

# Phonetic Considerations in Metaphors\*

Chun-lin Luo

Providence University, Taichung, Taiwan

It was found that English as a foreign language (EFL) learners had problems understanding metaphors. In previous studies, the metaphors in the song lyrics under investigation were analyzed. A correspondence which merits further research is the shared phonetic shape of the metaphors. The relation between sound and meaning is generally assumed to be arbitrary. Nevertheless, in the past decades, cross-linguistic data on sound symbolism have shown some significance in language that scholarship should recognize. There has been less work on the relationship between sound symbolism and metaphor; hence, the present study focuses on the interactions between phonetics and metaphors. The attempt is to provide a phonetic consideration on the metaphors collected in previous studies and to infer the existence of additional variables which might be relevant to metaphor description; in effect, concrete and abstract metaphors may be at play. These analyses are expected to provide consolidation for English teachers' linguistic foundation.

*Keywords:* metaphor, phonetics, English as a foreign language (EFL)

## Introduction

It was found that the students of English as a foreign language (EFL) had problems comprehending the non-literal meaning of metaphors. Many words have literal, non-literal, and metaphorical interpretations. The suggestive meanings of the metaphors designated are used implicitly or explicitly to mean something else. In other words, a metaphor is used to express ordinarily one thing or concept, but its literal meaning designates another thing or concept. Even though the purpose of translation is to bridge the thoughts and concepts from one language to another, it is indeed a challenge for EFL learners to decipher the metaphorical meaning of the original ideas and thoughts in the target language. Since metaphors were found to be a common area of students' weakness in learning, the purpose of Luo's (2010) study was thus to analyze the metaphors in the songs used in the studies during 2008-2010. A correspondence which merits further study is the shared phonetic shape of metaphors. Therefore, the aim of the present study would focus on the interactions between phonetics and metaphors, and the analysis provided is expected to offer consolidation for English teachers' linguistic foundation.

Generally, it is assumed that the relation between sound and meaning is arbitrary. Aspects of language against this assumption have traditionally been considered only as exceptional to the general rule. Nevertheless, in the past decades, cross-linguistic data on sound symbolism have shown some significance in language that scholarship should recognize (Hinton, Nichols, & Ohala, 1994). For example, Ultan (1978) found that in nearly 90% of the languages under his research that had diminutive marking, the diminutive was symbolized by high front vowels. Hines (1996) went "challenging the tenet of 'the arbitrariness of the sign'" (p. 196) in her metaphor

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Chun-lin Luo, Ph.D., associate professor, Department of English Language, Literature, and Linguistics, Providence University.

description. Recently, Carlson and Gerfen (2011) linked the distribution of diphthongs to a general and crosslinguistic tendency for words with productive morphology to be phonologically marked. There has been less work on the relationship between sound symbolism and metaphor; hence, to consolidate English teachers' linguistic foundation, the present study would focus on the interactions between phonetics and metaphors.

The analyses of metaphors were further divided into two categories, namely, concrete and abstract. These two terms are assigned based on the forms of the metaphor. For instance, "Students are plants and teachers are gardeners" is a metaphor containing concrete things, like plants and gardeners. Its metaphorical meaning would be that students are just like plants in the garden and need gardeners to take care to grow up. The conceptual mapping links "students" to "plants" in the garden that need the care of the gardeners to grow up and links "teachers" to "gardeners" who take care of the plants in the garden. "Walls have ears" is another example of concrete metaphor that contains concrete things, like walls and ears. It can be interpreted as "People may be listening even when you think they are not because you do not see them". In this sentence, the conceptual mappings link "ears" to "listening" and "walls" to "unseen people". The concrete form of metaphors is usually relatively easier to understand compared to the abstract form of metaphors. For example, "The streets have run crazy..." in O. Henry's (1985) story of "The Last Leaf" might not be easy for students to understand. In the sentence, "crazy" is an abstract notion that is usually used to describe the mental condition. The mental adjective "crazy" is used figuratively here to mean the way that the streets are laid out is not normal (Luo, 2005).

The following sections of the current study include discussions of previous research and identifications and analyses of the "core" elements of the metaphors in terms of their phonetic features and phonological markedness. Then, the interactions between phonetics and metaphors would be generalized and characterized tentatively according to the contrast of concreteness and abstractness.

### **Metaphor**

Metaphor is an important component of language creativity and also is a significant part of people's conceptual systems (Gibbs & Steen, 1999). Several studies (Lakoff, 1987; 1990; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Fiumara, 1995; Gibbs, 1994; 1996; Fauconnier, 1994; 1997; Goatly, 1997; Gibbs & Steen, 1999) have shown that metaphor is fundamental to the human thinking process. Goatly (1997) said, "Metaphor and the mental processes it entails are basic to language and cognition" (p. 1). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further pointed out that human beings think and act through the means of metaphor which is permanent in not only language, but also thought and action. The use of metaphors shows how human beings conceptualize their worlds and function within them. The conceptualized metaphors structure how human beings perceive the world, how they live in the world, and how they interact with other people (Su, 2007). Su (2007) claimed that "The generalizations that are captured by metaphor are not in language, but in thought. They have to do with conceptualizing one mental domain with another. They have to do with cross-mapping from one domain to another" (p. 7). In other words, abstract concepts, like time, states, change, and causation in our everyday life, are all metaphorical. "Metaphor" is not just a surface ornamentation of language but human thinking processes. It is the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else. For example, in the sentence, "The war against drugs", the word "war" is used here as a strong word for "fight" to show the determination of reducing the number of drug addicts (Cameron, 2003). In the above example, the speaker is talking about drug fight in terms of war. The concept of war is frequently used metaphorically in our daily life. This will be discussed further later.

Metaphors serve as a basic cognitive structure and a mechanism that enables people to understand a relatively abstract concept and perform abstract reasoning (Yu, 1998). The reason that people are capable of adapting concrete language to refer to an abstract concept and vice versa is because they are able to combine language concepts with their experiences in the real world and stretch the concepts and the experiences to refer to various related or non-related concepts. Mey (1993) proposed that “Metaphors are conceptual means of dealing with the world which have become accepted within a given linguistic and cultural community” (p. 62). That is, metaphor is a way of life because different ways of life lead to different metaphors and the understanding of life requires the understanding of metaphors. Accordingly, the metaphoric way of describing the happenings in our lives reflects the metaphoric way of our thinking. An account of metaphor as implicit and conceptual was proposed by Lakoff and his colleagues (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). They identified many groups of metaphors, each arranged around a shared implicit metaphor; they traced the implicit underlying metaphor to a literal concept on the basis of embodied physical experience. Most conceptual reasoning is basically metaphorical because human abstract concepts are experienced and expressed in terms of embodied physical experience.

In Lakoff’s (1993) *Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, it is proposed that conceptual metaphors involve mapping one conceptual domain, the source domain, onto another conceptual domain, the target domain. Let us look at the famous example, “Argument is war”, from Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) *Metaphors We Live by*. The source domain “war” is used to account for the target domain “argument”. Table 1 below contains examples to show how people talk about argument in terms of war. People analogize argument as a battle only without the physical fights because the things we say in the process of arguing are like the different things people do in the war. In order to gain the ground or to win the argument, we adopt strategies to defend ourselves and attack the rival’s positions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Through this kind of correspondence, people understand the abstract target domain “argument” through more concrete source domain “war”.

Table 1  
 From Conceptual Metaphor to Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions

The experience	War
The conceptual metaphor	Argument is war
Metaphorical expressions	Your claims are <i>indefensible</i> . He <i>attacked</i> every weak point in my argument. His criticisms were right on <i>target</i> . I <i>demolished</i> his argument. I have never <i>won</i> an argument with him. You disagree? Okay, <i>shoot!</i> If you use that <i>strategy</i> , he will <i>wipe you out</i> . He <i>shot down</i> all of my arguments.
Metaphorical correspondence	The structure of an argument corresponds to the structure of war.
Metaphorical entailment	The experience or the concept of war is used to structure the concept of war as an argument. The linguistic expressions about arguments correspond to the conceptual metaphor of war. Similarly, one’s way of acting and interacting with others during an argument corresponds to the concept of war.

Note. Source: Su (2007, p. 8).

The “Argument is war” metaphor plays a central role in European cultures and it structures the actions that people perform in arguing. Su (2007) stated, “The essence of a metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of conceptual domain in terms of another and these concepts are metaphorically structured” (p. 7). The

forming of the “Argument is war” metaphor is by applying people’s experiences of war to structure the activity of arguing since many of the things they say and do in the process of arguing are similar to those of war; thus, argument is structured by the concept of war. Argument is not war. It is not even a subspecies of war. The former one is verbal discourse and the latter one is armed conflict. They are two different things. Figure 1 adopted from Su (2007, p. 8) shows the process of conceptual mapping from the source domain to the target domain. Su (2007) also pointed out that “The concept of war is metaphorically structured, then the activity of arguing shares this metaphorical structure” (p. 8).

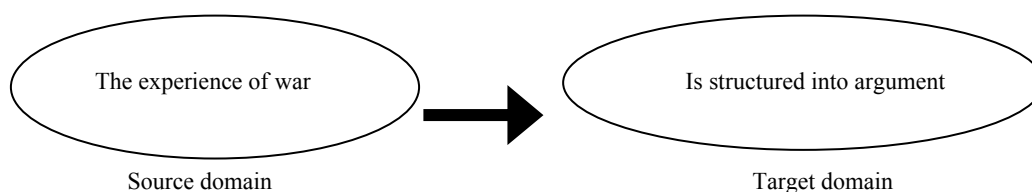


Figure 1. The process of conceptual mapping.

It is important to know that the mapping between domains could be abstract to concrete, concrete to concrete, and concrete to abstract. Moreover, metaphors can begin with either source domain or target domain. Let us look at the following examples provided by Glucksberg, McGlone, and Manfredi (1997): “His lawyers were sharks” is mapping between two concrete domains; “Love was the couple’s voyage” is to understand the abstract “love” through a more concrete concept like “voyage”.

As mentioned above, metaphor can not only serve as an important role in our daily discourse but it can also be found throughout our everyday language (Gibbs, 1994), even though the stereotypical view of metaphor is often a matter of words, a characteristic of language, rather than thought or action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors are indeed used more frequently than we know of so that they are often overlooked. Lakoff (1993; 1994) proposed that one of the important properties of metaphors is that they are used mostly unconsciously, automatically, constantly, and unnoticeably, just like our linguistic system and the rest of our conceptual system. Metaphor is like a common linguistic occurrence. It has various textual appearances and different functions in various settings, and it is also crucial to different types of communication, from informal interaction to political speeches (Semino, 2008).

Johnson (1975) found that there were five metaphors in every 100 words of general talk. H. Pollio, Barlow, Fine, and M. Pollio (1977) also estimated that an average of four “figures of speech” per minute was found in teachers’ talk over 12 hours which approximates to a strong linguistic metaphor. In another study of figurative speech in college lectures, Cortis and Poillio (1999) found that, in every 4.8 sentences, one “figurative use” was found; the figurative speech includes metaphor, hyperbole, irony, and so forth. Cameron (2003) also suggested that four metaphors in 70 words per minute were found in teacher talk. Not only do metaphors appear pervasively in spoken language, it is also common in written texts. Arter (1976) found a 2.5% proportion of “figurative language” in recognized literature excluding poetry and Pickens, M. Pllio, and R. Pollio (1985, p. 483) found a proportion of 1% of “figurative language” in basic readers.

The Conceptual Mapping Model for metaphor processing proposed by Ahrens (2002) categorized metaphors into three types, which are “conventional metaphor”, “novel metaphors that follow mapping principles”, and “novel metaphors that do not follow mapping principles”. Examples of each type adopted from Lu (2001) were provided in Table 2. By looking at how long it takes for people to react to the three types of

metaphors, Lu (2001) was able to discover the different comprehending speed of each type of the metaphor in Chinese. In her first of the two experiments, the whole sentence reading time experiment, the participants were asked to listen to the stimuli and the time spent on understanding these sentences was measured. The result suggested that conventional metaphors be processed the fastest since the conventional metaphors are already embedded in the lexicon or conceptual system. This type of metaphor is frequently heard and used in daily conversation. The second type of metaphor is processed the second fastest since it is less acceptable than the first type. Readers might have to take a little bit of time to think about it before understanding the intended meaning. The third type is processed the slowest since it is the least understandable. Even though the reader might understand every single word in the sentence, the meaning of the whole sentence might be anomalous. The results of her second experiment, the literal truthfulness judgment of metaphors, dealt with the issue of “literal falsity” in metaphor. The anomaly view towards the issue proposes that it is because the literal meaning is absurd to people, they are thus able to detect metaphors and understand them.

Table 2

*The Three Types of Metaphors*

Metaphors and mapping principle	Metaphor type	Experiment stimuli
Idea is an infant: Idea is understood as an infant because infants are physical beings that are born and ideas are abstract entities that are born.	Conventional metaphor	Tade lunwen dansheng le. His thesis is born.
	Novel metaphors that follow mapping principles	Tade lunwen manyue le. His thesis is a month old.
	Novel metaphors that do not follow mapping principles	Tade lunwen duannai le. His thesis is weaned.

*Note.* Source: Adopted from Lu (2001, p. 130).

Many studies (Clark & Lucy, 1975; Glucksberg, Gildea, & Bookin, 1982; Wolff & Gentner, 2000) have suggested that if a sentence can not be interpreted by its literal meaning, the metaphorical interpretation is then generated. The results of Lu’s (2001) second experiment suggested that it takes the longest for people to figure out that the conventional metaphor is actually literally false statement. The reason for that is because the conventional metaphors are the most commonly used metaphors and people are so used to them. It is very easy to mistake “metaphorically true” to “literally false” statements. The third type of metaphors is, on the other hand, the easiest and the quickest to be judged as literally false statement since they are the most novel and their interpretability is the highest among the three (Lu, 2001). It is important to know that the distinctions of conventional and novel metaphors could seriously affect the results of the study since conventional and novel metaphors might be processed differently in the human brain (Gentner & Wolff, 1997). Gentner and Wolff (1997) have already proposed that it is very likely that people, when dealing with different types of metaphors, adopt different strategies to decipher the metaphors. They also indicated that novel metaphors may be understood by alignment. It is still an unclear issue that how metaphors are processed and comprehended. There are some studies that attempt to reveal the process of people making sense of metaphors. The four studies of Gibbs and Nascimento (1993) have investigated how people adopt their previous knowledge to make sense of a novel statement. The results showed that people utilized various metaphors to conceptualize “love” and they were also aware of the metaphors used in poems. Moreover, people understood certain common metaphorical expressions when they were reading love poems. The studies provided evidence to show how people understand the literary language, and also provided opportunities for us to see that people unconsciously adopt their preexisting knowledge or apply the same conceptual domain to make sense of a novel statement.

### **Metaphor in Song Lyrics**

A song lyric is like a poetry that has limitation in length; yet, it contains more of the authentic language that people use every day. Metaphors reveal the way that lyricists think and act. A song lyric could also reflect the culture of a certain area of a certain group.

In the exploration of metaphors in Taiwanese love song lyrics from year 1990-2008, Chang (2008) found out how lyricists express their ideas and concepts by adopting metaphors in the lyrics. They showed aspect of culture that metaphors reflect in the lyrics and the interaction between audience and their own cognition and thoughts. Lyrics are often related to the five senses of human body: touch, see, smell, hear, and taste. Such a phenomenon is congruent with the Mind-as-Body Metaphor proposed by Sweetser (1990). Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the most commonly used conceptual metaphor in Taiwanese song lyrics is "Love is food". It is different from the results shown in other research, where "Love is a journey" is the majority of conceptual metaphors. This reflects Taiwanese culture in that people talk about the concept of love in terms of food.

Moreover, in the process of exploring the lyrics, Chang (2008) categorized the features of metaphors in lyrics into different kinds based on the theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1996; 1998; 2002). First of all, different metaphors are found in one song and all those metaphors actually refer to only one similar concept. Second, one metaphor is found within one song but it is used to refer to various meanings, e.g., the sentence "Smoke gets in your eyes", appeared twice in the song "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes". At the first time, the lyricist is trying to say that when smoke gets in the eyes, it makes people's eyesight blurry because they are so madly in love that they are not aware of their lover's faults. The second time means that when the love between two people is gone, smoke gets in the eyes and people will cry. One is to express the extremely happy feeling of being in love and the other is to describe the heart-broken feeling. Third, the metaphors in the song lyrics are persuasive and encourage people to do something. Fourth, the interpretations of the metaphors in song lyrics are not fixed. It has room for decipherment of people with different backgrounds and experiences. In other words, the meaning of the metaphors could be diverse. If people have their own interpretation of the lyrics, it is more likely that they would like the songs better (Chang, 2008).

### **Phonosemantics**

The sort of sound-symbolic patterning commonly discussed and illustrated is in terms of imitatives and synesthetic sound-symbolic forms. For instance, in imitatives, stops are used for abrupt sounds and acts, and continuants for continuing sounds and acts. Synesthetic sound symbolism is the process by which some vowels, consonants, and suprasegmentals represent visual, tactile, or proprioceptive features of objects, like size or shape. For example, sounds, such as palatal consonants and high vowels are commonly used for diminutive forms and words meaning small objects (Hinton et al., 1994).

People, especially children, learning a language, be it first or second, often use phonological resemblance as a strategy for interpreting unfamiliar words. The strategy becomes reinforced when some threshold of phonosemantic coherence is reached. This mechanism is proposed for the retention of phonosemantically related sets of lexical items over a long period of time (Lawler, 1990). Further, in the analysis of the lexicalization of a metaphor, one of the findings of Hines (1996) is the shared phonetic shape of the metaphorical expressions. Whether or not it is a peculiar coincidence or a linguistic conspiracy, Hines

suggested “eccentricity of the sign” against “the arbitrariness of the sign”. Similarly, the attempt of the present article is to provide a phonetic consideration on the metaphors collected in previous studies related to song lyrics and to infer the existence of additional variables which might be relevant to metaphor description and hence provide consolidation for teacher education.

### Methodology

The analysis used in this study follows an “ecological” approach in the sense of Rhodes and Lawler (1981)’s “reject(ing) presupposition of monocausal explanations” (p. 1) to examine the metaphorical expressions in the song lyrics. Metaphors subject to concrete and abstract subsets are described and discussed for the existence of additional variables, phonetics hereof.

The analysis framework is mainly based on that of Lakoff and his colleagues (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989), Luo (2005; 2010), and Hines (1996). The procedures start with identification of all the non-literal metaphorical meanings denoted by the words and expressions in the song lyrics. Then, the expressions are categorized as concrete and abstract as the classification shown in Luo’s (2005) study and in the “Introduction” section above. The “core” elements of the metaphors will be identified and analyzed in terms of their phonetic features as denoted in Hines (1996) and phonological markedness in Carlson and Gerfen (2011). For example, in “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”, the expression “smoke gets in your eyes” is a concrete metaphor with the smoke mapping to the domain of unclearness/blindness and the core element is “smoke”; then, the beginning of “smoke” is a phonologically marked consonant cluster. After the phonetic descriptions of the metaphors, the interactions between phonetics and metaphors will be generalized and characterized tentatively according to the contrast of concreteness and abstractness. The analysis process is illustrated in Figure 2.

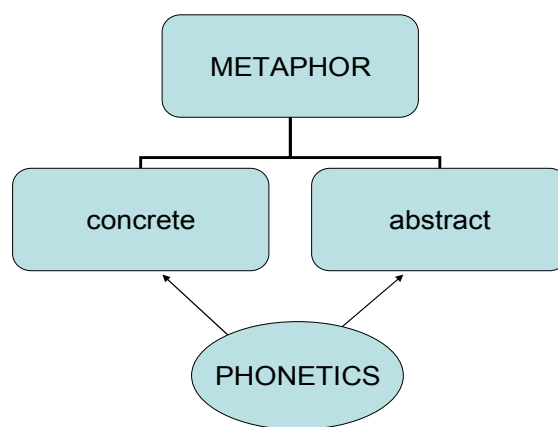


Figure 2. The analysis process of metaphor and phonetics.

### Phonetic Description of Metaphors

#### Concrete Forms of Metaphor

“Always”. How metaphors are used to assist the expression of one’s idea is shown in the line “Your life is sun chasing all the rain away” in the song “Always”; “sun” is mapped to the girl’s life, meaning her life is like the sun, bright and warm. “Sun” here is also personified as if it could move like human and repulse the rain away. “Rain” is used to illustrate a more negative side of life. The above citation means that “The girl’s life is bright and warm and repels away the bad things in life”. The core words here are “sun” /sʌn/ and “rain” /ren/;

both are frequent nouns and phonologically unmarked in the sense that both are of the phonetic structure of consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC).

**“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”.** In the lines “All who love are blind. When your heart’s on fire, you must realize. Smoke gets in your eyes”, “blind” literally meaning “cannot see” is mapped to people in love, who are usually not aware of their lover’s faults. The phrase “on fire” is used to describe the feeling of being in love and the heart filled with such strong passion for someone as if it were on fire. The smoke caused by the fire makes everything blurry. The citation means that when people are in love, the feeling can be so strong that it can make people lose their mind and not aware of their lover’s faults. The core elements are “blind” /blaɪnd/ and “fire” /faɪr/; the former starts with a consonant cluster, hence phonologically marked, and the latter with an unmarked structure of CVC.

An example of personification is in “When a lovely flame dies, smoke gets in your eyes”; “Flame” is personified otherwise it cannot literally die like a human being. “Lovely flame” refers to love and when the flame goes out, it creates smoke. Smoke getting in one’s eyes will irritate them and make them form tears. The citation means when the love is gone, one will cry. The core words here are “flame” /flem/ and “smoke” /smok/, both begin with consonant clusters and are phonologically marked.

**“She”.** She is an anonymous girl in the song that the man wants to be with. The lyricist adopted a lot of metaphors to illustrate the contradictory feelings of the man toward his dream girl. In the lyric, “Treasure or the price I have to pay” illustrates that being with her could be the most valuable thing for the man or it could be a lesson he would learn if she breaks his heart. The core elements “treasure” /trɛʒər/ and “price” /praɪs/ both begin with phonologically marked consonant clusters. In “Song that summer sings, and chill that autumn brings”, the mapping is made between the feelings of being with her and the warmth and coldness of different seasons. The words “song” /sɒŋ/, “summer” /sʌmə/, “sings” /sɪŋz/, and “chill” /tʃɪl/, all begin with unmarked sibilants, and “autumn” /ɔtəm/ and “brings” /brɪŋz/ begin with marked sounds of /ɔ/ and a combination of consonant cluster respectively. “Beauty and beast” means that she could be a “wonderful girl” or a “terrible” girl, with the two words both begin with the unmarked bilabial /b/. “Famine or the feast” means that being with her could leave the man starving for something or it could make him feel completely satisfied, and the two words both begin with the unmarked fricative /f/. “She may be the mirror of my dreams” means the girl maybe everything (since mirrors reflect everything) the man dreams of, and the core word “mirror” /mɪrər/ begins with an unmarked bilabial nasal. “She may come to me from shadows in the past that I remember till the day I die”; here, “shadows” refer to memory and the citation means that she will always be in the man’s memory and he will always think about her until the day he passes away. The mapping between shadows and memory relies on their feature of being unreachable. The core word “shadow” /ʃædɔw/ begins with an unmarked sibilant. In the end of the song, the line “Me, I will take the laughter and her tears” illustrates the determination of the man being willing to be with her. He will take the laughter, symbolizing the good times, and tears, the bad times. The core words “laughter” /læftər/ and “tears” /tɪrz/ start with unmarked sounds.

**“Memory”.** In the sentence “It is so easy to leave me all alone with the memory of my days in the sun”, “my days in the sun” refer to the good days. The singer has nothing left but the memory of her good days. The core element here is “sun” /sʌn/, phonologically unmarked with a beginning voiceless alveolar fricative and a structure of CVC. In “burnt out ends of smoky days, the stale, cold smell of morning”, “burnt out” means “get rid of”, “put an end to”, or “finish”; “smoky days” means the bad times or the bad situations; and “stale” refers to “old” or “past”; the sentence means to put an end to the bad times in the past. Here, the core words are

“smoky” and “stale”, both phonologically marked with initial consonant clusters. In the line “The moon lost her memory. She is smiling alone”, the “moon” is personified as a woman; as the core word, “moon” /mun/ is phonologically unmarked structure of CVC. A similar mapping of personification is shown in “The wind begins to moan”, where human being’s moaning sound is used to depict the blowing sound of the wind and the wind is personified as if it could moan like a human being. The core words “wind” /wɪnd/ and “moan” /mon/ are phonologically unmarked with an initial labiovelar glide and an initial bilabial nasal respectively. In “I remember the time I knew what happiness was, let the memory live again”, the core word “memory” is personified to be able to come and go, and it begins with an unmarked bilabial nasal. Then, “The street lamp dies” means the street lamp goes out when the sun rises; the “street lamp” is personified, and “street” /stri:t/ starts with a phonologically marked consonant cluster while “lamp” /læmp/ starts with an unmarked lateral.

**“Yesterday Once More”.** “Happy times” are personified as human beings that have gone away and come back again in “Those were such happy times and not so long ago how I wondered where they’d gone. But they’re back again just like<sup>1</sup> a long lost friend”. The core words “happy” /hæpi/ and “times” /taɪmz/ both begin with unmarked sequences of a consonant followed by a vowel. A mapping between the old song and the good old days can be seen in the line “Those old melodies still sound so good to me as they melt the years away”, meaning with the time/years going by, both the songs and people get old, and it is the songs that have brought people back to the good old days. The core words “melodies” and “melt” both begin with the unmarked bilabial nasal.

**“Top of the World”.** When a person is in love, everything she/he sees is great, as in “You are the nearest thing to heaven that I’ve seen”; heaven symbolizes perfection. The beloved is perfect in the eyes of the lover. The core word “heaven” /hevən/ begins with an unmarked sequence of a consonant followed by a vowel. Similarly, “Your love put me at the top of the world” does not mean to stand on the top of the world but describe the feeling that the lover has everything if the beloved is by the side. The core word “top” /tɒp/ contains the unmarked phonological structure of CVC.

**“Let It Be”.** To people who believe in the Catholicism, Mother Mary, the mother of God, is almighty. When people are in trouble or are lost in life, they need an almighty power to guide them from above. Here Mother Mary is mapped to the almighty power: “Mother Mary comes to me speaking words of wisdom”; that is, Mother Mary does not literally appear in front of people but is believed to help people in need. Both of the core words “Mother” and “Mary” start with unmarked sequences of a consonant followed by a vowel.

**“Trouble Sleeping”.** A spatial expression “there” can extend metaphorically to mean “the situation in love” as in “cause I’ve been there before and it’s not enough”. That is, last time when the singer was in love, something must have happened, which made her realize that being in love is not enough, so now she is scared to be in love again because it takes more than being in love for two people to be together. The core word “there” begins with a phonologically marked voiced interdental fricative.

**“Fernando”.** “Every hour every minute seemed to last eternally” is used to describe how scared the person is: He is so scared that an hour or even a minute seems so long for him. The core word “eternally” begins with a marked lax high front vowel /ɪ/. In “We were young and full of life”, “full of life” means they still have a long life ahead of them. The core word “full” /fʊl/ contains an unmarked initial voiceless labiovelar fricative. The color of hair can be mapped to age as in “Now we are old and grey, Fernando”. The core word

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<sup>1</sup> Sentences containing “like” are simile. This sentence of the citation is a case of simile.

“grey” /gre/ starts with a marked consonant cluster. Further, guns and cannons cannot “roar” unless personified as in “The roar of guns and cannons almost made me cry”. The fierce battle is what makes the guns and cannons shoot and produce sounds and thus make people cry out of fear. The core word “roar” /ror/ is composed of an unmarked sequence of CVC.

**“Don’t Know Much”.** “Life” is compared to a road which leads to an unknown destination as in “Look at this life, I still don’t know where it’s going”, which means “I am lost in life”. The core word “life” /laɪf/ contains an unmarked sequence of CVC. In “look at these dreams so beaten and battered”, “beaten and battered” are used metaphorically to mean dreams become old, worn out, and hard to come by as days go by. Both of the core words “beaten” and “battered” start with an unmarked stressed syllable of consonant and vowel (CV).

### **Abstract Forms of Metaphor**

This section describes the use of metaphor in abstract forms and their phonetic representations.

**“Always”.** In the lyric “The love like yours is grand. It must have been sent from up above”, the phrase “up above” literally means overhead, upon, or aloft. The figurative meaning of up above is “heaven”. The sentence means that your love is so great/big that it must have been sent from God in the heaven. The main vowel in the core words “up above” is marked /ʌ/ and their syllable structure is not canonical CV or CVC.

**“She”.** In the line “She may be the trace of pleasure or regret”, we can see “pleasure” refers to happiness and “regret” refers to sadness. Happiness and sadness are two extreme feelings. The citation means if the man is with her, he might be happy or he might be sad as well. The core words “pleasure” /plɛʒər/ and “regret” /rɪɡrɛt/ are both phonologically marked in that their stressed syllable both begin with consonant clusters.

**“Don’t Know Much”.** In “look at this soul still searching for salvation”, the noun “soul” refers to a person and the person is still looking for help. The core words “soul” /sol/ and “salvation” /sælveɪʃən/ both begin with the unmarked syllable structure of CVC.

### **General Discussion**

The analyses in the previous section have detected 47 instances of concrete metaphors and six cases of abstract metaphors in the 10 song lyrics. This asymmetrical result is congruent with those of Luo (2005; 2010). As proposed by Lakoff and his colleagues (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989), the implicit underlying metaphor was traced back to a literal concept on the basis of embodied physical experience. Most conceptual reasoning is basically metaphorical because human abstract concepts are experienced and expressed in terms of embodied physical experience. Hence, abstract metaphors are more advanced and difficult in terms of conceptual reasoning and thus fewer in number compared to concrete metaphors.

Among the 47 cases of concrete metaphors, only 13 of them are phonologically marked; the ratio is no more than one third. On the other hand, there are four out of six abstract metaphors that are phonologically marked; the ratio is two thirds. This finding coincides with those of Lu (2001) and Carlson and Gerfen (2011). By measuring the reaction time of the subjects on different types of metaphors, Lu (2001) found that conventional metaphors were processed the fastest since the conventional metaphors are frequently heard and used in daily conversation. The second type of metaphor was processed the second fastest since it is less acceptable than the first type. The third type was processed the slowest since it is the most difficult and the most novel. In this sense, the abstract metaphors in the current study correspond to Lu’s (2001) second or the third type of the metaphors in that the abstract metaphors are less frequently used and more novel compared to

the concrete ones. In addition, Carlson and Gerfen (2011) conducted corpus search and a lexical decision experiment on Spanish diphthongs and it was found that unmarked phonology is favored in words likely to be processed holistically and marked phonology is favored in those likely to be processed during processing (p. 533). They also claimed that novel structures should be parsed and favor marked phonology. If abstract metaphors here are considered novel, they should favor marked phonology as well, and so do they, as shown in the ratio of two thirds of phonological markedness.

### Conclusions

The present article has provided a phonetic consideration on the metaphors collected in previous studies related to song lyrics and to infer the existence of additional variables. After the phonetic descriptions of the metaphors, the interactions between phonetics and metaphors have been generalized and characterized tentatively according to the contrast of concreteness and abstractness, which might be relevant to metaphor description, and hence provide consolidation for teacher education.

Gentner and Wolff (1997) has already proposed that it is very likely that people, when dealing with different types of metaphors, adopt different strategies to decipher the metaphors. They also indicated that novel metaphors may be understood by alignment. The present study did not carry out empirical experiments to explore the processing of the metaphors. Future research may examine the unclear issue on how metaphors are processed and comprehended.

Although Hines (1996) presented the sound symbolism between voiceless stops /p/, /t/, and /k/ and the central dessert words for women, relevant descriptions in metaphor were not provided. The data in this study could not demonstrate specific or straightforward sound symbolism as shown by Hines (1996) in that the metaphors in this study represent various semantic topics and mappings. Nevertheless, it is significant that the present paper reveals a tendency of the phonological markedness toward the concreteness and abstractness of metaphor. The analyses provided are also expected to offer consolidation for English teachers' linguistic foundation.

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