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Conventional and novel/creative metaphors: Do differing cultural environments affect parsing in a second language?

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Abstract

Metaphors can be regarded as systemic interrelations of multiple experiences which map one relatively stable domain to another. A number of cognitive linguists, such as Kövecses (2005) and Lakoff (2006), suggest that much metaphorical thinking arises from recurring patterns of physical experiences and sensori-motor interactions with the physical world. Gibbs (1999, p. 152) furthermore states that "people clearly also learn conceptual metaphors from their experiences with language." Research findings indicate that the default interpretations by First Language speakers were actually the idiomatic understandings, not the literal ones. The question could be asked whether this would be the case with Second Language speakers when drawing inferences from metaphorical expressions used by first language speakers, and specifically in the case of novel/creative metaphorical expressions. I assumed that this process might pose difficulties for ESL readers from an African environment when reading a business article in English which contained a fair amount of metaphorical expressions. I looked at both conventional metaphors and novel/creative metaphors. These were the metaphors with a source domain that presupposed meta-knowledge of the British English cultural environment. I also included in the research instrument a few orientational metaphors that were used in the business artcle. The findings of this study indicate concurrence with Gibbs (1999, cited in Yu 2009) that "[c]ultural models 'in shaping what people believe, how they act, and how they speak about the world and their own experiences' set up specific perspectives from which aspects of 'embodied experiences are viewed as particularly salient and meaningful in people's lives. ... In short, 'social and cultural constructions of experience fundamentally shape embodied metaphor.'"

Introduction

All languages contain deeply embedded metaphorical structures which covertly influence overt 'meaning'. No use of language can be straightforward, that is free of metaphor, since it will make use of metaphor even when making that claim. Hawkes (1977, p. 60) states categorically, "Metaphor, in short, is the way language works."

Metaphors can be regarded as systemic interrelations of multiple experiences which map one relatively stable 'domain' to another. The basic process is that a concrete (the source) domain is mapped on to onto a more abstract (the target) domain (Balaban 1999, p. 131); thus, common metaphors are often made real in discourse form, since something real is constructed by conventional metaphor and thereby made comprehensible or even natural (Lakoff 2006). *Metaphor can thus be understood as a mapping* (in the mathematical sense)

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from a source domain (e.g. health/illness) to a target domain (e.g the economy).

In relation to individual words, metaphor is a basic process in the formation of words and word meanings. Concepts and meanings are conceptualised – expressed in words through metaphor. Many senses of multi-sense words are metaphors of different kinds, e.g. remedies which can be used as source domain for a variety of target domains. Similarly, the names of many new concepts or devices are metaphorical or extended uses of pre-existing words, for example shored up, a target domain from the bringing to shore of a ship for investigation and maintenance work in the shipping industry, but which could be creatively employed as a source for the abstract idea of financial companies under investigation.

Metaphor is not just a matter of language. Lakoff (2006) says that language is secondary – metaphor is centred in thought and reason. The cross-domain mapping is primary, in that it sanctions the use of the source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts. According to Lakoff (2006), the mapping is conventional – it is a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualising different relationships.

A number of cognitive linguists, such as Kövecses (2005) and Lakoff (2006), suggest that much metaphorical thinking arises from recurring patterns of physical experiences and sensori-motor interactions with the physical world. Gibbs (1999, p. 152) also states that "people clearly also learn conceptual metaphors from their experiences with language." The way these experiences are conceptualised, reasoned about and visualised comes from mostly sensory-motor domains of experience. The cognitive mechanism for such conceptualisation is conceptual metaphor, which allows humans to use the physical logic of grasping to reason about understanding.

Knowles and Moon (2006, p. 4) state that in relation to discourse, metaphor is important because of its functions – explaining, clarifying, describing, expressing, evaluating and entertaining. They continue that there are many reasons why we use metaphor in speech or writing, not least because there is sometimes no other linguistic device to refer to a particular phenomenon. It does appear, however, that when people have a choice, they choose metaphor in order to communicate what they think or feel about something.

It might further be assumed that the literal meaning of words is psycho-linguistically prior the figurative meaning. When we hear or read a metaphorical expression, we will first interpret it literally and when the interpretation fails, we will try a figurative meaning. According to Knowles and Moon (2006, p. 70), psycho-linguistic experiments have indicated that this is actually not the case. The processing of metaphors and other non-literal usages does not normally take any longer than the literal ones, and it is not normally any more difficult or problematic. Research findings indicate that the default interpretations were actually the idiomatic understandings, not the literal ones. The question could, however, be asked whether this would be the case when second language (L2) speakers draw inferences from metaphorical expressions used by first language (L1) speakers, and specifically with novel or creative metaphorical expressions, such as the metaphor (in italics) in UK competition authorities are to probe the stranglehold of the world's biggest accountancy firms.

Knowles and Moon (2006, p. 86) state that "the detail of metaphors and their exact realisation in vocabulary may vary between languages, even where those languages are

related." It can thus be assumed that where languages are so far removed from each other geographically and typologically as English and the African languages, there may be even greater discrepancies in the drawing of appropriate inferences from metaphorical expressions in, for instance, a business artcle. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Knowles and Moon, 2006) states that differences between languages enforce differences in thought. It further claims that speakers of different languages are likely to view the world and its phenomena very differently. There will not be enough shared ground between speakers of those languages, so that translation becomes impossible. This may be an extreme viewpoint. It does, however, provide some food for thought. The normal way in which we think of complex abstract ideas is by means of metaphor, and we draw on the linguistic resources of our language by a process of analogy. What therefore becomes arguable is to what extent the differences in linguistic resources may influence the drawing of appropriate inferences by second language readers of those often creative metaphorical expressions employed in, for instance, business articles.

Steen (2008, p. 231 – 232) states that three different functions of metaphor can be determined. The first is the lexical function. This means the filling of lexical and other gaps in the language system. This is also called naming. Secondly, Steen mentions the conceptual function of offering conceptual frameworks for concepts that require at least partial understanding, also called framing. Finally, there is the communicative function of producing an alternative perspective on a particular referent or topic, also called perspective changing.

Steen (2008, p. 223) proposes:

> Deliberate metaphors [...] involve the express use, in production and/or reception of another domain as a source domain for reviewing the target domain. Deliberate metaphor [use] is a relatively conscious discourse strategy that aims to elicit particular rhetoric effects. This is what distinguishes deliberate metaphor from all non-deliberate metaphor.

He also cautions that a deliberate metaphor may be either conventional or novel and either a simile or a metaphor. Furthermore, non-deliberate metaphor is not identical to conceptual metaphor. He says that it is quite possible for people to use conventional metaphors very deliberately, 'use' being a cover term for both production and reception (2008). He continues that "what was deliberately coded as metaphorical in production does not always have to be taken as such in reception, or [...] what is experienced as deliberately metaphorical in reception was not necessarily meant as such" (2008, p. 226).

It furthermore appears that the effective processing of metaphors is determined by their conventionality for the recipient. A conventional metaphor such as the economy is ailing, is processed directly and without the need for mapping between the source and the target. When a metaphor is not known, or maybe even less familiar to the reader, such as the economy has been strangled, mapping between the source and target is necessary before the metaphor can be processed further. According to Sopory and Dillard (2002), a substantial influence from metaphors can be expected in texts that are intended to persuade the reader – when the metaphor is novel, has a familiar target and is used early in the message.

Contemporary metaphor theorists use the term 'metaphor' to refer to the conceptual mapping and the term 'metaphorical expression' to refer to an individual linguistic

expression that is sanctioned by a mapping. This distinction will also be adhered to in this article.

The role of domains in the interpretation of metaphors

Conventional metaphors are metaphorical usages which are found again and again to refer to a particular thing, for example to boost. This can refer to any aspect that is being improved by some outside means, such as health, the economy, the ego, etc.

Creative or novel metaphors contrast with conventional metaphors. They are those metaphors that a writer or speaker constructs to express a particular idea or feeling in a particular context. The reader or listener needs to "'deconstruct' or 'unpack'" (Knowles and Moon 2006, p. 5) in order to understand what is meant. Such metaphors are typically new, although they may be based on pre-existing ideas or images. An example would be the metaphor (in italics) in the sentence:

> Banks were given a clean bill of health before they were shored up during the financial crisis.

According to Lakoff (2006, p. 186), "metaphor is absolutely ordinary natural language semantics." He continues that everyday metaphor is characterised by a huge system of thousands of cross-domain mappings, and this system is made use of in novel metaphor.

Novel metaphors are said to be abundant in press articles. According to Steen, Dorst, Hermann, Kaal, Krennmeyer and Pasma (2010:47), there is, however, a fine line that distinguishes novel from conventional language and this line is often difficult to locate. They continue that the assumption is that each word in a novel component will activate a distinct concept and is related to a separate referent in the projected text world.

Ricoeur (1977, p. 33) finds that there is "a pleasing quality [that] acts as an incentive to invention" and use of novel metaphors.

> This invention forces us to distinguish between the occasional causes of tropes (necessity and also pleasure) and the properly generative causes: imagination, spirit, passion. To give colour, to astonish and surprise through new and unexpected combinations, to breathe force and energy into discourse ... [w]hile the metaphor, 'burdened with age' is obviously a standard part of language.

Metaphor is not merely 'words'

One of the central tenets of cognitive semantics is that the meaning of words is encyclopaedic: everything you know about a concept is part of its meaning (Haiman 1980 and Langacker 1987, as cited in Croft 2006). We can thus assume that there is no essential difference between (linguistic) semantic representation and (general) knowledge representation (Croft 2006). The study of linguistic semantics is therefore the study of commonsense human experience. The employment of 'world knowledge' or 'common sense knowledge' and even contextual knowledge becomes part of semantics. The question that can be posed thus is: Does common sense knowledge differ from culture to culture?

The comprehension process in both native and foreign language is strongly embodied by cognition (Ferreira 2008). According to Gibbs (1999, p. 153), however, "what is missing from the psycholinguistic work, and from aspects of the work on metaphor in cognitive linguistics, is an explicit acknowledgement of culture and its important, perhaps defining, role in shaping embodiment and, consequently, metaphorical thought."

Kövecses (2005) furthermore argues that language may be the chief indicator of conceptual metaphors, and that conceptual metaphors may be realised in cultural practice, including institutions, behaviour, symbols and artefacts. Cultures may vary in terms of which metaphors are realised in practice or in the degree to which particular metaphors are realised; nonetheless, when conceptual metaphors are expressed in the form of metaphorical linguistic expressions in discourse, they may serve culturally distinct socio-cultural functions.

Kövecses (2005, p. 284) also says:

> If we think of culture as, in the main, a set of shared understandings of the world, the question of the role of figurative understanding in culture immediately arises. Because our understanding of the world includes both concrete and abstract objects and events, naturally figurative thought should play some role in the case of abstract objects and events. [...] Cultural models for abstract domains (e.g. our shared understandings of abstract objects and events) are, and can only be, metaphorically constituted.

Metaphor and socio-cultural differences between languages

The environment, the socio-cultural context and the communicative situation of groups of people or individuals provide them with experiences that are specific to them. Metaphors are also created by a certain history: either a history of the context (environment, socio-cultural, communicative situation) or the history of the individual. The history of contexts and individuals vary across time, and these variations in history produce variations in metaphors. The kinds of metaphors used also depend on the diverse concerns and interests that govern people's lives. For example, seafaring and the shipping industry are largely alien concerns and interests to the people of the interior of in a developing desert country, such as Namibia. People's concerns and interests may be general; that is "built into" (Kövecses 2005, p. 286) their culture, or personal lives. Both influence significantly the metaphors people employ to understand the world around them. The inseparability of body, mind and world, on the one hand, and cognitive and cultural models, on the other hand, are emerging from body-world interaction, rather than arising purely from the heads of individual people.

> Metaphor is a kind of tool that arises from body-world which we can 're-experience' in an embodied way, and is not simply accessed from long-term memory, in different ways in different real-world situations (Gibbs 1999, p. 156).

L2 speakers' language is, however, often not idiomatic enough because types of social situations are not cross-culturally invariant, and L2 speakers do not have access to "conventionalized conceptions" (Ferreira 2008, p. 128). In L2 learning not only the forms of the particular language but also the conceptual structures traditionally associated with those forms need to be acquired by the L2 speaker. It appears that while L1 speakers use the principle of salience to process figurative meaning directly, without accessing the literal meaning, the L2 speakers usually access the literal meaning first.

I concur with Knowles and Moon (2006) that conceptual metaphor may be culture specific. An example of such a metaphor (in italics) from a business article in a local newspaper in Namibia is:

PwC said it would actively take part in the round tables.

The comprehension of this metaphor presupposes a deep knowledge of English legend and folklore which is not readily accessible to Namibian ESL readers.

Some conceptual metaphors are, however, universal. For example, that of barriers obstructing progress. A metaphorical expression such as the one (in italics) in:

> The market for external audit services of large firms ... is highly concentrated with substantial barriers to entry and switching.

May be readily understood as it constitutes what Lakoff and Johnson (1980, cited in Knowles and Moon 2006) explain as cross-domain mapping from the source domain of a physical obstruction in one's way to the abstract target domain of hampering progress.

Since there are no languageless people, each culture deals with the world through its own linguistic devices, and it can hardly avoid imposing these on reality. Hawkes (1977) mentions a very important aspect, namely that the existence of different perceptions of the same reality is brought about ultimately by the differences in metaphor, What then if a specific metaphorical expression used, for instance, status quo in a business article, is bound to the cultural framework of a specific language?

Lee (n.d. cited in Hawkes 1977) puts it very well when she says

> The assumption is not that reality itself is relative but that it is differently punctuated and categorized, by participants of different cultures, or that different aspects of it are noticed by, or presented, to them.

Each culture obviously has words by means of which it can refer to the objects which confront it. Hence the vocabulary of a language reflects faithfully the material aspects of its culture. Hawkes (1977:83) argues

> If we accept therefore that the language provides a faithful mirror of the culture in the largest conceptual sense, we should also accept that most aspects of the culture will also find some representation in the language in terms of vocabulary, syntax and metaphor. This means simply that we are able to talk fully, in English, about whatever we do and think as members of an English culture ... Equally obvious is the fact that it would be difficult to talk as fully in English about non-English cultures, or as fully in a language other than English about the English culture. In this sense the English language is the English culture for practical (that is, English) purposes.

Language and experience interact and prove fundamentally implicated with each other to an extent that makes it difficult to consider them as separate entities. A language "creates" (Hawkes 1977, p. 84) reality in its own image. To use language like this is to 'get at' one reality 'through' another one. Reddy (1993, cited in Knowles and Moon 2006) states that English may have a preferred framework for conceptualising communication. He refers to this framework as the conduit metaphor. He analyses its major features as:

- Language functions like a conduit.
- In writing or speaking, people insert their thoughts into words.
- Words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others.
- In listening or reading, people extract the words and feelings once again from the words.

Reddy also looked at the social and cultural implications of the conduit metaphor. He also looked at ways in which the conduit metaphor is harmful rather than helpful, especially in relation to the development of mass communication. He found that successful communication depends on whether the receivers understand, not how much they receive. In relation to cross-cultural communication where a mother tongue, often with rich mother tongue cultural references and metaphors, is used to communicate with L2 speakers of that language, it seems inevitable that some of the intended meaning would fall by the wayside because of the differences in the world experience by the two different cultures. An example would be

> Global action would be needed for such a small group of companies that span the world.

This specific metaphorical expression appeared to be inaccessible to most of the Namibian readers who were tasked to read a specific business artcle published in one of the local newspapers. Certain metaphors will seem 'natural' to speakers of a specific language as they derive from a combined meta-knowledge and community experiences. This is idea is reinforced when Knowles and Moon (2006: 44) state that "[t]heorists suggest that many conceptual metaphors can be related to very basic human experiences, for example, ensuring a level playing field. However, anthropologists like Levi-Strauss indicate the extent to which such metaphors are relative in their validity to the 'way of life' from which they spring. I agree with Hawkes (1977) that they are culturally determined, and – very importantly – effectively 'limited,' when sharing the particular 'ordering' of nature which is at stake. From my previous research it became clear that an ontological metaphor, such as owl, would be mapped differently as target by African ESL speakers. It appears that the owl in the African cultural environment is seen as blind and thus excessively stupid, in contrast to the mapping: i.e. source: 'owl' and target: 'wisdom', as is normally done by people for most European countries. Another example is that dark clouds and a threatening storm are seen as promising in the (stereo) typically dry African context, in contrast to what is inferred by Europeans to be ominous, and probably disastrous.

Metaphor and business articles

According to Van Dijk (1991, cited in Steen et al. 2010), "there is probably no other discursive practice, besides everyday conversation, that is engaged in so frequently and by so many people as news in the press and on television." News contributes to the building and adapting of knowledge and beliefs. Steen et al. (2010), feel that news discourse is naturally a rich source of figurative language, as "metaphor is an essential part of the way we deal with novel and current affairs."

The language usage of mainstream newspapers, and by implication business artcles, is formal. Newspaper articles are usually written in Standard English – if it is an English publication – and are consequently easily accessible to a wide variety of readers for consumption. Such texts, and in particular business articles are often dense in information. The news production process, however, allows journalists to carefully craft their texts and make precise lexical choices. It is therefore no surprise that news articles often contain a large number of novel metaphorical expressions.

Since newspapers are meant for consumption by a large general public, reading newspaper articles usually does not require much expert knowledge for an understanding of the overall meaning of the text – general world knowledge usually suffices. The contextual meaning of words can be established in the overwhelming majority of cases. According to Steen et al. (2010), the only potentially difficult cases concern highly infrequent specialised terms,

novel compounds and novel metaphors, and contextual ambiguity. In order to establish to what extent this theory holds, it was decided to undertake this study. The main objective was to examine the cross-cultural transfer of certain metaphorical mappings, especially when employing a specific source domain demands a fair amount of culture specific meta-knowledge in order for it to be effectively mapped onto the target domain.

Gentner and Bowdle (2001, cited in Hasson and Giora, 2007) article an experiment in which they manipulated the sort of source domain that appeared in the metaphors and similes so that in some cases the source was novel, whereas in other cases the source had a conventionalised sense. They found that when sources were novel, then similes were comprehended faster than metaphors, but when sources were conventionalised, metaphors were comprehended faster than similes. These findings suggest that novel metaphorical expressions may put some constraints on speedy comprehension, especially by L2 readers/listeners.

> Steen et al.(2010:48) state that there are some novel metaphors which can be located in a dictionary as lexical items, but whose novel contextual meaning has not made its way there yet. Only when a metaphor becomes frequently used by a speech community does its metaphoricity become conventionalised to the point that, to the everyday speaker, it seems like a familiar expression (Croft and Cruise 2004, cited in Steen et al. 2010).

One of the assumptions in this study was thus that novel components in a newspaper article are supposed to activate a distinct concept that is related to a separate referent in the projected text world. Readers eventually need to parse novel expressions into their components in order to establish the presumed relation between the two concepts and the two referents. I assumed that this process might pose difficulties for ESL readers from an African environment when reading a business article in English containing a fair number of metaphorical expressions, both conventional and novel/creative, as well as some orientational metaphors.

Methodology and research design

This small-scale, exploratory study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm. It posits that the world is socially constructed through the interaction of individuals and the separation of 'fact' and 'value' is not clear-cut (Grice 2004, p. 83). According to Grice, social phenomena do not exist independently of our interpretations of them. It is these interpretations which affect outcomes. I concur with Grice (2004) that researchers in this paradigm tend to focus on meaning in the study of social life and emphasise the role language plays in constructing 'reality.'

In this study it was accepted that some of the creative metaphors may be unfamiliar to the readers since the specific style of the article is closely associated with business language; however, since this article appeared in the general section of the newspaper, it can be assumed that it was meant for a general readership. Furthermore, the high density of information in the article contributed to the demands made on the reader. It was therefore even more important to establish whether the readers drew appropriate inferences from expressions used to convey the content of the article.

The author acknowledges the fact that other variables might have contributed to the difficulties that readers experienced when reading the newspaper article. This studied was, however, exploratory in nature, and focused on the probable influence of creative

expressions on the drawing of appropriate inferences by the readers. The study thus aimed to investigate whether differing cultural meta-knowledge influences the way 'social reality' was perceived by L1 speakers/writers and L2 listeners/readers, when metaphorical expressions were employed to describe that 'social reality'.

Research study

It appears from the literature that there may be a definite relationship between the accessibility of metaphors used in one language for speakers of another language; it was thus decided to investigate this assumption in relation to the English L2 situation in Namibia by means of a small scale study.

The following research questions were posed:

- Do Namibian ESL readers draw appropriate inferences from conventional metaphorical expressions when they are reading business articles in English?
- Do Namibian ESL readers draw appropriate inferences from metaphorical expressions that rely on meta-knowledge of a specific culture as source domains?
- To what extent does the unfamiliarity of metaphorical expressions based on the L2 culture influence the readability of a business article in a Namibian newspaper?

Sample

In this study the researcher made use of convenience sampling as existing classes of university students were asked to participate. The participants in this study consisted of 29 students reading the subjects Stylistics and Language Studies for Communicators. For recording purposes the researcher employed their student numbers. They were reassured that the data and findings would only be employed for the purpose of this small-scale exploratory study and that all findings would be anonymously reported. None of the participants indicated any reservation in participating in this study.

Data collection

A business article in one of the Namibian daily newspapers, Republikein of 18 May 2011, was employed as source material for this small scale study. It was entitled UK to probe Big Four auditing stranglehold (see addendum). It reported on financial authorities in the UK which would investigate the effect that the world's biggest firms had on the auditing of blue-chip companies after finding evidence of anti-competitive behaviour.

Fifteen metaphors were identified and categorised as four conventional metaphors (questions 6, 9, 12, and 13), seven metaphors that have non-Namibian culture-based source domains (1, 2, 3, 4, 7. 11 and 14), as well as three orientational metaphors (5, 8, 10) (see addendum for the business article, as well as the questions).

The business article was duplicated and distributed among the participants. They were asked to read the passage and interpret the metaphors as they appear in the context of the article. They subsequently had to explain these metaphors in their own words in order to illustrate their understanding of the contribution of these metaphorical expressions to the explicitness of this article.

Although the respondents were aware of both conventional and creative metaphors, they were not specifically instructed that the phrases they had to analyse were metaphorical in nature. One of the aims of this exploratory study was to establish to what extent unfamiliar phrases in a news article that would be accessible to the ordinary reading public, would influence the Namibian ESL readers' ability to draw appropriate inferences from figurative

phrases; the drawing of appropriate inferences would affect the comprehension of the article writer's intended meaning.

The subjectivity of the research instrument could possibly be regarded as a limitation in this study; it was, however, necessary to look qualitatively at the explanations of metaphors given by the readers, in order to form an impression of the extent to which wrong inferences could influence their overall comprehension of the article.

The readers furthermore had to comment on the extent to which the use of the metaphorical expressions affected their comprehension of the business article. Finally, they were further asked to rate the readability of the article on a five point Likert scale and to give a reason for their rating.

Findings

When the answers to the first set of questions relating to conventional metaphor were compared, it indicated that inferences from the metaphors were drawn fairly appropriately and contributed to the understanding of the content.

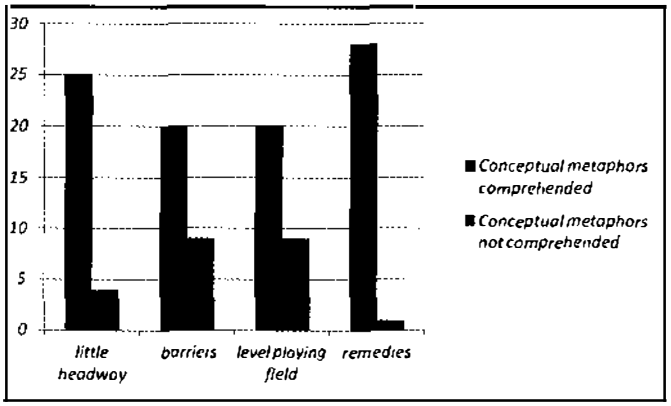

Fig. 1: Comparison of correct and incorrect answers (conventional metaphors)

From this graph it is clear that the participants did not experience any real problems deriving the most appropriate meaning in the context from these metaphorical expressions. The fact that practically all the participants interpreted remedies as meaning to improve might relate to what Knowles and Moon (2006) described. According to them, psycho-linguistic experiments have indicated that when confronted with metaphorical language, readers' default interpretations were actually the idiomatic understandings, not the literal ones.

Furthermore, the high percentages of appropriate choices could possibly be related to what Boers (2000, p. 553) has said, namely that "many polysemous lexical items occur more frequently in their derived figurative senses than in their original literal senses". Boers continues that in economic discourse, for example, "words like prescription and remedy are not likely to refer to real medicine." The readers of Text 1 were thus probably not even aware that this article contained many metaphorical expressions.

Metaphors such as to make little headway, barriers and level playing fields appear to be

familiar to the readers as these metaphorical expressions have been conventionalised by frequent use in different contexts.

When one considers those metaphors in the article that may be culturally more distant for readers who speak African languages as first languages, the data indicated that inferences drawn from the metaphorical expressions were much less successful.

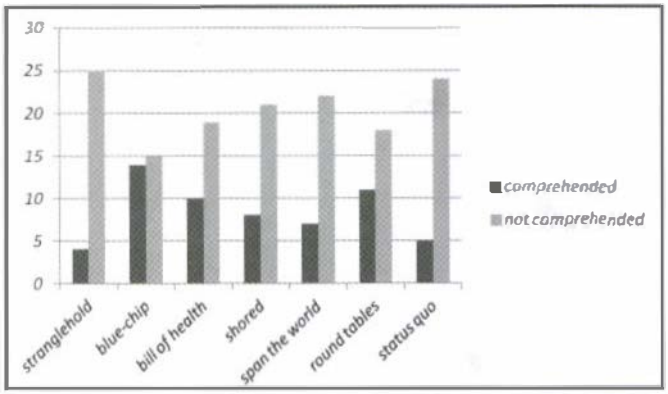

Fig. 2: Comparison of correct and incorrect answers (culturally based metaphors)

From this graph it can be inferred that the use of L2, culture-based metaphorical expressions rather muddied the waters for the readers and that not much successful communication was created. The fact that about 45% of readers inferred blue-chip companies correctly might be that this metaphorical expression has become more or less a buzz word in technologically influenced language.

It was, however, clear that the term stranglehold, which has its source in the game of wrestling, was unfamiliar to practically all the readers. They failed to draw an appropriate inference in the context of the article. It furthermore appeared that participants were not familiar with the term bill as used in bill of health, since the term bill is used in Namibia mainly in the context of an account that has to be paid.

The metaphors, shored up, referring to the shipping industry, and round tables, referring to the legendary King Arthur and his round table discussions in English folklore, clearly proved difficult for readers to comprehend. It can be inferred that they were not acquainted with these elements of the British culture.

It was interesting that many of the participants failed to draw appropriate inferences from the metaphorical expression to span the world. It appeared that the majority of the readers thought that spanned the world implied some control or importance. From their answers it is clear that they could not comprehend what the author meant when she/he wrote "But past efforts to open up the industry have made little headway and critics say global action would be needed for such a small group of companies that span the world."

Although the metaphorical expression status quo could be considered as largely conventionalised, only thirteen of the twenty-nine participants interpreted it successfully. In this case it can probably only be linked to the unfamiliarity of the expression to the readers.

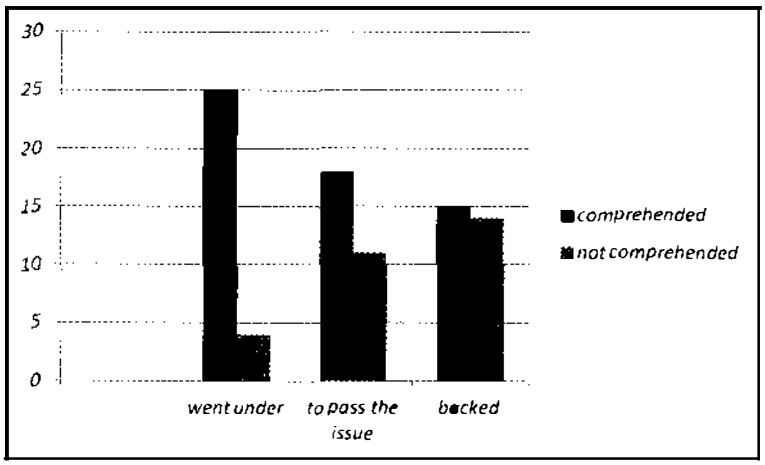

Fig. 3: Comparison of correct and incorrect answers (orientational metaphors)

From this graph it is clear that participants did not experience any real difficulties when they were drawing inferences from orientational metaphorical expressions. In each of these three metaphorical expressions the majority of the readers drew appropriate inferences. It is, however, interesting to note that 45% of the readers did not infer what the author meant. Answers given to the metaphor backed in Ernst & Young said it backed increasing choice ...

Included, it has stopped or reduces increasing choice; brought; considered; consists and prevented. These answers clearly indicated that miscomprehension of this sentence was inevitable to these readers who did not draw an appropriate inference from the metaphorical expression.

When the participants' comments on the readability of the business article were analysed, the following results were obtained:

Table 4.1: The level of perceived difficulty of the business article

Very easy	Fairly easy	Average	Fairly difficult	Very difficult
1	1	8	12	8

As far as the readability of the article by newspaper readers is concerned, eight participants found it pleasing and good to read, while seventeen found it difficult. One participant did not comment.

The following table gives a summary of some of the readers' verbatim comments.

Table 5: participants' view on the readability of this business article

Positive comments	Negative comments
I know how to read between the lines. I give the meaning of the words based on the context it is used. When changed the expressions to my own it became understandable. The expressions made it easier to understand the article depending on how they are used. The expressions make it easier to understand the content of the article as much of the expressions hold the meaning of the text. The expressions bring life to the article Readable. It is very interesting	Their choice of words like to probe the stranglehold" instead of just saying investigate or question is a bit unnecessary in my opinion and makes it hard to understand. It becomes difficult because metaphors mean different things to different people. Complex sentence include a lot of phrases in one sentence which make it difficult to recognise the phrases when combined. It makes it hard for the readers ... which in my opinion is not good at all because the main point of an article is to in for readers not to confuse with difficult terms. It gives the impression that the newspaper is very restrictive to its audience.

Although some participants valued and enjoyed the use of metaphorical expressions in the article, from the many negative comments it is clear that participants realised that an inability to draw appropriate inferences from the metaphorical expressions employed in this article would hamper comprehension and enjoyment of the content.

When asked specifically about the effect that the metaphorical expressions had had on their own understanding of the article, the majority of the readers (69%) indicated that they had found the article fairly difficult to very difficult to read. Although ten participants commented on the specific language used and accounting jargon associated with business articles, sixteen referred to the vocabulary and metaphorical expressions as impeding their understanding of the content of this business article.

Language and language teaching

I concur with Gibbs (1999, cited in Yu 2009, p. 253) that "[c]ultural models 'in shaping what people believe, how they act, and how they speak about the world and their own experiences' set up specific perspectives from which aspects of 'embodied experiences are viewed as particularly salient and meaningful in people's lives. ... in short, 'social and cultural constructions of experience fundamentally shape embodied metaphor.'"

Yu (2009) says that complex metaphors (for example, shored up) may be conceptual compounds with complex internal structures composed of a series of basic elements (i.e. metaphors and metonyms) combined with one another at different levels. However, "only those cultures that have selected the same number of basic elements and the way they are combined, as selected by a culture, serve as conditions that constrain the construction of metaphors in that culture" (p. 259).

In the past few years the important role of culture in the emergence of conceptual metaphor has attracted considerable attention from researchers, such as Boers (2003), Kövecses (2005) and Littlemore (2003) as mentioned by Low (2009). Therefore, it is valid to look at what Low (2009) says about language and language teaching.

According to Low (2009, p. 225), if L2 metaphor genuinely reflects L2 culture we should

ask ourselves whether 'salient aspects' of that culture should be taught before the linguistic exponents, so that the words would have meaning for the learners. Low further notes that there is no clear or universal answer to this question.

Furthermore, Deignan (2003, cited in Low 2009) notes that metaphors involving culture frequently involve generalised or prototypical cultural situations, such as round tables; status quo and level playing fields. Low raises the following question:

> Apart from the important teaching implication that many of these [metaphors involving culture] can be expressed as images, or image schemata, which could be taught in terms of pictorial reference points, it raises the key question of how far using a metaphor becomes a statement of 'buying in' to a culture/and or belief in the patterns underlying the lexis (p. 225).

I concur with Low (2009, p. 225) when he states that language teachers "somehow need to find a balance between teaching learners to have gut reactions about metaphor and teaching highly inaccurate models of second language culture."

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Appendices

UK to probe Big Four auditing stranglehold - *Republikein*, Wednesday 18 May 2011

1. UK competition authorities are to probe the stranglehold of the world's biggest accountancy firms on British blue-chip company audits after finding evidence of anti-competitive behaviour.
2. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) said dominance of the sector by the so-called "Big Four" – KPMG, Ernst & Young, Deloitte and PricewaterhouseCoopers – made it hard for firms to switch auditors.
3. The latest move comes on top of criticism from some policymakers who blame accountancy firms for giving banks a clean bill of health just before they had to be shored up during the financial crisis.
4. Policymakers also worry markets could be destabilised if one of the four went under – repeating the collapse of Arthur Andersen in 2002, which shrank the pool of big auditors from five to four.
5. The European Union's executive European Commission is set to publish draft legislation later this year to boost competition in the sector.
6. But past efforts to open up the industry have made little headway and critics say global action would be needed for such a small group of companies that span the world.
7. The auditors check the books of most blue-chip companies around the world.
8. In 2010, the four audited 99 of the companies in the FTSE 100 index. Those companies changed auditors every 48 years on average, according to a parliamentary article in March that called for the sector to be investigated.
9. The OFT said on Tuesday there were reasonable grounds for suspecting features of the market "restrict, distort or prevent competition" in Britain...
10. In some cases, banks will only lend to companies that have been audited by one of the Big Four.
11. The OFT said it would meet with the Big Four in May and June to explore what reforms can be made before deciding on whether to pass the issue to Britain's Competition Commission.
12. Otherwise, action at the international level could be more beneficial, the OFT said.
13. "The OFT has been concerned for some time that the market for external audit services to large firms in the UK is highly concentrated, with substantial barriers to entry and switching," it said.
14. London and New York are the top auditing centres in the world and changes may not be effective unless they were transatlantic.
15. Ernst & Young said it backed increasing choice such as reinforcing the audit committee's role in auditor appointments, removing "Big Four only" restrictive covenants from loan agreements, liberalising audit firm ownership rules, and the creation of a single market for audit services in Europe. PwC said it would actively take part in the round tables. Deloitte said it would support measures to increase competition and "ensure a level playing field."

16. KPMG had no immediate comment.
17. Accountancy bodies welcomed the OFT statement.
18. "The process the OFT has started today will consult broadly on what remedies can be taken to improve choice in the market," said Michael Izza, chief executive of the ICAEW in London.
19. "This should include looking at removing any artificial restrictions that merely serve to reinforce the status quo," Izza said. (Nampa/Reuters)

Questionnaire

Part One:

In your own words, say what you think the following expressions mean in the context of the article:

1. to probe the stranglehold (para.1)
2. blue-chip company (para. 1.)
3. a clean bill of health (para. 3)
4. to be shored (para. 3)
5. went under(para.4)
6. little headway (para. 6)
7. span the world (para. 6)
8. to pass the issue (para. 11)
9. substantial barriers (para. 13)
10. backed (para. 15)
11. the round tables (para. 15)
12. ensure a level playing field (para. 15)
13. on what remedies (para. 18)
14. to reinforce the status quo (para. 19)

Part Two

How do you rate the level of difficulty of this article for the general newspaper reader?

very easy	fairly easy	Average	fairly difficult	very difficult

Give a reason for your answer.

In your opinion, what is the effect of the expressions that you explained above on the readability of the article?

Give reasons.