L2 Figurative Language Teaching
L2 Figurative Language Teaching: Theory and Practice

Edited by Ioannis Galantomos
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First and foremost, I would like to thank each one of the authors, Aintzane, Aliki, Alys, Antonio, Argyro, John, Olympia and Sophia for having attended my call to contribute to the volume, their articles, their valuable cooperation and for having met the various deadlines. In addition, I must thank Clementine at Cambridge Scholars and her colleagues who were patient and helpful at every stage of the publication.
In recent years there has been a significant number of studies focusing on how speakers interpret and produce figurative language, the role and functions of figurative language in everyday human communication, the issues that figurative language poses for second language (L2) learners and the kind of instruction needed in order to make L2 figurative vocabulary teaching more feasible. The common feature shared by these studies is that figurative language is an important and integral aspect of a wide range of language activities. In other words, figurative language is not taken to be a deviation from standard communication, but reflects the many ways speakers organize, conceptualize and externalize their experiences. In terms of L2 instruction, it has been shown that figurative language is closely related to enhanced communicative competence in the target language and that a variety of teaching approaches address the issues raised by the multifaceted background of figurative language.

In light of the above, this volume has two aims. The first is to offer an overview of theoretical issues related to figurative language. The second aim is to offer tangible teaching tips and classroom interventions useful for L2 practitioners and material designers. Although we have tried to follow a middle course and not to adhere to a particular theory, many chapters reflect applications of Applied Cognitive Linguistics (ACL). ACL-driven teaching research has shown that ACL theoretical tenets and pedagogical techniques can lead to lexical precision and enhance long term retention of L2 figurative vocabulary. Thus, there is no claim that all existing theories and instructional methods are found in this volume.

This volume consists of ten chapters, ranging from theoretical considerations to L2 teaching practices. Galantomos opens this volume with an overview of first language (L1) and L2 figurative language. The next two chapters are authored by Liontas who argues that figurative language deserves much higher degree of attention than currently given. From this perspective, such attention must go well beyond the treatment figurative language currently enjoys in both curricula and research. It requires the systematic address of figurative language across the curriculum, from elementary school to university. In addition, Liontas introduces several idiomatics practices which can be applied to L2 figurative language instruction. In the next chapter, Galantomos addresses the role and place of
figurative language within Cognitive Linguistics. Tsaknaki explores the uses of humorous cartoons and figurative elements in the L2 classroom, whereas Jiménez-Muñoz examines the impact of the integration of several classroom approaches in an undergraduate bilingual-programme. Galantamos and Antomiadou assess the integration of figurative language in Greek as an L2 textbooks. The following chapter, authored by Skoufaki, evaluates two idiom teaching proposals within ACL and draws conclusions about the effectiveness of the two ACL proposals and their pedagogical applications. Williams and Doiz test the applicability of the blended methodology on the retention of 18 figurative expressions across three levels of linguistic difficulty from three different conceptual metaphors. Finally, Galantamos and Skourmalla introduce certain instructional steps, ideas/suggestions and processes in order to provide an effective and feasible way for teaching figurative language in a FL context. Additionally, they have developed activities to practice the teaching of emotions in Greek as an L2 context.

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CHAPTER ONE

L1 & L2 FIGURATIVE VOCABULARY: THE BASICS

IOANNIS GALANTOMOS

Introduction

“Figuration is not an escape from reality but constitutes the way we ordinarily understand ourselves and the world in which we live” (Gibbs, 1994: 454).

Figurative language is perhaps the most common aspect of creativity in everyday communication (Carter, 2004) and forms an integral part of ordinary language use, conveying dimensions of conventional knowledge and wisdom and social norms and practices found in every society (Gibbs & Beitel, 1995). Figurative language refers to speech where speakers usually mean something else than what they literally plan to say (Gibbs & Colston, 2012) and it is not a unified category but includes various figures, such as metaphors, idioms, irony, hyperbole and sarcasm (Cacciari & Padovani, 2012; Roberts & Kreuz, 1994). Gibbs (1994) argues that there is no single feature that is common to all figurative items. For example, metaphor involves the mapping of information between two conceptual domains, whereas irony consists of various forms of contrast (e.g. hyperbole and jocularity) (Gibbs, Wilson, & Bryant, 2012). Moreover, it has been shown that figurative language is ubiquitous in various texts and genres, such as academic discourse and performs key functions, such as evaluation judgements, agenda management, humor and topic change (e.g. Cameron, 2003; Semino, 2008).

The ability of understand and use figurative language comes with certain advantages, such as personal and professional success, successful social interaction (e.g. Thoma & Daum, 2006) and lexical precision (e.g. Hoang & Boers, 2018). For instance, successful idiom mastery has been associated with academic achievement (Nippold & Martin, 1989), whereas as poor
figurative language skills may contribute to the poor social performance of individual suffering from neurodegenerative diseases, such as schizophrenia (Mitchell & Crow, 2005).

The traditional view holds that figurative language is special to ordinary communication, is used mainly for artistic reasons, is distinct from anomaly, nonsense and literal usage, it can be easily paraphrased without meaning modifications and is based on/derived from literal language. Moreover, it is argued that children do not understand or use figurative language until the age of 11-12 years old and that there are figurative universals that are present across languages (Pollio, Smith, & Pollio, 1990). In particular, it is argued that:

1. Figurative language is special and does not occur in ordinary communication,
2. Figurative language is not useful in that it serves certain functions, such as deceit and artistic purposes,
3. Figurative language and literal use are psychologically distinct categories,
4. The paraphrase of figurative language equals to the same meaning,
5. Literal meaning is primary and therefore figurative language is dependent upon and stems from it,
6. Children understand and use figurative language at 11-12 years of age and
7. There are figurative universal features that appear across various languages, certain historical periods and cultural groups (Pollio, Smith, & Pollio, ibid.).

Despite the earlier peripheral role attributed to figurative language, it has been proven that figurative vocabulary is ubiquitous in ordinary communication. The pervasiveness of figurative language is shown in the estimates regarding the number of figurative expressions that are uttered by an average speaker on a daily basis. Hence, it has been found that a speaker produces approximately 4.7 million novel and 21.4 million conventional metaphors over a 60-year lifespan (Pollio, Barlow, Fine, & Pollio, 1977). Similarly, Glucksberg (1989) suggested that speakers use about six million figurative expressions per minute of discourse. The same pervasiveness is also evident in the language addressed to children. For instance, Nippold (1991) found that 6.7% of the sentences of the reading programs in the US primary schools exhibit an idiomatic expression. These findings led Jackendoff (1997) to argue that the proportion of fixed expressions and
single words are quite the same in a speaker’s mental lexicon. In the words of Winner “if people were limited to strictly literal language, communication would be severely curtailed, if not terminated” (1982: 253).

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that many aspects of real-life discourse are not based on abstract thinking (= figurative) as they are perpetual, iconic, indexical and so forth (Danesi, 1993). As a matter of fact, Danesi (2008) mentioned that there are many degrees of literalness and non-literalness and that the dichotomy of literal and non-literal meaning is a misleading one. Lakoff (1986) and Gibbs, Buchalter, Moise and Farrar (1993) claimed that the notion of literal has at least five different meanings:

1. Conventional literality: ordinary language which is contrasted to poetic language,
2. Subject-matter literality: certain expressions used to talk about a particular topic,
3. Nonmetaphorical literality: language in which a concept is never understood in terms of another concept,
4. Truth-conditional literality: language that is objectively either true or false,
5. Context-free literality: language whose literal meaning is not affected by the lack of any communicative situation.

With that said, Gibbs (1994) argues that there is no comprehensive definition and account of literal meaning. In addition, it has been shown that speakers manifest different intuitions about literality subject to what aspects of it are being emphasized (i.e. conventional literality, subject-matter literality and so forth) (Gibbs, 1994). As a result, Gibbs & Colston (2012) suggest that it is more accurate to distinguish between metaphoric vs non-metaphoric, idiomatic vs non-idiomatic and by extension figurative and non-figurative.

For Levorato (1993), figurative language exhibits three main features. These are the lack of compatibility between speaker’s meaning and utterance meaning, conventionality, and contextual dependence. The first characteristic refers to the discrepancy between a speaker’s used words and their communicative value. Conventionality has to do with the frequency of usage of a particular figurative expression and its salience in the speakers’ minds, which is particular to a language community. What is conventional and basic for L1 speakers, may not be salient at all, or to the same extent for L2 learners. Finally, the third feature of figurative language is its contextual dependence. Context is the necessary background for well receiving or not
with regard to the intended figurative meaning (Bromberek-Dyzman & Ewert, 2010).

**Figurative language development**

As said earlier, figurative language is pervasive in ordinary communication and we now know that figurative language comprehension and production is an integral aspect of children’s overall language development (Özçalışkan, 2010). Previous research has indicated that children begin to comprehend and use metaphors shortly after their first words (Billow, 1981). Moreover, their figurative competence is progressive as they get older (Özçalışkan, 2010), that is it continues to improve throughout schooling and adulthood (e.g. Asch & Nerlove, 1960; Gentner, 1988; Waggoner & Palermo, 1989). This developmental sequence is evident when comprehension is tested with activities that focus on verbal paraphrase of the metaphorical statement (Johnson, 1991).

With respect to these developmental changes in children’s ability to comprehend and produce figurative language, early pragmatic research on the development of figurative language comprehension assumed an initial literal interpretation which could lead to a figurative interpretation only if the literal analysis has failed (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1979). Researchers working within this theoretical framework postulated that metaphor understanding relies on children’s capacity to build analogies between the entities/domains of a metaphor based on perceived similarities, that is metaphor was seen as a set of mappings among feature-based similarities (e.g. Billow, 1981; Epstein & Gamlin, 1994; Vosniadou & Ortony, 1983). The major finding of these studies was that preschool children (~ age 4.0) were able to construct analogical links between the two entities of a metaphorical expression based on perceptual similarity (Gardner, 1974; Gentner, 1977). However, it was not until the ages 7 to 9 that children could be able to rephrase or understand efficiently the meanings of a metaphorical statement (e.g. Billow, 1975; Waggoner & Palermo, 1989).

Apart from these contributions that viewed metaphor as an implicit comparison between two domains, there is research focusing on the study of systematic analogical mappings between psychological features and physical sensations. This line of research suggested a three-stage developmental sequence starting from ages 3-6 (literal analysis only), to the onset of metaphorical comprehension (ages 7 to 10) which eventually led to a full mastery of both literal and metaphorical meanings, that is the ability to understand mappings involving cross-domain comparisons (ages 11 to 14) (Asch & Nerlove, 1960; Ciccone, Gardner, & Winner, 1981).
A radically different approach has been adopted by Özçalişkan (2005, 2007) and Stites and Özçalişkan (2013). These researchers introduced the cognitive linguistic approach\(^1\) to the study of children’s figurative language (and in particular metaphor) comprehension and production. Specifically, Özçalişkan (2005, 2007) and Stites and Özçalişkan (2013) examined various target domains (e.g. time, ideas and sickness) and two linguistic conditions (i.e. figurative and non-figurative). They found that early metaphor comprehension relies on a three-stage developmental pattern, at the age of 3, children cannot understand metaphors, at the age of 4, comprehension emerges as long contextual information (i.e. appearance of metaphors into stories) is provided and finally at age 5 where the verbal reasoning ability about metaphorical mappings is in place.

**L1 & L2 models of figurative vocabulary development**

Specific theories and models have been put forward to explain the comprehension and processing of first language (henceforth L1) and second language (henceforth L2) figurative language. These models mainly restrict figurative language to metaphor study, resulting in an incomplete picture of figurative language comprehension and use (Rundblad & Annaz, 2010) and focus on both children and adult use of metaphor.

**L1 models of figurative vocabulary development**

The various L1 models of figurative language processing that have appeared during the last decades focus either on the primary role of literal meaning or on the role of context (Gibbs & Colston, 2006). These theories and models are shown in FIGURE 1:

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\(^1\) Cognitive Linguistics emerged in opposition to the dominant theory in Linguistics, that is the Chomskyan Generative Grammar (Evans & Green, 2006). Cognitive Linguistics is a flexible framework, in that it is not a homogenous approach or a single theory of language but rather a collection of theories which share common features. Among these are the interrelation of language and human cognition, the notion of embodied mind and the role of metaphor and metonymy in conceptual structure (Lee, 2001). Under the cognitive linguistic approach, metaphor is a mapping between physical and abstract conceptual domains on the basis of bodily experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).
To start with, the Piagetian-based position views figurative language as one of the highest mental abilities subject to rich mental patterns and metaphor comprehension as a process in which a new joint category is created from the combination of the constituent elements (tenor: the 1st noun, vehicle: the 2nd noun, Richards, 1936) of a metaphorical utterance (Piaget, 1962). Bruner, Goodnow and Austin (1956) claimed that speakers construct three types of categories (i.e. disjunctive category, conjunctive category and relational category) on the basis of their cognitive development, world knowledge and their preference for selecting conceptually- or perceptually-based categories. A disjunctive category is the easiest to construct because the elements of the category share an alternative group of abstract attributes. A conjunctive category is more difficult to be constructed because its elements must share the suitable value of various abstract attributes. Finally, a relational category is the most difficult because the elements of the category must share various abstract attributes and share the suitable correspondences among the attributes.

Based on the Piagetian-based model of metaphor comprehension, Siltanen (1986) proposed a four-stage model. Stage 1 (5 years old) accounts for the understanding of easy metaphors in a story context by constructing perceptual disjunctive categories and requiring the identification of one perceptual ground. In Stage 2 (6-8 years old), children construct disjunctive and conjunctive categories by identifying one or more perceptual grounds.
In addition, children are able to understand easy metaphors in a story-based context by identifying various perceptual grounds. In Stage 3 (9-11 years old), children construct disjunctive, conjunctive and a few relational categories by identifying one or more perceptual grounds. In addition, children are able to understand easy and moderately difficult metaphors in a story-based context by identifying various perceptual and conceptual grounds. Lastly, in Stage 4 (12 years old and up), children are able to construct all categories and comprehend easy, moderately difficult and difficult metaphors in a story-based context because they have gained higher levels of word and world knowledge.

According to Gibbs (2001), the most famous model is the Pragmatic Model, related to Grice (1975, 1978) and Searle (1979). Alternatively, Clark and Lucy (1975) label this model as the Three-stage Model after the number of processes that are activated for reaching the appropriate and most suitable interpretation of the intended word or sentence. The Three-stage Model emerged as a response to findings demonstrating that metaphors take a longer time to be processed than literal language (Janus & Bever, 1985). Hence, speakers construct a mental representation of the literal meaning of a word or a sentence. Secondly, they test this literal meaning against the context to decide whether it is plausible and suitable or not. If this is the case, then the meaning is accepted. If not, it is rejected. Thirdly, if rejection occurs, a new interpretation of the literal meaning takes place.

The Direct Access Model holds that speakers do not take additional time to understand figurative meanings. On the contrary, they can grasp the meaning of several figurative utterances directly without the mediation of literal meanings only if this figurative vocabulary is presented in realistic communicative contexts (Gibbs, 1994).

Giora (1997) proposed the Graded Salience Hypothesis. According to this Model, highly salient meanings are automatically processed during the initial stages of figurative vocabulary comprehension. Familiar metaphor processing is claimed to activate both its literal and its metaphorical meanings. On the other hand, unfamiliar metaphor processing will only give rise to its literal meaning as this kind of meaning is taken to be the most salient.

Put forward by Frisson and Pickering (2001), the Underspecification Model holds that initially an interpretation that is compatible with a word’s figurative and non-figurative meaning will be activated. In other words, the initial meaning of any word is underspecified as to whether it is associated to its figurative or non-figurative meaning. The comprehension of a particular word will rely on the amount of context so as to prompt a particular (appropriate) meaning, that is, if the context is rich, the
comprehension process will be faster, whereas if the context is poor or neutral, the comprehension process will be slower.

The *Constraint Satisfaction Model* (Katz & Ferretti, 2001) suggests that speakers, when reading a text, should construct a meaning that best fits the available information rather than construct alternative interpretations. The most successful interpretation is the one that is more coherent on the basis of the intended communication. Under this perspective, the comprehension of a figurative expression entails various linguistic and non-linguistic cues which taken together should best fit to the intended meaning.

According to the *Space Structuring Model*, proposed by Coulson and Matlock (2001) and following *Conceptual Blending Theory* (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998), figurative language comprehension is based on complex correspondences among various spaces in conceptual integration networks. Hence, figurative language understanding involves the combination of conceptual structures, a claim that goes beyond the idea of a single mapping between the source domain and the target domain.

The *Career of Metaphor Theory*, developed by Gentner and Bowdle (2001) suggests that metaphorical correspondences between different concepts are feasible through comparison or categorization. In particular, this theory claims that conventional metaphors can be understood either by comparison or categorization, whereas novel metaphors can be comprehended only through comparison. Hence, the comprehension of metaphors demonstrated a shift, from categorization to comparisons on the basis of the degree of metaphor conventionality. Gibbs (2001) argues that the Career of Metaphor Theory is highly applicable to metaphors and raises questions whether it can be applied to other types of figurative language, such as metonymy or irony.

The *Literal Model* proposed by Chiappe and Kennedy (2001) holds that figurative language meanings are based on literal language. Under this perspective, classification mappings emerge when the topic and vehicle

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2 Conceptual Blending Theory was developed by Fauconnier and Turner (1996, 1998, 2002) as a general cognitive model for meaning-making and the emergence of novel concepts (Birdsell, 2014). Conceptual blends are cases where two input mental spaces (= conceptual regions containing specific kinds of information, Evans, 2007) contribute some conceptual cues to a blended space on the basis of a more generic space (Kövecses, 2006). For blending to be operational, four spaces are involved, two input spaces, a blended and a generic space (Kövecses, 2006).

3 Within the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003), the target domain is the abstract conceptual domain which is being understood by relying on conceptual knowledge of the more concrete source domain (Kövecses, 2002).
share many properties, whereas, similarity forms are developed when the properties are few. According to Chiappe and Kennedy (ibid.), figurative vocabulary seems to loosen the restrictions that come with the literal forms.

Espoused by Gernsbacher and Robertson (1999), the Suppression Model suggests that metaphor interpretation is based on the process of suppression, in that metaphor understanding suppresses the irrelevant attributes and enhances the most suitable ones.

With respect to metonymy comprehension and acquisition, little research has been published (Panther & Thornburg, 2007). The only notable study is the one by Nerlich, Clarke and Todd (1999) who found that from about 5 years there is a remarkable increase in metonymical production. Earlier than 5 years their findings are ambiguous in that it is not clear whether the few metonymies that appeared in their subject’s speech (at about 1 year) are based on contiguity relations or not. With reference to metonymy processing, Gibbs (1994) mentions two models, the Error Recovery Model and the Concurrent Processing Model. The first model holds that metonymic meaning is created only after the conventional meaning has been found not to be valid. Speakers start looking for alternative interpretations (i.e metonymic) after they have realized that sentences such as “The ham sandwich is getting impatient for his check” which is taken to violate Grice’s maxim of Truthfulness. On the other hand, the second model assumes that meaning creation and meaning processes operate at the same time in the determination of tropological meaning.

Apart from the above mentioned general L1 figurative language processing models, in the relevant literature there have been developed specific models which account for idiom acquisition and processing. These models fall under three categories, the noncompositional models (or alternatively direct look-up models, Glucksberg, 1993) (= idiomatic meaning is arbitrary, and its interpretation is based on idiom retrieval as a whole without any processing of the constituent elements. These models assume a separate mental lexicon for idioms other than the general word mental lexicon), the compositional models (= idiomatic meaning is based on both the literal meanings of the idiom elements and the specific interpretation of these elements within a given context) and the hybrid models that include elements of both compositional and noncompositional theories (Cieslicka, 2015; Libben & Titone, 2008). The noncompositional models are attractive, because they can solve the problem of how idioms are processed faster than comparable literal expressions (Ortony, Schallert, Reynolds, & Antos, 1978). Nevertheless, idioms are not just single words lacking the possibility of internal modifications (Gibbs, Nayak, & Cutting, 1989).
Chapter One

The major noncompositional models include the *Acquisition via Exposure Hypothesis*, the *Idiom List Hypothesis* and the *Lexical Representation Hypothesis*. On the other hand, significant compositional models are the *Global Elaboration Hypothesis*, the *Idiom Decomposition Model*, the *Configuration Model* and the *Figurative Competence Model*. The third class of theories is represented by the *Hybrid Model* or the *Constraint-Based Model*. These models are shown in FIGURE 2.

In particular, the *Acquisition via Exposure Hypothesis* (Ezell & Goldstein, 1991) holds that children acquire idioms in a rote manner by being exposed to idiomatic language in their everyday discourse environment. Thus, familiar idioms will have an advantage over less familiar idioms.

*Idiom List Hypothesis* (Bobrow & Bell, 1973) holds that idioms are retrieved as a whole from a special idiom lexicon that can be accessed through an *idiom mode* of processing. According to the Idiom List Hypothesis, a literal interpretation is always attempted on an idiom and then the idiom mode is activated. Hence, literal analysis is obligatory, in that if the literal meaning of an idiom is rejected only then will its figurative meaning be retrieved.

Lastly, the *Lexical Representation Hypothesis* (Swinney & Cutler, 1979) posits that there is not a particular idiom lexicon, but rather idioms are retrieved as long words from the mental lexicon in the same manner as any other word. Moreover, literal and figurative meanings are processed simultaneously.

The *Global Elaboration Hypothesis* (Levorato & Cacciari, 1992, 1995; Levorato, Nesi, & Cacciari, 2004) argues that there is no special procedure for idiom comprehension. The same strategies that are activated for every word, be it literal, metaphorical, ambiguous and so forth are applied to idioms as well. According to this Hypothesis, when children encounter an idiom in text, they demonstrate certain skills, such as the ability to hypothesize about the meaning starting from the single word to the sentence level, the ability to prompt a particular meaning from its various possible ones, the ability to put aside non suitable meanings and finally the ability to monitor their own text comprehension.

The *Idiom Decomposition Model* (Gibbs, Nayak, & Cutting, 1989) holds that speakers attempt to do some sort of compositional analysis when encountering idiomatic expressions. When an idiom is decomposable, speakers will assign independent meanings to its constituent elements, so as to construct the final/overall figurative meaning. Longer processing times for analyzing nondecomposable idioms confirm the fact that speakers normally perform a compositional analysis on these idioms, as part of
Figure 2: L1 Idiom processing models
figuring out their figurative meanings. In addition, the Idiom Decomposition Hypothesis does not comment on the probable activation of literal meanings of the constituent parts of an idiom during idiom processing. In other words, the analysis of each idiom element does not necessarily have to be a pure literal one.

The Configuration Model introduced by Cacciari and Tabossi (1988) holds that idioms are not listed separately from other words in the mental lexicon but rather their meaning is related to particular configurations of words that become available when sufficient contextual cues have made the configuration recognizable. The words that are members of the configuration are the same words that are accessed during comprehension of literal discourse. Hence, there is only one level of processing that is literal and sometime after the activation of the idiom key (= the exact recognition point of the idiomatic expression) the configuration emerges. At this point, the remaining elements of the idiom may not be processed in a literal manner.

The Figurative Competence Model proposed by Levorato and Cacciari (1995) aims at explaining the relationship between idiom acquisition and idiom processing and views the development of figurative competence as a sequential process exemplified in four (4) phases that qualitatively differ. During Phase 1 (up to 7 years old) children elaborate idioms piece-by-piece in a literal manner. During Phase 2, children are able to look for nonliteral interpretations based on their world knowledge and given a particular context. During Phase 3, children are able to focus on the intended, figurative meanings by considering features, such as the internal states of the speaker and his intentions. Finally, in Phase 4, the end point of idiom acquisition, children are able to produce idiomatic expressions as they have developed a full mastery of figurative language.

The Hybrid Model (Caillies & Butscher, 2007; Libben & Titone, 2008) holds that idiomatic expressions manifest both compositional and noncompositional behavior. In particular, idioms are noncompositional because they are stored as long words, that is they are represented as single entries and as a result they are retrieved directly from the mental lexicon. On the other hand, they are compositional, because they are represented as configurations (word strings) and the literal analysis of their constituent parts allows inferring the original motivation that lies behind their figurative meaning. Due to the inferential process required for the retrieval of the meaning of a configuration, decomposable idioms take longer to be processed than nondecomposable idioms that are stored as long words. Within the Hybrid Model, idiom comprehension is a dynamic process in that it can interact with many types of relevant information (= constraints), such as, familiarity, word frequency and literal plausibility so as to construct
the intended meaning (Libben & Titone, 2008). Therefore, idiom understanding requires that speakers consider various linguistic and nonlinguistic information that best fit together so as to make sense of the intended meaning. Constraints are present and provide probabilistic evidence in favor of various alternatives that seem to best fit. The meaning is constructed when one alternative is the most coherent and suitable interpretation of what speakers are communicating (Gibbs & Colston, 2012).

**L2 models of figurative vocabulary development**

Despite the abundance of L1 figurative language processing models, the opposite stands for L2 figurative language, where most of the proposed theoretical models explore the applicability of L1 models in a foreign language context (Türker, 2016). The following research lines have been identified:

- investigation of whether L2 learners comprehend figurative language literally or figuratively. Most findings support the literal processing over figurative interpretation (e.g. Abel, 2003; Cieslicka, 2010, 2013; Liontas, 2003),
- representation of figurative expressions in the L2 mental lexicon. Findings suggest various patterns dependent upon frequency, compositionality (or lack of it) or familiarity (e.g. Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Kecskes, 2000). There are studies pointing at L2 idiomatic expressions’ retrieval as a single word (e.g. Jiang & Nekrasova, 2007; Nelson, 1992) and others arguing that decomposability plays a role in the manner idioms are processed (e.g. Cieslicka, 2006).

Although there are not particular L2 figurative language processing models, research on the interaction of cross-language similarity and the role of context, on idiom decomposability and familiarity and on initial literal analysis gave rise to three L2 idiom processing models. These are the *Idiom Diffusion Model of Second Languages*, the *Model of Dual Idiom Representation* and the *Literal Salience Model* (Cieślicka, 2015). These models are shown in FIGURE 3:
More specifically, the Idiom Diffusion Model of Second Languages (Liontas, 2002, 2015) is a two-phase model. In the first phase, the prediction phase, the L2 learners form various hypotheses about the meaning of an L2 idiom’s figurative meaning. These hypotheses are subject to factors, such as idiom transparency, lack or presence of meaningful context and its semantic distance (and/or proximity) from the corresponding L1 counterpart. In the absence of contextual cues, the L2 learner will exclusively rely on the literal analysis of the idiom’s constituent elements. L2 idioms with identical L1 counterparts are the easiest to be understood and lack of context is not expected to influence their comprehension. L2 idioms with slightly different L1 counterparts will be cognitively demanding and their understanding will require the presence of some context. L2 idioms, with no equivalent L1 counterpart, will heavily rely on communicative optimal context. In the second phase, the confirmation or replacement, reconstructive phase, the L2 learner will verify, modify or reject the predictions formulated in the prediction phase by focusing on the most suitable contextual information and rejecting or modifying unlikely interpretations.

The Model of Dual Idiom Representation was first proposed by Titone and Conine (1994a, 1994b, 1999) and further developed by Abel (2003). This model builds on the notions of decomposability, frequency and familiarity and suggests that decomposable idioms have direct lexical entries of their constituent parts (constituent entries), whereas nondecomposable idioms have separate lexical entries in the mental lexicon (idiom entries). The more frequent an L2 idiom is, the more likely it is to construct its own lexical entry. Due to less exposure to an L2, L2 learners do not develop as many idiom entries as the native speakers of the target language. Thus, they have to proceed with the literal analysis of the subparts of an idiom.
Finally, Cieślicka (2006) proposed the Literal Salience Model in order to account for learning an L2 in a formal setting without exposure to the target language outside of the classroom. The basic argument of this model is that literal meanings of an L2 idiom are more salient than its overall figurative leaning. Salient meanings are those that are activated automatically and are most taken to be more basic regardless of contextual information. Given that L2 learners are learning the target language in a formal setting will be familiar with the literal meanings of the words they encounter and before they see those words in an idiomatic expression. Therefore, the literal meanings of those words will be more salient, and they will form stronger connections in their (i.e. learners’) mental lexicon. The more an L2 learner encounters the figurative meaning of an idiom, the less salient the literal meaning of this idiom will become. As a result, the salience status will be affected by familiarity and repeated use. However, in a formal setting without the opportunity for engagement in authentic L2 communicative instances, it is unlikely for a total shift in salience status to occur.

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise the comment by Gibbs and Colston (2006) that there may not be a single theory of L1 (and by extension L2) figurative language comprehension, processing and use because the reasons for using various figures and the mental mechanisms involved in understanding these figures are quite different making it difficult to categorize under a single umbrella every figure, be it metaphor, idioms or metonymy. In the same vein, Gibbs, Wilson and Bryant (2012) claim that there is no single mental process that accounts for the production and processing of all members of figurative language.

**L2 figurative vocabulary teaching**

Despite the advances in L2 vocabulary teaching (e.g. Carter, 2012; Gardner, 2013; Read, 2000; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020), figurative language has been given less attention in L2 instruction than it deserves (Lazar, 1996), although it is deemed to be an essential component of L2 communicative competence (Littlemore & Low, 2006a, 2006b). The marginal place of figurative language is reflected even in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (henceforth CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) where metaphor appears three times (2001: 35, 110, 186), whereas idioms appear nine times (2001: 27, 66, 71, 74, 77, 112X2, 122X2). Two points deserve our attention here, first the two out of three uses of metaphor are metalinguistic ones, whereas only once appears as part of lexical competence in a way restricting its role as a rhetoric device or a figure of speech (Gutiérrez Pérez, 2017). Second, idiomatic knowledge appears
mainly at C1 and C2 CEFR levels (and only one time at B1) following that at A2 and B2 levels this type of figurative language is not necessary.

Littlemore and Low (2006a) argue that L2 learners do not exhibit native speaker skills in the target language. As a matter of fact, research findings indicate that developing figurative competence in an L2 is a challenging task and a major stumbling block for L2 learners. While for native speakers, figurative language is used effortlessly and usually unconsciously, when it comes to L2 learners the situation becomes more challenging (Alexander, 1987; Boers, 2000; Cieślicka, 2015; Lazar, 1996). That is, figurative language causes additional difficulties to L2 learners in cultural-related settings and thus affects their *pragmalinguistic* and *sociopragmatic competence* (Bromberek-Dyzman & Ewert, 2010). It is worth mentioning that the tendency/ability to comprehend and produce metaphors in L1 is closely related to the same tendency/ability in the target language (Littlemore, 2010). Even though L2 learners have the advantage of resorting to background knowledge and experiences of other languages, when it comes to figurative language certain difficulties arise (Littlemore & Low, 2006a). For instance, L2 learners may be unaware of conventions guiding the use of figurative language in the appropriate communicative instances (Low, 1988). In addition, they may be unaware of the cultural background of many figurative language expressions (Littlemore & Low, 2006a) and may not have access to the way many figurative multiword items are structured (Bortfeld, 2003).

Despite the peripheral role attributed to figurative language, many scholars have pointed out its importance in L2 fluency (e.g. Boers, 2000; Cieślicka, 2015; Littlemore & Low, 2006a, 2006b; Low, 1988; Yorio, 1989). In the words of Danesi “the true sign of proficiency […] is the ability to metaphorize in the target language” (1986: 193). Therefore, an inability to use figurative language accurately subject to context is the major reason why L2 learners do not attain native-like fluency (Kecskes & Papp, 2000). To put it another way, in an L2 context the various functions performed by metaphor and related structures (such as idioms) cannot really be ignored (Danesi, 1986). In light of the above, various terms have been introduced in order to describe the different aspects of L2 figurative language mastery and bring L2 learners’ attention to it.

In particular, Levorato (1993) coined the notion of *figurative competence* in order to describe “the ability to deal with figurative language” (1993: 104). For Levorato and Cacciari (1992, 1995), figurative competence involves four main linguistic skills. Firstly, the ability to grasp the dominant, peripheral and polysemous meanings of a word and also the ability to perceive its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. Secondly, the
ability to go beyond a purely literal-referential strategy. Thirdly, the ability
to use contextual information in order to create new figures of speech, and
finally, the ability to understand the figurative uses of a linguistic structure.

In addition, Danesi (1986, 1992) introduced *metaphoric competence*
which is broadly defined as the ability to understand and produce metaphors
(Danesi, 1986, 1992). Low (1988) suggests that metaphoric competence is
the sum of certain skills/abilities which are subject to variation under
appropriate instruction. These skills are the following ones: First, the ability
to construct plausible meanings when a given utterance contains contradictions
and semantic anomalies. Second, the ability to understand the boundaries of
conventional metaphors or distinguish the creation of novel ones. Third, the
ability to combine acceptable entities in order to form comprehensible (new)
metaphors. Fourth, the ability to interpret the potential meaning of an
utterance, as a literal, metaphorical or both. Fifth, the ability to distinguish
sensitive cultural connotations behind certain metaphors. Sixth, the ability
to comprehend the various reference layers behind metaphors and finally,
the ability to relate language statements in a coherent manner that are not so
explicit.

For Littlemore (2001a), metaphoric competence consists of four
components. These are the ability to create new metaphors (originality in
metaphor production), the ability to find more than one accepted meaning
for a conventional and a novel metaphor and the ability to find meaning in
metaphor rapidly.

Cameron (1996) uses the term *metaphorical capacity* which includes
four skills. The first skill is related to the negotiation of the various metaphor
meanings by finding a resolution of incongruity. The second skill has to do
with the automatic access of stored metaphorical meanings. The third skill
is associated with the knowledge of whether metaphor use is appropriate
and effective or not. The last skill is linked to the goals achieved through
metaphor use.

dichotomy introduced, *idiomatic competence* and *performance* respectively.
Idiomatic competence refers to the ability to identify and comprehend
idioms accurately and appropriately in a wide range of contexts and includes
both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge, whereas idiomatic performance is
related to the actual use of the implicit competence, that is idiom production
in diverse communicative settings. In our view, idiomatic competence
includes not only the implicit knowledge of what is accurate and appropriate
idiomatic language behavior, but also the ability to produce both
conventional and authentic idioms. Just as with the place of metaphoric
competence in L2 pedagogy, Yorio (1989) claims that idiomaticity is
essential in L2 instruction and the proper use of idioms stands as an indicator of native-like proficiency.

Building on the above competencies, **metonymic competence** was coined as well. Unlike metaphors and idioms, metonymy is the less studied feature in L2 learning and teaching. Nevertheless, the ability to identify, comprehend and use metonymies in everyday communication is referred to as metonymic competence (Denroche, 2015).

Littlemore (2001b) based on Gardner’s (1983) *Multiple Intelligence theory* introduced a ninth kind of intelligence, namely **metaphoric intelligence**. Metaphoric intelligence is considered to be a specific skill and depends on two cognitive mechanisms, loose analogical reasoning and divergent thinking. Analogical reasoning refers to a speaker’s ability to grasp the meaning of new phenomena using background and similar knowledge. On the other hand, divergent thinking is related to the generation of many equally acceptable responses for a given problem subject to quantity, variety and originality of answers (Littlemore, 2001b). Regarding the benefits and advantages that metaphoric intelligence brings to L2 classroom, Littlemore (2001b) argues that it enriches language production in the target language and enhances comprehension of metaphors. Moreover, metaphoric intelligence is likely to affect the communication strategies adopted by an L2 learner, such as the metaphoric extension strategies.

Finally, and given the importance of figurative competence in a learner’s communicative ability, one could expect that this type of competence would be an integral component of the major models of communicative competence. However, only in Bachman’s (1990) model the ability to comprehend figures of speech is categorized under **sociolinguistic competence**. Nevertheless, Littlemore and Low (2006b) showed extensively that metaphoric competence plays a crucial role in all areas of communicative competence. Similarly, Liontas (2015) classified idiomatic competence under sociolinguistic competence, but there is no reason not to assume that, as with metaphoric competence, idiomatic competence is an integral aspect of all components of communicative language ability.

**Conclusions**

To sum up, figurative language is far from being a decorative feature of esthetic value. Rather it is important and pervasive in everyday communication and serves various functions, such as topic of humor management. Instead of sticking to traditional/standard dichotomies, such as **figurative vs literal language/meaning** and given the different meanings the notion of literality exhibits, it proves to be more fruitful and accurate the