



## **Reflection of Culture: Metaphor Usage in Teaching English as a Second Language<sup>1</sup>**

### **Kültürün Bir Yansıması Olarak Metaforların İngilizcenin İkinci Dil Olarak Öğretimindeki Yerinin İncelenmesi**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Purpose of this study is to reveal through metaphors the mental images of secondary school students which they use while stating feelings in a foreign language (English). Accordingly, each participant student is asked to fill in the sentence “..... (any feeling) is something like ..... (metaphor) because ...” and to express their ideas by using this sentence and concentrating on a single metaphor. Data is analyzed though qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative (chi-square) data analysis techniques. With regard to findings of the study, the participants produced 79 valid metaphors for feeling statements. These metaphors are collected under 7 different conceptual category as to their common features. Conceptual categories showed significant difference in terms of gender and class level of the students. This situation put forward that metaphors can be used as a research tool for understanding, revealing and explaining the mental images of the students regarding the feeling statements.*

**Key Words:** *Metaphors, conceptual metaphor theory, culture, metaphor usage in foreign language teaching and learning*

#### **ÖZET**

*Bu araştırmanın amacı, ortaöğretim öğrencilerinin yabancı dilde (İngilizce) duygu ifadelerine ilişkin sahip oldukları zihinsel imgeleri metaforlar aracılığıyla ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu amaçla katılımcı öğrencilerin her birinden “..... (any feeling) is something like ..... (metaphor) because ...” cümlesini tamamlaması ve bu ibareyi kullanarak ve sadece tek bir metafor üzerinde yoğunlaşarak düşüncelerini dile getirmeleri istendi. Veriler, nitel (içerik analizi) ve nicel (ki-kare) veri çözümleme teknikleri kullanılarak analiz edildi. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, katılımcı öğrenciler toplam 79 adet geçerli metafor üretti. Bu metaforlar ortak özellikleri bakımından 7 farklı kavramsal kategori altında toplandı. Kavramsal kategorilerin öğrencilerin cinsiyeti ve sınıf düzeyi bakımından önemli derecede farklılık göstermesi metaforların öğrencilerin duygu ifadelerine ilişkin sahip oldukları zihinsel imgeleri anlamada, açığa çıkarmada ve açıklamada güçlü birer araştırma aracı olarak kullanabileceğini ortaya koydu.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Metaforlar, kavramsal metafor teorisi, kültür, figüratif dil, yabancı dil eğitimi ve öğreniminde metafor*

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Yob (2003) mentions that metaphor is a powerful mental tool which can be used by the individual for understanding and explaining a high level abstract, complex or theoretical phenomenon. By virtue of this feature, metaphors help students to understand especially the difficult concepts and terms more clearly; enable concretization and visualization of abstract concepts in mind and thus increase the learning motivation by providing longer retention in mind and easier retrieval of learned information.

Metaphor usage is thinking and viewing style that pervades general comprehension of the individual. They allow start of a cognitive process in the reader or listener. Developed cognitive process creates affective influences on the individual. Cognitive and affective processes interact and feed one another. This points out the power of metaphors on the individual. Individuals benefit from metaphors while defining their or others' feelings and ideas. In this context metaphors indicate the ways individuals perceive the world and themselves (Girmen, 2007).

### **Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

Conceptual Metaphor Theory was put forward by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980 with their book titled "Metaphors We Live By". In this theory, metaphor is defined as an action realized in mind before language. From cognitive aspect metaphor must be considered in whole together with various components. Kovecses (2003) lists these parts as follows:

- Experiential basis
- Target domain
- Source domain
- Relationship between the target and the source
- Metaphoric linguistic expressions
- Mappings
- Entailments
- Blends
- Non-linguistic realization
- Cultural models

Metaphor is understanding of a target area through a source area. In a form where A is B, A represents the target area whereas B represents the source area. For the relation between target and source area that enables metaphor, Conceptual Metaphor Theory addresses the experience basis. Target area of the metaphor generally describes the abstract concepts such as success, love, happiness. Making inference regarding these abstract concepts, source areas that are used for visualization are all affective areas.

Whereas the conceptual metaphors that are based on culture related evaluations, constitute the group which is open to differentiation to the utmost. Because, experiences directing the social life are efficient in formation of such metaphors. For example, in Western literature “human is a pig.” metaphor is related with dirtiness and ambition whereas in China it is used to describe a human kind like foolish lover in our culture (Ungerer ve Schmid, 2006).

### **Metaphors in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning**

Metaphors provide a learning approach that efficiently structure the understanding when they are used in educational area. In this approach student should comprehend the similarities between the pre-learned knowledge and new knowledge. Then s/he should define the differences between the learned information and its metaphoric presentation.

Metaphors are highly practical tools for development of learning. If we want to investigate a new thing first we have to imagine it. Metaphors can also provide a creative and exploratory learning; because they are tools in order to form clear ideas in our vision instead of indefinite concepts. Metaphors have the power to change our conceptual systems and alter the viewpoints of the students (Sanchez et al, 2000).

Foreign language teaching methods, related activities and means that are used in Turkey recently, are all developed in western countries. Language teaching process does not mean any method, definite rule to be followed blindly by teachers or a stable process depending on procedures. Contrarily, it is a dynamic, creative process that is shaped as to the characteristics of student groups. In other words, one of the basic principles of this process is to teach language according to certain positions and needs (Acat, 2009.)

Metaphors can be used for stating more comprehensible some of the concepts, perceptions and attitudes or incoherent, complicated subjects in education. From this point of view we can say that the facts, concepts, perceptions and attitudes in different cultures and societies will be transferred and learned more easily through metaphors in our country where English is thought as a second language. Therefore, purpose of this study is to reveal through *metaphors* the mental images of secondary school students which they use while stating *feelings* in a foreign language (English).

### **Problem Statement**

Problem statement of this study is “What are the metaphors (or mental images) the secondary school students use while stating their *feelings* in a foreign language (English)?” whereas the sub-problems are: “Under which conceptual categories the metaphors produced by the students in a foreign language (English) can be gathered in term of their common features?” and “Do they differ by gender and class level of the students?”

## METHOD

In this study, data is analyzed through qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative (chi-square) data analysis techniques. 85 students from 9th and 10th classes who take writing course in Eskişehir Gelişim Koleji constitute the limited universe and sampling. 41 of the participant students are female (48,2%) and 44 of them are male (51,8%) as well as their participation is based on voluntariness.

The participants are asked to complete the sentence “..... (any feeling) is something like ..... (metaphor) because ...” and to express their feelings by using this statement and focusing on only one metaphor. A period of 20 minutes is given to the participants during English writing course in order to realize this task. In the researches where metaphors are employed as a research tool, the term “like” is generally used to recall the link between the subject and source of metaphor even more clearly (Saban, 2004). In this study also the term “because” is used in order to enable participants to provide a justification or reasonable basis for their own metaphors. The paragraphs written by the participants form the basic data source of this study.

Metaphors developed by the participants in English are analyzed in five stages: (1) coding and selecting, (2) sample metaphor image collecting, (3) category development, (4) providing validity and reliability and (5) transferring data to SPSS package program for quantitative analysis.

After eliminating the papers that do not involve metaphor images, 79 valid metaphors in total are obtained. A “sample metaphor list” is formed by collecting metaphor images that are assumed as best representing each of these 79 metaphors. Then they are analyzed as to the subject, source and relation between the subject and source of metaphor. Each metaphor image is associated with the themes “anger, sadness, afraid, love, pleasure, expectation inspiring feelings” in terms of the perspective it has for the feeling statement and 7 different conceptual categories (animal, object, human, plant, nature, action, idiom) are established. For reliability of the study expert opinion is consulted in order to determine whether if the metaphor images listed under these conceptual categories represent the said conceptual category. All data is processed in SPSS and the results are analyzed and interpreted.

## FINDINGS

In this part, primarily 7 conceptual category that are developed for feeling statements are introduced. Then, these conceptual categories are compared as to gender and class level of the participant students.

**Love** (36.5%) and **anger** (15.3%) occurred as the most preferred feeling themes that the participant students tried to state (Table 1).

Table 1.  
7 themes for feeling statements

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Included Feelings</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Love-inspiring feelings	love, friendship, trust	31
Anger-inspiring feelings	Anger, irritation, revenge	13
Pleasure-inspiring feelings	happiness, excitement, joy, cheerfulness	10
Shame-inspiring feelings	guiltiness, sadness, disappointment, regret	11
Fear-inspiring feelings	anxiety, worry	3
Affliction-inspiring feelings	Crying	1
Expectation-inspiring feelings	Hope	10

Please find in Table 2 the percentages of conceptual categories.

Table 2. 7  
Conceptual categories for metaphors

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Nature metaphors	38
Object metaphors	15
Plant metaphors	12
Animal metaphors	7
Human metaphors	4
Idiom metaphors	2
Action metaphors	1

Table 3.  
General Review

<b>Category</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Common Metaphors</b>	<b>Total Number of Metaphors Produced</b>
Nature metaphors	Expectation, Love	Rainbow (8,2%) sea (8,2%)	13
Object metaphors	Love, Anger	Fast food (4,7%) and candy (2,4%)	11
Plant metaphors	Love	Tree (10,6%)	3
Animal metaphors	Love	Dog (5,9%)	2
Human metaphors	Love, pleasure, expectation	Brother, little child, arms, child's smile (1,2%)	4
Action metaphors	Shame	Smoking (1,2%)	1
Idiom metaphors	Love	Butterfly at one's stomach, Have one's head in the clouds (1,2%)	2

**1. Nature Metaphors:** This category is represented by 38 students (44.7%) and 13 metaphors in total. “Rainbow” and “sea” are the most used metaphors by the students for stating expectation (hope) and love (love, friendship, trust) inspiring feelings. Other produced metaphors are: sun, rain, autumn, black cloud, foggy day, rainy day, river, volcano, earthquake, fire, weather.

*“Friendship is something like a sea. Because when we feel friendship, it won’t end. If you choose wrong friends you may be down in the deep sea...”*. (F,10)

*“Love is something like a sea. Because, sea is sometimes calm and sometimes wavevy. You feel love in high degree in some times and low in other ...”*. (F,9)

*“Hope is something like a rainbow. Because the rainbow does not have a limit and it can go everywhere that you imagine. Hope is a consequence of imagination. Because of these reasons there is a similarity between hope and rainbow.”* (F,9)

**2. Object Metaphors:** This category is represented by 15 students (17.6%) and 11 metaphors in total. “Fastfood” and “candy” are the most used metaphors by the students for stating love (love, friendship, trust) and anger (anger, irritation, revenge) inspiring feelings. Other produced metaphors are: good song, adventure, music, information, vinegar, poison, sharp sword, uncomfortable bed, bottomless pit.

*“Love is something like fast food. Because when we are in love we don’t feel empty and when we eat fast food we don’t feel empty too. And when we are eating fast food we feel happy, love is the same.”* (M,10)

*“Anger is something like a fastfood. Because if you close in, it grows...”* (M,9)

**3. Plant Metaphors:** This category is represented by 12 students (14.1%) and 3 metaphors in total. “Tree” is the most used metaphor by the students for stating love (love, friendship, trust) inspiring feelings. Other produced metaphors are: Flowers, lemon.

*“Friendship is something like a tree. Because if you spend time, you develop your friendship. If your friendship’s stem is strong, your friendship lives long long time. If tree’s stem is strong, it lives long long time. And friendship gives sweet memories, tree gives fruits to us. You stand your back to a friend or tree. Sometimes leaves are falling down. It’s your breaking a part.”* (M,10)

**4. Animal Metaphors:** This category is represented by 7 students (8.2%) and 2 metaphors in total. “Dog” is the most used metaphor by the students for stating love (love, friendship, trust) inspiring feelings whereas “bull” is the other metaphor produced.

*“Trust is something like a dog. Because, dog protects us from many dangerous things. You can trust your dog like that you trust your friends. But if you hurt a dog it can bite and hurt you. If you don’t hurt a dog it doesn’t hurt you. So in real life, if you trust your friends they trust you but if you don’t trust and disappoint them, they don’t continue to trust you.”* (F,10)

**5. Human Metaphors:** This category is represented by 4 students (4.7%) and 4 metaphors in total. These metaphors are; brother, little child, arms, child's smile.

*"Love is something like a child's smile. Because when children smile we become happy and feel good. Love does too. Love brings happiness and destroys sadness..."* (F,9)

*"Friendship is something like a little child. Because, it is sometimes boring, sometimes funny and sometimes mix..."* (F,9)

**6. Action Metaphors:** This category is represented by 1 students (1.2%) and 1 metaphor in total. The produced "smoking" metaphor is used for a shame inspiring feeling.

*"Regret is something like smoking. Because, smoking means illness and illness means death and regret".* (M,9)

**7. Idiom Metaphors:** This category is represented by 2 students (2.4%) and 2 metaphors in total. The produced metaphors are; butterfly at one's stomach and have one's head in the clouds.

*"Love is something like a butterfly at one's stomach. Because, when I see my lover I'm full of happiness and feel like there's a butterfly in my stomach."* (F,10)

*"Love is something like having one's head in the clouds. Because, if a person is in love, his/her eyes don't see anything. S/he thinks about only one thing: love. When we have our heads in the clouds we also don't see and think about anything."* (F,9)

When these conceptual categories are compared by applying independent Pearson  $\chi^2$  test in terms of genders and class levels of the students, differences in the following points are found: Male students produced metaphors representing "object" and "animal" categories highly more than female students whereas female students ranked first at "nature" metaphors.

Table 4.  
Comparison of 7 conceptual categories as to gender

Category	Male (n=38)		Female (n=41)		Total (n=79)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Nature metaphors	13	34.2	25	65.8	38	44.7
Object metaphors	11	73.3	4	26.7	15	17.6
Plant metaphors	6	50.0	6	50.0	12	14.1
Animal metaphors	5	85.7	2	14.3	7	8.2
Human metaphors	2	50.0	2	50.0	4	4.7
Action metaphors	-	-	2	100.0	2	2.4
Idiom metaphors	1	100.0	-	-	1	1.2

Pearson chi-square  $\chi^2(10, N=79)= 11.165, p=0.008$

On the other hand, ninth class students produced highly more “*nature*” metaphors prorata tenth class ones whereas tenth class students showed themselves in “*object*” and “*animal*” categories; ninth class students are also well in producing “*plant*” metaphors.

Table 5.  
 Comparison of 7 conceptual categories as to class level

Category	9 <sup>th</sup> Class (n=38)		10 <sup>th</sup> Class (n=41)		Total (n=79)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Nature metaphors	27	71.1	11	28.9	38	44.7
Object metaphors	6	40.0	9	60.0	15	17.6
Plant metaphors	7	58.3	5	41.7	12	14.1
Animal metaphors	3	42.9	4	57.1	7	8.2
Human metaphors	2	50.0	2	50.0	4	4.7
Action metaphors	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	1.2
Idiom metaphors	1	100.0	-	-	1	2.4

Pearson chi-square  $\chi^2(10, N=79)= 12.533, p=0.008$

## CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

The findings obtained from this study that is intended to reveal through *metaphors* the mental images of secondary school students which they use while stating *feelings* in a foreign language (English), draw attention to a few important points.

Firstly, as emphasized by Yob (2003) basically metaphor is only the symbol of the fact it explains, therefore several metaphors are required in order to explain the *feeling statements* concept. For example, feelings can be defined as “primitive” and “complex” as well as “*anger*”, “*affliction*”, “*fear*”, “*love*”, “*pleasure*”, “*share*” or “*expectation*” inspiring feelings. In this case, it is clear that feeling concept cannot be fully explained with a single metaphor.

Secondly, when the mental images of secondary school students which they use while stating *feelings* in a foreign language is considered, it is seen that the popular conceptual categories by class levels are “*nature metaphors*” (71.1%) in ninth class whereas “*object metaphors*” (60.0%) in tenth class. In a similar study carried out by Bozlk (2003) with 49 freshman university students taking a course on education, 35 metaphors are obtained concerning how they perceive as a student. These metaphors are collected under four categories: (1) *animal metaphors* (37%) (for example; *snail, fish, jerboai, duck, hinny, cow, bird, camel, donkey, squirrel*, etc.), (2) *object metaphors* (29%) (for example; *sponge, colored pen, curtain, computer program*, etc.), (3) *human metaphors* (26%) (for example; *child eating candy, observer, baby, Alzheimer patient*, etc.) and (4) *action metaphors* (8%) (for example; *climbing tree, eating*, etc). As it can be seen, university students produce more concrete metaphors due to their experiences.



So, it can be said that as far as the class level of students raises they produce more concrete metaphors.

Thirdly, we can say that gender variation also influence mental images of secondary school students which they use while stating *feelings* in a foreign language. Male students produced images representing “*object metaphors*” (73.3%) and “*animal metaphors*” (85.7%) categories highly more than female students. Likewise, female students produced images representing “*nature metaphors*” (65.8%) category highly more than male students. In a comparable study carried out by Saban, Koçbeker ve Saban (2006), 111 valid metaphors produced by teacher candidates were collected under 10 different conceptual category. Male students appreciated “*shaper/formative*”, “*instructive/directive*” and “*colloborative/democratic leader*” roles whereas female students “*information provider*”, “*individual development supporter*” and “*character guidance*” roles of teachers in higher rates than the other. Accordingly, it seems obvious that there are substantial differences between male and female students regarding perception and statement of concepts.

Fourthly, students’ association of anger with bull and volcano, vinegar; sadness with black cloud and description of love by using the idioms “butterfly at one’s stomach” and “have one’s head in the clouds” can be deemed as an indicator for culture and experience scars on metaphor production.

Consequently, metaphors can be used as a *powerful research tool* for understanding, revealing and explaining the mental images of the students regarding the *feeling statements* in a foreign language (English). In this context, students can be asked to produce metaphors for different abstract concepts and facts, then to share these with others. After they analyze their own metaphor images and recognize the alternative conceptualizations provided by these images for certain facts; the metaphor images that bring new perspectives to different abstract concepts can be introduced to the students.

As stated by Acat (2009), we are in need of enabling the individuals learning foreign language to produce language products by using basic language skills and therefore, establishing the environments where they can display their creativity. Considering the suggestion for preparing such environments for learners, it can be said that a new approach is required to be appreciated in Turkey for foreign language teaching.

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