

Moving Conceptual Metaphor to the Classroom

David E. Shaffer

(조선대학교)

(1) I. Introduction

Difficult is the task of teaching English figurative expressions in an L2 classroom. Figurative language, such as proverbs, idioms and metaphors are not intended to be understood with their literal meaning. Thus, the proverbial meaning of "The early bird catches the worm" has nothing to do with birds and worms; "Spilling the beans" has nothing to do with beans; and "He erupted" is not about a volcano. Conveying figurative meanings to EFL learners has always been problematic. Conventional instruction often consists of random presentation of a figurative expression and its meaning, and possibly a few situations in which it may be used. The necessity of a more effective method of teaching figurative language is apparent.

The study presented here deals with the incorporation of the conceptual linguistics constructs in the teaching of proverbs, idioms, and metaphors. It is proposed here that conceptual metaphor and image schema can be adapted to form such an approach. Rather than thinking of metaphor as an extraordinary form of discourse characteristic of literary language, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have shown that conceptual metaphor is a fundamental property of everyday language and a powerful cognitive tool for the conceptualization of abstract categories. These conceptual metaphors motivate many of the conventional metaphors used in everyday speech as well as motivate many of the commonly used English idioms and proverbs. Image schemas are discussed in Lakoff (1987), Lakoff and Turner (1989), and Johnson (1987) and are characterized as recurring basic abstract conceptual structures that occur in our conceptualizations of the world, and which play a fundamental role in cognitive semantic processes.

Conceptual metaphors have been suggested as being effective for learning proverbs (Gibbs 1994, 2001; Gibbs & Beitel, 1995; Gibbs, Colston, & Johnson, 1996; Gibbs, Strom, & Spivey-Knowlton, 1997), for idioms (Gibbs, 1992; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990;) and for conventional metaphors (Holme, 2004). Accordingly, this study examines the teaching of these types of figurative language with motivating conceptual metaphors. It also examines whether mental adaptations of image schema can additionally contribute to making figurative learning more efficient.

(2) II. Conceptual Metaphor with Proverbs

1. Method

The aim of this study is twofold: 1) to determine the efficacy of incorporating the cognitive linguistic concepts of conceptual metaphor into the teaching of English proverbs in comparison with a conventional teaching method, and 2) to determine if the inclusion of rich mental images whose purpose is to activate image schemas has any effect on the learning rate of proverbs in comparison with a teaching method using conceptual metaphors alone or with a conventional teaching method not employing either conceptual metaphors or mental images.

1) The Participants and Context

The participants in this study were 110 university students enrolled in English skills courses. The participants were of various majors and ranged from sophomores to seniors. English proficiency levels for the participants ranged from low- to high-intermediate. The present study was conducted during the participants' regularly scheduled class time and in the regular classrooms used by the participants for their courses. The experimental lessons were administered during 110-min. class sessions to ensure conformity. Both the lessons and the instruments were administered by this researcher.

2) Design

The participants were divided into three experimental groups. One group, the Conventional group, was taught eight proverbs after being pre-tested on them. These eight proverbs were among the sixteen that Gibbs et al. (1997) used in their empirical study showing that the figurative meanings of proverbs are motivated by underlying conceptual metaphors that form a significant part of our ordinary conceptual system. After explaining the meaning of each proverb, which appeared on a student handout, the teacher initiated a question-and-answer session in which the participants were asked questions using the proverb being studied, attempting to elicit responses concerning, and possibly using, the same proverb. For example, when studying the proverb *Don't count your chickens before they are hatched*, the teacher would ask various participants questions such as *Do you count your chickens before they are hatched?* and *Do you know anyone who counts their chickens before they are hatched?* The proverb introduction and question-and-answer session lasted for approximately 40 minutes.

A second group, the Metaphor group, was taught the same eight proverbs, but with the addition of two conceptual metaphors for each proverb. These two

conceptual metaphors are considered to be the two main conceptual metaphors motivating the proverb and thereby linking the proverb to its meaning. For example, the two conceptual metaphors associated with *Don't put all your eggs in one basket* were LIFE IS A CONTAINER and BELIEFS ARE POSSESSIONS. Those associated with *Look before you leap* were KNOWING IS SEEING and LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

The third group, the Image group, was presented with the meaning and two conceptual metaphors for the same proverbs, but their discussion questions focused on creating rich mental images that would activate image schemas. Image-inducing questions for the proverb *Look before you leap*, for example, included *What image comes to mind when you read "Look before you leap"? Why do you need to look before you leap?* and *What may happen if you don't look before you leap?* Immediately after the lesson in each group, post-test 1, identical to the pre-test, was administered. One week later, post-test 2, identical to the previous tests, was administered unannounced.

3) Materials

The materials for this study consisted of the following printed materials:

(1) The pre-/post-test instrument

This quiz consisted of the eight proverbs used in the study with a blank inserted in place of two important content words (nouns, verbs, or adjectives) and a space provided below for writing the meaning of the idiom. The eight proverbs selected for this study were the following (underlining indicates blanks in the test items): (a) A rolling stone gathers no moss. (b) The early bird catches the worm. (c) One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel. (d) Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. (e) Don't put all your eggs in one basket. (f) Don't count your chickens before they are hatched. (g) Look before you leap. (h) The bigger they are, the harder they fall.

(2) Lesson materials

The proverb study handouts for each of the three study groups differed slightly. For the Conventional group, each of the eight proverbs was followed by its literal meaning beneath. The handouts for the Metaphor group were the same as those for the Conventional group except that they contained two motivating conceptual metaphors for each proverb and were placed in two boxes under the proverb. The Image group's handout consisted of all the material on the Metaphor group's handout, with the addition of questions designed to initiate mental images of

the specific proverb.

4) Data Collection

Each of the groups was given an unannounced pre-test near the beginning of the class. Immediately before the administration of the instrument, the students were informed that the test was part of a research project and that it would in no way reflect on their grade for the course. There was also a 10-minute discussion of what a proverb is. Approximately 10 minutes was given for the participants to complete the test. The pre-test was followed by a 10-minute explanation and general discussion of conventional and conceptual metaphors for the Metaphor and Image groups. This was followed by forty minutes of discussion of the eight individual proverbs as per the material on each of the three groups' study sheets. Immediately following the lesson, post-test 1, containing the same fill-in-the-blank test items as the pre-test for the eight proverbs studied, was administered for 15 minutes. One week later, each of the three groups in the study was administered post-test 2, identical to post-test 1, and given 15-minutes to complete this test. Each of the tests was administered without any prior announcement about the administrations to the participants.

(3) 2. Results and Discussion

Results tabulated on the proverb tests were (a) total number of lexical items correct (two possible per proverb), (b) number of proverbs for which both lexical items were correct, (c) number of proverb meanings correct, and (d) number of proverbs for which both the meaning and the two lexical items were answered correctly. The mean scores were tabulated for each of the three groups in the study and for the pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2 in each of the four categories above.

As the ability to both produce the correct form and have an understanding of the meaning of a proverb is required to "know" that expression, the last of these four tabulations, category (d), meaning and both lexical items correct, was considered to be of the most importance. The pre-test scores for the Conventional group were slightly lower than for the other two (0.51, 0.67, and 0.87). On post-test 1, the Conventional and Metaphor groups' scores were similar, but the Image group's score higher (3.95, 4.41, 5.67). However, on post-test 2, the scores increased in the group order: Conventional, Metaphor, Image (2.51, 3.71, 4.27). See Table 1 below. The indication is that while metaphor instruction increases scores immediately after and one week after the lesson, the addition of image instruction raises them even higher.

Table 1. Mean Scores on Proverb Tests (Both Lexical Item & Meaning Correct)

Group:	Conventional (n=41)	Metaphor (n=24)	Image (n=45)
Pre-test	0.51	0.67	0.87
Post-test 1	3.95	4.41	5.67
Post-test 2	2.51	3.71	4.27

Note: Total Possible Score = 8

(4) III. Conceptual Metaphor with Idioms

1. Method

An idiom study was carried out to determine the effectiveness of incorporating conceptual metaphors alone or in tandem with mental images in teaching idioms and the effectiveness of both in comparison with a conventional method. One group (Conventional) was taught 16 idioms conventionally arranged into five semantic categories: Anger, Control/Authority, Secretiveness, Loss of Self-Control, and Revealing. A second group (Metaphor) was introduced to two motivating conceptual metaphors for each of the idioms, e.g., ANGER IS HEAT and MIND IS A CONTAINER for idioms of the Anger category. The third group (Image) was presented with the meaning and two conceptual metaphors for the same idioms, but their related discussion questions focused on creating rich mental images that would activate image schemas for the motivating metaphors. Image-inducing questions for the idiom hit the ceiling, for example, included *What image do you "see" in your mind when you think of "hitting the ceiling"? Where does the force come from? and What is the result of hitting the ceiling?* Pre- and post-tests were administered at the same intervals as in the first study. The 66 participants were university students of approximately the same English language proficiency as those in the proverb study above. The construction of the pre- and post-test instrument, testing procedures and scheduling, and data collection procedures also followed those described for the proverb study.

2. Results and Discussion

The number of test items for which both the missing lexical item of the idiom and the meaning of the idiom were correct was tabulated. The mean scores on the pre-test neared zero for all three test groups. On post-test 1, the Conventional group (9.70) scored higher than the Metaphor group (8.79), but the Image group (10.95) scored more than a full point higher than either of the other two groups.

On post-test 2, however, the Conventional group (4.74) scored slightly lower than the Metaphor group (5.10), while the Image group (5.85) scored at least three fourths of a point higher than the other two groups (see Table 2).

The most obvious general pattern that appears for all three groups for all three sets of mean scores tabulated is that all groups scored lowest, near zero, on the pre-test; they all scored highest on post-test 1; and they all scored considerably lower on post-test 2 than on post-test 1. Scores dropped drastically in the one-week interval between post-test 1 and post-test 2 (by as much as 49%), an expected decrease in retention with time. On post-test 1, the Image group scored considerably higher (10.95) than the Metaphor group (8.79) and the Conventional group (9.70). Similarly, on post-test 2, the Image group scored higher (5.85) than the Metaphor (5.10) and Conventional (4.74) groups. These results strongly suggest that it is more effective to teach idioms by employing conceptual metaphor instruction than by not using it as a supplement, and that it is even more effective to supplement the motivating conceptual metaphors with activities designed to produce rich mental images.

Table 2. Mean Scores on Idiom Tests (Both Lexical Item & Meaning Correct)

Group:	Conventional (n=27)	Metaphor (n=19)	Image (n=20)
Pre-test	0.15	0.16	0.05
Post-test 1	9.70	8.79	10.95
Post-test 2	4.74	5.10	5.85

Note: Total Possible Score = 16

(5) VI. Conceptual Metaphor with Conventional Metaphor

1. Method

This study was designed to test the effectiveness of conceptual metaphor and image schema in teaching conventional metaphors. Three groups were employed: a group taught semantically organized metaphors (Conventional group), a group taught 25 metaphors grouped into five conceptual metaphors (Metaphor group), and a group taught the same as the Metaphor group, with the addition of being introduced to abstract image schemas for the conceptual metaphors (Image group). Conceptual metaphors introduced included ANGER IS HEAT and EMOTIONS ARE THINGS INSIDE A PERSON while corresponding conventional metaphors included "She got all steamed up" and "He is filled with rage," respectively. The pre-test was administered immediately prior to the lesson and post-test 1 immediately after the lesson. One week later, post-test 2 was administered. All three tests were identical

and all test administrations were made unannounced. The 86 participants in the study were second-, third-, and fourth-year university students and were at an intermediate to high-intermediate level in English proficiency. The construction of the pre- and post-test instrument, testing procedures and scheduling, and data collection procedures also followed those described for the proverb study.

2. Results and Discussion

The mean scores on the pre-test, out of a total possible score of 16 points, ranged from 4.0 for the Metaphor group to 4.7 for the Conventional group, with the Image group in between at 4.1 points. The mean score was highest for the Conventional group (10.3) and lowest for the Metaphor group (8.5) on post-test 1, but highest for the Image group on post-tests 2 (9.3) and lowest for the metaphor group (7.6), as shown in Table 1.

Percentage increases over the mean score on the pre-test were calculated for each of the three experimental groups for each post-test. On post-test 1, the percentage increase in mean score was highest for the Image group (136.6) and lowest for the Metaphor group (112.5). On post-test2, the Image group again recorded the highest percentage increase (126.8), while the Conventional group scored the lowest (80.9). The Metaphor group's score was closeto that of the Conventional group's (90.0). See Table 3.

These figures also suggest that grouping conventional metaphors by conceptual metaphor is more effective in teaching metaphors than grouping them semantically (topically). In addition, introducing the concept of image schema with that of conceptual metaphor increases the efficacy of teaching conventional metaphors over that of the introduction of the concept of conceptual metaphor only.

Table 3. Scores of Metaphor Test by Group and Percent Increase Over Pre-Test Score

Group	n	Pre-Test	Post-test		Post-test 2	
		Mean Score	Mean Score	Mean In.(%)	Mean Score	Mean In. (%)
Conventional	(n=27)	4.7	10.3	5.6 (119.1%)	8.5	3.8 (80.9%)
Metaphor	(n=36)	4.0	8.5	4.5 (112.5%)	7.6	3.6 (90.0%)
Image	(n=23)	4.1	9.7	5.6 (136.6%)	9.3	5.2 (126.8%)

Note: Total Possible Score = 16

(6) V. Conclusion

In the one-week delayed post-test 2 in each of the studies, the Image group had the highest scores, followed by the Metaphor group, followed by the Conventional group. These results strongly suggest that the inclusion of motivating conceptual metaphors along with material to elicit related mental imagery into the instructional material for the teaching of proverbs, idioms, and conventional metaphors is more efficient than a conventional teaching method, as well as more efficient than the inclusion of motivating conceptual metaphors alone into the instructional material.

At present, the cognitive linguistic concept of conceptual metaphor and its related images is incorporated into only an infinitesimal amount of materials for teaching figurative expressions. Those that do exist are for metaphors and idioms. Teaching materials for proverbs which are based on motivating conceptual metaphors have yet to be developed in textbook form. To make figurative language (i.e., proverbs, idioms, and conventional metaphors) more learnable, these concepts need to be incorporated when developing related teaching materials for learners at the intermediate level and above. In addition to their linguistic value, an understanding of the conceptual metaphors motivating figurative expressions reveals to the language learner metaphorical schemes that are ubiquitous in the everyday thought of the speakers of the language. At the same time, they acquaint the language learner with cultural aspects of the language they are learning.

References

- Gibbs, R.W. (2001). Proverbial themes we live by. *Poetics*, 29, 167-188.
- Gibbs, R.W. (1994). *Poetics of the mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, R.W. (1992). What do idioms really mean? *Journal of Memory and Language*, 31, 485-506.
- Gibbs, R.W., & Beitel, D. (1995). What proverb understanding reveals about how people think. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(1), 133-154.
- Gibbs, R.W., Colston, H.L., & Johnson, M.D. (1996). Proverbs and the metaphorical mind. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 11, 207-216.
- Gibbs, R.W., & O'Brien, J. (1990). Idioms and mental imagery: The metaphorical motivation for idiomatic meaning. *Cognition*, 36, 35-68.
- Gibbs, R. W., Strom, L. K., & Spivey-Knowlton, M.J. (1997). Conceptual metaphors in mental imagery for proverbs. *Journal of Mental Imagery*, 21, 83-110.

- Holme, R. (2004). *Mind, metaphor and language teaching*. Houndmills, UK/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Shaffer, D.E. (2004, December). *Conceptual metaphor- and image schema-based approaches to foreign language teaching*. Paper presented at the 2004 KAFLE Winter International Conference, Seoul, South Korea.
- Shaffer, D.E. (2005, June). *Idiom instruction: A cognitive approach*. Paper presented at the 2005 KATE International Conference, Seoul, South Korea.

David Shaffer (PhD, Linguistics) has been an educator in Korea since the early 1970s. In addition to teaching graduate and undergraduate courses at Chosun University, he has years of experience as a teacher trainer and materials developer. Dr. Shaffer is the author of several books and EFL-related columns in periodicals for Korean English learners. His main academic interest at present is incorporating cognitive linguistic constructs into more effective teaching techniques, especially into the teaching of figurative language: proverbs, idioms, and conventional metaphors.

David E. Shaffer

광주광역시 동구 서석동 375번지 (우)501-759

조선대학교 외국어대학 영어과

전화번호: 062) 230-6917, Fax 0505-502-0596

이메일: disin@chosun.ac.kr