The relationship between conceptual metaphors and classroom management language: reactions by native and non-native speakers of English

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Abstract

The use of the target language to manage a class and organise its work represents one of the few genuinely communicative uses of the target language in many formal foreign-language or bilingual-education teaching situations. It is thus important that both teachers and learners understand and know how to use the key expressions involved. These tend to be highly metaphoric (Low, 2008) with one particularly productive conceptual metaphor involving the JOURNEY (or TRAVEL) source domain seemingly standing out. There seems to have been little investigation to date into whether or not learners whose first language is not English actually understand the expressions involved in such classroom management language. Moreover, with the recent growing interest in the area of content-based learning, there is increasing pressure on language teachers, whose first language is not English, to use English as their classroom management language. Our first aim was to look at whether the acceptability judgements for classroom management expressions offered by non-native speaking teachers of English resembled those of native speakers, and whether these judgements reflected corpus findings regarding the frequency of usage in spoken English. To do this, we analysed native and non-native speaker responses to a short questionnaire. Our second aim was to look at how non-native speakers of English perceive the meanings of these expressions, comparing our findings to native speaker judgements and corpus results.

Keywords: metaphor, phrasal verbs, language learning, classroom management discourse.

Resumen

La relación entre las metáforas conceptuales y el lenguaje de gestión del aula: reacciones por parte de hablantes nativos y no nativos de inglés

En la docencia académica de una lengua extranjera o en contextos de enseñanza bilingüe, el uso de la lengua meta con el fin de gestionar la actividad en el aula y organizar el trabajo colectivo constituye uno de los pocos usos de la lengua meta que podrían considerarse como genuinamente comunicativos. Es por ello que resulta fundamental que tanto profesores y alumnos comprendan y utilicen las expresiones clave que suelen aparecer al efecto. Por lo general, el lenguaje que se utiliza para este fin tiende a ser muy metafórico (Low, 2008), destacando aparentemente el uso de la metáfora conceptual que tiene por dominio fuente el concepto de TRAYECTO (o VIAJE). Hasta la fecha, la investigación encaminada a conocer si el alumnado cuya lengua materna no es el inglés entiende o no las expresiones correspondientes a este dominio fuente, no parece haber despertado gran interés. Además, a esto se le une el hecho de que el aprendizaje del inglés basado en contenidos, cada vez más popular, ha contribuido a recalcar la necesidad de que los profesores no nativos en lengua inglesa utilicen el inglés como herramienta para gestionar el aula. En un principio, nuestro objetivo consistirá en examinar si los juicios relativos a la adecuación de las expresiones que los profesores de inglés no nativos utilizan para gestionar el aula son comparables con los juicios de adecuación de los profesores nativos y, además, si ambos juicios guardan alguna relación con la frecuencia en el uso del inglés hablado que figura en los estudios de corpus vigentes. Para este fin analizamos las respuestas de hablantes nativos y no nativos de lengua inglesa obtenidas mediante una breve encuesta. Nuestro segundo objetivo consistirá en examinar la percepción de los profesores no nativos en cuanto a los significados de las expresiones en cuestión y, para ello, cotejamos nuestros hallazgos con los juicios expresados por los hablantes nativos y los reflejados en los resultados del corpus.

Key words: metáfora, verbos frasales, aprendizaje de lenguas, discurso para la gestión del aula.

Introduction

With recent increases in the number of international students studying at English-speaking universities, it is becoming ever more important to identify the linguistic difficulties that such students are likely to encounter, and to design language teaching approaches that will help them deal with these difficulties. One aspect of language that international students find

particularly difficult is the understanding of spoken discourse (Lynch, 1994). A number of factors have been identified that are likely to make listening to spoken discourse, in particular lectures, difficult for learners of English. These include things such as the conversational style of lectures, the fact that students need to combine visual and aural information, and the fact that they have to process long stretches of discourse (Dudley-Evans & Johns, 1981; Flowerdew, 1994; King, 1994; Tauroza, 1998; Littlemore, 2001). However, to the best of our knowledge, no one has ever looked at how far students understand the language their teachers use to manage their classes and organise the work in them. This is an important area, given that an ability to understand what the lecturer or teacher is going to do and what he or she wants the students to do is vital if a student is going to get maximum benefit from the learning experience.

Another reason for studying classroom management language is that the use of the target language to manage a class and organise its work represents one of the few genuinely communicative uses of the target language in many formal foreign-language or bilingual-education teaching situations. Moreover, with the recent growing interest in the area of content-based learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), there is increasing pressure on language teachers whose first language is not English to use English as their classroom management language, and thus it is important for these teachers to have a good grasp of expressions such as these. From the student's perspective, it is also of vital importance that they understand such expressions, so that they do not misinterpret what the teacher wants them to do.

A large number of the phrases involved in classroom management language are highly metaphoric, which may present a challenge to both teachers and students. Low (2008) cites: "go through homework", "go over it", "run through a text", "run over it", "look through it", "look over it", "look at a topic", "skip over something", "skip through it", "pass over it", "home in on it", "touch on it", "work through it", "work on it", "work at it, then rework it". An inability to understand expressions such as these may have serious repercussions for international students. For instance, Littlemore et al. (in progress) asked a group of upper-intermediate level international students who had recently attended a lecture on semiotics to explain the meaning of a series of extracts from the lecture. One of the extracts was: "I want to *go through with you* the ideas about the sign". Although 15 of the 18 students interpreted this more or less correctly as meaning "discuss" or "talk about", three were unable to accurately explain what the lecturer meant, and one

came up with the particularly worrying interpretation: "explain together with the participation of the students". This student appears to have made a more literal interpretation of "with you" than that intended by the lecturer, and he could have ended up in a very embarrassing situation if he had attempted to join in the discussion, which was not what the lecturer intended.

It is clear, even from the short list of expressions mentioned by Low (2008) above, that one particularly productive conceptual metaphor, involving the JOURNEY (or TRAVEL) source domain, can be applied to several different target domains, ranging from the learning process itself, to the different tasks that the students are set. It has been suggested that similarities in conceptual metaphors such as this, across languages, may facilitate the understanding of expressions such as those listed above (Li, 2002). For instance, because the TRAVEL metaphor exists both in English and in Chinese, a Chinese-speaking learner or teacher of English should find it easier to understand and produce expressions involving this conceptual metaphor than expressions involving other conceptual metaphors that do not exist in Chinese. However, languages vary considerably in terms of the ways in which conceptual metaphors are elaborated and in terms of the contexts in which they are used (Deignan et al., 1997). For example, although the CONTAINER metaphor is virtually universal, it can be used in English to refer to bank accounts (you put your money "in" the bank) whereas in French it cannot; you put your money *sur la compte* (= "on" the bank account) rather than in it. In the context of classroom management discourse, we can "run", "skip" or "go" through a text, but it would be odd to talk about "sliding", "dancing" or "creeping" through it. Moreover, the phraseology preferred by the native speaking community is never 100% predictable from the conceptual metaphor, and the resulting expressions are often idiomatic (Deignan, 2005). To illustrate, let us look at the conceptual metaphor COMPETITION IS WARFARE (OR FIGHTING), which is widespread across a number of languages. In English, the metaphor allows us to say things like:

> The gloves are off in the software price war

Although the use of war in this example is fairly easy to predict from the conceptual metaphor, it is much more difficult to use this metaphor to predict (a) the fact that we can talk about "boxing gloves" in the context of a price war, but not, say, "mouth guards", and (b) the particular, conventionalized phraseology in "the gloves are off" (it would, for example,

be strange to say "the companies are removing their gloves"). As well as knowledge of the conceptual metaphor, a learner of English would also need considerable exposure to the English language in order to pick these expressions up. Although some might argue that in these days of globalisation and English as a *lingua franca*, "naturalness" and an ability to produce target-like phraseology is not particularly important (e.g. Jenkins, 2003), the fact remains that elaboration and phraseology are responsible for the subtle nuances or even very different meanings in similar sounding expressions, and that language learners do need to perceive these nuances. For example, reading "through" a text is very different from reading "out", "round", or "about" a text. To the best of our knowledge, there has been no investigation into whether or not learners whose first language is not English actually understand expressions such as these, or whether they can detect the subtle nuances that give very different meanings to expressions such as "run through", "skate over", or "gloss over".

In this study, we therefore look at a small sample of classroom management expressions involving "through" and "over" collocated with verbs like "run", "go", "pass" and "skate" that appear to reflect the JOURNEY or TRAVEL metaphor. Our first aim in the study was to look at whether the acceptability judgements for these expressions offered by non-native speaking (NNS) teachers of English resembled those of native speakers, and whether these judgements reflected corpus findings regarding the frequency of usage in spoken English. In order to do this, we administered a short questionnaire to native and non-native speaking teachers of English who were studying on teaching-related MA programmes at the Universities of York and Birmingham. Our second aim was to look more closely at how non-native speaking teachers of English perceive the meanings of these expressions. In order to do this, we asked the respondents to say whether or not the expressions could be complemented by the words "rapidly" or "in detail". Again, we compared our findings to native speaker judgements and corpus results.

We expected that a number of factors would interact with each other to affect the tendency of NNSs to understand expressions such as these, or to accept them as meaningful. Firstly there is the issue of transfer. Kellerman (1987) found that language learners tend to be suspicious of creative figurative uses of the target language in general. He also found that a student's tendency to accept idiomatic expressions in the target language as meaningful is influenced by whether or not those expressions exist in their

own language. In his study, beginning and advanced learners were likely to accept the possibility that an idiom existing in their own language might also exist in the target language, whereas intermediate learners tended to be much more suspicious of these expressions. Secondly, it is important to consider differences between the NS and NNS lexicon (e.g. Verspoor, 2008). It has been shown that a particularly strong form-meaning association in the mental lexicon will make it less likely for that form to have another meaning (Tomasello, 2003). Infants learning their first language are sensitive to this. For example, if a child had learned that "run over" meant "being knocked down by a car" and repeatedly used it with this sense, he/she might be less likely to accept the verb as seemingly applying to a very different domain: as a meaningful way of talking about reviewing or explaining homework.

Thirdly, there is the issue of semantic transparency. If it is easy for a learner to use the senses of an expression's constituent parts to get to its overall meaning, then they may be more likely to identify its meaning (Littlemore & Low, 2006). Fourthly, all the verbs that we studied are figurative extensions of "manner of movement" verbs. Talmy (2000) categorises languages into two types, in terms of the way in which they habitually construe movement. According to Talmy, in "satellite-framed" languages (such as English), manner of movement is habitually expressed within the verb, and the direction of movement is expressed through a preposition, as in "to dash in", "to slip out", "to creep up", and "to eat away". We usually understand (or "parse") sentences by focussing first and foremost on the verb, and then by working out how the rest of the sentence relates to the verb (Rost, 2002). The verb is thus the key constituent of a sentence, and any information contained within the verb can be considered paramount. As manner of movement is expressed within the verb in English, it occupies a central role in the message. In "verb-framed" languages (such as Spanish), only the actual direction of movement is expressed in the verb, and the manner of movement is expressed as a non-finite verb as in *entró en la casa corriendo* ("he entered the house running"); and *salí corriendo a la calle* ("I exited running into the street"). The focus in verb-framed languages is thus very much on the direction of movement, rather than the manner. The potential challenges that such variation presents to language learners are highlighted by Slobin (2000). Slobin's research has led him to suggest that speaking a satellite-framed language predisposes a speaker to cognitively encode motion events in a different way from speakers of verb-framed languages. As some of the NNSs in our study were speakers of verb-framed languages, they may have found it particularly difficult to work out the

meaning of the expressions, particularly those with a strong physical element, such as "run" and "skate". The interaction of these four factors was useful in helping us to interpret the results from our study. In order to deepen our interpretations, we checked the responses of participants against the spoken English section of the Bank of English, which we used as a benchmark assessment of general native speaker usage.

Method

Instrumentation

A short questionnaire was constructed involving background information questions, reactions to phrasal verbs and reactions to derived noun phrases (see Appendix 1). The phrases all involved (or derived from) the motion verbs "go", "run", "pass" and "skate", plus the particles "over" and "through"; those hypothesised as acceptable were taken from the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* and the *Cobuild Advanced Learners Dictionary* (both corpus-based). None of the phrases were marked as regional variants. To avoid cognitive overload, the number of judgments of similar items was kept below 25, in line with the findings in Low (1995); thus there were 16 utterances with phrasal verbs and 4 with derived nominals. Items were organised into five question sets, each with four items. The order of "go", "run", "pass" and "skate" was varied across the five question sets in order to avoid sequence effects. It is hard to write instructions that are unambiguous for NS and upper-intermediate NNS at the same time when it comes to giving the focus and scope of judgements of acceptability. The intention in this case was that negative judgements could be made on semantic or syntactic grounds (or both), so it was decided to ask whether invented utterances were "normal English" with the rating scale values set as "OK" and "not OK". The primary intention was not to ask whether a phrase was relatively common, though clearly semantic or grammatical unacceptability would imply that something was not common. It was also decided for the sake of simplicity to omit scales or boxes for uncertainty, even though this information would have been helpful.

The questionnaire was pre-piloted on two NNS graduate students at Birmingham and then on one at York (the latter being close to NS level); changes were made after each piloting phase to the rubric, the layout and the background questions.

Delivery and data preparation

The questionnaire was piloted and delivered as a web-based survey from the University of York, with the responses collected initially on an Excel spreadsheet. The responses were checked for spelling (e.g. of L1s), and several of the test-related background questions were collapsed into a four-point English Proficiency variable: 4 = native speaker (self-categorised); 3 = IELTS 7+; 2= IELTS 7; 1 = IELTS 6.5. In the event, only one respondent fell into category 2, so categories 2 and 3 were conflated. The result was 37 NS, 17 IELTS 7/7+ and 20 IELTS 6.5. At this point, the data were saved as an SPSS file.

Sample

The students on language-based masters courses at the Universities of York (N=62) and Birmingham (N=296) were emailed and invited to participate in the study. Of these, 90 completed the proforma: 26 from York and 64 from Birmingham. It was not possible to establish the language proficiency status of 16 of the participants, so the data used for analysis here derives primarily from a sample of 74 (37 NS and 37 NNS). The NS sample was overwhelmingly from Birmingham, with just one from York. They were a mixture of British and North American nationals. The NNS sample of 37 consisted primarily of Chinese speakers (see Table 1):

Nationality	No. of students
Chinese	22
Indonesian/Malay	3
Korean	3
Greek	2
Japanese	2
Persian/Farsi	2
Other	3
Total	37

Table 1. NNS sample.

A check of the comments at the end showed that while some students did experience confusion or perplexity at times, there was no evidence of hostility or a refusal to answer appropriately; no further scripts were therefore excluded from the sample.

Results

The likelihood of using the target language for classroom management

Almost all respondents (93%) had used, or intended to use, English for classroom management, and intention to use English did not vary markedly with either English proficiency level or years of teaching.

Responses to the 5 question sets

Native versus non-native speaker differences

Each of the 20 items was examined separately using a 2x2 contingency table. Fisher's Exact Test was used, as seven cells had low expected frequency counts (McDonald, 2008: 68).

Four items reached significance $p<.05$ (two-tailed):

Q1a   Acceptability of "pass through Chapter 4"
        All NS felt "pass through" was not acceptable; 9 (24%) NNS felt it was.

Q1d   Acceptability of "run through Chapter 4"
        All NS felt "run through" was acceptable; 10 NNS (27%) felt it was not.

Q5a   Acceptability of "I want a short run through (the play)"
        All NS felt "a run through" was acceptable; 13 NNS (36%) did not.

Q5b   Acceptability of "I want a short run over (the play)"
        All but 2 NS felt "a run over" was not acceptable; 16 NNS (43%) felt it was.

This would appear at first sight to be a reasonably encouraging finding; the non-native speakers were not diverging wildly, at a general level, from the native speakers. All four cases of a significant difference between the two groups involved phrases where the NS were in almost total agreement. Thus, for example, the NS all rejected "pass through Chapter 4", a finding which is in broad agreement with Bank of English spoken data. In the Bank of English, the expression "pass through" occurred thirty times, but none of the usages were of the type in the example above. They were mainly to do

with physically "passing through" doorways and places, as exemplified in the expression: "around fifteen million people will pass through the Bullring". The NNSs were significantly less tolerant than the NS of "run through" as both noun and verb, but significantly more tolerant of the noun phrase "a run over". The reasons are unclear, but one factor may well have been unfamiliarity with, and thus uncertainty about, "run" as a noun; there was thus an almost equal chance of NNS guessing this item to be "acceptable" or "unacceptable".

Besides the significant differences between the two groups on these four items, there was a considerable amount of variation within the two groups, which is worth exploring in more detail. It is to this variation that we now turn.

Variation within the native speaker reactions

• to skate through/over

In the open section for comments, several Canadian NS said they had never come across "skate over" as a figurative / class management term. Typical concerns were:

> I find your selections very odd as, for the most part, in Canada, we only use "go over" and a "run through" (...) generally, I would say we use 1/4 of your expressions...the expressions with "shall" are extremely awkward (…) we would more likely say "run through"

> I'm unfamiliar with the use of the verb "to skate" in these contexts. Perhaps it's British usage?

> Being Canadian, I'm not sure if "run over" and "skate over" are Br. English expressions or not. They sound strange to me. I would say "run through" and have never heard "skate over" or "skate through".

It is possible that "skate over" is a purely UK term –though neither the *Cobuild Advanced Learners Dictionary* nor the *Oxford ALDC* gives any indication of regional use. Interestingly, "skate through" did not occur in the Bank of English. In fact there were only four instances of "skate" including one "skate over", all of which were in the British English section of the corpus:

(i) the way that they did. Well I'll **skate** over some complexities in Sen's

(ii) pond. <M01> Oh. <M02> We kids used to **skate** on there. <tc text=laughs>

(iii)   means and these days you tend to **skate** <tc text=pause> talking about it in

(iv)   you know I mean l+ I feel I perhaps **skate** around more than just coming out

However, despite these concerns, all but one NS felt "skate over" meant "ignore" (Q2c) and, in line with this, all but one (a different person) felt you could not say "skate over X in detail" (Q4a). We ourselves were uncertain about whether "skate through" (Q1c) could be used acceptably, to mean "deal very rapidly with" and this would appear to be mirrored by the NS reactions (13 OK; 24 not OK). "Skate rapidly over X" (Q3d) posed a similar problem, since, if you find it acceptable you must change the sense of "skate over" from "ignore" to "deal briefly with". The NS respondents showed the same split as with Q1c (13 OK; 24 not OK) –with 66% of them having the same reaction to both items.

• to go over/through

Our expectation was that these two verbs would show few differences of opinion between the NS. Thus everyone agreed that "go through Chapter 4" was acceptable, as was "go over homework in detail". However, somewhat surprisingly, 11 NS felt "go over" was not an unmarked verb and so could not be used to mark the opposite: "go rapidly over your homework". Curiously, two NS felt "go over your homework" did *not* by default suggest a detailed discussion, but rather meant "deal with briefly/ignore".

• to pass over/through

All the NS rejected "pass through Chapter 4" (Q1a), all but one felt "pass over" meant "ignore" (Q2b) and all but 2 felt you could not say "pass over in detail" (Q4b). However, as many as 23 (31%) felt you could not say "pass rapidly over". The reason why is unclear. As a similar situation occurred with "skate over" (Q3d), it may be an artefact of the questionnaire, or perhaps a UK use of the adverb (at times with hyperbolic or slightly ironic design).

• to run over /through

All the NS accepted "run through", but beyond this, the results were quite mixed. Nine NS felt "run over your homework" (Q2a) meant "ignore" it, 14 felt you could *not* say "run rapidly over your homework" (Q3c) and 14 felt it *was* acceptable to say "run in detail over" (Q4d). It is very hard to explain these results; it is not as if the same c. 10 people had a coherent but different

mental model of "run" – only 4 of the people concerned agreed between Q2a and Q3c, only 3 between Q2a and Q4d, and there were no agreements between Q2a and Q4d. If the comments above are right, and "run over a text/task" is not used in Canadian English, then the variation would represent guesswork and an acquiescence effect of trying to help a UK questioner.

Interestingly, *Cobuild* does not list "run over" with the sense of "list", "discuss" or "explain", just that of crashing into (e.g.) a dog, and the US spoken subcorpus of the Bank of English lists just one example of "run over" in the sense of examine:

> the — <X01> You wouldn't want to just run over the rules just for something

• The nouns "run" and "go"

All the NS accepted "a run through" (Q5a) and 35 (95%) rejected "a short run over" (Q5b), but interestingly, 19 also accepted "a short go through" (Q5c) and 12 "a short go over" (Q5d). These usages sounded marked to both of us, and we found no instances of them in the Bank of English. We therefore asked five NS informants resident in Birmingham what they thought of them. Responses were varied, but in general the informants found them somewhat acceptable, if slightly marked. "A short go through" was deemed slightly more acceptable than "a short go over", in line with the responses of our participants, and younger informants tended to be more accepting of them than older ones. We can tentatively conclude therefore that the tendency of the participants in our study to accept these expressions as relatively unmarked was either due to the fact that they had been living abroad for a number of years (an idea that we develop further in the discussion below) or that there is a generational bias in our study (the participants in the study were, on average, 20 years younger than the authors). The usages may have recently entered the English language, and may not yet have been picked up by the Bank of English.

• NS conclusions

We had expected the NS reactions to be highly predictable, in almost all cases. The variation we found was considerably more than we expected and in some cases was difficult to explain. How far responses were affected by the use of a questionnaire format, or the decision to use "I shall" rather than an ambiguous contracted "I'll", are unclear.

Variation within the non-native speaker reactions

• Verbs with "through"

All but one NNS accepted "go through", but 10 rejected "run through", even though they were highly likely to have heard it repeatedly used by their lecturers over the previous six months. We comment further on this below. 32 students rejected "skate through", but only 27 rejected "pass through". If we look at the 9 who accepted "pass through", all accepted "go through", 7 accepted "run through" and 7 rejected "skate through". The sample is too small to establish a pattern, but we might suggest that "pass" was interpreted as roughly similar semantically to "go", and "pass through" was thus seen by analogy as a plausible English phrase.

• Verbs with "over"

The reactions to Q2 (verb + "over") and Q4 (verb + "over" + "in detail") were mostly in line with the anticipated correct answers. Thus, of the 37 respondents to Q2, 34 felt "pass over" meant ignore, 33 felt "skate over" meant ignore and 35 felt "go over" meant cover. Views were more divided (or respondents were more uncertain) about "run over", with 24 saying "cover" and 13 saying "briefly cover/ignore".

The ratings for Q4 (verb + "over" + "in detail") were mostly consistent with those for Q2. Thus 31 people felt "skate over in detail" was unacceptable, as did 32 people for "pass over". Similarly 36 rated "go over in detail" as acceptable. Opinions were again divided about "run + over + in detail" (15 said "OK").

In Q3, opinions were much more evenly divided on the acceptability of verb + "rapidly" + "over", even where the verb ("run" or "skate") inherently had the idea of speed. In one case there may have been a halo effect. The verb "go" occurred consecutively in Q2d and Q3a, so if you felt "go" + "over" meant "covered the topic", you might be more inclined to think "go" + "rapidly" + "over" would *not* be acceptable.

The mixed reactions to the three "run" + "over" items (Q2a, Q3c, Q4d) are worth examining in a little more detail. Three people (all IELTS 7) rejected all three; indeed, they also rejected "run" + "through" (Q1d), so for them the verb "run" simply did not have the figurative sense of mention or discuss. The other 34 accepted at least one of the "run over"'s. Indeed, 10 accepted both the modified phrases, so for them "run over" could (like "go") take on different qualities depending on the modifier.

One might have expected the 20 people who accepted "run rapidly over" to represent most of the 22 who rejected "run in detail over", but this was not the case; only 11 people (i.e. about half) felt the two were mutually exclusive.

There may be a semantic explanation for the NNS's greater variation/ uncertainty with respect to "run over". We noted earlier Tomasello's (2003) finding that strong form-meaning associations can reduce an L1 learner's willingness to accept a new meaning for a phrase. The results in this study may indicate that this can also be the case for L2 learners. The common physical sense of "run over a person/animal", which we assume all the NNS respondents knew, might have stopped some from accepting "run over items in a text". More research would be required, however, to test whether our interpretation here is correct.

• The nouns "run" and "go"

Two thirds (65%) of the NNS respondents identified "a run through" as acceptable. Opinion was divided fairly evenly with respect to "a run over", "a go through" and "a go over", with 17 (46%) accepting "a go through" and "a go over". The high level of acceptance of these usages can be attributed in part to the high proportion of South East Asian respondents in the sample, whose L1s do not distinguish finite and non-finite verb forms. We thus assume decisions were largely made on semantic grounds. However, it seems unlikely that there was a semantic transfer from previous acceptability decisions about the verbs "run" and "go", as we would then have expected "a go through" to have been more, not less, acceptable than "a run through". Given the small size of the sample, the variation may, as we noted earlier, simply reflect widespread NNS uncertainty about the use of "run" and "go" in noun phrases.

NNS conclusions

On the whole, the NNS may have been guessing at times, but at a general level the group was not phased by the similarity of verbs of movement and correctly established where the meaning of the phrasal verb flipped from "cover carefully" to "ignore". Reactions to "run" were mixed and for a small group of IELTS 7 students, it had no sense of discuss at all. A third of the group were also unaware of the derived noun "run through". Reactions to "rapidly" were also mixed, and about half the NNS group seemed to have difficulty establishing that all four verbs could be modified to imply (or highlight) a less thorough discussion. Having said that, the group as a whole

seemed to accept "pass" + "rapidly" + "over" more often (22 (60%)) than the native speakers, of whom 23 (62%), for some reason, rejected it.

Discussion

In this study, we have made two main findings. The first is that, with the exception of the four cases listed above, there was in general little significant disagreement between the NSs and the NNS populations. This statistical similarity is, however, somewhat illusory partly because of the small sample, but more importantly due to the second finding.

The second finding is that there was a substantial amount of variation within both groups. We expected a reasonable degree of variation between non-native speakers, if only because several would be uncertain about the acceptability or meaning of particular phrases, especially if they had not been exposed to them in the recent past. However, the extent of variation in the native speakers was much more surprising, and is an indication of the fact that one must be very wary of talking in terms of "native speaker norms" when conducting this type of study.

Part of the variation seems due to differences between Canadian and British English. The dictionaries consulted at the start of the study had not suggested differences with respect to "skate" or "run over", but the question of regional variation in "inner circle" vocabulary for classroom management language is important, at the very least with respect to training practices, arguing perhaps for different strategies for training students studying in English-speaking countries and students intending to teach in non-English speaking countries.

Another part of the variation between the native speakers can probably be attributed to the fact that many of the NS had been abroad, in non-English-speaking countries, for up to ten years. Living abroad and regularly speaking a second or third language can have a significant impact on one's use of the L1. It has been discovered that speaking a second or third language can make quite a large impression on the way in which we speak our *first* language (Cook et al., 2003). Research in this area, which is sometimes referred to as "reverse" or "backward" transfer tends to emphasise the notion of "multi-competence", or knowledge of two or more languages in one mind (Cook, 1992). Jarvis (2003) presents a case where the acquisition of a second language led to an extended repertoire in the L1. In other words, while the

speaker was still able to use L1 rules, he was also able to import L2 rules, structures and meanings into the first language. So the ability to speak another language may have made some of the participants in this study more likely to find meaning in the expressions studied than their monolingual counterparts. Another factor that may explain this variation relates to the participants' tolerance of ambiguity (Ely, 1986). Research has shown that people vary in terms of what they are likely to accept as meaningful and that some people are more tolerant than others. The tendency among the NS to treat the noun phrases with "go" as acceptable may have been due to L2 influence, combined with the fact that they had been living abroad, or, as we noted above, it may reflect a genuine change in the English language.

As for the NNSs, the reasons for the variation in their responses are likely to be slightly different. Tolerance of ambiguity will be one factor, but another equally important factor is likely to be the different levels and types of exposure that they have had to the target language. Also, as we mentioned above, the native language of the participants is also likely to have been a contributing factor (the NNSs in this study had nine different native languages). Basically, this finding emphasises the huge differences in terms of target language knowledge that can exist in the minds of learners who are, on the face of it, roughly similar in terms of proficiency.

This leaves our conclusions about what started out as the main focus of the study; whether NNS would be tempted to treat all verbs of movement as roughly equivalent members of a single DOING A TASK IS TRAVELLING metaphor. It has to be said that, for the most part, they managed to distinguish correctly (in terms of our original expectations of correctness) between metaphors for doing things ("run through/run over things") and metaphors for avoiding or not doing them ("skate over things") and that they were thus able to display some sensitivity to the more subtle shades of meaning.

To sum up, this small study has been no more than an exploratory probe, but there are nevertheless several important research and pedagogical implications. The first is that more research is needed into regional variation in metaphoric (and possibly non-figurative) classroom management language, and the results need to be fed back into key commercial reference materials. The second implication is that, to the extent that the sample of 37 is at all representative of NNS on UK masters courses, many NNS coming to the UK need training in the precise meaning of the phrases they will hear

their lecturers use. Ideally, this training would take place long before the students come to Britain, but equally, it is something that university presessional courses might take more account of. The third implication is that TEFL teacher trainers in the UK need to take a position on the scope of what they teach, as they cannot assume classroom phrases common in the UK will be equally common abroad. Lastly, it tends to be assumed that NS of English coming to study in the UK will have no problems understanding the classroom management language they hear – but the respondents' comments make it abundantly clear that this is not the case, so a degree of training and discussion might help NS learners too.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: Extract from on-line questionnaire

B. Your reactions to the language

1. Which of these expressions with "through" are/aren't normal English?
a. I'm going to run through Chapter 4 with you.	OK	Not OK
b. I'm going to go through Chapter 4 with you.	OK	Not OK
c. I'm going to pass through Chapter 4 with you.	OK	Not OK
d. I'm going to slide through Chapter 4 with you.	OK	Not OK
e. I'm going to skate through Chapter 4 with you.	OK	Not OK

2. Which of these expressions with "over" are/aren't normal English?
a. I'm going to run over the new instructions.	OK	Not OK
b. I'm going to go over the new instructions.	OK	Not OK
c. I'm going to pass over the new instructions.	OK	Not OK
d. I'm going to gloss over the new instructions.	OK	Not OK
e. I'll going to skate over the new instructions.	OK	Not OK

3. Which of the following mean "explain/cover" and which mean "not cover in detail"?
a. I want to run over your homework	Cover	Not cover
b. I want to pass over your homework	Cover	Not cover
c. I want to skate over your homework	Cover	Not cover
d. I want to gloss over your homework	Cover	Not cover
e. I want to go over your homework	Cover	Not cover

4. To which statements could you add in the word "rapidly"?
a. I want to run over your homework	Can add	Can't add
b. I want to pass over your homework	Can add	Can't add
c. I want to skate over your homework	Can add	Can't add
d. I want to gloss over your homework	Can add	Can't add
e. I want to go over your homework	Can add	Can't add

5. To which could you add "in detail"?
a. I want to run over your homework	Can add	Can't add
b. I want to pass over your homework	Can add	Can't add
c. I want to skate over your homework	Can add	Can't add
d. I want to gloss over your homework	Can add	Can't add
e. I want to go over your homework	Can add	Can't add

6. Which statement can a drama teacher say about a play rehearsal?
a. I want a short run through after school	OK	Not OK
b. I want a short run over after school	OK	Not OK
c. I want a short go through after school	OK	Not OK
d. I want a short go over after school	OK	Not OK

7. If you want to comment on any of your answers, please write in the box below: