‘Good’ extensions of re-literalised idioms: Evaluating and comparing the creative productions of L2 and L1 language users

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Theme: Metaphor and creativity: ‘what constitutes a ‘good’ metaphor in terms of creativity?’

Introduction
- Creatively playing with word forms, meanings, sounds etc. is important for both first (L1) and second language (L2) learning.
- This process allows speakers to perform social functions and shape their language identity (Wray, 2012), and offers various L2 learning gains (Bell, 2005; MacArthur 2010).
- Creative idioms, language users frequently ‘resuscitate’ literal senses, as in ‘I’ve been sitting on the fence so long my bottom is beginning to hurt!’ (I’m being very indecisive!).
- Eliciting such creative productions from (even advanced) L2 learners is generally hard (Littlemore & Low, 2006), and little is known about the types of responses that might be produced, which idioms tend to be easier/more difficult to extend, and how this ability relates to other aspects of Metaphoric Competence (Low, 1988; Littlemore & Low, 2006).
- Evaluating the quality of any L2 production is made harder by the absence of a robust scoring procedure and, for example, L1 response data, although other ‘target’ forms exist (Kathpalia & Carmel, 2011).
- The research presented aims to address these gaps.

RQ1: How does a productive re-literalised idiom extension test relate to other Metaphoric Competence tests, and which idioms are particularly easy/difficult to extend?

Descriptive statistics

How does this MC test compare with 14 others?

Test items (MED ‘phrases’): ‘Please extend the idiom…’

Exploratory Factor Analysis

MC factors and test loadings (34% total variance explained)

Key finding: For the L2 participants, the ability to re-literalise idioms was a key marker of the most creative L2 metaphoric competence dimension uncovered in the test battery data, (F2) Metaphor Language Play.

Other dimensions include (F1) Productive illocutionary MC, (F3) Topic/Vehicle acceptability, (F4) Grammatical MC.

RQ2: To what extent is the ability to produce re-literalised idiom extensions a central aspect of L2 Metaphoric Competence?

Key finding: This test [its receptive/multiple-choice counterpart] = most difficult!

Which idioms were comparatively easy/difficult?

Key finding: = easiest

= most difficult

Figure 1. L2 participants, proportions of 2, 1, and 0 scores

Figure 2. L1 participants, proportions of 2, 1, and 0 scores

Figure 3. AM MC Tests (productive idiom extension = high)

Figure 4. EFA diagram, showing ‘underlying’ MC factors and test loadings

Key finding: For these learners, producing creative, re-literalised idiom extensions was a central but highly challenging aspect of L2 Metaphoric Competence, but still, many appropriate responses were produced, suggesting L2 learners can engage in this skill given the right kind of test design.

Take home message: For these learners, producing creative, re-literalised idiom extensions was a central but highly challenging aspect of L2 Metaphoric Competence, but still, many appropriate responses were produced, suggesting L2 learners can engage in this skill given the right kind of test design.

Unsurprisingly, the L2 and L1 creative productions were found to be different in several respects, which future research might seek to use for metaphor-based teaching interventions.

RQ3: What types of re-literalised idiom extensions do L2 and L1 language users produce, and how do they compare?

Creative response patterns

Typical for...
- L2 creative response
- L2 partial correct
- L1 creative response
- L1 partial correct
- L2 literalised leaves
- L2 literalised idioms
- L1 literalised leaves
- L1 literalised idioms

Examples of responses scoring ‘1’ (Correct)

Key finding: L2 and L1 specific response patterns, examples above show similarities/differences for lexicogrammatical aspects (e.g., a preferred collocation, metaphors/metaphor features, and the diversity of metaphors produced).

References


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