

Published as: BATORÉO, Hanna Jakubowicz (2018). Metaphorical Competence in Multilingual Context of Language Acquisition and Learning. In: Psychology of Language and Communication Special issue: In Honor of Professor Barbara Bokus - Developmental Psycholinguistics: Old Questions, New Answers. Volume 22, Issue 2. De Gruyter. Sciendo. ISSN: 2083-8506. DOI: 10.2478/plc-2018-0024. <https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/plc/22/1/article-p534.xml?lang=en>

**Pre-print version.**

HANNA J. BATORÉO

Departamento de Humanidades, Universidade Aberta and  
CLUNL – Centro de Linguística da Universidade Nova, Lisboa, Portugal\*

## METAPHORICAL COMPETENCE IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING

It has been defended since Gibbs (1994) that in proper contexts people mostly use the metaphorical asset of a message rather than its literal meaning, which means that in a proper communicative context we express ourselves metaphorically and that metaphors are features of communicative interaction. In the present paper we discuss the notion of *metaphorical competence* (Aleshtar & Dowlatabadi 2014: 1895) in the process of multilingual acquisition and learning. This competence goes beyond other competences, such as communicative or linguistic, a speaker has to master when (s)he wants to speak a new non-native language. Thus, the importance of metaphorical competence implies that a speaker should not only be linguistically and communicatively appropriate but also *conceptually appropriate*. Based on previous studies by Sinha and Jansen (2004), Kövecses (2005), Palmer & Sharifian (2007), Gibbs & Colston (2012) and Sharifian (2015), among others, we defend that research in the area should be centred not exclusively on Language but on interaction in a triangle Cognition – Language – Culture. This interaction is *embodied*, which means the way we conceptualise the world is based on body and bodily experience mediated by culture, giving origin to physiological and/or cultural *embodiment*.

In this study we present research from different language backgrounds both from occidental cultures (giving examples from European Portuguese, English and Polish) and oriental ones (Mandarin Chinese). We centre our analysis on conceptualization of emotions (for instance, manifested in the case of emotional expression of feeling hungry) and moral values (such as courage). This implies both physiological and cultural *embodiment*, giving evidence of differences that can be observed in mapping of different organs – such as heart or gallbladder – in different cultures into different emotions and values (cf. Yu 2003, 2007, 2009; Batoréo 2017a, b & c). We defend that in a multilingual context conceptual appropriateness in metaphorical competence and metaphor awareness play a fundamental role in the acquisition of figurative language (cf. Doiz & Elizari 2013). Figurative language is understood to be (at least, partially) motivated, and thus object of (partially) insightful learning (cf. Boers 2001, Boers *et al.* 2004, 2007).

Key words: metaphorical competence, language acquisition and learning, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, (physiological and cultural) embodiment, figurative language, conceptual appropriateness, metaphor awareness, Chinese, English, Polish, Portuguese, multilingual context.

### Introduction

---

\* E-mail for correspondance: [Hanna.Batoreo@uab.pt](mailto:Hanna.Batoreo@uab.pt)

The starting point of our study is to answer the question: why is it important for a multilingual speaker to be conceptually appropriate while expressing emotions and values in different languages?

Traditionally the problem of appropriateness has been posed in Linguistics from the linguistic point of view only, especially in the context of idiomatic language, understood as arbitrary in nature and thus requiring blind memorization in the process of language learning. Nevertheless, the research developed in last thirty years in the field of Cognitive Linguistics shows that the scope of the background should not be merely linguistic but also focus on the area of Language, Cognition and Culture interaction. Based on studies by Sinha and Jansen (2004), Kövecses (2005), and Sharifian (2015), among others, we defend that interaction Cognition – Language – Culture is centred on the importance of body and *embodiment* in conceptualization, and is mediated by culture, emphasizing the role body and everyday experience have in shaping the mind and creating specific conceptualisations.

Studies of figurative language in the field (e.g. Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 1990 and 2005; Lakoff, 1987) have shown that figurative idioms are believed to be (at least partially) motivated. It is defended that although idiomatic meaning is not fully predictable its derivation from a literal sense can be explained by means of cognitive mechanisms (cf. Batoréo, 2017a), such as conceptual metaphors and metonymies, for example, creating a specific motivation in the process of learning. Boers (2001), Boers *et al.* (2004) and Boers *et al.* (2007) defend that associating an idiom with its etymology enhances retention, as the etymological information is likely to call up a mental image of a concrete scene which can then be stored in memory alongside the verbal form (Boers *et al.*, 2007: 43). According to Dual Coding Theory (Clark and Paivio, 1991), this mental image can subsequently provide an extra conceptual pathway for recalling.

Research dedicated to figurative language in Cognitive Linguistics (e. g., Gibbs 1994) postulate that in proper communicative contexts people mostly use the metaphorical asset of a message rather than its literal meaning. It means that in everyday common contexts we express ourselves metaphorically, making metaphors features of communicative interaction. At the same time L2 studies (Danesi, 1992, 1993, 1995; Doiz & Elizari, 2013) postulate that in order to make metaphors work we need to develop a special sort of competence – *metaphorical competence* – which requires becoming *conceptually fluent* and *conceptually appropriate* in a given language. If we function in a multilingual context, speaking various languages that represent different cultural backgrounds, it may result in a demanding and complex task of cognitive, linguistic and cultural character.

Taking into consideration the research referenced above, in the present paper we defend that:

- (i) appropriateness in language is to be taken not only in its linguistic dimension but also in the conceptual and cultural, in a *triangle Language – Cognition – Culture*, creating a complex multidisciplinary background for language acquisition and learning;

- (ii) *figurative language* – composed of (semi-)fixed linguistic expressions, such as idioms – is not completely arbitrary but, at least partially motivated by their original, literal usage, and can be object of insightful learning (for example by learning etymology of fixed expressions);
- (iii) *conceptual appropriateness* in *metaphorical competence* and *metaphor awareness* play a fundamental role in the acquisition of figurative language, especially if it is observed in a multilingual context;
- (iv) interaction in a triangle Cognition – Language – Culture is centred on the importance of body and everyday bodily experience and activities: *embodied* conceptualizations mediated by culture give origin to *physiological* and/or *cultural embodiment*.

Research in Cognitive Linguistics centred on the interaction in a triangle Cognition – Language – Culture defends conceptualisation of experience in *image schemas* (i. e., schematic versions of images). This means that images are representations of specific *embodied* experiences (Croft & Cruse, 2004: 44) and suggests that many concepts (such as those of emotion, for instance) are *embodied* with a basis in bodily experience because “[t]he kind of body we have and how it functions influence and shape what and how we mean (...)” (Yu, 2009: 178). It is also defended that physiological embodiment is rooted and anchored in culture (Sinha & Jansen, 2004; Palmer & Sharifian, 2007), whereas *embodied theories of cognition* in Cognitive Sciences postulate that our minds are embodied and shape the way we think and speak:

One of the most salient events in cognitive science in recent years is the rise of work on embodied cognition and language (Bergen, 2005; Gibbs, 2006a). Embodied theories of cognition emphasize the degree to which minds are embodied and how they are distributed across brains, bodies, and the world. Most of the empirical work on embodied thought and language has focused on the way bodies and ongoing bodily activity shape people’s thinking and speaking about concrete objects and events.” (Gibbs and Colston, 2012: 114).

The present study is divided in four sections: (i) introduction, (ii) metaphorical competence in language acquisition and learning, (iii) examples of embodiment, and (iv) discussion and final remarks. In order to illustrate the phenomena referred to in the introductory section, first we define the theoretical background of metaphorical competence in Language Acquisition and Learning, and then we present three groups of examples with different types of conceptualisation and embodiment (both physiological and cultural) observed in different languages and cultures. The exemplification comes from three languages embedded in so called occidental culture of Latin origin (English, European Portuguese and Polish) and one oriental language and culture (Mandarin Chinese). In example 1, we focus on the emotional aspects of speaking about hunger; in example 2, we present the emotional aspects of referring to a small time distance, and, in example 3, we discuss how courage can be embodied in different cultures and languages. Finally, we analyse how metaphorical competence is built up in the context of different languages and cultures in Language Acquisition and Learning and in what way it can make contribution to learning figurative language.

## **Metaphorical competence in Language Acquisition and Learning**

In the field of Language Acquisition and Learning there are various types of competences that a speaker of a language – a native or a non-native tongue – has to master. If, traditionally, linguistic competence was understood as the system of linguistic knowledge of native speakers of a given language, nowadays after decades of theoretical discussion, it is defended that a competent speaker of a language has to master not only different sorts of *linguistic competence* – as, for example phonological, syntactical, semantical, lexical, discursive and/or narrative – but (s)he has to be competent communicatively, which means (s)he is expected to show good *communicative competence*, in order not only to know the language but also to be able to use it in a correct and accurate way in a given context.

Nevertheless, if – as defended by Gibbs (1994) – we communicate using metaphors rather than literate language, having good linguistic and communicative competence may not be enough for a speaker to be an accurate and competent user of language. In this context metaphorical competence is required, going beyond other competences a speaker has to master when (s)he wants to speak a given language. *Metaphorical competence* is understood here as “the ability to comprehend and use metaphors in a given language as used in natural discourse” (Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi 2014: 1895). It implies that speakers should not only be linguistically and communicatively appropriate but also *conceptually appropriate*, learning how to express themselves in the target language, using figurative speech going with the culture. As stressed in last years’ literature in Second Language Acquisition (cf. Shirasi & Talebinezhad 2013; Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi 2014) this has been one of more prominent subject matters in the field, after having been called “a neglected dimension in the L2 Learning” by Danesi (1992) twenty years before (cf. Shirasi & Talebinezhad 2013: 136). According to Danesi (1992, 1993 and 1995) metaphorical competence requires *conceptual fluency* to describe “the ability of speakers to tap effectively into the cultural and linguistic reservoir of verbal images” (Shirasi & Talebinezhad 2013: 136). Thus being conceptually fluent in a language means “to know how that language contemplates or illustrates its concepts based on the metaphorical metaphors structuring” (Shirasi & Talebinezhad 2013: 136). Following these definitions, metaphorical competence is a sort of umbrella term to refer to an individual’s ability to comprehend and produce metaphors in natural discourse. As metaphors have entailments that organize our experience and create necessary realities, and require projecting or mapping one domain of human experience into another, this competence focuses on the ability to detect the similarity between disparate domains and to use one domain to talk about another. Metaphorical competence requires metaphor awareness and strategies for comprehending and creating new domains in order to express new experiences. In a multilingual context both conceptual appropriateness in metaphorical competence and metaphor awareness play a fundamental role in the process of acquisition of figurative language (cf. Doiz and Elizari 2013).

## Examples of embodiment

If we recognize that in everyday life it is “metaphors we live by” (following the title of the fundamental book in the area of Cognitive Linguistics, by Lakoff and Johnson) then it is important to understand how these metaphors are created for instance in the process of conceptualisation of emotions (such as sadness or joy) and values (such as sense of loyalty or courage). This process requires physiological and/or cultural *embodiment*, differing from culture to culture, and it is defended (Yu, 2007) that different cultures map different body organs – such as heart, gallbladder or liver – into different emotions (cf. Batoréo, 2015, 2017 a, b & c). This means for example that if, in English history, we have heroic leaders such as Braveheart or Richard the Lionheart, well-known for their courage/ bravery, in English (and in many other occidental languages) it is the heart that is considered the organ responsible for embodiment of courage, as shown also by the etymology of the word<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, there are languages and cultures in which the embodiment of courage is not in the heart but in a different organ (see example 3, below). This means that learning them implies understanding how these conceptualisations are constructed in order to make their learners become conceptually fluent and able to learn insightfully figurative expressions of a new language.

To illustrate the phenomena defined above we present three groups of examples with different types of conceptualisation and embodiment (physiological and/or cultural) in different languages and cultures. In example 1, we focus on the emotional aspects of speaking about hunger; in example 2, we present the emotional aspects of referring to a very small distance, and, in example 3, we discuss how courage can be embodied in different cultures and languages.

### Example 1: emotional expression of hunger in an everyday situation

In order to understand how metaphorical competence works in particular languages, let's look at an example of emotional expression of hunger in three different languages: English, (European) Portuguese and Polish.

(1)

Meaning (in a common, everyday situation): “I am starving and I need to eat as soon as possible”.

(1a) English: *I'm so hungry that I could eat an ox*

(1b) (European) Portuguese: *Tenho a barriga a dar horas'*

(lit.: “I am having my belly telling the time”/ “My belly is striking the hour” )

(1c) Polish: *Zjadłabym konia z kopytami*

(lit.: “I'm so hungry that I could eat a horse with its hooves)

---

<sup>1</sup> The root of the word courage is ‘*cor*’, the Latin word for heart. Courage originally meant “to speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” In: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage>

In examples in (1), if we want to say ‘*I am very hungry*’ in (European) Portuguese (1b), in everyday discourse we shall use a language specific metaphor and say ‘*tenho a barriga a dar horas*’ (lit.: “I am having my belly telling the time”, meaning “I am starving and I need to eat as soon as possible”). In an analogous situation in English (1a) we shall say: ‘*I’m so hungry that I could eat an ox*’, whereas in Polish (1c) the expression will be: ‘*Zjadłabym konia z kopytami*’ (lit.: “I’m so hungry that I could eat a horse with its hooves”). As the examples in (1) show, each of the languages exemplified here uses a different sort of metaphor to express in an emotional way the same concept of hunger and each uses a different sort of conceptualisation of the phenomenon and different embodiment (either physiological, cultural or both). In Portuguese (1b), the embodiment is physical, as there is an organ of a human body – the belly<sup>2</sup> – within which digestion is conceptualised. It does not mean that Portuguese bellies have built-in clocks (which might be a possible guess from a non-fluent, unprepared non-native speaker) but that they function according to a meal day schedule where meals are served at fixed hours. If the meal is not served, the belly is empty and makes physiological noise in order to remind its “host” the meal cannot be missed. In Portuguese, the physiological embodiment is anchored culturally in a strong meal-oriented day schedule of Portuguese society. The expression is opaque to a non-native speaker, as (s)he is not culturally aware of this cultural schema, which has to be consciously analysed with the explicit conceptual and cultural insight. On the other hand, in English (1a) and Polish (1c), the embodiment is cultural and it uses an emblematic figure of a big-sized animal relevant culturally in each country, an *ox* in England and a *horse* in Poland. This reference “measures” the hunger somebody is (introspectively) feeling, as its conceptualisation requires voracious eating of a big-sized animal. In the Polish case (1c), the horse is chosen with the reference being done with its hooves included in order to upgrade the scale of the emotion experienced. These two expressions (1a) and (1c) are probably not as opaque as the Portuguese idiomatic expression (1b) analysed above and function in semi-fixed constructions, which can probably make the process of learning easier than in the first case.

The three examples in (1) show that each of the referred languages has its one underlying conceptual system that emerges at the idiomatic level in figurative language. One language specific conceptual structure cannot be used in a different language, as shown by pseudo-English expressions “\*I am having my belly telling the time” or “\*I’m so hungry that I could eat a horse with its hooves”, linguistically built up with English syntax and lexicon but having no relevant meaning, as they illustrate lack of conceptual fluency and conceptual awareness specific to English. If you are a non-native speaker of English and you want to say in an everyday situation that you are starving you have to restructure conceptually and learn that your reference has to be made – culturally and linguistically – to an *ox*, in a specific English semi-fixed expression. It means that learning a new tongue involves conceptual restructuring (for instance, from an internal *belly clock* or a *horse with its hooves included* to a native *ox*) and implies transforming into a new cultural system:

---

<sup>2</sup> There is also an alternative an apparently less frequent expression in Portuguese ‘*Tenho o estômago a dar horas*’ (lit.: “I have my stomach telling the time”), in which hunger is conceptualised in stomach.

[O]ne's first language, together with its underlying conceptual structure, is acquired within one's own cultural system, but the learning of a second language involves conceptual restructuring. That is, second language acquisition takes place in the process of transforming into a new cultural system. (Yu, 2007: 78).

## Example 2: emotional expression of a small time distance in an everyday situation

Example (2) illustrates emotional expression of a very small distance in three different languages: English, (European) Portuguese, and Polish.

(2)

Meaning (in a common, everyday situation): "something happened narrowly, barely, as if nearly no time was included".

- |                             |                                     |           |                     |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| (2a) English:               | <i>By the skin of (one's) teeth</i> |           |                     |
| (2b) (European) Portuguese: | <i>Por um fio</i>                   | <i>or</i> | <i>Por um triz</i>  |
|                             | (lit.: "by a thread")               |           | (lit.: "by a hair") |
| (2c) Polish:                | <i>O włos</i>                       |           |                     |
|                             | (lit.: "by a hair")                 |           |                     |

The metaphor used in examples (2) is: BARELY ANY TIME IS HARDLY ANY SPACE understood as an instantiation of a broader metaphor TIME IS SPACE.

The English expression in (2a), '*by the skin of (one's) teeth*', is used to refer to a very small time distance in an emotional way, meaning that something happened narrowly or barely, usually indicating a narrow escape from a disaster. The expression is of biblical origin<sup>3</sup> and the image used here is the amount of thickness of the (imaginary) skin of one's teeth: as teeth don't have skin, the allusion is made to the teeth's surface, indicating that there is no thickness – meaning nearly no distance – to be referred to. This expression is often used to allude to something that almost didn't happen (such as, for instance, missing a meeting, missing a plane, passing at school with difficulties, escaping from disaster or accident), as illustrated in the following expressions<sup>4</sup> (2a) (i) to (iv):

(2a)

- (i) *My car wouldn't start this morning. I just made it here by the skin of my teeth!*
- (ii) *I got through calculus class by the skin of my teeth.*
- (iii) *I got to the airport a few minutes late and missed the plane by the skin of my teeth.*
- (iv) *Lloyd escaped from the burning building by the skin of his teeth.*

---

<sup>3</sup> The phrase first appears in English in the *Geneva Bible*, 1560, in Job 19:20, which provides a literal translation of the original Hebrew: "I haue escaped with the skinne of my tethe." In: <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/83000.html>.

<sup>4</sup> All the English usage examples (i) to (iv) are quoted according to: <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/by+the+skin+of+teeth>

The embodiment presented here is of cultural origin with its roots in the Bible but it can be anchored physiologically, indicating the imaginary “skin of our teeth” as the place of no real physical dimension.

On the other hand, neither in (European) Portuguese (2b) nor in Polish (2c) the biblical image used in English occurs; instead a “hair distance” with something happening (or not) “by a hair distance”<sup>5</sup> is indicated. Portuguese actually uses two parallel constructions with the same meaning: ‘*por um triz*’ (lit.: “by a hair distance”) and ‘*por um fio*’ (lit.: “by a thread distance”), whereas, the corresponding expression in Polish (2c) is ‘*o włos*’ (lit.: “by a hair distance”) or ‘*o mały włos*’ (lit.: “by a small hair distance”). In order to compare the usage of the English expressions (2a) with Portuguese<sup>6</sup> (2b) and Polish<sup>7</sup> (2c) in examples (i) to (iv) below:

(2b)

- (i) *Foi por um fio/ por um triz que cheguei cá.*
- (ii) *Fiz o seminário por um fio/ por um triz.*
- (iii) *Por um triz/ por um fio ela perdeu o avião.*
- (iv) *Por um triz/ por um fio ele escapou do incêndio/ atropelamento ao atravessar a rua.*

(2c)

- (i) *O mały włos, a nie przyjechałabym na czas.*
- (ii) *O mały włos nie zdalabym egzaminu.*
- (ii) *O mały włos uderzyłbym w drzewo, gdy na mój pas wjechał samochód jadący z naprzeciwka.*
- (iv) *Wydaje się, że w moim wieku śmierć jest o włos.*

Comparing the usage examples of the figurative expressions in the three languages in (2) we can observe some linguistic restrictions in the constructions of syntactic and semantic character that have to be discussed in a separate study<sup>8</sup>.

As for embodiment observed in the three languages in (2), both Polish (2c) and Portuguese (2b) use a ‘hair’ as a strategy for measuring a nearly-non-existing distance. At the same time both English (2a) and Portuguese (2b) use a ‘thread’ as the same sort of strategy. It is curious to observe that a hair is the thinnest part of the body imaginable, corresponding to a thread in the body-external world. In the first case, we have a physiological embodiment, centred on a body organ, whereas in the second case we have a cultural embodiment, referring to a traditional everyday human bodily activity, such as weaving and producing textiles.

---

<sup>5</sup> The word used in the Portuguese expression ‘*por um triz*’ comes from Ancient Greek θρίξ [thríx], τριχός [trikhós] meaning hair and is not productive in Portuguese any more (Portuguese uses instead ‘*pelo*’ ou ‘*cabelo*’). The etymology is proposed by José Pedro Machado, but it is referred to as controversial. In: <https://pt.wiktionary.org/wiki/triz>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. <https://www.significados.com.br/por-um-triz/>; <http://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/por+um+fio/>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/o%20w%C5%82os.html>; <https://sjp.pwn.pl/poradnia/haslo/Smierc-jest-o-wlos;16627.html>

<sup>8</sup> It seems that in the constructions we discuss here speakers of English prefer to refer to something that was managed to be done, whereas speakers of Polish refer to something that was not managed to be done, using a hypothetical construction to express it. These restrictions though require a special and more thorough comparison of language usage based on data from linguistic corpora in a separate study.

It is interesting to notice that English has also an analogous expression to those observed in Polish and Portuguese: ‘*hanging by a thread*’<sup>9</sup>, as in: ‘*his life is hanging by a thread*’ (Port. ‘*a vida dele está por um fio*’, Pol. ‘*jest o włos od śmierci/ jego życie wisi na włosku*). All of them are idiomatic or fixed in character and show greater formal semantic and syntactic restrictions than expressions presented in (2). The image used here and the cultural embodiment are the same in the three languages analysed with their roots in history and culture of Ancient Greece. It is said<sup>10</sup> to derive from a banquet held by King Dionysius for Damocles, a courtier of ancient Syracuse, where Damocles was seated under a sword suspended by a single hair, which symbolized his tenuous position in the court. In this way both the sword and Damocles’ life were said to be hanging by a thread: both in a literary and in a figurative meaning.

### **Example 3: expression of courage in different cultures**

In the subsection of example (3), we are going to focus our study on the expression of courage in different cultures, taking into consideration the differences observed on one hand in broadly speaking occidental languages of Latin cultural influence and, on the other, in the Chinese culture and language. We use the word *courage* here in a very broad sense to cover a large spectrum of meanings also represented in English by such words, for example, as *boldness*, *bravery* or *daring*.<sup>11</sup>

As referred above in the introduction to the section of examples, English and many other occidental languages with strong Latin cultural roots consider courage to be housed in the heart, the organ responsible for its embodiment. It can be observed in the etymology<sup>12</sup> of the word ‘*courage*’ in English as well as in its counterparts in the Romance languages (as Portuguese ‘*coragem*’, for instance) and in many expressions, such as names of brave historical leaders *Braveheart* or *Richard the Lionheart*. In the occidental culture the heart is not only the place where courage originates but also where all the emotions are placed, as observed in the expressions: ‘*you are braking my heart*’, ‘*sick at heart*’, ‘*sing/speak/pour/cry one’s heart out*’, ‘*heart breaking news*’, ‘*heartbroken person*’, ‘*from the bottom of my heart*’, etc.

No matter what our cultural origins are, if we learn a new language from a different culture we have to take into consideration that the embodiment observed in it can be totally different from the one we know from our native tongue and are inclined to take for granted. As body organs can be conceptualised in different ways in different languages, the process originates different embodiments and it is important in the process of language learning in order to create conceptual fluency in a new tongue and make the speakers become metaphorically aware and competent.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. <https://www.englishexperts.com.br/forum/como-dizer-estar-por-um-fio-em-ingles-t7340.html>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. [http://www.grammar-monster.com/sayings\\_proverbs/hanging\\_by\\_a\\_thread.htm](http://www.grammar-monster.com/sayings_proverbs/hanging_by_a_thread.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. “I am aware that words of this kind could be language-specific and should be used with caution in analyzing one language using a different language (see e.g., Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1994; Wierzbicka, 1992, 1999).” (Yu, 2003: 15-16).

<sup>12</sup> The root of the word ‘*courage*’ is ‘*cor*’, the Latin word for heart. See footnote 1, above.

The examples presented in (3) focus the emotional expression of courage first in Chinese (3a) and then are illustrated by three languages coming from occidental cultures of Latin origin analysed in previous examples (3b).

If we are a non-native speaker of Chinese, it is important to understand that Chinese culture is strongly determined by the traditional Chinese medicine and philosophy. According to Yu (2007: 70), in Chinese medicine, the internal organs of the human body are divided into two major classes: one, called *zang* (脏), of primary importance, and yin in character, and the second one, called *fu* (腑), of secondary importance, and yang. The five primary organs *zang* are liver, heart, spleen, lung, and kidney, and each of them is matched with a secondary organ *fu* respectively, gallbladder, small intestine, stomach, large intestine, and bladder. There are also extra *fu* organs that refer to the three visceral cavities housing the internal organs. Yu stresses (2003: 18) that the heart and the gallbladder hold a special relation between them. Whereas the heart is the organ of emperor, ruling all psychological and mental activities, it is the gallbladder, considered the emperor's minister, the organ of justice that makes judgments and decisions, guided by the heart. As the primary and the secondary organs are closely related, the disease of the gallbladder, for example, will affect the functions of the heart. For instance, if the vital energy *qi* of gallbladder rises to trouble the heart, the patient will display unusual states of emotion:

If the *qi* in both the heart and the gallbladder is “weak” or “vacuous” (*xu*), the patient may feel scared for no or any reason, and be laden with misgivings. If “the emperor (i.e., the heart) and the prime minister (i.e., the gallbladder) help each other, they will together promote vitality and preserve life” (Wang et al., 1997, p. 759). (Yu, 2003: 18).

Given the specific philosophical and medicinal roots of Chinese culture, Yu (2003:16) postulates the existence of two Chinese metaphors *GALLBLADDER IS CONTAINER OF COURAGE* and *COURAGE IS QI (GASEOUS VITAL ENERGY) IN GALLBLADDER* that explain the specificity of Chinese physiological and cultural embodiment that underlies the figurative language in expression of bravery. Examples<sup>13</sup> (3a) (i) to (vii) illustrate both these metaphors:

(3a) Expression of courage in Chinese

- (i) *Wu-dan zhi ren shishi nan.*  
(without-gall MOD people everything difficult)

*“Everything appears difficult to people without gallbladder.”*

Meaning: those who are not brave (i.e., do not have gallbladder) consider everything difficult

- (ii) *hun-shen shi-dan*  
(whole-body is-gall)

*“be every inch a hero; be the embodiment of value”*

---

<sup>13</sup> All the Chinese examples in this section follow Yu (2003: 15). In the glosa line, the gallbladder is referred in its short form ‘gall’.

Meaning: if you consider every inch of your body a gallbladder you are embodiment of courage

- (iii) *qige-tou bage-dan*  
(seven-heads eight-galls)

“extremely bold and not afraid of death”

Meaning: If you feel like having eight gallbladders you are extremely brave

- (iv) *gu-dan yingxiong*  
(single-gall hero)

“a lone fighter”

Meaning: having only one gallbladder makes you a lonely fighter

- (v) *qun-wei qun-dan*  
(crowd-might crowd-gall)

“(display) mass heroism and daring”

Meaning: mass gallbladders make you powerful and daring

- (vi) *Hao da de danzi!*  
(how big MOD gall)  
(lit.: How big your gallbladder is!)”

“What a nerve!”

Meaning: the size of your gallbladder guarantees your bravery

- (vii). *Ni da-zhe-danzi qu, bu-yao pa.*  
(you big-PRT-gall go don't-be afraid)  
(lit. Go ahead with your gallbladder big)

“Go right ahead and don't be afraid.”

Meaning: if your gallbladder has the right size (is big) you can show your courageous acts

All the examples (3a) (i) to (vii) illustrate the central role the gallbladder plays in housing courage in Chinese culture. The image created by the embodiment – both physiological and cultural – implies that you can be seen as a brave person only if you are considered to have a gallbladder; the (imaginary) lack of this organ means lack of courage, whereas its (imaginary) size (i. e. being big or not) determines the scale of your bravery. This means that the dimension of the value is determined by the organ itself, its size, as well as the number of gallbladders you can count on: the bigger the imaginary number of organs the higher the effectiveness and visibility of your courage, determining the final result of your brave and daring performance.

The sort of embodiment observed in Chinese culture determines the figurative language used by its speakers. If you are a non-native speaker of Chinese you need to restructure conceptually, in order to refer to the gallbladder native speakers adopt a new conceptualisation, and transit into a new cultural system. Without the insight of how the

gallbladder houses courage for a Chinese speaker it is not possible to express emotions in Chinese, understand or speak the language with competence. For an occidental non-native speaker, the role the gallbladder plays in Chinese imagery may seem strange because in occidental cultures and languages it is not common<sup>14</sup> to refer the organ in everyday language or to have it referred to metaphorically, probably due to the taboo restrictions (varying from culture to culture) in referring to some internal human organs.

Taking into consideration some exemplification from occidental languages in (3b), it is interesting to observe what internal organs they conceptualise as housing courage. The examples in (3b) are expressions<sup>15</sup> illustrating the embodiment of courage (and power) in English, Portuguese and Polish, and come from very informal speech and/or slang.

(3b) Expression of courage in some occidental languages (examples)

(i) English *Have the guts*

e. g. *Does he have the guts to dive off the highboard?*

*Have the balls*

e. g. *You don't even have the balls to ask for a girl's number.*

(ii) Portuguese *Ter tomates*

(Lit.: “have tomatoes?”)

e. g. *É preciso ter tomates para falar com um almirante desta maneira!*

(iii) Polish *Miec jaja*

(Lit.: “have eggs”)

e. g. *Co to znaczy mieć jaja, czyli rzecz o męskiej odwadze.*

In (3b), the general informal reference is made either to the internal organs as ‘guts’, in English, or to testicles in all three of the languages taken into consideration, conceptualised either as *balls* (in English, and in Portuguese interjections) or *eggs*<sup>16</sup> (in Polish) or even *tomatoes* (in Portuguese), as symbol of (sexual) power. Sometimes the use of ‘stomach’ is found instead of ‘guts’ but it is considered obsolete<sup>17</sup>.

The insightful analysis we presented here of how courage is conceptualised in different languages coming from different cultures and how different embodiments are

<sup>14</sup> To provide some examples, we consulted some sites of figurative expressions referring gallbladder in English, Polish and Portuguese but no figurative expressions were found.

<sup>15</sup> The examples follow the sites: for English <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/have-the-guts>, for Portuguese <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=have%20the%20ball>, and for Polish <http://www.szkolajcostwa.pl/artykuly/meska-odwaga/>

<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to refer that in Polish *having eggs* refers both to males and females, whereas in other languages in which the same expression occurs it can have gender restrictions. Spanish, for instance, uses the same reference in the expression ‘*tener huevos*’ but it can be used in reference to males only, whereas in the case of females the expression ‘*tener ovarios*’ (“have ovaries”) is used in this sense (personal communication).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/have-the-guts> The same restricted usage is found in Portuguese for ‘*ter estômago*’ (“have a stomach”) in the sense of to be daring, to be able to stand up for something: <http://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/ter%20est%C3%B4mago/>

built up in each one gives important clues from the area of Language Acquisition and Learning. If, on the one hand, you come from Chinese Culture and you want to speak an occidental language, or, on the other hand, if you are an occidental non-native speaker of Chinese, you have to understand that knowing the everyday usage of a new language implies knowing the type of embodiment it uses to refer to courage (or any other value) and learning it in language-in-usage using figurative expressions. This cultural switch may imply crossing barriers of taboos such as referring to some body organs that we are not used to referring to in our native language but that make part of the cultural imagery of metaphorical competence of a new tongue we are learning.

## **Discussion and final remarks**

In the present paper we defend that the process of language acquisition and learning is not only about linguistic appropriateness, as the research in the area has defended for decades. We understand that in order to use a language – being it native or not – it is not enough to be linguistically and communicatively competent, constructing syntactically and semantically correct discourse in communicatively appropriate situations, working on competences at both linguistic level (such as phonological, syntactic, semantic, discursive, narrative, and so on) and communicative one. Taking into consideration all the research developed in the area of Cognitive Linguistics in the last decades, and especially Gibbs' (1994) postulate that in everyday speech we use figurative language metaphorically grounded, we defend the speaker of a language must be competent not only linguistically and communicatively but also conceptually and culturally. This perspective switches the focus of the research in the area from the Language itself to the triangle Language – Cognition – Culture, creating a complex multidisciplinary background to the respective research. It also focuses on metaphorical competence, as one of the basic competences to be developed in the process of language acquisition and learning.

In order to illustrate the phenomena referred to globally in the introduction to the study we presented three groups of examples with different types of conceptualisation and embodiment – both physiological and cultural – observed in different languages and cultures. Broadly speaking, the exemplification came from two different cultures: the occidental, of Latin origin, and the oriental anchored in Chinese culture. The exemplification of embodiment came from English, European Portuguese, Polish and Mandarin Chinese. First we focused on the emotional aspects of speaking about hunger and on emotional aspects of referring to a small time distance in the case of the three European languages taken into consideration. Then we illustrated the embodiment of courage first in Chinese, showing how it was rooted in Chinese philosophy and medicine, and then comparing it to different types of embodiment observed in occidental cultures we focused upon.

In the exemplification of cultures and languages we provided, we intended to show how important it is to be metaphorically competent in order to use metaphoric conceptualisations that a given language requires for rooting its figurative language, given that different languages map different organs into emotions and values. It was shown, for

instance, in example (3), that somebody is considered courageous in China if his gallbladder is conceptualised as being visible in size, strength and in (imaginary) number; on the contrary, when you are not brave you are considered to lack this organ. This cultural reference to the gallbladder may seem unusual to a speaker of a different culture, as many internal organs (such as those of the digestive system, for example) may not be naturally referred to and subject to special taboo restrictions. On the other hand, we observe that speakers of occidental culture in the same context and in their everyday language make reference to sexual organs, and this strategy may be considered strange or unacceptable by members of other cultures and considered a taboo.

It is interesting to observe that in the case of the same culture broadly referred to as having the same historic roots, as is the case of the Latin culture in Europe, it does not necessarily mean that the conceptualisation is made and the embodiment is built up and in the same way by many different languages of the same culture. In the case of the courage example (3), we can observe that all the languages studied and illustrating the phenomenon embodied courage in the same organ, i. e., testicles, relating it with the sexual power of an individual. In an analogous way to what was previously shown in the case of gallbladder in Chinese, the speakers of these tongues refer to somebody who is not brave as a person with no testicles. Although the embodiment of testicles works for the three languages exemplified, each of them instantiates this embodiment in a different euphemistic way used for the taboo reference: *balls*, in English (and partly in Portuguese), *eggs* in Polish, and *tomatoes* in Portuguese. The same phenomenon is observed in the types of embodiment studied in example (2). Although there may exist the same sort of cultural embodiment in all the three languages studied here (as observed priorly in the case of an ancient reference to Damocles' sword), the specific linguistic expression differs from language to language, showing some linguistic restriction that have to be mastered if metaphorical competence is expected. In some cases, different languages may use an analogous reference to the same type of activity but its instantiation again is determined both culturally and linguistically. It can be observed, for instance, in example 1, where speakers of both English and Polish refer emotionally to the state of being very hungry as if they wanted to eat up voraciously a big sized animal. Nevertheless, in each case the choice of the animal used in the image is different: the English prefer an *ox*, whereas the Polish prefer a *horse* (with its hooves included).

As the examples show in our study, the figurative language used for the expression of emotions or values and composed of (semi-)fixed linguistic expressions, such as idioms, is neither completely opaque nor arbitrary but, at least, partially motivated by their original, literal usage, and can be the object of insightful learning, for example by learning the etymology of figurative expressions or history of cultural references in which they are rooted. In a multilingual context *conceptual appropriateness* in *metaphorical competence* and *metaphor awareness* play a fundamental role in the acquisition of figurative language. The interaction Cognition – Language – Culture is centred on the importance of body and every day activities, i. e., *embodiment* in conceptualization, and is mediated by culture.

To sum up, if you are a non-native speaker of English coming from a different culture, even if broadly speaking you belong to the same global culture of the same Latin

origins, in order to refer in an everyday situation either that you are starving, or you nearly missed a train or even you admire brave attitudes and heroes, you have to restructure conceptually and learn that your reference has to be made – both culturally and linguistically – for instance to *the skin of your teeth*, to *eating voraciously an ox* or to *having balls*, in a specific English figurative expression. It means that learning a new tongue involves conceptual restructuring – for instance, from the *internal clock* or a *horse with its hooves included* to a native English *ox* – and implies transforming into a new cultural system, with courage housed either in gallbladder or in testicles, sometimes crossing boundaries of your native linguistic and cultural taboos. Or, as Yu (2007) puts it metaphorically, you have to switch conceptually from travelling by day to travelling by night:

As language is embedded in culture (Palmer and Sharifian, [2007]), cultural context is the “physical environment” in which language acquisition takes place. However, first language acquisition and second language acquisition are very different. First language acquisition is “traveling by day”, whereas second language acquisition is “traveling by night”. That is, second language learners have to “feel their way in the dark”. Introducing the cultural context to second language learners is to “set up street lights and road signs” for them so that they can “see” where they are going and “go faster”. (Yu, 2007: 83).

**Acknowledgments:** We would like to thank Margarida Martins for the discussion of the last English version of the paper with us.

## References

- Aleshtar, M. T. and Dowlatabadi, H. (2014). Metaforic Competence and Language Proficiency in the Same Boat. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 98 (2014) 1895-1904.
- Batoréo, H. (2015). Competência metafórica e Linguística Cultural: Exemplo de conceptualização de emoções em Chinês e na cultura ocidental (Metaphorical competence and Cultural Linguistics: examples of conceptualizing emotions in Chinese and occidental cultures). *Revista Investigações*, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, v. 28, n. 2, Jul. 2015. 1-28.  
<http://www.repositorios.ufpe.br/revistas/index.php/INV/article/view/1695/1421>
- Batoréo, H. (2017a). On Ironic Puns in Portuguese Authentic Oral Data. In. A. Athanasiadou & Colston, H. (eds.). *Irony in Language Use and Communication*. John Benjamins.
- Batoréo, H. (2017b). Metaphorical Competence in Multilingual Context of Language Acquisition and Learning. Ms. Presented at: ICMME 2017 - *International Conference on Multilingualism and Multilingual Education*, University of Minho, Braga, 11-13 May 2017.
- Batoréo, H. (2017c). Metaphorical Competence and Cultural Linguistics: Why is it important for a multilingual speaker to be conceptually appropriate while expressing emotions in different languages? Ms. Presented at: *Rhetoric Discourse and the Communicative-Dialogical Mind*, Lisbon, Faculdade de Letras da Uiniversidade de Lisboa, 7-9 June, 2017.
- Boers, F. (2001). Remembering figurative idioms by hypothesising about their origin. *Prospect*, 16(3), 5–43.

- Boers, F., Demecheleer, M., & Eyckmans, J. (2004). Etymological elaboration as a strategy for learning idioms. In P. Bogaards & B. Laufer (Eds.), *Vocabulary in a Second Language* (pp. 53–77). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Boers, F., Eyckmans, J., & Stengers, H. (2007). Presenting figurative idioms with a touch of etymology: more than mere mnemonics? *Language Teaching Research*, 11(1), 43–62.
- Clark, J. M. and Paivio, A. 1991: Dual coding theory and education. *Educational Psychology Review* 3: 233–62.
- Croft, W. & Cruise, D. A. (2004). *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dancyngier, B. & Sweetser, E. (2015). *Figurative Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Danesi, M. (1992). Metaphorical competence in second language acquisition and second language teaching: The neglected dimension. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.), Georgetown University round table on languages and linguistics (pp. 125-136). Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Danesi, M. (1993). Metaphorical competence in second language acquisition and second language teaching: The neglected dimension. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.), *Language, Communication and Social Meaning* (pp. 489–500). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Danesi, M. (1995). Learning and teaching languages: the role of conceptual fluency. *Applied Linguistics*5(1), 3-20.
- Doiz, A. and Elizari, C. (2013). Metaphoric competence and the acquisition of figurative vocabular in foreign language. *ELIA – Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada*, 13, 2013, 47-82.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative language, thought and understanding*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, R. W. (ed.) (2008). *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, R. W., & Colston, H. (2012). *Interpreting Figurative Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kövecses, Z. (1990). *Emotion Concepts*. Springer-Verlag.
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ots, T. (1990). The angry liver, the anxious heart and the melancholy spleen. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 14 (1). 21–58.
- Palmer, G. & Sharifian, F. (2007). Applied Cultural Linguistics: An emerging paradigm”. In: Sharifian, F. & Palmer, G. (eds.). (2007). *Applied Cultural Linguistics: Implications for Second Language Learning and Intercultural Communication*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia : John Benjamins, 1-14.
- Sharifian, F. (2011). *Cultural Linguistics*. Inaugural Professorial Lecture, Professor Farzad Sharafian, School of Language, Cultures, and Linguistics, Language and Society Centre, Monash University.  
[http://monash.academia.edu/ProfessorFarzadSharifian/Papers/611702/Cultural\\_Linguistics\\_Farzad\\_Sharifians\\_Inaugural\\_Professorial\\_Lecture](http://monash.academia.edu/ProfessorFarzadSharifian/Papers/611702/Cultural_Linguistics_Farzad_Sharifians_Inaugural_Professorial_Lecture)
- Sharifian, F. (2015). Cultural Linguistics. In F. Sharifan (ed.) (2015). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture*. Oxford: Routledge. 473-493.

- Sharifian, F. and G. B. Palmer, (eds.). (2007). *Applied cultural linguistics: Implications for second language learning and intercultural communication*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Sharifian, F.; R. Dirven, N. Yu & S. Niemeier, S. (eds.). (2008). *Culture, body, and language: Conceptualizations of internal body organs across cultures and languages*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 45-74.
- Shirazi, M. G. and M. R. Talebinezhad (2013). Developing Intermediate EFL Learners Metaphorical Competence through Exposure. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Jan. 2014, Vol. 3, N° 1, 135-141.
- Sinha, Ch. and Kristine Jensen de López (2004). Language, Culture and the Embodiment of Spatial Cognition, *Cognitive Linguistics* (2000) 11: 17-41.
- Yu, N. (1995). Metaphorical Expressions of Anger and Happiness in English and Chinese. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 10 (2). 59–92.
- Yu, N. (1998). *The contemporary theory of metaphor: a perspective from Chinese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Yu, N. (2003). Metaphor, Body, and Culture: The Chinese Understanding of Gallbladder and Courage. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 18 (1), 13–31.
- Yu, N. (2007). The Chinese conceptualization of the heart and its cultural context. Implications for second language learning. In F. Sharifian & G. B. Palmer (Eds.), *Applied cultural linguistics: Implications for second language learning and intercultural communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 65-86.
- Yu, N. (2008a) Metaphor from Body and Culture. In R. W. Gibbs, Jr. (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. 247-261. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yu, N. (2008b). The Chinese heart as the central faculty of cognition. In F. Sharifian, R. Dirven, N. Yu & S. Niemeier (Eds.), *Culture, body, and language: Conceptualizations of internal body organs across cultures and languages*. 131-168. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter
- Yu, N. (2009). *From Body to Meaning in Culture*. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Extra references: Websites with linguistic expressions:

English

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage>

<https://www.englishexperts.com.br/forum/como-dizer-estar-por-um-fio-em-ingles-t7340.html>

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/have-the-guts>

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/83000.html>

<https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/by+the+skin+of+teeth>

Portuguese

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=have%20the%20ball>,

<https://pt.wiktionary.org/wiki/triz>.

<http://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/ter%20est%C3%B4mago/>

<http://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/por+um+fio/>

<https://www.significados.com.br/por-um-triz/>

Polish

<http://www.szkołajcostwa.pl/artykuly/meska-odwaga/>

<http://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/o%20w%C5%82os.html>;

<https://sjp.pwn.pl/poradnia/haslo/Smierc-jest-o-wlos;16627.html>