

## **Use of conceptual metaphors: A strategy for the guessing of an idiom's meaning?**

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### **Abstract**

In the study presented here, Greek adult advanced-level learners of English guess at the meaning of unknown English idioms and describe the train of thought that lead them to an idiom's interpretation immediately after supplying an interpretation for it. Results indicate limited use of Conceptual Metaphors as a strategy for the guessing of an idiom's meaning, thus contradicting previous claims of no such use. This study also tests whether meaning guessing based of idiom-inherent features occurs more often when idioms are presented out of context than when in context. This hypothesis is supported for all such strategies except that the one utilising Conceptual Metaphor knowledge, possibly because of its rare occurrence in both context conditions. Some caveats about the reliability of the data are expressed.

**Keywords:** L2 idiom instruction, L2 idiom learning problems, Cognitive Semantics, Conceptual Metaphor

### **1. Idiom learning and instruction**

Although all kinds of vocabulary are necessary for native-like speech, idioms are considered the sign of such speech due to second-language learners' limited ability to learn and use idioms appropriately (Yorio 1989: 64). Students have difficulty learning idioms, probably because their meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of their constituent words. 'Non-compositionality' has been considered the defining feature of idioms by most researchers, but, as most

idiom features, it is scalar. There are, for example, idioms which include words that are meant literally, such as 'jog one's/sb's *memory*' and idioms with literal meanings which can still be related to their figurative meanings by some speakers, such as 'beat one's breast' (Cowie, Mackin and McCaig 1983: xiii). The difficulty of L2 idiom learning is compounded by other features of idioms. For example, the lexical and syntactic variations they can undergo don't seem predictable. Also, idioms vary in terms of formality and it may be difficult to understand their connotations, so it is difficult to use them appropriately.

For the purposes of this paper, I will accept the 'non-compositionality' feature as the defining feature of idioms and will include in this category all the constructions traditionally included in it (e.g. Verb+NP (PP) constructions, phrasal verbs, proverbs, sayings, phrasal constructions such as Adj+Noun, frozen similes). I will not include prepositional verbs because, given that their prepositions play only a syntactic and not a semantic role and are moreover optional in some cases, they do not conform to the requirement of non-compositionality.

According to researchers, idioms cannot be learned by L2 learners without instruction. Findings related to the ability of L2 learners to remember the form of idioms and recognise them as such point to this conclusion. Yorio (1989: 62) considers that the finding that L2 learners make errors in the form of idioms (Irujo 1986a: 293-295, Yorio 1989: 60-64) may indicate that L2 learners do not learn idioms as wholes and then store their form and meaning in memory, but that they analyse the forms of idioms. Therefore, some instruction on how to analyse idioms effectively so as to remember their meaning and form better may be necessary. Laufer (1997: 25) has found that students interpret idioms literally when they see them in texts, so instruction to recognise idioms is also needed. Lack of recognition of idioms may also occur for weakly idiomatic expressions and exploited forms of idioms, because they may pass unnoticed, as Marton supposes may happen for collocations which have close L1 equivalents (Marton 1977: 47-48). Moreover, idioms are avoided for various reasons. Hebrew students avoided phrasal verbs in a variety of tasks (Dagut and Laufer 1985: 75-77). This avoidance was explained as being due to the lack of the particle category in Hebrew. Hulstijn and Marchena (1989: 248, 250) found that Dutch learners avoided phrasal verbs having Dutch equivalents with identical meanings.

Irujo's (1986b: 237-238) review of five ESL textbooks has led her to conclude that idioms are not taught well. Specifically, many books ignore idioms or do not provide any exercises on them. ESL idiom books do not necessitate the learning of an idiom's meaning, because many of the exercises can be filled in

just through manipulation of their structure. She also points out that students are not encouraged to produce idioms because in most textbooks, exercises that necessitate understanding of an idiom are only comprehension and not production ones.

It seems, therefore, that the way idioms are taught needs to be improved. Various proposals have been put forward on the most beneficial way of idiom teaching. Some researchers have been modest in their proposals, because they believe that the meanings of idioms are not linked to their forms in a rule-governed way. Such researchers propose various categorisations of idioms so that they can be presented to the students in categories. The categorisation of idioms seems to be a beneficial method of idiom presentation because the grouping of input seems to be congruent with people's preferred learning methods. Schmitt (1997: 211-7) refers to studies showing that without prompting, people recall together words that belong to certain categories in free recall tasks and indicating that words are better remembered when presented in categories. He also mentions a study where more advanced L2 learners have been shown to use grouping strategies in vocabulary learning more than beginners. However, the problem with this method of idiom instruction is that idioms vary in terms of more than one variable, so various different categorisations have been proposed, each according to a different criterion. For example, Sornig (1988: 286-288) proposes three kinds of classification: one according to the surface structure of idioms, another according to their motivation, and the last according to the communicative purpose they serve (e.g. to describe a situation, as phatics). No empirical work has been conducted on which of these categorisations is more beneficial to idiom learning.

Another strand in the teaching methodology proposed is that of encouraging students to guess on their own the meaning of idioms. This technique is proposed by Irujo (1993: 217), because she considers that focusing students' attention to idiom features through urging them to guess at the idioms' meaning may lead to better learning since the idioms that seem to be learned more effectively are the highly transparent ones. Boers and Demecheleer (2001) asked L2 learners to guess at the meaning of imagistic idioms and found that at least 35% of the given definitions pointed to the same general metaphorical meaning as the original one, so they proposed that students be encouraged to guess at the meanings of imagistic idioms. Lennon (1993) has also proposed that learners should be encouraged to guess at the meaning of idioms on theoretical grounds, because such a process would involve deeper processing and would therefore lead to better retention.

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## 2. Cognitive linguistics and idiom learning

The proposals on idiom instruction I aim to focus on in this paper are those of cognitive linguists. In what follows, I will first give a brief introduction to Conceptual Metaphor theory. Then I will provide an overview of the proposals cognitive linguists have made on the instruction of idioms and the experiments testing their claims. I will end this overview with a review of an experiment which suggests that Conceptual Metaphors are not used by L2 learners spontaneously when they guess at the meaning of unknown idioms. Finally, I will present a study whose results indicate that, at least for a certain type of idioms, L2 learners use Conceptual Metaphors on their own initiative as a strategy to guess at the meaning of unknown idioms.

Conceptual Metaphor theory began with Lakoff and Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). It is the only theory which sees metaphor comprehension, not as the product of an on-line computation, but as achieved through the activation of Conceptual Metaphors. Conceptual Metaphors are the products of the cognitive mechanism of metaphor. They underlie not only novel metaphors, but also dead metaphors, metonymies, idioms and many cases of what is usually considered literal language (e.g. "I see what you are saying." is an instantiation of the Conceptual Metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING).

Cognitive linguists have proposed various types of exercises aimed at increasing L2 learners' awareness of the Conceptual Metaphors underlying new vocabulary assuming that this will lead to better vocabulary learning (e.g. Boers and Demecheleer 1998: 203, Deignan, Gabrys and Solska 1997: 356-359). The impact that the instruction of Conceptual Metaphors has on the retention of taught vocabulary and on learners' attempts to learn untaught vocabulary has been tested in experimental studies.

Boers and Demecheleer (ibid: 202-203) report an experiment they did where French L2 learners of English could translate sentences with metaphorical meanings of *beyond* (absent in its French equivalent) better when presented with the literal, spatial senses that formed the source domain of the underlying Conceptual Metaphors than when given the definitions of *beyond's* metaphorical senses.

Boers (2000a: 139-141) tested the effectiveness of presenting learners with the literal (that is, source-domain related) meanings rather than definitions of the figurative meanings these words had in the texts used as experimental materials. He gave half students the literal meanings of unknown words in a text and the other half definitions of the meanings these words had in the text. In the test phase, they had to answer comprehension questions about the author's

opinions about the events narrated. These were expressed by the Conceptual Metaphors in the crucial metaphorical words. The majority of the learners who had received the literal meanings answered the questions correctly, while those in the other condition answered mostly "Don't know". Three days afterwards they were given a cloze test exercise to measure word retention. The experimental group was more likely to reproduce at least one of the taught words.

Boers has also tested the effectiveness of presentation of new vocabulary according to Conceptual-Metaphoric themes compared to functional themes. In his first experiment (Boers 2000b: 554-557), Belgian intermediate-level learners of English were asked to fill in a text with words they had been taught related to 'anger', according to either Conceptual Metaphoric groupings (e.g. according to whether they expressed "ANGER IS HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER" or "ANGER IS MADNESS") or functional dimensions such as "to describe acute and sudden anger", "to describe anger as a process". They were asked to use more than one answer, if they could. The group that was taught these words in Conceptual-Metaphoric groupings produced significantly more of the words studied. However, in some cases, the words produced were translations into English of L1 metaphorical expressions, rather than the taught words. This indicates that not all answers can be attributed to the learning of the taught vocabulary. In the second experiment (ibid: 557-559), participants wrote an essay to describe graphs on economic growth and unemployment using words they had learned about upward and downward trends in economy after they had been taught the same vocabulary from a Conceptual Metaphoric or a functional perspective. A significantly higher number of the taught words were given by the group that had received the Conceptual-Metaphor related instruction. The last experiment (ibid: 559-562) tested whether L2 learners would try to use Conceptual Metaphors to guess at the meaning of novel words, but Boers failed to find support for this. The test phase was a cloze test where among the words to choose from were also words that had not been taught. Participants who had received the Conceptual-Metaphor vocabulary instruction did not correctly use more novel words than those who had received the functional vocabulary instruction. Luciani (2001: 47-49) did a similar study with advanced Spanish learners of English. Half of them were led to think of newly-presented vocabulary in terms of Conceptual Metaphors and the other half in terms of functional groupings. The group that had received the Conceptual-Metaphoric instruction performed better in cloze tests where they had to choose from a selection of words which had been taught (ibid: 54-55). Luciani gave another group of participants exercises that alerted them to the Conceptual-Metaphoric

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basis of certain conventional metaphoric expressions. The majority of both the participants and their L2 teachers who administered the exercises considered the exercises useful, interesting and innovative (ibid: 50-52).

Boers's (2000b) aforementioned last finding is contradicted by Kövecses and Szabó's (1996) conclusion. They conducted an experiment to see whether L2 learners, when taught vocabulary grouped according to Conceptual Metaphors, would remember it better than when having been simply presented with the words and their L1 equivalents. Their second aim was to see whether learners, after receiving Conceptual Metaphoric instruction, would try to guess at the meaning of new vocabulary via Conceptual Metaphors. In this experiment, Hungarian adult intermediate-level learners of English were taught phrasal verbs with 'up' and 'down' and then filled out sentences with these adverbs. Half of the sentences contained the phrasal verbs from the learning phase and the rest contained phrasal verbs that had not been taught. In the learning phase, half of the subjects were presented with the phrasal verbs' equivalents in Hungarian and the other half with the underlying Conceptual Metaphors as well. The answers given by the group that had received the Conceptual-Metaphoric instruction had a higher percentage of correct responses than those of the other group, as far as the taught phrasal verbs were concerned; however, the researchers do not state whether this difference is statistically significant (ibid: 350). With respect to the use of the Conceptual-Metaphor idiom interpretation strategy, Kövecses and Szabó concluded that second-language learners do not use Conceptual Metaphors on their own initiative to guess at the meaning of idioms, since only the subjects that had received the Conceptual-Metaphor instruction performed significantly better than chance when filling out the sentences with the non-taught phrasal verbs (ibid: 351).

### 3. Searching for evidence of spontaneous Conceptual Metaphoric use

The evidence discussed above has convinced many cognitive linguists that Conceptual Metaphors are not used by second language learners on their own initiative when they try to guess at the meaning of unknown words. However, the methodology in Kövecses and Szabó (1996) does not offer any direct evidence on the mental processes participants experienced when solving the exercise in the test phase. Participants could have used any number of different strategies to reach their interpretations of the novel phrasal verbs and not only the Conceptual Metaphoric one. In Boers (2000b: 557), for example, participants used their knowledge of equivalent words in their native language, as mentioned in the previous section. Another drawback of the methods used in

Kövecses and Szabó (1996) and Boers (2000b) is that they presented the participants with cloze tests, thus offering them contextual clues about the meaning of the idioms under consideration. In this way, the contextual information may have limited the participants' range of possible interpretations and may have forced them to base their interpretations on contextual clues rather than other kinds of knowledge, such as Contextual Metaphors. Moreover, it is possible that such lack of spontaneous use of this strategy occurs only with certain kinds of idioms, such as phrasal verbs.

I conducted a study to see whether I would obtain the same kind of results if I used a different methodology and different type of idioms. The methodology I used is a modification of the one in Cacciari (1993: 39-40). Cacciari and her colleagues examined the kinds of strategies English native speakers would use to guess at the meaning of idioms unknown to them. Adult native English speakers were asked to write their interpretations of unfamiliar idioms. After giving their interpretations for all the idioms, subjects explained how they had thought of them. Their responses in the latter task were categorised by two researchers into strategy categories they formed themselves. Results do not include the use of Conceptual Metaphors as a strategy used to guess at the meaning of idioms presented out of context.

In the study presented here, Greek adult advanced-level learners of English write their guesses of the meaning of unknown idioms. Instead of asking participants to explain how they had thought of their interpretations of the idioms after they had written them all down, as Cacciari did, I asked them to supply this explanation immediately after they had written their guess for an idiom. According to the review of verbal protocol methodology in Matsumoto (1993: 43), immediate descriptions of thought processes are more likely to help avoid the intervention of other mental processes with the originally-stored information than delayed ones.

### 3.1 *Method of the experiment*

#### 3.1.1 *Participants*

The participants were 40 Greek advanced-level second-language learners of English. They were all students at the University of Athens, Greece, and attended the English language course at the Language School of the University. They were studying towards sitting the CPE (Cambridge Proficiency in English) University of Cambridge diploma examinations. Their ages varied from 18 to 26. They received a payment of 6 euros for their participation.

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### 3.1.2 Materials and Procedure

As already mentioned, participants were asked to give their interpretations of unknown idioms and to explain how they had thought of their interpretation in each case. There were two conditions. In one, idioms were presented in contexts and in the other out of context. This manipulation was used to see whether contextual clues tend to preempt the use of idiom-inherent clues about an idiom's meaning, such as the literal meaning of words in an idiom.

Participants were presented with a booklet which had, on each page, two questions on each of the idioms. The first was a 'yes/no question' on whether they already knew the meaning of this idiom. If a participant gave a negative answer, s/he should go on with the second question, which asked her/him to write down her/his interpretation of the idiom and then describe the train of thought that led to this interpretation. Participants were also asked to circle any word in the idiom or the text in which it occurred, if they thought that their lack of knowledge of this word prevented them from understanding the idiom's meaning.

When idioms were presented out of context, the only 'context' they had were the personal pronouns in the subject and object positions, e.g. "She set her cap at him", "They praised him to the skies". In the other condition, the idioms were presented in small texts that contained clues about the meaning of the idiom presented in italics in the last sentence. Here is the text for "Be too hot to handle".

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Jack is a detective. He has a lot of experience and believes that he can solve any mystery. However, last month a woman came to his office saying that she thought her husband had been kidnapped or killed. She said that he did not return from work one afternoon. Jack found out that her husband, apart from working as a bank clerk was also a drug dealer. He immediately decided that he would not go on with that case. He told his client that he *found it too hot to handle*.

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*Figure 1. Text for "Be too hot to handle" in the context condition*

To ensure all texts offered a similar amount of assistance to the reader, the kind of clues that existed in the texts have been standardised. They all let the reader infer the meaning of the idiom rather than give her/him more explicit information about it (e.g. a synonym or an antonym, which have been shown to be more helpful than expressions which promote inference). Experiments which manipulated the distance between the clues and the unknown word in a text (e.g. Carnine, Kameenui and Coyle 1984: 191-200) show that guesses were less successful when the clue was distant, so the distance between the clue and the



idiom had to be standardised. Also, all texts have been rendered uniform by each having only one clue.

Two Greek teachers of English checked whether they contained any words that could potentially be unknown to advanced-level students and also judged which are the clues for the idioms in these texts, so that my judgment would be supported. In the cases where they disagreed, they were asked to cooperate in order to reach a common decision on which the clue or clues of a text is. Afterwards I amended the texts so that each would have only one clue and there would be around 10 words between the clue and the idiom. Therefore, each text had one clue and the distance between the idiom and the clue ranged from 6 to 14 words. The number of sentences in each text was also kept similar. It ranged from five to eight lines.

The idioms in my study had the V+NP (PP) structure (e.g. "kick the bucket" and "have one's knife into someone"). In order to make sure that the meaning of the chosen idioms would be unknown to the advanced-level Greek L2 learners of English, I used the idioms that English native speakers had rated as of low or medium familiarity in two such norming studies, the first with 17 and the second with 20 participants. The rationale was that if native English speakers were not familiar with certain idioms, the learners of English would probably not know them.

The reports of the thoughts leading to the interpretations were categorised by two judges – who had been given some information about Conceptual-Metaphor theory – into categories formed by themselves. The judges also categorised the definitions people gave for the idioms into the following categories: literal, correct, plausible, and no answer/nonsense. Here is a sample instructions sheet given to the judges.

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We will lighten the load.

IMPORTANCE IS WEIGHT or DIFFICULTY IS WEIGHT

Does the explanation have any indication of a relation with one of the conceptual metaphors written below the idiom?

YES NO

If the explanation has an indication of a relation with a conceptual metaphor other than those written above, please write it below.

If you have circled NO, please write a name for the strategy you think the participant has used instead and write what it involves. If you have circled YES, please also write of any other strategy you think the participant has used apart from the conceptual metaphor.

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*Figure 2. Instructions given to the judges for the categorisation of explanations for the interpretations of "lighten the load"*

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In this figure, one can notice that I have listed as many Conceptual Metaphors as I could think of that could be linked to the idioms and not just those cognitive linguists consider as underlying the idiom, so as to increase the possibilities that I would locate the Conceptual Metaphors the L2 learners might think of while guessing. I also encouraged the judges to try to see whether each participant's explanation bore any relation to a Conceptual Metaphor other than those I had listed.

Because the idioms were 24 in total and in the pilot study of this experiment participants needed an hour to guess at the meaning of 10 idioms, I presented half of the idioms out of context to a group of 10 people and the other half to another group; the same procedure was followed for the within-context condition. So, there were four groups of participants, 10 in each group.

### 3.1.3 Results

I did not include in the analysis responses in which an idiom had not been interpreted by a participant and in which, therefore, an explanation for how one reached its interpretation had not been given (10% of the total number of answers). Neither did I include cases in which the participant did not offer an explanation because s/he already knew the idiom (4% of the total number of answers).

After collecting the judges' responses, I found the discrepancies in their categorisations of the participants' interpretations in the literal, correct, plausible, and no answer/nonsense categories and asked them to resolve them. Their agreement before the resolution of their differences was assessed via Kappa tests done for each one of the four filler idioms that were common in all conditions. Because for only half of them was the judges' agreement above chance, I did the same test for all experimental items as well. Judges had agreed at an above chance rate for 71% of the experimental items.

I also conducted Kappa tests on the fillers' data to compare the judges' categorisations of the descriptions people gave about how they reached their idiom interpretations. The agreement percentage was in all cases higher than that predicted by chance.

To see whether the four groups of people were comparable, I conducted a chi-square for each filler idiom, since the fillers were included in the materials of all groups. The dependent variable was the literal/correct/plausible/ no answer/nonsense response. In all cases the chi-square value was smaller than the critical one, so there were no significant differences among the four groups.

I found some evidence on the use of Conceptual Metaphors as an idiom-

interpretation strategy, but the percentage of use for this strategy was very low. Because all strategies except for 'Word meaning-General for idioms within context' had abnormal distributions, Table 1 shows, not only the mean, but also the mode of use percentage together with the minimum and maximum percentage of each strategy in the two context conditions.

The strategies used are similar to those found in Cacciari (1993: 40-41). All the categories mentioned here are compilations of categories which share their main guessing strategy, because in some cases participants mentioned more than one thought process that helped them reach an interpretation for an idiom. For example, the category "Greek idiom-General" is the combination of the 'Greek idiom' category (which involved guessing of an idiom's meaning thanks to the knowledge of an L1 idiom with a similar syntactic structure or with words having similar meanings) and the 'Greek idiom + other' category (where people first reported using their knowledge of a similar L1 idiom and then another strategy as well). The "Word meaning-General" strategy includes the "Word meaning" strategy, that is, attempts to translate the idiom or focus on the meaning of one or more words in the idiom combined with the "Word meaning + other" strategy. The "Encyclopedic meaning -General" involved the "Encyclopedic meaning" strategy, that is, the use of encyclopedic knowledge about the extension of words in the idiom or about events relevant to the one referred literally in the idiom (e.g. "It is too hot to handle"), and the "Encyclopedic meaning + other" strategy. The "Mental image in general" strategy includes cases when a participant described a mental image s/he thought of when reading the idiom (the "Mental image" strategy) and cases of the "Mental image + other" strategy.

Table 1. Modes, minimum and maximum values for each strategy category

Strategy	No context				Context			
	Mean	Mode	Min	Max	Mean	Mode(s)	Min	Max
Conceptual Metaphor-General	6.49%	0%	0%	33.3%	7.97%	0%	0%	33.3%
Greek idiom-General	17.95%	0%	0%	62.5%	5.35%	0%	0%	25%
Word meaning-General	34.27%	33.3%	0%	90%	13.59%	0%	0%	57.1%
Encyclopedic knowledge-general	17.50%	0%	0%	66.6%	5.65%	25%,40%,50%	0%	25%
Mental image-General	8.49%	0%	0%	33.3%	1.46%	0%	0%	12.5%
Arbitrary/no answer/nonsense	15.23%	0%	0%	62.5%	12.54%	0%	0%	50%

A careful examination of the verbal protocols that had been categorised as instances of Conceptual-Metaphor idiom-interpretation strategy yielded two categories:

- (a) Cases where the participant explains the relation between the source and target domain. For example, for "It was too hot to handle" a participant's explanation was: "I thought because of the 'too hot', like something is very hot even to touch it, you will burn. So, he could handle a thing or he/she would get burned."
- (b) Cases where the participant refers only to the source domain. For example, for "They were heading for a fall" a participant responded: "Fall means to lay down when I lose my balance. So, I suppose that this idiom has a negative meaning."

In order to test whether contextual clues about an unknown idiom's meaning preempt the use of idiom-inherent ones, I had to compare the percentages of idiom-interpretation strategies between the context conditions. I did a Wilcoxon's matched pairs signed-ranks test because all strategies' data except that in "Word meaning-General for idioms in the context condition" had abnormal distributions. In our case, this statistical test first lists the differences between the scores for each strategy when idioms were presented in and out of context from the smallest to the largest by assigning them ranks irrespective of the sign of the difference (that is, whether the score was bigger in the context or no-context condition). Then it sums the ranks corresponding to the less frequent sign and calculates whether this sum is significantly different to a chance difference value. Table 2 has the z-scores SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) creates out of the smaller sum of ranks for each strategy and their significance level. The significance levels are smaller than 0.05 for the "Greek idiom-General", "Word meaning-General", "Encyclopedic knowledge-General" and "Mental image-General" strategies. This means that only for these

Table 2. Comparison of strategy percentages when idioms were presented in and out of context

Strategy	z-score	1-tailed significance
Conceptual Metaphor-General	-0.707 (b)	0.240
Greek idiom-General	-2.573 (a)	0.005
Word meaning-General	-3.803 (a)	0.000
Encyclopedic knowledge-General	-3.183 (a)	0.0005
Mental image-General	-2.595 (a)	0.0045
Arbitrary/No answer/Nonsense	-0.191 (a)	0.424

(a) Based on positive ranks

(b) Based on negative ranks

strategies was there a significant difference between their frequency of occurrence when idioms were presented in and out of context. For all these strategies, the z-values were based on the positive ranks, which means that there was an increase in strategy use when idioms were presented out of context.

The crucial result in our investigation is the lack of a significant difference in the frequency of use for the Conceptual Metaphor strategy. This may be a result of the very low use of this strategy. As can be seen in Table 1, these strategies were rarely used when idioms were presented both in and out of context.

However, one might attribute this pattern of results to the influence of certain experimental items. I had included in the study eight idioms from the study in Keysar and Bly (1995) to test their claim that intuitions about idiom transparency are not determined by idiom characteristics (*ibid*: 104-105). Richard Breheny (personal communication) and the audience of a talk I gave in the Experimental Methodology workshop in Cognitive Linguistics at Cornell University (May 2003) pointed out that the results may be influenced by the fact that some of these idioms do not seem to be underlain by Conceptual Metaphors. For example, "set one's cap at someone" and "applaud to the echo" seem unlikely to be underlain by a Conceptual Metaphor. Therefore, I repeated the same statistical analysis to the data excluding that for the idioms shared with the Keysar and Bly study. Again, the same strategies were used significantly more in the no-context condition than in the context one and the Conceptual Metaphoric strategy did not differ in its frequency of use between the two conditions. This finding rules out the possibility that some idioms in the materials were responsible for the pattern observed for all of them.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aforementioned study provides evidence for the limited use of the Conceptual Metaphor strategy for the guessing of an idiom's meaning by advanced L2 learners. This evidence however cannot be considered as directly contradictory to Kövecses and Szabó (1996), because of differences not only in the methodology of the studies, but also in the participants' L2 proficiency level and L1 as well as the kind of idioms examined.

Three more caveats should be expressed about the validity of the data. As Steen (1991: 570) points out, because this methodology does not provide strict guidelines on the way people should express their thought processes, "it still is the reader's activity of verbalization which defines the clarity, aptness, variety, and extent of the response". So, some answers are incomplete, hence difficult to classify. Therefore, the percentages for the strategies people were found to use

may not reflect the real percentages of the strategies, because the judges may have been unable to classify them properly. My subjects were Greek learners of English, so maybe, because they were afraid of making linguistic errors, they avoided expressing all the ideas that they had when guessing at an idiom's meaning. Another possibility is that the linguistic mistakes they made caused the judges to misunderstand their responses and therefore led to mistakes in the categorisation of definitions and explanations. Finally, the idioms used could be seen not as solely expressing Conceptual Metaphors but possibly also Conceptual Metonymy and encyclopedic knowledge, so the use of these kinds of knowledge during idiom-meaning guessing may have preempted the use of Conceptual Metaphors.

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