



# TCM's: Resources for Promoting Figurative/Metaphorical Language

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**Investigation Paper**

**Volume 5 Issue 4**

**Received Date:** October 11, 2020

**Published Date:** November 24, 2020

**DOI:** [10.23880/pprij-16000248](https://doi.org/10.23880/pprij-16000248)

## Abstract

We present two versions of assessment / intervention tools for understanding metaphors: the TCM for children aged 9 to 14 years old, or elementary school (Portugal), and the junior TCM, for children aged 4 to 6 years old, or in age preschool. They are versions / adaptations for European Portuguese of existing tools in Italian. The authors of the Italian versions are professors at the University of Sapienza, Rome, Italy, with internationally recognized work, presenting the original versions with good psychometric qualities.

**Keywords:** language; Figurative; Assessment; Intervention; Tools

## Introduction

The metaphor is seen as a form of semantic conflict induced by the anomalous combination of the conventional meanings of its main constituents-tenor (content) and vehicle - and the understanding of the metaphor is framed as a metasemantic ability based on the analysis of these meanings [1].

In a metaphor, the vehicle is the linguistic figure in itself, that is, the immediate image that incorporates or "carries" the tenor (the theme or content of the metaphor). The interaction of the vehicle results and the content give meaning to the metaphor.

The authors propose a Piagetian functionalist framework, based on Piaget's last equilibrium model [2-4], to analyze how this semantic conflict can be faced and resolved by children in the considered development period.

Is understanding metaphors a "thing for children" or not? The authors believe that it is, provided that metaphors similar to those that children of that age spontaneously produce and that a "game" is established with them are presented. Understanding and knowing how to explain the meaning of metaphors is a complex skill, whose relevance was perceived by various sectors of psychology (cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, developmental psychology, psychoanalysis and other theoretical currents of clinical psychology, social psychology, sport psychology, etc.), generating, for over forty years, a vast scientific literature.

## Methodology and instruments

### TCM

It is a paper and pencil instrument, consisting of 12 items subdivided into 2 groups of metaphors:

From a structural point of view, the TCM is composed of two parts, corresponding to two different types of metaphors, called “physical-psychological” and “conceptual” [5].

The distinction is based on certain semantic characteristics of the two main components of the metaphor that we introduced earlier, the “tenor” and the “vehicle”, T and V, and the different relationships that are established between them. In physical-psychological metaphors, the two terms belong to different semantic-conceptual domains: one is taken from the universe of human beings, while the other derives from the inanimate universe of physical objects. An example of this is the phrase “The prison guard is a rock” which, expressed to convey information about a psychological quality, establishes a connection between the physical domain (hard rocks) and the domain of psychological traits (obstinate lack of feeling). In conceptual metaphors, however, certain concepts or ideas are linked to a concrete object, such as in the example “Memory is a sieve”, through which we want to express some functional (in this case, dysfunctional) aspects of the memory process. However, the limits are not always so clear, so it can be difficult to decide when a metaphor is unmistakably physical-psychological or conceptual [6].

12 items were constructed, divided symmetrically into 6 items containing physical-psychological metaphors and 6 items containing conceptual metaphors

### Examples

#### Physical-psychological metaphors

The prison guard is a rock.

#### Conceptual metaphors

The family is an umbrella.

#### TCM Junior

It is a paper and pencil test, consisting of 25 items, presented in a playful way, with 12 sentences and 4 short stories (for each story, there are between 3 to 4 questions) [7].

As an example, we have:

#### Phrases

1. “The moon is a lamp.”;

Brief history:

“Once upon a time there was a boy named Philip. One morning, Philip flew away with his father, to the basement

of the house. The father opens the cellar door and Filipe sees the night and begins to be afraid. So he decides to run and flees. The father says to the mother, “Philip is a train”.

### Questions

- What do you think “Philip flew away with his father” means;
- What do you think “Philip sees the night and begins to be afraid” means?
- What do you think “Philip is a train” means?

The junior TCM allows to apprehend the typical characteristics from the point of view of reasoning and lexical skills of the age group targeted by the test.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In addition to being able to function as an assessment tool, it will be a useful intervention tool for the educator.

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