

METAPHORICAL COMPETENCE AT DISCOURSE LEVEL: BILINGUAL PROCESSING OF L2 SPANISH METAPHORIC REFERENTIAL DESCRIPTIONS

Jagafarova, Anastasija
Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Anastasija.Jagafarova@vub.be

Abstract

Researchers investigating the receptive metaphorical competence in SLA have generally found that comprehending L2 figurative language is a substantial complication for L2 learners (Littlemore, 2001; Zibin, 2016). However, while the body of work on understanding L2 non-literal language at word or sentence level in such domains as idiomatic expressions is rapidly growing (Cooper, 1999; Cieřlicka, 2015), very few empirical investigations have been carried out on how bilingual speakers comprehend L2 metaphoric referential expressions (Heredia & Muñoz, 2015; Heredia & Cieřlicka, 2016). In metaphoric referential descriptions like (1), the subject (i.e. *landlord*) and vehicle (i.e. *shark*) occur apart from each other. Therefore, understanding metaphoric anaphors not only requires inferring the ground (i.e. making an inference that the landlord is dishonest and victimized the renter) but also tracing the vehicle back to its topic. In the monolingual literature (Almor et al., 2007; Gibbs, 1990; Onishi & Murphy, 1993), such reactivation of the antecedent from the metaphoric reference has been shown to require additional inferential processes to understand the intended meaning.

(1) *The landlord added extra fees on top of my rent bill. The shark hadn't included it in the contract.*

To contribute to the very limited knowledge of bilingual processing of metaphoric anaphor, the present study aims to examine whether access to the figurative meaning of the metaphoric referential description is modulated by language status (native speaker vs. L2 learner) and to explore the temporal course of meaning activation (literal vs. figurative) using the visual world eye-tracking paradigm. The results are to be interpreted in light of metaphor processing models (Direct Access Model, Indirect Processing Model, and Graded Salience Hypothesis).

Keywords: metaphorical competence, metaphoric anaphor, bilingual metaphor processing

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