

**PROMOTING METAPHORICAL THINKING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM
THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE**

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ABSTRACT

The present study describes how an English learning activity with an emphasis on metaphorical thinking was taught in a class of 46 college freshmen in Taiwan. The activity investigated students' beliefs about love from their perspective. Conducted during the 2005 spring semester, this 2-week activity combined different types of learning input, including (1) an introduction to figurative language, metaphors, similes, and metaphorical thinking in general, (2) examples taken from Chinese song lyrics and from a weblog essay about a blind date, (3) classroom discussions, and (4) an English song, "Perhaps Love." Data included (1) my teaching entries, (2) students' discussion sheets, and (3) students' writing assignments about love. The process followed a general approach to metaphor analysis: (1) collecting examples of metaphorical expressions about love from students; (2) generalizing the figurative expressions that students used, and (3) eliciting thought patterns that expressed students' beliefs and actions. The study suggests that reader-based metaphorical responses to texts allow for the demonstration of specific cultural understanding and social consciousness. In addition, the study indicates that English instruction should involve a process in which students (1) discuss themes relevant to their lives and (2) read the texts reflectively through their personal experiences. With regard to second language learning, the present instruction provided a mix of skills (especially listening and reading abilities) and creativity drawing on students' reader-based responses to texts usually encountered outside the classroom. To sum up, EFL instruction should build on relevance, engagement, poetic possibilities, and language development.

Key Words: popular culture, conceptual metaphor, metaphorical thinking

INTRODUCTION

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, metaphors are not only figurative expressions used in literary works but also ways of thinking and knowing that are manifested in our everyday language: “If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor” (p. 3). Furthermore, the metaphorical interpretation of everyday language deepens our understanding of language that we speak in a fresh and imaginative fashion (Palmer & Brooks, 2004).

The study of metaphor is significant in literary criticism and there is an established tradition of exploring metaphors in English teaching and learning (Alvermann, Swafford, & Montero, 2004; Taylor, 1984). For example, Johnston (1999) observes that frequent images have described teachers as “facilitators,” “managers,” “guides,” “architects,” “shapers,” and so forth. More imaginative and creative comparisons portray teachers as “moral craftspersons,” “carers,” “healers,” and even as “rain dancers” (p. 256). Smith (1988) thinks about literacy through an illuminating metaphor: becoming literate is similar to joining a club, a literacy community where students participate in club activities to gain specific benefits.

This indicates that metaphors can help us see language teaching or learning through powerful images. Moffett (1983) encourages us to view language teaching as drama: “The guts of drama is rhetoric, people acting on each other . . . Drama is the perfect place to begin the study of rhetoric” (p. 116). Similarly, VanDeWeghe (2003) urges us to examine teaching writing (tenor) as writing a story (vehicle), a metaphor that can illuminate our concepts of pedagogy, but also can shape our students and our teaching itself. In brief, metaphors add life and color to our otherwise hackneyed language; more importantly, metaphors “powerfully shape how we think about our students, ourselves as teachers, and what and how we teach” (p. 103).

Accordingly, this paper investigates a teaching activity that I designed to promote 46 college freshmen’s metaphorical thinking in an English Reading class offered in Taiwan in spring 2005. The activity helped students metaphorically construct the concept of love while learning English through different modes of textual input (e.g. my introduction to figurative language, metaphors, similes, and metaphorical thinking, illuminating examples from various sources such as academic

writing; a weblog; Chinese song lyrics; an English song). In particular, the activity was intended to increase students' ability both in metaphorical expression and in English listening and reading abilities. The present study starts from the premise that metaphor is a phenomenon of language and aims at exploring the possibilities of metaphorical thinking for EFL students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study describes an English learning activity in which 46 college freshmen were exposed to various types of learning input (e.g. classroom discussions, an English song, and personal reflections). In addition, it analyzes students' metaphorical conceptualizations of the notion of love, i.e. metaphorical expression about love from the viewpoint of Taiwanese teenagers. In brief, the purpose of the study is: (1) to examine the types of students' metaphorical expression as a meaningful mode of self-awareness in a specific culture, (2) to explore the possibilities of promoting metaphorical thinking in the EFL classroom, and (3) to investigate the relevance of metaphorical thinking to increasing English proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Figurative language instruction should be stressed because of its usefulness in helping language learners enhance their communicative and creative abilities (Palmer & Brooks, 2004). Shie's (2004) research also points out that learning English through various types of figurative speech is a valuable learning experience for EFL students in achieving a higher level of thinking and expression. Among these different types of figurative expression, metaphor is one of the primary language devices discussed in language research and education from different perspectives (Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Gwyn, 1999; Kovecses, 2002; Taylor, 1984).

Metaphors have long been viewed as an essential component of language by many philosophers of language (Black, 1962, 1979; Holman & Harmon, 1992; Kittay, 1987; Searle, 1979). In this classic paradigm, metaphors are constructed in contrast to literal language and are used as a rhetorical or poetic device. A metaphor is figurative language in which an analogy is posited between two objects and one or more of the qualities of the second object are attributed to the first. Metaphor is thus

a device of poetic imagination and rhetorical debate, a feature of extraordinary language rather than of ordinary language.

Another way to see metaphor is to put it in a conceptual framework, a cognitive or constructive approach to metaphor mainly initiated by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) book *Metaphors We Live By*. Specifically, metaphor should be treated as a mode of thought rather than a rhetorical device because "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (p. 3). That is, the concepts that govern our thought and action are metaphorical in nature.

As Shie (2004) explains, a conceptual metaphor reflects "a process of conceptualizing one thing in terms of another" (p. 9). In labeling the components of a metaphor, while *one thing* is often marked as the topic/theme/tenor, *the other thing* is thought of as the vehicle. For instance, the idea from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* that "all the world's a stage" is a metaphor in which the tenor is the world and the vehicle is a stage. Shakespeare attempts to relate the world to a stage, another concept that conveys various meanings to different people. The process of understanding one thing as another involves our conceptual system, i.e. how we perceive in the world and how we relate to people around us.

It thus can be argued that when language educators or researchers devote their attention to the process of metaphorical conceptualization, they should consider language items as part of a larger text and as integral to language use in a specific context for a certain purpose. Language items that convey metaphorical expressions should be viewed not in isolation but within language use in a specific discourse community (Cameron, 1999). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, metaphorical language within a specific speaking community "can characterize a coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts" (p. 9). Accordingly, such a discourse system allows language users to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another concept.

Figurative expressions (e.g. metaphor as discussed above) have become conventional components of everyday language, a way of speaking or writing that is presented in a creative and imaginative fashion (Palmer & Brooks, 2004; VanDeWeghe, 2003). However, some researchers suggest that language educators should put aside the distinction between explicit and implicit figures of speech because the power lies in the juxtaposition of differences and similarities regardless of syntactic structure (Pugh, Hicks, Davis, & Venstra, 1992). In this

regard, extended metaphors represent linguistic devices that include metaphors, similes, metonymies, and other figures of speech, a concept that views figurative language broadly and emphasizes the imaginative use of comparison in diverse forms. In brief, extended or multiple metaphors provide human beings with “a creative license to stretch, bend, rearrange, and shape English in new ways” (p. 6), a language that is filtered through personal experience within a specific culture.

Accordingly, the notion of metaphorical thinking should be highlighted in language learning activities through which language learners come up with “parallels between apparently unrelated phenomena to gain insight, make discoveries, offer hypotheses, wage arguments, and accomplish other such useful purposes” (Pugh, Hicks, & Davis, 1997, p. 2). As Pugh et al. (1997, pp. 5-6) recommend, a trying-it-out activity can be used for the instructor to show students how metaphorical thinking can be constructed:

- (1) Collect a box of familiar items (e.g. a cup, an apple, a light bulb, a candle, etc.). Teachers should have at least as many items in the box as there are students in the class.
- (2) Continue to add interesting items to the box and encourage students to contribute items, too.
- (3) Select an object for which you have a clear conceptual comparison. For example, a light bulb is often compared to a bright idea, and a candle flame can be a comparison for life.
- (4) Hold up the object for the class to observe, state the comparison, and ask how many students have heard of the comparison.
- (5) Make a list on the board of the qualities shared by the object and the concept.

Metaphorical thinking stressed in the current research represents metaphorical ways of knowing, the imaginative nature of thought and expression that can be found in our everyday lives. A process of experiencing metaphorical thinking can help students develop a better sense of themselves in a specific culture (Thornbury, 1991). In addition, students in a classroom that promotes metaphorical thinking can be metaphorical thinkers because they are engaged in a constructive learning experience in which they actively build bridges from the known to the new.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Case Study

This research is a qualitative case study because it employs different data (e.g. my teaching entries and individual reflections on the notion of love) to describe a General English class in Taiwan designed from the perspective of metaphorical thinking. From this perspective, literacy is seen as a social practice in which students are exposed to learning activities that help them develop not only the four skills but also their metaphorical thinking. As Pugh et al. (1997) emphasize, an English class should promote students' creative powers as language users and makers in the course of a learning process that highlights "the imaginative logic of metaphorical thinking" (p. 3).

As Nunan (1992) indicates, "a case is a single instance of a class of objects or entities and a case study is the investigation of that single instance in the context in which it occurs" (p. 79). The present study is an interpretative case study of an English Reading class in Taiwan. This research does not intend to be sufficiently representative for generalization. Rather, because the present study is exploratory in nature, it is viewed as a form of pilot study for those researchers and/or educators who are interested in fostering metaphorical thinking in their own classroom.

Setting and Participants

This study took place at a rural national university of technology and science in south-central Taiwan, which at that time included four separate colleges. I was a part-time teacher there only for the 2005 spring semester. The class discussed in the paper was a General English class for college freshmen. I was the substitute instructor for about four weeks during the same semester because the regular class instructor took sick leave. The class consisted of 46 college freshmen (43 males and 3 females) from the School of Engineering. The English level of the class was low and the students did not have much experience in discussing and writing in English.

Data Sources

Data sources included my teaching journal entries, classroom

observations, students' discussion sheets, and their writing assignments about love.

Teaching journal entries

I kept a weekly journal as a reflection on class activities and on my students while I was serving as a substitute instructor for this class. Only the two weekly entries relevant to the present activity are considered here. These teaching entries also recorded some classroom observations from my perspective. Although I was the substitute instructor for this class for only one month, I still had some opportunity to observe and communicate with the students, especially during classroom discussions among students themselves or among students and myself.

Students' discussion sheets

Before students were asked to write a reflection of what love would be from their perspective, students in pairs were required to discuss the notion of love and to write down their responses. The pair discussion was designed as a warm-up exercise to promote students' metaphorical thinking on the notion of love. Discussion arguments were written in Chinese on paper for interpretation in the future.

Students' writing assignments

When the activity for Week 11 was finished, students were asked to write a reflection paper at home on the concept of love from their perspective. Papers were submitted the following week. The students' final products, i.e. their arguments written in Chinese about what love would be, were the main data source for analysis together with the complimentary data mentioned earlier.

Data Analysis

Following the analytical procedure in previous research studies (Cameron & Low, 1999; Guerrero & Villamil, 2000) on metaphorical thinking, the current research adopts a general approach to metaphor analysis: (1) collecting examples of metaphorical expressions about love from students; (2) generalizing the figurative expressions that students used, and (3) eliciting thought patterns that expressed students' beliefs and actions. In addition, the present study will attempt to categorize students' figurative examples into groups of similar concept and thought. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the categories that explain

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different notions of love include: (1) “love is a journey”; (2) “love is a physical force”; (3) “love is a patient”;¹ (4) “love is madness”; (5) “love is magic”; and (6) “love is war” (pp. 44-49). It is hoped that the present research will come up with different categories from these Taiwanese students’ metaphorical expressions about love, categories with different cultural manifestations.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Metaphorical Thinking Activity on the Concept of Love

First week of the activity

The first two sessions of the present activity were conducted on Thursday of Week 10 and were focused on the understanding of figurative language and metaphorical thinking. Considering students’ English level, I spoke in Chinese while explaining some notions of figurative language and relevant samples listed in the handout (Appendix A) that I passed out to the students at the beginning of the activity.

I started explaining the meaning of figurative language, simile, and metaphor with the aid of the definitions and relevant samples shown in the handout. To encourage students to think about these types of figurative language, I had a student chosen at random describe his girlfriend. This literacy event was not planned in the lesson plan (Appendix B) but it turned out to be a valuable warm-up exercise for promoting students’ metaphorical thinking—as one of my teaching journal entries indicates:

Dennis was very comfortable with my request (i.e. to describe one’s girlfriend) and admitted without hesitation that he had a girlfriend.² Then he used English to describe his girlfriend. He talked about his girlfriend’s weight, height, how they met, etc. However, I stopped him in the middle of his description. I told Dennis that he could use Chinese to fulfill the task because I wanted students to have more creative interactions with their first figurative language expression. I wanted him to describe his girlfriend with language that could create a picture in the listener’s mind. (Journal Entry, April 26, 2005)

At my suggestion, Dennis offered a description of his girlfriend, a comparison that carried a biblical implication: “If God is food for the

hunger of our soul, my girlfriend is a spring for the thirst of my soul.” I used this anecdote to facilitate students’ engagement in understanding metaphorical thinking. During the remaining class time, I discussed with students the handout, material in which figurative expressions such as simile and metaphor were presented in parts of the lyrics of nine selected Chinese pop songs and in a weblog journal entry.

In particular, I read part of the lyrics (in English) to the Chinese song “What Is Love Like?” because the song was directly related to the theme that the present study will explore: “What is love like? / Love is like a Sunday morning / What is love like? / Love is like the wind you embrace / What is love like? / Love is like a purple fantasy / What is love like? / Love is like eyes that can talk.” In addition, I used a weblog story written in Chinese by a student from a weekend class that I was teaching during the same semester. In the story, the male student provided a vivid description of his blind-date experience, an engaging account that compared the date to a nine-inning baseball game.³ Then before the class was finished, I played the song “Perhaps Love” (Appendix C) once for students to consider the potential of love, the diversity of love that would be further explored in Week 11.

Second week of the activity

Another two sessions of the activity were implemented on Thursday of Week 11. At the beginning of the first session, I spent about fifteen minutes asking some students whether they still remembered what had been discussed in Week 10. During the discussion with students, I employed the instances that had been used in the previous week to refresh students’ memory of figurative language, simile, metaphor, and metaphorical thinking. To help students develop more interest in figurative expressions, I wrote the following quote on the blackboard and had students rethink the relationship between an interview and a marriage from their viewpoint:

Interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed door there is a world of secret. (Oakley, 1981, p. 41)

I pointed out to students that people might interpret the parallel between marriage and interview differently according to their understanding of marriage either from their personal lived experience or from their own cultural customs. I wanted students to understand the sort of comparison

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and contrast that appeared in their mind as a type of figurative language that they should not ignore.

The second session began when I played the song “Perhaps Love” for the second time. I asked students to circle any words that they considered important while listening to the song. After the song was finished, seven students were asked to write on the blackboard two words that they had just circled for further discussion. Then I explained these words to students and played the song again. During the remaining time of the second session, I had pairs of students discuss what love might mean to them. I asked students to choose one sentence or one phrase from the song that they liked the most and to answer the question *What is love like?* Each student in a pair needed to write his/her ideas on a discussion sheet provided by me and to share his/her arguments with his/her partner (Appendix D). Finally, students were asked to finish a writing assignment at home and submit it in the following week, i.e. Week 12. Specifically, students were to expand their discussion into a reflection paper in which they would explore the notion of love from their individual perspective (Appendix E).

Students’ Types of Metaphorical Responses to the Concept of Love

After a careful examination of students’ responses to the question “what is love like?”, we find that none of the students’ perceptions of love fits in the categories of love mentioned previously, such as war, madness, magic, a journey, a physical force, or a patient (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Specifically, these forty-six students’ notions of love can be grouped into four categories: (1) nature; (2) food; (3) sports/games; and (4) other. Some students offered more than one notion, so there were in total sixty-four perceptions of what love is like. A further analysis of these notions is provided below.

Nature

Thirty student responses were directly related to nature, a general category that can be sub-divided into the following: (1) natural phenomena; (2) heavenly objects (3) seasons; (4) plants; and (5) water.

Natural phenomena. Sixteen students compared love to natural phenomena relating to the atmosphere, such as the sky, clouds, a breeze, wind, a tornado, weather, rain, air, rainbows, clouds, and the sun in summer. In particular, these students connected love to such features of

the atmosphere as mutability and imperceptibility.

For example, Jenny and Alan both related love to the sky because of its variability and dynamics.⁴ “Love,” as Jenny said, “is like the sky with many faces. It is changeable! At times it is sunny and at times it is cloudy. It can be a face with tracks of tears, but it can be a bright sun with beaming smiles. However, at times, the sky can be so dark and make people disheartened.” From Alan’s viewpoint, “love can be a cloudless sky, especially when a pleasant breeze moves across a meadow, and love is like a breeze blowing through lovers’ hearts.”

As we see, love can also be a breeze or a wind. As Jimmy suggested, “love is an elusive breeze, and love is in the air.” He continued, “some people try their best to look for the traces of love by searching every corner of the globe. However, finally they find that love is waiting quietly at home for them to come back.” To Peter and Tony, love is like the wind—variable, unstable, and unpredictable. Furthermore, when love is compared to a tornado, “love comes quickly and goes quickly and it destroys everything in its path. So people need to wait for another chance to love—a brand-new beginning of life” (David). The ephemeral quality of the atmosphere is also presented in students’ reflections in which love is compared to weather, rain, and clouds. For instance, people maintain an ambivalent attitude toward love. When rain comes during the summer heat, people are overjoyed. In contrast, when people need to work outside, they get unhappy when it starts raining heavily.

The analysis so far indicates that love to many students seems to happen suddenly rather than gradually. Students’ concepts of love do not reveal too many manifestations of various emotions that lovers in reality would experience. These emotions include sadness, despair, happiness, adoration, jealousy, highs and lows, etc. Perhaps this lack of depth is due in part to the inexperience of students at the age of eighteen or nineteen, as my memory of these students suggests. Few students in their reflections mentioned the experience of love. Only Mary shared personal experience of a love that she had in senior high school. She thought of this love as beautiful but disillusioning: “The love I had before was like a rainbow. It added new hues to the dull sky at the beginning, but later it made me realize that love is also like a rainbow—unpredictable—because we never know when it will disappear and when it will appear again.”

Heavenly objects. The complexities of love can be seen when three students compared love to astronomical objects such as shooting stars, the North Star, and black holes. First, Chad said in his reflection that the

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evanescent quality of love can be analogous to the momentary appearance of a shooting star in the sky:

Love is like a shooting star—something that appears for a second. We can only use our pupils [eyes] to collect the instantaneous beautiful memory in our mind for future reflection. . . . I've been waiting for the one and only beautiful star that belongs to me, i.e. a shooting star that will land on my lonely balcony. . . . What I can do is to wait quietly. What does this mean? When love comes, it is like the sudden appearance of a shooting star—so fast that you won't even notice it's there!

While Chad revealed a sentimental feeling about the transience of love from a Taiwanese teenager's perspective, Winston emphasized the permanent nature of love as we can see from his comparison of love to the North Star. Winston pointed out that the North Star is a star that seems never to move, which can be perceived as a symbol of an everlasting love. As he said, "the existence of the North Star gives you comfort, making you realize that you still have some company even when you are in the depths of trouble and loneliness. It can help you understand yourself. Even when you get lost and don't know who you are, the North Star can still lead you to the right path toward love."

Finally, Aaron showed his thought and creativity by comparing love to another astronomical object, a black hole. Specifically, Aaron's conception of love is demonstrated through a lyrical narrative that, as his discussion partner suggested, may be a reader response based on Aaron's personal experience at that time:

Love is like black holes in the universe. [They] endlessly devour my flame-like planet. [They] absorb the love I have only for you—drop by drop. They are merciless when they take away the little eclipse-like demon. [They] endlessly occupy your face—a face with sweet smiles. [They] take one bite after another. . . . Since I lost contact with you, I have become like the earth out of orbit that has stopped revolving—devouring my heart like black holes.

Although such a poetic reflection on love seems unclear in meaning, the attractive but destructive power of black holes is obvious. As a critical instructor who valued students' thinking and perspective, I was

appreciative of such a creative response to the assignment. It shows that teachers can inspire students to think metaphorically through activities based on popular culture.

Seasons. The four seasons are a theme commonly seen in many literary works about love (e.g. Shakespeare's sonnet, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day"), but only two students employed such a comparison. Both stressed the uniqueness of each season, which can be related to the variability of love:

Andy: Love is like spring. When spring comes, all the living things come to life—full of energy. When we have a lover, we regain power just like what spring does to the earth. Every day of our lives is full of energy. Our lives become colorful as well.

Sara: Love is like the change of seasons. When we are being pursued, it is like spring. . . . When lovers have an argument, it is like thunder storms on a lazy summer afternoon. Everything will be fine. . . . When love between a couple has changed, it is like the season of fall—yellow leaves and cold winds. When love comes to an end, it is analogous to the coming of winter. But spring will come again after winter. Love is like the cycle of the four seasons. How long will it last? Unpredictable! It depends on the two lovers themselves.

Plants. Two students compared love to plants such as trees and roses. As the poet Robert Burns does in the famous line, "My love is like a red, red rose," Sylvia drew a parallel between love and a rose: "Love is like a rose. It is beautiful when we look at it from a distance. But when we approach it [love/the rose], we get hurt as a thorn stings our heart." Robert, a quiet student in the classroom, shared a concise notion of love: "Love is like a tree. It won't grow tall if we don't take care of it."

Water. Water is a topic mentioned in two students' reflection papers that considered the fact that human beings cannot live without water. In other words, students emphasized the importance of love based on the necessity of water in our lives.

Food

Eight students used the notion of food, such as candy, a cup of tea or coffee, and so on, to describe love. Some examples are provided below.

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- Larry: Love at the outset is like the taste of kimchi, hot and strong. Later, when love starts to stabilize, the flavor lingers in your mouth.
- John: Love is like eating chocolate. If you don't put it into your mouth, you will never know its taste.
- Sam: Love is like food—indispensable to human life.
- Justin: Love is like a cup of coffee, which needs you to taste and appreciate it. Some coffee is bitter, which means your love encounters a bottleneck [difficulty]. When it tastes sweet, it represents the sweetness of love.
- Teresa: Love is like eating a super hot pot. Even though you know it will be extremely spicy and might make your stomach uncomfortable, you still can't help but try it again and again—to feel its power.

Sports/Games

Reader responses are socially constructed and meaning is socially negotiated and mediated through multiple sign systems (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978). Students' responses are mainly based on the connection between the text and their personal experiences or their prior knowledge. Accordingly, interpreting reader-centered responses is the window to knowing the worlds of students (Yau, 2007). Students' comparison of love to sports/games can confirm such a theory.

Seven students compared love to a sport or a game such as a hockey match, a marathon, bungee jumping, a race, or an unspecified game. For example, Hugo employed his previous knowledge of table tennis to explain what love would be like. As he pointed out, there are two types of table tennis, one the real game and the other a practice game. He compared love to the latter type of table tennis, a kind of practice composed of different ways of striking the ball. Love is like such a practice game, the purpose of which is to be better rather than victorious.

Another meaningful example can be found in Martha's comparison of love to "a bat that was just used to score a hit." Martha added in her reflection that she liked watching baseball, so she considered love as a baseball game. Her personal experience made her relate love to the process of a baseball game, the result of which is unpredictable even until the last inning of the game. As Martha pointed out:

Love is like playing a game full of ups and downs. Sometimes love

makes us happy and sometimes sad. After being in love for a while, you will be like a coach who has been promoted from being a player. You will be like a coach who knows everything on the field. You will employ the strategies you are good at to deal with the unpredictable situations of love.

Other

Under the category of Other, eleven students compared love to something that shows their creative and whimsical thought. Some comparisons stem from students' imagination, while some from their personal experience. For example, Greg and Eddie both regarded love as something mysterious and invisible—love is like an abstract noun or an invisible object. Eddie, in particular, pointed out that he used to think that love was an ordinary thing for silly people who did silly things. However, he had become one of them. What follows are some comparisons of love provided by these students.

- Jenny: Love is like a pyramid that will lead you to many wonderful and unexpected views.
- Mark: Love is like a summit that requires our effort and perseverance if we want to climb to the top of it.
- Lily: Love is like a maze. While searching for the way out of the maze, we will encounter many things. Some are valuable things that are just like the surprises offered by our lovers. Some are like venomous snakes or ferocious monsters when lovers are arguing.
- Tim: Love is like studying calculus and requires our attention and calculation.
- Danny: Love is like the pillars that support a building. No matter what happens to a couple, love is the reason that keeps them moving in life.
- Johnny: Love is like money or a kind of currency, the value of which depends on how you see it.
- Bob: Love is like scales that need to be balanced. Once one side is too heavy, the other side will be too light. That will lead to tragedy. So love is mutual.
- Donna: Love is like an abyss that draws us somewhere we cannot escape.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

With regard to students' metaphorical expression of love, the current study shows that the activity created many opportunities for students to explore and develop their originality through metaphorical thinking, specifically opportunities that encouraged students to use their creativity to envision aspects of love. A topic related to love turned out to be an engaging issue that involved students in developing many categories to interpret students' concepts on love: (1) nature; (2) food; (3) sports/games; and (4) other. Students' notions of love are different from the six categories of love provided by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in *Metaphors We Live By*, suggesting that reader-based metaphorical responses to texts allow for the demonstration of specific cultural understanding and social consciousness. In other words, this study confirms the following argument: Metaphors are not only figurative expressions used in literary works but also ways of thinking and knowing that are manifested in our daily language.

In addition, the present study indicates that this learning experience provided students with an open space where they could demonstrate their potential to make poetic connections within language learning activities. Moreover, students were encouraged to express their perspectives about love through classroom discussions and personal reflections. English instruction should involve a process in which students (1) discuss themes relevant to their lives and (2) read the texts reflectively through their personal experiences. When learning is based on learners' own interests and lived experiences, students will become more motivated and more engaged in the learning experience. This relevance suggests that learning a language involves not only the acquisition of the four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) but also the development of higher thinking abilities (Hooks, 1994)—metaphorical thinking in the current study. Language learning should be not only functional but also transformative (Rogers, 2004).

With regard to second language learning, the present instruction based on notions of metaphorical thinking and popular culture provided a mix of skills and creativity drawing on students' reader-based responses to texts usually encountered outside the classroom. As the lesson plan stressed, the activity discussed was especially designed to help students develop their listening and reading abilities, especially during the process in which students listened to the English song "Perhaps Love" and tried to make sense of the lyrics.

Students' responses were documented in Chinese in order to encourage students to express their ideas first with their native language's figurative expressions, which can be seen as the starting point for further exposure to figurative expressions in English (Palmer & Brooks, 2004). In particular, EFL students at lower levels may be allowed to show their personal creativity in their first language through metaphors, similes, essays, stories, and so on. This can be seen as a preparatory pathway to more metaphorical activities in the foreign language that students are studying. English follow-up activities can include translating the students' metaphors (L1) into English (L2), introducing commonly used patterns of metaphors, group/class discussions in English, individual reports in English on students' reflections, and so on. To sum up, what has been discussed implies that EFL instruction should build on relevance, engagement, poetic possibilities, and language development.

Other recommendations for future instruction and research are as follows: First, instruction intended to increase students' comprehension of figurative language can include exercises in which students are encouraged to write poems related to their lives and in which there are no wrong answers (Wiseman, 2007). Second, the approach discussed in this paper can be implemented with English majors who have a higher English proficiency in order to develop a more comprehensive argument. Third, more data should be gathered for further interpretation and better triangulation, such as interviewing participants with open-ended questions that can stimulate more reader-based responses (Flick, 2006). Fourth, future research and/or instruction can be focused on applying popular culture (e.g. popular music) in the EFL classroom as a means of fostering metaphorical thinking (Pugh et al., 1997).

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NOTES

1. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), many common expressions about romantic love and relationships are based on an implicit comparison of the relationship to physical condition (sickness/health). Examples include (1) This is a sick relationship; (2) They have a strong, healthy marriage; and (3) Their relationship is in really good shape.
2. All students' names in the paper are pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality.
3. This weblog does not currently exist on the World Wide Web.
4. The quotations from students are translated from Chinese into idiomatic English expressions.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Metaphorical Thinking

1. Figurative language

Webster’s definition: expressing one thing in terms normally denoting another with which it may be regarded as analogous.

Cambridge’s definition: (of words and phrases) used not with their basic meaning but with a more imaginative meaning.

E.g. Of course, she was using the term “massacre” in the figurative sense.

2. Simile

Definition: an expression in which you compare two things using the words “like” or “as,” for example “as red as blood.”

E.g. (a) cheeks like roses; (b) as strong as a lion; (c) Byron’s poem: “She walks in beauty, like the night....”

3. Metaphor

Definition: a way of describing something by comparing it to something else that has similar qualities, without using the words “like” or “as.”

E.g. (a) a river of tears; (b) drowning in money; (c) The mind is an ocean; (d) The city is a jungle.

4. **Metaphorical thinking:** drawing parallels between apparently unrelated phenomena to gain insight, make discoveries, offer hypotheses, wage arguments, and accomplish other such useful purposes

5. Concept vs. Object

| Mind / Brain | Sponge |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Absorb knowledge | Absorbs liquid |
| Holds knowledge | Holds liquid |
| Can be washed | Can be rinsed |
| Dries up when not used | Dries up when not used |

6. 靜止 (楊乃文 / 詞曲：大張偉)

空虛敲打著意志 彷彿這時間已靜止。。。。時光不經意流逝 像顆在耗費的電池

Stand Still

Emptiness is striking my soul / It seems like time has stood still / Time has passed unnoticed / Like a battery losing power

7. 證據 (楊乃文 / 詞：林暉哲 / 曲：陳琦貞)

就當我的愛掉進了黑洞 做過的夢是一陣漩渦 沒了你 才有出口

Evidence

Just pretend that my love for you has fallen into a black hole / The dreams I had before were a number of whirlpools / With you there are no exits

8. 愛像什麼 (劉文正)

愛像什麼 愛像星期天的早晨 愛像什麼 愛像擁抱著風 愛像什麼 愛像紫色的夢幻 愛像什麼 愛像說話的眼睛

What Is Love Like?

“What is love like? / Love is like a Sunday morning / What is love like? / Love is like the wind you embrace / What is love like? / Love is like a purple fantasy / What is love like? / Love is like eyes that can talk.”

Appendix B. Lesson Plan of Metaphorical Thinking Activity

Brief Description

This lesson employs different types of learning input to help students develop metaphorical thinking through an extended English learning process. The two-week activity is conducted in two sessions each week and is designed for EFL college freshmen at lower English levels.

Objectives

To increase students' English reading/listening ability, foster a collaborative spirit, develop metaphorical thinking, and integrate students' language learning with their personal experiences.

Materials

1. Handouts about figurative language, metaphors, similes, and metaphorical thinking
2. Lyrics of some Chinese pop songs that contain a number of figurative expressions
3. Part of the lyrics (in English) to the Chinese song “What Is Love Like?” (愛像什麼)
4. A weblog essay about a blind date
5. Lyrics to the English song “Perhaps Love”

Procedures

Week 1

1. Use the handouts to introduce the concepts of figurative language, metaphors, similes and metaphorical thinking with examples written in English (e.g. city as jungle)
2. Read the English version to the lyrics of “What Is Love Like?”
3. Have students briefly discuss a hilarious weblog story written in Chinese comparing the author's blind-date experience to a 9-inning baseball game
4. Play the English song “Perhaps Love” before the students leave class

Week 2

1. Refresh students' memory of figurative expressions and metaphorical thinking by using (a) some instances taught in Week 1 and (b) an English quotation comparing interviewing to marriage
2. Play “Perhaps Love” once and have students circle words in the song (i.e. words they don't know or they consider important) while listening to the song
3. Ask some students to write on the blackboard two words they have circled
4. Discuss the meaning of these words and have students read each of these words after

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- the instructor
5. Play the song again
 6. (1) Give each student a discussion sheet and have students in pairs answer the questions on the sheet and share their ideas
 - (2) Ask students to finish a reflection paper at home about their notion of love based on their pair discussion

Appendix C. “Perhaps Love” / John Denver & Placido Domingo

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Perhaps love is like a resting-place | 愛也許像個休息的地方 |
| 2. A shelter from the storm | 一個暴風雨中的避難所 |
| 3. It exists to give you comfort | 它的存在是為了給你慰藉 |
| 4. It is there to keep you warm | 為了給你溫暖 |
| 5. And in those times of trouble | 在你苦惱的時候 |
| 6. When you are most alone | 在你最孤單的時刻 |
| 7. The memory of love will bring you home | 愛的記憶將帶你回到溫暖家中 |
| 8. Perhaps love is like a window | 愛也許像一扇窗戶 |
| 9. Perhaps an open door | 也許像一扇敞開的門 |
| 10. It invites you to come closer | 邀請你靠近一點 |
| 11. It wants to show you more | 想讓你了解更多 |
| 12. And even if you lose yourself | 即使你迷失了自我 |
| 13. And don't know what to do | 不知所措 |
| 14. The memory of love will see you through | 愛的記憶將帶領你前進 |
| 15. Oh, love to some is like a cloud | 對有些人來說，愛像一朵浮雲 |
| 16. To some as strong as steel | 對有些人則像鋼鐵一般堅固 |
| 17. For some a way of living | 有人覺得愛是生活的方式 |
| 18. For some a way to feel | 有人覺得是一種感受的方式 |
| 19. And some say love is holding on | 有人說愛就是堅持 |
| 20. And some say letting go | 有人說愛是隨它去 |
| 21. And some say love is everything | 有人說愛就是一切 |
| 22. And some say they don't know | 也有人說他沒意見 |
| 23. Perhaps love is like the ocean | 愛也許像一片海洋 |
| 24. Full of conflict, full of pain | 暗潮洶湧，充滿痛苦 |
| 25. Like a fire when it's cold outside | 當外面天氣嚴寒，它像一把火 |
| 26. Or thunder when it rains | 陰雨時，像一道閃電 |
| 27. If I should live forever | 如果我長生不老 |
| 28. And all my dreams come true | 美夢都能成真 |
| 29. My memories of love will be of you | 妳將是我所有愛的回憶 |

Note. Chinese Translation Source: <http://www.tacocity.com.tw/abs1984/lyrics.htm>

Appendix D. Student Discussion Sheet (Sample)

Discussion Sheet

Your Name: _____ Your Partner: _____

1. Choose a sentence/phrase from "Perhaps Love" that you like the most
I like "When you are most alone, the memory of love will bring you home."
Because, love is everywhere. When we are sad and cold, it always keeps us warm and makes us happy. Let us feel just like at home.

2. What is love like?
馬拉松就像是愛情一樣，一步一步的前進，慢慢的不斷的完成旅程，直到終點，但不可操之過急，否則在路途中就失敗了，所以愛是一點一滴形成的，就像跑馬拉松。

3. What is love like from your partner's perspective
我的討論同伴說，愛情就像一杯咖啡，要喝一杯香醇的咖啡，就要耐心的等待，一滴一滴的慢慢累積，那這杯咖啡肯定很濃郁，相對的，如果越是急躁，這杯咖啡必定長久無味，奇淡無比。

