The Comprehension of Metaphor in English Contemporary Songs by English as a Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract

Nowadays, metaphor becomes a part of our conceptual system which expresses cultures consisting situation, culture and language in particular period of time. In the second language classroom, teachers rarely teach metaphors because of their complicating meanings .In order to interpret metaphor, students have to comprehend and realize culture background knowledge in the particular countries .Metaphor is not only about meaning but also about giving reasons . The purpose of this study was 1) to explore the ability of EFL students to comprehend metaphorical expressions, and 2 (to investigate the problems in interpreting metaphorical expressions of EFL learners .Five English contemporary songs released in 2016-2017 were used in the study .The participants were 30 undergraduate students majoring in English for International Communication Program at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL) .The data were analyzed by document analysis, questionnaire and interview .The findings show that most of the students were able to interpret "Active metaphor" at 76.87%, "Mixed metaphor" at 55.26%, and "Personifying metaphor" at 45.0% respectively. From the questionnaire and interview, they were found that the students encountered learning problems most. Culture also influenced the metaphor translation of the EFL learners. Lastly, creative skills problem also found because students' background knowledge were different so the students can interpret differently.

Keywords: metaphor, metaphor comprehension, EFL, English contemporary song

Introduction

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that a metaphor is not just a feature of language but involves thought and reason. It is also developed through experience and becomes a part of our basic conceptual system which plays important roles in defining everyday realities. Metaphors are presented in drawings, gestures, and symbols or signs as well as speech, fiction, poetry, and songs to convey a message.)MacArthur, 2012 (It is impossible to avoid metaphors in our daily life since metaphor is an expression used to describe a person or an object comparing to something which have similar characteristics .Ritchie (2013) claimed that a metaphor has been variously defined in terms of substituting one word for another word with an apparently different meaning, comparing one idea to another idea. For example, 'You are my sunshine ' metaphorically means you are the light of my life shone for me like the sun.

However, Dong (2004) stated that in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, metaphoric expressions are often problematic. It is seldom taught in the beginning stage of second language acquisition because of the fear of overwhelmingly complicated multiple layers of meanings as well as abstract meaning. Furthermore, Aardal (2014) stated that although metaphors are claimed that they are a daily life language, they are still a problem

for second language learners because sometimes the reader cannot fully understand and interpret metaphors correctly.

This study aims at exploring the ability of EFL students to comprehend metaphorical expressions, and investigating the problems in interpreting metaphorical expressions of EFL learners. The findings of this research can be used to evaluate the problems of interpreting metaphorical expressions of Thai students as well as raised teachers' awareness of teaching metaphors in EFL classroom. Moreover, it is used to broaden Thai students' knowledge and understanding of the situation, culture and language reflected in English contemporary songs. This may help teachers to plan and design the lessons relating to metaphor interpretation. Moreover, it also helps students to improve their reading, writing and vocabulary skills as well as cultural awareness

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 30 junior and senior students majoring in English for International Communication (EIC) at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL). All of the participants have background knowledge about metaphors. The first questionnaire relating to students' common background knowledge and the interest of the songs is used in the beginning of the study to select the participants.

Instruments

In order to answer 1.) What types of metaphor are EFL students able to comprehend? and 2.) What are the problems of EFL students in interpreting metaphorical expressions? Document analysis, questionnaire and interview were used to collect the data.

Five English contemporary songs released in 2016- 2017 were used in the study. The selected songs were "H.O.L.Y." sung by Florida Georgia, "Perfect" by Ed Sheeran, "Hey Hey Hey" by Katie Perry, "Quit" by Ariana Grande& Sia, and "Wolves" by Selena Gomez. Each song must consist of three types of metaphors which are active metaphor, mixed metaphor, personifying metaphor based on Crystal (1999), Newmark (1988). The questionnaire designed based on Azuma and Masumi)2004(, Cardoso and Vieira)2006(and Lakoff)2008('s theory was used to find out the problems that the students encountered while interpreting metaphors. Six students were randomly selected to participate in the interview section to find out the further information about the problems they encountered while interpreting metaphors.

Data Collections and analysis

The method applied in this study is mixed method .The data was collected from document analysis, questionnaire and interview. Firstly, five songs were chosen based on the criteria. Then, active metaphor, mixed metaphor, and personification metaphor were highlighted. In order to answer the first research question "What types of metaphor are EFL students able to comprehend?", thirty students were asked to interpret the highlighted metaphors in the selected lyrics. Then, the researcher checked weather the students can interpret each metaphor correctly.

After that, to answer the second research question "What are the problems of EFL students in interpreting" After that, the participants were asked to do questionnaire in order to check what are the problems they encountered based on Azuma and Masumi (2004), and Lakoff, 2008)). Finally, there are six students selected to further interview to gather more detail about those problems.

Literature Review

Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1992) mentioned that a metaphor defines the ordinary, everyday English expression. It is not poetic, nor is it used for special rhetorical effect. Besides, Lakoff (1992) stated that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, not just in a language, but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of how we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

Metaphor is so widely used that we hardly notice it .Lakoff and Turner)1989 (have explained metaphor in our everyday language as follows :Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it, metaphor suffuses our thoughts, no matter what we are thinking about .It is accessible to everyone :as children, we automatically, as a matter of course, acquire a mastery of everyday metaphor .It is conventional :metaphor is an integral part of our ordinary everyday thought and language

Moreover, Lakoff (1992) also claimed that metaphors are not mere words but they can be understood through mapping. Everyday metaphors involve a mapping between two different domains which are source domain and target domain. The mapping maps the knowledge about something in the target domain onto knowledge about what we talk about in the source domain. It can be concluded that the source domain provides terms where the target is described whereas the target domain refers to what is being described. Two different domains exist as can be seen in the form "A" is "B" or "X" is "Y".

Classification of Metaphor

There are many linguists classified metaphor into different types.

Structural Metaphors : They bring an experience in a structure, or rather in a field of another experience and this is in the form of specific concepts, as in the concept of Argument is war .For examples :I demolished his argument, Your claims are indefensible, He attacked every weak point of my argument .In these examples, the used structures are borrowed in the field of war as the verb demolish the adjective indefensible, and the verb attack .(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)

Orientational Metaphors : They are the metaphorical use of a word with their semantic concepts 'directionality' and 'specialization' where this type organizes metaphors of the many concepts, the one with the other, in the form of the concepts that indicates the place . For examples :Try to pack more words into fewer words, Don't force your meanings into the wrong words .The words that are used indicate directionality and specialization which are borrowed here in the abstract expressions of the lingual that have nothing to do with the place at all .These words are all included within the conceptual .(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)

Personifying metaphors : They are also called anthropomorphic metaphors .Those that add human qualities to what is not human, such as: My car whines in pain as it climbs up steep hills .In this example, the car is likened to the human and made it a body feels and a mouth pronounces as a whine .The intensity of pain and all these qualities are ascribed to human beings .(Tucker, 2010)

Active metaphors : They are also called living metaphors .Active metaphors are those that have not yet become part of the daily use of language such as :You are my sun .Where the beloved person is likened by the sun because she or he represents the life in the shining sun and provides the other part with warmth and heat .(Newmark, 1988)

Stock and Standard metaphors: They are metaphors that are effective means of describing concrete or abstract concepts, which has emotional impact on the reader, unlike

dead metaphors that have an active aesthetic function. This type of metaphor is an established metaphor which is in an informal context. It is an efficient and concise method of covering a physical and/or mental situation both referentially and pragmatically. Moreover, this type of metaphor can sometimes cause some difficulties for the translator because the metaphor maybe out dated such as 'it's raining cat and dogs', or be used only in a particular social class or age. For example, 'to oil the wheels', and 'he's in a giving humour' (Newmark, 1988)

Mixed metaphors: They are a combination of more than one metaphor. The element in a mixed metaphor is surprisingly incongruent, as a result of trying to apply more than one metaphor to one idea. An example of a mixed metaphor is "A zebra can't change his spots." This metaphor is absolutely of the mixed variety. The metaphors that are being mixed are, "A zebra can't change his stripes" and "A leopard can't change his spots." Either way, the message is clear. It means that people do not change and you can find the true person by looking at them. (Crystal, 1999)

Education model and metaphor

Although EFL learners encounter English metaphorical expressions in reading and listening, they usually learn them as one-off experiences .Even idioms embedded with metaphorical meanings in them are usually treated as just idioms, although they may provide opportunities for learning metaphors or metaphorical expressions .Teachers and learners do not go beyond a superficial level and consequently they miss the chance to learn expressions and concepts lying behind them, probably due to time limitation for teaching/learning, lack of awareness involved in metaphor and its concept, or for some other reason .This results in a scarcity of studies on awareness or competence .Metaphor in language education can provide an opportunity to learn how our conceptual system is organized and how it functions in language .This enables learners to learn not only languages but also develop understanding of views on relationship between mind, body and language) .Azuma and Masumi, 2004   (

Metaphor is often problem in second-language holding and learning and in English literacy instruction. Native speakers)L1(learners who grow up in the mainstream American culture, immersed in oral language and schooling .However, Non-native speakers)L2(learners are asked in their youth to gain a new language for which they have no cultural references or natural oral immersion .When second-language learners are mainstreamed into the English classroom, teachers often find that limited experience with metaphor language severely affects students 'reading comprehension and writing performance)Dong, 2004.(

Findings and Discussions

The first research question in this study aimed to explore the ability of EFL students to comprehend metaphorical expressions .The findings show that most of the students were able to interpret "Active metaphor" at 76.87%, "Mixed metaphor" at 55.26%, and "Personifying metaphor" at 45.0% respectively.

The data collected from the questionnaire and interview were analyzed in order to answer the second research question "What are the problems of EFL students in interpreting". The results found that the students encountered learning problems most. Culture also influenced the metaphor translation of the EFL learners. Lastly, creative skills problem also found because students' background knowledge was different so the students can interpret differently.

Table 1: *Problems that EFL students encountered during analyzing metaphors*

Type of problem	Problem	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High	X	SD	
1. Learning Problem	1. The context affects the metaphor analysis in song.	2 (6.7)	2 (6.7)	2 (6.7)	7 (23.3)	17 (56.7)	4.17	0.22	High
	2. understanding the meaning of a metaphor can help gain understand about the meaning in songs	0 (0)	2 (6.7)	1 (3.3)	2 (6.7)	25 (83.3)	4.67	0.36	Very High
	3. A metaphor affect for your interpretation.	2 (6.7)	0 (0)	1 (3.3)	4 (13.3)	23 (76.7)	4.53	0.32	Very High
	4. Knowing the general vocabulary affects your metaphor interpretation.	5 (16.7)	3 (10.0)	1 (3.3)	1 (3.3)	20 (66.7)	3.93	0.27	High
2. Culture Problem	1. Culture influences for metaphor translation.	6 (20.0)	2 (6.7)	2 (6.7)	5 (16.7)	15 (50)	3.87	0.18	High
	2. Cultures may cause differences in analyzing meaning of a metaphor in western song.	2 (6.7)	5 (16.7)	3 (10.0)	7 (23.3)	13 (43.3)	3.80	0.15	High
	3. Culture is indispensable when considering the implications of a metaphor in song.	2 (6.7)	6 (20.0)	3 (10.0)	9 (30.0)	10 (33.3)	3.63	0.12	High
	4. The metaphor relates with your daily life.	2 (6.7)	7 (20.0)	8 (10.0)	5 (30.0)	8 (33.3)	3.33	0.08	Average
3. Creative skills	1. Interpretation metaphor in the song can imply to the individual's creative skills.	4 (13.3)	6 (20.0)	5 (16.7)	3 (10.0)	12 (40)	3.43	0.12	High
	2. Analyzing a metaphor in song can improve your creativity skills.	7 (23.3)	7 (23.3)	4 (13.3)	5 (16.7)	9 (30.0)	3.27	0.06	Average

3 .creative skills are useful for interpret the metaphor in song.	5 (16.7)	6 (20.0)	5 (16.7)	6 (20.0)	8 (26.7)	3.20	0.04	Average
4 .Imagination or ideas affect the analysis a metaphor in song.	5 (16.7)	7 (23.3)	8 (26.7)	4 (13.3)	6 (20.0)	2.97	0.05	Average

According to the table 1, The most common problems that the 30 EFL students perceive in analyzing a metaphor is "**Learning problem**", the problems are Firstly, "Understanding the meaning of a metaphor can help gain understand about the meaning in songs", The average mean is 4.67. Secondly, A metaphor affect for your interpretation", the average score is 4.53. Thirdly, "The context affects the metaphor analysis in song", The mean score is at 4.17, and the average score of "Knowing the general vocabulary affects your metaphor interpretation " is 4.53 respectively.

The minor types of metaphor problem the 30 EFL students perceive is "**culture problem**". The mean score of "Cultures influences metaphor translation "is 3.87. Next, the mean score of "Culture may cause differences in analyzing meaning of a metaphor in western song." is 3.80. Then, "Culture is indispensable when considering the implications of a metaphor in song", the mean score is 3.63. The students interpreted the expression in the song such as "You are my kind of church". They explained that the word "church" metaphorically means "You are a good person", "You are innocent", "You are my sanctuary", "You never lie to me", and "You are my problem solver". In Thailand, temple is the place where people do the worships. Some students do not know what Christianity do in the church.

"**Creative skills problem**" is the least problem that the students encountered during interpreting metaphors including "Interpretation metaphor in the song can imply to the individual's creative skills". The mean score is 3.43, "Analyzing a metaphor in song can improve your creativity skills "is 3.27," Creative skills are useful for interpret the metaphor in song "is 3.20 and "Imagination or ideas affect the analysis a metaphor in song "is 2.97.

Recommendations

Teacher in an EFL classroom may use the English contemporary song to teach metaphor in both word level, phrase level as well as sentence level in the classroom. Moreover, Metaphor is understood as a tool to transfer characteristics of one thing to another thing. Metaphoric expressions can be used to describe something in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful. Therefore, it can be useful for teacher to create the lesson relating to metaphor to teach creative thinking and analytical thinking. Students are encouraged to use an imagination and creation to express their logical ideas. In addition, since ESL students may not have the experience of people in English speaking countries, learning language through metaphors in contemporary songs is one way for them to perceive the daily language used and gain access to the current situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, metaphor is in a part of our conceptual system that people think and act automatically. It can also be found in English songs' selected lyrics to express the abstract feeling toward each metaphor. The teachers who teach in EFL classroom may choose metaphors that match students' level. In addition, the interpretation of each metaphor requires the reason in order to analyze how the context in the song relates to each metaphor. The

researcher hopes that this study will be useful for ESL teachers to create their lessons and learners who would like to study further about metaphor.

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