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Incorporating Metaphor Instruction in ESP Classrooms and Its Effect on the Tunisian Learners' Metaphorical Competence

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of using metaphor as a teaching tool in ESP courses, namely; the business English course to enhance learners' metaphorical proficiency. To this end, this research used control and an experimental group. The former did not receive a treatment effect which consisted in the incorporation of metaphor instruction during the ESP course. The experimental group, however, was exposed to explicit metaphorical instruction during the course. The main findings show that learners develop better metaphorical competence after the incorporation of conceptual metaphor courses and extra activities and exercises dealing with metaphor use and production. Besides, learners show better skills in extracting metaphorical utterances from business English texts. They understand metaphors easier and more quickly and most importantly they were more proficient when it comes to producing metaphors during their PowerPoint project.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, ESP, L2 learners, metaphorical competence.

1. Introduction

A Metaphor is a figure of speech in which meanings deviate from their literal sense. It is reflected in our everyday language and is far from being restricted to linguistic analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). More importantly, metaphor has been extensively studied and can be defined based on a linguistic approach and a cognitive approach(Sacristán, 2005). From a linguistic perspective, metaphor is a figure of speech and is considered as a linguistic phenomenon and it is mainly used for poetic and artistic purposes to compare two resembled entities (Halliday, 1985; Cameron & Low, 1999). Cognitive linguists, however, consider metaphor as a cognitive process where one conceptual domain, also called the source domain, is partially mapped onto another different conceptual domain, known as the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff &Turner, 1989; Lakoff, 1990, 1993). More interestingly, cognitive linguists have recently focused on the use of metaphor in the field of L2 acquisition and language teaching (Aleshtar, &Dowlatabadi, 2014). Indeed, recent studies offer theoretical and practical contributions on the use of metaphor as an instructional tool to increase self-reflection and raise awareness among L2 teachers about the powerful way in which metaphors impact their educational beliefs (Shuwu,2002; Guerrero and Villamil, 2002). In this respect, Beck (1982)and Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014) pointed out that the conceptual system described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) can be applied to education, more specifically; in second language acquisition. Other researchers highlighted the explicative value and productive patterns underlying metaphor and their potential value for EFL learners as well as the interrelation between language, mind and culture(Sacristán, 2009; Littlemore and Low 2006; Piquer-Píriz and Alejo-González 2016). In addition, Hoffman (1983), Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014) added that metaphor is essential for vocabulary comprehension and acquisition and the use of connotative meanings of words are more common than the denotative meanings. It has also been shown that conceptualizing EFL learners' speeches in metaphorical ways is considered an integral trait of native-speakers' competence (Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014). In fact, teaching metaphor to EFL learners provides ways to understand how learners develop their attitudes and beliefs towards objects and how learners process thoughts and reasoning and teachers can develop their teaching competence and uncover how learners process metaphors and the challenges they encounter during this process (Bas & Gezegin, 2017; Ishak, 2019; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ishak, 2019). Despite the extensive focus on the fundamental role of metaphor in foreign language teaching, there is still a lack of studies when it comes to the incorporation of metaphor as an instructional material in ESP classroom (Rodriguez, 2003; Sacristán, 2009). Henceforth, this research aims at investigating the impact of explicit metaphor instruction in an ESP classroom on the learners' metaphorical competence.

2. Teaching metaphor in an ESP course

According to cognitive linguists, metaphor plays a central role in everyday thought and language and transmits shared cultural values and beliefs and its presence in ESP courses is important because it enhances the learners' enculturation process and is considered an integral trait of native-speakers' competence (Rodriguez, 2003; Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014). More importantly, teaching metaphor in ESP courses helps students retain figurative expressions by

raising their metaphoric awareness of the source domain of the figurative expressions and the associated inference patterns. More importantly, drawing learners' attention to the conventional and more innovative metaphors in ESP courses has a positive effect on their ability to understand and produce metaphorical utterances and perceive the differences in style and tone between genres (Boers, 2000; Smith, 1995; Sznajder, 2010). Teaching metaphor to ESP learners, however, is different from teaching it to learners of general English (Rodriguez, 2003). Teaching metaphor in a general English course is explicit and could be more difficult. In ESP courses, however, the focus is on a more constrained and specific language that can be acquired quickly and effectively (Lindstromberg, 1991; MacLennan, 1993; Rodriguez, 2003). Other researchers, however, disagree with the aforementioned claim because teaching metaphor in an ESP context is more difficult because learners often find difficulties in understanding metaphorical utterances in written texts or conversations, since, unlike native speakers, they cannot access the stock of ready-made and readily-understood figurative words and they try to decipher each word separately (Bortfeld, 2003). These difficulties are also common in language production because there is literalness and absence of metaphor in the speeches of ESP learners that sound non-native (Danesi, 1994). Furthermore, ESP learners encounter more metaphorical difficulties because they do not expect to come across metaphorical expressions which are difficult to understand (Charteris-Black, 2000; Henderson, 1994; Smith, 1995; Sznajder, 2010).In this respect, it has been shown that metaphorical difficulties depend on the extent to which there is a difference between the metaphorical systems of the L1 and L2. Indeed, learners should first understand the similarities and differences in metaphor use between L1 and L2to be able to grasp and use metaphor more effectively in an ESP context (Sacristán, 2009). Translation, for instance, was found to help instructors teach metaphor in ESP courses more effectively because translation focuses on the communicative function of the language and helps learners understand conceptual metaphors and their linguistic realizations in L1 and L2 in a professional context (Sacristán, 2009). Other studies focused on the psychological processes underlying figurative thinking and vocabulary acquisition which are both enhanced by an explicit use of metaphor and metonymy in the classroom (Cameron, 2003; Steen, 2004; Sznajder, 2010). Teacher-student intervention and interaction also enhance learners' metaphorical competence (Littlemore, 2002; Sznajder, 2010). Furthermore, it has been shown that teaching vocabulary based on lexis that uses metaphors is also useful for the learners' language proficiency and metaphorical competence. This teaching method offers learners insights into the conceptual domain of the objects and facilitates the acquisition of metaphorically-based concepts (Charteris-Black, 2000; Sznajder, 2010). In addition, using optimum teaching materials, which include both linguistic and conceptual metaphors, is essential to improve learners' metaphorical competence and language proficiency. In fact, learners should be aware of possible social effects derived from conceptualizing metaphors in business discourse(Sznajder, 2010). Henceforth, the literature review on the use of metaphor in an ESP classroom has many benefits on the learners' language acquisition, proficiency, and most notably metaphorical competence. Below is a literature review on the effect of metaphor instruction on the learners' metaphorical competence.

3. The impact of metaphor on the learners' metaphorical competence

Previous studies in SLA have placed grammatical and communicative competencies as the main competences which reflect learners' language proficiency (Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014). It is

only recently that researchers started to focus on metaphorical competence (Gardner and Winner, 1978; Low, 1988; Danesi,1992; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014)Metaphorical competence is defined as the ability to comprehend and use metaphors in a given language as used in natural discourse and is considered an important factor that enables learners to reach a native-like production (Teymouri, et al.2014; Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014). It is not restricted to linguistic proficiency but it is also associated with our perception of the world because it is typical for humans to think and act metaphorically (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In other words, metaphorical competence includes the ability to understand the similarity between different domains and to use one domain to explain or understand another domain. This competence is directly related to metaphor awareness, and strategies for comprehending and producing metaphors (Deignan, Gabrys, & Solska, 1997 Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014). According to Beréndi (2005), metaphorical competence is complex, develops gradually, always changing, and is related to the continuous increase in the types of conceptual metaphors. Despite its importance in determining learners' language proficiency, studying metaphorical competence remains an exception rather than a rule, especially when it comes to studies on metaphorical competence in an ESP context. Henceforth, this study aims at investigating the effect of integrating metaphors in an ESP context on Tunisian EFL learners' metaphorical competence. The main research hypothesis of this study is presented below.

H1: Incorporating metaphor instruction has a positive effect on the learners' metaphorical competence in an ESP context.

Since metaphorical competence is defined as the ability to comprehend and produce metaphor (Teymouri, et al.2014; Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014), the hypothesis above is divided into two sub- hypotheses.

H1a: Incorporating metaphor instruction has a positive effect on the learners' metaphorical comprehension in an ESP context.

H1b: Incorporating metaphor instruction has a positive effect on the learners' metaphorical production in an ESP context.

4. Method

4.1. The participants

This study used one sample where 40EFL students participated in a pre and post-test experiment. All the students were second-year students and were majoring in Business English at the Higher Institute of Human Sciences of Mednine. The experiment consisted in comparing the metaphorical competence of the students before and after introducing the students to a conceptual metaphor instruction and offering them extra activities and exercises dealing with metaphorical use and production.

4.2. Instrumentation

As mentioned earlier, this study employs a pre and post-test. The pre-test took place during the first semester where students were not exposed to a conceptual metaphor instruction. Also, there were no extra activities, written and spoken, related to metaphor use, comprehension and production. During the second semester, however, a conceptual metaphor course was integrated and the teacher explained the key concepts such as source domain, target domain, mapping two

different entities, types of metaphors, etc. Also, Extra exercises were given to train students to understand metaphors and detect the similarities of two different objects. All the metaphors used during the second term were business-related. By the end of each semester, the students were tested on their metaphorical competence. There were two types of tests, one written and one spoken. The tests procedures along with the data collection are shown below.

4.3. Procedures

The analysis of the data consisted in comparing learners' grades before and after the integration of the conceptual metaphor instruction. In other words, metaphorical competence was measured based on two dimensions, namely; comprehension and production of metaphor. To measure learners' metaphorical comprehension, the students were given a test composed of three main sections. The first section contained a reading passage from the business English book "Market leader" and the students were asked to extract at least 5 metaphorical utterances and to explain the mapping patterns. The second section included vocabulary exercises in which metaphorical utterances were divided into halves and the students were asked to match them. The third section of the test consisted of a writing activity where the learners wrote a short essay (explanations) of two metaphorical utterances given by the teacher. Each activity was out of 10. The second dimension, metaphorical production, focused on the learners' ability to produce and explain metaphor orally. The production test was graded based on the learners' speaking and production abilities of metaphors during their PowerPoint project presentations. This test was out of 10. The data analysis of the grades used a paired sample t-test because the two variables, metaphorical comprehension, and production, are matric and concern the same subjects who were tested at two different times. The data were analyzed using SPSS23. Below, the conceptual model is shown.

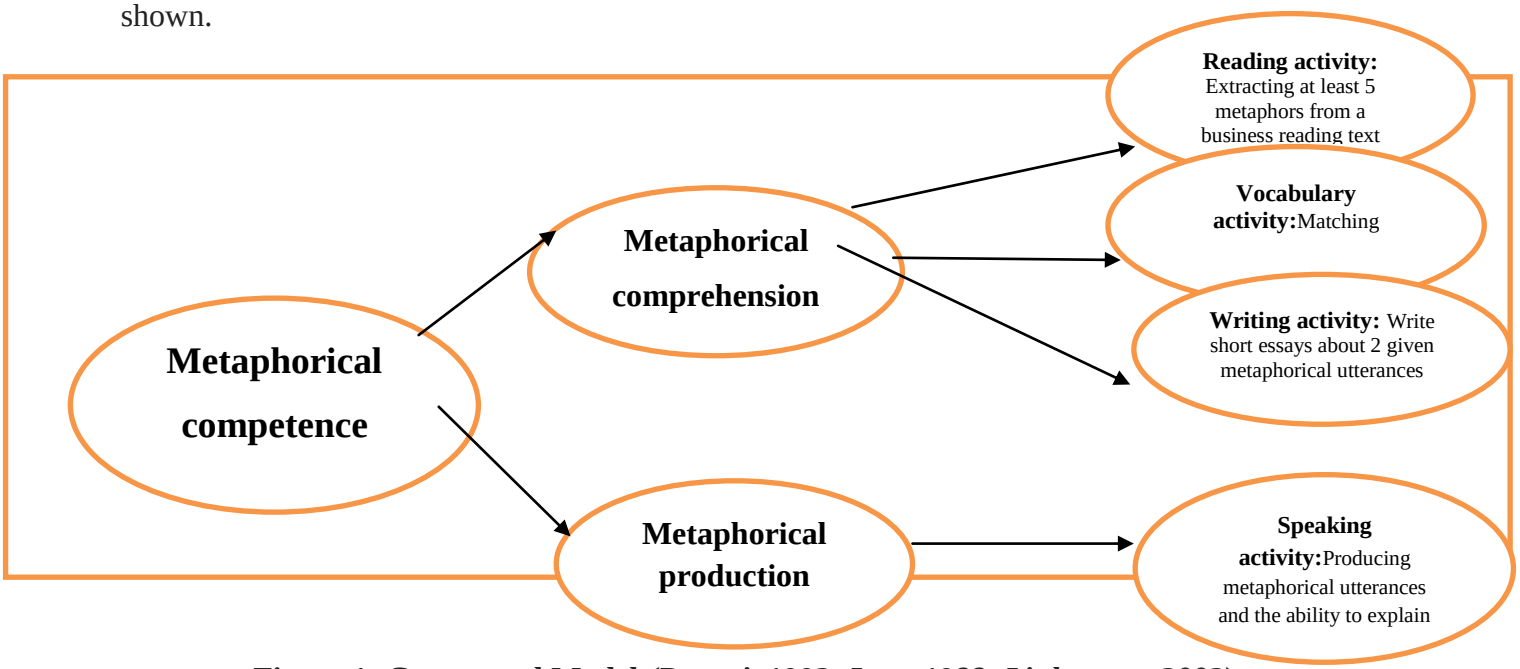

Figure 1: Conceptual Model *(Danesi, 1992; Low, 1988; Littlemore; 2002)*.

4.4. Results

The statistical results of the data are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Mean difference and paired sample t-test

Variables	mean	SD	Paired sample t-test	Significance
Reading (pre-test)	3.15	2.16		
			-9.53	0.000*
Reading (post-test)	5.95	1.31		
Vocabulary (pre-test)	3.02	1.49		
			- 9.91	0.000*
Vocabulary (post-test)	6.62	2.07		
Writing (pre-test)	3.25	1.39		
			-8.99	0.000*
Writing (post-test)	5.82	1.19		
Metaphorical comprehension (pre-test)	3.14	1.19		
			-15.71	0.000*
Metaphorical comprehension (post-test)	6.13	0.83		
Metaphorical production (pre-test)	3.00	1.32		
			-5.50	0.000*
Metaphorical production (post-test)	4.50	1.28		

***Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)**

Table 1 shows the statistical findings of the means, standard deviations, and paired sample t-test. The first variable "reading" reached a mean of 3.15 in the pretest and in the post-test the mean is equal to 5.95. This difference is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). The second variable, vocabulary,

has a mean equal to 3.02 in the pre-test while in the post-test the mean improves and reaches a value of 6.62. This difference in mean is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). Moving to the third variable, writing, the pre-test shows a mean equal to 3.25 while in the post-test the mean increases to 5.82. The corresponding paired sample t-test indicates that this difference is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). The metaphorical comprehension variable has a mean in the pre-test equal to 3.14 and the post-test the mean increases to 6.13and the t-test is significant which means that the mean difference is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). The last variable, metaphorical production, accounts for a mean equal to 3 in the pre-test, while in the post-test the mean changes to 4.5. Its corresponding t-test is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$) which means that the mean difference is significant and not due to chance. These results are discussed in what follows.

5. Results discussion

The findings above reveal that teaching metaphors to ESP learners and use extra activities and exercise to raise their awareness about metaphorical use and to train them to understand and produce metaphor are important factors that help students improve their metaphorical proficiency. In fact, the findings show that extracting metaphors while reading has been improved after integrating metaphor teaching in the class. Expanding metaphorical vocabulary has been also improved as learners' performed better in the test after getting a course on metaphor and extra activities related to metaphorical use. The writing skills, which consist in writing interpretations of metaphorical utterances, have increased and learners show better writing achievement after the treatment effect of metaphorical integration in the classroom. The variable metaphorical comprehension, which is the sum of the three aforementioned variables, has been significantly improved. In fact, ESP learners showed good abilities to comprehend and understand metaphors through their reading, vocabulary and writing activities. In other words, using a course on conceptual metaphors and doing more exercises on business metaphors has a positive effect on the students' metaphorical comprehension competence. As far as metaphorical production is concerned, this variable has witnessed an improvement after the integration of the treatment effect. In other words, learners can speak and show more confidence when using metaphorical utterances during their project presentation. They even show better explanation skills of these metaphorical utterances. Therefore, the results point out the importance of teaching and using a course on conceptual metaphor to ESP learners to introduce them to the main key concepts of metaphor most notably to raise their awareness of the extensive use of metaphor in business texts, slogans and advertisement messages. This integration has been shown to have a higher effect on metaphorical comprehension competence more than metaphorical production competence. Put differently, metaphorical instruction has a greater positive effect on the learners' vocabulary development followed by metaphorical writing skills, metaphorical reading skills and finally metaphorical production skills. More interestingly, these results agree with previous studies which found that integrating explicit metaphorical instruction in the L2 curriculum will raise learners' awareness of metaphorical concepts, will improve the linguistic, communicative and metaphorical competencies of L2 learners (Danesi, 1992; Aleshtar, & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Boers, 2000; Kovecses, & Szabco, 1996). In the same respect, Danesi (1995) added that metaphors give the learners a native-like fluency and proficiency since metaphorical competence requires a high level of cultural knowledge. This study also agrees with Danesi (1992), Talebinezhad and Hashemian (2006) upon the finding that once a metaphorical course and

activities are incorporated, the metaphorical competence can be developed and improved within six months. These findings offer several practical and theoretical contributions. The first and foremost implication is that metaphor should be explicitly taught and inserted into the ESP syllabus. Metaphorical competence is a trait of native speakers' proficiency and teaching it will help ESP learners acquire this nativelike proficiency and fluency. Second, metaphors reflect others cultures. It is an integral part of the cultural background as it is a common language phenomenon. The common use of metaphor in different cultures leads speakers and writers to use metaphorical expressions to convey their ideas. Henceforth, metaphorical instruction will be helpful in the learners' enculturation process. Practical implications consist in the ways teachers can incorporate metaphorical instruction in an ESP course. Teachers can rely on explicit teaching and explanation of key metaphor concepts involving both image and conceptual types. Furthermore, teachers have to raise learners' awareness about metaphorical occurrences and use in order to help them be active in understanding and producing metaphors. Extra exercises, activities and assessments are also highly recommended to achieve better metaphorical competence proficiency.

6. Conclusion

In sum, this study demonstrated the important role in incorporating explicit metaphorical instruction to ESP classrooms to improve learners' metaphorical competence proficiency which will be also reflected in their linguistic and communicative proficiencies. In other words, it does not make sense to read business texts full of metaphorical utterances and come across metaphorical expressions without initiating learners to the key concepts of conceptual metaphor and extra activities that help them comprehend and produce metaphors more effectively and properly. Therefore, it is highly recommended to revise the ESP syllabus in a way to adapt it to the learners' needs. One of those needs is to acquire a native-like proficiency. Incorporating metaphorical instruction, for instance, will have a significant impact on the learners' metaphorical proficiency, enculturation process and native-like fluency. Future studies could add the effect of working memory (WM) as a means which controls the speed of understanding metaphors. In addition, it would be interesting to do a comparative study between incorporating metaphor instruction in general English and ESP classrooms.

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