

## Reading Poems: An Intercultural Comparative Analysis

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### **Abstract**

With the feedback from the subjects being presented and discussed, this article aims to explain how different readers in English and Chinese cultures read, engage with and interpret poems and how they respond to the culturally loaded texts by writers from same cultural background and from different cultural backgrounds. The study of the data seeks to illustrate how the subjects are influenced by their 'acculturation' (Kramsch, 1998a, p. 125) and education. It attempts to exemplify how the subjects read and respond in their communications in terms of their different schemata which result in the differences and similarities in their interpretations and responses when they read poems and the culturally loaded discourses. It aims to present different ways in which these subjects form and utilize images and how they interpret metaphors in their reading process. As a supplementary part of the research, there is also discussion on both the advantages and the disadvantages of the research methods used for such a study.

### **1. Incentives**

With the increased interest in reading processes, the last two decades have seen considerable diversity in its research. A number of researchers have made many achievements in this field. By bringing early work into current practice and adapting it to current needs, these researchers have broadened the scope of reading theory and practice (Durow, 1997; Gumperz, 1982; Van Peer, 1986; Rayner & Pollatsek, 1989 Ruddell, Ruddell & Singer, 1994). What is involved in a reading process has been more and more revealed. It is known that a reader is not a passive receiver of the superficial messages from a text, nor is he or she at the mercy of the original words of a text. He/she is, as a reader, usually actively engaged with what is being read and trying to figure out his or her own interpretation (Alder & Doren, 1974).

In his work, Kamil (1984, p. 45) summarizes as follows the distinctive goals of modern reading research:

1. Research to generate a theory of reading.
2. Research to generate or validate a model of reading.
3. Research to collect data.
4. Research to make instructional decision.

Most of these researches however are done in one culture. And they are typical of psychological approaches. In contrast to the above researches, the purpose of this project centres on the reading process of subjects from different cultures.

Though a person's reading practices involve the psychological activities of his mind, it is axiomatic in the view that it involves both pre-existing linguistic and cultural knowledge, which form one's linguistic and cultural schemata (Chang, 2001). Since readers of different cultural communities receive a different education, the knowledge they have acquired is not identical. Moreover, they have been greatly influenced by their social customs, their social behaviour and their social ideology. Since cultural learning has attracted much more attention than it used to and has become an integral part of language learning, the mere study of reading practices by means of psychology alone is considered inadequate. It should be reconsidered from the perspectives of psychological, linguistic and cultural studies in terms of the reviewed theories.

When a person reads a text, his/her emotions, attitudes, and motivations in relation to the target language of the text itself, to its addresser and to the target culture will affect how they respond to the text. Similarly, words in different syntactic, semantic and cultural contexts become different entities for readers. This is especially the case when the readers are from different cultures. An illustrative example can be found in the following different, culture-bound expressions used for the same functional concept of doing something in a very efficient and beneficial way (Yang, 1993).

Kill two birds with one stone. (English)

Yijian shuangdiao. (Chinese)

(= Shoot two hawks with one arrow.)

As different languages possess disparate culture-specific inventories of linguistic items for expressing universal concepts, the consequent diversity of these expressions often disrupts the comprehension of culturally underlying meanings as far as a non-native reader is concerned. Reading a text in their native language and culture and one in their target language and culture, they are more responsive to the former than the latter. Sometimes, different interpretations of the same linguistic item or the same interpretation of different linguistic items might appear among readers from different cultures (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

## 2. Research Design and Implementation

The focus of the research is to find out how readers from Chinese culture and English culture react in interpreting poems. The essence of the research is more linguistic and cultural than psychological. The research has been designed with full consideration of these factors so that differences and similarities in responses among these subjects should emerge.

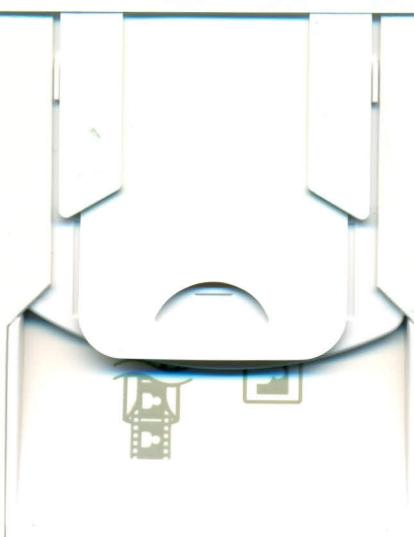
### 2.1 Questionnaires

For this research, a questionnaire has been designed. As a means for the qualitative study, it is used for interviews with one Chinese visiting scholar and one Chinese MA student and two English MA students, all from the School of English Studies, University of Nottingham. The questionnaire is designed to investigate how advanced educated readers from different cultures read selected Chinese and English poems. Some of the questions in the questionnaires are added deliberately to keep the subjects from knowing the aim of this research.

### 2.2 Materials and Points of Entry to Interpretation

Since the essence of the research is mainly to examine the subjects' reading process from the perspectives of intercultural communication by means of comparison and contrast of the relevant data, a criterion for material selection has been set up on the basis of relevant investigation and empirical evidence. According to this criterion and the aim of the research, the target texts for such a test should be culture-loaded and full of images and metaphors. The words used in these texts should be within the limit of the core vocabulary of the subjects. Besides, the materials should have their own distinctive native cultural features. With such a criterion, four poems have been selected for the questionnaire. Two of them are Chinese poems. Two of them are English poems. Though the poems seem to be familiar to some subjects, their familiarity with the poems can make their acts in their reading processes more explicit. These poems have been chosen deliberately to show how the subjects react to the poems written either within their cultural background (communications within under the same or similar cultural background) or against their cultural backgrounds (intercultural communication).

The decision to choose poems as materials for the test was made in an investigation among 24 university teachers and 33 English majors. Four copies of texts (a poem, a prose passage, a newspaper article and an excerpt from an instruction manual) ranging from *literary* to *non-literary* were presented to them. They were asked to choose the one that they felt they had most difficulty with either in teaching or in learning in terms of its cultural factors.



The result turned out to be that all of the teachers and 29 of the students chose the poem. One student chose the prose and three students chose the newspaper article. Those who chose the poem felt that they had more difficulties in reading poems than in reading other kinds of text, because they found the poems to be more culturally loaded.

The two selected Chinese poems were written by poets in the Tang Dynasty. They highlight some typical features of traditional Chinese poetry with its imagery and cultural allusions. These influences are so dominant in Chinese poetry that their traces can be found in many other Chinese poems. Besides, they have been introduced abroad through translations more widely than some other Chinese poems.

The two selected English poems were written by native poets. They have the usual features of English poetry. They contain both cultural factors which share the cultural commonality as well as cultural divergence. Besides, the word choices in these poems are within the limit of the core vocabulary of readers of both countries (Carter, 1998).

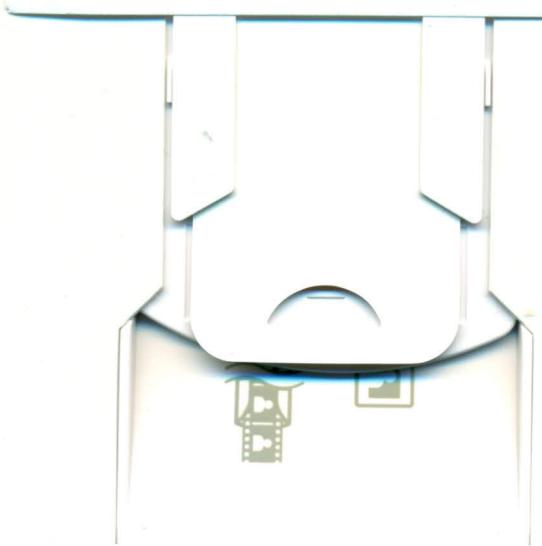
Before being used in the questionnaires, the selected poems were shown to some Chinese visiting scholars, who are university teachers in China, and to some of the MA students at the School of English Studies of Nottingham University. Their response was that, whilst they are understandable due to common and shared cultural and literary competence, they are also challenging because of the cultural background information.

The poem, *Remember Younger Brothers*, was written by Du Fu, a Chinese poet in the Tang Dynasty. It is a traditional Chinese poem, which is not at all influenced by western cultures. The setting of the discourse dates back to ancient China. At that time, Shi Si-ming (a Chinese figure) had attacked and occupied Bianzhou (a place in China) and was fighting his way towards Xi'an (a city in China). Shandong and Henna (provinces in China) were in great chaos from the war. Du Fu had four younger brothers. Three of them were scattered in Shandong and Henan. In his poem, he expresses his feelings for his missing brothers. To best express such emotion, he separated *bailu* (white dew) and *mingyue* (the bright moon), the two set expressions in Chinese, into two separate morphemes. The deliberate semantic separation achieved an extraordinary artistic effect (Xu, 1980).

Li Shang-yin was also a famous Chinese poet in the Tang Dynasty. His poem, *An Untitled Poem*, describes the romantic love between lovers. It shows that their love affairs have been hindered. After a long separation, they are very anxious to see each other. But they have been deprived of such freedom (Anon, 1987).

In the first couplet, the poet uses the first line to express his feelings and the second line to describe the related scenes. Of the next two couplets, the first two lines are written from the perspective of the poet, who expresses his devotion to his beloved, by analogy with the production of the spring silk worm and the burning of the candle. Two homophones, *si* (silk fibre) and *si* (thinking, missing) are used with the implication of his full devotion. The strong desire of their mutual love will last throughout their whole life. The tears of the candle remind one of the tears of lovers, who miss each other. It bears a similar meaning to the previous image. The next two lines are written from the perspective of his beloved, who, the poet supposes, is pining with love so much that her hair turns white. The last couplet embodies the poet's wish for help from the legendary bird, which could send his messages to his beloved (Anon, 1987).

The third poem *Meeting at night* was written by Robert Browning, a British poet in the nineteenth century. The poem was first published in *Dramatic Romance* on November 6, 1845. It was one of his love poems.



The landscape described in the poem reminds one of Italy. It is said that a view of night in Italy gave the poet his inspiration. In answering a question put to him concerning the interpretation, Browning declared in effect that the man was the speaker in the poem (Devane, 1955). The depiction of nature in the poem also perfectly sets the stage for the unexpected ending hinted at only in the last line.

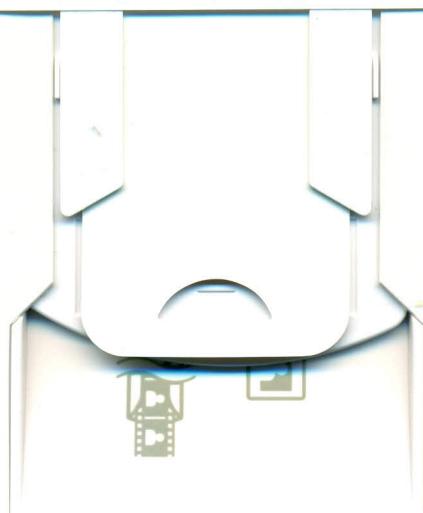
The use of adjectives in the poem is especially effective. The adjectives chosen are in themselves commonplace. Yet they convey exactly the feeling of the night by the sea. The use of iambic and anapaestic patterns (x/xx) in the phrase *a tap at the pane* resembling the pattern of light knocking and the gathering of onomatopoeic words such as *tap, scratch, spurt* and *beating* show the subdued sounds of their greeting as well as their psychological tension. The appearance of alliteration in the whole poem also reinforces the feeling of tension and discreteness since all the alliterated words begin either with a bilateral consonant or with a voiceless consonant.

The poem is remarkable for what is included as well as what is left out. There is neither description of the fiancée nor that of the lover's meeting. There are only indirect suggestions of their love affair in the last two lines of the first stanza and more in the last stanza.

However three verbs in the last two lines of the first stanza are rather striking. The verb *gain* means *possess* with overtones of conquest, while *push* is a dynamic word with an indication of *insertion*. And the word *quench* is usually collocated with such words as *fire, thirst, desire* etc. So the semantic collocations in these lines have a metaphoric association with the theme of erotic passion. They express a sense of the speaker's desire to meet his lover in the second stanza. With all these descriptions as background, the last two lines in the last stanza are much more emphatic. These descriptions heighten the feelings of the two in their passionate reunion.

Sylvia Plath (1932-63) was a famous American poet. Her work is valuable for its stylistic accomplishments and experiments with discourse types. (Newman et al. 1971) Her poem, *Metaphors*, is drenched in a typical imagery of domesticity. With her metaphorical clues, she presents a self-portrait of a pregnant woman. She uses for such a portrayal the words that connote her huge size, ungainliness and her state of pregnancy. 'The numerous quick-shifting metaphors emphasize different aspects of a pregnant woman's size, shape, fertility, value, the inevitability of her fate' (Gibbs, 1994, p. 2).

What is bold and extraordinary in her poem is the juxtaposition of the womb and intestine with its suggestion of birth through excretion. There are three interpretations for the last two lines. If one takes the penultimate line literally and the ultimate line figuratively with the *train* connoting *intestine*, the sentence indicates the process of digestion and excretion. If one takes both lines figuratively, one will arrive at two different interpretations, because of the ambiguous deixis of the word *boarded*. *Apple* reminds us of Adam and Eve, *green* of the state of being *inexperienced* or *unripe* and *bag* of the *contraceptive device*. Therefore the sentence *I've eaten a bag of green apples* with *I* as the agent might mean '*I*' have been impregnated for lack of experience or by mistake. So '*I*' has a non-optional choice just like involuntarily boarding a non-stop train. The third interpretation takes *a bag of green apples* as the recipient of the action *board*. It means that '*I*' have the '**seed**', which has been embedded (*boarded*) in *my* womb and will grow there until its destination — '*my*' labour. Like a rope of three strands, these three interpretations are inseparably interwoven.



The whole poem is narrated by the poet from her personal point of view. It seems that the poet is talking directly to an assumed reader, which is clearly exemplified by the deitic item *this (this fat purse)*. Her narration to the reader is however, interwoven with her exclamation to the inborn baby. (*O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers.*)

The narration itself gives the impression of a pregnant woman talking to another woman in colloquial language about a personal subject. The evidence for this judgement is the use of forms of language, which are associated with female speech. The words she uses mostly relate to domesticity. The exclamation *O* — a switch she has in her talk to her inborn baby, is a stylised feature of a mother-to-be when talking to someone. Perhaps it is not uncommon to compare birth to excrement in such talks among women. Though it can be derived from the words (such as *ponderous, loaf, cow etc*) that she has a feeling of boredom, the words such as *ivory, fine, new* still bear an implication of her maternal love for her unborn baby.

### 2.3 Subjects

Four subjects were interviewed separately. They are two Chinese speakers and two native speakers. Among these four interviewees, two of them (Mr. D and Miss J) have a good background in literacy studies and the other two (Miss P and Miss C) have interests in language studies in relation to the study of literature.

Mr. D (Chinese Interviewee 1) was a visiting scholar from P.R. China. He finished his MA in Literature in China. He is an associate professor in a teachers' college. He has a strong interest in poetry.

Miss P (Chinese Interviewee 2) is also from China. She is a lecturer in a teachers' university. She finished her Bachelor of Arts in China. At the time of the interview, she had just become an MA student at the School of English Studies, Nottingham University when the interviews took place.

Miss J (Native Speaker 1) and Miss C (Native Speaker 2) are both native speakers of English. They were at the time MA students at the School of English Studies, Nottingham University.

### 2.4 Analysis of the Educational Backgrounds of the Subjects

His informal talks with the subjects before the interviews provided the interviewer (the researcher) with a context of their English educational backgrounds which are different.

The native subjects have been educated through the use of communicative approaches and language-based approaches symbolized by theoretical works of John McRae (McRae & Boardman, 1984) and Ronald Carter (Carter & Long, 1987a, 1987b & 1991; Carter & McRae, 1996).

The Chinese subjects however received their English education mainly through traditional approaches. Their educational learning preceded the introduction of communicative approaches in China. Though the publication of McRae and Boardman's *Reading Between the Lines* and the introduction of Carter's works have made a great impact on the ELT area in China, the spread and application of their theories still take time. So their access to the language-based approaches started only after their arrival at the School of English Studies of Nottingham University.

## 2.5 Procedures

The interviews were carried out with certain aims in mind. In order to avoid reciprocal influences, all the subjects were interviewed one at a time. Each interview was started first with some warm-up questions in the questionnaire to make the interviewees feel at ease. Then he/she was asked to read the selected poem one after another. He/she was shown two lines at a time to get his/her interpretation. When the interpretation of each poem was finished, he/she was asked a set of questions in the questionnaire. The Chinese interviewees were interviewed twice separately in order to avoid the language difficulties they might have in expressing themselves. One interview was conducted in Chinese with those two Chinese poems in their original versions. Another was done in English. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards by the researcher, who also translated the Chinese versions of the interviews into English.

## 3. The Results and Analyses

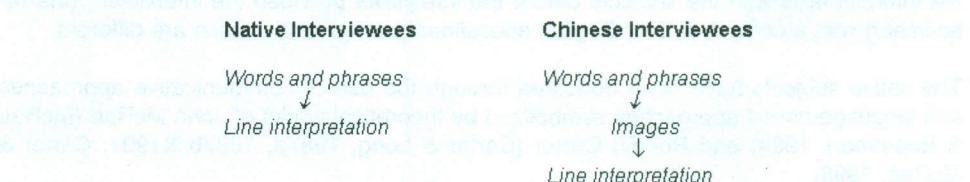
The research has been designed for comparative and contrastive study. It is hoped that a clear distinction between reading procedures and responses might emerge. Though much of the evidence suggested that in some cases interviewees shared common procedures and interpretations, some distinctions did occur. Furthermore, most of the distinctions had their origins in different cultural orientations.

### 3.1. Different Line Interpretation Schemata in their Reading of Poems

According to the theory articulated by contemporary researchers, readers' schemata provide much of the basis for their comprehending and learning the ideas in the discourses (Rubin, 1995) (Bower and Cirilo, 1985). When people read something, they construct a mental representation of typical situations. When key words or phrases in the text come into their eyes, their stimulated mind activates their linguistic and cultural schemata and cuts and fits them in order to get a satisfactory interpretation of the message.

As the transcripts indicate, what the native interviewees and the Chinese interviewees have in their minds are different when they are shown two lines at a time. The native interviewees interpret each line as a whole while the Chinese interviewees catch hold of individual images first and then make necessary logical connections before they arrive at their interpretation of the whole line.

Their ways of line interpretations are different as illustrated below.



In other words, what native interviewees read the lines separately while Chinese interviewees tend to read the lines together. This difference may be due to the different cultural backgrounds of the interviewees. Chinese culture emphasizes the relationship between parts and the whole, while Western culture tends to emphasize the individual parts. Therefore, Chinese interviewees tend to focus on individual images first and then make logical connections between them, while native interviewees tend to focus on the whole line at once.

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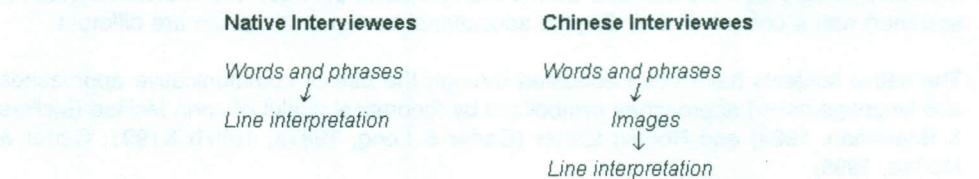
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Native interviewees interpret the lines as a whole, while Chinese interviewees interpret the lines by catching hold of individual images first and then make necessary logical connections before they arrive at their interpretation of the whole line.

The native interviewees have their own ways of thinking without relying too much on the images. The Chinese interviewees grasp images for their understanding. This can be clearly illustrated in the following table.

**Table 3.1  
REMEMBER YOUNGER BROTHERS**

Subjects Lines / Categories	-D	-P	-J	-C
1 & 2 <b>-Textual Clues</b>	The boundary, the beating of drums, the army for a battle, the far-away place in autumn, the cry of a swan.	A funeral procession is going on with the drums beating. The scene of the autumn, a cry of a swan.	Swan.	Sentries beating drums.
1&2 <b>Impressions</b>	Misery and sadness.	Somebody has died. That kind of sad cry of the swan. Feeling very sad.	The two lines, they sound lonely, because no one is around. The swan is lonely. There is the word <i>remember</i> in the title. The swan is the symbol of sadness. It seemed very lonely. It might be a funeral scene.	The war or armies, the tragedy of war maybe.

The Chinese subjects form more images with the textual clues before they come to their understanding. The British subjects do not show an obvious tendency to look for images in their interpretations.

### 3.2. Different Poetry Reading Schemata

Unlike the previous line interpretation schemata, this difference does not lie between the native and the Chinese, but among individuals. Though they have been asked to read two lines at a time, which, to some extent, has kept them from showing their usual way of reading, their responses still show that they diverged into two main directions in their poetry reading schemata. For instance,

#### Mr. D, Miss P and Miss C

(To read the whole poem to get) *the general (impressions)*



*Individual details*



*Understanding of the poems*

#### Miss J

(To get hold of the meanings of) *individual details*



*The general*



*Understanding of the poem*

These subjects have either a background primarily in literary study or a background primarily in language study. The different ways in which they read the poems might originate from their fostered reading schemata, which are related to the way in which they have been previously educated. The modules that students of literary studies take are different from those taken by students of language. Besides, the approaches and strategies recommended for reading in modules of these two specialities are different too. Whether their different text-processing directions in reading poetry are a result of the ways they have been taught has to be further researched but such processing is unlikely to affect local interpretations of the language used or the application of particular cultural schemata (Chang, 2001).

### 3.3 Textual and Cultural Context

'Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways' (Kramsch, 1998a, p. 3).

Readers from distinctly different national cultures tend to give different interpretations to culturally sensitive materials if their cultural schemata are divergent. The same words or expressions may not mean the same thing to people from different cultures. If, however, their cultural schemata are convergent on these words or expressions, their interpretations share the commonality. If their cultural schemata do not exist for these items, they cannot come to any interpretation at all.

Since full understanding of a poem requires the activation of their relevant cultural schemata (Chang, 2001) suitable for the cultural context of the poems, all of the interviewees face some difficulties in their interpretation of the non-native poems. The different representation of cultural schemata results in their different interpretations. The examples given below will present such evidence.

**Table 3.3**

(**S** means the same or almost the same interpretation. **D** means different interpretation. **M** means that they did not interpret. **I** means that they interpreted.) **N** stands for native (British and American) interviewees. **C** stands for Chinese interviewees.

Examples	Native interviewees	Chinese Interviewees	Schemata
Swan	S	S	Convergence
Bright moon at home	S	S	Convergence
Easterly wind	M	I	Absence (N)
Spring silk-worm ... productions	D	D	Divergence
A candle... dries up.	D	D	Divergence
Mount Penglai	M	I	Absence (N)
Two heart beating	S	S	Convergence
Red fruit	I	M	Absence(C)
Money's new- ..purse	D	D	Divergence
I've eaten a bag... apples	D	D	Divergence
Boarded ...getting off	I	M	Absence(C)

Among these examples, both *easterly wind* and *Mount Penglai* are culturally marked expressions. They have very strong cultural connotations. They are imagistic signs to Chinese readers. In Chinese culture, *easterly wind* means *the spring wind*, which brings life to everything. *Mount Penglai* is imagined to be the ultimate paradise of the Taoists, the home of the Eight Immortals. The houses there are of gold and silver, the birds and animals all white, the trees of coral with pearl fruit, and all the flowers sweet-scented and in abundance. The fountains produce the water of life, and those who drink it never die, for only Immortals live there. However, it was said that it could not be reached by mortals, because they were surrounded by 'weak water', which could support neither a boat nor a swimmer. The only means of access was therefore by air, a form of transport reserved for immortals and birds (Anon, 1987).

Without such background knowledge in their cultural schemata, it is natural for the native interviewees to fail to obtain the appropriate meanings. They are not likely to form relevant images in their mind. The same is true of the Chinese interviewees in their failure to grasp the meanings of exotic culture-specific English items as shown above.

### 3.4 Fostered Schemata and the Linguistic Education

The other findings from the analysis of the data are the different steps in Miss P's gradual understanding of the poem *Meeting at Night*.

Understanding a poem involves setting up in one's mind a model of the presumed intended meaning of the poem. (Kintgen, 1983) This is done by building a central causal chain and reorganizing information from the poem and from one's pre-existing schemata with respect to that chain. Many schemata are activated and instantiated in this reading process in order to correlate and decode the information in the poem. The process of choosing and matching with schemata to be related to the gist of the poem gradually leads the way to final understanding.

This can be seen in Miss P's reading process as shown in Table 3.4 (a).

Table 3.4 (a)

No.	Textual clues	Miss P's reaction	Comments
1	The grey sea and the long black land.	Why is the sea not a blue sea but a grey sea instead?	The confrontation of her native cultural schema about the sea with English cultural schemata. The sea described in the poem brings her questions.
2	The yellow moon hung in the sky.	1) There are three colour words: grey, black and yellow. 2) We Chinese do not say yellow moon. But here in England I do see the yellow moon. The so-called yellow moon is a moon with a yellow halo, which is typical in Britain and which I don't in China. 3) The colour of the moon, the sea and the sand are helpful in your understanding of the poem.	1) The activation of her English linguistic (semantic) schema of colours. 2) The interference of her native cultural schemata about the moon and the arousal of her relevant English cultural schemata. The selection and renewal of her schemata. The combination of her NCL and ECL. 3) The fitting of intertextual schemata.
3	The startled little waves.	Why are they startled? It might mean that they have been startled by something and woken up from their sleep. I am not quite sure.	Her struggling with the possible interpretation through her NLS and ELS of personification. Convergence of schemata.
4	Sand.	1) The 'land' again? Oh no not 'land' but 'sand'. Maybe for its rhyme. 2) On the beach? Because it is sand, there might be a beach.	1) Her use of ELS (rhyme schemata). 2) The word <i>sand</i> activates her beach schema, because it has great diagnostic value as a component in the schema. Convergence of both NCL and ECL.
5	I.	What is the person doing there?	Raising questions. Looking for clues.
6	Warm sea-scented beach.	Here comes the beach.	Confirmation of her beach schema.
7	Till a farm appears.	On the seaside there is a farm, isn't there?	Formation of the settings.
8	And blue spurt of a lighted match.	Maybe it's too dark. He/she used a match. When it is lit, the blue spurt comes out.	The use of schema of lighting a match. Convergence of both NCL and BCL.
9	A tap at the pane.	1) What is the pane? 2) Oh, yeah. Someone is tapping the window.	1) Trying to figure out the meaning of the word 'pane'. Lacking sufficient ELS. 2) Realization of its meaning with its semantic context.
10	The quick scratch.	A very quick... Ah, this scratch is the lighting of the match.	Repetition of phrase leading to interpretation of meaning within its context. The application of her GS.
11	Two hearts beating each to each.	1) It seems that there is a room on the farm, in which sit two people. 2) Maybe there are two lovers sitting there.	1) The 'chewing' of the phrase. The application of her NLS and ELS. 2) The 'digestion' of the phrase with her lovers' meeting schema. Convergence of the NCS and ECS.

When she finished reading the last line of the poem, her lovers' meeting schema, the convergence of her NCS and ECS, correlated with her other schemata and made her realize that it was a love poem.

'My general impression is that the poet 'I' is a ... a kind of... The first stanza gives me a not very good collocation of being unhappy because of the colour words grey and black. But the second stanza gives me a kind of sweet and warm feeling. For instance the blue spurt of the lighted match, and then two hearts beating each to each. There is a kind of tenderness and romance in it. I just make nonsense. I don't know exactly what it really means. This might be a love poem.'

During the whole process, she met with only one difficulty, which was caused by her lack of relevant ELS (see No. 9 above). She solved the problem herself by guessing its meaning according to its context. Most of the difficulties she had been struggling with however were related with her ECS. The whole process of her reading was saturated with confrontation (see No. 1), activation, interference, selection, renewal, combination (see No. 2) and convergence (see No. 8 & 11) of her NCS and ECS.

After her reading, she was offered some follow-up questions. It was by checking points from these questions that she was led into comparatively further understanding.

**Table 3.4 (b)**

No.	Questions	Her response	Comment
1	What do you think of the language used in this poem?	The language is good. It sounds beautiful and musical. There is a lot of alliteration. It sounds rhythmical.	The question arouses her ELS for language appreciation.
2	Are there any cultural references in this poem which makes it easier for you to understand the poem? What are they?	I just get hold of the use of the colour words. Neither the colour grey nor the word <i>black</i> gives people good association. They all have negative connotation.	The use of her cultural schema about colours for her analysis of the colour words.
3	What associations have you made in understanding the poem?	1) Why does the sea become grey? When can you find that the sea looks grey? The black land looks black, either because of his mood or because of time. 2) The title here is <i>Meeting at Night</i> , because the night falls, everything looks black and grey. Besides, the sea arouses one's romantic and spacious imagination. 3) We Chinese do not say yellow moon. The so-called yellow moon is a moon with a yellow halo, which is typical in Britain and which I didn't see in China. The colour of the moon, the sea and the sand are helpful in your understanding.	1) She is trying to get the answers for the previous questions in her mind aroused by her sea schema (No.1 of the above table). 2) She finds out the answer at the hint of the word 'night', which activates her night schema 3) She correlate her moon schema with the information about the moon in the poem, trying to compare and revise her moon schema.
4	What visual impressions have you got from the poem?	That is the sea. And also the colours.	The result of the confrontation between her schemata and the information of the poem.
5	What images have you got from the poem?	The pictures I have in my mind are that of the seaside with a moon and waves and sand and that of a room on a farm, in which there is a dim light and two hearts also, ha... this kind.	Her rearrangement of images in her mind as a result of her use of image forming schemata.

No.	Questions	Her response	Comment
6	Are there any metaphors in the poem? What are they? How do you understand them?	I think 'the blue spurt of lighted match' can be a kind of metaphor. It stands for a kind of hope or tenderness.	Her schema of spatial sequence. And her interpretation of the specific expression with her metaphor schemata.
7	From whose point of view is this poem narrated? What is its narrative sequence?	It seems that it's narrated according to space. The first thing one sees is the sea and the land. From what the poet sees to the beach, then the farm.	She is conscious of the spatial sequence and the views from the poet.
8	What is the usual schema in your poem reading?	I felt uncomfortable when you showed me two lines at a time just now, because I didn't know what's going on in the rest of the poem. It affected my understanding of these two lines. So the reading of the whole poem is very helpful in your understanding of the poem.	Her stated usual reading schema --- from the general to the individual.

When Miss P started to read the poem, she was puzzled by the colour words. She repeated these words several times. It suggested that she was grappling with the incongruity between the description in the poem and her colour schemata (see **Table 3.4(a)**). The use of the words to describe the sea and the land, as she acknowledged, was against her usual schema about them. She had been wrestling with the problem until she found the hint in the title.

In her search for meaning and her interaction with the text, she continued to apply her schemata to develop strategies in order to solve those complex problems. For instance, she used rhyme schema to explain the use of the word 'sand' in the poem. She used her cultural schema about colours in her analysis of the colour words when she answered Question Two.

But **Table 3.4 (b)** shows that she was not quite sure of her interpretation of the poem until she came to the follow-up questions. It is quite obvious that she could understand the poem better than in the line-by-line interpretation. One reason could be that in the line-by-line interpretation she could only see two sentences out of the textual context. Another more important reason is that the following-up questions were like a check list, which served as stimuli to arouse her relevant schemata.

The objective effects of her reading in a certain way has indicated that the linguistic education (especially the teaching of models and checklists as a vital part) will enable students to build their awareness of how to process texts. Such a typical example can be found in the work of John McRae (McRae, 1991, pp. 95-96).

The extreme of the objective approach will lead to close textual analysis, and to an understanding of such features of the text as

- Lexis
- Syntax
- Cohesion
- Phonology
- graphology
- semantic
- dialect
- register
- period
- function
- culture\* (\* suggested and added by the writer in his modules)

With such a checklist in her mind, Miss P would have felt more confident of what to do in her reading. Items in such a checklist can help her find the embedded cues in a written discourse for the activation of appropriate schemata. However, the precondition for this transaction to proceed properly requires that she should possess such schemata.

#### 4 Understanding Metaphors

When the subjects do not have, or are unable to access, relevant schemata with which to organize their perceptions, they can feel that things do not make any sense (Kern, 2000). Both Chinese interviewees feel it is more difficult to read the English poems. They are not used to the word collocations of the poems. They feel it very hard to form images through word associations. They think poems like *Metaphors* lack normal coherence. In their view, all the ideas presented in Plath's poem are fragmented. They have difficulties in understanding those metaphors. Even the native interviewees encountered many difficulties because of its metaphorical density, though they finally succeeded in solving problems and making their interpretation.

There are a lot of nouns put together in this poem by Plath. It is the usual case with most of the Chinese poems. But why do the Chinese interviewees find it easier to understand them in Chinese poems but not in *Metaphors*? One reason is that both the poets and subjects share a common culture. Another reason is that all the nouns, which appear in the Chinese poems, are semantically inter-related. They are obvious imagistic signs. They can stimulate coherent images in the minds of these Chinese readers. The nouns in Plath's poem however are not superficially connected with each other. They produce fragmented, isolated images in their minds, as Miss P said, "It's a quite simple picture, you know, if I draw it. Just a melon and you know strolling on two tendrils. Red fruit and ivory, but (they have) nothing to do with each other." She regards all these nouns simply as concrete signs instead of imagistic signs. She cannot see through the metaphorical meanings behind them.

Take the poem *Remember Younger Brothers* for instance. The table below (see **Table 4 (a)**) shows that all the images that appear in their minds enable them to understand the poem better.

**Table 4 (a)**

Subjects		-D	-P
Lines / Categories			
1 & 2	-Images	The boundary, the beating of drums, the army for a battle, the far-away place in autumn, the cry of a swan.	A funeral procession is going on with the drums beating. The scene of the autumn, a cry of a swan.
	Derived Meanings	Misery and sadness.	Feeling very sad.
3 & 4	-Images	Dew at night, very bright moon at home. Dew becomes more and more	The moon at home is much brighter and fuller.
	Derived meanings	Winter is coming. People and relatives at home miss someone.	A person away from his hometown misses his hometown very much.
5 & 6	-Images	All the brothers have been separated from each other. No home to return, no relative, no friends.	There is a younger brother at home. They haven't seen each other for a long time since they parted.
	Derived	Nobody will be concerned if you are still alive or not as your brothers have all gone to the war.	It is not known if his brother is still alive or not. There is nowhere to ask.
7 & 8	-Images	Letters, sending letters home. The sending of the letters is so difficult. Truce. It is still war time	Letters sent home during wartime are delayed for a long time. They cannot reach their destination because the war is going on.
	Derived meanings	It is more difficult for the letters to reach their destination.	He couldn't express his feeling of being homesick by means of letters.

While they read the poem by Plath, they found great difficulty in understanding it. They could not figure out the meanings of the poem at all.

Table 4 (b)

Subjects Lines/ Categories	-D	-P
1 & 2	<b>-Images</b> An elephant, a ponderous house, the nine syllables. <b>Derived meanings</b> These two lines are metaphors.	The metaphor has nine syllables. The huge elephant. What does it want to express? It leaves me an exact riddle. The poet is just playing with words.
	<b>-Images</b> A melon grows with two tendrils. Timber, Ivory. <b>Derived meanings</b> These two lines are concerned with the previous lines.	A melon, red fruit, ivory, fine timber. I have totally no idea about that.
3 & 4	<b>-Images</b> The flour is rising. It keeps growing up. The money in the swelling purse is new minted. <b>Derived meanings</b> It means more and more money in the purse I think.	Money, purse, treasure. The appearance of money reminds me of ivory and treasure.
	<b>-Images</b> A means, a measure, a stage, a stair and a cattle. <b>Derived meanings</b> That refers back to <i>me</i> the metaphor.	Why a cow in calf? None of these things can remind me of anything.
5 & 6	<b>-Images</b> Getting on a train but cannot get off. <b>Derived meanings</b>	The moment you get on a train, you cannot get off. I have no idea
7 & 8	<b>-Images</b> A means, a measure, a stage, a stair and a cattle. <b>Derived meanings</b> That refers back to <i>me</i> the metaphor.	
9	<b>-Images</b> Getting on a train but cannot get off. <b>Derived meanings</b>	

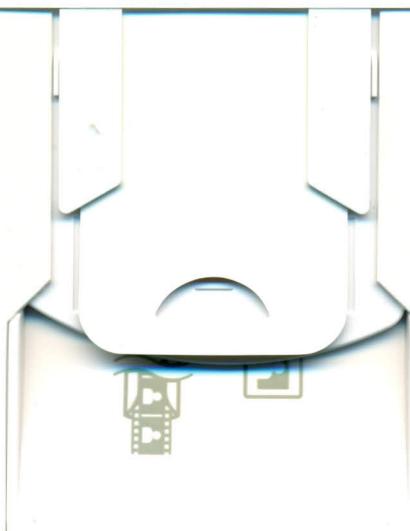
It is quite obvious that they could not understand the poem at all. As a poet, Plath embedded a considerable amount of knowledge in her poem that she wanted to share with her readers. When she assumed that her readers would be able to infer what shared knowledge had been omitted, she would certainly omit it. This was normal, especially when she wanted to achieve an intentional effect of superficial ambiguity, which conformed with the theme of her poem (Butscher, 1979).

Generally speaking, metaphor content is based on the underlying propositional, schematic and imagistic identity of metaphors. The problem with these Chinese readers lies in their lack of 'appropriate' English cultural schemata (Chang, 2001). They are bound by their social conventions and culture. They would not expect a pregnant woman to be described like that. They failed to explore the necessary cultural context for understanding the target poem.

According to Ortony (1985), in understanding metaphorical comparisons, it is not enough just to find similarities between the concepts compared, but to categorize the concepts introduced in the metaphor and make a suitable selection.

The first thing he puts forward is that metaphorical comparisons exhibit a strong symmetry. If the components of a metaphor are divided into *Topic*, *Vehicle* and *Ground*, what the *vehicle* presents is supposed to be more prototypical than the *topic* (Shen, 1994, pp. 328-329).

Then, he says that a metaphor can be seen as a partial similarity match between two concepts. But not all of the similarities can serve equally as reasonable interpretations of metaphors. In other words, the most suitable one is the similarity whose micro-proposition is relevant to the gist.



Finally, he observes that the understanding of a metaphor is not only based on discovering pre-existing similarities but on the transformation of knowledge as well. 'Thus, our knowledge about the topic of the metaphor changes on the basis of inferences we transfer from what we know about the vehicle into the domain of the topic' (Shen, 1994, p. 327).

In terms of these observations, it is possible to find out some of the reasons why the Chinese interviewees had difficulties in understanding the English poem, *Metaphors* rather than the Chinese poems.

The metaphor vehicles present in Chinese poems are more stereotypical to readers with Chinese cultural backgrounds, though some of the cultural features can be found in English culture as well. For instance, one of the obvious properties of a lone swan is 'being lonely'. That of the sentry beating drums is 'being at war'. And the brighter moon at home connotes the meaning of being 'home sick'. All these meanings are stereotypical and have culturally obvious connections with each other.

The implied meanings, which Plath's poem represents with its metaphor vehicles, are not conventional or stereotypical (at least to the Chinese readers) with the exceptions of *elephant* and *house*. The following table shows the contrast between the stereotypical meanings of those vehicles in Chinese culture and their understandable meanings in the context of the poem.

Table 4 (c)

	Stereotypical meanings in Chinese culture	The understandable meanings
A riddle in nine syllables		Nine month pregnancy, nine lines in the poem. A woman in the family way.
An elephant	Huge and clumsy in its movement.	Huge and clumsy in its movement.
A ponderous house	Huge	Huge
A melon	Round and sweet	A rounded body
Tendrils		Short, weak limbs
Red fruit	Ripe	The fruit of the womb
Ivory	Treasure	The colour (of the limbs)
Fine timbers		Fine limbs of the baby
Loaf	Soft, spongy	Belly growing up
Money	Wealth	Embryo
Fat purse	Rich	Swelling belly
Means	A tool, a measure	A tool, a measure
A stage	The place with a variety of people	A place to perform
A cow in calf		A pregnant woman
Green apples	Unripe	Unripe, inexperienced
A train ...	A non-stop train	No other choice, from beginning to the end

Blinded by their native cultural schemata, the Chinese subjects cannot easily see through those meanings hidden behind the vehicles from other perspectives.

If one understands the poem with its context, one can find that the partial similarity matches between 'I', the topic, and its relevant vehicles (Lakoff, 1987) are mostly either 'huge' or 'swelling', which are all related to the appearance of a pregnant woman. The similarity match between the baby and its vehicles are 'new' and 'fine'. The Chinese subjects have drawn a wrong inference. This is clearly shown in Miss P's words. "The word 'money' makes me think over all the things mentioned in the previous lines such as ivory, which is usually expensive. So it's related to money. The appearance of money reminds me of ivory. It reminds me of treasure, fine timbers." She took an unsuitable property similarity between the topic and vehicles for granted by applying her NCS, which led her into a misinterpretation.

The last observation of Ortony (1985) on metaphor interpretation can also throw light on the interpretation of Plath's poem.

When a person reads and understands her poem, the new information he/she gets has to be related to his store of general knowledge namely general schemata (Chang, 2001). As new information is added, it becomes part of the old information to which further new information can be added. And a textual concept grows as he/she goes on reading.

But there is one more thing the writer of the thesis wants to add to Ortony's procedure. That is, if the new information a person gets is not well related with his store of general knowledge, it will stay in their mind as a question and it will not become part of the old information for the time being. When all the information in question piles up, a stimulus is needed to allow him to invoke a dominating schema, which can tie together all the relevant schemata. Then after rearranging and selecting all the relevant schemata in his mind, he can arrive at a suitable solution. During the process of the solution formation, a new schema is being fostered while the new knowledge is being schematized.

These Chinese readers failed also because they did not succeed in finding out the clue that might give them an inkling of what was going on within the poem. They found no leitmotif which would enable them to make a sensible choice of meanings. Besides, they were working under a misleading metaphor schema. Lack of appropriate schemata prevented them from understanding the relationships among the facts for the gist of the poem. They could not decide what to do with the information in the poem.

The native readers succeeded in decoding the meanings of the poem, after a gradual transformation of their knowledge, as shown in the table below.

Table 4 (d)

Subjects	-J	-C
Lines / Categories		
1 & 2	<b>*Textual Clues</b> <b>Impressions</b> It's a riddle. That's all I get. <b>Problems</b> I don't know the riddle. I can't interpret it.	Nine syllables, an elephant, a ponderous house. All these are metaphors. I haven't got sense of anything at the moment.
3 & 4	<b>*Textual Clues</b> <b>Impressions</b> They are all relatively large things depending on what have been compared to. So maybe this thing is <b>large</b> . <b>Problems</b> As far as my understanding goes, I don't understand.	An elephant, a ponderous house and a melon. Crackly. Maybe the riddle of nine syllables is with in the poem, but you've got to pick out.
5 & 6	<b>*Textual Clues</b> <b>Impressions</b> Again it's <b>big</b> things. Whatever this riddle is is <b>big</b> . <b>Problems</b> I don't know what it is.	I haven't got clue as to what this means at all. No, I don't know.
7 & 8	<b>*Textual Clues</b> <b>Impressions</b> It's still <b>big</b> . That is as far as I know what it is. <b>Problems</b> I don't know.	Is it to have been <b>pregnant</b> ? Uha ... because of <b>nine</b> syllables.
9	<b>*Textual Clues</b> <b>Impressions</b> It sounds that this woman's <b>pregnant</b> . An elephant, a house, a melon...gave em that idea. Lots of money is large. Pregnancy with her two little legs sticking out beneath. The loaf being baked. The money means the baby is new. A <b>cow in calf</b> gave it away for me to think. 'Eaten ...' if you're pregnant, you can be developing and give birth ...	<b>One more line.</b> OK it might be about <b>pregnancy</b> . <b>Nine syllables</b> is nine months. Yeasty rising means create something. Cow in calf obviously. Money's new minted in this fat purse, yes. I don't understand that (line 9). She is pregnant, she can't do anything about it maybe. I don't know.
	<b>Problems</b> Nine syllables I don't know.	

Miss J was given a hint on reading the phrase 'a cow in calf', while Miss C got her clue when she knew that there were altogether nine lines in the poem. The activation of the relevant knowledge leads them to infer that all the vehicles refer to a pregnant woman. **Table 4 (d)** shows that both of them were kept in a kind of suspense until they found their clues from which they invoked the schema of a pregnant woman. 'It is this kind of inference that leads to coherent discourse' (Kern, 2000, p. 82). After rearranging and selecting all the schemata they had, they came to their final understanding of the poem.

### 5 Analysis of Miss C's and Mr. D's Schemata Application in Reading Metaphors

In the interviews, both native subjects succeeded in understanding the poem *Metaphors*. The two Chinese subjects seemed baffled throughout their reading process and finally failed to interpret the poem. Though they could understand most words in the poem, they could not acquire their metaphorical meanings.

To illustrate how these things turned out, the reading process of Miss C and Mr. D are presented and analysed as follows:

**Table 5 (a)**

Lines	Miss C's reading process	Analysis
1-2	H: Nine syllables, an elephant, a ponderous house. All right all these are metaphors but I haven't got sense of anything at the minute, really OK.	To make sense of these poetic lines, Miss C attempts to make assumptions based on her schematic knowledge of the text and its organization.
3-4	H: 'A melon strolling on two tendrils. O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!' Su... er right... cracky. I think it might be like, I think if, might, one of the poem were the answer is in the poem is to is 'I'm a riddle in nine syllables' maybe the riddle of nine syllables within the poem, but you got to pick out. But at this point I can't.	She assumes that the metaphors are embedded in the poem. She attempts to fill in her schemata to pick them out. But she cannot find any clues for the ignition of the schemata.
5-6	H: 'I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.' Oh! 'I've eaten a bag of green apples,' Is it ...Is it to have been pregnant? Uha...because nine syllables. Or can we discuss that in a minute? Or do you want me to say?	She suspects that the narrator in the poem is a female and is perhaps pregnant. Her schemata have been ignited. She utilizes her schemata of fertilization and women's nine-month pregnancy. She is seeking confirmation.
7-8	H: One more line. OK it might be about pregnancy, nine syllables are nine months. Er.... yeasty rising means create something. Cow in calf obviously. Money's new-minted in this fat purse, yes.	Facing the convergence of all her schemata for pregnancy, she attempts to select and jig all the commonalities of her schemata, attempting to come to her conclusion.
9	'Boarded a train there's no getting off.' Right. 'Boarded a train there's no getting off.' Puh... I don't understand that.... She is pregnant, she can't do anything about it, maybe, I don't know.	She arrives at her final interpretation by reading the last line. She finds out the embedded metaphors in the poem. But she still need to correlate all the schemata she has and fill in some more relevant schemata for further understanding.

As shown in 2.4, Miss C has been educated with language-based or discourse-oriented approaches symbolized by theoretical works of Carter and McRae. This fact explains her ways of reading with 'intuition' (Carter & Simpson, 1989). She is able to secure an initial "way-in" or access to the literary text (Carter & Long, 1991, p. 11). Her suitable selection and matching of the schemata brings her to a final understanding of the metaphor.

Table 5 (b)

Lines	Mr. D's reading process	Analysis
1-2	D: 'I'm a riddle in nine syllables, An elephant, a ponderous house.' An elephant. Does 'ponderous' mean 'thinking'? A house that is thinking? Large. Huge?  'Ponderous' can also mean 'thinking.' 'I'm a riddle in nine syllables, An elephant, a ponderous house.' Let me see... I think these two sentences are metaphors. Its title is 'Metaphor'. As to these two sentences, the latter is a comparison	Mr. D attempts to fit in the context his linguistic schema about the word 'ponderous'. His wrong schema (taking 'ponderous' for 'thinking') intercepts his appropriate schema selection.  The title of the poem makes him assume that the two lines are metaphors. He attempts to figure out the relationship between the two lines by using his metaphor
1-2	to the former one and is a comparison to 'I'. It means I am like an elephant, a ponderous house in the nine syllables. I'm a riddle in nine syllables, something needs to paraphrase to interpret, just like an elephant, a ponderous house standing there. OK.	schemata. He thinks that 'I' is the 'topic' of the metaphors. But he fails to match the features of the vehicles being 'huge', due to the interference of the use of wrong schema ('thinking').
3-4	D: 'A melon strolling on two tendrils.' A melon is a melon. Strolling means 'rolling'. Two tendrils. What does 'tendrils' mean? Are they two frames? 'O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!' A melon.... These two sentences, I think, are connected with the previous sentences. A melon grows with two tendrils. 'O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!' Timber is a kind of tree. What does 'timber' mean? Here I think it should be like this. It's a further description of the melon. A red fruit, ivory. Ivory is a green tendril, isn't it? And fine timber. Does it mean its tree frame? Let me see. All right. Let me think it over. All right, that's all.	This part of his reading process represents the usual ways Chinese students utilize to read poems. He is figuring out every single meaning of each word, analysing the syntactic relations, without giving much consideration to the text-level meanings. His schemata enable him to find a relationship between a superordinate (fruit) and a hyponym (melon), which however leads him into an improper matching in this context. The wrong matching of his schemata and the wrong schematic knowledge of the word 'ivory' impede him from further interpretation.
5-6	D: 'This loaf's big with its yeasty rising. Money's new-minted in this fat purse.' 'This loaf is big with its yeasty rising.' I don't know the word 'yeasty'. Maybe it's sure arising, I think. This loaf is big with its yeasty rising. Then why does 'loaf' appear? Loaf is bread. This loaf is big with its yeasty... Is yeasty 'ferment'? Oh, I see as I said just now, it's sure, a sure rising. Is that right? That's it. It keeps growing up. That's the idea. It means the flour is rising. The self-rising, such kind of thing. And money's new-minted in this fat purse. Ha.... money is new-minted in this fat purse.....  The money in the swelling purse is new minted. 'Mint' is 'peppermint'. New-minted. Money is new-minted. It means more and more money in the purse. I think so.	He is seeking new words and their meanings. He does not notice the appearance of the deictic word 'this'. Later he declares that he does not know its functions at all.  He is puzzled by the appearance of the word 'loaf', due to his ignorance of the whole context and lack of metaphorical assumptions.  However he catches the meaning that the loaf is rising.  He struggles to select and find the appropriate schematic knowledge of the word 'minted' and manages to arrive at an interpretation.
7-8	D: 'I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf. I've eaten a bag of green apples,' 'I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.' Er... 'I've eaten a bag of green apples...' That refers back to 'me' the metaphor. 'A means' is a kind of measure. A stage is a stair. A cow in calf is a cattle. 'I've eaten a bag of green apples' means that I've eaten a bag of green apples (Chinese). That's it.	The appearance of the pronoun 'I' takes him back to the narrator again. Then he paraphrases word by word literally. His metaphor schemata are not activated at all.
9	D: Boarded a train there's no getting off. Getting on a train but cannot get off.	He acquires literal interpretation again. His metaphor schemata still remain static.

The analysis shows that Mr. D's failure lies in either his improper selections of schemata or lack of relevant schemata. What are hidden behind this superficial phenomenon are his culturally bound reading schemata. As stated in 2.4, Mr. D received his English education with traditional approaches. Trained in this way, students tend to apply the micro-level strategies when they read in their 'extensive' reading classes, paying little attention to global, text-level meaning. 'In intensive reading classes, students are asked to read slowly, to look up all unfamiliar words, to analyze complex structures carefully and to reread difficult sentences until they are understood'. Mr. D's reading acts exemplify this feature.

Besides, according to Kern, 'schema theory provides an explanation for the fact that misunderstandings arise not just because of one's inability to comprehend the words expressed, but also because of differences in what speaker/writers and readers/listeners tacitly assume (which remains *unexpressed* in words)' (Kern, 2000, pp. 95-96). His theory explicates the case of Mr. D's reading. Mr. D declared afterwards, 'there is no theme in this poem I think. I don't think there is any.' As he explained, he could not expect a poem to be written about a pregnant woman. And he added that, as a university teacher in China, he could never remember a poem related with sex being studied in classes in China. Since he was unable to access the schema necessary to reconcile his personal experience with what he read in the poem, he felt lost (Kern, 2000).

In fact, he was impeded more by his lack of proper reading schemata and cultural schemata than his linguistic schemata. Only by utilizing these relevant, proper schemata throughout his reading activities, could he effectively override the threshold and facilitate his comprehension of metaphors.

## 6. Conclusion

1. When the subjects read the poems, they made evaluations of the poems by resorting to their past knowledge. When either an unexpected linguistic item or an unfamiliar cultural item occurred, they would use their schemata to make at least a seemingly sound explanation for the item.

2. Chinese subjects showed an obvious feature—the image-making activity—when the lines of a poem appeared before their eyes. While they read, they kept constructing images before they came to a fuller understanding of each line. Once an image was produced, it was seldom modified and reconstituted or adapted to its cultural context. As a result, they were too constrained to go any further. Being faced with an alien experience in the poem, they could not jump out of their cultural circle to get a 'panorama' of the whole poem and discover an inner world of which they were not conscious. They are relatively more sensitive and responsive to the images in the poems than the English subjects. From the images they have received, they are more inclined to the formation of established images, which come out of their pre-existent cultural and linguistic schemata (Chang, 2001). However, such preferences restrict their way of thinking. Once they are put in an unfamiliar discourse situation with striking cultural differences, frustration and puzzlement are more likely to befall them. Additionally, the Chinese subjects obtain visual images by focusing on the content words, especially nouns. They are more sensitive to the nouns of concrete signs than the English subjects for 'nouns, referring to things, can more directly evoke images than other parts of speech. On the other hand, the English subjects do not show any obvious evidence that they are image-dependent. They tend to think more logically and analytically by using their linguistic and cultural schemata. Though they can come to their final interpretations of the poems from Chinese culture, they face difficulties in figuring out their meanings when they meet with the culture-loaded expressions.

3. *... The collected data shows that the reading of culturally sensitive discourse is often culture-oriented. That means the understanding of such poems requires the correlation of cultural schemata. The understanding of the same targeted discourse with different schemata correlation results in different interpretations of the discourse.*
4. *... As the study shows, there exists another reading schema difference. Three of them read from the general to the specific and one of them from the specific to the general. However such a difference is not seemingly culture-specific.*

Finally, both Chinese and English subjects have their respective features in identifying and understanding metaphors. The Chinese subjects tend to look for stereotyped metaphors while the English subjects like to explore for fresh metaphors. They all try to use their own native cultural and linguistic schemata to evaluate and comprehend metaphors. But the cognitive processes of the Chinese subjects in the study indicate that they might be more able to find out the similarities between the vehicles and topics of the conventional metaphors. They might be less able to find the similarities of the new and unstereotyped metaphors, even though they have some schematic knowledge about the vehicles. As a result, they might not activate and co-relate their schemata for their understanding of the metaphors. They have more difficulties in finding out novel metaphoric analogies. All the clues in the study indicate that more research should be done to find out how Chinese subjects process metaphors in their reading. They call for further research on metaphor awareness on a pedagogical basis.

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