How to make yourself understood by international students: The role of metaphor in academic tutorials

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Contents

Abstract

In order to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the presence of international students in British universities, it is important to be aware of the extent to which the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of international students differ from ours. An area where linguistic and cultural differences are particularly obvious is in the use of metaphor, as the understanding of metaphor often involves a sophisticated understanding of background assumptions and conventions that vary significantly across cultures and disciplines.

In this paper we study oral interactions between lecturers and international students studying at a British university and a Spanish University. We explore how metaphor and gesture are used in the different exchanges, discussing the extent to which and the ways in which the different interlocutors appropriate each other's use of metaphor and gesture, and the ways in which the interlocutors use gesture to help them structure and communicate their own ideas.

We identify a range of metaphors being used successfully and less successfully. We show that the use of metaphor has a great deal to offer in terms of its ability to develop shared understanding of difficult concepts, but that it can present problems leading at times to misunderstandings and a tendency in students to stray from the topic. In order to avoid the pitfalls of metaphor use, we make a number of recommendations for making the most of the potential that metaphor has to offer in academic tutorials.

1

Introduction

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of international students studying at British universities. This contributes to making universities more universal centres of debate, enquiry and learning, enriching the culture of our universities through numerous multicultural encounters. However, it is not always a straightforward matter to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the presence of international students in our classes. We may not for instance be sufficiently aware of the extent to which the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of international students differ from ours. An area where linguistic and cultural differences are particularly obvious is in the use of metaphor, as the understanding of metaphor often involves a sophisticated understanding of background assumptions and conventions that vary significantly across cultures and disciplines.

What are 'metaphors' and how do they vary across languages?

If people are asked to think of an example of a metaphor, well-known quotations from literary texts like 'Juliet is the <u>sun</u>' or 'All the world's a <u>stage</u>' tend to be the ones that spring to mind. We would be less likely to think of utterances like 'They gave us a <u>warm</u> welcome' or 'He <u>shouldered</u> all the blame', perhaps because the way of expressing these notions is so familiar and conventional that they do not seem to us like metaphoric uses of language. Yet, if we think about this a little, we can see that welcomes do not have a temperature that can be measured, and 'blame' is not something that we can literally carry about on our shoulders. But because we regularly talk about our emotional responses to others in this way (for example, 'a <u>cold</u>, calculating person') or conventionally use body part terms to denote processes that are not literally true (for example, we don't actually '<u>give</u>' anyone a hand when we help them, nor does anyone or anything literally '<u>catch</u>' our eye when we notice them) they seem the natural way of expressing these notions even though they are metaphors. In fact, metaphor plays a very important role in creating new senses of words, and a word's polysemy is often metaphorically motivated. However, there are great differences in the way that words can metaphorically extend their meaning in different languages. For example, English 'cup' and Spanish 'taza' both denote a particular type of drinking vessel, but in English the word can also be used to refer to a part of a bra, a part of an acorn, and a hip joint. In addition, the word can become a verb to describe a way of holding (something in) the hands. Yet none of these extensions are possible for the word 'taza' in Spanish.

What are metaphorical gestures and how do they vary across languages?

These differences are not just important for the way that people *talk* but also for the way they *think* about everyday concepts (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This is sometimes reflected in the gestures that they use (Cienki, 2008). For example, although English speakers regularly talk about the future as something in front of or ahead (for example, 'I'm really <u>looking forward to</u> the holidays) and the past as something behind them (for example, 'When I <u>look back</u>, I can <u>see</u> I was wrong'), speakers of Chinese sometimes use the opposite orientation: the future may also be behind (because you can't see it) and the past ahead of the speaker (because you can see what's been). And if one observes a Chinese speaker talking in English about the past or the future, we may find that he or she sometimes uses forward- and backward-pointing gestures that are consistent with the front/past-back/future metaphors in their speech (Littlemore and Ngan, forthcoming; Yau, 1997), which may reflect the way he or she is *thinking* about time. The metaphoric gesture appears to give conflicting information about what is being said and this may make Chinese speakers of English more difficult to understand because of their 'gestural accent'. It is not surprising, then, to find that learners of a foreign language may find it difficult to understand and produce the metaphors conventionally used in another language, because they often do not match those they use in their mother tongue. As well as metaphors being a source of misunderstanding, gestures too can sometimes be difficult for international students to understand.

Why do people use metaphors in conversation?

Despite the difficulties they present, the conventional metaphors used by English speakers (and the gestures that accompany them) play important roles in communication, in everyday conversation as well as in educational contexts. When they use metaphor, speakers do not usually use the form

SOMETHING IS SOMETHING ELSE (as in 'Juliet is the sun' metaphor, mentioned above) when talking to each other, but rather favour verbs and verb phrases (e.g. take something in hand) or noun phrases with 'of' (e.g. the mouth of the river). In general people express their meanings metaphorically through the kind of conventional metaphors mentioned earlier, often fossilised in 'delexical' verbs like 'take' or 'go' accompanied by prepositions or particles (for example, 'go up' meaning 'increase' or 'take to' meaning 'develop a liking for') (Cameron, 2003). That is, the 'building blocks' for everyday conventional metaphors are the words most frequently used in English – a fact which is both advantageous and problematic for the non-native speaker of the language.

A significant fact about metaphor use is that metaphors are not distributed evenly across conversations, but rather occur in bursts or clusters in response to various factors (Cameron and Stelma, 2004). One of these is that metaphors are used more frequently when the topic of conversation is problematic or sensitive in some way. And analysis of conversations has also shown that metaphor fulfils important ideational, interactional and discourse functions when people talk to each other face-to-face. Metaphors can be repeated, reworded or challenged in the course of a conversation (Gibbs and Cameron, 2008), and are often used to 'frame' a speaker's stance towards the topic at hand. In conversation between native speakers (NSs) of English, metaphor seems to play key roles in discourse management and in expressing evaluative meanings.

Why do people use metaphors in university settings?

Metaphors are particularly frequent in academic discourse (Steen et al, 2010). Lecturers use metaphors not only to express notions important to their disciplines (for example, 'floating exchange rates' and 'trickle down effects' in Economics) but also to organise their lectures ('to wrap this up', for example) or to encourage critical or creative thinking (for example, 'think outside the box'). In tutorials, metaphors are likely to be used when talking about topics such as organising one's schedule (e.g. 'cramming' and 'struggling to keep up'), planning an assignment (e.g. 'sticking to the upper limit'), completing assignments ('meeting a deadline') or handing in work (e.g. 'turn in'), among other things.

What kinds of problems do metaphors present to international students?

It has been found that students whose mother tongue is not English often misunderstand these metaphorical uses of language, which may lead to under-achievement in their academic work. For example, in previous studies (Littlemore et al, 2011) we have found that international students have misunderstood conventional metaphors such as 'turn over a new leaf' (thinking that it means 'continue with what went before'), 'attack one's job' (thinking that it means 'be critical of one's own performance') and 'stem from' (thinking that it means 'be clearly different from'). The issue is thus not limited to idiomatic phrases but extends to many common collocations. For example, they have also been found to misunderstand highly commonplace metaphors, such as 'point' in 'some point over next week' (thinking that it means 'interesting topic'). It is nevertheless true that, if international students take advantage of the opportunity to speak to their lecturers in office hours' tutorial sessions, some of these misunderstandings may be cleared up. Likewise, if lecturers are aware of their use of metaphor and of the areas where problems of comprehension may arise, they are more likely to be able to communicate their ideas more effectively to students in these one-to-one sessions where students seek advice or guidance on their academic work. But the extent to which the lecturer will be able to overcome such problems in communication will depend on the extent to which he or she is able to use metaphor appropriately in conversation with international students – both in the language forms used and in accompanying gestures. At the same time, however, avoidance of metaphorical language by lecturers who anticipate the problems it may cause may give rise to the use of forms which are barely idiomatic in English, and may ill-prepare learners about to embark on a period of study at a university in an English-speaking country for the challenges that will be posed by this characteristic of discourse.

2

Methodology

In this paper we look at various interactions between lecturers and students in office hour consultations at universities in England and Spain, and use these conversations to show how lecturers may learn to become more sensitive to their own and students' uses of metaphor, and thus to communicate more successfully with their students. In turn, learning how to pick up and use their lecturer's metaphors effectively may help students themselves to expand the range of the ideas they wish to express in their second language.

Who is in the recordings?

A number of oral interactions were filmed between native and non-native speakers of English. The aim was to simulate as closely as possible the 'office hour consultation'. The lecturers were therefore asked to talk to the students about their subject matter as well as more practical issues such as essay writing and exam preparation. Some of the lecturers in our study had the same linguistic and academic backgrounds as the students, others did not. The reason for including both was to allow us to study the impact of shared language and background knowledge on the use of metaphor in the consultations. The interactions filmed were as follows[1]:

John and Lola (an English-speaking lecturer in Applied Linguistics working at a British university and a Spanish Erasmus student on an undergraduate Applied Linguistics programme)

John and Tina (an English-speaking lecturer in Applied Linguistics at a British university and a British/American student of English on an undergraduate Applied Linguistics programme)

Alice and Karim (an English-speaking lecturer in International Development at a British university and Kazakh-speaking student on a postgraduate International Development programme)

Alice and Charlie (an English-speaking lecturer in International Development at a British university and Taiwanese-speaking student on a postgraduate Applied Linguistics programme)

Cristelle and Daniel (a Spanish-speaking lecturer in Spanish at a British university and an English-speaking student on a postgraduate programme in Educational management at a British university)

Cristelle and Rafael (a Spanish-speaking lecturer in Spanish at a British university and a Spanish-speaking student on a postgraduate programme in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at a British University)

Gloria and Ruth (a Spanish-speaking lecturer in English Language and Literature at a Spanish university and an English-speaking international exchange student on an undergraduate English Language and Literature programme)

Gloria and Clara (a Spanish-speaking lecturer in English Language and Literature at a Spanish university and a Spanish-speaking student on an undergraduate English Language and Literature programme)

Debbie and Helena (an English-speaking lecturer in Applied Linguistics at a Spanish university and a Polish-speaking Erasmus student on an undergraduate Applied Linguistics programme)

Debbie and José (an English-speaking lecturer in Applied Linguistics at a Spanish university and a Spanish-speaking student on an undergraduate Applied Linguistics programme)

The recordings were transcribed and the transcriptions were coded for metaphor using an identification method proposed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). This method involves examining every lexical unit in the text to see whether it has a more basic, concrete meaning than the meaning that it has in context. In our examples, the salient metaphors are underlined and stretches of text that were accompanied by gesture are indicated in bold.

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[1] Names have been changed throughout.

3

Metaphor in interaction

How is metaphor used by students who are native speakers of English?

In order to gain a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities that metaphor presents to international students in academic tutorials it is useful to look at how such interaction takes place between native speakers. The following extract from Ruth, an English native speaker undergraduate student, currently spending an Erasmus year in Spain, shows how native speaking students typically use metaphor to present their ideas in tutorials:[2]
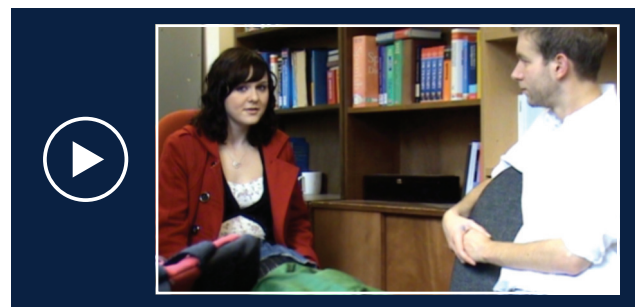

| Ruth | mm-hm, urm, it wasn't too <u>hard</u>[3] to talk in front of, urm, cos our class is so small and I know everyone really well, so that wasn't a problem, right, urm the <u>structure</u> wasn't too bad either because since I used PowerPoint it was, I could think about it and it was <u>laid out</u>, urm, and so I didn't in that way didn't <u>get lost in the structure</u>. I think the <u>hardest part</u> is, I like, urm, when I present I don't, I like to present the facts but also I don't wanna be reading <u>on</u> a piece of paper that has everything written down, so often I get <u>caught up in</u> talking and will forget or like realise that I don't really know the right words to say what I want to say so then I sort of <u>stumble along</u>, so I think, I guess that's probably the <u>hardest part</u> for me, because I know what I want to say but sometimes when I'm up there, I don't know how to say it. |

The student is describing a fairly abstract process here, and the metaphors she uses help her to explain the difficulties she experienced. The most important metaphorical idea in describing the process of putting an oral presentation together is that of a journey (where she can 'get lost' or 'stumble along'), a very prevalent way of talking about all sorts of experiences in life. In turn, her use of a large number of metaphors makes her language sound natural

and idiomatic. They also make her language sound relatively informal, which is something that some international students may feel uncomfortable with in academic settings.

How is metaphor used in interactions between lecturers and students who are native speakers of English?

Speakers don't always use metaphors in isolation, and in tutorials it is often found that the two speakers will often share metaphors, tossing them back and forth in order to share and develop their ideas. In face-to-face interaction it's natural for people to repeat words, expressions and gestures used by their interlocutor as this contributes to the building of coherence in the discourse and shared understanding between the speakers. In our tutorials, we have observed that this sort of repetition is particularly prevalent for metaphor. Students and tutors jointly construct and share meaning through metaphor. For instance, in the following extract, in a tutorial with a native speaking lecturer (John) and a native speaking student (Tina), both interlocutors share the metaphor of an essay as a container. Both the student and her lecturer share their ideas by bouncing the same metaphor back and forth:

Tina	Like sometimes it's like <u>cramming</u> stuff <u>in</u> …
	…
John	Just like <u>getting</u> the word count <u>up</u>
	…
Tina	It was 200 and something words <u>over</u> and he was like yeah and I was like how did that happen and it was 75 and it was 200 <u>under</u> the word limit like
	…

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[2] Speech was transcribed according to turns at talk. In general, very short pauses were indicated with a comma (,), medium pauses with two dots (..) and longer pauses with three dots (...). Words spoken noticeably more loudly were transcribed in all capital letters. Other prosodic features and overlaps in speech were not marked since the focus here is on the words themselves.

[3] The salient metaphors in our examples are underlined.

John	I think, I think it's yeah, I don't think you should worry about <u>filling up</u> the <u>whole</u> word count cos people look at the word count to check it's fair
	…
Tina	I always plan to <u>fill</u> the word limit exactly. The thing is if you <u>go over</u> the word limit you get penalised don't you?
	…
John	Yeah. If you <u>go</u> sufficiently <u>over</u>

How does the use of metaphor facilitate learning and understanding in interactions between native and non-native speakers of English?

Even where the lecturers and students did not share the same linguistic background, they were sometimes able to share and develop the same metaphors. An example of how a metaphor may be used by interlocutors to establish joint understanding of a topic can be illustrated with an extract from the conversation between John and Lola at Birmingham University, where they reach some sort of consensus on the process of turning the ideas presented in a lecture in a structured PowerPoint presentation into a coherent whole through the metaphor of a 'mak[ing] a story' out of it:

John	So what you have to do in the exam is you have to- you have to- so each lecture is <u>about</u> a different topic and you have to explain one of those topics, um so maybe language and gender, we talked <u>about</u> language and gender, that was last week, or this week was speech, you know, so the <u>features</u> of speech compared to the features of writing, um so yes, you do that
Lola	My problem is that they are not developed so they have just in <u>squares</u>, so I have to <u>joint</u> all the ideas, so the- what- this is what I have to do
John	That's the difficulty, so you have a PowerPoint, and it <u>tells</u> you this, this, this, this, and this, and you have to <u>make</u> sense of it, yes, it's difficult. It is difficult to <u>make a story</u>. Sometimes your PowerPoints they just <u>tell</u> you lots of- so we did that lecture a few weeks ago <u>on</u> genre, remember that, and that was very technical. You had a <u>piece</u> of information about this, a <u>piece</u> of information about that, a <u>piece</u>, and it's <u>hard</u>, I agree, it's <u>hard</u> to <u>make</u> an essay <u>out of</u> it
Lola	But in your lectures, I am very grateful of them because you can explain us, you- you do an introduction <u>before</u>, so you <u>joint</u> all the ideas, you <u>give</u> us an introduction, you <u>joint</u> all the ideas this PowerPoint <u>with</u> this <u>one</u>, who is this author, yeah, it's better

John	Well I'm glad <u>about</u> that, okay, so that- I'm glad that helps, so you think <u>making</u> a <u>story</u> <u>out of</u> it helps
Lola	Yes
John	As opposed to just looking at the PowerPoint slides
Lola	Or maybe my house when I read all the PowerPoints I try to <u>do</u> a <u>story</u> <u>in</u> my mind and I do, like, an <u>outline</u>

This stretch of talk about how what has been learnt in the lecture hall can be written up in an exam question goes backwards and forwards between the literal and the abstract. On the one hand, there is reference to the physical world of the lecture hall, with a lecturer talking about particular topics with the visual support of a PowerPoint presentation, in which the phases of the lecture and its content is displayed – in 'pieces' or on different slides. On the other hand, the student and/or lecturer has to 'joint' (sic) or connect these pieces ('this, this, this and this') into a coherent whole – a creative act of reconstruction ('you have to <u>make</u> sense of it'), success at which will demonstrate the student's grasp of the concepts in an exam. John's use of '<u>make</u> sense' appears to trigger the metaphor he introduces ('<u>make</u> a <u>story</u>') to explain and at the same time show his understanding of Lola's difficulty in finding and expressing the links between the various ideas or pieces of information she has. Of course, the lecturer does not necessarily mean to suggest that this 'story' would be characterised by features peculiar to narratives (temporal sequences, for example) but rather by a thread that joins the pieces together. Interestingly, although he introduces the metaphorical idea, he actually attributes it to the student rather than himself ('so you think <u>making</u> a <u>story</u> <u>out of</u> it helps'), making it clear that, for him, what he has done is simply to interpret and reword Lola's formulation of the problem ('you <u>joint</u> all the ideas'). However, in this interpretation and rewording with a different metaphor, John suggests a slightly different – and academically more valuable – way of looking at the problem: 'making' rather than simply 'joining' ideas. And the metaphor is appropriated by Lola herself ('I try to do a story in my mind'). That is, in this part of their interaction, the use of a particular metaphor seems to act as a bridge to understanding and the creation of common ground. Here, a figurative use of language can be seen to have fulfilled ideational and interactional functions, bringing about – at least at the local level of this academic consultation – the kind of understanding which will help Lola to prepare for her exams in ways that are appropriate for the kind of questions she is likely to be asked.

However, it should be noted that Lola's additional remark ('I will do an outline') may be interpreted as showing that she has understood the 'story' metaphor somewhat differently from John, and may not have learned much in this interaction. Is making an 'outline' of the contents of a particular lecture consistent with 'making a story out of it'? It could very well be so for Lola herself, though not necessarily for a native

speaker of English. As can be seen in the extract from Debbie's interview with José below, a speaker whose L1 is Spanish may confuse English compounds which appear similar ('guideline/headline/outline'). The common feature of these compounds is 'line', which these students may interpret as being roughly equivalent to Spanish '*línea*' or '*hilo*' ('thread'), a word that figuratively extends its meaning to signify 'link' or 'join', and is used regularly in Spanish to positively evaluate coherence in speech and text. If this is how Lola understands an 'outline', then this would be coherent with the 'story' metaphor, as well as her own concern with 'joining' disparate ideas.

Much of the way we talk about the setting of academic assignments involves metaphor, as can be seen in the next extract. Here, the repetition of metaphor across turns can also help the learner pick up and use a conventional way of talking about assignments. For instance, in the following extract, in a tutorial at the Spanish university, the lecturer, Debbie, uses the metaphor 'guidelines', which the student, José mishears as 'headline'. Debbie responds to his use of 'headline' by repeating 'guidelines' and José repeats it too. This contributes to José's lexical development, and also, as we see, helps him to develop the idea of a 'guideline' as a 'pattern' that he can 'follow':

Debbie	Oh good, okay. Does it help you when you have assignments to have very clear urm <u>steps</u> to follow and <u>guidelines</u>?
José	Yes
Debbie	Or do you prefer when you're freer to decide
José	I prefer following the <u>steps</u> that I have in the <u>headline</u>
Debbie	in the <u>guidelines</u>
José	In the <u>guidelines</u>, cos I think I work better if I <u>follow</u> a <u>pattern</u> of the, the <u>guidelines</u>
Debbie	Okay and that's true in general for all of your classes
José	Mm
Debbie	Okay. Do you generally receive that kind of step by step <u>guideline</u>?
José	Yes
Debbie	When you're asked to do
José	mm-hm

What happens when there are metaphorical and gestural mismatches?

When tutors are mentoring international students, they may be well aware of the linguistic handicaps that the student has in expressing him or herself, but may not pay enough attention to the gestures that the disadvantaged speaker may use to supplement the words and phrases he or she is using. The meanings that a person may be able to express fluently in the L1 may simply not be available in English or may not be known to the non-native speaker. So, in the conversation between John and Lola, we find that this student uses a rotating gesture with her hands at several points, as in the following example:
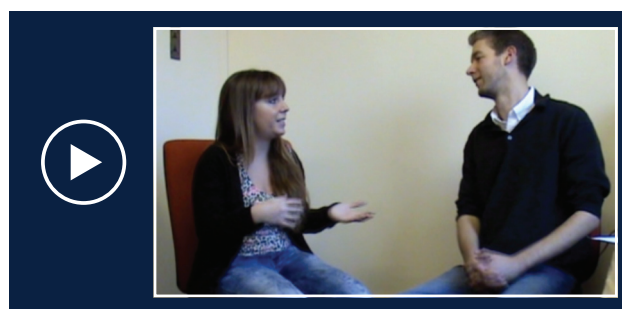
Lola	Yes But now I can **follow**[4] much better the TELLING, the TELLING lectures, because now I can **know** better the teachers and the way they speaks,	Gestures with two hands rotating outward one over the other

As is well known, speakers of different languages may express similar understandings of temporal events in different ways (Slobin, 1996). In a language such as Spanish (Lola's L1), the difference between the description of events which are seen as complete and those which are seen as ongoing or incomplete is marked in the verb through aspectual inflections. Although English does have the means to distinguish between perfective and imperfective aspect per se, it is often the context which determines whether an event is to be interpreted as complete (for example, 'He swam across the lake') or one which is seen as ongoing (for example, 'He swam with water wings when he was a child'), while a language such as Spanish will express the difference in the verb's inflections ('nadó' versus 'nadaba', respectively). Such differences between the temporal aspects of events are often represented lexically – rather than grammatically – in English. So, 'know', 'meet/find out' and 'get to know' all refer to a similar kind of mental state, but distinguish between how this occurs as an event in time. We can construe it as an unchanging state ('know'), a punctual or bounded occurrence ('meet' or 'find out') or an ongoing process ('get to know'). Spanish, in contrast, distinguishes these

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[4] Words that are accompanied by gestures are shown in bold.

meanings through the verbal inflections of the same verb: 'conocer'. In this regard, Lola's use of the 'rotating' gesture accompanies the use of a verb which describes a state ('know') but which she sees as a process. That is, her gesture contributes to the sense of what she is trying to convey, making up for the lexical gap she is suffering from.

In fact, Lola uses the same rotating gesture at several points in the conversation with John. It accompanies utterances such as the following:

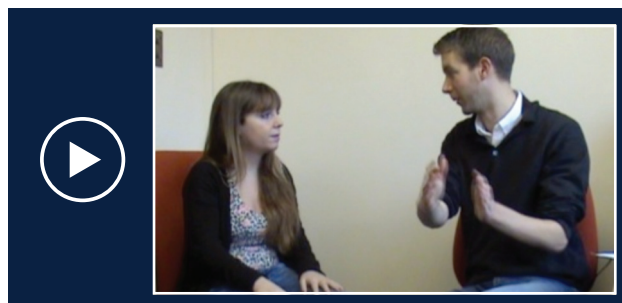| Lola	Your lectures are really useful for me because <u>on</u> Thursday we can **review** what were we talking <u>about</u> <u>in</u> the first day	Gestures with two hands rotating outward one over the other

When describing mental processes ('know', 'review', 'think'), then, Lola's gesture draws attention to the dynamic nature of these processes. However, although John picks up and repeats some of Lola's words, he does not repeat her gestures, accompanying the beginning of his turn with a 'chopping' gesture:
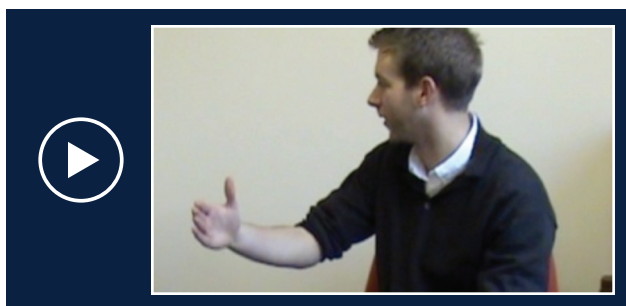
John	So you haven't done **the revision** for the exam you haven't' **gone back over** your- your notes to, well, of course, because the exam is <u>in</u> eight months or something	Vertical chopping gesture

Lola has used the verb 'review' which John recasts as the more idiomatic 'revision', but both of these words are motivated by the same metaphor: 'looking backwards'. John then develops this idea with another metaphorical expression 'go back over', rewordings that pick up and expand on Lola's. However, the coherence between his contribution and Lola's is not supported by a gesture that might have drawn Lola's attention to the fact that the words he has uttered are fully consonant with hers. If John had imitated Lola's rotating gesture,

it would have been plain that, like her, he is referring to mental, rather than visual processes. On the other hand his use of a different gesture emphasises the fact that there are different ways of viewing the writing process, and may thus have been very useful for Lola for different reasons as it demonstrates that there are different ways of viewing the essay-writing process. The contrast between their two sets of gestures can be seen most clearly in the following exchange:

John	So what you have to do in the exam is you have to, you have to, so each lecture is <u>about</u> a different topic and you have to **explain** one of those topics, urm so maybe language and gender, we talked <u>about</u> language and gender, that as last week, or <u>this</u> week was speech, you know, so the **features of speech compared to the features of writing**, urm so yes, you do <u>that</u>	Hands facing each other, palms flat vertical chopping motion
Lola	My problem is that they are not **developed** so **they have just in squares**, so I have to **joint all the ideas**, so the, what, <u>this</u> is what I have to do	Writing gesture with right hand (on 'developed'), then left hand is held palm up while right hand is held up palm out, moving as if placing objects on a vertical surface ('just in squares'), then two flat hands move in circles in vertical plane ('so I have to joint'), then palm up ('so the') then point down ('this is [what I have to do]')

In the context of this part of their interaction, John's use of an incongruent chopping gesture does not have any visibly problematic effects and may in fact have been useful in conveying his particular view of the essay writing process. However, in another extract from their conversation we can see that repetition of gestures, or the use of gestures that support and clarify the metaphorical uses of words may be very useful when words and phrases are being used metaphorically. When John introduces the idea of a 'story', their gestures start to resemble one another, with each pointing toward his/her own head and then moving outward and down.

Lola	This is that I can't say	RH stretched out to side
John	It is difficult to **make a story**. Sometimes your PowerPoints they just <u>tell</u> you lots of, so we did that lecture a few weeks ago <u>on</u> genre, remember that, and that was very technical. You had a **piece** of information about <u>this</u>, a **piece** of information about that, a pi, and it's <u>hard</u>, I agree, it's <u>hard</u> to <u>make</u> an essay <u>out</u> of it	Small rotation of RH Moving down 'Placing' gestures in the air with open hands palm out, moving forward
Lola	But <u>in</u> your lectures, I am very grateful of them because you can **explain us**, you, you do an introduction <u>before</u>, so **you** <u>joint</u> **all the ideas**, you <u>give</u> us an introduction, you <u>joint</u> all the ideas this PowerPoint with this one, who is this author, yeah, it's better.	Two hands rotating outward one over another ('you can explain us'), switching to inward rotation ('you do an introduction before'), to RH waving left to right ('you joint all the ideas')
John	Well I'm glad <u>about</u> that, okay, so that, I'm glad that helps, so you think **making a story** <u>out</u> of it helps	His two hands begin with index fingers pointing at his face and then rotate outward and slightly forward and down, and repeat ('making a story out of it')
Lola	Yes	
John	As opposed to just looking at the PowerPoint slides	Two hands held up in fists, slightly apart, as if holding a flat vertical object
Lola	Or maybe my house when I read all the PowerPoints I try to do a **story in my mind** and I do, like, an <u>outline</u>	LH palm up, RH index finger moves L to R over LH, RH changes to two fingers as if holding small object ('read all the PowerPoints'), then both hands waving on each side of her head near her temples, then RH with index finger pointing toward her forehead moves out and down ('I do, like, an outline').
John	Right	

In this extract, which immediately follows the one described above, Lola stretches her hand out to one side perhaps to indicate the linear nature of an essay. John picks up on this and along with her previous utterance in which she talks about joining ideas, and introduces the idea of a 'story'. At this point, he makes use of a small rotating gesture which echoes the small rotating gestures that she has been using throughout the tutorial. However, he immediately goes back to using the two-handed vertical chopping gestures (as if compartmentalising things) when he talks about 'pieces' of information using a series of 'placing' gestures that are in the air, perhaps because they represent abstract concepts. He appears to have picked up on her 'flow' gesture possibly because this represents 'narrative'. Lola continues to use flowing gestures, which are then used by John and the exchange ends with Lola making a rotation gesture near her temples, perhaps to indicate that the mental process in her head. John looks at her very attentively at this point suggesting that there is a close alignment between the two of them at this stage of their conversation. The 'story' metaphor (including its accompanying gestures) creates the shared space for common ground. The story is a new conception, which is a blend of her flow and his structure model. Much later on in the tutorial, Lola appears to have taken the idea of structuring an essay on board:

Lola	I will do it, I will classify my ideas, main ideas, so I <u>follow</u> a **structure**, for example the introduction, the body of the essay, and the conclusion	Two hands palm down, each making slight rotating motions ('I will classify my ideas'), moving to palm up open hands ('I follow a structure'), then using RH to count off on LH beginning with little finger on RH ('for example the introduction'), then ring finger ('the body of the essay'), then middle finger ('and the conclusion')

Our interpretation of this exchange has been that up till this point, there has been a clear mismatch in the conceptualisation of essay writing that each of these interlocutors has. This is resolved by the 'story' metaphor. On the other hand, it may be the case that John was deliberately emphasising structure because that's what Lola is going to need to focus on in her essays. The 'story' metaphor may be a deliberate attempt on his part to identify common ground.

5 In the gesture transcription, RH = right hand, LH = left hand.

Other apparent mismatches between these two speakers in terms of their use of metaphorical gesture include those they use when talking about time. Lola constantly makes use of a left to right orientation when discussing past, present and future, whereas John's use of gesture is more varied:

Lola	and the teachers are native speakers at university teachers who are teaching me English are Spanish and they speak slow, but here the **first day** I saw many authors like **Chomsky** or many example that I didn't know, so the **first day** I were a bit lo-, I **was a bit lost**,	LH moves to left and points left with thumb ('I were a bit lo-'), LH palm up open hand repeats lateral move to left ('I was a bit lost')
John	Ok	
Lola	But when you, **when you were** on Thursday and you teach us in the lecture, I could understand **much better**.	LH moves laterally to left and back ('when you were') Later, open LH moves left to right with beats ('much better')
John	Oh, that's good, I'm glad to hear that yeah, urm, ok that's good, and this was the first time you'd **come across** these things like **Chomsky** and **things like** that	Open RH facing self moves outward with slight rotation (repeating on 'come across','Chomsky', 'things like')

Although John's use of a forward gesture to indicate a past event is incoherent with the timescale, it does highlight, through repetition, Lola's notion of a first encounter with these ideas. For Lola, the timescale appears more important and it serves more of a structuring function. This exchange reflects the fact that time is metaphorically constructed and is not something that is objectively 'out there'. When people with different conceptualisations of time come together there may or may not be misunderstandings. There do not appear to be any misunderstandings here.

Finally, it is interesting to contrast John's 'bringing together' gesture in the following extract with Lola's 'joining' gesture mentioned above:
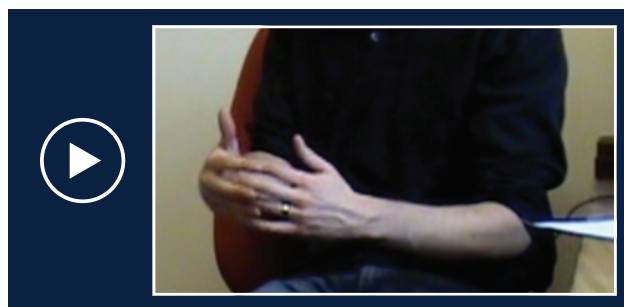
John	**And you'll bring them together and you'll see whether you agree or disagree and compare them**	Brings his two hands together so that the fingers interlock.

The way in which John neatly brings his hands together here contrasts sharply with Lola's more complex gesture that accompanies the same concept of bringing together other people's ideas in the context of an academic essay.

Another gesture mismatch relates to the amount of gesture used by each of the interlocutors. Whereas Lola uses a large amount of gesture, John uses very little:

Lola	Um how do I, how do I **review** this, for example in my house, after the lectures,	Lola makes use of multiple gestures, while John sits with his arms folded

Although differences in the amount of gesture used did not appear to affect the information exchange, in other contexts they may have had an adverse effect on the quality of the interaction. In this particular extract however, the fact that John has his arms folded sends out a message that he is in the role of listener (and thus not gesturing). This is emphasised by the look of concentration on his face.

What happens when the speakers' gestures are closely co-ordinated?

Despite the differences in John's and Lola's 'gestural accents', there are times when their gestures are very closely co-ordinated and they almost seem to perform a kind of 'gestural dance'. At this point they appear to be reaching shared understanding through their use of gesture. It is also worth noticing the degree of overlap between their speech at this point, which can indicate close rapport between speakers as they co-construct an idea:

John	So, what, what words have you had to look up. And I mean--	
Lola	Mm, I don't know, some verbs, nouns?	
John	OK, and do they tend to be--	Both speakers produce two handed gesture with palms down, hands open, fingers slightly spread, hands wavering back and forth
Lola	General vocabulary.	
John	General vocabulary.	
Lola	Or also specific, also specific vocabulary of these subjects	

Matching one's gestures in this way is a powerful way of building rapport. A further example of a 'gestural dance' we have observed was between Cristelle and David. In this example the two speakers took turns using a gesture for text as space that Cristelle introduces to the conversation. Unlike the previous example, the target for this gesture becomes developed with each use. Cristelle offers a gesture to represent the 'essay question' as a horizontally extended space and Daniel, perhaps recognising the labour this gesture could save, extends it to represent the 'introduction' of the essay. In the transcripts below, gestures produced that are not simultaneous with spoken words are marked with a caret (^) .

Cristelle	You know you <u>got</u> your **question**, your...^	Both hands open, facing outward, move horizontally out from the centre ('text-as-space gesture'). Gesture is repeated once.
Daniel	Erm I think the first <u>thing</u> that I usually do, is, I <u>take</u> <u>the</u> question <u>away</u>, and... erm, **I'll work out**, a sort of, Er. **Steps that I need to take** to answer the question. So...	Raises LH to left side, fingers bent flat 90° to palm. Moves LH downward, stopping three times.
Cristelle	Yeah	
Daniel	**To do, to <u>put</u> a <u>plan</u> together**, I'll <u>put</u>	Raises RH, open, facing outwards, moves it down in a sweeping motion
Cristelle	Yeah	
Daniel	I'll <u>set</u> <u>out</u> an **introduction** that I need to do,	Text-as-space gesture

Later Daniel uses a variation on the same gesture to represent a 'first paragraph':

Daniel	And I'll <u>have</u> the **first paragraph** <u>about</u>, what the first .. author said <u>about</u> it	Text-as-space gesture with LH more stationary and RH moving out from left to centre

The gesture that was first introduced by Cristelle is developed in two distinct stages by Daniel as he accepts and adapts the gesture for himself. This helps build up an atmosphere of shared meaning and understanding. In pre-sessional language training programmes it may be useful for teachers to encourage their students to extend and develop the metaphors that have been introduced to the conversation by their lecturers. This would provide lecturers with an immediate response on the extent to which the metaphor and topic have been understood or misconstrued. This could facilitate progression as it would give students an opportunity to be creative with their metaphor and gesture use while being monitored by their lecturer within an environment of shared understanding.

What happens when metaphors are misunderstood?

Metaphor can also be a cause of confusion, although for the native speaker it may not be apparent why misunderstandings might arise. We can see this in the following extract from the tutorial with John and Lola, where both are using the verb 'look':

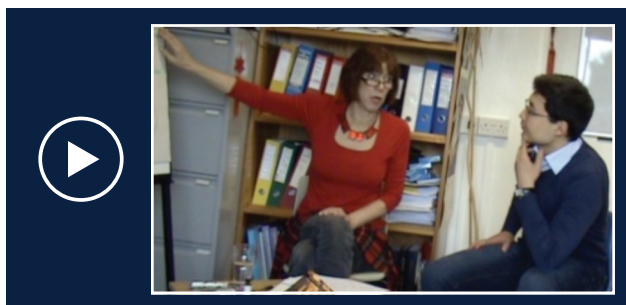| Lola	So I will look for this words on internet, and, I use them
John	Ok, you'll look at, yeah, will you look at any, because one of the strange things <u>about</u> you studying applied linguistics is that you are, you're studying what you're doing <u>in</u> a way, so a lot of people in linguistics have talked about these things. They sometimes <u>call</u> them discourse markers, yeah? They <u>call</u> them <u>linking</u> words they <u>call</u> them discourse markers so they, they've been a lot of studies <u>on</u> these. Would you consider <u>looking at</u> that kind of thing <u>looking at</u> the <u>things</u> that linguists <u>say</u> about these things or would you just look in the dictionary or internet, urm, because, so, in the, in the urm, in the last, the last lecture, you <u>looked at</u> some of the <u>features</u> of speech
Lola	Yes
John	So things like when people reformulate what they say start again and say <u>it</u> in a different <u>way</u>, and I think academic essays they have their own <u>features</u> as well as you know
Lola	For example have we do, have we got to do any essay in TELLING, not for the moment
John	Not for months
Lola	It will be okay.
John	So you're not worried <u>about</u> it
Lola	I could practice.

John	Yes, you can practice, and it sounds like it will be ok, yeah.
Lola	Also I can do it by myself because I study at home English, I watch TV every day, I'm reading books
John	Do you watch the television, do you
Lola	Yes
John	English telly what do you watch?

This extract from their conversation is curious. The conversational partners begin by talking about academic work and end up talking about the student's favourite TV programmes. What has happened? We would suggest that it is the polysemy of the verb 'look' that causes the problem. Lola begins by asserting that she will 'look for' words on internet, a use of the verb that can be interpreted as literal (she will indeed use her eyes to find the words on the screen). Her use of 'look' seems to trigger the lecturer's use of the same verb, followed by 'at'. Of course, 'look at', like 'look for' can be interpreted literally ('look at the PowerPoint slides') but John is using it here in a figurative sense, meaning 'consider', 'think about'. In the same way, he uses the verbs 'say' or 'talk about' in non-literal ways. But Lola, who is probably thinking about lectures in which students do 'look at' the visual displays used by lecturers and listen to what they 'say' and 'talk about', does not recognise these as metaphors but rather interprets them literally – which, for her, leads naturally to another source of visual and verbal information: the television. Thus, repeating and elaborating on each other's words may help provide coherence to a conversation and allow participants to develop a topic ('look for' is repeated and elaborated as 'look at'), but when this involves metaphor, the possibilities for misunderstanding are high, if interlocutors are not aware that each may be using the same words with literal rather than metaphorical senses, and vice versa.
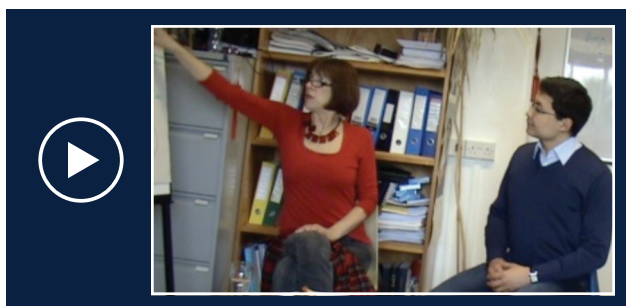
What happens when metaphorical gestures are misunderstood?

The use of gesture to accompany one's metaphors can also cause problems, as is illustrated in the following extract from a tutorial. In this extract, the lecturer uses an upward-pointing gesture to accompany her speech when talking about 'outward-looking' organisations. In fact she uses this gesture twice to accompany the same phrase, as she is indicating the top part of a diagram on a flipchart, which represents different types of organisations:

| Alice | some have a very <u>inward</u> <u>focus</u> and some have a very ^ <u>outward</u> <u>focus</u>... |

| Alice | And then..the organisation which is decentralised but has a very ^ <u>outward</u> <u>focus</u> we can think of <u>open</u> systems... |

At a later stage of the tutorial, the student produced the expression 'upward-focused' organisations, which does not exist in English and which was not used by the lecturer. It may have been that he processed her upward gesture semantically and incorporated this into his understanding of the nature of the organisations:

| Karim | And there is another, did I mentions? which <u>about</u> the companies with decentralised and ^ <u>upward</u> <u>focused</u> like export orientated companies, I <u>guess</u> |

It is not always easy to know what to do about these sorts of misunderstandings as we are rarely in total control of our language and gestures and we may inadvertently be sending messages that we do not intend to send. One solution is to attend closely to the metaphors and gestures that are used by the student and to use the same or closely related metaphors and gestures when responding to their questions. Another is to attend carefully to one's own use of metaphors. It is to this area that we now turn.

4

Implications

How can we ensure that our metaphors are understood?

As we have seen, international students sometimes misinterpret metaphors in academic contexts or interpret them literally and misunderstandings can arise when different metaphors and gestures are used. One way to reduce the risk of this happening is to signal your uses of metaphor. This can be done either through the use of gesture or words.

Gestural signalling of metaphor use

Alice makes particularly effective use of gestures to signal the use of metaphor when speaking to international students. Her use of expansive gestures is clear from the outset, particularly when compared with her use of gestures when speaking to native speakers. For example, in this first extract, she emphasises the words 'internal focus', by pointing her right forefinger down towards the floor. She does this just before producing the words themselves:

Alice	and this one down here	
	which is very centralised	
	with a-a very kind of	
	^ internal **focus**…	Exaggeratedly points with R forefinger downwards from the centre of the body

When asked about this particular gesture, the lecturer commented that she was indeed putting in more 'effort' with him and was, to a certain extent, 'acting' at this point. Other examples of these 'exaggerated' gestures include the following, where she illustrates 'freedom' with an expansive hand movement and 'closeness' with a kind of hugging gesture.

Alice	we think of it as	
	the human relations er type of culture where..	
	people <u>have</u> a lot of freedom to do what they want…It's not so centralised..	Both hands move rapidly upwards and outwards palms opening
	They've <u>got</u> **a lot of freedom**	Arms coming together, hands overlapping
	But they're very **close** to each other	

This is a good example of 'dramatic contrast', a rhetorical technique in which two contrasting ideas are juxtaposed for maximum impact. Although the contrast is not necessarily clear in the language, it is very clear in the gestures. Thus the gestures in this sequence contribute to the overall coherence of the discourse by emphasising the antonymic relationship between the two ideas. They are thus serving an important discourse function.

Other 'signalling' gestures are used to accompany potentially difficult vocabulary items, such as 'underpinning' in the following example:

Alice	motivations... motivations er involved **underpinning** these different quadrants	 RH palm up, claw shape, fingers move in and out twice

The gesture in this example enhances the dynamic nature of the metaphor as it involves movement. 'Underpinning' could be read either as a stationary state or as a dynamic process. This particular gesture highlights its dynamic nature.

Another signalling gesture involves the removal of a lecturer's glasses to represent 'looking at' and the placing of her glasses on the end of her nose to represent 'close detailed work'. The speaker below, Alice, does this a lot when referring to both literal and metaphorical concepts (here: mentally considering something is metaphorically construed as physically looking at it). In the following extract, the removal of her glasses co-occurs with the term 'looking for jobs':

Alice	So if we're <u>looking at</u> organisations ^and if you're thinking <u>about</u> **looking** for jobs it's quite a nice idea to think <u>about</u> what sort of organisation you'd want to be working for	 Removes glasses Spreads hands wide, palms up

It is often the case that the students pick up on the gestures and use them themselves, as we can see in the following extract from Alice and Charlie:

Alice Charlie Alice Charlie Alice Charlie	it was like **money is sort of <u>energy</u>** .. you know .. Hm hm (nodding) and if you **keep it moving <u>round</u>** ^ ..it <u>works</u> Right yeah but if you **put it in a box** and count it it doesn't <u>do</u> anything. Hm hm (nodding)	Hands closed together Expansive waving of both hands Hands come together

Immediately after Alice has produced the gesture, Charlie produces virtually the same gesture sequence in which his hands come together:

Charlie	like er .. you know .. sometimes we say you know the **rich people become rich** because they have the money as their res- resources? .. they can use it to .. er .. to invest <u>in</u> a lot of () and earn money <u>back</u> <u>from</u> <u>that</u> but .. some people they are not that rich and **<u>keep on</u> working and they don't use this money** to .. for investments so they don't get more money <u>back</u> they just ..	 Both hands palms open rotating gesture Hands still rotating come much closer together

What he appears to be echoing here is the idea of 'going from something large to something small'. These gestures appear to correspond to a metaphor of openness and closedness to represent the different ways of dealing with money and the different attitudes towards it.

The importance of choosing our metaphors and accompanying gestures carefully is illustrated by the fact that international students often echo both our words and our gestures, often immediately after we have used them ourselves, as we can see in the following example:

Alice	and for me it was so frightening to **let go** .. of control.	Giving gesture with both hands
Charlie	I think .. if you **let go** of the control a little bit by little bit gradually I think .. you won't worry that much but if you do it **suddenly** just like .. you really keep control of them from you know up until fifteen ... you will worry much more.	Giving gesture with both hands Hands spread out palms facing each other

Thus we can see that when speaking to international students, Alice uses plenty of supporting gestures and that the students appear to echo her use of both the words and the gestures when describing theories back to her. There could be several reasons students repeat words and gestures in this way. It could be that it is a part of the learning process (they are, after all learning both new language and new concepts), or it could serve an interpersonal relationship-building function, perhaps linked to the unequal power relationship between the student and the lecturer. It may also indicate a lack of confidence on the part of the students who perhaps prefer to stick closely to the metaphoric construals provided by the lecturer.

John also makes good use of gesture to support his metaphors, as we can see in this extract where he entwines his fingers to illustrate the bringing together of disciplines:
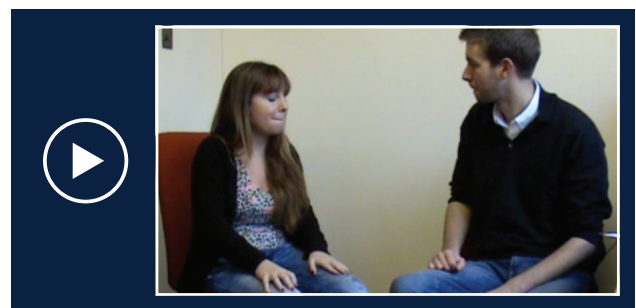

John	Yeah, so that's applied linguistics, **so it works quite well with your other things** because you're doing translation which is a bit practical, and you're doing conversation, also practical, then you're doing TELLING, so you're learning	Fingers entwined

In places, John uses gesture to support easily understood, literal uses of language, such as the word 'long' in the following extract:

John	An essay. Have you written **long essays** in English before?	Hands stretched out, facing each other horizontally in a line

In contrast, he does not always make use of supporting gestures when conveying difficult abstract concepts, such as the notion of 'view' in the following extract:


John	yeah, yeah, I agree the best way I think to, to, to evaluate things, to get a view on things is to compare them, so once you've studied more things you'll have a better basis for comparing things you'll be able to compare things across	No gesture
Lola	In Spain, I think here teachers teach really good	

In the opening turn, John is trying to clear up a misunderstanding that has lasted throughout a substantial part of the tutorial. He wants to convey to Lola that it is important to engage in critical thinking when writing about her linguistic subjects. She does not understand this and thinks that he is asking if she is critical of the teachers. He uses abstract metaphors (e.g. 'view on things', 'basis for comparing things', 'compare things across') to communicate these notions but Lola appears not to understand him. As we saw earlier, with John and Lola's different uses of 'look', Lola has a tendency to interpret such metaphorical uses of language literally and when John talks about comparisons in terms of space ('compare things across'), the space that the student focuses on is that between the UK and her own country: she does not grasp his intended meaning. However, it is possible that if John had supported these difficult uses of language with gesture, this might have helped. As we will see below, students who are planning to study in English-speaking universities need to be prepared for this sort of idiomatic way of talking about academic mechanisms.

The use of supporting gestures therefore appears to be important when we use metaphor in academic tutorials with international students. Furthermore, studies have shown that teachers who use a lot of gesture are more likely to be well perceived by their students than teachers who use little gesture (Sime, 2008). In order to extend our range of gestures, we could perhaps make video recordings of ourselves teaching, and use this to critically evaluate how we use gesture and whether our use of gesture can be improved.

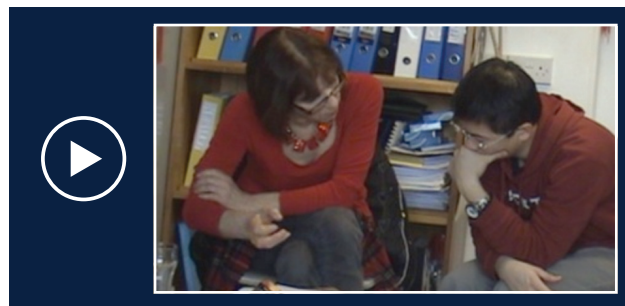### Linguistic signalling of metaphor use

Metaphors are often signalled linguistically through the use of discourse markers such as 'like', 'kind of' and 'sort of' (Goatly, 1997: Chapter 6). These can be very useful for international students:
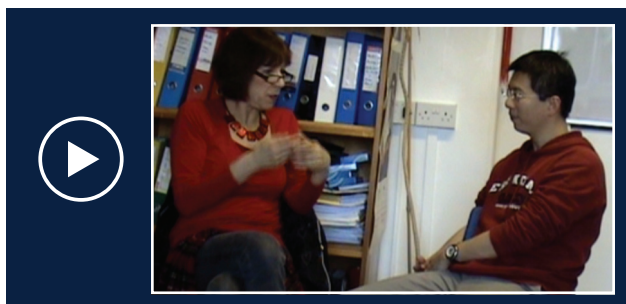
| Alice | reas .. if you just think ^ .. let's go .. it all .. it was like money is sort of <u>energy</u> .. you know .. and if you keep it moving round ^ .. it works | Hands intertwined |

| Alice | so they don't get more money back they just .. yeah .. it doesn't <u>flow</u>. they **sort of put** it in a drawer .. there's that <u>thing</u> in the bible isn't there? err | Points away |

| Alice | ute. and good at getting grants .. and .. **pulling in** the money .. all that sort of thing. quite dynamic. and this one here .. down here .. the goal orie | Pulling action |

It is interesting to note how in these examples, Alice also uses gestures to reinforce her examples.

Another way to linguistically signal one's use of metaphors more clearly is to introduce them as explicit similes. In the following extract, Alice signals the metaphor 'prison' with the marker 'like'. This helps the student to notice it and he then uses it himself:

Alice	So it's like a <u>prison</u> really
Karim	Ah I guess that's maybe a <u>prison</u>
	For the employee
	Yes well

Thus we have seen that metaphor can serve as a powerful source of understanding in academic tutorials, particularly when it well signalled through the use of either gestures or discourse markers. For this reason, it may be useful to prepare students to use metaphor and gesture when they go abroad. In the following section we look at how this might be done.

How can we prepare students for their year abroad at a British university?

Studies have shown that some lecturers who are experienced communicators with international students tend to avoid using a lot of metaphor. We can see this in the following extracts from the tutorial with Debbie, the American lecturer at the Spanish university and Helena, the Polish student studying at that university:


Debbie	Okay, so you were all studying the same subject, all right and then you were able to ask each other questions and urm clear up any doubts you may have had. Okay, so then I'm assuming that the place where you study there's doesn't have a TV, there's no music on or
Helena	Oh, yeah, I'm not a good study when something is going on near me
Debbie	Mm-hm
Helena	I have to be calm and silent
Debbie	Mm-hm
Helena	Mm everything must be silent
Debbie	Okay, all right. Urm, then you found it by sharing your ideas after studying you were able to help each other and you understood the material better
Helena	Yes. If I had some problems then they tell about it and when I hear something from my friend I'm able to remember it better. Then, when I read by myself.
Debbie	All right, when you guys were studying together, did you speak in Polish or in English?
Helena	Mostly in Polish
Debbie	Okay, all right. Ur, then do you have a specific time of day that you tend to study, like I don't know some time in the afternoon or how many hours or
Helena	Weekends are the best time to study, because during the week I am very tired, but if I have to I study, but weekends are, the days that I spend most time for learning
Debbie	Okay and do you spend all day, usually, both days all day?
Helena	Mmm. Usually almost all Saturday, and part of Sunday
Debbie	Mm-hm, okay, and when you're studying do you take breaks?
Helena	Yes, but not very long breaks, just to eat dinner because when I study I'm not able to stop studying because I feel I have to, I have to study
Debbie	Mm-hm
Helena	And I have remorse when I go out
Debbie	Okay, so you just continue studying and do you, you don't feel guilty during the breaks do you? I mean, you do have to eat?
Helena	Ah, no, no

There are a number of ways of naming the different learning activities students can engage in: they can 'go over' or 'revise' their notes, look at them closely ('study' them), do summaries, or memorise the contents, among other things. However, in this conversation, all these processes are being called 'studying'. In Spanish, the verb '*estudiar*' is an 'all-purpose' verb to denote a number of these activities, and Debbie may well have found her students whose L1 is Spanish use the English equivalent verb to denote a wide range of learning activities. She appears to be using it here in order to accommodate to what she anticipates may be problematic uses of English for her interlocutor, and seems to be avoiding other verbs and phrases to talk about learning activities carried on outside class. This kind of speech accommodation is likely to be far from infrequent in university tutorials held in English outside English-speaking countries. The vast majority of students Debbie interacts with do not speak English as their L1, and she is used to anticipating problems in communication by avoiding what she has learnt are problematic uses of language.

At the same time, however, the avoidance of potentially obscure uses of language has two consequences. On the one hand, Debbie's use of English sounds somewhat unidiomatic if we compare it to the way the lecturers at the UK university talk. Her use of the phrase 'continue studying' sounds a little unnatural and 'go on working' might have been more appropriate, so she is not really modelling the kind of language uses this student might hear in a British university. More importantly, if one of the purposes of a tutorial such as this is to help the student to make better use of her time or to understand the study skills she employs in order to suggest ways in which different types of activities might help in different ways, avoiding opportunities to employ the lexical richness of the target language to describe them also prevents the lecturer and the student from fully exploring these possibilities. Every micro-interaction is an opportunity for learning and students pick up what they hear.

In the following extract, we see a potentially more valuable way of accommodating one's speech to a student's limited understanding is to use alternative forms to express the same idea. Here, Debbie uses the phrase 'express your opinion' more frequently than the more idiomatic (and metaphorical) 'give your opinion':
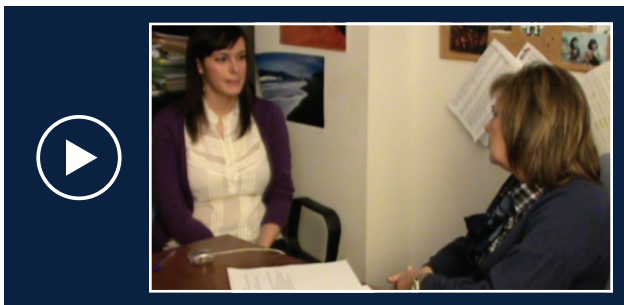
Debbie	Okay. And th- the compositions that you had to write, did you have to express your opinion in any of them?
Helena	No, if I had to express my opinion it would be easier, but it was like no opinion, just writing, I don't know, I sh- how should I call it, like des- description
Debbie	^okay
Helena	Something like this, and I <u>find</u> it <u>harder</u>
Debbie	It's <u>harder</u>. How <u>about</u> for your other classes, your literature classes, did you have to ever write anything, prepare any, a written piece of work where you
Helena	^ urm, no
Debbie	<u>Gave</u> your opinion
Helena	We had to prepare for example some quotations from the books and we analysed it just orally.
Debbie	I see, all right so do you have in the coursework you're doing here in Spain, do you have to write anything where you express your opinion, or <u>turn in</u> a work where you express your opinion?

In contrast, in a tutorial at a British university, the native speaker lecturer does not use 'express' your opinion, but favours the more idiomatic 'give' your opinion:

John	I think that's very good because sometimes people, sometimes people think, I'll read this and I'll just <u>give</u> my opinion, but yes, I think it's a good idea to read as many things as possible and to try and do this.

In the interaction between Debbie and Helena, the latter picks up and repeats 'express your opinion' rather than 'give your opinion', possibly because this is the form Debbie uses most frequently. That is, as we saw earlier in the conversation between Alice and Karim, if alternative ways of expressing an idea are used by a lecturer, students may pick up on one (possibly the less idiomatic one) and re-use it. So Karim paid attention to the gesture Alice used while uttering 'outward-focus' and later produced 'upward-focused'. In re-using their lecturers' way of expressing something, both students have shown their understanding of what has been said and that they are paying attention.

In turn, this may suggest ways for lecturers to accommodate to L2 speakers' difficulties in understanding metaphorical language uses in ways that do not involve complete avoidance of metaphor or result in impoverishment of the interaction. For example, if John had used 'think about' or 'consider' alongside 'look at' when talking to Lola, this could have alerted her to the fact that he was talking about mental processes rather than visual perception. At the same time, Debbie might have used a wider range of expressions alongside 'study' in order to develop the topic while at the same time making it clear that the possibly unfamiliar expressions ('go over your notes', for example) are related to those the student already knows. Avoidance of metaphor in response to a real or imagined difficulty in understanding is not the answer.

5

Recommendations

Key points to bear in mind for lecturers working at British universities

In this paper we have seen a range of metaphors being used successfully and less successfully by lecturers working at a British university when talking to international students. We have seen that the use of metaphor has a great deal to offer in terms of its ability to develop shared understanding of difficult concepts but that it can present problems leading at times to misunderstandings and a tendency in students to stray from the topic. In order to avoid the pitfalls of metaphor use, we would like to conclude with a number of tips for making the most of the potential that metaphor has to offer in academic tutorials:

- Try to use metaphors carefully and employ linguistic signalling devices, such as 'sort of' and 'kind of' as well as explicit similes to support your use of metaphor.

- Emphasise metaphoric meanings through the use of gesture where appropriate.

- Check for signs that the students may have misunderstood everyday metaphors and 'small words' such as prepositions.

- Look out for strange topic changes on the part of the student as these may indicate that they have interpreted your metaphor literally or in the wrong way.

- Look out for metaphors and gestures that are used by the students and try to encourage or elaborate on them as appropriate.

Key points to bear in mind for lecturers working abroad who are preparing students to study at a British university

We have seen in this paper that metaphor is often used in academic settings at British universities and it is important to prepare your students for this. In order to provide them with the maximum amount of support, we recommend that you follow these recommendations:

- Try to avoid falsely accommodating to the avoidance of metaphor by your students (use things like phrasal verbs and natural English).

- Support your students' understanding of metaphor through gesture.

References and further reading

A great deal has been written about metaphor and the problems that it presents to language learners. Less has been written about the advantages that it affords in cross-cultural communication. Here is a short, introductory reading list for those of you who are interested in learning more about the topic.

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