Metaphors have long fascinated many scholars for their capability of embodying abstract ideas. They are considered as heavily culturally loaded linguistic units which closely connect language, culture and thoughts. In respect of the belief that metaphors are culture- and language-specific, people outside a speech community are expected to encounter difficulties in understanding culture-specific metaphors of a foreign language. This paper explores the processes through which people interpret metaphors of foreign languages. Interviews were conducted with 40 native speakers of Danish and Cantonese, in which subjects were asked to interpret English, Cantonese and Korean metaphors. Subjects from both cultures employed similar strategies to interpret the metaphors. The reasons for successful or unsuccessful interpretations are also discussed.
1. Introduction\(^1\)

Since the twentieth century, the connection between language and culture has become a prevalent research topic. It has fascinated not only linguists, but also people from a wide variety of backgrounds. The inseparability between language and culture is later confirmed and reaffirmed by many pieces of research (see, for example, Sapir, 1929; Carroll, 1956; Wardhaugh, 1986). Some scholars such as H. Douglas Brown even depict the relationship between language and culture as flesh and blood. They believe that language would be dead without culture and culture would have no shape without language (Jiang, 2000). To be specific, culture, in this paper, is defined as a set of shared assumptions, meanings and understandings that are developed in a given speech community. Among the linguistic devices, metaphor is one of the salient ones reflecting culture. With their capability of embodying conceptual ideas in different cultures, metaphors permeate almost every sphere of our lives and serve as a vehicle of thoughts across languages. The conventionalization of metaphors, i.e. the process by which some figurative expressions become integral parts of our language resources, also contributes to the unconscious use of metaphors in our work and speech, be they formal or informal.

In respect of Leech’s (1974) understanding of metaphors as being culture- and language-specific, some research has suggested that foreign language learning closely ties with cultural learning. In the eyes of most Chinese speakers for instance, English is regarded as a foreign language. Some academics such as Scollon (1995), Chun (2003) and Chen (2007) have conducted research on the topic of contrasting Chinese and English metaphors, aiming to study the different cultural assumptions behind the construction of metaphors. Notwithstanding the authors’ vastly diverse backgrounds, their studies validate culture as one crucial variable of establishing metaphors. They further reiterate that the ways people construct and make sense of metaphors vary across languages and cultures. Nevertheless, in addition to language proficiency, the comprehension of metaphors of a foreign language can be facilitated by the similarities between one’s culture and that of the foreign language, as well as the transparency of the metaphor itself.

Although the interconnectedness between language and culture is well established, an important question remains: What are some of the processes through which people

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\(^1\) This study is developed based on an earlier group research conducted in Denmark in 2008. The author would like to acknowledge the contribution of Anne LEE, Ernest NG and Ruby CHAN in the previous study.
Interpreting metaphors of a foreign language? This paper aims to address this question by exploring and explaining the ways in which people from two different cultures (Hong Kong and Denmark) interpret metaphors of other languages. With English being widely spoken by most people in Hong Kong and Denmark as a second language, Hong Kong and Denmark serve an excellent ground for this study. Being a cosmopolitan city in Asia and an old kingdom in Europe respectively, the diverse cultures and backgrounds of both places promise to shed light on the question of how speakers interpret metaphors of a foreign language.

2. Metaphor, language and culture

In the 1980s, cognitive linguists like George Lakoff and Mark Johnson proposed that irrespective of the varieties of language, metaphors are one of the basic essential elements of human communication. They exist in almost every language and are helpful for the expression of abstract ideas. However, owing to distinct language systems and cultural characteristics, metaphors used within a particular community can hardly be transferred to another social group or be fully understood by people outside the community.

2.1 Meaning and metaphors

Since Aristotle, whose philosophy mainly focuses on the universal, the fascination with metaphors has sparked in many philosophers, cognitive linguists and literary theorists, etc. The use of metaphors is not only constrained to the ornamental literatures, but it can also be applied to other contemporary spoken and written discourses such as advertisements, legal speeches and scientific explanations. With regard to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, as cited in Tompkins and Lawley, 2000), metaphor is defined as a process: it is principally “a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding”. With the ability to embody conceptual ideas, metaphor is hailed as an important part of the “interconnected systems of language, thinking, affect, physicality and culture” (Cameron, 2008).

Metaphors can be categorized into different collections, one special feature of metaphors is their degree of transparency. The transparency and opacity of metaphors
largely determine the comprehension of metaphors of both native speakers and language learners. According to Guttenplan (2005: 23), transparency is interpreted as “when we hear a metaphor utterance framed in familiar words, we have an unmediated sense of having understood it – a sense not unlike that when we hear an utterance with familiar words used in a straightforwardly literal way”. In other words, the familiar words that appear in the figurative language sometimes enhance its level of transparency, and hence facilitate our understanding of metaphors.

With respect to transparency, Wieser (2008) also expresses that different levels of transparency of metaphors do affect the “ease of processing, i.e. whether the meaning of the metaphors will be actively constructed or directly retrieved from memory”. Three levels of metaphor transparency, including novel transparent metaphor, conventionalized transparent metaphor and fossilized opaque metaphor, are thus put forth. Novel transparent metaphors are any new and unfamiliar metaphors which normally take significantly longer to process than other literal sentences (Camp, 2006). For example, a Japanese writer, Yamazaki Takumi (1998), depicts life as a picnic. He intends to encourage his readers to live enthusiastically as if they were going on a picnic. Conventionalized transparent metaphors, by contrast, are “expressions that have become part of people’s language resources… Conventionalization of metaphor occurs through the use in a discourse community in which co-adaptive processes of accommodation lead to shared ways of talking among members” (Cameron, 2003:110). For instance, the expression *time flies* is considered as conventionalized because it is now commonly incorporated into our speech even though everyone knows time does not literally fly. Because of conventionalization, this type of metaphors normally takes people a shorter processing time to decode.

Fossilized opaque metaphors, i.e. idioms, which are made up of a string of words are the most opaque type of metaphor. Nevertheless, a clear context and a transparent relation between the literal and idiomatic meanings of an idiom may ease the opaqueness of the metaphor. For some idioms, “one of the words in the idiom makes a more transparent contribution to overall idiom meaning than the rest” (Vega Moreno, 2007: 182). In the English idiom *wash hands of it* for instance, the word *wash* carries a meaning of making something clean, while the idiom itself has a definite meaning of withdrawing from something. In this case, the word *wash* could be a hint of understanding the idiom. Needless to dispute, the understanding and interpretation of metaphors also heavily relies on one’s first language and culture, in addition to the transparency of metaphors.
2.2 Language, culture and thinking

In the previous decades, many academics like Sapir (1929) and Brown (1994) have confirmed the inseparability of language and culture. Brown (1994) expresses that the two are simply interwoven with one another and are part of each other. While language serves mainly as an embodiment or reflection of a culture, “every language form we use… carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language” (Nida, 1998: 29). Although language and culture are inseparable, they are, however, seen as two semiotic systems. With regards to Halliday (1975), culture in particular is seen as a semiotic system in which meanings or information is encoded in the meaning potentials of its members. The linguistic system is yet another semiotic system that constitutes culture. Therefore, owing to the reciprocal effects of language and culture that they shape and constitute one another, a learner of a new language, Korean for instance, has to learn the Korean culture at the same time in order to master the language comprehensively.

To master a new language successfully depends on how much the learners immerse themselves into the native speakers’ world of conception, in addition to the thorough understanding of the language system. By this, conception means the thoughts and/or mental impressions about the world, which are formed through biological and social processes. As suggested by some cognitive and cross-cultural psychologists like Nisbett (2003), human conception which can be shaped through formal education depends on cultural contexts. It is never universal but is profoundly influenced by culture instead. Hence, people from the same speech community who share constructed experiences are expected to have some cultural patterns of thinking and responses (Fiola and MacDorman, 2008). In connection with the completeness of language learning, conceptual fluency, i.e. the knowledge of “how the target language reflects or encodes its concepts on the basis of metaphorical structuring” is considered comparably significant to verbal fluency which can be acquired through gradual education (Kecskes, 1999: 148; Danesi and Mollica, 1998). Cultural understanding serving as a conceptual base is thus unquestionably one of the important elements of second language learning while second to knowing the language system.

On account of their arbitrariness, metaphors, being one of the higher levels of language learning, are mostly culture-specific while a limited number of them is cross-cultural on occasion. But Lê and Lê (2004: 1) comment that most metaphors are
ready-made, these “ready-made metaphors strongly reflect cultural perceptions and attitudes which have been in existence in a culture for many years”. For instance, in the case of a man being rejected by a lady for a date, a Danish figurative expression goes like biting into *a sour apple* whereas the Cantonese one goes like *eating a lemon*. Although the expressions share the same meaning, they are culturally loaded and their surface meanings are barely equivalent when translated into a common language like English. The conventional use of these expressions allows them to become more localized and culture specific. In addition to Broughton’s (1978: 198) belief that “foreign language learning involves cultural learning”, the connection between culture-specific languages and conception development also sheds light on the inseparability of language, thoughts and culture.

In relation to culture-specific expressions, idioms which are regarded as fossilized opaque metaphors are a typical culture-bound linguistic device. They are one of the best vehicles illustrating how metaphoric language serves as a manifestation of a culture. Alexander (1978) adds that idioms are deliberately fuzzy and have a high degree of tolerance of ambiguity. Without prior knowledge and exposure to a language and its culture, the English idiom *bread and butter* (meaning basic living), for example, can hardly be rightly interpreted. Leech (1974) therefore concludes that people from different cultures with vastly diverse conceptual thinking may not be able to understand the figurative speeches of another culture. Hence, understanding metaphors requires knowledge of not only the linguistic meaning, but also the conceptual meaning which is overt, and the associative meaning which is implicit. Traugott (1984) also adds that the importance of differentiating sentence meaning, which is the literal meaning of an utterance, and utterance meaning, which is the underlying or intended meaning of the utterance, should be taken into account in order to fully understand the figurative meaning of an expression.

3. Objectives of study

Since a lot of studies proposed that language and culture are interwoven, metaphors, as one salient linguistic device reflecting culture, have sparked researchers’ interests in how culture influences the construction and understanding of figurative language. However, instead of solely focusing on the cultural aspect of metaphor interpretation, this study aims to investigate how people usually make sense of metaphors of languages other than their first language. Based on this primary objective, this study
also attempts to identify some variables that facilitate and/or hinder the right interpretation of metaphors.

4. Methodology

The study was conducted in two intervals: the first was completed in Denmark from 26 May to 6 June 2008 and the second was done in Hong Kong from 20 to 31 December 2008. A field study which included face-to-face assessments of English metaphors interpretation involving 40 randomly selected young people was carried out. All subjects spoke English as their second language and were locally educated in either Denmark or Hong Kong. They were selected on the belief that young people aged from 20 to 29 have a wider exposure to the English cultures, like American and British cultures, than the younger or older generations, and that they are the main group living under the influence of English popular culture.

An equal number of subjects, i.e. 20, was selected correspondingly from Aalborg (Denmark) and Hong Kong for a face-to-face assessment on English metaphors. All assessments were conducted in English and were done on an individual basis, in avoidance of groupthink. The rationales of this study were clearly explained to the subjects before the assessment and they were asked to rate their English proficiency in the first place. During the process, a total of thirteen metaphors were shown to the subjects, in which five were put into sentences. In addition to English metaphors, three Cantonese metaphors translated into English were included in the assessment for the Danish subjects and three Korean metaphors translated into English were integrated in the assessment for the Hong Kong subjects. The original English metaphors were the same for all subjects. A short interview concerning participants’ recognition of non-English metaphors, the reasons why they could or could not interpret some of the metaphors, and suggested ways for enhancing their awareness and understanding of English metaphors was conducted at the end of each assessment.
5. Results

A thematic analysis was conducted to evaluate the data and information collected from the field study. The data collected from the short interview after each assessment are presented under four big themes: Recognition of English Metaphors, Accounts for Correct Interpretation, Accounts for Incorrect Interpretation, as well as Enhancements of English Metaphoric Awareness and Understanding. Subjects’ responses are summarized as follows.

5.1 Recognition of English Metaphors

Almost none of the interviewed subjects, except one, could recognize the non-English metaphors and distinguish them from the English ones. The only Danish subject who could interpret the Cantonese metaphors revealed that because of her Danish-Chinese family background, she could understand Cantonese jargons and spoke some Cantonese as her second language.

The rest of the interviewed subjects, however, expressed that since all the metaphors were presented in English, they had a feeling that all of them should be English metaphors. Some added that since they had limited exposure to Cantonese or the Korean language and culture, they could not identify them as non-English metaphors straight away.

5.2 Accounts for Correct Interpretation

In addition to their daily exposure to some of the English metaphors, many subjects expressed that because there are similar or exact equivalents in their own languages and cultures, most of the English metaphors could be decoded easily. The subjects further revealed that they made sense of the metaphors based on the literal meanings of the metaphors and the given contexts where the metaphors appeared. They also relied on the direct translations from English to their own native language to understand the metaphors. Some subjects even attempted to visualize the metaphors or associate them with their own cultures in order to comprehend the underlying meanings of them.

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2 See appendices for accessed metaphors, interview questions and comprehensive assessment results.
5.3 Accounts for Incorrect Interpretation

The interviewed subjects said that the principal difficulty in interpreting the given metaphors was their limited exposure to English metaphors. Other relevant reasons mentioned by the subjects included their levels of English proficiency, the lack of cultural understanding, the literal meaning being totally unrelated to the underlying meaning of the metaphor, incorrect association or conceptual understanding under the influence of the subjects’ own culture and knowledge, as well as the infrequent use of English metaphors in everyday life.

5.4 Enhancements of English Metaphoric Awareness and Understanding

Being not able to correctly interpret all English metaphors, interviewees suggested some effective ways of enhancing their English metaphoric awareness, such as reading more English articles and books, looking up the English metaphors in a dictionary, watching English movies and live shows, making contact with English people, and immersions in an English-speaking country.

6. Discussion

The subjects, both Danish and Hong Kong people, overall displayed a fairly good understanding of English metaphors while they showed a relatively weak awareness towards these metaphors generally. During the survey, although many subjects revealed that they did not understand some English metaphors because they had never used or heard of them before, they gave some sensible interpretations on them. They made guesses at the meanings of these metaphors by referring to the metaphors’ literal meanings and the associate meanings according to their own cultures. Due to the fact that English is not their native language, the interviewees were, however, not aware of the non-English metaphors as they had only a very limited exposure to English metaphors. Their non-nativeness of English has hindered them from recognizing the English metaphors successfully. They also pointed out that whether one metaphor exists in their language or culture greatly affects their understanding of the metaphor, especially when it is presented in a second language.
Among the seven English metaphors, some were particularly common to either the Danish or the Hong Kong subjects, or even both. One significant finding of this study supports Kovecses’s (2002) proposition that cultural variations which are peculiar to specific languages do exist among metaphors, for example, the different source domains. According to the assessment results, 95% of the Hong Kong subjects correctly interpreted the metaphor small potato which infers an unimportant person, especially at the workplace. With reference to the fact that small potato is indeed a Hong Kong English metaphor originated in Hong Kong and is widely used throughout the city, the Hong Kong subjects could automatically assign the correct meaning to it. This result seems to suggest that personal exposure to the use of metaphors is one important aspect of fully understanding them.

However, being unfamiliar with the Hong Kong English metaphors, the Danish subjects tended to understand the metaphor small potato based on the clumsy appearance of a potato; the word small that appears in the metaphor was interpreted as meaning inessential. Some guesses such as “an unimportant issue” and “a stupid person” were therefore made. In fact, small fish is a more common expression for describing unimportant people in the Danish culture while these people can be termed as a small cog in the machine in English. In relation to this, the dissimilar source domains can possibly account for the observation that only 30% of the Danish subjects could accurately interpret this metaphor.

Apart from the conventional use of metaphors within a specific territory, historical and cultural backgrounds of a country also have an impact on people’s understanding of metaphors. According to the data, 95% of the Danish subjects showed a clear understanding of the English metaphors wash hands of it, in the same boat and break the ice because they have exact equivalents in their language. The meanings of these metaphors in their first language are exactly the same as those of English. One plausible reason why there are exact Danish equivalents can be traced back to the history of English and Danish which are genetically related and belong to the same language family of proto-Germanic (Lyovin, 1997). The common language ancestor of Danish and English probably sheds light on the correct interpretations of metaphors by the Danish subjects due to shared or similar cultural assumptions. This observation is supported by Lyovin (1997: 4) who points out that it is likely that there are some common linguistic traits in two languages “because these traits have diffused from one language into another” through language contact.
On the contrary, without any direct relations between English and Cantonese, the Hong Kong subjects encountered more difficulties than the Danish subjects in assigning accurate meanings to the metaphors, like *in the same boat*. Although Cantonese has an exact equivalent of *in the same boat*, it does not share exactly the same meaning as that of English. In English, *in the same boat* refers to being in the same difficult situation. However, it can refer to either a positive or a negative situation in Cantonese. Through the Chinese understanding of this figurative expression, some Hong Kong subjects were unable to specify the negative situation that this English metaphor connotes. Owing to this difference of connotation between English and Cantonese, the Danish subjects could therefore make a more accurate interpretation for this metaphor than the Hong Kong people. Nonetheless, knowing that the metaphor in the same boat exists in two unrelated languages, i.e. English and Chinese, an interesting question arises: If a metaphor shares similar meaning between two unrelated languages, from which language does this metaphor actually originate?

In accordance with history, religious beliefs also play a role in the interpretation of long-established metaphors. As a Christian country, in Denmark, over 80% of its citizens are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (see the official website of Denmark 2009). In light of this, most of the Danish people (95% of the Danish subjects) should probably have no difficulties understanding the metaphor *wash hands of it* which originated from an allusion of the Bible (Matthew, 27: 24). Hence, in addition to the equivalents among different languages, the influence of a religion is highly likely to enhance the understanding of metaphors in other languages. Some metaphors that have long been used in the scriptures of the holy books for many thousands of years are expected to be understood across languages.

Throughout the field study, the most peculiar phenomenon noted is that many subjects, both Danish and Hong Kong, tried to translate the given metaphors and/or the contexts that come along with the metaphors into their own languages in order to understand them. Over half of the overall subjects were able to understand the metaphor *an old hand* (meaning an experienced or skilled person) after they completely translated it into their first language and took the literal meaning of it. They succeeded in associating the word *old* with someone who is experienced or aged and *hand* with the action of working. This observation, in accordance with Wieser (2008), implies that the higher transparency of metaphors can ease the interpretation of figurative language when contextual clues are absent.
On top of direct translations, the interviewed subjects also stated the significance of contextual clues for metaphors interpretation. The subjects pointed out that such clues provided them with hints that facilitated their understanding of unfamiliar metaphors. The metaphor *dark horse* served as a very good example in this study. By presenting this metaphor in the sentence like *He is not outstanding but is a dark horse in this game*, over 60% of the overall subjects correctly inferred dark horse as someone who is not attended to at first, but performs unexpectedly well on an event. Although several Hong Kong subjects attempted to associate this metaphor with the Cantonese equivalent, some subjects of both Danish and Hong Kong expressed that the words *not outstanding* and *but* were major hints for accurate interpretation. Their responses thus support the assumption that contextual clues are essentially vital, especially for understanding metaphors of a foreign language.

An additional interesting observation of this study is subjects’ dependence on visualization and imagination. When they were given the unfamiliar metaphors, some subjects tended to visualize or imagine the appearance and nature of the object. Other than *spreading one's octopus legs, tip of the iceberg* is a typical example where the subjects deduced meaning by visualization. Having understood that *tip* is just a small part of an iceberg appearing above the sea level, 85% of the total subjects gave the correct definition that it means one small part of a larger issue. In relation to image schema, Kimmel (2002: 11) explains that “the human capacity to build complex models rests on basic physical experiences in space, which motivate conceptual representations”. In other words, people in general assign meaning to something unfamiliar according to experiences.

Closely tied with image schema, a remarkable result concerning the association of unfamiliar metaphors with everyday life experience is also noted. As suggested by Brown and Yule (1983: 133), “the general knowledge about the world underpins our interpretation in discourse”. Because of different experiences and cultural backgrounds, varied associations of metaphors are expected. The metaphors *bread and butter, kicking the bucket, cucumber-like face, golden finger* and *eating a lemon* are instances which cause distinct associations. Without the habit of having bread and butter as the basic food for breakfast every day, only around 20% of the overall subjects could spell out the exact meaning of *bread and butter* as a metaphor by guess. Two other noteworthy examples include *cucumber-like face* and *golden figure*. None of the Hong Kong subjects could associate a cucumber-like face with an acne face (as in the Korean culture) because cucumber, in Hong Kong, is normally linked with
bitter taste which implies unhappy or sad feelings. Some Hong Kong subjects also associated green colour (like that of cucumber) as cowardness or the feeling of scare. On the contrary, when they were presented with the Cantonese metaphor golden finger (meaning a traitor who is keen on backstabbing others), some Danish subjects instantly associated it with the James Bond movie or the story in Greek mythology about Midas’ golden touch. As a result of different associations, a lot of the subjects were astonished at these connotations and the cultural discrepancies.

With reference to the above instances, this study attempted to reveal some common strategies for deconstructing metaphors of a foreign language. From the analysis, it is interesting to have noted that people from both Asian and Western places (i.e. Hong Kong and Denmark) actually used similar processes of decoding metaphors of another language, such as translating directly the English metaphors into the subjects’ native languages or visualizing the metaphors. The empirical data collected for this study have described some of the ways in which people make sense of figurative expressions of other language or cultural groups.

7. Conclusion

Regarding the claim that most metaphors are culture- as well as language-specific, this study was set up to explore the processes in which people attempt to understand metaphors of a foreign language. Throughout the study, the empirical data and observations further support Broughton’s (1978) belief that foreign language learning should go in line with cultural learning, and at the same time, confirm the general relationship among language, culture and thinking. While the findings of this study suggest that cultural and personal experiences, together with mental impressions of the world tend to provide the largest portion of significant contribution to the understanding of unfamiliar figurative language, some other common strategies and processes involved in the interpretation of metaphors are observed as well.

By exploring the ways in which people make sense of unfamiliar metaphors, it is hoped to provide some ideas for future researchers who should further examine the complex strategies and processes involved in understanding metaphorical ideas and expressions. The findings also reveal some variables which may have an impact on metaphor understanding, such as religious beliefs, contextual clues, and similarities between the speakers’ first language and the foreign language.
Nevertheless, this study has explored only some of the most apparent strategies and processes involved in the interpretation of unfamiliar metaphors with a limited scope. If the wider research goal is to examine metaphor construction and interpretation in a specific speech community or to look at the most effective or important processes and approaches to analyzing unfamiliar metaphors or use of language, it is important to investigate further in the cultural and cognitive aspects involved in the processes. In this respect, it is hoped that this research has made some contributions to future studies, in which more precise definitions like culture, speech community and cognition could be further developed.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Assessment results

Table 1. English proficiency of surveyed subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject/Proficiency</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of people (%)</td>
<td>Number of people (%)</td>
<td>Number of people (%)</td>
<td>Number of people (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danes</td>
<td>5 (25)</td>
<td>8(40)</td>
<td>7(35)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong people</td>
<td>1(5)</td>
<td>7(35)</td>
<td>12(60)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>6(15)</td>
<td>15(37.5)</td>
<td>19(47.5)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Correct interpretation of metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Correct interpretation</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Danes (%)</td>
<td>Number of Hong Kong people (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Small potato (Hong Kong English)</td>
<td>6(30)</td>
<td>19(95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. An old hand</td>
<td>11(55)</td>
<td>12(60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wash hands of it</td>
<td>19(95)</td>
<td>13(65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bread and butter</td>
<td>7(35)</td>
<td>2(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In the same boat</td>
<td>19(95)</td>
<td>14(70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Break the ice</td>
<td>19(95)</td>
<td>12(60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Golden finger (Cantonese)</td>
<td>1(5)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Eat lemon (Cantonese)</td>
<td>1(5)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Cucumber-like face (Korean)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A pumpkin (Korean/U.S.)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It’s just the tip of the iceberg.</td>
<td>18(90)</td>
<td>16(80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. He is my beggar son. (Cantonese)</td>
<td>1(5)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. He is not outstanding but is a dark horse in this game.</td>
<td>8(40)</td>
<td>17(85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. There are lots of white elephants in Asia which</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3(15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

3 English proficiency is self-rated by the subjects.
waste a lot of money to preserve.

15. Peter, the old man, just kicked the bucket.  
   
16. He is busy every night because he spreads his octopus legs. (Korean)

Appendix 2: Assessment form (Danish subjects)

Age range:  
- 11-19  
- 20-29  
- 30-39  
- 40-49  
- 50-59  
- 60 or above

English Proficiency:  
- Proficient  
- Good  
- Fair  
- Poor

Part I
1. Small potato
   - Interpretation:
   - Yes  
   - No  
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:

2. An old hand
   - Interpretation:
   - Yes  
   - No  
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:

3. I wash my hands of it
   - Interpretation:
   - Yes  
   - No  
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:
4. Bread and butter
   - Interpretation:
   - [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:

5. In the same boat
   - Interpretation:
   - [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:

6. Golden finger
   - Interpretation:
   - [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:

7. Break the ice
   - Interpretation:
   - [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:

8. Eating lemon
   - Interpretation:
   - [ ] Yes  [ ] No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Danish expression:
Part II

1. It’s just the tip of the iceberg.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

2. He is not outstanding but is a dark horse in this game.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

3. He is my beggar son.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

4. There are lots of white elephants in Asia which waste a lot of money to preserve.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

5. He just kicked the bucket.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

Part III

1. Did you recognize some are not English metaphors? Why?

2. What ways would you recommend if you are to raise your metaphoric awareness and understanding?
Appendix 3: Assessment form (Hong Kong subjects)

Age range:  □ 11-19  □ 20-29  □ 30-39  
           □ 40-49  □ 50-59  □ 60 or above

English Proficiency:  □ Proficient  □ Good  □ Fair  □ Poor

Part I
1. Small potato
   ● Interpretation:  
      □ Yes  □ No  
   Remarks:  
   ● Reason:  
   ● Equivalent Cantonese expression:

2. An old hand
   ● Interpretation:  
      □ Yes  □ No  
   Remarks:  
   ● Reason:  
   ● Equivalent Cantonese expression:

3. Wash hands of it
   ● Interpretation:  
      □ Yes  □ No  
   Remarks:  
   ● Reason:  
   ● Equivalent Cantonese expression:

4. Bread and butter
   ● Interpretation:  
      □ Yes  □ No  
   Remarks:  
   ● Reason:  
   ● Equivalent Cantonese expression:
5. In the same boat
   - Interpretation:
     - Yes
     - No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Cantonese expression:

6. Cucumber-like face
   - Interpretation:
     - Yes
     - No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Cantonese expression:

7. Break the ice
   - Interpretation:
     - Yes
     - No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Cantonese expression:

8. A pumpkin
   - Interpretation:
     - Yes
     - No
   - Remarks:
   - Reason:
   - Equivalent Cantonese expression:

Part II

1. It’s just the tip of the iceberg.
   - Interpretation:
     - Yes
     - No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:
2. He is not outstanding but is a *dark horse* in this game.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

3. He is busy every night because he *spreads his octopus legs*.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

4. There are lots of *white elephants* in Asia which waste a lot of money to preserve.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

5. Teddy, the old man, just *kicked the bucket*.
   - Interpretation:
     - ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   - Remarks:
   - Factors affecting interpretation:

*Part III*

1. Did you recognize some are not English metaphors? Why?

2. Why do you think you can or cannot rightly interpret some of the metaphors?

3. What ways would you recommend if you are to raise your metaphoric awareness and understanding?
References


Interpreting metaphors of a foreign language


