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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## METAPHORIC EXPRESSIONS EMPLOYED BY LEBANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A LINGUISTIC STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

This study used a mixed method approach and a quasi-experimental design to investigate how teaching metaphors affected Lebanese university students' comprehension of metaphors and their ability to determine whether certain metaphors were appropriate to use in English. The study thus addressed one main of three research questions: do metaphorical expressions increase the motivation of Lebanese foreign language learners to communicate in English? It has been confirmed that students who receive direct instruction on metaphorical expressions comprehend metaphors more effectively than those who do not benefit from such an intervention.

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## INTRODUCTION

Literacy remains a foundation for academic and life success, defined as the ability to read, understand, and apply knowledge (Eldredge, 1995). In foreign language learning, difficulties often arise from typological differences between native and target languages. Metaphorical language, especially multi-word units, poses challenges but is vital for native-like fluency. Scholars highlight metaphors as central to cognition, communication, and cultural understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, this study investigates how teaching metaphorical expressions impacts Lebanese EFL learners' English writing proficiency

**Statement of the Problem:** Metaphors were considered ornamental rather than necessary in the past. In fact, they are seen as essential instruments for communication and ideation in contemporary research (Cameron, 2008). However, metaphors are not taught in English classes in Lebanon, thus pupils are ill-equipped to understand or use them. This study examines the lack of metaphor education in Lebanese colleges and how it might help students become more proficient in the language.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to assess how teaching metaphorical phrases affects the English ability of Lebanese EFL learners. It specifically aims to ascertain how this type of training enhances communication abilities and tackles students' difficulties understanding metaphorical language.

**Significance of the Study:** Metaphors are essential to second language acquisition, yet learning a foreign language is complicated. According to research, even highly proficient students' interpretations of metaphors differ from those of native speakers (Kokcu, 2017). Because it highlights the value of using metaphors in Lebanon EFL classes, this study is important for curriculum designers, educators, students, and educational policymakers. It emphasizes how metaphors help develop native-like proficiency and offers useful solutions for learning obstacles.

### Research Questions

- Do Lebanese EFL learners have trouble understanding metaphorical expressions?
- How can students' comprehension of metaphors' appropriateness in English be enhanced through instruction?
- Does teaching metaphors make students more eager to speak English?

### Hypotheses

- Pupils who receive education in metaphorical terms comprehend concepts more fully than those who do not.
- Students who learn metaphorical terms have a better understanding of when they are suitable to use them in a foreign language.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, research on metaphors is reviewed with an emphasis on their definitions, function in language acquisition, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and educational consequences.

**Metaphor Definition:** Metaphors have always been seen as rhetorical or stylistic devices (Black, 1962; Searle, 1979). However, contemporary perspectives characterize them as essential to language, thought, and perspective (Ungerer & Schmid, 2013). According to scholars, metaphors help with comprehension, make abstract ideas concrete, and compare different concepts (Ricoeur, 2012; Ellis, 2011; King, 2000). Metaphors, according to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), are ubiquitous in everyday life and thought, serving as cognitive aids as opposed to merely decorative language. Metaphors are used in education for textual, interpersonal, and ideational reasons (Cameron, 2008). In this study, metaphor is defined by Lakoff and Johnson as a ubiquitous cognitive and linguistic process that facilitates the conceptualization of abstract ideas through more concrete domains.

**Role of Metaphors in Language Learning:** When learning a second or foreign language, metaphors are essential. They clarify complicated ideas, broaden vocabulary, and introduce students to various cultural viewpoints (Kövecses, 1995; Low, 2006; Oxford, 2003). Metaphors are used in SLA research to illustrate educational philosophies, simplify teaching approaches into memorable imagery, and link abstract theories with personal experiences (Ellis, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Thus, developing deeper comprehension and communication proficiency in a foreign language requires mastering figurative discourse, including metaphors.

**Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT):** By putting forth the idea that metaphors structure mind as well as language, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) transformed the field of metaphor studies. According to CMT, a major portion of human cognition is metaphorical, with abstract ideas being comprehended by mapping them from concrete domains (for example, "warmth" denoting compassion). These mappings are based on embodied experiences and are influenced by culture (Kövecses, 2002, 2010). CMT emphasizes how target domains—like emotions, relationships, and time—are projected onto source domains—like the body, nature, and food. Thus, metaphors facilitate understanding of abstract concepts while reflecting social and cultural worldviews. Scholars emphasize that comprehending metaphors shows how people think, make sense of experiences, and communicate (Turner & Lakoff, 1989; Cameron, 2003).

### Characteristics of Conceptual Metaphors

Three primary categories of conceptual metaphors exist (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010):

- Structural metaphors: Describe an idea using the framework of another (e.g., TIME IS MOTION, ARGUMENT IS WAR).
- Ontological metaphors: Consider abstract ideas as things or beings (e.g., calling someone, using the mind as a container).
- Orientational metaphors: Use opposites to arrange ideas geographically, such as "more is up, less is down" or "raise your voice vs. lower your voice."

The formula A is B is shared by all three types, and they frequently communicate with each other. Understanding these types aids students in comprehending cognitive processes, cultural links, and hidden meanings.

**Classification of Metaphors:** Charteris-Black (2002) divides metaphors into six categories according to conceptual and linguistic similarity between languages:

- The same verbal form plus the same conceptual metaphor.
- A distinct verbal form combined with the same conceptual metaphor.

- Various conceptual metaphors (the most difficult, frequently leading to negative transfer).
- Distinct verbal forms but the same mental foundation.
- Completely distinct intellectual underpinnings and linguistic forms.
- Metaphors that are culturally distinctive, ambiguous, and challenging to interpret.

Learners find kinds 1 and 2 to be relatively easy, whereas types 3–6 are more challenging and frequently call for explicit teaching. This categorization aids educators in determining which metaphors could provide difficulties and in selecting the best teaching techniques.

**Teaching Metaphors:** The question of whether metaphors should be taught explicitly in EFL/ESL classes is up for dispute. There are two positions:

- Uninstructed learning: Through context and speech, learners organically pick up metaphors (Allwright, 1976).
- Instructed learning: Teachers employ exercises and techniques to purposefully lead students (Ellis, 2011; Housen & Pierrard, 2005).

One approach to teaching is meaning-focused, which emphasizes understanding metaphors in context.

- Form-focused: Emphasizing the meaning and form of language (Widdowson, 1998).

According to scholars (Low, 1988; Littlemore & Low, 2006), explicit metaphor education should include the following: • Activities that increase awareness (such as translating and comparing L1 and L2 metaphors).

- Critical conversations about conceptual metaphors.
- Teaching strategies like "querying routines," which encourage pupils to inquire about associations and meanings.

Learners can develop their metaphorical awareness, identify underlying conceptual mappings, and employ metaphors in their second language in a creative and acceptable way with the support of explicit instruction.

### Related Studies

**Scholars have investigated how EFL learners struggle with metaphors and comprehension-boosting techniques:**

- Boers (2000) discovered that grouping figurative phrases according to common source domains (e.g., ANGER IS HEAT: simmering, exploded) makes them easier to remember. His studies with Dutch and French language learners demonstrated that vocabulary retention was enhanced by metaphor awareness. He suggested exercises for the classroom to increase students' understanding of metaphorical language.
- Sasaki (2010): After observing foreign students in an American classroom, it was discovered that they had trouble understanding metaphors since the teachers employed them without conscious thought.
- Az-Zuwar (2010): Examined how Lebanese EFL students understood political news using metaphors. The findings indicated that although even native speakers struggle with metaphors, students who have teachers with more training did better.
- Kosciuk (2003): Analyzed two second language learners while they read a text full with metaphors. Both had trouble understanding metaphors, which highlights the challenges faced by students.

These studies demonstrate that even native speakers find it difficult to understand metaphors, and that EFL learners require explicit instruction and awareness-raising.

## METHODOLOGY

The study's design, participants, tools, methods, data collecting, and analysis are all described in this article

**Design of Research:** The study uses a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental approach (qualitative and quantitative). Pretests, posttests, and statistical analysis with SPSS are examples of quantitative procedures; questionnaires are used to collect qualitative data. Examining whether teaching metaphors enhances students' understanding and metaphor-making is the goal.

**The Study's Sample:** 60 Al-Kufa University first-year nursing students, ages 18 to 22, who were all native Arabic speakers, participated. They were split up into two groups: 30 students in the experimental group received metaphor teaching, and 30 students in the control group received instruction using conventional techniques.

**Method:** A pretest was given to both groups to gauge their understanding of metaphors. The experimental group received teaching in metaphorical terms over a period of 15 weeks, while the control group received conventional instruction that did not emphasize metaphors. To gauge their development, both groups completed a posttest at the conclusion. The findings of the pretest and posttest were compared using a t-test. To assess their motivation and attitudes on learning metaphors, the experimental group also answered a questionnaire.

**Approach to Metaphor Instruction for the Experimental Group:** An introduction to metaphors and their role in language was given at the start of the 14-week course of treatment. Students reviewed the distinctions between literal and metaphorical interpretations, examined metaphors from their textbook (Headway), and produced original examples. The language-specific nature of metaphors and their connection to comprehension were stressed in the lessons. Practice evaluating the use of metaphors in context was part of subsequent weeks. The posttest and questionnaire took up the last week. Charteris-Black's (2002) taxonomy of metaphors, which makes a distinction between categories such as identical metaphors in L1 and L2, metaphors with similar expressions but different meanings, and metaphors with culturally distinctive forms, was used by the researcher. Pupils were encouraged to deduce meanings on their own and assisted in identifying the distinctions between metaphors' literal and conceptual meanings.

### Various types of examples were used:

- Type 1 (the same metaphor in both languages): upside down, catch, ages, enticing notion, and honeymoon.
- Type 3: burst into, broken down, night owl, and shadow (identical phrases but differing emphasis on L1).
- Types 5 and 6 (different or culturally specific): struck the roof, standard Hershey Kisses, flushed with shame. Because Arabic and English have different conceptual frameworks, these were the most difficult.

### In order to instruct them, the researcher displayed examples on the board and asked them to examine each one in detail:

- Night owl => metaphorical (an active night person) versus literal (a bird).
- Date: actual (monthly day) versus symbolic (romantic rendezvous).
- Upside down: figurative (life-altering event) versus literal (inverted).

Students created lists of challenging metaphors to discuss in class, compared meanings in L1 and L2, and determined appropriate and inappropriate applications. This method later supported the questionnaire on metaphor appropriateness and helped draw attention

to cross-linguistic similarities and variances, particularly in culturally distinctive metaphors.

**Evaluation and Conversation:** In order to assess the study's hypotheses and answer its research questions, this article presents the results of the pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire.

**The Importance of Theories:** The study looked at how teaching metaphorical phrases affected nursing students in Lebanon. According to the results, the experimental group made noticeable progress following metaphor instruction, while the control group exhibited little to no gain between pre- and post-tests. The experimental group greatly outperformed the control group in terms of understanding and identifying suitable metaphorical language, according to statistical testing.

- The first hypothesis was validated: students who received direct teaching had a greater understanding of metaphors than those who did not.
- Hypothesis 2 was also validated: students who received metaphor education outperformed those who did not in terms of recognizing suitable metaphorical expressions in English.

### Examining the Research Questions

- **Research Question 1:** The study verified that Lebanese EFL students initially had trouble understanding metaphors. There is a favorable correlation between teaching metaphors and improving comprehension, though, as those who received metaphor instruction shown noticeable progress.
- **Research Question 2:** Students who received metaphor education also showed a greater understanding of when metaphorical English statements are appropriate. Through instruction, they were better able to comprehend the role metaphors play in text construction, which improved their comprehension and production of expressive, clear language.
- **Research Question 3:** A Likert-scale questionnaire revealed that students in the experimental group were more motivated to learn English after metaphor instruction. Metaphors improved the clarity and interest of reading, writing, and comprehension tasks, according to the majority of participants who agreed or strongly agreed. Over half strongly agreed on the importance of metaphors, and nearly 90% expressed heightened motivation to continue learning English.

**Conclusion and Consequences:** Nursing students were split into experimental and control groups for the study, which looked at the effects of teaching metaphors in EFL classes. When compared to the control group, the experimental group, who received explicit metaphor teaching, shown a notable improvement in their awareness, recognition, and comprehension of metaphorical language. The results demonstrate how linguistic and cultural background affects metaphor understanding.

**Advice for Teachers of Languages:** According to the study, teaching metaphors in EFL environments is both possible and advantageous. Instructors are encouraged to integrate metaphor instruction, use authentic language data, and adapt curricula beyond traditional textbooks to make learning more engaging and effective.

**Suggestions for Upcoming Studies on Learning/Teaching Metaphors:** To move pedagogy from merely teaching skills to communication-focused learning, more study is required to examine the cognitive processes EFL learners employ to comprehend metaphors. Examining understudied topics in metaphor studies is important, particularly with regard to students' awareness of metaphor usage.

Curriculum designers should create resources that use metaphors to improve intercultural and pragmatic skills. Through conceptual analogies, well-crafted resources can aid learners in text interpretation, the development of cohesive and culturally relevant

conversation, and a deeper comprehension of the target language's culture.

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