

<b>Institution: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: D29 English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: Enhancing awareness of metaphor in English Language examinations and in advice on cross-linguistic communication</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The research findings have led directly to a decision by Cambridge English Language Assessment to change the assessment criteria in their examinations to include assessment of metaphor use. The availability of the research report on the Cambridge website widens the impact of the findings to English Language Teaching and Assessment more broadly, changing attitudes to the assessment of metaphor use at the crucial university-entry level in particular.</p> <p>The findings have also led to change in the advice given by the British Council for those involved in communication with people from different linguistic backgrounds. The advice is available on their website, which receives several million hits per year (see below for details and exact numbers of hits). This advice has been amended to include information on metaphor. The website has been used by teachers to improve language teaching materials and enhance the way that students are helped to engage in academic courses in English.</p> <p>Cambridge English Language Assessment is a sector leader and delivers assessment to just under 4 million students per year, including the 1.5 million candidates who take the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for entry to English-speaking universities. Cambridge examinations are recognised by 13,000 institutions in 130 countries. The British Council is a global leader in English Language teaching and is a respected provider of impartial advice. The adoption by these agencies of these research findings can be expected in turn to lead to a greater focus on metaphor in language classrooms around the world.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Since January 1993, Dr Littlemore has engaged in research into the comprehension and production of metaphor by language learners, and has published 60 papers and 3 monographs on this topic. She has worked at the University of Birmingham as Senior Lecturer then Reader since 1999. The research has culminated in three related international funded research projects which have led to a number of recommendations for language teachers, testers and people who are professionally involved in cross-linguistic communication. The projects have been funded by Cambridge English Language Assessment (1st May 2010 – 31st March 2011), the British Council (1st August 2010 - 31st July 2011), and the Spanish Ministry of Education (1st April 2012 – 31st March 2015). For the first two projects, Littlemore was Principal Investigator. She supervised the work of four research assistants who transcribed student speech, and identified linguistic and gestural metaphors in student writing and speaking. Littlemore conducted the analysis herself. For the third project, Littlemore was a Co-Investigator. Approximately one sixth of the work on the third project was carried out at Birmingham University.</p> <p>In the first research project (funded by Cambridge English Language Assessment), the focus was on the production of metaphor by learners of English. It contributed to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an EU initiative which provides descriptions of language abilities that can be used to set clear targets for achievements within language learning. It has now become accepted as a way of benchmarking language achievement all over the world, measuring ability against six levels (A1 to C2). Littlemore's study was the first to address the use of metaphor in this context. An outcome of the research was a detailed report (source 1 below) containing a number of recommendations, which is available on the Cambridge ESOL website: <a href="http://www.cambridgeesol.org/rs_notes/">http://www.cambridgeesol.org/rs_notes/</a>.</p> <p>The report provided:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>measures of the amount and distribution of metaphor and metonymy used by language learners in their writing across CEFR levels of language ability.</li> </ol>

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- ii. a description of the functions that it is used to perform at each level.
- iii. a set of descriptors for CEFR levels A2-C2 regarding the appropriate use of metaphor at each level, for use by Cambridge ESOL examiners.

In the second and third research projects (funded by the British Council and the Spanish Ministry of Education) the focus was on the use of metaphor in academic tutorials involving international students studying at British universities. The aim was to provide recommendations on the use of metaphor for individuals who interact with people from different linguistic backgrounds.

Littlemore and her colleagues pioneered the study of metaphor and gesture, investigating the ways in which interlocutors appropriate each others' practices and the ways in which gesture is used to structure and communicate ideas. A key aspect of their research was to identify less successful metaphor use, where metaphor is misunderstood. This led to a number of recommendations for making the most of the potential that metaphor has to offer in academic tutorials.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

- 1) Littlemore, J. (2003). The effect of cultural background on metaphor interpretation. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 18 (4), 273-288. **(Entered in RAE 2008 – available from HEI on request)**
- 2) Littlemore, J. and Low, G. (2006). Metaphoric competence and communicative language ability. *Applied Linguistics*, 27 (2): 268-294. **(Entered in RAE 2008– available from HEI on request)**
- 3) Littlemore, J. and Low, G. (2006). *Figurative Thinking and Foreign Language Learning*. Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 4) Low, G., Littlemore, J. and Koester, A. (2008). The use of metaphor in three university lectures. *Applied Linguistics*, 29 (3): 428-455. **(Listed in REF2)**
- 5) Littlemore, J., Chen, P., Koester, A. and Barnden, J. (2011). Difficulties in metaphor comprehension faced by international students whose first language is not English. *Applied Linguistics*, 32 (4): 408-429. **(Listed in REF2)**
- 6) MacArthur, F. and Littlemore, J. (2011). On the repetition of words with the potential for metaphoric extension in conversations between native and non-native speakers of English, *Metaphor and the Social World*, 1 (2): 201-238. **(Available from HEI on request)**

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)**Cambridge English Language Assessment**

Cambridge English Language Assessment is the world leader in the provision of English Language examinations to 4 million candidates per year in 2,700 examination centres in 113 countries. In addition to providing examinations, Cambridge English Language Assessment engages in research, teacher education, and publication of materials and research reports. Key to its examinations are the assessment level descriptors that provide the benchmarks for examiners. These descriptors relate to six levels of achievement identified in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language. Those descriptors do not include reference to metaphor or figurative language. As a result of the first research project described above, a decision has been taken to change the descriptors to include those relating to metaphor use, as appropriate for the different levels.

As an illustration, the following descriptors have been recommended by Littlemore and accepted by CELA for B2 and C2 (source 2):

*B2 Learners should be able to make use of a limited number of conventional and creative open-class metaphors. They should be able to use metaphors for evaluative purposes and for dramatic effect and start to use them for discourse organising purposes. They should be starting to use personification metaphors more extensively. Metaphorical clusters are more in evidence at this level. Some are coherent, whereas others contain mixed metaphors.*

*C2 Learners should be able to use metaphors with consistent appropriate phraseology and collocations, use non-conventional, creative collocations and make creative use of direct metaphor to present their evaluations. They should be able to produce a high number of semi-coherent clusters, possibly containing mixed metaphors and peripheral response. They may use*

*personification metaphors as part of extended analogies and in combination with metonymy, and they may be able to convey sarcasm through metaphor and metonymy.*

### **ELT Professionals**

The impact of the research goes beyond the Cambridge organisation to language teachers and examiners more generally, especially examiners using the European Framework. The recommendations for B2 shown above are particularly important because B2 is the standard level of English proficiency required for entry into language programmes at European universities. The research report recommends that examiners should give credit for expressivity rather than accuracy at level B2 to allow learners scope to experiment with new forms of language and to demonstrate their skill in using language creatively. This represents a change in approaches to assessing language and avoids excluding from language programmes highly skilled students who are prepared to take risks with metaphor use. As an indication of the reach of the research, Cambridge ESOL reports that *Research Notes issue 47* was downloaded 707 times between February 2012 and 30 September 2012 (source 3).

The results of the third project above (funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education) have been used to revise teaching materials used in preparing students for Erasmus exchanges to include training in metaphor recognition and comprehension (source 4).

### **The British Council**

The British Council is a leading source of information for language teachers and professionals who communicate on a regular basis with people whose first language is not English. Its website receives around 20 million hits per year from people accessing its advice. Littlemore's research produced a report and a series of interactive web pages.

Both the report (source 5) and the interactive web pages are available on the British Council website through both <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications> and [http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/B458%20ELTRP%20Report%20-%20Littlemore\\_final.pdf](http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/sites/ec/files/B458%20ELTRP%20Report%20-%20Littlemore_final.pdf). According to the British Council, the publication was viewed on the website 'English Agenda', 62 times by 43 people between May 7th 2013 (when the publication was uploaded to the site) and 8th July 2013. The total number of page views on the entire site during that time was 89,190. On 'Teaching English', the publication was viewed 110 times by 83 people between May 7th 2013 (when the publication was uploaded to the site) and 8th July. The total number of page views on the entire site during that time was 3,512,483 (source 6).

This research has enhanced the advice that the British Council is able to offer. For the first time, information and recommendations about metaphor use in academic settings are available for users to access. This enhances the Council's service to its users, and thereby its worldwide reputation for reliable and constructive advice. Other users of the research are teachers in UK universities who interact with international students and teachers outside the UK who are preparing students to study at British universities.

Littlemore has received emails from a number of teachers who have used this website. Here is a quote from one of them, a language teacher and teacher trainer working in Estonia:

*I have used the research paper 'How to make yourself understood by international students: The role of metaphor in academic tutorials' in two courses I teach at the University of Tartu: 1) Teaching in English at University and 2) English for Academic Purposes for Academics. Using the videos presented in this paper has been incredibly useful for additional insight of the small things which causes misunderstandings... Using this material has been very useful for these two courses I teach and the participants which are enrolled, mainly to boost their confidence of their language usage, and make them aware that misunderstandings often find their origin elsewhere and they need to explore these, or question these. This material will remain part of the instructional material for these courses.*

As well as the published reports, these findings have been presented in invited keynote and plenary lectures given at teachers' conferences in the UK, Spain, Montenegro and Japan between

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2009 and 2012 (sources 8-12). Evidence that the findings have changed the practice of teachers and teacher trainers comes from correspondence with participants at these conferences outlining how they are using Littlemore's ideas and the website materials in their teaching and training (source 7).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Littlemore, J., Krennmayr, T., Turner, J. And Turner, S. (2012). Investigating figurative proficiency at different levels of second language writing. *Research Notes*, 47, 14-28. Available online at: [http://www.cambridgeesol.org/rs\\_notes/rs\\_nts47.pdf](http://www.cambridgeesol.org/rs_notes/rs_nts47.pdf)
- [2] Factual statement provided by Cambridge ESOL stating how the descriptors are being used by their examiners.
- [3] Cambridge ESOL reports that *Research Notes issue 47* was downloaded 707 times between February 2012 and 30 September 2012; 626 downloads came from unique IP addresses.
- [4] Factual statement provided by Universidad de Extremadura on use of outcomes from joint Spain-UK project (materials for ELT professionals)
- [5] Littlemore, J., MacArthur, F., Holloway, J. and Cienki, A. (2012). Making yourself understood by international students: The role of metaphor in academic tutorials. British Council Funded Research Project. Final Report.
- [6] Attested information from the British Council regarding number of web page and article hits.
- [7] Collated feedback from over fifty language teachers worldwide stating that they will be reconsidering their approach to the teaching of metaphor in light of Littlemore's work – available on request.
- [8] Invited plenary lecture (entitled: The Role of Metaphor in Foreign Language Teaching), given at the Cambridge Profile conference for language teachers in South East Europe, Montenegro (approximately 250 attendees) (September, 2009)
- [9] Presentation of findings from the first part of the Cambridge ESOL funded research project given at the Cambridge Profile seminar (approximately 50 attendees) (June, 2010)
- [10] Presentation of findings from the second part of the Cambridge ESOL funded research project given at the Cambridge Profile seminar, Cambridge (approximately 50 attendees) (February, 2012)
- [11] Invited pre-seminar workshop (entitled: The Role of Metaphor in Language Teaching in Post-Bologna Europe) for language teachers in Spanish secondary and tertiary education, given at the RaAM seminar on Metaphor across Time and Genre (approximately 45 attendees, of whom approximately half were Spanish school and university language teachers) (May, 2011).
- [12] Invited keynote speech (entitled: Metaphor and the Foreign Language Learner) delivered at the Japanese Association for Language Teachers (approximately 1000 attendees of whom over 950 were language teachers) (October, 2012).