The comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing of EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan

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Abstract

The present study endeavors to investigate the learning of the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan. Moreover, the study attempts to see the role of mother tongue influences in the learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in expository writing by Jordanian EFL learners. Thereafter, the collected data on the semantic interpretation of metaphor are analyzed by using SPSS (22.0), One-Way ANOVA, and Mann-Whitney U test. The results indicate that: (1) the learners have good learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University (mean = 3.25). (2) There is no significant difference between the male and female learners in their learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners (P. = .057). (3) There is an agreement on using learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing (M = 2.96). Finally, it was found that learners' mother tongue (i.e., Arabic) has a negative effect in the course of learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by the Jordanian EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University as most of the errors were attributed to learners' mother tongue.

Keywords: metaphor; semantic interpretation; comprehension EFL Learners; Albalqa Applied University

1. Introduction

There has been a growing interest in semantics as a suitable research area since the beginning of the 21st century. Researchers become more interested in the complexity of language, particularly how meanings are constructed in the language (Kamp & Reyle, 2013; Bickerton & Bickerton, 2016). Semantics has been extensively applied in the study of the human mind, its processes of thoughts, conceptualization, and cognition (Reyes, Rosso & Buscaldi, 2012). These aspects of the human mind are bounded intricately in a sense through which the world's experience could be classified and conveyed utilizing language. Regel, Gunter and Friederici (2011) argue that semantics usually seems to be inexplicable. This is because there have been various approaches to semantics that are hardly clear even to the authors who have written on this area. Studies on the subject of figurative language, specifically in the acquisition of foreign language, have focused primarily on the receptive skills where there is strong evidence for suggesting that motivating learners for reflecting on their figurative expression's metaphoric origins would more likely enable them to learn while recalling representative

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vocabulary more efficiently (Black, 1962; Philip, 2011). On the other hand, the study of metaphors has been a tradition in various intellectual fields and disciplines including philosophy of language, literary study, and linguistics. Taking this notion into consideration, metaphor has been recognized as the exclusive territory and field among literary scholars. Furthermore, the concept of metaphor could be traced back to the Rhetoric and Poetics era of Aristotle (Raii, 2009). Metaphor is considered a special territory and field for most scholars in literary studies (Ungerer & Schmid, 2013). Imre (2010) stated that the subject of metaphor has been the focus of numerous studies over centuries. The nature of metaphor is one of the dedicated subjects for debate back to the time of Aristotle who explained metaphor in the position of a noun, describing that metaphor normally 'happens' to the noun (Imre, 2010). The major reason to study metaphors in expository writing is that the use of metaphors tends to make up a greater part of many areas of everyday reasoning. Consequently, this study tries to investigate the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan.

2. Literature Review

Metaphor is derived from two major Greek words i.e. 'meta' and 'pherein' (Indurkhya, 2013). 'Meta' means over or across while 'Pherein' means "to carry, bear". Therefore, the literal meaning of this word is to transfer, to carry over, or to alter especially in the sense of one word to another (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Metaphor is defined as a figure of speech referring to a particular thing by stating another thing mainly for rhetorical effect (Kovecses, 2010). The concept of metaphor also tends to identify the hidden similarity or even describes the clarity between two ideas or concepts (Barnes & Duncan, 2013). A metaphor compares two items and does not likely use words such as 'as' or 'like' as used in 'simile'.

On the other side, expository writing revolves around one topic and it is developed based on the pattern or even combination of it. Cameron and Maslen (2010) stated that the writer should not assume that listener or reader has a prior understanding or previous knowledge of the topic being discussed when writing an expository text. The strong organization of expository writing is basically to provide clarity. Thus, the major mechanisms for improving the skills in expository writing are related to improving the organization of the text (Charteris-Black, 2011). Indurkhya (2013) posits that the content of expository writing is structured around a single topic. It is also profoundly explained utilizing the pattern or its combination. Researchers have also discussed some of the most commonly used patterns in expository writing including cause and effect, description, process, comparison, problem and solution as well as the sequence (De Oliveira, 2011). These patterns have their distinct clue serving as a guide in expository writing. Many researchers have long studied the notion of expository writing which is used to describe, explain, inform, or provide information (Barnes & Duncan, 2013).

3. Previous Studies

In the existed research literature, metaphor is an area of semantics that has gained the attention of many scholars and linguists in the past few decades G It is a rhetorical mechanism that considers the comparison of two different objects referring to each other based on their intrinsic qualities. This kind of figure of speech is a technique of analogy that has a great contribution to the comprehension and development of language learning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999). Nonetheless, most Arab EFL learners face difficulties in using metaphoric expressions in English. One of the issues in the evaluation of the pattern that occurs in allegorical usage, especially in expository compositions (Tuan, 2010).

Yin (2013) states that the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural field of comparative studies tends to offer researchers an opportunity to critically analyze the cultural or social processes, besides their expression in literature, arts, media, religion, science, and technology. By conducting a comparative study between English and Arabic languages, the learners are more likely to develop critical thinking and analytical ability in both spoken and written communication using these languages. Also, the understanding of cultural differences would be broadened as comparative study helps in intersecting ethnicity, gender, class, or race. Shavit (2007) posits that comparative study is the act of contrasting two or more things to discover something on one or all the things being compared.

The metaphor refers to saying one thing while meaning another. It is also seen as a violation of semantic rules or making implicit comparisons of unlike things (Leary, 1990). Therefore, the notion of metaphor tends to reflect the evaluation of two distinct occurrences that have some collective points. Aristotle provides the first definition of Metaphor as "a shift carrying over a word from its normal use to the new one" (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). For instance, in the sentence 'the customer is a king', the customer is directly compared with a king because a customer has many attributes similar to the king's, such as power, importance, and influence. Looking at the symbolic meaning of the phrase 'a ship of state', the ship's captain tends to reflect the 'government'; however, the bad weather reflects a crisis, the sea reflects the flow of time, and the absence of wind represents the stagnant economy. Therefore, metaphor is perceived as the symbolic expression that has grown with an advanced contribution to the world in literary translation (Leary, 1990).

Metaphors lie at the center of the critical and fundamental relationship that exists between language and thought, and that has been investigated thoroughly in the field of cognitive sciences, psychology, and linguistics (Gibbs, 1994, 2011; Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008). Goatly (1996) noted that metaphor tends to occur when the element of dialogue is unconventionally used for referring to the process, object, or concept in an unconventional manner, and when such unconventional act of reference is implicit on the grounds of matching, similarity, and analogy. Metaphor expressions are considered as the features of a language compared with thoughts. These expressions are perceived as the literary style of poetics which could be traced back to the rhetoric and poetics of Aristotle (Ungerer & Schmid, 2013), as opposed to the routine variety of dialect (Lakoff, 1993). From this viewpoint, metaphor can be considered as an event in linguistics that occurs mainly within the sphere of the figurative and poetic discourse or speech in which such occurrence is accredited to the linguistic style used in the literature (Raii, 2009). The two seminal works that revolutionized traditional mannerism view on metaphor are 'Metaphor and Thought' and 'Metaphors We Live By' edited by Ortony (1979) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) respectively. These works transformed the view on metaphor from an instrument of rhetorical style and literary imagination to a more intellectual view, where the metaphor is perceived as a notion that is rooted firmly in the verbal behavior and the conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

Moreover, Leary (1994) differentiates between natural metaphor and its literal meaning. According to the author, the distinction between figurative and literal meanings is an important issue that offers descriptive and explanatory power to the analysis of language. The author further supports other critics like Hoffman (1988) who argues that the definitions associated with literal meaning are themselves metaphoric such as 'logical truth value' and 'what words point to'. Metaphor involves the creation of new meanings and not just logical comparisons or literal truth values. The traditional assumptions of metaphor considered it similar to all other tools of linguistics that deviate from everyday speech and literal language while aliening to direct literal meaning or semantics (Al-Ahdal et al., 2017; Balck, 1962; Fauconnier, 1994; Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Kozlowski, & Klein, 2000). In this regard, Lakoff (1993) argues that metaphor reflects a false assumption that "all everyday conventional language is literal and none is metaphoric" (p. 2).

4. Questions of the Study

Many researchers have claimed that the majority of Arab EFL learners who study English as a foreign language have problems and difficulties in the learning and comprehension of English semantic interpretation of metaphor. Furthermore, most of the students do not make any differentiation between semantic interpretations of metaphors. Consequently, this study endeavors to shed light on this problem and to investigate the following questions:

1. To what extent is the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan?

2. To examine the EFL learners' attitudes to the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University.

3. To find the difference between the male and female learners in the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University?

4. What are the causes of violations in the Jordanian EFL learners learning semantic interpretation of metaphor?

5. Methodology

Participants of this study are 120 undergraduate EFL students with an equal number of males and females, all native speakers of Arabic, at the Department of English at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan. This was a convenience sample chosen for two reasons: Enrolment at UOB is moderate, and given the pandemic imposed closures. A questionnaire was prepared following informal interviews with learners at UOB in the early part of 2020 when physical teaching-learning was in vogue. The questionnaire was revised by two specialists in questionnaire scheming and statistical analysis. Their comments led to some modifications in the questionnaire, both in terms of dropping certain items and rewording some others. This was followed by pilot administration of the questionnaire via google forms application to twelve learners at par with the convenience sample. This step ensured the reliability of the questionnaire items. The last form of the circulated questionnaire consisted of two units. The first section planned to provoke demographic information (profile) of the learners. The second section was further divided into two subsections: 1) 5-point Likert Scale items (statements), scaled from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', that were intended to elicit information from the learners about their comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University; and 2) 5-point scale items, scaled from 'always' to 'never' that were intended to elicit information about the respondents' comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners.

The questionnaire was circulated among the undergraduate students of the Department of English at Albalqa Applied University. As reported earlier, the sample size was one hundred twenty respondents from the four levels of English with the median age of the group being 22.7 years. The respondents were requested to revert with the filled-in forms in a week and they were free to seek the researcher's help if they needed an explanation on any of the items. However, only three respondents came back with minor inquiries on the meanings of a few items in the questionnaire. The data were subjected to SPSS (Version 22.0) for analysis. The tools that were used in the analysis were descriptive statistics, One-Way ANOVA, and the Mann-Whitney U test.

6. Results and Discussion

For achieving the research questions of this study, the researcher dealt with the statistical analysis of One-Way ANOVA and Mann-Whitney U test.

It was found, as shown in Table (1), that the learners tended to have a good comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University (mean = 3.25). This means that they were positively disposed to the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor. As shown in Table (2), there is no significant difference between the male and female learners in their comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University (P. = .057). This is a significant finding in the socio-economic context of Jordanian learners.

Table 1. The learners' learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor.

Gender		The comprehension semantic interpretation of metaphor
Female	Mean	3.3019
	N	60
	Std. Deviation	.26837
Male	Mean	3.2056
	N	60
	Std. Deviation	.28036
Total	Mean	3.2537
	N	120
	Std. Deviation	.27752

Table 2. Difference between male and female learners' comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Semantic interpretation of metaphor	Between Groups	.278	1	.278	3.694	.057
	Within Groups	8.887	118	.075		
	Total	9.165	119			

In general, learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor were investigated, and it was found, as shown in Table 2, that the learners used varied strategies to learn and comprehend the semantic interpretation of metaphor. It is apparent from the data that there is an agreement on using the semantic interpretation of metaphor (M = 2.96). Table (4) shows there is a significant difference between the male and female learners in learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor (P = .003).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the learners' to enhance the learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor.

Gender		The correct use of English semantic interpretation of metaphor
Female	Mean	2.9108

		60
	Std. Deviation	.19659
Male	Mean	3.0088
	N	60
	Std. Deviation	.15948
Total	Mean	2.9598
	N	120
	Std. Deviation	.18492

Table 4. Difference between male and female learners in using English semantic interpretation of metaphor.

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Semantic	Between Groups	.288	1	.288	9.000	.003
interpretation	Within Groups	3.781	118	.032		
of metaphor	Total	4.069	119			

Moreover, analysis of the learners' data in using of semantic interpretation of metaphor discloses that the violations of semantic interpretation of metaphor are essentially due to four aspects as illustrated in Table (5):

Table 5. Violations of semantic interpretation of metaphor

Violations of semantic interpretation of metaphor	Percentage
a. "Learners incomplete metaphor knowledge".	35
b. "Presentation of the strategy of influences L1 to L2 semantic interpretation of metaphor".	44
1. "The effect of the source text patterning".	18
2. "Overgeneralization".	20

The tradition of learning and comprehending a foreign language through semantic interpretation of metaphor alone has a long history. Howatt (1984) points out that even earlier than Roman times, foreign languages were learned through communication alone. In recent times, Krashen and Terrell (1983) provided a varied theoretical basis for foreign language learning outside the classroom by arguing in favor of the 'natural approach which is based on the techniques that stimulate learning and comprehension. The other end of the spectrum was offered by Prabhu's 'procedural approach' (1987) whose focus is on engaging learners with problem-solving by actual language use. In both the approaches, controlled practice or correction are kept at bay, and learners are left to 'learn and comprehend' as it were, the foreign language much. Like they acquired the mother tongue. Learning and comprehension are a special kind of place that cannot make natural learning and comprehension conditions available to the learners, less so in the case of learning and comprehension a foreign language such as English. Since we understand that natural language learning is a time taking phenomenon, it is important to provide such learning conditions to the learners as are most suitable for the learning and comprehension in the classroom. Observations beyond the classroom indicate that language learning is fundamentally different from other classroom learning experiences and if teachers can enable learning strategy use amongst the learners, suitable learning opportunities can be created

for the learners. Although both the approaches were proven to be successful in language learning environments, they failed to prove their universality. Therefore, the need was felt for harnessing people's skill-learning capacities or providing such essential tools to the learners as to make them acquire language on their own. The grammatical collocations have played a considerable role in second and foreign language learning as it assists learners by making the process of learning faster, easier, more amusing, more transferable to new conditions, more effective, and more self-directed. Hence, one way to be effective in the learning of the target language is that learners have to be conscious of using positive strategies of language learning.

7. Conclusion

This study tries to investigate the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan. As the statistical analysis reveals that the learners showed good learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University (mean = 3.25). Moreover, there is no significant difference between the male and female learners in learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University (P. = .057). On the other side, there is an agreement on learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners (M = 2.96). There is a significant difference between the male and female learners in learning and comprehension of grammatical semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University (P = .003). The learners, both the males and females, in learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University. Finally, it was found that learners' mother tongue has a negative effect in the process of learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University as most of the errors were attributed to learners' mother tongue.

8. Recommendations and Limitations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that syllabus makers and EFL teachers should consider the in the process of learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University as most of the errors were attributed to learners' mother tongue. Students should be given continuously separate classes on learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository writing by EFL learners. Influences of students' mother tongue i.e., Arabic on learning on learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository. Moreover, EFL teachers should give an extra attention on learning and comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in the expository, especially the initial years. The study recommends that there should be a way to develop and establish new techniques for teaching semantic interpretation of metaphor to help Jordianian EFL students especially and other Arab countries in general. Finally, the study limits itself on investigate the comprehension of semantic interpretation of metaphor in expository writing by EFL learners at Albalqa Applied University, Jordan. Further studies may come to real on other universities on Jordan investigating the same topic with different samples.

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