When Congruency Meets Metaphor: Does Congruency Processing Facilitation for L2 Learners Extend to Metaphoric Collocations?

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Metaphors are pervasive in collocations (e.g., *sweet voice, grasp a concept*), yet few studies considered the figurativeness of collocations. The present study focuses on metaphoric collocations and investigates whether the consistently reported congruency facilitation extends to the L2 processing of metaphoric collocations. A primed lexical decision task was administered to 44 L1 Chinese L2 English learners and 40 L1 English speakers (the control group) to assess response times for metaphoric and literal congruent collocations along with matched incongruent controls. The result shows that congruency facilitation was found in the L2 processing of metaphoric collocations, albeit such facilitation was modulated by both figurativeness of collocations and L2 proficiency (as measured by the prior collocational knowledge). Specifically, metaphoric congruency provided a processing boost for low-proficiency learners but imposed a processing cost for high-proficiency learners. The findings suggest that L2 learners primarily depend on their activated L1 equivalent semantic network at the earlier stage of acquisition of metaphoric collocations but pivot to a greater dependence on their weak collocational form representation with gains in L2 proficiency.

Keywords*: metaphoric collocations, L2 collocational processing, congruency effects, processing facilitation, processing interference