

## METAPHOR AND MEANING: ANALYSING METAPHOR USE IN THE CREATIVE WORK OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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*This article explores the significance of metaphors in the creative work of second language learners of English. Metaphor, as viewed in this article, is not only a poetic device or a literary tool, but is recognised as a crucial part of our everyday thinking and meaning making. Essay writing is a genre of discourse that lends itself to sharing thoughts and reflecting on life and important issues. Teaching and assessment practices in creative writing are studied against the background of the apparent difficulty learners experience with English as their second language. The article argues that recognition should be given to the particular ways in which learners are able to express themselves and to create meaning in a second language by means of metaphor. An analysis was undertaken of the metaphors created by learners in their second language as an expression of their life worlds. The implications for teaching and assessment of learners' creative writing work suggest a move away from reading only for errors towards recognising learners' ability to create meaning.*

Key words: Metaphor analysis; creative writing; life world; second language; assessment; 'otherness'

### INTRODUCTION

'That key of success hepening in our life' is a metaphor from an essay script that echoes the contrast between youthful optimism and the obstacle of language relating to second language (L2) writing in a *key of success* metaphor about the life of South African Grade 12 learners who speak an African language at home. The metaphor quoted above is different from the well-known *education is the key to success*. In a country where English is the home or first language (L1) of 9.6% of its citizens (Statistics South Africa, 2011), the majority of learners continue to struggle with mastering English. Essay excerpts below indicate this struggle. This is not limited to the subject English, but extends to all subjects since competence in English supports scholastic success.

In this study a constructive approach is followed that focuses on learners' competence to develop English use. Errors and weak command of English are neither considered nor corrected, while expression of meaning reflected by metaphor use becomes the focal point. Metaphor is more than a stylistic device - it is a powerful tool that creates meaning. It will be argued that competence in language could be developed and manifested through use and production of metaphor in English L2 writing. This article looks into the neglect of learners' own resources in acquiring English.

In the first section conceptual and contextual views of metaphor will be discussed, followed by a method for analysing metaphor and metaphors in creative writing. The third section on

creative writing comprises an analysis of excerpts from essays, after which a conclusion follows.

## 1 CONCEPTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL VIEWS OF METAPHOR

The significance of metaphor is not well-recognised in policy, teaching or assessment. Neither the official document (Department of Basic Education, 2011a) on curriculum and assessment nor the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document (Department of Basic Education, 2011a) urges teachers to make use of learners' cultural backgrounds or metaphor production to enhance their L2 writing. Kaschula (2013: 6, 11, 19, 21) writes about identity, insecurity and the vulnerability of people who are not learning in their first language. If teachers respected the cultural heritage and metaphors of their learners, self-confidence issues would be solved and the problem referred to by Kaschula (2013) could be mitigated.

Current views on metaphor are based on Aristotle's seminal contribution to understanding metaphor. He distinguishes between literal and metaphorical language and gives priority to the literal (Shield, 2012). The powerful characteristic of metaphor is how the linking of one thing to another suggests the transference of implicit meanings, e.g. 'Peter is a lion'. Lions are known to be brave, courageous and strong. As Peter is a lion, it follows that all these characteristics are part of his make-up.

Egan (1997: 58) writes that metaphor is one of our cognitive grappling tools that enables us to view the world through different perspectives as it assists our flexible engagement with the world. He points out that metaphor is the product of language development and will therefore be evident in very young children (1997: 54), discussing and understanding how an idea was 'killed' (1997: 57) by a parent. According to Botha we create the world through language that opens up the world to us. In turn we open up ourselves to the world (Botha, 2009: 441).

This article draws on two prominent views of metaphor, the conceptual and the contextual. Aspects from both views are used in the analysis of learners' creative writing. According to the conceptual view, metaphors link two conceptual domains (the concrete source from which the concept originates and the abstract target), and express complex ideas in language. Lakoff (1993: 204) uses *love (or life) is a journey* to illustrate how source and target operate in practice, with *love* as the abstract target and *journey* as the concrete source. The conceptual domain, *journey*, extends the meaning of *love (or life)*. Journey could extend this metaphor as in the following example: *This relationship has been on a rocky road the last few months*. The source domain is the conceptual domain where metaphorical expressions originate, namely *journey*. The target domain is the conceptual domain to be comprehended: *love*, an abstract noun, is linked to a journey. Target domains include relationships between entities, attributes and processes that are related to the source domain. The mappings of a conceptual metaphor come from pre-linguistic schemas of space, time, moving, controlling and other basic elements of the embodied human experience (Lakoff, 1993: 207). Selecting such metaphors occur subconsciously or implicitly in the mind of the speaker. Many dead or overused metaphors convey the same meaning as Lakoff's original metaphor on *love (or life) is a journey*, e.g. *they are on a difficult road at present*.

The conceptual view of metaphor explained above should be augmented by a contextual view. A Vygotskian (1986: 126; 1978: 141) perspective on thought and words is found in understanding the complexities of metaphor. Metaphor is an essential element in the construction of meaning and the enactment of reality. Metaphors express our thinking as

described by Vygotsky's (1986: 125) 'things'. He writes how thoughts are expressed through words. Every thought connects one thing to another and relationships are created between things. These relationships are important as they reflect the thoughts and contexts behind metaphors. Systems of concepts are metaphorical, and metaphors structure perceptions, thinking and actions.

The conceptual view of metaphor works with static categories, while the contextual view explains how metaphor contributes towards the meaning-making process through dynamic interaction with the life world of language users. It allows us to reconstruct the life worlds of learners when interpreting their metaphors. Reflecting upon their life world, urbanised learners from rural backgrounds rely on traditional as well as modern resources of meaning. In relation to traditional resources of meaning that are neglected in education Costandius (2007) writes that African culture comprises a multitude of proverbs, and adds that these proverbs are metaphors. According to Costandius (2007), the close relation between metaphors and proverbs points to the wealth of stories in African cultures. The contextual view of metaphor is further expanded by Fairclough (2003: 5) who defines discourse analysis as the natural environment of metaphor. He points out how this analysis improves an understanding of society and adds that discourse analysis as a social activity constitutes genres such as writing stories – essays in this case (Fairclough, 2003: 144).

Metaphor is not merely a stylistic or decorative element in language, but also a powerful conceptual instrument that adds new meanings to existing or literal categories. According to Cameron (2011), metaphor links up with linguistic, cognitive, affective, physical and cultural dimensions that contribute to our thinking. Cameron (2011) writes that the inseparability of thinking and culture constitutes the basis of the discourse dynamics framework, due to their connection and dynamic nature. An intrinsic and inseparably close human activity, metaphor unfolds dynamically and influences people profoundly.

Spelling and language errors in metaphors indicate how L2 learners still struggle, after 12 years at school, to master English. Metaphors indicate how learners attempt to find meaning, express their life worlds through metaphors and indicate in the essays what they think about the times they are living in; how gender roles are shifting; teenagers and substances/alcohol abuse and their fears for the future. The fact that they succeed in making meaning through their L2 reflects a particular command of the language.

## **TOWARDS A METHOD FOR ANALYSING METAPHOR**

The metaphoric language analysed in this article comes from the creative writing section (Paper 3) of the grade 12 examination scripts of EFAL (English First Additional Language or L2) learners in Gauteng.<sup>1</sup> Learners wrote about their backgrounds, their situations and their concerns. They used metaphors to express these ideas. Some indicated anxiety about tertiary studies, and expressed fear about achieving academic success. For example, their thinking about changing gender roles reveals an ability to adjust to societal changes that may contradict their cultural upbringing. The analysis below is based on selected essay excerpts. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of the ways in which metaphor is used, but to explore how learners create their own meanings in their L2.

This article draws on both the conceptual and contextual views of metaphor analysed above. Cognitive linguists Lakoff (2006: 188) and Kövecses (2003: 30) explore the production of master or universal metaphors, such as life, love, education, etc. These metaphors occur in all

languages because they reflect the thinking of people. Zanutto *et al.* (2008: 1) use a contextual approach to metaphor while Fairclough follows a discourse approach (2003: 67). While metaphor explains our thoughts and ideas to other people, it should be researched as social and situated. This means that thoughts and ideas are about people (social) and situated in the context where these thoughts/ideas can be placed (situated). They must be researched as language and discourse – thoughts are verbalised and are expressed in words and language. Thoughts and ideas are expressed as more than thinking as they belong in a social context. Various methodologies and techniques that relate to different understandings of metaphor were, therefore, drawn upon. While conceptual metaphor theory tends to view metaphors as relatively stable entities, a contextual approach understands metaphor as part of the dynamic interaction between language and reality. For the purposes of this study it seemed appropriate that these two research methods must be combined for metaphor research to be based on conceptual metaphor theory and linked to the role of discourse, as suggested by Zanutto *et al.* (2008: 8; 39). Discourse offers a way of representing the world that can be identified and differentiated alternatively<sup>ii</sup> (Fairclough, 2003: 95) when analysed.

The focus on the contextual approach adds complexity to language studies in general and indeterminacy to the study of metaphor. Gibbs refers to the complexity of metaphor and describes it as a complex topic in language and thought (in Zanutto *et al.*, 2008: 47). Gibbs (1999: 151) writes how the context obfuscates interpreting the indeterminate meanings of metaphor, but concedes that they are open-ended as their ambiguity counters one definitive propositional meaning. Gibbs (in Zanutto *et al.*, 2008: 46-7) refers to linguistic materials and their methodologies that are limited. He adds that these limitations must be considered before theoretical claims can be made about metaphor and its characteristics.

The difficulties encountered have to be recognised when metaphor is studied. This should assist with the process of unravelling the complexity and indeterminacy of metaphor. For the purposes of this study, Cameron's method (2003; 2007 and 2011) has been adjusted for the research methodology that is used here, namely identification, interpretation, contextualisation, distinguishing themes and relating these themes to other similar, universally identified themes. To develop a new form of analysis better suited to L2 discourse, Cameron's categorisation of metaphors is useful. The methodologies followed by others in the field, such as Gibbs (1994; 1996; 1999), Kövecses (1999; 2002; 2003; 2005) and Lakoff (1987; 1993) were also employed.

The significance of metaphor is identified and investigated by using two methodological approaches, namely metaphor analysis and discourse analysis. These approaches combine the work of cognitive linguists Lakoff (1993 and 2006), Gibbs (1999, 2008) Cameron (n.d.) Kövecses (2003) and discourse analyst Fairclough (2003). Metaphor analysis that draws on Lakoff's conceptual view enables us to identify metaphor, to draw on universal metaphor and to map metaphors. Lakoff (2006: 188) identifies metaphors that are embedded in language use to the extent that they are no longer noticed, for instance *the road ahead is clear*. Universal metaphors (Lakoff, 2006: 80-95), discussed above, indicate that all people use metaphors when explaining their thinking, in their L1, L2 and other languages. Mapping of domains and source and target terrains, referred to earlier, extends the original metaphor to allow for additional expression of further ideas (Lakoff, 1993: 205-237). These methods reveal how metaphor functions, how new meanings are created through the linkage of different semantic domains and how the introduction of a different domain could change the meaning of dead metaphors (Lakoff, 1993: 207-8).

Metaphor analysis that draws on the contextual view is closely related to methods in Applied Linguistics developed by Zanotto *et al.*, 2008. There is no single method for metaphor analysis because of the dynamic and contextual nature of language (Zanotto *et al.*, 2008: 59 and Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 186; 1993: 207). An Applied Language approach focuses on language in use and moves away from a cognitive approach to a view of language in context. Language is a dynamic tool through which new meanings emerge, particularly by means of metaphor. Because of this dynamism, the indeterminacy and fluidity of metaphorical meaning (Zanotto *et al.*, 2008: 13), the myth of objectivity must be avoided in researching metaphor.

In this article metaphor is investigated within the sociocultural and discursive contexts of learners. Metaphor must be interpreted within discourse as its natural environment according to Zanotto *et al.* (2008: 2). The focus of analysis is the creative writing of learners who are given a topic and write an essay of 300 words. Their use of metaphor is located within the context of this genre of discourse. An understanding of their life world and their being 'born-frees' (Mahlatsi, 2014) or South Africans born after 1994, is essential to interpreting their metaphors. These meanings are related to the semantic world they encounter in metaphoric language as well as ways in which they extend their own understanding through novel metaphors.

In the case of L2 learners metaphoric meanings originate from different sources such as their L1, the L2 within which they write, and their changing sociocultural contexts. The interpretation of metaphor is, therefore, related to the particular contexts of the learners as well as novel ways in which they make sense of these contexts, and matches the focus of Zanotto *et al.* (2008: 3) on variation as well as stability in metaphor use.

On the basis of these methodological considerations the research strategy of Cameron is used. Metaphors are identified within the discursive context of creative writing. It is accepted that creative writing is about creative meaning-making rather than the accurate use of language in relation to a particular standardised English (Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2000: 12, 23). Since discursive context refers to the context of the individual learner producing a text, one could expect learners to express their ideas and beliefs. A linguistic identification of metaphor also leans heavily on the Aristotelian distinction between metaphoric and literal language.

This identification not only focuses on single words, but also on metaphoric phrases, in line with the views of Cameron and Deignan (2006: 676) on metaphoremes, that are defined as bundles of metaphors functioning together as metaphoric phrases. Second, the interpretation of the use of metaphor as discourse of L2 learners requires that their metaphors be contextualised within their language use and life worlds. These life worlds include teenage fears, African culture, etc., as metaphors originate in thinking and do not exist independently. Third, metaphors are finally categorised to distinguish them thematically, e.g. life, love, education, etc. as a way of structuring them according to universal metaphor production. Cameron's adapted strategy does not consist of discrete and sequential steps, but is drawn on where these steps contribute to the meaningful analysis of metaphors in learners' writing.

The study of learners' essays as discourse reveals the different sociocultural histories and experiences that became apparent in their metaphors, seen from the perspective of Western-based education. These differences or the Other-ness of learners as reflected in what they write, must be respected when considering the merits of an essay. Metaphoric expressions and insights may be seen as unusual from the perspective of a Western approach to teaching and assessment yet must be considered respectfully from a position of extreme Other-ness (Cameron 2003: 67-9). On the basis of Fairclough's view of discourse and metaphor, the life

worlds of learners could be recreated after analysing their essays to find a semiotic tableau of their individual societies as well as their social lives (Fairclough, 2003: 147-9). This tableau of meaning has helped gain insight into the social and individual lives described in learners' essays. Fairclough indicates how metaphors are used in discourse and points out that discourse covers society in all its facets, linking up to Lakoff who posits that metaphors occur in all languages as they describe the human condition; metaphors make up the social discourse on lives described in the essays (Fairclough, 2003: 148 and Lakoff, 2006: 188).

## METAPHORS IN CREATIVE WRITING

Learners successfully produce metaphors that concretely express their point of view despite weak language ability and limited vocabulary. Although their writing displays their unfamiliarity with sentence construction; planning and structuring a cohesive essay, their ability to use and create metaphors indicates some degree of language competence. Their metaphors reveal their ability to account for their life worlds.

Three excerpts are discussed below as emblematic of the typical metaphors that were found in essays.

### Excerpt I: metaphors numbered and italicised

#### It is great being a teenager in South Africa

We have good education everywhere we go there is a (1) *board saying* (2) *education is key of life* (3) *but we don't want that to hap*<sup>1</sup>. See (4) *that key of success hepening in our life* becouse as (5) *teenager living in South Africa* (6) *there is one thing killing us* is this (7) *we called 'Right'*. We teenagers we have (8) *many challenges in life that we have to face like drug and alchol* meny of us teenage (9) *the reason why we don't go to school is becouse we ingejt* our self in drug before we even realise our dream or goals in life.

The number of errors and the spelling errors, e.g. 'hepening'; 'challenges'; 'alchol'; 'becouse' or 'ingejt'; 'board saying' or the use of 'hap' may be frowned upon. However, errors may lose their importance if we strive instead to recognise the learner's innovative use of familiar metaphors, e.g. *that key of success*. Cultural or social wisdom in this essay proclaims education as the secret to achieving success. Metaphors used by learners link to master themes, such as *life is a journey* or *doors to the future are open*, as described by Kövecses (2003: 31) and Lakoff (2006: 188).

**Excerpt I** echoes the master metaphor, *education is the key of life*. Learners draw on the familiarity of master metaphors but add new layers of meaning and use the interactive and contextual nature of metaphor to do so. They develop their own stories within the context of a dominant and often unfamiliar language. The analysis of metaphor aims to show how meaning is expressed through metaphor. In the process learners largely draw on universal and

<sup>1</sup> Errors are inevitable in L2 writing and are neither indicated nor corrected as the focus is on metaphor use and analysis.

dead metaphors and change these. While such changes can be interpreted as their unfamiliarity with the correct discourse, the newly created meanings must be appreciated. These meanings develop in the process of making sense of multiple conflicts in which they find themselves. The essays also reveal richness of metaphors that do not display the L2 unfamiliarity with English.

The numbered metaphors are discussed as they appear in the excerpt above.

1 ... *a board saying*

Human characteristics are ascribed to an inanimate object as the board speaks its message and becomes a reputable source of information. What is significant here is how a billboard's message becomes part of the meaning-making process. The speaking board addresses learners about their lives and the value of education. Learners are advised about the importance of education but they are more interested in taking drugs than attending school (metaphor 8). The concept is created that they are passively allowing life to pass them by (metaphor 9) without grabbing opportunities when they appear. (Note learners' lack of agency that is discussed under metaphor 9 below.)

2 ... *education is key of life*

Dead and novel metaphors are combined in one phrase here. Explaining education as a key unlocking success in many forms is a master metaphor that refers to *life* and is linked to *wealth* or *success*. Learners typically produce a dead and a novel metaphor with an unexpected twist, as in this example where new life is blown into them. Changes to the master metaphor *education is the key to success* include that the preposition and the last noun have been changed and the definite article left out altogether. The unusual structure without a definite article and the unexpected use of the two nouns *key* and *life* grab the attention while indicating some unfamiliarity with English. Education is described as an ideational goal that opens up opportunities and success. Key is the vehicle term for education. The notion that a key literally opens doors to the good life indicates the value learners attach to education. The combination of education, key and life is a new creation. This metaphor reveals an important aspect of the life world of these learners, their striving for success that they believe can be attained by means of education. For them, education equals success.

3 ...*but we don't want that to hap*

Education, in metaphor 3, is something they do not want to *happen* to them. Teenagers see themselves as passive and believe that education is magically bestowed upon them. They seem unaware that they must be their own agents in achieving success, despite possible beliefs of entitlement that they may hold. On the other hand it could be argued that they view education as a powerful transforming device to which they are subjected passively. The value of education is emphasised, and this metaphor relates to the previous one. The *happening* of education refers to something inexplicable or mysterious. It is believed that education can miraculously change the lives of the educated person and their family. They do not see an own role and agency in effecting these changes. This could be ascribed to a political heritage of denied agency – see also discussion that follows on metaphor 4.

4 ...*that key of success hepening*

The key metaphor from Essay excerpt I is a newly created metaphor and it is applied to a new domain with a slight twist: *that key of success hepening in our life becouse as teenager*

*living....* The *key of success* is imposed from the domain of work onto their lives as *teenager[s] living*. The key metaphor indicates how learners think about life and their future lives, judging on the popularity of metaphors about education, success and key. The universal metaphor, *education is the key to success*, is a variation (cf. metaphor 2). Great importance is attached to education, hence the idea that a successful life depends on study. Dead metaphors are used, some in grammatically incomplete phrases such as *that key of success hepening*. The education/success metaphors link education and a successful life. The one inevitably becomes the other. Education has now transformed into success and is opened up by the key that is the vehicle term for the topic. Where the topic has been education before, it is now success. The education and key-of-life metaphor is intensified when education becomes success that is unlocked by the key. The vehicle term for the topic is *key* again, but where the topic was education before, it is now success, as education is believed to lead to success. Education and success are closely related in the desire for upward mobility, the attractive end goal. The lack of agency is apparent in success that is described as happening of its own accord. Fanon (2004: 33, 51) ascribes this passivity to helplessness that has been effected by colonialism.

### 5 ...*teenager living*

Teenagers living (in South Africa) contextualise young people in a developing country. Learners accept their difficult circumstances as the reality to which they are accustomed. Judging from their essays, crime plays no role in their lives. This is the first of many metaphors referring to life being lived and most teenagers experience their lives now as full of promise and opportunities. Teenager living could be contrasted to living as an adult or living as a child. Teenagers, especially those who wrote the school exit examination, are on the brink of their future lives. Their essays reflect excitement and some fear of the unknown. They realise that choices must be made and the consequences of these choices endured afterwards. Their own lives are different from the lives of their parents, who may not have enjoyed the same luxury. Circumstances may have compelled them to start earning an income as soon as they were old enough to do so. Their parents may also be regretting some of their life choices, so that learners are aware of the opportunities before them and being middle class and young, these possibilities seem infinite.

### 6 ...*one thing killing us*

Inexplicably, their constitutional rights that represent freedom, equality and self-realisation, are feared. Young people are afraid of abusing their rights as this could cause their death, *killing them, us*. It is applied to the lives of teenagers and interpreted as if they now have the right to do what they like. Many essays indicate that their rights are interpreted as freedom from restrictions. Wrong choices are described as leading to the abuse of alcohol/substances. This illogical view is expressed in the majority of essays. Their rights are described as the enemy that kills young people who continue abusing life-threatening alcohol/substances, in a powerful expression of personification. This relates to a particular kind of popular discourse where rights are divorced from responsibilities.

### 7 ...*we called 'Right'*

Teenagers find themselves in a separate phase of life from that of adults. Rights or freedom and the perceived abuse of rights by young people (*us*) is described as manifesting in alcohol/substance abuse that is *killing* young people. While metaphors 7, 8 and 9 indicate unfamiliarity with English idiom, the message comes across clearly, namely that children are



themselves endangering their lives by exercising the right to act and make decisions independently, even if these choices may be irresponsible.

8 ...*many challenges in life that we have to face like drug and alcohol*

This metaphor also focuses on substance abuse and challenges are repeated. The literal and kinaesthetic facing of these challenges in the personified form of the enemy or a powerful force is a powerful metaphor. Teenagers are turned towards their challenges, and are facing their enemies from the opposite side as if at war. The embodiment of these metaphors is linked to physical experience of the danger that exercising their responsibilities holds for them. They are depicted as in a constant and fierce struggle against drugs and substance abuse. This 'war' requires great vigilance.

9 ...*the reason why we don't go to school*

Teenagers, *we*, prefer abusing alcohol/substances to attending school. Fear of this abuse is repeated, so that this difficult choice is emphasised. Teenagers seem to know which decisions are wise and could lead to success. Their essays indicate an awareness of their own weakness. They know how future success can be realised; by attending school. However, the lure of not attending school, but rather using alcohol/substances is a frightening choice. They fear that absence from school could be detrimental to their future, yet they play truant (9).

Many essays reflect the contradiction found in Metaphor (6) that learners fear their *rights* or independence while they do not trust themselves to make the right choices. Their thinking as indicated in this excerpt shows that learners realise they should attend school yet they do not go. Learners have the insight to recognise their own passivity and reluctance and know that they are jeopardising their future by not attending school, but cannot motivate themselves to go. This cycle of negativity that Kaschula (2013: 9) ascribes to a vulnerability of their identity, leaves L2 learners passive and unable to change their fate. They lack a sense of agency (wa Thiongo 1986: 67) and are ambiguous about the danger freedom holds for them. Their inner struggle is reflected in concretised ideas conveyed by metaphors. Despite clumsy language, the metaphors indicate an awareness of a benevolent government who 'will provide'. Parents and teachers will 'support' and guide by giving advice as described in the rest of the essay.

## Excerpt II: metaphors numbered and italicised

### The gift of love

This (1) *gift bought to me* because (2) *i had love of a father* before he die and I need some love from someone but (3) *i get love from this girl* the love that i was need (4) *she give me that*. This girlfriend of mine she like father and my mother because she always caring supporton and loving in every thing i do. If do things like going of night she does not fight with me just took to me very nice to see that is ronge ... (5) *She still young in age but in mind she is too old*.

1 ... *gift bought to me*

These words manage to describe love, an abstract concept, in the L2. This love was received as a gift. The learner passively accepts his father's gift of love, and after his father's death he

accepts the love of the girl in a similar way. This love seems to be one-sided, with the ‘girl’ giving care, support and love to the learner who sees himself as not possessing any agency (cf. last paragraph of Excerpt I) or responsibility to reciprocate.

## 2 ... *i had love of a father*

The father’s love is described as a concrete possession. The gift of fatherly love was lost when the father passed away. The lost love of the father is described as if it could be replaced by the love of the girlfriend. The father’s love as *philia*, unromantic or neighbourly love differs from romantic love or *eros*, between the learner and the girlfriend. It seems, however (3), that the girl looks after the learner as a parent would (4 and 5).

## 3 ... *i get love from this girl*

The girlfriend’s love is explained in a progression where the metaphor is extended to another person, besides the father, who loves him. The love is described in a concrete manner, *I get love*, to emphasise its importance. The recipient regards this love in his life as necessary and important, despite his passivity.

## 4 ... *she give me that*

The love she ‘gives’ him as a possession that he receives is personified. It is repeated with some variation, *she give me that*, the love is given like a gift to the passive recipient. This repetition of metaphor 3 reinforces the concept of the passivity in this relationship: *give me that*, where the learner expresses his dependence on the girl and his own lack of agency. He does not indicate awareness of an own role or reciprocity towards her but seems content to receive only, although he expresses his amazement at the gift. The role of a child in relation to parents seems to be continued.

## 5... *She still young in age but in mind she is too old*

The girlfriend is depicted as young in years, yet wise for her age (cf. the next paragraph on the inner strength of African women). The inherent contrast adds depth and substance to this metaphor, suggesting that the love is not only romantic love, but also love for a family member or friend. The word ‘too’ indicates amazement at the wisdom of the girl. The grammatical error in ‘too old’ means an intensive form of age and is used in the discourse of people who speak an African language at home, often to express surprise. The essay depicts love as a one-directional gift with no awareness of the reciprocity of love.

A decision was taken, in spite of numerous errors, to include this essay in the analysis, because of the metaphoricity of this excerpt and the contrast in metaphor 5, where the girlfriend is described as a remarkably sage, but young person. This resonates with African views of women when Chilisa (2012: 211, 276) writes about the history of strong women in Africa. Chilisa writes that among the Tswana- and Sotho-speaking people of southern Africa, proverbs indicate that relationships are often unequal, and that ‘women cannot be leaders’: *Ga dinke di etelelwa ke e namagadi pele, di ka wela ka le mina* (Chilisa 2012: 137). The description of the young, yet wise girl in the excerpt echoes Chilisa’s reference to women’s strength. Metaphor use makes up for the inarticulate L2 expression of abstract ideas such as love.

## Excerpt III: metaphors numbered and italicised

### Picking up a piece of gold

Teenage life in South Africa is the best ever. It (1) *is like picking up a piece of gold and treasuring it*. (2) *As far as you can go you will never find a better place to be a teenager than in South Africa*. Teenagers in South-Africa (3) *have got rights to many thing's such as education, freedom of speech ens.* (4) *Living your life in South-Africa* (5) *is like making history to a unknown citizen*. A (6) *life of a teenager in South Africa is very fast*. because a lot of (7) *things are happening daily* in South-Africa such as robbery, hijacking ens. (8) *The community is the people that looks up to the teenagers* and say that (9) *they are the future* and that we can make South-Africa a better and peaceful country.

#### 1 ... *is like picking up a piece of gold and treasuring it*

Teenage life is equated with a nugget of gold in this proper simile where 'like' indicates the comparison that follows. Depth is added by the gold that is treasured when found. The directional preposition in the metaphor, ***picking up a piece of gold***, adds spatial meaning (*pick* and *up*) to the expression. The same happens in metaphor 8 below. The idea of metaphor 1 is unusual as gold is mined and only rarely picked up in riverbeds. The life of teenagers is expressed clearly in the L2 as valuable, something rare that should be treasured.

#### 2 ... *As far as you can go you will never find a better place*

A hyperbole indicates the impossibility of ever finding a better place. This exaggeration displays an awareness of how life has changed for the better and repeats the hyperbole in the first line of this excerpt, where teenagers are described as having *the best life ever*. This contrasts with metaphor 7, where it is stated that [criminal] *thing's* [sic] *are happening daily*. A balanced and optimistic depiction of life, from the viewpoint of teenagers ready to live as adults, is given in this metaphor.

#### 3 ... *have got rights to many thing's such as education, freedom of speech*

An example of etymology appears in the metaphor cluster with struggle vocabulary, e.g. *rights to many thing's* such as education and freedom of speech. Many essays include references to the rights of learners (20 references in two out of the three excerpts discussed here). They are aware of their rights, especially their new freedom, but excerpts I and III clearly indicate fear for this responsibility of making their own choices.

#### 4 *Living your life in South-Africa*

Metaphor 4 comprises repetition of the li- and f-sounds and has a richness of sound. This phrase comes across as a conventionalised metaphor or cliché and is part of a master theme on life being lived. Four hundred out of 1000 essays were written on the topic of living life (cf. Endnote). Learners may find themselves at a reflective life stage where they look back on their lives before taking a courageous step towards their imminent future. Life in South Africa is viewed as different from life elsewhere. This fact reflects an awareness of the uniqueness of different cultures and languages brought together, the rainbow nation settling in one area.

#### 5 ... *like making history to a unknown citizen*.

A cluster of metaphors is used where the inclusion of 'like' announces a comparison. The *unknown citizen* could refer to a poem by WH Auden with a similar title and that is prescribed for English FAL. The association of living your life and making history suggests a strong

sense of agency, the notion of being in control of your destiny and creating your own history. This contrasts strongly with the idea of being a victim of circumstances found in many other metaphors.

6 ...*life of a teenager in South Africa is very fast*

Metaphor 6 indicates a sense of being overwhelmed by the *very fast* pace of city life, where criminals could be around the next corner (cf. metaphor 7), in contrast to rural or traditional life that may follow a slower pace. This excerpt depicts the life of a teenager who is aware of the good and not so good aspects of his/her life, the life of a person on the brink of adulthood. The hurried lives of urban people who are aware of crime while living their lives to the full are expressed lucidly in a concrete, believable manner despite it being written in the learner's L2.

7 ...*things are happening daily*

As mentioned above, metaphor 7, with its reference to *things* like 'robbery and hijacking' *are happening daily* contradicts and spoils the statement in metaphor 2 about the good life in South Africa. This is a continuation of metaphor 6 – crime becomes unexceptional because *daily* is used. The acceptance of harsh circumstances in a developing world as an ordinary occurrence is the reality of the context that learners experience. Similar nonchalance about crime was found in many essays. Having to use the medium of their L2 does not stop them from explaining their immediate life world and their thinking about this.

8 ... *The community is the people that looks up to the teenagers*

This cluster of metaphors adds a note of optimism with the directional preposition of people looking 'up', adding spatial meaning to the expression. It is easy to conjure the picture sketched in metaphor 8, where the spatial metaphor describes the community physically looking up to teenagers, an unusual occurrence. Usually teenagers look up to adults for guidance, not the other way round.

9 ... *they are the future*

People often remark that today's children are tomorrow's leaders. Metaphor 9 states that *teenagers are the future*, who can solve the country's problems, and "make South-Africa a better and peaceful country". When this dead and mundane future metaphor is read in relation to metaphor 6, it gains momentum and credibility. Another note of optimism is juxtaposed against the fears reflected by "life in South Africa" that accompany the description of a fast-paced, dangerous life where crime is rife and occurs daily (cf. the discussion of themes on living life and teenagers below). The way in which the future is described indicates their optimism. This essay excerpt expresses confidence, amazement and happiness despite criminal activities that do not seem to frighten the teenager who wrote about them. The positive excerpt also comprises trust in a *better, peaceful* future that will be realised by the teenagers of today.

## CONCLUSION

South African learners who speak an African language at home are familiar with a metaphor-rich cultural heritage, and it is surmised that this explains their inclusion of existing metaphors in English as part of their speech. While unfamiliar with English, they are familiar

with metaphoric language, a fact that must be recognised in assessing their writing. The importance of attention to metaphor in teaching and assessment is indicated by the analysis of using and creating metaphors in the three essay excerpts discussed here. Learners write about their life worlds that have been moulded and based on various sources and influences. Learners not only find themselves in a traditional African context, but they are also exposed to traditional and modern influences that expand their horizons while defining them. Metaphor enriches as it facilitates their learning, especially their writing. If learners bring their own metaphors to the classroom, and are encouraged to employ their metaphor-rich cultural backgrounds, the creative writing class becomes more than a class where only Standard British English (Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2000: 12) is allowed. In such a class metaphors are mixed or reinvented by L2 speakers, rather than viewed as inappropriate because they do not meet the conventional form of the language. Teachers assessing these essays in the final exam did not indicate any acknowledgement of learners' metaphor use. Errors, structural shortcomings and logical issues were pointed out.

The 'otherness' (Cameron 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) of learners who speak an African language at home is not recognised adequately in education. Encouragement and acceptance of the cultural heritage of African learners to make use of what is familiar to them when telling their stories and reporting on their life worlds, could decrease the effect of unfamiliarity and alienation experienced by learners in the L2 or EFAL class. Ricoeur (2003: 195) warns about the dangers when learners are not familiarised within the English class and at school, and writes that metaphor revives our perceptions of the world. He points out that we become aware of our creative capacity for seeing the world anew both by its creation and by discovering metaphors. He argues that the tension between the subjective, creative and the objective discovery aspects of a metaphor proceeds 'from the very structures of the mind, which it is the task of [Kant's] transcendental philosophy to articulate' (Ricoeur 2003: 197). This principle stated by Ricoeur can be applied to reading metaphors produced by learners who use language to make sense of their worlds. Metaphor indicates how learners create new meanings within their interaction with their environment and how their reality is restructured by these new meanings.

When assessment of learning becomes assessment that entails creating own meanings, the way learners create new knowledge through metaphor becomes significant. It is suggested that a new approach be followed in the assessment of creative writing. At present the grids used to mark essays (Department of Basic Education, 2011b: 8-13; National Senior Certificate, 2012: 2) allow for marks allocated to the content and planning (32); language, style and editing (12) and structure (6) out of 50. This weighting of content, language and structure is still a negative approach that does not promote creativity. The recommendation of this article is that essays need not be grammatically correct, but that individualised, creative use of metaphors must be acknowledged. This is admittedly a big change to the current position and could perhaps be applied in the last school grade only and only for L2 learners. Looking at a thousand essays makes one aware of the Sisyphean task of indicating every error. Many errors were missed in the original data, possibly due to the enormity of the task. Assessment should perhaps focus exclusively on the composition of an essay and the ability to create and communicate ideas, so that the use and creation of metaphor become a key element in the assessment process. The way in which learners succeed in using language to convey meaning becomes the objective of the assessment instead of the current practice of finding and indicating errors.

English L2 could be taught more successfully if essay assessment were approached differently. Reading for metaphor use and expression of life world would give a different slant to essay assessment. The analysis of these excerpts strongly suggests that learners produce interesting and appropriate new metaphors in their L2. A larger study should yield similar results with similar master themes. Such a study could ultimately underwrite the validity of this distinctly small exploration.

Creative writing is to some extent an anomaly, since the circumstances of exam writing inhibits creativity *per se*. Due to anxiety and stress that could suppress creativity L2 learners struggle to varying degrees when faced with an exam where the topics require unprepared writing. However, with a view to the future, learners show how they are developing their own life stories within the context of a dominant and often unfamiliar language. Language teachers would enable learners by opening up opportunities for creative writing and by wise use of the powerful tool that is assessment. Through the focus on metaphor, a nuanced and complex picture of learners' life worlds is gained. Similar themes show that commonalities exist between individual life worlds across linguistic borders. The focus on metaphor clearly indicates learners' ability to express complex ideas in a language despite limited familiarity.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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<sup>i</sup> A sample of 979 essays were randomly selected by a Gauteng official and used in the original study preceding this research. A very small selection of excerpts was used in this article. Permission to use these essays was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education.

<sup>ii</sup> Discourse is a specific way in which the world is represented. There are other or alternative discourses, associated with people in various social positions. Discourse is a part of social practises through which we interact with the world and make meaning. Discourses differ in the representation of social events, what is excluded or included, whether events are represented abstractly or concretely, and how processes and relations, social actors as well as time and place of events are represented (Fairclough 2003: 17).