



A STUDY OF METAPHORS IN SPECIALIZED
TEXTS AND THE EFFECTS OF METAPHOR
AWARENESS ON VOCABULARY ENHANCEMENT
AND READING COMPREHENSION OF SECOND
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Metaphorical expressions are a part of everyday language and can also be found in academic texts, particularly in specialized disciplines. Their usage has become so common that learners and teachers may not even be aware of some phrases they encounter in specialized texts, are actually metaphorical. Considerable number of research has shown that metaphorical expressions are abundant in specialized readings and enhancing metaphor awareness can help students understand metaphorical words in them. This study explores the density of metaphorical words in specialized texts and examines the effects of metaphor awareness on vocabulary enhancement and reading comprehension. The first part of the study involves an investigation on eight selected specialized texts in order to gain the preliminary insight of metaphorical words in different genres. The second part of the study involves a quasi-experimental design and was carried out involving an Experimental and a Control group. The participants of both groups (n= 61) were international students enrolled in the English preparatory class at the Centre for Languages and Pre University Academic Development (CELPAD) at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The experimental group received instructional treatment in the form of metaphor awareness raising activities while the control group went through conventional classes. The pre-test was administered during the first week of the semester while the post-test was administered at the end of it. Findings in this study establish two major facts concerning metaphors, namely: 1) metaphorical words occur pervasively in the selected specialized texts especially in History and Sociology texts. In relation to that, the functions of metaphor are not exclusively found in literary texts but vary considerably depending on the genres. 2) The results of this experiment indicate that awareness of metaphors may improve the process of vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. *t*-test and ANCOVA results suggest that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of vocabulary enhancement and reading comprehension measures between the experimental and control group where the experimental group outperformed the control group.

خلاصة البحث

أصبحت التعبيرات المجازية جزءاً من اللغة المستخدمة يومياً، يمكن أن توجد هذه التعبيرات في النصوص الأكاديمية وبالأخص في بعض المجالات العلمية المتخصصة، ولا شك أن استخدام هذه التعبيرات المجازية أضحت منتشرة لدرجة أن الدارسين والمعلمين لا يكادون يدركون أن هذه التعبيرات تعبيرات مجازية، وقد أوضحت الدراسات أن مثل هذه التعبيرات كثيرة جداً في القراءات المتخصصة، كما أشارت إلى أن تعزيز الوعي عن التعبيرات المجازية يساعد الطلاب على فهم الألفاظ المجازية والنصوص المقروءة. ويسعى هذا البحث إلى دراسة أثر التوعية عن المصطلحات المجازية في تعزيز المفردات وفهم النصوص لاكتشاف كثافة الألفاظ المجازية في النصوص المتخصصة. ويضم هذا البحث دراستين: الأولى: عبارة عن الفحص في ثمانية نصوص مختارة بغية الحصول على الرؤية الأولية المتعلقة بالألفاظ المجازية في مختلف أنواع النصوص. والدراسة الثانية تم تنفيذ شبه تصميم تجريبي يحتوي على تجربة ومعيار التجربة. والمشاركون في كلا الفريقين ($n=61$) هم طلاب أجناب (غير محليين) مسجلون في المرحلة التأهيلية للغة الإنجليزية في مركز اللغات والتنمية الأكاديمية للمرحلة ما قبل الجامعية (CELPAD) بالجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. وقد تلقى فريق التجربة إرشادات في شكل أنشطة تتعلق بالتوعية بالألفاظ المجازية بيد أن فريق المعيار مر بالفصول التقليدية. وتم إجراء عملية ما قبل الاختبار في الأسبوع الأول من الفصل الدراسي في حين أن عملية ما بعد الاختبار أجريت في آخر الفترة. وأوضحت نتائج هذه الدراسة حقيقتين متعلقين بالمجازات: الأول: أن الألفاظ المجازية منتشرة وبشكل عشوائي في النصوص المتخصصة المختارة، كما أشارت إلى أن الألفاظ المجازية كثيرة في النصوص التاريخية، ويلبها في الكثرة نصوص علم الاجتماع. وتجدر الإشارة إلى أن التعبيرات المجازية ليست منحصرة في النصوص الأدبية ولكنها تختلف باختلاف النوع. الثاني: نتائج هذه التجربة فقد أفصحت أن التوعية عن الألفاظ المجازية قد تساعد على اكتساب المفردات واستيعاب النصوص، ونتائج اختبار ت (T-Test) و (ANCOVA) أثبتت أن ثمة تبايناً ملحوظاً في نسبة درجات معياري تنمية المفردات واستيعاب القراءة بين فريق التجربة وفريق المعيار حيث إن فريق التجربة تفوق على فريق المعيار.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Signature

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*This thesis is dedicated to My Beloved Late Father Haji Abdul Manap Bin Taib, A
Man of Great Wisdom and Knowledge (1933-2008)*

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In The name of Allah the Most Gracious The Most Merciful
LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

This journey had been long, dark and perilous. The road was fraught with danger from the beginning, the forest was thick, the mountains were high, the darkness was terrifying. Nonetheless, I traversed the path with faith and hope to the end of the tunnel to finally see the light and to find cool water where I could safely drink and bath, all by the grace of Allah.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with an introduction followed by the background of the study, an overview on Cognitive Linguistic and metaphor, metaphor in second language acquisition, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance and limitations of the study, and definition of terms.

Metaphorical expressions are a part of everyday language and can also be found in academic texts, particularly in specialized disciplines. Their usage has become very common that learners and teachers may not even be aware that some phrases they encounter in specialized texts are actually metaphorical. Cooper (1999) states that when the level of linguistic competence in the target language is lower, learners are at a distinct disadvantage in understanding L2 figurative expressions, yet they will meet idioms in all forms of discourse: in conversations, lectures, movies, radio broadcasts, television programs, in all forms of print, including newspapers, magazines and books, and throughout the world of electronic communication. Boers (2000a) claims that metaphorical expressions are abundant in specialized readings. He further says that enhancing metaphor awareness can assist students in understanding metaphorical words in specialized reading.

This thesis presents two major premises; (1) An exploration of the frequency, classes and themes of metaphorical words in specialized texts, and (2) An investigation on the effects of metaphor awareness on learners' improvement of vocabulary and reading comprehension. It shows that the majority of words in

specialized texts are highly metaphorical. The study also evaluates if metaphor awareness can facilitate vocabulary learning and consequently improve reading. It shows, through comparison, that contextual guessing alone is insufficient to enhance learners' vocabulary learning, thus is also insufficient to improve reading comprehension.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.2 TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHODS

During the last century several traditional teaching methodologies that have been practised in the area of vocabulary learning and reading comprehension are:

- i. Grammar Translation method
- ii. Direct method
- iii. Audio-lingual Method
- iv. Communicative Language Teaching

In the Grammar Translation Method, the medium in class is the native language of the learners. Emphasis is given to explicit explanation of grammar and memorization of bilingual vocabulary list. Activities mainly consist of translating long text passages. Vocabulary instruction takes place only if it could be combined with grammar (Zimmerman, 1997). Learners are expected to use the obtained skills to read either classic literature or literature that is connected with their future academic life. Accuracy takes precedence over fluency since it is assumed that fluency in a language can be achieved by exposure to language in a native country.

As the name Direct Method implies, an effort is made to obtain meaning from a language directly without the mediator of translation. Consequently, the target language is also the language of instruction. Explicit grammar and vocabulary

teaching are avoided, along with the use of the dictionary. Known words, imitation, demonstration and pictures are used to teach vocabulary (Richards & Rodgers, 1995). For the first time, vocabulary teaching receives particular attention through reading and vocabulary is seen as one of the most important aspects of second language learning (Zimmerman, 1997). As a consequence of this, word-frequency lists are compiled. The selection of the vocabulary content of language courses is deemed as a scientific and rational effort in enhancing vocabulary learning in classrooms.

Audio Lingual method advocates habit formation by incorporating drills and positive reinforcement (Richards & Rodgers, 1995). Vocabulary is taught by memorizing the list of isolated words selected by teachers. This traditional method emphasizes the need for the learners to learn vocabulary items separately, master the grammar rules and memorize the exception of certain grammar rules. This method places a heavy cognitive burden on students as they have to memorize a considerable list of vocabulary. The limitation of this method finally gives way to the humanistic approach that is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

In the CLT approach, grammar is not taught but acquired where the learners are given a context to use the target language for a communicative and functional purpose (Brown, 2000). Similarly, vocabulary teaching does not occur per se, but it is assumed that vocabulary acquisition is achieved by frequent exposure to the target language. In the process it is hoped that ESL learners will acquire abstract semantic and cultural-specific concepts when they are engaged in communicative tasks in the classroom. This method shares some similarities with Cognitive Linguistic because it emphasizes on language as a tool to represent what is on the learners' mind. In other words, Cognitive Linguistic and Communicative Language Teaching view language as a manifestation of the learners' mind. However, Communicative Language

Teaching alone is not sufficient in dealing with metaphorical vocabulary which is so pervasive in English language. This brings us to the Cognitive Linguistic theory, a recent approach which is relevant to vocabulary learning which views language as a tool to serve as an evidence of human thoughts.

The CL theory mentioned above could resolve the complex phenomenon of vocabulary learning. ESL learners usually are not aware that some difficult words they encounter when learning vocabulary are actually metaphorical. Semino (2008) raises a significant point that the presence of large numbers of highly conventional metaphorical expressions in language is very pervasive. Since the phenomena is so pervasive and so common, learners often use and understand those metaphorical words without being conscious of their metaphoricity.

Metaphorical language is often neglected as ESL practitioners view metaphor as a linguistic device of literary discourse. This traditional and narrow perspective of the role of metaphor limits it to the realm of poetry of figurative language. Hence, metaphor is often a topic studied restrictively in English Literature and ignored or not taught deliberately in the ESL and ESP courses.

Semino (2008) claims that for the past twenty years extensive research into metaphor have been carried out among psychologists, sociologists, scientists, humorists, advertising copywriters, philosophers and their studies reveal that metaphor is a pervasive linguistics phenomena not limited to literature texts per se. It occurs in various textual manifestations and is versatile in its function and central to many different types of communication from informal interaction through political speeches to scientific theorizing (Semino, 2008). This explosive finding sees the need to incorporate metaphor in the teaching of ESL as well as ESP courses. Merely leaving it up to the students to be aware of metaphor by accident is not sufficient. An

approach to raise the metaphor awareness among students and to trigger their consciousness is essential. A linkage in the form of metaphor awareness raising activity in the classrooms must be given to help ESL learners to cope with metaphorical words.

As stated above, research on metaphor on the various genre texts has revealed the multi-functional role of metaphor between conventionality and creativity (Semino, 2008). Metaphor plays a significant role in the way people think, the way people speak, and the way they live. Metaphor acts as a tool to categorize the way the world is seen around us and to carry out abstract reasoning. Metaphor assists the cognition to understand abstract events by associating it with concrete events (physical world). The significant multi-functional roles of metaphor bring about the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who have raised the significant awareness of metaphor in language learning and teaching.

The topic of metaphor has drawn increasing attention in applied linguistics. Ortony (1993) notes that metaphor is an essential ingredient of communication, and it can be of great educational value. He raises the attention and increasing discussion on why metaphor is important in learning and how conceptual metaphors can facilitate learning and communication. Second language pedagogy begins to pay attention to the cognitive role in L2 learning and teaching since considerable amount of research shows that cognitive role in language learning could help in enhancing vocabulary (Boers, 2004; Charteris-Black & Ennis, 2001; Cameron, 1999; Cameron & Low, 1999; Csabi, 2004; Deignan, Gabrys & Solska, 1997; Herrera & White, 2000; Kalyuga & Kalyuga, 2008; Kondaiah, 2004; Kovecses & Szabo, 1996; Lazar, 1996; Nation, 2000; Verspoor & Lowie, 2003). Juchem-Grundmann (2009) notes the importance of metaphor for L2 learning and advocates pedagogical uses of conceptual

metaphors in Business English. Danesi (1986) believes that the ability to metaphorsize in a second language is the true sign that the learner has developed L2 communicative competence. Moreover, Maclennan (1994) suggests that learning with those conceptual metaphors that are common across cultures and languages can simplify the acquisition of vocabulary, facilitate its learning and improve reading comprehension.

Although still in its infancy, metaphor awareness in the teaching and learning of the English language has become increasingly important. An awareness of metaphors is a valuable tool for learners and studies have repeatedly shown that encouraging students to refer to conceptual metaphors in their attempts to comprehend new words, has a positive effect on their ability to interpret and increase vocabulary (Boers, 2000a, 2000b; Charteris-Black, 2000; Deignan, Gabrys, & Solska, 1997; Holmes, 2004). Lindstromberg (1991) advocates raising awareness of metaphors in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In subject specific areas such as business, law or medicine, students will encounter (in addition to technical terminology and genre conventions) a wider range of unpredictable lexis. Furthermore, findings of studies in metaphor awareness have been successfully adapted to facilitate vocabulary acquisition (Boers, 2004; Charteris-Black & Ennis, 2001; Cameron, 1999; Cameron & Low, 1999; Csabi, 2004; Deignan, Gabrys & Solska, 1997; Herrera & White, 2000; Kalyuga & Kalyuga, 2008; Kondaiah, 2004; Kovecses & Szabo, 1996; Lazar, 1996; Nation, 2000; Verspoor & Lowie, 2003).

1.3 METAPHOR IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Metaphor plays an important role in language acquisition. The ability to acquire, produce and interpret metaphor in the second language is crucial for language learning especially because words often have substantially more metaphoric than denotative

meanings (Littlemore, 2001). Acquiring common metaphorical patterns can simplify the acquisition of vocabulary, which is basic for the acquisition of a second language and native like proficiency. In fact, the absence of metaphor in students' production is also a mark of non native like speech (Danesi, 1994). Consequently, second language learners need to develop their awareness of metaphor and metaphoric competence.

Metaphorical transfer has played an important role in children's acquisition of language (Lyons, 1977). It allows children and learners to convert sense of impressions into a set of abstract symbols by finding similarities and differences among the phenomena around the world. The product of continuous comparison is the development of patterns, without which the learners' brain is overloaded with a mass of sensory data. Detecting similarities at every level of abstraction is the key to human memory organization (Charteris-Black, 2000).

Metaphor should be used in pedagogy because it can facilitate learning through compactness, vividness and inexpressibility (Ortony, 1993). Compactness involves the transfer of well-known to less-well-known domain. Vividness allows a more memorable learning experience due to the greater imagery of association. Inexpressibility deals with how metaphor works by encoding certain aspects of human experience which it would not otherwise be possible to encode (Ortony, 1993).

Therefore, through metaphor, complex and new concepts can be embodied in very common words which people know very well. Metaphor helps learners maximize their memory in language learning. In fact, words and information in the human mind or in the mental dictionary are selected, retrieved, stored and linked in a gigantic multi-dimensional cobweb, or interconnected system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They are not really stored independently, but linked together according to a number of connections.

Metaphorical language is largely neglected in ESL pedagogy. As opposed to literal language, metaphorical language lacks direct references to concrete objects in perceptual physical experience. Because of that, ESL pedagogy has problems rendering explicit or direct instruction for it. Some have arrived at a conclusion that metaphorical language is neither teachable nor learnable (Singleton, 1999; Sale, 1982). This false conclusion has resulted from several gaps left by the current ESL pedagogy.

In dealing with the area of metaphorical language, ESL practitioners have adopted a traditional linguistic view and worked with a narrow scope of assumption on metaphor. Metaphor has been traditionally viewed as a linguistic device only for rhetoric purpose (Low, 2008). This narrow definition has confined the role of metaphor to the realm of poetic or figurative language. The possible cognitive role that metaphor can play for learning, therefore, has been restricted from application (Littlemore, 2004). This traditional view of metaphor has limited its functions in ESL teaching practice as it over emphasizes the linguistic aspect of metaphor and on the restrictive literal-metaphorical distinction. Metaphor, therefore, very often becomes a topic of study restrictively for the course of English Literature (Kondaiah, 2004). Such pedagogical decision not only reflects an instructional difficulty in directly teaching metaphorical language but also defines the course of ESL learning.

The distinction between literal and metaphorical language has restricted ESL students at low proficiency levels to the learning of literal language only. As the process of first language acquisition, second language acquisition has been construed as a process of first learning literal language and then, after it is thoroughly mastered, moving on into nonliteral language (Low, 2008). Most ESL students have never been introduced to this topic throughout their English learning experience unless they are

English majors. ESL learners even at the beginner level might need to learn metaphorical language. Low (2008) has brought forth the notion of a metaphoric competence. His focus is on alerting learners (L2) to the presence and effects of conventional metaphor and pedagogical approaches to achieving this in ELT contexts. Therefore, the emphasis is on the discursal and pragmatic aspects of metaphor rather than literary uses. He identifies a number of functions of metaphor in language use and includes how things in life are related in systematic ways that can at least be partially comprehended through the complex structure of conceptual metaphor. Metaphoric competence according to him is skills which native speakers are expected to be proficient at and which learners need to master if they are to be competent language users.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Vocabulary is very central and extremely significant to language learners because they are used in a language to label objects, describe actions and ideas, express feelings and communicate with others. Without words, the intended meaning cannot be conveyed. Nevertheless, when learning vocabulary, students often face the problem where they tend to forget the words after checking them in the dictionary. In the prevalent cases where contextual vocabulary learning is applied, they are also not able to recognize the same words they encounter when they appear in different contexts. Some related major problems with learning words through context are:

- i) Words tend to be forgotten quite easily soon after the learning took place.
- ii) Learners also have to put a considerable amount of mental effort (Nation, 2001) in an attempt to store the newly learned vocabulary in their brain.

- iii) Many words have several senses, or meanings, which may further complicate guessing from context especially in a lengthy text, only a limited number of items can be learned.
- iv) There is a strong link between the word and the context that may distract attention from what should be the focus in vocabulary acquisition (Vespoor & Lowie, 2003).

The problems with contextual guessing discussed earlier gives the preliminary insight that vocabulary learning through contextual guessing alone is not sufficient for learners in recalling words they have learned. This is because contextual guessing is cognitively inefficient and time consuming and may impose a heavy working-memory load that interferes with learning (Kalyuga & Kalyuga, 2008). Cognitive load in the process of vocabulary learning needs to be taken into consideration and meaningful ways need to be developed to reduce the learning burden in this process (Kalyuga & Kalyuga, 2008).

Furthermore, vocabulary learning is one of the significant elements incorporated in English language proficiency class. At the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), students need to undergo foundation courses in English proficiency to be qualified to enter their respective faculties/kulliyahs. In the foundation English course, the main components to learn are reading, speaking, listening and speaking. All these four components require them to master a considerable amount of vocabulary in order for the students to participate in class activities especially in the reading class. When they begin their studies at their respective kulliyahs, they will inevitably have to deal with reading in specialized areas. However, phrases and expressions used in specialized texts are not only technical, but often also metaphorical. Cameroon (2003) makes a distinction between

three kinds of metaphorical expressions commonly found in specialized texts namely sub-technical, technical, and technical theory-constitutive. The complexity of words, phrases and expressions found in the specialized texts would inevitably require a very high and demanding cognitive ability of the learners. Cognitive Linguistic (CL) has the potential to offer learners the ability in managing potential learner overload and lessen the learning burden. Vocabulary learning could be enhanced through the awareness of conceptual metaphor. The acquisition of metaphors does not require the storage of whole copies of the source domains with the target domain in the brain. However, it is only the establishment of the connection from the source to the target domain in the brain which saves mental space thus minimizes the learning burden (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

Exposing students to only contextual guessing in learning vocabulary may not be adequate to equip them with knowledge and vocabulary skills they will need when they enter the Kulliyah. They will inevitably encounter specialized readings which are largely technical and metaphorical. Therefore, it is crucial to expose students to metaphor awareness activity in vocabulary learning where they could reduce the potential of the cognitive load. Conceptual metaphor could help them retrieve stored knowledge and apply them in a cognitively efficient way. Activities which raise awareness of metaphors in vocabulary could facilitate retention of unfamiliar figurative expressions (Boers, 2000b). There is a need to identify metaphors so that vocabulary lessons can be geared towards focusing on awareness of them and their relevance to the language. There is also a crucial need to draw students' attention to the literal (non metaphorical) meanings of metaphors in order to improve vocabulary learning and enhance reading comprehension. Thus, there is a need to address the problems resulting in the administration of the current study.