

## The Perceptions of High School Students for the Concept of English through Metaphors: Tokat Sample

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### Article Info

#### Keywords:

Metaphor,  
Perception,  
English,  
English teaching

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of high school students for the concept of English through metaphors. Phenomenological method has been applied in this qualitative study. The study group is formed by the 420 students attending to five different schools' 9th-12th grads in Tokat. The data was collected using a questionnaire formed with one question prepared in respect to gap-filling method. To collect the research data, each student was asked to produce a metaphor and to complete the statement "English is like . . . because . . ." to draw an analogy. Content analysis technique was used in this study. According to data analysis, 249 valid metaphors were developed. The most dominant metaphors were respectively "Book" (f=11), "Water" (f=9), "Mountain" (f=7). Metaphors were classified into 3 groups such as "positive", "negative", "neuter". According to negative metaphors, English is difficult to learn and always requires memorizing and needs to be repeated. According to positive metaphors, some of the students accept the importance of English and the relationship between English and their daily lives. Also, it is seen that female students produced much more positive metaphors than male students.

## Lise Öğrencilerinin İngilizce ile İlgili Algılarının Metaforlar Yoluyla Belirlenmesi: Tokat Örneği

### Makale Bilgileri

#### Anahtar

#### Kelimeler:

Metafor,  
Algı,  
İngilizce,  
İngilizce Eğitimi

### ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı lise öğrencilerinin İngilizce kavramıyla ilgili algılarının metaforlar yoluyla belirlenmesidir. Bu nitel çalışmada olgu bilim (Fenomenoloji) deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Tokat ilinde 5 farklı liseden 9 ve 12. Sınıf aralığında ki 420 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmanın verileri tek sorudan oluşan boşluk doldurma yöntemine göre hazırlanmış bir formla toplanmıştır. Öğrencilerden İngilizceye ilişkin bir metafor geliştirmeleri ve benzetme yönünü de İngilizce .... benzer, çünkü ..... cümlesini tamamlayarak yazmaları istenmiştir. Verilerin analizinde içerik analiz tekniği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre 249 adet geçerli metafor üretilmiştir. İlk üç sırada yer alan metaforlar sırasıyla şöyledir: "Kitap" (f=11), "Su" (f=9), "Dağ" (f=7). Metaforlar "pozitif", "negatif" ve "nötr" olmak üzere 3 farklı grupta sınıflandırılmıştır. Negatif metaforlara göre, İngilizce öğrenilmesi zor, daima ezber ve tekrar gerektiren bir konu olarak görülmüştür. Pozitif metaforlara göre ise, bazı öğrenciler İngilizcenin önemini ve günlük hayatlarıyla İngilizce arasındaki önemli ilişkiyi kavramışlardır. Ayrıca kız öğrencilerin erkek öğrencilere oranla daha fazla olumlu metafor ürettikleri tespit edilmiştir.

### INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is an inevitable fact in a globalizing world where nations and peoples are ever more dependent upon another to supply goods and services, to solve political and economic disputes and to ensure international security. In today's era, learning a foreign language offers us to open up a world of new opportunities, to connect different people, to access new cultures and in

consequence of these features, we can utilize the opportunities in terms of both social and financial aspects. We can mention many advantages of bilingualism when we think its benefits in individuals' lives. Apart from the financial gains, learning a foreign language enables you to travel freely, connect with different peoples and cultures in overseas successfully and access the scientific knowledge and technology easily. Learning a new language makes you indispensable at your work and moves you to a higher level at school, at work even in your life. Because of the reasons above, a great importance is given to teaching a foreign language in our country. Turkish education system approves that each student must be taught at least one foreign language (The Ministry of Education English Teaching Programme, 2011, p.4).

Today, when you think about foreign language education in Turkey; English, German and French which belong to western languages come to our mind primarily. Among these languages the most taught language is English (Özdemir, 2006, p.29). Because in a globalizing world where nations' learning and using English having become a global lingua franca besides their native language, English has become obligatory in every respect (Acat and Demiral, 2002, p. 312). After comprehending the importance and benefits of learning a new language, all that's left is to have a methodical education with individual learner's effort, determination and constancy (Soyupek, 2015, p. 1572). English teaching is affected by some factors such as the learner's effort, interest and perceptions. Individuals' positive perceptions and attitudes towards learning a foreign language affect this process positively but negative perceptions and attitudes affect it negatively (Gömleksiz, 2013, p.649). In this regard metaphors have been used to find out individual's perceptions about English in this study. "Metaphors are powerful tools for trying to comprehend what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices and spiritual awareness" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, pp. 4-6) . Metaphors aren't only rhetoric that enriches our daily language, but their importance in humans' life is much more than that (Saban, 2008, p.459). So, metaphors have been a common means with which to express an understanding of complex concepts (Jensen, 2006, p.2). Metaphors can be useful conceptual tools for, in and of education research. One common use of metaphor in education research is to illustrate or explain a concept in a way that will communicate effectively to the intended audience (Midgley and Trimmer, 2013, p.1). From this aspect, metaphors lead, enlighten and guide our applications and researches (Saban, 2004, p. 131). When we consider from this point of view; to analyze, understand, and explain the perceptions of high school students through metaphors will show us important clues about how English teaching should be done. In our country, many researches about education and training have been done on metaphors (Afacan, 2010; Aslan, 2013; Gömleksiz, 2013; Gültekin, 2013; Limon, 2015; Öztürk, 2007; Pilav and Üstten, 2013; Saban, 2004; Usta and Ültay, 2015). Within the scope of this study, metaphors have been analyzed to understand and interpret 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade high school students' perceptions concerning English as a foreign language.

## **YÖNTEM**

This is a qualitative study based on phenomenological model. Phenomenology model focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but cannot comprehend fully and deeply. This model reveals new examples, descriptions and experiences that let us comprehend and recognize a phenomenon (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013, p.78).

## **Samples**

420 students attending five different high schools; Anatolian Teacher High School, Social Sciences High School, Vocational High School for Girls, Anatolian High School (2) within Ministry of Education in Tokat have participated in this study. Of the participants 132 students are male and 288 students are female, among these students 176 students are 9th graders, 117 students are 10th graders, 66 students are 11th graders and the remaining 61 students are 12th graders.

### Data Collection Instrument

In this study in order to reveal the students' metaphors on English, each participant was provided with the following sentence: "English is like..... because....." to collect the data through metaphors. This form is used by (Kilcan and Akbaba, 2013; Saban, 2009). They were asked to complete this statement using only one metaphor which evoke and express their perceptions on English and to explain the reason of their metaphor.

### Data Analysis

Data were evaluated using content analysis technique. Within this framework metaphors held by students and their analogy were classified. While classifying the metaphors, common themes were considered and they were given in a table with their frequencies. These metaphors were classified into three categories as positive metaphor, negative metaphor and neuter metaphor. The data were transferred into SPSS package programme for the quantitative data analysis and their frequencies (f) and percentages (%) were calculated.

### FINDINGS

The metaphorical perceptions of students for the concept of English were classified and given in the Table 1 and Table 2.

*Table 1.* The classification of the metaphorical perceptions of students for the concept of English

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Metaphors	179	42.6
Negative Metaphors	216	51.4
Neuter Metaphors	25	6,0
Total	420	100.0

When we analyze Table 1, we see that 51.4 % students produced negative metaphors, 42.6 % students produced positive metaphors and 6 % students produced neuter metaphors.

*Table 2.* The classification of the most dominant metaphors by the students for the concept of English

Positive Metaphors		Negative Metaphors		Neuter Metaphors	
Metaphor	f	Metaphor	f	Metaphor	f
book	11	mountain	9	Grammar course	4
friend	7	ocean	7	Turkish	3
tree	7	dream	6	personality	2
light	6	soup	5	iron	1
bridge	5	hot pepper	5	painting	1
chocolate	5	ungrateful cat	5	others***	
world	5	puzzle	5		
water	4	flower	5		
key	4	foreigner	5		
life	4	difficult exam	4		
soil	4	animal	4		
pencil	4	torture	4		
game	4	Math's	4		
sea	3	road	4		
fun fair	2	cigarette	4		
jewelry	2	car	4		
love	2	death	3		
cycling	2	baby	3		
building	2	marsh	3		
swimming	2	woman	3		
sapling	2	puzzle	3		
football	2	chameleon	3		

rose	2	black wall	3
river	2	deadlock	3
translator	2	complex question	2
hero	2	butterfly	2
institution	2	bird	2
lamp	5	maze	2
harbor	2	ocean	2
candle	2	rainbow	2
oxygen	2	man	2
money	2	watch	2
film	2	chess	2
meal	2	Math's exam	2
picture	1	bad habit	2
others*		hill	2
		jigsaw	2
		a fool's errand	2
		elflock	1
		others**	

\*A foreign country, door to the world, sport, volleyball, matryoshka doll, fire, su do ku, joker, a stranger, a charismatic language, commissure, second language, translator, pomegranate, apartment etc.

\*\*our childhood, bad habits, a glass of half empty, habit, unfavorable food, burghul, space, my elder brother, blind street, a tourist, treadmill, difficult question, colonialism etc.

\*\*\*stream, love, cave, car, human, tomorrow, country, background, swimming, school, food, rope, old pal, world, life etc.

When we analyze Table 2, we see that the most dominant positive metaphor is book (f=11). Others are given respectively; friend (f=7), tree (f=7), light (f=6), bridge (f=5), chocolate (f=5), and world (f=5). Some statements including positive metaphors are given as an example below and each statement belongs to a different class level.

"English is like a game because you enjoy it while learning" (9th graders, male).

"English is like a book because when you read it you become knowledgeable" (10th graders, female).

"English is like a jewelry because it will be valuable in the future" (11th graders, male).

"English is like a key because it can open many doors" (12th graders, female)

The most dominant negative metaphor produced by the students is mountain (f=9). Others are given respectively; ocean (f=7), dream (f=6), soup (f=5), hot pepper (f=5), ungrateful cat (f=5). Some statements including negative metaphors are given as an example below and each statement belongs to a different class level.

"English is like a mountain because it is difficult to climb" (9th graders, male).

"English is like an ocean because you can't see neither its bottom nor its end" (10th graders, male).

"English is like a blind street because you are unable to work out in any way" (11th graders, female).

"English is like an ungrateful cat because if you don't use it you forget it" (12th graders, female).

The most dominant neuter metaphors are given respectively; grammar course (f=4), Turkish (f=3), and personality (f=2). Some statements including neuter metaphors are given as an example below and each statement belongs to a different class level.

“English is like a school because it is compulsory” (9th graders, male)

“English is like a grammar course because it teaches the rules of a language” (10th graders, female)

“English is like a personality because it changes according to person to person” (11th graders, female).

“English is like a painting because everyone sees the painting but the comment and viewpoint differs person to person” (12th graders, female).

Table 3. Frequency distribution of students' metaphors in respect to gender factor

Gender	Metaphor			Total
	Neuter Metaphors	Positive Metaphors	Negative Metaphors	
Male	7	51	74	132
Female	18	128	142	288
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>420</b>

When we analyze Table 3, we see that of the participants, 142 female students have developed negative metaphors and 128 have produced positive metaphors. Among the male students, 74 students have developed negative metaphors and 51 have developed positive metaphors. In this regard, male students (56%) have produced more negative metaphors than the female students (49%). In other words female students developed more positive metaphors than male students.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Students' Metaphors in Respect to Class Variables

Class level	Metaphor			Total
	Neuter Metaphors	Positive Metaphors	Negative Metaphors	
9th grade	14	68	94	176
10th grade	5	63	49	117
11th grade	2	26	38	66
12th grade	4	22	35	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>420</b>

Table 4 shows that while 68 students developed positive metaphors, 94 students developed negative metaphors among 9th grade students. With regard to 10th graders, 63 students developed positive metaphors, 49 students developed negative metaphors. When we look at the metaphors produced by the 11th grade students, we see that 26 students developed positive metaphors, 38 students developed negative metaphors. And finally, 22 students developed positive metaphors while 35 students developed negative metaphors among 12th grade students. In this context the highest rate of positive metaphors for the concept of English (54%) were developed by the 10th grade students but other grades developed positive metaphors at similar rates (36-39%).

## DISCUSSION, RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, in this study it was seen that 420 students developed 249 different valid metaphors. As a result of the content analysis which was applied in this study, it was concluded that students reflected 179 positive perceptions, 216 negative perceptions and 25 neuter perceptions. In direction of these results, it may be said that the greater part of the students have negative point of views towards English as a foreign language. While this finding overlaps the previous studies' findings on the perceptions of high school students for the concept of English through metaphors done by Ocak ve

Gürel (2014), Limon, (2015) ve Demirbulak (2013); it doesn't overlap the study's findings on the perceptions of the teacher candidates for the concept of foreign language through metaphors conducted by Gömleksiz (2013). Another result of this study is that female students developed a bit more positive metaphors than male students. Moreover, in terms of class variables 10th grade students developed 15% more positive metaphors than the other graders. But when we look at the other class levels, the rate of developing positive metaphor (36, 38 & 39%) approximates each other.

As understood from the metaphors provided by the students, they think that English as a concept is boring, difficult and a rote learning subject. Therefore in this respect, some suggestions can be offered such as using enjoyable activities, visual aids in the courses and teaching English by relating students' real lives and in a student centered way. Various materials can be developed and different projects can be given to enable students to learn English caressively and to make them understand that English is a part of their real lives beyond dream. Moreover, concerning the importance of English some conversations can be done with students to emphasize its necessity in their future lives.

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