomalous sentences, as well as knowledge about the boundaries of conventional metaphor both with respect to what people tend to say and tend *not* to say. Learners also need to know about the interactive aspects of metaphor, including mindfulness of socially sensitive metaphors (for example, Animal metaphors in connection with gender) or of the possibility of ‘multiple layering’ when an expression refers to both literal and metaphorical meaning at one and the same time (Low 1988: 133-134). Low’s skills-based approach is intended as a basic framework to guide the practical application of metaphor theory in the classroom and improve learners’ L2 language competence.

Littlemore (2001a) operates with an alternative definition of metaphoric competence as consisting of four separate components: ‘(a) originality of metaphor production, (b) fluency of metaphor interpretation, (c) ability to find meaning in metaphor, and (d) speed in finding meaning in metaphor’ (Littlemore 2001a: 461). She expands upon Low’s contention that metaphoric competence varies from person to person, suggesting that the different aspects of metaphoric competence may develop independently and at varying rates in different learners. Specifically, Littlemore — and later Littlemore and Low (2006b) — find that a learner’s degree of metaphoric competence may depend upon their cognitive learning style, i.e. ‘a person’s habitual way of perceiving, organizing, and processing information’ (Littlemore 2001a: 462). Littlemore and Low (2006a) additionally demonstrate how metaphoric competence, as part of what they term ‘figurative thinking’, contributes to linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic elements of communicative competence.

An alternative perspective on metaphoric competence is offered by Danesi (1994), who maintains that it primarily relates to the level of thought rather than the surface manifestation of

language: 'student-based discourse texts seem to follow a native-language conceptual flow that is "clothed" [...] in target language grammar and vocabulary' (Danesi 1994: 454). Based on a few pilot studies, Danesi finds that learner 'infelicities' are caused by a mismatch between the concepts fundamental to speakers of the L1 and L2 in question. He concludes that learners need to utilize the L2 conceptual system rather than their own to sound truly native-like. By contrast, Philip (2006) maintains that learners' infelicities are linguistic rather than conceptual — that is, inappropriate L2 encoding of shared concepts. One of her examples comes from an Italian learner who writes the *escape of the brains* (a literal translation of *la fuga dei cervelli*), instead of the conventional L1 English expression *brain drain* (Philip 2006: 5). Although the cultures share similar underlying conceptual metaphors here, the metaphor is realized differently in the two languages and results in the production of unconventional L2 collocations. Philip concludes therefore that sensitivity to phraseological patterns in an L2 trumps the need for conscious awareness of conceptual domains when it comes to metaphor production.

Metaphoric competence in its most encompassing sense thus concerns the ability to decode and encode metaphorically structured concepts (cf. Danesi 1994), the practical skills and knowledge required to do so (cf. Low 1988), and the awareness of conventional phraseological patterns and how such patterns may vary between languages (cf. Philip 2006). In a broader sense, metaphoric competence concerns the overall 'ability to acquire, produce, and interpret metaphor' (Littlemore, 2001a: 459), important for all aspects of communicative competence in an L2 (cf. Littlemore & Low 2006a). Most research concerning metaphoric competence has centered around this wider sense of the concept by using different methods to investigate comprehension and/or production of metaphor by L2 learners, demonstrated in the following subsections.

1.1. Studies of L2 metaphor comprehension

Perhaps the most obvious way of gaining insight into learners' metaphoric competence is to measure their understanding of metaphorical language. The very concept of 'understanding' is not as straightforward as many might first suppose, however, leading e.g. Gibbs (1994: 116-118) to decompose it into four main components: comprehension, recognition, interpretation and appreciation. 'Comprehension' is the immediate and ongoing process of creating meaning from utterances by linking linguistic information (e.g. syntax, lexis, phonemes) and context. Psycholinguistic research indicates that this process is rapid, taking anywhere from milliseconds to a few seconds. 'Recognition' refers to the conscious identification of an utterance as a type, e.g. recognizing a metaphor *as metaphor*. 'Interpretation' involves the analysis of the products of comprehension by, for example, expanding upon the entailments of a particular metaphor. These meanings may or may not have been intended by the speaker/writer. Finally,

'appreciation' involves aesthetic judgment of an utterance, determining its quality. Gibbs explains that much of what is involved in the understanding of figurative language is comprehension, i.e. grasping the intention of utterances. The remaining three steps are later, and optional, products of understanding.

Investigations into understanding of metaphor have thus far not looked into all four of Gibbs' proposed components. Most research into the understanding of L2 metaphor focus upon the comprehension or the interpretation stages (or both stages, sometimes conflated), rather than whether learners actually recognize the language as non-literal or whether they 'like' it in some way. One example of a comprehension study is Golden (2006), comparing the metaphor comprehension of Norwegian L1 15-year-old students with that of their minority-language peers (speakers of Norwegian with varying L1 language backgrounds). The metaphorical expressions Golden asked these students about had all been identified from Norwegian-language textbooks that were aimed at these students; she wanted to find whether there were any differences between different subgroups of students, as well as whether certain metaphorical expressions were more difficult to understand than others. To do so, Golden asked her informants to choose the appropriate meaning of the selected Norwegian metaphorical expressions from among a number of distractors in a multiple-choice task. She found that all her informants had difficulties comprehending the same metaphors, but to varying degrees: if a particular metaphor presented only a slight problem for some L1 speakers, it was likely to present an even greater challenge to L2 learners. These findings have important pedagogical implications, especially for textbook authors and publishers who may not necessarily realize that certain conventional metaphorical expressions may not communicate well to their target audience.

Pickin (2005: 73-9) investigated the degree to which L2 English learners comprehend so-called 'invisible' metaphors in literature, with the aim of exploring the extent to which metaphor poses comprehension problems. He asked 30 first-year Japanese university students of English to write explanations for the penultimate line in one of two versions of almost identical stories. In each case, the line in question called for a metaphorical interpretation, but the explicitness of metaphor in the two versions differed. In the more explicit text — *In her heart, she was drowning* — the metaphorical reasoning was triggered by a so-called 'topic domain signal' (the phrase *in her heart*), precluding the literal understand of the 'drowning'. In the less explicit version — *She was drowning* — the metaphor was 'invisible' in the sense that the metaphorical meaning had to be entirely inferred from context. Findings showed that the invisible version was significantly more often misinterpreted; students believed the topic was the literal sense of drowning. Pickin's results thus indicate that metaphor comprehension may be significantly affected by linguistic form, where absence of signalling might lead L2 learners to

interpret a metaphor as a literal event in the world of the text at hand, rather than a metaphorical one.

While Golden and Pickin looked into metaphor comprehension in written texts, Littlemore (2001b) investigated L2 learners' comprehension of metaphor in spoken discourse. Her informants were Bangladeshi students attending a British university as part of an overseas studies program; Littlemore wanted to investigate whether metaphor, which may rely on shared culturally specific knowledge, played any negative role in their understanding of university lectures. She first recorded and transcribed some of the students' lectures, then asked them to underline any language they perceived as difficult. Afterwards, the students were asked to explain ten metaphors that had been preselected by Littlemore from the lectures, and it was found that they were frequently unable to successfully do so; many of the students' explanations were inappropriate. What was surprising was that some of what they had clearly not understood had *not* been marked by them as difficult language — that is, they were sometimes completely unaware of any possible comprehension problems; they truly believed they had understood correctly. Such misinterpretation would not be serious if metaphor only played a minor role in lectures, but Littlemore *et al.* (2008) later found that it actually has quite an important function in academic talks. Metaphor is used both to organize discourse and to convey speaker opinion; moreover, it is *never* overtly explained. Students might therefore grasp the basic content but miss out on the speaker's evaluation, thereby potentially misinterpreting the overall message. This type of research has since prompted practical advice for raising metaphoric awareness among both international students and British university lecturers (further described in section 3).

In a 2004 study, Littlemore turned toward investigating the *interpretation* rather than comprehension stage of metaphor understanding, by exploring the mental processes that L2 learners employ when deciphering metaphor. For this research, she videotaped intermediate level Japanese learners of English as they worked together in a group to decipher the meanings of previously unknown metaphorical expressions such as *pig out* and *skirt an issue*, all of which the learners had encountered in context; this type of method is known as a 'goal-directed interactive think-aloud technique' (Littlemore 2004: 2/14). Littlemore observed a range of interpretation strategies, depending upon the richness of available context. By way of example, learners faced with minimal context figured out meaning by applying potentially relevant source domain features to the context, as when they worked out the meaning of *cradle work* (referring to the suspended platforms which window cleaners use to ascend tall buildings) by identifying possibly relevant features of a baby cradle. With richer context, learners did the opposite: they used the context as a framework to identify pertinent source domain features. An added observation was the extensive use of gesture that promoted understanding. Sometimes a single

simple gesture was enough to trigger a complex interpretation, or one student's gesture would help another student come up with the meaning of the expression in question. Such observations lend support to the CMT claim that metaphor is fundamental to cognition, in that linguistic metaphor would seem to reflect 'embodied cognition' — that is, the idea that our understanding of the world around us (including abstract concepts) depends to some extent on our physical experience. On a more practical level, Littlemore's study suggests that teachers should encourage learners to use clues in both the context and in the source domain to figure out the meaning of metaphor, as well as to use gesture.

Piquer-Píriz (2008) applied a similar think-aloud protocol in her series of studies conducted with young Spanish learners of English, aged 5 to 11 years old. Her main aim was to explore the extent to which very young learners exploit the literal meaning of a lexeme when trying to decipher its metaphorical sense — that is, she too was interested in interpretation strategies and exploring ways of promoting L2 acquisition of metaphorical lexis. Her work, however, is especially noteworthy because little research about L2 metaphor development among very young children has thus far been conducted.

Specifically, Piquer-Píriz wanted to uncover whether and how these children made sense of metaphorical semantic extensions from familiar body parts such as HEAD, as in *the head of a hammer*. To do so, the children were asked to complete various tasks such as labelling the metaphorical 'head' of objects (e.g. a hammer, a bed, a staircase) in photographs; their interaction and negotiation as they explained their interpretations were recorded and transcribed. Piquer-Píriz's findings show that semantic motivation from literal to metaphorical sense plays a significant role in interpretation, the human body being especially salient at the youngest ages. Like Littlemore's (2004) research highlighting the importance of gesture, Piquer-Píriz's work provides support for embodied cognition, given that her very young informants employ metaphorical reasoning, even in an L2. Piquer-Píriz further maintains that teachers and materials designers should foster metaphorical thinking as an aid to vocabulary enrichment, also for very young children.

1.2. Adding metaphorical production to the investigative mix

A further means of shedding light on L2 metaphoric competence is to investigate spoken or written L2 language *production*, rather than (or in addition to) L2 comprehension and interpretation strategies. An example of a relatively early study looking into both metaphorical production and comprehension at the same time is Charteris-Black's (2002) small-scale study of the second language figurative competence of Malay learners of English. He first selected 40 contemporary figurative units from Malay and English found in standard reference works, and then classified and compared them to create an analytical framework: a contrastive model with

six types of figurative units. These types ranged on a scale based on how closely the metaphorical expressions in the two languages resembled each other (linguistic similarity), together with how closely the underlying metaphors in the two conceptual systems matched (conceptual similarity). For instance, Charteris-Black's 'Type 1' figurative units are judged completely equivalent because both their conceptual basis and linguistic realizations closely correspond (e.g. the English expression *a broken heart* has a similar corresponding Malay expression). At the opposite extreme, 'Type 6' figurative units have different conceptual bases in the two languages and are also linguistically encoded in culturally-specific ways (e.g. Malay *makin angin* [eat wind] for English *to travel for fun*, which do not resemble each other either conceptually or linguistically even though they mean the same thing). One might assume that such expressions would be far less transparent for language learners.

After developing his six-fold taxonomy, Charteris-Black first tested a group of Malay undergraduate students of English in their comprehension of metaphor, by administering a multiple-choice exercise requiring them to select the appropriate meaning of expressions given in context. He followed this up by a production task — a so-called 'cued completion exercise', requiring learners to fill in the appropriate expression within the presented context (helped by a short clue, to avoid the choice of alternative phrases). His main findings indicate that 'Type 1' English figurative units present the fewest difficulties for Malay students. The most challenging metaphors for learners were those with an equivalent linguistic form, but different conceptual basis. These are expressions that may look alike in the two languages, but mean very different things; he cites the example of *get the wind up*, which refers to anxiety in (British) English but to anger in Malay. On the basis of his research, Charteris-Black offers pedagogical suggestions. Specifically, in cases where L1 and L2 conceptual metaphors differ, he advises teachers to explicitly highlight the differing source and target domains in the classroom. By contrast, when L1 and L2 conceptual metaphors are shared, there is then no need to overtly focus on any underlying concept. Rather, he advises teachers to instead point out and work with any differences in the L1 and L2 *linguistic* realizations of those concepts.

Another means of investigating both L2 comprehension and production of figurative language is adopted in MacArthur and Littlemore's (2011) research into metaphor in intercultural communication. They looked at the ways in which metaphor contributes to the joint construction of meaning in *spoken* interaction between L1 and L2 speakers of English, rather than written material. To do so, they first identified all metaphors in the transcriptions of two types of oral data: one set containing elicited, semi-structured interviews between people with different first languages (L1 Polish/L1 English and L1 Spanish/L1 English), and one set containing naturally-occurring conversations between an L1 Spanish speaker and her colleagues, some of whom had English as their L1. The particular focus of their subsequent

analysis was on lexical repetition of metaphorical words and phrases. They conclude that, although topic and content affect metaphor density, both native speakers and non-native speakers use metaphor in spoken discourse. Indeed, the use of particular metaphorical words in back-and-forth spoken dialogue may actually indicate the degree to which an L2 speaker has become part of a particular discourse community, exemplified by when L2-speaking teachers adopt a key term such as *cover* in their professional discourse (e.g. *cover a topic*). MacArthur and Littlemore also observe that non-conventional metaphorical language produced by non-native speakers, as when an L2 speaker says *coal print* instead of the conventional English expression *carbon footprint*, does not lead to communication breakdown; misunderstandings, if any, are quickly and easily resolved. Based on such observations, MacArthur and Littlemore suggest that L2 language learners be trained in exploiting the metaphorical potential of target language vocabulary, since adapting even a limited stock of words may prove more valuable than memorizing a large number of seldom-used idioms. This type of research is important for its holistic approach, by viewing production and comprehension in real-life discourse as two parts of a whole: comprehension in spoken discourse affects production, and production affects comprehension.

Detailed investigation into L2 learner metaphor production alone is relatively rare, the first major such corpus-based investigation having been conducted by Nacey (2013). This research compares the metaphorical production of Norwegian L2 learners of English from the Norwegian subcorpus of the International Corpus of Learner English (NICLE) with that of British L1 novice writers from Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS), partially to uncover any significant differences. All linguistic metaphors in roughly 20,000 words of text in both corpora were first identified following a version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), a procedure allowing for reliable and valid identification of metaphors in discourse (for more about MIPVU see Steen *et al.*, 2010). Findings indicate that the texts in the two corpora mirror each other in many ways. For instance, metaphor is highly frequent in both sets of texts, representing 18% and 16.7% of all lexical units in NICLE and LOCNESS respectively. Moreover, both groups (even the L2 language learners) tend to express their arguments in quite conventional language. Novel metaphors — those whose contextual meanings are not codified in standard English dictionaries — are fairly rare. This observation is contrary to what one might expect given a general focus in metaphor literature on novelty, often linked with creativity (see e.g. Kövecses 2010). Nacey (2013) proposes that a better indicator of possible metaphorical creativity may be deliberate metaphor, i.e. metaphor produced with the express intention of prompting a shift in perspective about a topic through reference to a seemingly unrelated ‘alien’ concept (cf. Steen 2008). One documented example from the Norwegian L2 English texts is the simile *Working today is like being in a competition*, where a

comparison between two unrelated semantic domains (flagged by *like*) may only be understood through recourse to metaphorical reasoning; otherwise, the reference to competition in a discussion about working would be incongruous. With such examples to go by, Nacey suggests that future investigations into deliberate metaphor might prove fruitful in distinguishing the fuzzy boundary between creativity and error in L2 learner texts.

A concurrent study of L2 metaphor production is Littlemore *et al.* (2013). They were granted access to the Cambridge Learner Corpus, a database of anonymised Cambridge examination scripts written by EFL learners of different L1 language backgrounds. These scripts had been marked following the assessment criteria in the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR), a document intended to guide 'language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe' (Council of Europe 2001: 1). From this corpus, Littlemore *et al.* selected 100 essays written by Greek learners of English and 100 essays written by German learners of English, with each group represented by 20 essays falling into each of the five CEFR proficiency levels, ranging from the 'elementary' A2 level to the 'mastery' C2 level. The overall objective of this study was to uncover how metaphor use varied across these levels in terms of amount, word class (open or closed), distribution of metaphor clusters, function, appropriateness, and L1 language background. Findings indicate, perhaps unsurprisingly, that metaphoric density in learner texts increases with proficiency level. Arguably more important is that the *type* of metaphor usage changes around the B2 level, as more content words are metaphorically used, the amount of error involving metaphor increases (and peaks), and L1 transfer of metaphorical expressions into the L2 becomes more common. In short, something happens at the B2 level: learners seem to experiment with language to a greater extent than at earlier levels, perhaps in response to the more demanding nature of their assigned writing tasks. Such research has immediate practical applications, since Littlemore *et al.* used their findings to propose CEFR descriptors for metaphor use, something that had been missing from the framework. When it comes to teaching and assessment, they suggest that teachers provide more scaffolding to help learners with their production of metaphorical language, and also propose that language assessors be more tolerant of deviation from conventional L1 language at the B2 level than they otherwise might be. Learners need an experimentation phase in order to mature linguistically.

3. CRITICAL ISSUES

When Low first offered his definition of metaphoric competence in 1988, he simultaneously called for practical measures to adapt theories about metaphor and language learning to the 'shop floor' of the classroom. This has hardly happened. An examination of the CEFR guidelines from the perspective of a metaphor scholar demonstrates that contemporary notions about

metaphoric competence are almost entirely absent. Metaphor is mentioned primarily in terms of obstacles, a trope that only appears in language towards the ‘proficient’ C1/C2 levels. The CEFR view of metaphor is informed more by the layman’s impression of metaphor being something unusual and extraordinary than by the cognitive linguist’s view of metaphor being ubiquitous in both language and thought (for more about metaphor and the CEFR see Nacey 2013: 40-55). The CEFR, however, clearly states that its categories and examples are not intended to be exhaustive, but are instead suggestions that should be adjusted to suit the individual reader’s own practice — hence the CEFR descriptors for metaphor use proposed by Littlemore and her colleagues (2013; described above in section 1.2). Unfortunately, the chances that such suggestions from a single study will have much impact on teaching practices out in the field are slim, given that far more practitioners consult the CEFR itself, rather than scholarly articles.

Boers (2014) too notes a general lack of transfer from theory to practice, saying that findings from metaphor scholars have yet to filter down to textbooks. He attributes this absence to a general belief that cognitive linguists focus on the parts of language that do not merit prioritization, metaphorical language being associated with the ‘icing-on-the-cake’ type of knowledge: useful, but not absolutely necessary. He argues that metaphor scholars need to provide more compelling evidence for the importance of metaphorical language for learners, as he finds that earlier studies simply lack rigour and, as a result, may not be persuasive enough. Given enough convincing evidence, however, the problem still remains as to how to translate theory into practice. Dissemination of ‘digestible’ material through easily accessible channels is essential. One good example of this is a British Council publication about the role of metaphor in academic tutorials, offering clear suggestions for British university lecturers on how to better make themselves understood by international students, both at home and abroad (Littlemore *et al.* 2012). This report uses examples from recorded oral office hours consultations between L1 and L2 speakers of English, to illustrate how and when metaphor in language and gesture is used by the different participants, highlighting moments that might lead to misunderstandings. Most importantly, practical advice is proffered to help lecturers avoid the potential pitfalls of metaphor use in tutorials.

Implementation of activities designed to stimulate metaphoric competence needs to be viewed by teachers as doable, given practical constraints such as limited time and large classes. Such implementation also needs to be as painless as possible — that is, teachers need practical activities that they may adapt to their classroom needs, rather than just theory (see van der Branden 2009 about implementation of innovations in the classroom). The integration of activities focusing on various aspects of metaphoric competence into standard teaching aids and tools (such as textbooks) is crucial if research into metaphoric competence is to have much real impact in language teaching, learning, and assessment. Such integration needs to be carried out

in a principled manner and in such a way that will better prepare pupils for any obligatory examinations they will face. At the moment, there are some excellent activity books anchored in a cognitive linguistic view of language. An example is Lindstromberg and Boers (2008), which offers numerous activities designed to make pupils aware of chunks and the cultural and/or embodied motivation behind them. However, many of the activities in such books, while valuable in and of themselves, are ‘stunts’, in that it is challenging to adapt them to other language areas and/or texts without a good deal of work. Ideally, activities fostering metaphoric competence should be incorporated into standard textbooks and other learning aids so that teachers, who are frequently pressed for time, need not hunt for appropriate activities elsewhere. The more (mostly metaphorical) steps that must be taken to apply insights from metaphor research reaches in the classroom, the less likely it is to do so.

4. CURRENT RESEARCH

Different types of learner corpora allow for studies into metaphor and second language development from various perspectives (see chapter 9 for corpus linguistic approaches to metaphor). My latest research in the field investigates metaphor production in multiple learner translations, looking into the ways in which advanced Norwegian learners of English translate metaphor from their L1 into English. Most previous scientific literature about metaphor in translation has either viewed metaphor as a translation problem — ‘a kind of ultimate test of any theory of translation’ (Toury 1995: 81) — or consisted of guidelines for metaphor translation (see also chapter 18). Perhaps the most well known of these guidelines is that of Newmark (1988: 88-91): his proposed metaphor translation procedures constitute a top-down approach, since actual translations were never consulted in their development (according to Fernández 2011: 265). A growing body of research is being produced in the field of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), however, to explore what translations actually *are*, rather than what they should be (e.g. Rosa 2010; Toury 1995). Investigation into the metaphors produced by L2 language learners therefore contributes to this descriptive endeavour.

The data for my study comes from the Norwegian-English Student Translation Corpus (NEST; available HTTP: <<http://clu.uni.no/humfak/nest/>>), a corpus of L2 learner language — more specifically, a multiple translation corpus containing translations written by language learners rather than professional translators. The investigation identifies and categorizes the translation of metaphors from 25 different Norwegian source texts (ST) in a total of 284 English translated texts (TT), thereby both describing individual translations and providing comparative descriptions of several TTs derived from the same ST. The STs range in length from 200 to 900 words and cover different topics and text types; the translations were produced as part of a university course and intended as a means for learners to improve their English language skills,

through illustrating a variety of contrastive challenges for the learners to translate and later discuss. In this study, focus is placed upon the translations of three types of metaphors, identified using MIPVU: 1) metaphorical verbs, codified in Norwegian, 2) metaphorical idioms, which are often culture-specific and 3) potentially deliberate metaphorical expressions such as similes and other metaphorical analogies (cf. Nacey 2013; Steen 2008; see chapter 14 for more detail on metaphorical idioms). All identified metaphors have been categorized following Newmark's classification guidelines for metaphor translation. As it turns out, however, his top-down approach does not sufficiently account for all translation solutions actually chosen by the language learners, leading to a proposed modification of Newmark's classification that more closely reflects the data under study, based on real decisions rather than theoretical options.

What follows is a sample analysis of one of the three types of metaphor under investigation: idioms. The NEST STs contain relatively few idioms, not unsurprising given Moon's (2007: 1050) contention that smaller corpora (< 100 million words) yield only isolated instances of idioms, except for 'anomalous local densities' of an idiom repeated in a single text. Nevertheless, because comprehension of unfamiliar idioms often depends upon some degree of shared cultural knowledge, they are of interest when investigating translation strategies of metaphor. Translation of idioms may pose particular problems when it comes to the balance between faithfulness to the ST and production of a TT that is both understandable and idiomatic for the language and text type and in question.

One NEST idiom is found in a ST about the life of Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. He is described as being an independent individualist with a characteristic *kjerringa-mot-strømmen-holdning* [literal translation: hag-against-stream-attitude]. The phrase derives from a Norwegian folktale where a disagreeable wife argues with her husband about the best way to harvest grain. While he intends to mow the grain with a scythe, she insists that it be cut with shears; the husband finally silences his wife's nagging by drowning her in a nearby river. He later searches for her body to give her a proper funeral, only to find that she has drifted upstream, against the current. The (rather sexist) idiom thus refers to people who are both stubborn and irritating, who do what they want without listening to others. While variants of this folktale are known in other cultures, there is no traditional English equivalent. Packing so much cultural information into a comprehensible English translation is challenging for novice translators, ten of whom translated this text. Their solutions are presented in Table 1.

	Translation
1	characteristic for his 'against-the-stream-attitude'
2	characteristic to his 'kjerringa mot strømmen' attitude (the Norwegian folktale about the old woman who always had to have her own way')
3	characteristic for his 'going against the grain attitude'

4	typical of his go against the stream-attitude
5	characteristic for his 'go against the grain' attitude
6	characteristic of his 'swimming upstream-nature'
7	characteristic for his go against the grain-attitude
8	characteristic for his 'swimming-against-the-currant-attitude'
9	characteristic of him to go against the current
10	characteristic for his attitude of contrariness

Table 1 Translations of *karakteristisk for hans kjerringa-mot-strømmen-holdning*
(Source text: NEST_Oppno.s38)

Only a single student chose an approximate literal paraphrase (Translation 10), this being the least popular translation strategy. Although all the others retained metaphor, none chose a transliteration reproducing the Norwegian metaphor with the same metaphor in English. The students have thus realized that an English readership may not have the necessary cultural background knowledge to fully understand the phrase when rendered word-for-word, and have produced alternative versions. In most cases, *kjerringa* (literal translation: hag) has been dropped in the English version. The one exception is Translation 2, where the core elements of the phrase remain in the original Norwegian (presumably evaluated as untranslatable), followed by a lengthy explanation – making this version arguably the least idiomatic of the ten translations.

Six of the nine remaining cases retain the image of resistance to flowing water, alternatively translated as *stream* (influenced by the partial false friend in the ST, Norwegian *strøm*), *current*, or *currant* (a spelling error). Two of these six add information to the metaphor by introducing the element of swimming, something incoherent with the original story because the wife had been drowned, meaning that her body floated rather than swam. Three of the students chose to substitute another TL metaphor, *go against the grain*, for the Norwegian metaphor. The two metaphors are semantically close, but the English metaphor introduces certain connotations that are absent from the original metaphor — that is, someone doing something against the grain is performing an action unexpected of them and contrary to their normal inclination. By contrast, the wife from the folktale behaves true to form.

These translations offer several indications that the informants are still very much English language learners: this may be noted by the choice of *stream* where *current* or *flow* might be more appropriate, by the spelling error *currant*, and by the apparent lack of realization of the added connotation of the TL metaphor. In addition, most of the students demonstrate colligation problems, by not adopting the standard English colligation *is characteristic of*. The most common choice of preposition is *for*, the basic translation of Norwegian *for* that is

appropriate for the SL context. Nevertheless, what is evident from these translations is that all the informants in some way acknowledged the translation challenge raised by this idiom, by attempting to unpack the Norwegian metaphor and repack it in English. Such observations demonstrate that L2 metaphor research may contribute to additional fields of inquiry, in the present case by essentially marrying the fields of metaphor, learner corpus research and DTS.

5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A great deal of research into the metaphoric competence of L2 language users has already been conducted, despite the relatively young age of the field as a whole. Findings from studies such as those outlined in this chapter have consequences not just for practical pedagogical concerns and considerations but also for theoretical issues, both related to the field of metaphor and to other fields (such as translation). Additional research about learner varieties of languages other than English is called for, as is investigation into metaphor use among more diverse learner populations than university students. Further studies into metaphor in both spoken and multimodal discourse (including gesture) would also be welcome, as would both quasi-diachronic studies of metaphor acquisition (i.e. tracking metaphor development of different individuals across time and proficiency levels à la Littlemore *et al.* 2013; see section 1.2) and longitudinal studies (tracking metaphor development in the *same* individual students). Finally, future investigation into the understanding and production of metaphor could explore the areas of bidirectional transfer (from an L2 to an L1), crosslinguistic influence across multiple languages, and the role of metaphor in code-switching. In short, there is still a great deal of work to be carried out.

6. FURTHER READING

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