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**Exploring The Role Of Metaphoric And Communicative Competence  
Among Second Language Learners: A Qualitative Case Study Of Gpgc  
Karak**



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**Abstract**

Metaphors are part of the human communication system and application in the second language learning has not been studied properly especially in the Pakistani EFL setting. This paper explores the sense of metaphorical competence as perceived by learners and the role when it comes to communicative competence in terms of understanding and applying metaphors. Because this study was informed by the conceptual metaphor theory, consequentially, in this aspect, a qualitative research design was used. Overall, a convenient sampling method was used to select ten undergraduate EFL learners, and, accordingly, semi structured interviews were held to collect thorough information on the issues under consideration. Thematic analysis showed that learners consider metaphors as effective means to convey their complicated ideas, feelings, and cultural senses and have the idea that metaphorical fluency is also coherent, creative, and pragmatically appropriate. Nevertheless, the difficulties that were reported included the insufficient exposure, cultural difference, the absence of specific instructions, and the excessive use of literal language. Nevertheless, these challenges did not eliminate the fact that learners were very interested in metaphor-based lessons in the classroom. The paper ends by concluding that metaphorical competence is a constituent of communicative competence that is necessary but overlooked, and needs to be incorporated in the EFL teaching systematically. The results have important pedagogic implications on the teachers, curriculum developers, policymakers, and recommend future studies on larger sample sizes and teacher attitudes.

**Keywords:** Metaphorical Competence, Communicative Competence, Efl Learners, Qualitative Research, Thematic Analysis, Pakistan

**Introduction**

Language is not just a system of sounds and grammar, it is a way through which people form and shape reality, and communicate with each other. Communicative competence has been the prevailing model of language ability in decades. Communicative competence is a set of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies as first identified by Hymes (1972) and formalised by Canale and Swain (1980). The multidimensional model has influenced the English language teaching, curriculum development, and assessment across the globe (Bachman, 2018). Although these frameworks acknowledge the use of language in context, their consideration of metaphorical competence is in most cases ignored. Metaphor, formerly an art of rhetoric, is now known as a central cognitive process. In the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphors organize abstract cognition by projecting ideas on a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). An example of this is the popular metaphor of time is money which illustrates how the people have imagined the abstract concept of time in terms of the more concrete concept of money.

Studies conducted in the last 20 years have shown that metaphorical competence ,the capacity to comprehend, interpret, and apply metaphorical expressions is very important in language learning and communicative competence (Littlemore, 2021;

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Pope et al., 2023). Students who have excellent metaphoric competencies can understand academic texts better, develop vocabulary and engage in a more complex discourse (Boers, 2018; Guerrero and Martinez, 2022). On the other hand, students who have poor metaphorical competence usually have problems in articulating abstract concepts, making sense of figurative messages, and communicating in an academic manner (Marta, 2024).

In most EFL processes such as in Pakistan, metaphorical competence has not been fully addressed in the programs and classroom activities. The language teaching in Pakistan focuses on grammar, learning new words by heart rather than analyzing the meaning of words, and preparing exams, which in turn are the most discussed concepts of a language (Anwar et al., 2018). Consequently, students can be literate without being able to communicate in a subtle way which requires skills in figurative language. It poses obstacles to academic language, in which metaphor tends to be employed in describing theories, building arguments, and conveying abstract ideas.

Therefore, the current research paper explores the issue of metaphorical competence as the means of improving communicative competence among undergraduate students of Government Postgraduate College (GPGC) Karak. Using a qualitative case study, it discusses the manner in which the learners exhibit metaphorical competence in academic communication and how that competence is translated into their overall performance in communication.

## **Statement of the Problem**

In Pakistan, the learners at the undergraduate level are usually good in grammatical and lexical proficiency but are poor in understanding and application of metaphorical language. This fact limits their capacity to develop advanced arguments, convey complicated ideas, and present abstract concepts in the academic communication. Banaruee (2019) stressed the importance of being familiar with the conceptual system of a particular language, which is largely based on metaphor. Denying the analogy to Hwang (2018), the author observed that the creation of metaphorical competence has the potential to decrease the social and cultural distance between first- and second-language speakers. Nonetheless, even with these illuminations, metaphorical competence has been sidelined in language teaching among the foreign languages.

Recent research also indicates that students who do not possess proper metaphorical proficiency find it difficult to decode figurative meaning in academic texts, which also lowers their understanding and communicative performance (Amara et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2023). In Pakistan, there is not much empirical studies on the influence of metaphorical competence on communicative competence in undergraduate level. The mentioned gap implies the need to research the relationship between these two competencies and especially in regions that are not as urbanized as Karak, which experiences other linguistic and cultural issues among learners.

## **Research Questions**

How do undergraduate second language learners demonstrate metaphorical competence in their academic communication?

In what ways does metaphorical competence contribute to communicative competence among second language learners?

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## **Research Objectives**

To investigate how undergraduate second language learners demonstrate metaphorical competence in their academic communication.

To explore how metaphorical competence contributes to communicative competence among second language learners.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study has a theoretical, pedagogical, curricular and policy level of interest. In principle, it expands communicative competence model by introducing metaphorical competence as an essential element to enhance the knowledge of figurative language in communication. Pedagogically, it provides practical approaches to the way of how to develop the awareness and use of metaphors among learners, which contributes to the development of the overall communicative ability. At the curriculum level, it is a proponent of the inclusion of metaphorical competence in curriculum, content, and testing of English to teach language holistically. On the policy level, the study enlightens the policymakers about the necessity of considering metaphorical competence in the policies of national languages. To learners, it shows that the improvement of metaphorical competence leads to better performance at school, workplace communication and cross-cultural.

## **Literature Review**

Having been considered as ornamental, metaphors are currently regarded as cognitive and communicative processes (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003; Kövecses, 2020). Research (Khalili Sabet & Tavakoli, 2023; Liu and Xing, 2025) indicates that MC can improve cognitive flexibility and communicative skill in all of the skills. The students possessing high MC show more fluency, awareness of culture, and pragmatic competence (Alkhalaf, 2025; Dastjerdi, 2024; Zhou et al., 2022). The reflection synthesizes theoretical and empirical knowledge (2000-2025), which studies concept-based and multimodal teaching, variables of the learner, and gaps of information that influence the rationale of the current study. CMT (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) is a theory that states that metaphors organize human thought, which involves the mapping of abstract concepts to concrete ones, including: time is money. In the learning of language, it is necessary to comprehend these mappings to prevent pragmatic and cultural miscommunication (Kövecses, 2020; Littlemore, 2019).

MC is the ability to comprehend, decode and generate metaphors. The concept of conceptual fluency by Danesi (2016) and the multidimensional model by Littlemore and Low (2006) emphasize the linguistic and cognitive aspects of it. The Integrated Idiomatic Metaphorical Competence (IIDMC) model developed by Liu and Xing (2025) places MC in the context of a dynamic system based on the neural, cognitive, and contextual factors. CC that was introduced by Hymes (1972) and elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) and comprises of grammatical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic elements. Scholars (Littlemore and Low, 2006; Khalili Sabet and Tavakoli, 2023) posit that figurative language and MC in particular, is a crucial factor in pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Empirical research states that MC enhances CC through the improvement of receptive and productive abilities (Zhou et al., 2022; Khalili Sabet and Tavakoli, 2023). Therefore, MC and CC are constructs that are dependent on each other, which are the key to communicative success in L2 learning.

The previous studies of SLA considered metaphors as exception (Boers, 2000) without considering their cognitive functions. Subsequent researchers (Littlemore and Low, 2006; Danesi, 2016) have stressed conceptual fluency as a key to interpreting figurative meaning. More recent work shows that instruction based on metaphors has positive effects on vocabulary, pragmatics and cultural awareness (Boers and Lindstromberg, 2020; Dastjerdi, 2024; Alkhalaf, 2025; Liu and Xing, 2025). MC positively influences listening and reading comprehension. It therefore supports both the receptive and productive communication.

As it is demonstrated in classrooms, metaphor teaching improves vocabulary learning, pragmatic skills, and discourse proficiency (Boers et al., 2017; Khalili Sabet and Tavakoli, 2023; Dastjerdi, 2024). Research with technology support points out the benefits of the mobile, artificial intelligence, and multimodal tools (Zhou et al., 2022; Alkhalaf, 2025; Guan and Sun, 2021). The cross-cultural research demonstrates that there is a cultural difference in metaphor application and interpretation (Kövecses, 2020; Wang and Zhao, 2021; Liu and Xing, 2025). Meta-analyses affirm that metaphor instruction can always improve the communicative competence at all levels of proficiency (Zhou et al., 2022; Khalili Sabet and Tavakoli, 2023; Alkhalaf, 2025). Conventional education was centered on memorizing the material (Boers, 2000) without considering the conceptual knowledge (Danesi, 2016). Learners acquire metaphorical reasoning and independence through concept-based teaching (Negueruela Azarola, 2020); this is applicable to other fields, such as Liu and Xing (2025) and Guan and Sun (2021). Technology-assisted and multimodal with visuals, memes, and VR can help to create engagement and figurative understanding (Forceville, 2009; Zhou et al., 2022; Wang and Zhao, 2021; Alkhalaf, 2025).

MC is promoted through cognitive flexibility and intelligence (Liu and Xing, 2025; Zhou et al., 2022; Dastjerdi, 2024). The perception of metaphors is conditioned by cultural background (Kövecses, 2020; Wang and Zhao, 2021; Alkhalaf, 2025). Gender and identity are involved in metaphor use (Zhou et al., 2022; Littlemore, 2019) and motivation and affective engagement improve the performance (Dastjerdi, 2024; Zhou et al., 2022). MC supplements all the elements of CC: it facilitates pragmatic interpretation (Khalili Sabet and Tavakoli, 2023), sociolinguistic awareness (Wang and Zhao, 2021), discourse organization (Alkhalaf, 2025), and strategic communication (Littlemore, 2019). It is therefore central and not peripheral to communicative competence.

The current literature focuses too much on vocabulary learning (Boers et al., 2017), is not longitudinal (Zhou et al., 2022), and is restricted to the Asian and Middle East settings (Khalili Sabet et al., 2023). There is low neurolinguistic evidence (Liu and Xing, 2025) and low pedagogical implementation is due to poor teacher training and testing instruments (Littlemore, 2019; Dastjerdi, 2024).

### **Research Methodology**

To investigate the linkage between metaphorical competence (MC) and communicative competence (CC) among Government Postgraduate College (GPGC) karak undergraduate learners, qualitative case study design was used to develop a deep insight into the use and understanding of metaphors in academic talk among learners. The qualitative data used in the study was collected from population selected through the technique of purposive and convenience sampling; therefore, the sample will be restricted to participants who are enrolled in English courses and who have a

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basic level of English, and whom they willingly consent to participate in the study. The data collection was carried out by using semi-structured interviews so that the participants could narrate their experience in their own words keeping the research goals at the forefront. There was compliance with ethical protocols, such as informed consent and confidentiality. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data in their six-phase procedure in NVivo software. To uphold credibility and integrity of findings, reflexivity and ethical transparency were upheld.

## **Research Design**

An innovative research method was selected, a qualitative case study design, to investigate complicated, context-related phenomena like MC and CC, which cannot be studied without intense insights into the views of learners (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The design is suitable to answer the questions how and why, as well as to explore how learners of GPGC Karak can use metaphors during academic communication or why MC helps them improve communication outcomes (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

## **Population and Sampling**

The population of the study was undergraduate students who are in English language programs at GPGC Karak. The convenience sampling is based on the non-probability approach, and approximately ten participants were identified in accordance with their availability and readiness to be involved (Etikan, 2016). This is a small, narrow sample that fits the qualitative research tradition, which focuses on depth rather than breadth (Guest et al., 2020). Relevance and ethical interaction Inclusion criteria were enrollment in English courses, basic English proficiency, and voluntary participation.

## **Data Collection Tools**

The semi-structured interviews were used as a way of collecting data were the most appropriate format that combines structure with the flexibility of conversation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The metaphor awareness, challenges and perceptions about the role of metaphor in communication of the learners were investigated through open-ended questions. This is because interviews were carried out in English, they were audio-taped with consent, and transcribed word-to-word to be analyzed. This method guaranteed the rich and authentic data that was in tandem with the aims of the study.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was done after receiving institutional approval. The subjects were advised on the purpose of the study, the study procedure and that they had the right to withdraw any time. Written informed consent was realized. The interviews were conducted as individual that is, 30-45 minutes and were recorded with consent. The anonymity of the transcriptions was ensured by the use of pseudonyms to maintain the privacy of the information and keep it ethical.

## **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was based on six stages offered by Braun and Clarke (2021), including (1) familiarization with data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme generation, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6) report writing with illustrative extracts.

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NVivo software aided the coding process and the organization of themes, whereas reflexive memos recorded analytic choices (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This was a structured method which made results to be based on the experiences of the participants and which were read in a transparent manner.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study was directed by ethical uprightness in every phase. The purpose and procedures of the research were completely explained to the participants, and they were free to engage and withdraw at any time. Transcripts and reports were done using pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and all data was stored in password-protected files that could only be accessed by the researcher. Ethical approval was also received by the departmental committee before data was collected and this made sure that the standards of professional and institutional research are met.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

### **Profile of Participants**

Ten undergraduate students were used (coded as P1 to P10) in the study. They all had studied English several years but their level of proficiency, their self-assurance to use the English language and their exposure to the metaphorical language differed. Some were fluent and were at ease with using metaphors in both spoken and written language, and others had low awareness or shunned metaphors as they were not sure. Some of them were inclined to the direct and literal language, and some of them took metaphors as the strong means of expression. This variation of background and outlook made it possible to have a full and varied insight on metaphorical competence as it relates among ESL learners.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The verbatim transcripts of the interviews were read and familiarized with several times. Initial coding was made to determine significant statements on the understanding, use, attitudes, and challenges of learners on metaphors. These codes were also contrasted among the participants and were grouped into wide categories which were further subdivided into themes and subthemes. The last themes are the prevailing trends that were brought out by the data and answer the primary interest of the study. All the themes are backed by direct quotes of the subjects to give evidence and be authentic.

### **Presentation of Themes**

#### **Theme 1: Learners Understanding and Awareness of Metaphors**

This theme examines the definition of metaphors and their conscious awareness of metaphorical English language by the participants. Despite the fact that everybody in the studies had experienced metaphors, the level of understanding was different.

The majority of the participants interpreted metaphors as saying one thing using another one to convey another, deeper meaning. An example is given by P2 as he described, A metaphor is when you define something as indirectly as possible to make the point more powerful and P1 said, It is comparing two things without the words like or as. Nevertheless, there were participants who failed to draw a line between metaphors and other figurative devices. P3 mentioned that, at times, he is lost between metaphor, simile and idiom, meaning that he has partial comprehension, While some

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of them had a more sophisticated, conceptual understanding of metaphors as a means of thinking. P10 wrote that metaphor is not a mere language tool but it is a mode of conceptualizing how we think about the world, whereas P4 noted that metaphors shift the angle and assist in seeing things differently. These remarks indicate the recognition of the metaphors as mental, not only verbal, phenomenon.

Respondents indicated they were able to pick out metaphors in literature, lectures, media, and in everyday conversations. P6 said, The metaphor is used by people in lectures and presentations to explain things, and P8 said, I hear metaphors in movies and songs, and sometimes I did not notice it in the first place. Some of them associated increasing awareness with language proficiency; according to the description of P1, with more exposure I began to pay more attention to them in conversations and in books. Quite a number of the interviewees admitted that their metaphor awareness has been built over time as a result of being exposed to real language. P2 replied, I used to believe that only poets use metaphors but now I can see them all around. This is an indication that awareness is built on contextual experience as opposed to awareness raised by direct instructions.

## **Theme 2: Use of Metaphors in English Communication**

This theme examines the application of metaphors by learners in communicative situations and the factors that determine their desire to use them.

Some of them stated that they intentionally apply metaphors in formal contexts like presentations, essay or speech because they thought that it helped to explain ideas better and made them more interesting. P4 said, to make the presentation more interesting, I may use a metaphor in class and P2 responded, when I write I use metaphors to make it sound expressive and creative. Such reactions show that there are learners who realize the rhetorical worth of metaphors and strategically employ them in order to improve communication. Other participants made use of simple metaphors in real life without being aware of these metaphors as examples included; time is running or I feel under pressure. P6 said, Sometimes I do not intend to use metaphors, just when I speak. This is an indication that the use of metaphors is usually automatic and not intentional.

Some other people did not want to use metaphors because they did not know or they were afraid of being misinterpreted. P3 confessed, I am scared to use metaphors, as I do not want to sound wrong, and P9 said, I like to speak directly. Things are complicated by metaphors. These perceptions help to emphasize the discouraging effects of anxiety and low confidence on the use of metaphors, even in the case of those learners who are aware of them. Others valued the use of literal language to make their language clear, particularly in the academic settings. P9 clarified by saying that I use metaphors when doing exams or discussing serious topics since direct language can be considered safer. This is an indication of less creativity and more accuracy in the event that accuracy is appreciated.

Nevertheless, several participants, despite the reluctance, admitted the communicative power of metaphors. According to P1, sometimes a metaphor can help the listener know how I really feel, and P10 said that it can help make the speaker and the hearer on the same level. Therefore, even the non-regular users were aware of the usefulness of metaphors in conveying more complicated or emotional concepts.



**Theme 3: Perceived Benefits of Metaphors**

This theme brings out positive functions which learners have attached to the use of metaphor in English communication. Each of the participants admitted that metaphors help to enrich meaning and interest.

Most respondents considered metaphors to be effective in defining complex ideas. P2 said, Metaphors make it easy to say something complex in a concise and simplified manner and P4 continued, it is through a metaphor that hard topics are made clear and easier to comprehend. This indicates that learners interpret metaphors as cognitive aids to aid the understanding. Another perception that participants had was that metaphors were more vivid in expression. P5 said, It is difficult to describe the emotions straight, therefore a metaphor helps me do this and P1 added Metaphors present what is within the heart in an imaginative manner. This is a sign of the value of the emotional depth that is expressed by metaphors.

Some of the participants linked metaphors to more interesting and catchy communication. P4 remarked that a metaphor makes the message more compelling and the people will remember it and the P10 remarked that, metaphors help the listener to feel they are connected with the message. Students felt that metaphors enhance the imaginative and stylistic diversity. P6 stated, language using metaphors is not dull and one can be more expressive and imaginative (P6) and P7 added, that when she writes some metaphors, she feels more creative.

Lastly, a few respondents were of the opinion that metaphors facilitated recall and comprehension. P1 noted, When a teacher employs a metaphor, I can remember the concept better and P8 pointed out that a vivid image is formed in the mind hence making it easier to recall. The perceptions highlight the cognitive and pedagogical worth of metaphors.

**Theme 4: Challenges in Understanding and Using Metaphors**

Even though the participants had identified the importance of metaphors, most of them noted challenges in understanding as well as in production, and this influenced their confidence and desire to use it.

One of the frequent issues was the determination of when the language was metaphorical. P3 replied, in part, that at times he lets the sentence have its literal meaning, and then sees afterwards that it was a metaphor, P8 also replied, in part, that it is not always obvious when the person talking to him was being literal or figurative. This implies that there is a lack of pragmatic consciousness in deciphering metaphors. A number of participants expressed that they could have not understood metaphorical meaning due to poor use of vocabulary. P5 said, when I do not know one of the words, I will not be able to comprehend the metaphor, and P3 said, I have heard the words, but I did not have the opportunity to understand the deeper message. In this way, the linguistic competence has a great impact on the metaphor comprehension.

A great number of learners were afraid of making a mistake or misconception when using metaphors. P2 said, I do not use metaphors in fear that the listener will not comprehend, whereas P9 remarked, I will be embarrassed in case I apply a metaphor in the wrong situation. These fears restrict production of metaphors even when they are aware of its positive effects. It was also stated by learners that metaphors must be planned and thought of. P7 replied that she needs to think before applying a metaphor, and thus she does not use metaphors when speaking, and P3 added that she is not

confident enough to apply a metaphor without preparation. Little confidence therefore acts as a deterrent to spontaneous use.

Others considered metaphors to be too literate or inappropriate to the day-to-day application. P6 noted, some metaphors are good in poetry, but they are weird in everyday life, and P9 said that, I prefer plain words; metaphors confuse me. This is an indication of the tendency to refer metaphors to literature. Some of the participants said that language classes seldom covered metaphors. P3 noted, and P5 added, that teachers only mention metaphors in poetry classes, rather than speaking or writing classes, and that they do not practice them, and thus do not know how to use them. Instructional neglect is therefore one of the causes of metaphor-related challenges.

### **Theme 5: Cultural Influence on Metaphor Interpretation**

This topic brings out the importance of cultural background in the context of understanding and application of metaphors by learners. The participants underscored that metaphors are deeply rooted in cultures, and their interpretation is very complex and interesting.

It was well known that metaphors are products of cultural situations. P4 replied, P4 responded, metaphors are something in culture and history and thus, they are easier to understand by native speakers, whereas, P10, said, it is what you learn when you learn that this is how a particular culture thinks. Such learners therefore understood metaphors as cultural manifestations and not as a linguistic device.

Some of the participants reported that English metaphors are usually different to their first language. P8 said, In my language there are other metaphors and English are alien and P3 added, there are metaphors that cannot be directly translated. This indicates that cross-linguistic variation makes understanding difficult. Interviewees stressed that one must learn about cultural references. P6 mentioned that without knowing the cultural background, I would not be able to comprehend the metaphor and P9 stated that with sports or history metaphors, I would not understand the metaphor as I do not know the reference. Other learners also got confused with metaphors and interpreted them in their own cultural context. P5 said that occasionally the words are clear to me, but I have the wrong idea, and P2 supplemented it with the fact that a metaphor can sound good in one culture and vice versa.

Although these challenges existed, it is not that the metaphors could not be taken as a gateway to understanding culture. P10 replied, and said, The knowledge of metaphor is to enable me to have the perception of what people in that culture think like, and P4 said, and metaphors taught me about values and how people think. In such a way, the cultural learning can turn the difficulties of metaphors into learning opportunities.

### **Theme 6: Metaphors as a Component of Communicative Competence**

Metaphorical competence was commonly considered by the participants as a part of communicative competence, and it is something which adds to expressive as well as receptive skills.

Some of the learners believed that speech is made easier and more fluent by using metaphors. P6 remarked that when a person uses metaphors, the English language becomes more developed, P10 replied that it is smoother and the speech is less machine-like. Respondents accepted that metaphors have a meaning other than literal words. P1 clarified, that straightforward words are not always sufficient, a metaphor

can demonstrate the true meaning, and P4 added, that metaphors are easy to understand and persuasive. The emotional and rhetorical effect of metaphors was pointed out by many participants. P10 commented that metaphors are related to the emotions of the listener and are easy to remember or P4 said that they are useful in motivating or influencing people.

The learners also indicated that they could understand better when they were able to interpret metaphors. P8 replied, When I have a metaphor, I will get the meaning behind it and P6 replied, they are present in scholarly work and in the news, thus, they make it easier to understand. Majority of the subjects considered metaphorical competence as the focus of mastery. P10 said, without metaphors, language is flat and P1 added, it means knowing language, not grammar.

Some however, regarded them as being unnecessary. P9 remarked, Well, you can talk without metaphors with a good grammar and vocabulary. This indicates the disparity in the view of the need of metaphors during communication.

### **Theme 7: Need for Teaching Metaphors in English Classes**

This theme explores how the learners view the existing teaching on metaphor and how they strongly believe that there is a need to have a systematic and practical teaching in metaphor.

The vast majority of the people who participated claimed that metaphors were brought into the situation very briefly and in the literary contexts. According to P3, metaphors were only studied when working on the analysis of poems, and P5 said that they were only spoken about by the teachers but were not given the idea of how to use the metaphor in real communication. This is an indication that metaphor teaching is mostly theoretical. Students noticed that lessons rarely focused on the real life or communicative practice. P2 added, I was taught definitions, but not how to use metaphors when talking or writing, whereas P6 added, there was no training of the actual conversation. This brings out a knowledge-application gap.

The participants said that metaphors must be incorporated in effective skills training. P4 said, When metaphors are included in communication, then they must be taught in the speaking and writing courses, and P1 said, Students must learn to use a metaphor to convey an idea, rather than learn to recognize one. Students assumed that meaning could be made clearer and comprehensible with the help of explicit instruction. P8 explained, Metaphors can be explained by teachers and this would help us to make meaning of books, speeches, and even jokes and P7 added that when they are explained, the metaphors would be meaningful. To many metaphors were considered as a fundamental part of language acquisition. P10 said, Metaphors are all over language and it must be part of the curriculum and P4 said, To be a good speaker, we need to learn how metaphors work.

The respondents highlighted the importance of systematic and ongoing training. P5 replied, saying, that metaphors need to be taught gradually in step-like progression with real life examples, and P2 added, that teachers need to teach the metaphors not once or twice. Such learners therefore demanded a regular and purposeful incorporation of metaphors in the curriculum.

### **Theme 8: Suggestions to Improve Metaphorical Competence**

This theme provides the practical recommendations given by the learners to improve the understanding of metaphor and its production using the interesting,

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contextualized, and culturally sensitive pedagogy.

The participants suggested paying attention to everyday communication metaphors. P2 replied, we need to be taught metaphors that people use in situations, not just in poems, and P6 replied, it is easier to remember and use metaphors using real life example. Students promoted usage of multimedia resources. P8 mentioned that there are numerous metaphors in songs and movies and thus the teacher can use them to make learning enjoyable, whereas P4 said that it shows how native speakers implement metaphors in real life.

Several proposed innovative practice as one of the learning strategies. P10 replied, we take time to think and create when we construct our own metaphors and P4 continued on the same, saying it assists us to communicate personal experiences. The participants focused on cross-cultural comparison. When P5 explained that when teachers demonstrate the distinction between English and our language we can understand better and P7 mentioned that by comparing cultures, we avoid misunderstanding.

Students appreciated cooperative reading. P1 explained, we should also talk about metaphors together to comprehend various meanings and P3 said, guided practice would make us sure that we use metaphors in the correct way. Respondents sought positive criticism. P6 replied: When teachers tell us that our metaphor is appropriate in the situation, we can do it more efficiently, and P10 also said: Feedback can help us to understand that the metaphor is effective or ineffective. Others emphasized on the role of psychological safety. P7 wrote, teachers ought to give us a chance to experiment with metaphors and not to judge us when they go wrong, P4 further added that we will be more innovative when the environment is conducive.

Lastly, the learners thought that metaphor teaching had to be expanded to all areas of skill. P10 replied, Metaphors ought to be included in each skill since they abounded in language, and P1 ended, Since metaphors are part of communication, they ought to be part of any language learning.

This is indicative of a metaphorical competence holistic perception as a component of communicative competence at large.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

### **Learners Understanding and Perception of Metaphors**

Most learners interpreted metaphors as non-literal or indirect phrases that had deeper meaning, as per the conventional opinion of linguistics (Newmark, 1988). Yet, the interpretation of metaphor was different: some people accepted that metaphors could be regarded primarily as literary devices in connection with poetry (Cameron, 2003), others took the interpretation of metaphors as a cognitive tool that helps to conceptualize experience, which was in line with Lakoff and Johnson (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

The learners stated that their metaphor awareness grew as they were exposed to media, conversations and real life language as opposed to being taught, which is in agreement with Littlemore and Low (2006) argument that awareness develops through authentic input. On the whole, the perceptions were on superficial recognition and deeper cognitive understanding depending on personal experience and exposure.

### **Learners Use of Metaphors in Communication**

The use of metaphors by learners also differed depending on the context, confidence, and communicative objectives. Others deliberately applied metaphors in formal contexts to make the statement more understandable and interesting, which is why Low (2008) believes that metaphorical language would make rhetoric more effective in the L2 environment. People employed metaphors in their daily lives unknowingly (e.g., time is running), which also supports the point that metaphors are a part of the language, and they are usually processed on an unconscious level (Steen, 2010).

Instead, some shied away of metaphors because of the fear of being mistaken or culturally insensitive (Boers, 2000), opting to use literal language when the message is clear (another problem that manifests the creativity-accuracy conflict in L2 language acquisition) (Littlemore, 2010). This evasion brings to the fore the issue of affective attributes like anxiety and self-efficacy. Although used rarely, the majority of learners admitted the communicative importance of metaphors, implying that they are reluctant to use them due to poor confidence and teaching assistance instead of a failure to appreciate it. Comprehensively, the use of metaphors seems to be influenced by the confidence of the learners, exposure, and the learning environment.

### **Challenges in Understanding and Using Metaphors**

The learners encountered a number of difficulties in the understanding as well as the production of metaphors. One of the biggest challenges was the difficulty in telling between literal and figurative meaning and tended to be interpreted in a misleading manner, so, it is not surprising that Boers (2000) and Kecskes (2010) reported that L2 students process language to a significant amount on a literal level. Lack of vocabulary was also a barrier to comprehension, learners could not match up meanings between the target and source domains despite identifying metaphorical constructions (Littlemore and Low, 2006). It was only with limited contextual or cultural understanding that deeper meanings of words were missed even when they were comprehended (Charteris-Black, 2004).

The affective factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence also hampered the use of metaphors, as learners were afraid of making mistakes or saying something unnatural (Littlemore, 2010). Most of them favored literalism in schools because educational institutions were exam-focused and marks were highly valued thus creativity was not stressed. These problems were aggravated by cultural unfamiliarity, as learners were usually not able to cope with those metaphors based on English specificities, which agrees with Koeveses (2005). There was also misinterpretation when the learners transferred logic in their native language. In general, these results underline that the metaphorical competence is based on the lexical knowledge, cultural awareness, pragmatic understanding, and emotional confidence.

### **Metaphorical Competence and Communicative Competence**

The majority of learners were able to identify metaphorical competence as a key to effective communication, as they think that the metaphors use makes the speech more clear, more engaging, and more emotional. This is in line with the Canale and Swains (1980) model where metaphor plays a role in strategic and pragmatic competence through the enhancement of persuasion and coherence. This was confirmed by learners who were confident in using metaphors and this was found to enhance fluency as well as expressiveness which upheld the arguments of Lakoff and Johnson

(1980) who argued that metaphors are used to conceptualize and Boers (2000) who argued that metaphors are used to aid in understanding and remembering.

According to the participants, metaphors helped them to make the complex ideas understandable and language easy to remember, which supports the thesis by Low (2008) that they contribute to the rhetorical effect. Although some students considered metaphors to be unnecessary to achieve basic communication (placing accuracy above creativity) (Carter, 2004), the majority of the students acknowledged that metaphor is an enrichment tool to discourse and a true picture of how people use language. These results support the claim by Littlemore (2010) that metaphorical competency incorporates language, cognitive, and cultural aspects, and form an essential part of communicative competency.

### **Learners Views on Teaching Metaphors and Pedagogical Suggestions**

Findings revealed a strong consensus among learners that metaphor instruction in English classrooms is inadequate. The majority also reported that metaphors were quickly taught as part of poetry or literary analysis and hardly associated with common communication, which Cameron (2003) says are traditional curricula, which only explores metaphors in literature. This restricted exposure was perceived to detract the learning of the practical worth of metaphors and also compounded confusion on the use of metaphors by the learners, a disconnect between what they learned in classes and the practical use of language in everyday life.

The participants pointed out that explicit and systematic teaching of metaphors should be taught, as every metaphor is often present in spoken language, written texts, and media. This is in line with Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) who justify that the prevalence of metaphors in the natural language merits special training. Students thought that explicit instruction was able to boost comprehension, confidence, and production and this can substantiate the assertion by Littlemore and Low (2006) that metaphor awareness can be useful in L2 acquisition.

The learners suggested working with real materials, like films, songs, and media texts, to demonstrate metaphors in actual situations, which is at par with the cognitive linguistic approach that focuses on meaningful input (Boers, 2000). They also suggested comparison and creativity, such as the identification, interpretation, and generation of metaphors, and cross-linguistic comparisons to further enhance the level of understanding (Kövecses, 2005). Also, the learners appreciated guided practice and useful feedback to nourish the precision and confidence.

Lastly, the need to have a positive, creativity-based classroom atmosphere that neither intimidates a person nor discourages errors was also mentioned by participants, and Littlemore (2010) also discusses the significance of affective variables in metaphor use. Comprehensively, the views of learners indicate that explicit, contextualized, culturally informed, and learner-focused pedagogy could be effective to achieve metaphorical competence development.

### **Conclusion of the Study**

The major objective of this research was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of learners towards metaphorical competence and to analyse the role of metaphorical competence towards communicative competence in ESL setting. The results showed that learners tend to interpret metaphors as non-literal phrases but the level of their interpretation relies on how the learners are exposed and how they

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experience learning. Some learners perceive metaphors as literary means, others as elements of cognition and communication which form the meaning and thinking.

The study results also established that learners apply metaphors differently. Some make use of them purposefully in academic or formal applications whereas others apply them unknowingly in their daily language. But most learners shun metaphors because of fear of misuse, uncertainty or because of literal language choice. In spite of this, every participant recognized the positive impacts of metaphors in simplification of ideas, articulation of feelings, elaboration of creativity and making language interesting and memorable.

The results also indicated that learners experience a number of difficulties in comprehension and application of metaphors which include inability to differentiate literal and figurative meaning, vocabulary, culture and absence of instructional resources. Notably, the majority of the learners were of the view that metaphorical competence is a critical element of communicative competence as it adds expressiveness, fluency, clarity, and persuasiveness. Few of them considered metaphors as optional.

Lastly, the learners also stressed on the importance of metaphor teaching in the English language learning. They were not happy with the emphasis placed on metaphors in literature alone and recommended the inclusion of metaphors in daily activity, mass media, speaking and writing assignments, comparisons between cultures, guided practice, and feedback. These conclusions show that there is a serious gap in the current teaching practice, and the directions on improving pedagogy are evident.

To conclude, the paper has shown that metaphorical competence is not just applicable but a key to effective communication in a second language. The competence can be developed to improve the communicative skills, understanding of cultural differences, and the overall proficiency of the language among learners. The following section is the pedagogical implications of these findings which would be applicable to teachers, curriculum designers, and language programs.

## **Implications of the Study**

The research recommends clear metaphor teaching at all levels and skills of language. Teachers need to introduce metaphor as an ordinary communication medium and include them in reading, writing, speaking and listening activities using real materials. Anxiety can be reduced with the help of confidence-building activities, collaborating with peers, and positive feedback that can lead to creativity. The training of teachers and curriculum development must focus on metaphorical competence so that instructional resources and tests must express its communicative significance.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future researches must consist of larger and more heterogeneous samples, employ mixed-method or longitudinal research, and focus on instructional techniques in the development of metaphorical competence. Cultural factors, motivation in the learner and teachers attitudes could also be studied to address gaps between the theory and classroom practice. Research into the concept of metaphors as demonstrated in textbooks, and syllabuses would also reinforce pedagogical strategies.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The small sample size of the study, the use of self-reported data, and the short period makes the study hard to generalize. The lack of classroom observations and teacher opinion limit the understanding of the instructional practices. In spite of these weaknesses, the study provides significant information about the metaphorical awareness of learners, the difficulties, and instructional requirements, which leads to further research and better ESL teaching practices.

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