

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER ON THE SPOT: A STUDY ON METAPHORICAL IMAGES OF EFL TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

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ÖZET

Yabancı dil öğretmenleri ve öğrencileri eğitim sürecine öğretme ve öğrenmeyle ilgili daha önceden oluşturdukları düşünceleriyle dahil olurlar. İngilizce öğretmenine ait olan düşünceler de daha önceden oluşturulmuş düşünce sisteminde yer alır. Öğrenci ve öğretmenlerin düşünceleri davranışları daha iyi anlamada ve hem öğrenme hem de öğretme sürecini daha iyi hale getirmede önemli olduğundan ortaya çıkarılmaları büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı dil öğrencilerinin ve öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğretmenine ait algılarını metaforlar aracılığıyla ortaya çıkarmaktır.

ABSTRACT

Both language learners and teachers come to educational context with preconceived beliefs about the teaching and learning contexts. One of these beliefs reveals itself in the perceptions of language learners and teachers in regard to English Language Teacher. As the perceptions of both learners and teachers play an important role in understanding their behavior better and enhancing the learning/teaching environment, it becomes crucial to uncover them. This study aims to analyze language learners' and teachers' concept of an English Language Teacher through the metaphors they generate.

Introduction

The use of metaphor as a rhetorical device has long been recognized by scholars and researchers in the field of language and literature. However, with the ongoing interest in searching into how teachers and learners construct representations of themselves or the learning/teaching process, studies using metaphor as a research tool have increased considerably. Research in the field of foreign language teaching and learning has also recognized the importance of metaphor as a means of discovering perceptions and creating awareness. Considering metaphor as a process through which we construe the world as well as the essence of our thoughts and learning, metaphors undoubtedly stand as an essential tool for investigating our understanding and conception of education with its many components as the teacher, the learner, the teaching/learning context and so forth. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that "metaphors not only make our thoughts more vivid and interesting but they actually structure our perceptions and understanding". They claim that "metaphors provide ways of comprehending experience, they give order to our lives and are necessary for making sense of what goes on around us. Metaphors have been used to describe

approaches and perspectives regarding education in general and foreign language teaching/learning (In this article, the focus will be on the use of metaphors in regard to foreign language teachers). Among the studies that focused on metaphors about language teachers is Block's study (cited in De Guerrero and Villamil 2001) in which two macro-metaphors for language teachers and learners were distinguished: (1) teacher as contracted professional/learner as respected client and (2) teacher as supportive parent/learner as respected child. In a study by De Guerrero and Villamil (2001) nine categories of teachers such as teachers as the coach, teacher as the nurturer, teacher as the innovator were found. In another study by Saban, Koçbeker, and Saban (2006), 111 metaphors about the concept of teacher were identified. In a study by Shaw, Barry & Mahlios (2008), English and foreign language teachers' metaphors and their relation to conceptions of literacy were investigated. In addition, Nikitina, Larisa & Furuoka, Fumitaka (2008) conducted a study on student-generated metaphors about language teachers and they found out that metaphors support the enlightened eclecticism approach toward language teaching. In another study by Cerit (2008), metaphors about classroom teachers were investigated and the results showed that teacher is perceived as the one who provides and transmits knowledge. Similarly, Martinez, Sauleda and Huber (2000) diagnosed metaphorical conceptions of teachers regarding their images of learning and they found out that most of the metaphors were behaviorist and empiricist based.

The Research Questions

The present study aims to investigate the following research questions.

1. What are the metaphors created by foreign language teachers with respect to the concept of "foreign language teacher"?
2. What are the metaphors created by foreign language learners with respect to the concept of "foreign language teacher"?

Methodology

Participants

The participants for the present study were 100 ELT major learners and 100 EFL teachers. Both the learners and the teachers were randomly chosen from Çukurova University and Cyprus International University.

Procedure

In order to reveal language learners' and teachers' concept of an English Language Teacher through the metaphors they generate, EFL teachers were asked to complete the sentence of "An English Language Teacher is a/an....because.....). Upon the completion of the sentence, participants were interviewed both to clarify the unclear points about the metaphors. In addition, participants were asked to write their thoughts on paper by concentrating on their own metaphors. As for the learners', the list of the metaphors were given to them and they were asked to choose one metaphor that they believe to best represent an English Language Teacher. The steps used in the categorization of metaphors can be summarized as follows:

- participant teachers' and learners' metaphors and the rationale behind choosing these metaphors were listed
- main categories of metaphors were developed
- metaphors were grouped under main categories
- the distribution of the metaphors in each category was displayed in tables.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The obtained data were analyzed and interpreted using the content analysis method. The reason for utilizing this method was that “concepts and themes that are not noticeable using the descriptive approach may be seen by using the content analysis” (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). In addition to two researchers conducting the present study, the data were read by two other instructors as to check their relevance to the study. Unlike many studies on metaphors, the categories in the present study were based on the reasons that the participants stated in their choice of metaphors.

Table 1. EFL Teachers' and Learners' Metaphors of “ LanguageTeacher”

Theme	Metaphor	Teachers		Learners	
		f	%	f	%
Enjoyment	cook	3	3	1	1
	painter	2	2	1	1
	candy	1	1	2	2
	actor	9	9	5	5
Show off	artist	2	2	5	5
Leading	guide	4	4	8	8
	traffic sign	1	1	5	5
	map	2	2	-	-
	light	6	6	8	8
	song	1	1	-	-
	encyclopedia	4	4	-	-
	holy book	1	1	-	-
	sunshine	2	2	3	3
Necessity	meal	1	1	-	-
	computer	1	1	-	-
Preciousness	gold	2	2	1	1
	money	4	4	1	1
	treasure	1	1	-	-
Production	factory	3	3	8	8
	gardener	2	2	-	-
	composer	3	3	-	-
	fruit tree	1	1	-	-
Management	coach	8	8	5	5

	commander	1	1	-	-
	manager	1	1	-	-
	conductor	5	5	-	-
Happiness	musical show	2	2	10	10
	music box	1	1	6	6
	holiday resort	1	1	3	3
	adventure movie	1	1	2	2
	gift	1	1	3	3
Growth	sunrise	2	2	-	-
	water	1	1	-	-
	candle	4	4	-	-
Variety	garden	1	1	3	3
	department store	1	1	2	2
	pizza	2	2	5	5
	rainbow	1	1	3	3
	wardrobe	1	1	-	-
	fruit basket	1	1	2	2
	dictionary	5	5	5	5
	ocean	3	3	3	3

In Table 1, we see both the themes and the metaphors that were created for the concept of “foreign language teacher”. Out of the metaphors elicited from the participants, ten categories formed and forty-two metaphors were developed by the participants (EFL teachers). It is seen in Table 1 that most of the themes such as “variety”, “growth”, “preciousness”, “enjoyment”, and “production” have positive connotations. Of all the categories, the theme “variety” has the highest number of metaphors (n: 8). We see in Table 1 that EFL teachers who developed the metaphors under the theme of “variety” perceive themselves as a “garden”, “department store”, “pizza”, “rainbow”, “wardrobe”, “fruit basket”, “dictionary”, and “ocean”. The highest frequency for the teachers belongs to the metaphor “dictionary”. That is, 5 of the teachers believe that a language teacher is a dictionary as s/he brings variety with the knowledge s/he brings to the learning environment. It is important to note that, the metaphor “dictionary” receives the same frequency among the learners. In other words, both learners and teachers associate language teacher with the metaphor “dictionary” the most in this category. We can suggest that the metaphor “dictionary” might be used to refer to the teacher who has all the right answers for the students. That is, teachers using this metaphor seem to adopt the duty of transmitting information (cultural or linguistic) to the students whenever they are in need of and the learners using this metaphor seem to be the passive receivers of the correct answers transmitted by the language teacher. The next category in regard to highest number of metaphors developed is “leading”. Table 1 reveals that 19 teachers developed 7 metaphors under the theme of “leading”. The number of learners choosing the metaphors in this category is 21. When we look at the metaphors in this category, we see that teachers associate the concept of a language teacher with “guide”, “map”, “light”, “song”, “encyclopedia”, “traffic sign”, and “holy book” as they believe that these metaphors represent language teachers’ role as a leading figure. The metaphors used by the teachers might refer to the one who directs

(guide, traffic sign, map), the one who directs (light, encyclopedia), and the one who entertains (song). This might suggest that though the theme remains the same, the metaphors may refer to different roles of the teacher, which might be attributed to a mixture of roles that a teacher adopts or a mixture of expectations that the students have. Among these metaphors, learners have chosen only three metaphors for the concept of a language teacher: “traffic sign”, “guide” and “light”. It is also noteworthy that the metaphors “guide” and “light” receive the same number of frequency both by the teachers and learners. The metaphors under the theme of “enjoyment” reveal the pleasure that the teachers get out of the teaching experience. Teachers developing the metaphors in this category associate a language teacher with “cook”, “candy”, “painter”, and “actor” as they believe that these give the teacher the feeling of enjoyment when teaching. Among these, the metaphor actor receives the highest frequency both by the teacher (9%) and learners (5%). The use of the metaphor “actor” might be attributed to perceiving the teacher as the one who gives shape. The categories “management” and “happiness” reveal important results. That is, out of the metaphors in management category, the metaphors “coach” and “conductor” receive the highest frequencies by teachers. However, only one metaphor out of four is chosen by learners. In other words, while teachers associate language teachers with “coach”, “conductor”, “commander”, and “manager”, learners associate language teachers only with the coach metaphor. That is, for learners a language teacher is the one who manages. In contrast to “management”, the category “happiness” receives a lower frequency of teachers and higher frequency of learners. While six percent of the teachers associate the concept of language teacher with “musical show”, “music box”, “holiday resort”, “adventure movie”, and “gift”, twenty-four percent of the learners perceive a language teacher with these metaphors as they represent happiness. The reason for such a result might be linked to learners’ perceiving the language teacher as the source of happiness. However, the low frequency of the teachers using the metaphors under the theme “happiness” might result from the dissatisfaction they have with their job. The category “production” the metaphors of which are “factory”, “gardener”, “composer”, and “fruit tree” reveals that three percent of the teachers perceive language teacher as a factory while the frequency of the learners choosing this metaphor is eight. That is, learners associate “factory” (which represents production) more with a language teacher as compared to teachers. Another important category seen in Table 1 is “growth”. We see that of the three metaphors developed by the teachers (sunrise, water, and candle), none is chosen by the learners for the concept of a language teacher. In Table 1, it is seen that the category “preciousness” also yields a noteworthy result as out of the 3 metaphors developed by seven teachers (gold, money, and treasure), only two learners have chosen the metaphors gold and money. That is, the number of teachers who associate foreign language teachers with “gold”, “money”, and “treasure” which stand for preciousness is higher than the number of learners choosing the metaphors under the theme “preciousness”. Of all the categories, “show off” receives the lowest frequency for the teachers (n: 2). In other words, only two of the teachers’ concept of a language teacher can be described by using the metaphor “artist”. Interestingly, the number of learners choosing this metaphor is higher than the teachers. The reason why learners seem to associate a language teacher with showing off more than do the teachers might be

because of their perception of a language teacher as someone who has an extra ability such as speaking a foreign language in addition to their mother tongue.

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. EFL teachers developed 42 metaphors for the concept of “foreign language teacher” and out of these 25 metaphors were chosen by the learners.
2. For the 42 metaphors developed by EFL teachers, 10 categories were created.
3. Among the categories, the category “variety” had the highest number of metaphors developed by EFL teachers.
4. For EFL teachers’ concept of a foreign language teacher, the first three metaphors in regard to highest frequency are “actor” (9%), “coach” (8%), and “light” (6%).
5. For EFL learners’ concept of a foreign language teacher, the first three metaphors in regard to highest frequency are “musical show” (10%), “guide”, “light”, “factory” (8%), and “music box” (6%).
6. EFL teachers associate the concept of a foreign language teacher more with “enjoyment”, “management” and “leadership” whereas EFL learners’ concept of a foreign language teacher mostly refer to “happiness”, “leadership”, “production”.
7. None of the EFL learners associate the foreign language teacher with the metaphors in “growth” category.

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that EFL teachers’ and learners concept of a foreign language teacher display both commonalities and differences. The differences in the way teachers and learners perceive a language teacher can be attributed to past experiences, expectations, and personal constructs created for the notion of a language teacher. Although this study shares some of the metaphors created by teachers and learners about language teachers such as tree, dictionary, light, candle (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2008), artist, encyclopedia, coach (Guerrero and Villamil, 2001), it does reveal some metaphors peculiar to the present study (wardrobe, fruit basket, pizza).

Implications of the study

It should be within the objectives of the teacher development programs to uncover teachers’ perceptions of themselves through use of metaphors by which teachers’ conceptual frameworks are analyzed. Becoming more aware of their beliefs and strategies by means of metaphors, language teachers can develop better insights into their own way of thinking and thus they can adapt their teaching styles and strategies accordingly.

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