



English Language Teaching Students' Perceptions of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

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Abstract

Problem Statement: The way undergraduate students studying at the English Language Teaching program perceive Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) could shed light both to the course content they are enrolled in at the fourth grade just before they step into teaching and thereby to the integration of technology into their teaching during their professional life.

Purpose of the Study: The study aims to illustrate the perceptions of English Language Teaching (ELT) students related to Computer-Assisted Language Learning through analysis of the metaphors they formulated at the end of the course.

Method: This qualitative study is based on metaphor analysis in line with the content analysis. Two hundred fifteen metaphors collected from 84 undergraduate students studying at the English Language Teaching program were analyzed, coded and later categorized.

Findings and Results: The categories emerged about the perceptions of ELT students related to CALL are as following: Informative, Enjoyable, Accessible, Useful, Innovative, Interesting, Progressive, Negative aspects, Habitual, Interactive, Supportive, Easy to use, Necessary, Motivating and Relaxing. All in all, the categories reveal that students perceive CALL highly positive.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The results of this study will contribute to perspective and practice of teachers in that they would be able to realize student perceptions about CALL and to what extend these match to their own perceptions.

Keywords: Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), English Language Teaching (ELT), metaphor analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Living in the Integrative Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) era as named and predicted by Warschauer in 1996, followed by the Structural /Behaviorist and Communicative eras, we are witnessing a tremendous shift for integration of technology into the educational settings that is becoming more evident than ever. Along with the progress of integration, all actors of the process need to be monitored, guided and their perceptions need to be considered for effectiveness. Though CALL emerged as a top-down movement from tertiary education to secondary and primary schools (Jung, 2005), from the administration to the teachers and students, it is not recently as clear as it used to be to distinguish who sparks the integration most and practice more. Furthermore, the paradigm shift outlined by Jung illustrated that learner has been truly placed at the center of CALL and the attitudes of the learner for the “new” have been investigated intensively; similarly, this study aims to examine learner perspective about this “new” type of learning form that could be later transferred to the teaching practices of today’s students.

Metaphor Analysis in Educational Research

Metaphors, not taken as a solely string of words, are seen as “thought processes” by Lakoff and Johnson (2003:6). They stand as the linguistic reflections of thoughts and these concepts help to dip deep the mind’s course of action. Although considering one aspect of a metaphor can drift away other points, metaphors are highly valued as a research tool in a variety of disciplinary areas. Botha (2009:431) simply puts the definition of metaphor in relation to education as “seeing, describing or interpreting some unfamiliar educational phenomenon event or action in terms of a familiar thing, event or action.” This definition also highlights the fact that metaphors are not only a means to compare features of two entities but rather to form a meaning out of the interaction of these two features. Furthermore, as a guide for metaphor analysis, Kövecses (2003) identified the main features of conceptual metaphors as having the source and target domain with multiple connections. These domains are linked to each other leading to the creation of some underlying entailments.

Metaphor analysis has been widely used in many different contexts of education about different elements of pedagogy; the courses (Aydın & Ünalı, 2010), the coursebooks (Kesen, 2010), English learning by English as a Foreign Language learners (Ishiki, 2011) and teachers (Pishghadam & Pourali, 2011) and especially the language teachers (Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine and Saleh, 1998; Farrell, 2006; Nikitina & Fumitaka, 2008; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008a). Initially to mention, as an interdisciplinary area Aydın and Ünalı (2010) analyzed the Geography teacher candidates’ perceptions of “Geography” concept resulting in “expression of life” as the leading category out of seven categories formulated. On the other hand, Kesen (2010) analyzed the metaphors of university students about foreign language coursebooks and 15 themes emerged “mystery” and “guide” being two most frequent ones.

Numerous studies centered on student perspectives of language teachers. Nikitina and Fumitaka (2008) quantitatively explored the metaphors and reported

that teacher image metaphors were categorized as: Team Member, Boss, Interactor, Provider, Advisor and Precise Mechanism. These correspondingly indicate the teacher roles, how power is distributed in the classroom and the interaction patterns. In another metaphor analysis, Nikitina and Furuoka (2008a) explored student generated metaphors by completing “A language teacher is like...” prompt and analyzed the correspondence of data to Oxford et al.’s (1998) typology of metaphors. To be more precise, this typology categorized four main perspectives on education: Social Order, Cultural Transmission, Learner-Centered Growth and Social Reform and Nikitina and Furuoka’s (2008a) studied lacked only the Social Reform perspective. Likewise, Farrell’s (2006) case study in which three pre-service teachers kept a journal and described the teacher in a metaphorical sentence displayed a similar typological pattern to that of Oxford et al. (1998).

Similarly, Pishghadam and Pourali (2011) questioned ELT students’ perceptions about both the student and teacher in their current and ideal situations; therefore, it was detected that behaviorist, cognitive and situative learning perspectives shaped the divergent perspectives of students. Martinez, Sauleda and Huber (2001) collected metaphors from both the teachers and students to find the similarities and differences in their views of learning and teaching. The results indicated that the experienced teachers constructed behaviorist teaching metaphors while the prospective teachers described more constructivist and socio-historic metaphors for learning.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are as following:

1. What images do ELT students generate about CALL?
2. Do these ELT student metaphors produce a distinct categorization of CALL features?

METHOD

Participants and Setting

Three groups of undergraduate students studying at the English Language Teaching (ELT) program participated in the study: Day group (n= 28), Evening Group (n= 33) and Summer School Group (n=23). Seventy (83%) of the 84 participants was female while the rest 14 (17%) was male students. Data were collected from the fourth year Day and Evening group students during the 2010-11 Spring semester of the academic year; from the third year students who were enrolled in the fourth year courses during the Summer School.

The ELT program at the state university located in the north-west of Turkey offers Computer-Assisted Language Learning as an elective course to the fourth year students. The course is offered two hours a week and each week the first hour of instruction is followed by the hands-on practice which takes place in the computer labs of the Faculty of Education. Moreover, 14 weeks of course instruction broadly covers these topics: introduction to CALL, professional development and CALL, Web 2.0 tools and language teaching covering tools for all skills. Each week a task related to the topic was assigned and announced on Twitter (Twitter, 2012) and students following the instructor’s tweets both performed the tasks and responded online posting the links of the completed tasks on their Twitter accounts.

Data Collection Procedure

Metaphor elicitation technique, as also applied by Pishghadam and Pourali (2011), was used to collect data. Participating students were asked on Twitter to complete the sentence “CALL is like because...” and post their complete sentences to their Wallwisher (Wallwisher, 2012) walls. Wallwisher is an online notice board maker where you as well as your friends can post to the same wall created. After you build a wall, you can edit, delete and organize the notes on the wall. The students were asked to reflect on CALL by formulating three “CALL is like...” sentences in each of which focusing on a point they wish. Another requirement was to post on their classmates’ walls both to see others’ walls and to collaborate on a particular web tool. After they completed the task, they shared the link to their wall by posting it on Twitter. Most of the students came up with two to three sentences; however, the expected number of 252 could not be reached as not all students completed the task and some posted one or two sentences. Finally, a total of 215 metaphors were gathered for this study.

Data Analysis

The research design of this qualitative study is metaphor analysis as also linked to content analysis. Steps for content analysis is simply put by Ezzy (2002) (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Keith, 2007) gathering the text, defining the units of analysis and categories to analyze, coding the text by revising and fitting these to the categories. In this study, the unit of analysis is the sentences as prompts assigned to the students to complete. Additionally, as for the analysis of metaphors the steps followed were:

1. Identifying the source and target domains of the metaphors collected
2. Identifying the source features
3. Developing conceptual metaphors based on source feature mapping onto the target
4. Categorizing them based on source features and entailments (Armstrong, Davis, Paulson, 2011)

At the end of the spring and summer semesters the metaphors posted on Wallwisher were copied and pasted to a word document. The source features were listed, identified and coded. The codes were formulated to reflect the perspectives of participants and later categorized. In line with these analyses, briefly the metaphors were examined identifying their source and target, source features and then source features were linked to the target domain (Armstrong, 2008).

During this stage, for the reliability issues, another researcher was consulted. All of the listed metaphors were categorized by another researcher. Afterwards, the categories identified by the two researchers were compared and a final list was formed. Most of the categories matched with differing names such as “in progress” and “progressive” or “input provider” and “informative”. On the other hand, the categories such as “useful” emerged and added to the list after the final examination. The categories were kept at length for the content validity (Cohen, Manion & Keith, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative research revealed that the ELT students as prospective teachers of English had overall positive perceptions of Computer-Assisted Language Learning. The fourteen categories identified in the order of their frequency are listed as: Informative, Enjoyable, Accessible, Useful, Innovative, Motivating, Progressive, Negative, Habitual, Interactive, Supportive, Easy to use, Necessary and lastly, Relaxing. These “curricular” metaphors (Botha, 2009: 433) display how CALL as the subject matter is perceived as a part of the ELT higher education curriculum. The metaphors were diverse, and some of them could be characterized as “hybrid” (Martinez, Sauleda & Huber, 2001: 969) and signaled by an asterisk below which might fit in more than one category; for instance, “newspaper” or “ladder” could be categorized as an Informative and Innovative as both stated in a single metaphor.

The categories of metaphors emerged can be briefly explained as following:

1. Perceived informative function: For the perceived informative function (n=47), students stated metaphors such as “CALL is like real life because you can find whatever you want.” or “CALL is like a key which opens a door to an unlimited source of materials”. This category broadly includes sources of words pertaining to the nature (eg. the sun, sea, moon), people (eg. teacher, a wise man, a smart classmate), objects (eg. book, ladder, handbag), places (eg. shopping center, endless road) and actions such as “going upstairs in the building in each flat of which there are different methods of language teaching”.

2. Perceived enjoyment function: The second category of perceived enjoyment (n=29) includes statements such as “CALL is like watching a good movie because you like it whenever you watch.” or “CALL is like chocolate because you eat it and eat more and more and more.” An interesting source in a metaphor is “mathematic problem” as fun “... because you want to solve it willingly.” Though it could have been thought to be a negative aspect, the metaphor considers a mathematic problem as a motivating factor.

3. Perceived accessibility function: Accessibility is expressed by means of transportation like “bus, bicycle, and car” and some technological devices like “mobile phone and memory stick”. Accessing to technology through technology is a prevalent issue such in “CALL is like a mobile phone, because nowadays every ELT student has learnt it and uses it.” On the other hand, nature (natural environment, sea), places (shopping center) and people (friend and Mevlana) are other key sources linked to the target domain. Mevlana, also known as Rumi, was mentioned twice for accessibility in reference to his famous saying: “Come, come whoever you are” inviting people regardless of their conditions and characteristics. CALL seems to be perceived as inviting all the people to make use of it regardless of where and how they are. Related metaphorical statements are: “CALL is like Mevlana, because everyone goes to it.” and “CALL is like Mevlana, because it wants everyone to come, nothing matters for it.”

Table 1. Categories of ELT Students' Metaphors about CALL

Categories	Metaphors
Informative (n= 47)	Sea (2), the sun (3), ocean, moon, rain, space, bridge, newspaper(3), newspaper*, dictionary(2), an encyclopedia, library (4), book (5), digital book , rich restaurant menu, teacher (3), wise man, smart classmate, new born baby*, salad, girl's handbag, ladder*, shopping center, huge building, endless road, ATM, train, a door, handbag, freedom, real life*, going upstairs in a building
Enjoyable (n= 29)	Cycling, learning to dance, playing with a toy, watching a good movie, Disneyland, Alice's wonderland, Cindy doll, amusement park (2), ranger, a book, a child's toy, old friend, game (5), game, magic hole, color of our lives, meal, apple pie, ice-cream, chocolate (2), surprise party, mathematic problem (2)
Accessible (n=29)	Plane, bus, bicycle, car, wind (fast), mobile phone, window, real life*, key*, bird, bird's wing, watching the city on the roof of the highest building in the city, key (3), sea (vast), natural environment, free shopping center, Superman, iceberg (vast), four season flower, iphone, memory stick*, door, friend (necessary), jet (fast), Mevlana(2), dream
Useful (n=27)	Mobile phone, emergency help kit, travelling around the world, key *, magic wand, effusion, long-lasting pencil, camera, meal, energy saver lamp, vitamin, map(2), north star, painkiller (2), savior, magic world (2), bridge, signboard, city center, communication world, miracle, friend, aspirin, vitamin
Innovative (n=14)	Watching a fashion show, bridge, a door to the future, clock, the sun, ladder*, Formula 1 race, iceberg, newspaper*, cheetah, long trip, fashion, a new born baby (2)
Motivating (n=17)	Making up, reaching caramel in the deep of ice-cream, a girl's discovery of a new shop, rainbow (3), detective story, magic box, canvas, mystical area, adventurous life, window, wonderland, a new dress, life saver, box, puzzle
Progressive (n= 13)	Balloon, child (3), baby, tree, blossoming flower, a new born baby*, factory, time, child, guide, snowball*
Negative (n=11)	Boy, a luxury yacht (expensive), water(2), spider web (demanding), driving a car (difficult to learn), sister (love and hate), crowd (lose yourself), trip (enjoyable but tiring), life (demanding), ant (demanding)
Habitual (n=6)	Sunflower seed, cigars, coffee, woman, love, fear
Interactive (n=6)	Child, best friend, child, wave, snowball*, conversation
Supportive (n=5)	Jewelry, remedial tool, substitute teacher, tutor, mother
Easy to use (n=4)	Friend (fast), memory stick*, uninhibited island, piece of cake
Necessary (n=4)	Gravity (irresistible), water, salt, heart
Relaxing (n=2)	Cup of coffee, medicine

*hybrid metaphors

4. Perceived usefulness function: CALL is resembled to a helper easing the difficulties of our lives such as “mobile phones, long-lasting pencils, or an energy saving lamp”. It either guides us (North Star and map) or eases our pain keeping us healthy (painkiller, vitamin). Learners stated that “CALL is like a mobile phone, because it enables us to communicate with people on the other side of the world.” and “CALL is like a rainbow, because it can be used for various types of activities.”

5. Perceived innovative function: Innovation is represented as “watching a fashion show, Formula 1 race, a door to the future or ladder” that a learned formulated this metaphor “CALL is like a ladder because you learn new things step by step.” Innovation is also related to “cheetah”, a fast animal that could reach the speed of the technology and as “a new born baby” open to all new ideas and information.

6. Perceived motivating function: To the participating ELT students, “a new dress, a box, a puzzle or a life saver” can be motivating. “CALL is like a box that you don’t know what things there are inside until you open it.” display the curiosity CALL brings to the educational settings. As for motivational factors, categories of “perceived interest and enjoy” could have been merged as a sub-factor of motivation; however, these categories were kept separate to illustrate their distinctive functions.

7. Perceived progressive function: “A child” is dominantly seen as a part of progression in statements as “CALL is like a child, because it is growing day by day.”; moreover, growing feature realized in nature “tree” and “blossoming flower” reflects another connected sub-function.

Two more interesting points need to be addressed: Firstly, the influence of students’ gender can clearly be observed in the metaphor sources. Metaphors such as “watching a fashion show”, “shopping center, “a new dress” and “handbag” reflect female perspective; while “Formula 1 race” reflects a male perspective. In a metaphorical sentence, it is stated as “CALL is like a girl’s handbag, because you can find everything you need in it.” Obviously, the number of gender-specific metaphors is more in favor of females as they outnumber the males in the study.

Secondly, negative perceptions comprise some demanding points (life, spider web, and ant), some difficulties (driving a car) and some contradictions (“sister” who you love and hate; “trip” that is enjoyable but tiring). There is also a risk of losing yourself (crowd) by burying yourself into the technology. Additionally, “boy” most probably from the female perspective is categorized under negative points as explained “...because if you don’t know how to use it or what to do with him, you have lots of trouble then.” The alteration in these aspects are in parallel with the technological advancements, for instance Felix (2001) reported that students complained about distraction, lack of speaking, absence of teacher, no interaction with peers and inadequate feedback on the Web. However, most of these perceived disadvantages are almost no longer applicable in the world of two-way interaction with more user control over the Web tools. As a supporting evidence for the interactive and innovative mode of today’s Web tools, Hernandez et al. (2011) focused on the social motivation rather than that of individuals. The study further revealed that attitudes towards Information and Communication Technology (ICT) interactive tools play an important role on the intention of continuous use of these tools.

The rest of the categories (Habitual, Interactive, Supportive, Easy to use, Necessary and Relaxing) might seem not very comprehensive but they are believed to represent complementary features of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Instruction. Last but not the least, a sentence could not be categorized as it was meta-metaphorical “CALL is like a metaphor, because everything in a computer is metaphor (eg. Window, chatroom, etc.)”

The majority of metaphors formulated represent a positive attitude toward the basic functions of CALL: informative, enjoyable, accessible, and useful. These all signal that CALL is a significant factor in motivating the students. These categories appear to corroborate the results of the study (Felix, 2001) in which student perceived advantages of use of Web in class were listed as wealth of information, comfort and enjoyment, and usefulness of materials. The participants reacted to CALL positively while also mentioning some negative aspects such as distraction and lack of speaking practice. However, considering the date of aforementioned study as 2001 and along with the rise of Web 2.0 tools, now there is more opportunity to interact and practice speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

Metaphors have guided the research in a way to see the reflections of the learners about the CALL course and how they perceive the course content as prospective teachers. The positive attitude of learners was observed in the majority of the metaphors pointing out the perceived benefits of CALL as learning and teaching tool. The habitual metaphorical expressions emphasize a significant point such as in “CALL is like a sunflower seed because when you start once you can never give up”. As to reveal, students perceive CALL as informative, useful, enjoyable and innovative with numerous reasons to integrate technology in their learning process and predictably into their teaching environments.

As stated and concluded in the study by Wiebe and Kataba (2010) learning about the student perceptions towards web-based learning is significant in that student and teacher perceptions do not always match. Though both of them maintain positive attitudes, teachers’ assumptions about the student behavior on the use of Web could fail. Therefore, the language teachers would benefit from this current study knowing student perceptions and integration technology in class considering all of the above.

This study is limited to a certain number of participants who were studying at the same university and at the same program. Differences in these variables might have yielded different results. As the majority of participants were female, gender-dominated results could not be achieved. Further research could explore metaphors from an equally distributed number of male and female participants. Had there been more male students, the findings would have looked differently. Moreover, by triangulating the data collection procedure, deeper insight could have been illustrated through interviews or questionnaires.

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İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Öğrencilerinin Bilgisayar Destekli Dil Öğretimi ile İlgili Algıları

Özet

Problem Durumu: İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümünde öğrenim gören lisans öğrencilerinin Bilgisayar Destekli Dil Öğrenimi dersi ve konusu hakkındaki algıları, öğretmenler açısından hem dersin içeriğine öğretmen adayı olan öğrenci yaklaşımını görmek hem de bu öğrencilerin ileride mesleki yaşamlarında teknolojik araçları derslerine ne derece dahil edeceklerine dair kestirim yapma imkanı sağlayacaktır.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu araştırma Eğitim Fakültesi bünyesinde yer alan İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümü lisans öğrencilerinin Bilgisayar Destekli Dil Öğrenimine yönelik algılarını metafor analizi ile çözümleyerek ortaya koymaktır. Araştırmada hem derse hem konuya yönelik algılar, hem ileriye dönük mesleki yaklaşımlar ortaya konarak öğretmenlerin öğrenci algılarına dikkat çekmek de amaçlanmaktadır.

Yöntem: Bu nitel çalışmada hem metafor analizi hem de içerik analizi tekniklerine başvurulmuştur. 2010-11 akademik yılı bahar ve yaz dönemlerinde yapılan çalışmada İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümünde öğrenim gören 84 (70 kız, 14 erkek) lisans öğrencisinden çevrimiçi ortamda 215 metafor toplanmıştır. Öğrencilere “Bilgisayar Destekli Dil Öğretimi..... gibidir, çünkü.....” ifadesi verilerek tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Her öğrenci çevrimiçi ortamda yaklaşık üç metafor paylaşmıştır. Bu metaforlar daha sonra listelenip, incelenip, kodlanarak kategorilere ayrılmıştır. Kategori oluşturma aşamasında bir başka araştırmacıdan da 215 metaforu kategorilere ayırması istenmiş, oluşturulan veriler karşılaştırılarak listeye son hali verilmiştir.

Bulgular: Metafor analizi sonucunda Bilgisayar Destekli Dil Öğrenimine yönelik ortaya çıkan kategoriler şu şekildedir: Bilgilendirici, Keyifli, Erişilebilir, Yararlı, Yenilikçi, İlginç, İlerleyici, Olumsuz yönler, Alışıl gelmiş, İnteraktif, Destekleyici, Kullanışı Kolay, Gerekli, Güdüleyen ve Rahatlatan. Bu kategoriler öğrencilerin konuyla ilgili genelde olumlu algılara sahip olduklarını göstermektedir. Öğrencilerin olumsuz algıları arasında bilgisayar destekli ders işlemenin zorlayıcı ama eğlenceli olduğu ve fazladan iş yükü getirdiği belirtilmiştir. Oluşturulan metaforlarda kız öğrenci sayısının çokluğu göz önüne alındığında kızlara yönelik metaforların fazlalığı göze çarpmaktadır.

Sonu ve neriler: Bu alıřmanın sonuları đretmenlerin Bilgisayar Destekli Dil đrenimine ynelik İngilizce đretmenliđi blmnde okuyan đrencilerin algılarını anlamalarını ve kendi algıları ile đrenci algılarının ne derece rtřtđđn grmelerine imkan sađlayacaktır.

Anahtar Szckler: Bilgisayar Destekli Dil đrenimi, İngilizce đretmenliđi, metafor analizi.