

Neglected Dimension of Lexical Competence in ELT: Metaphorical Competence*

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Abstract

In this study, ELT students' metaphorical competence was investigated. The study was conducted at a foundation university ELT Department in 2009-2010 academic years. The participants of the study were 35 students. The data collecting tool was a list of sentences that are having figurative usage, and participant were asked to translate given sentences into Turkish. Students' translations were analyzed from statistical perspective as complete, partial wrong, and untranslated, and from the standpoint of student's prep-school attendance, and the type of the high school graduated by statistics computer program SPSS 16, in addition to above mentioned criteria translations were analyzed from the linguistic perspective on semantic and conceptual basis as well. The study displays that there was no any significant difference among the participants depending on their prep school attendance and the type of high school graduated. Metaphorical competence of the students attending ELT Department was highly low, they have difficulty in expressing intended meaning of the given sentences as their lexical competence is limited in their native language. Results obtained by this study manifest that courses such as Lexical Competence, Translation, Advanced Reading and Writing, and Speaking given at ELT Departments should support students' conceptualization in target language, and knowledge of metaphorical competence.

Keywords: semantics, lexical competence, metaphorical competence, English language teaching, vocabulary teaching

1. Introduction

English language is one the most widely taught and learned languages on earth. Almost in every country where the English is not accepted as an official language, it is taught and learned either as a foreign language.

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Turkey is one of the countries where the English is taught and learned as a foreign language. Students, attending the state schools, start to learn English at the 4th grade and continue to study English until they graduate from a university. Education, covering the primary and secondary schools, is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, and higher education, covering undergraduate and graduate programs at universities, is achieved under the responsibility of the Council of Higher Education in Turkey.

The Council of Higher Education's main function is to establish coordination and cooperation among the universities. Universities are grouped under two main bodies as state universities and foundation universities in Turkey. The Council of Higher Education, besides the cooperation and coordination among the universities, aims to establish a parallelism among the programs of these universities.

Both state and foundation universities have graduate and undergraduate programs for teacher training. These programs are given either within the organization of Faculty of Education or Faculty of Science and Letters. These faculties have teacher training programs for different fields of teaching including English Language Teaching (ELT).

The Council of Higher Education, within the above-mentioned responsibility, determines the courses that should be given by the ELT Departments of these faculties. One of these courses is "Lexical Competence" and its purpose is defined by the Council of Higher Education as teaching *"the relationship between lexical items and structural forms, word formation including prefixes and suffixes, idioms, collocations, slang, euphemisms, neologisms, proverbs and phrasal verbs in spoken and written language."*

As it is seen from the course definition of "lexical competence", mentioned course does not aim to make ELT students familiar with the metaphorical concepts of the target language and also above-mentioned course description does not have any wording related to metaphorical or figurative use of target language. Given description mostly emphasize the size of the vocabulary that will be learned by an ELT Department student. Vocabulary depth seems partly under the responsibility of the instructor who is responsible from the above-mentioned course and it seems mostly the responsibility of the student.

Students who are learning English (L2) as a foreign language in a non-English environment can achieve to have a good command of English grammar and communicative knowledge that make them successful at verbal fluency. However, due to their lack of metaphorical competence, they still have problems in understanding the native speakers' intended meaning and expressing themselves within a discourse that looks like authentic. So as to make our students' discourse more authentic, L2 learners should be encouraged to be

aware of the L2 conceptual system. Unfortunately, L2 learners do not develop metaphorical competence after several years of study as they have never been exposed to the conceptual system of the L2. Within this framework, the above-mentioned course, lexical competence, gains importance in order to make ELT students familiar with the conceptual system of L2.

In Turkey, for the students, who are learning English in a non-English environment, one of the most challenging parts of foreign language learning process is vocabulary learning and using these words accurately, appropriately and effectively in their oral and written performances. They may encounter with the problems depending on their vocabulary size and depth and, the level of understanding the conceptual system of L2. Most of these students do not have a chance of using L2 in a real setting except the classroom. Their main source for vocabulary learning is their course books, and their teachers. Very limited number of those students uses L2 in their daily life by reading books and magazines published in English, watching Tv channels broadcasting in English such as CNN, BBC, Eurosport or by getting touch with people who can use English on the internet through SMS, Facebook or Twitter.

For many teachers to know the grammar rules of a language and to be able to use these rules accurately is enough to label their students as efficient and even as proficient in L2, and most of the students have a tendency to neglect the role that vocabulary plays in the use of language. Within the curriculum of English language lessons, class hours devoted to structure teaching is more than the class hours dedicated for vocabulary teaching. Actually, there is no particular class hour planned for teaching vocabulary in the curriculum. Through the skill teaching activities and especially as a part of reading comprehension activities, vocabulary teaching is promoted. From the standpoint of the teachers, Maera (1996:2) states that the way you think about your own vocabulary and the implicit assumptions you have about it, influence the way you go about teaching L2 vocabulary to learners. Depending on the Maera's above-mentioned assessment, non-native English language teachers' active vocabulary size and depth of knowledge on words gain importance for the efficient vocabulary teaching in ELT classes.

There is no doubt that the basic dimension of lexical competence is size and depth. Learners who have a huge amount of active vocabulary are more proficient in a wide spectrum of language skills than learners who have limited number of active vocabulary. Within this context a course such as "lexical competence" becomes crucial source for ELT Department students so as to improve and enlarge their vocabulary size and depth.

Velasco (2007:166) defines the lexical competence as the ability to use words in appropriate and effective ways in verbal interaction. On the other hand, Meara (1996:1)

emphasizes that lexical competence is an aspect of L2 competence which has not received a great deal of attention as it is lumped indiscriminately with other forms of linguistic form, but he underlines that lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence.

There is no doubt that vocabulary learning that is the significant part of building lexical competence, is a highly challenging for the human mind. Henriksen (1999: 304) mentions a number of very different knowledge components as well as learning, production, and reception processes for lexical competence. According to him there are three separate but related vocabulary dimensions: (a) a “partial-precise knowledge” dimension, (b) a “depth of knowledge” dimension, and (c) a “receptive-productive” dimension.

Partial-precise knowledge dimension refers to a continuum of knowledge related to word’s first partial then precise comprehension. Depth of knowledge dimension is described by Read (1993:357) as “the quality of the learner’s vocabulary knowledge”. Henriksen (1999:305) mentions numerous researchers such as Ellis, Harley, Nation and Richards who have stressed the complexity of vocabulary knowledge and the many types of knowledge that comprise full understanding or a rich meaning representation of a word. Henriksen (1999:305) states that rich meaning representation entails not only knowledge of a word’s referential meaning but also its different intentional or sense relations to other words in the vocabulary, such as paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. The receptive-productive dimension refers to a substantial difference in how well different lexical items are mastered in relation to ability to use the words in comprehension and production (Henriksen, 1993:307).

Although Aitchison’s description about vocabulary learning is related with L1, the process described by her can be accepted as the one followed by L2 learners. Aitchison (1994:170) emphasizes three different but related tasks when acquiring word meaning: (a) labeling, (b) packaging, and (c) network building. Labelling refers to the process of discovering which sequence of sound can be used as a name for a thing or an entity. Henriksen (1993:308) states this process as creation of a link between concepts, sign and referent. Packaging refers to the process of discovering which things can be packaged together under one label. Henriksen (1993:308) assesses this process as discovering the range of meanings such as derived and figurative ones for the same word. Network building refers to the process of discovering the sense relations or intentional links between words.

Moras (2001:1) points out that the teaching of vocabulary above elementary level is, mostly incidental, limited to presenting new items as they appeared in reading or sometimes listening texts. This indirect teaching of vocabulary assumes that vocabulary expansion will happen through the practice of other language skills. However, it is well known that

vocabulary expansion does not appear depending on the developments in other skills of language.

Learners still have problems both in expressing their ideas and understanding the native speakers' intended meanings within a discourse due to their lack of metaphorical competence. Their oral or written discourse does not look like authentic as well.

As it is emphasized by Russo (1997:55-56), Danesi contends that in order to learn a language fully, we must also have the ability to access and encode our expression according to the conceptual system that the language is rooted in. Danesi calls this "neglected dimension" in second language pedagogy as metaphorical competence. When learners have achieved a native-like metaphorical competence, it can be said that they are conceptually fluent. Danesi (1986:9) claims that "true sign that the learner has developed communicative proficiency is the ability to metaphorize in the target language".

Littlemore (2001:459) emphasizes the importance of the ability of acquiring, producing, and interpreting metaphors in the target language for language learning, and underlines the Hoffman's idea that words often have substantially more connotative (metaphoric) meanings than denotative meanings and that these connotative meanings are often in frequent usage.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003:3) points out that metaphors is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought and action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. However, Lakoff and Johnson (2003:3) also claim that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. They believe that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, what we experience and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.

The word *metaphor* derives from the Greek *metapherein*, transfer as META= + Pherein, to bear, in Latin the word is *metaphora*, and in Middle French the word is *metaphore* (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th Edition, 1998). Because of the word's simple root given in its etymological definition, Glucksberg (2001:3) states that metaphor has come to mean different things to different people. In the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1998) two senses of the term are given. The first sense identifies metaphor as figurative language and defines it as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them". The second sense defines the word metaphor as "an

object, activity, or idea treated as a metaphor, symbol". Glucksberg (2001:4) claims that the first sense identifies metaphor as a type of language, and the second sense identifies metaphor as a form of conceptual representation.

Within the context of these two senses, we can accept the use of metaphor as a substitution. In this process we substitute one word or concept for another. This substitution process brings metaphoric interpretation into action. Glucksberg (2001:8) emphasizes that metaphoric interpretation involves recovering the original literal expression for which the metaphor substitute. Depending on the metaphoric interpretation, metaphoric understanding forces us to use our logic so as to comprehend the discourse.

According to Glucksberg (2001:9) Grice claims at least two kinds of logic that involve in discourse comprehension: the logic of language and the logic of conversation. The logic of language applies to literal or linguistic meanings. The logic of conversation applies to the rules that people use to infer what a speaker intends to convey. This process begins with the literal meaning of an utterance and ends with an utterance meaning that is also known as speaker meaning, intended meaning or conveyed meaning. As Searle (1994:84) strictly emphasize whenever we talk about metaphorical meaning of a word, expression, or sentence, we are talking about what a speaker might utter it to mean, in a way that departs from what the word, expression, or sentence actually means.

Equip ELT students with a skill that will make possible to comprehend the speaker's or writer's intended meaning through developing their metaphorical competence will increase and enhance their deeper understanding of English expressions. If ELT students more deeply understand English expressions, not only their oral and written discourse will be more authentic, but size and depth of their vocabulary will be larger and sound as well.

As can be seen in the aforementioned review of literature looking at various aspects of both lexical competence, metaphorical competence and metaphor, there are still missing points which require more research that will shed light on the issue. Hence, in order to build onto our current knowledge of metaphorical competence in lexical competence of ELT students, this study aims to explore ELT Department students' level of metaphorical competence.

2. Method

2.1 Participant

The sample of the study consisted of 35 ELT Department students attending at a Foundation University. The males represented 28.6% (n:10) and the females 71.4% (n:25) of the samples.

The ratio of the representatives graduated from State High Schools is 54.3% (n:19), and 45.7% (n:16) of the representatives graduated from Private High Schools. Distributional ratio of the State High School graduates are as in the followings; 20.00% (n:7) from General High School, 22.9% (n:8) from Super High School, 11.4% (n:4) from Anatolian High School. Ratio of the representatives attended English Language Preparatory Class is 57.1% (n:20), and ratio of those who did not attend preparatory class is 42.9% (n:15). Representatives' score on Foreign Language University Entrance Exam is between 262 and 322.

2.2 Data Collecting Tool

In order to examine the metaphorical competence level of the students; twenty sentences that have figurative use, selected from Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English are given to ELT Department students and then the students were asked to translate the given 20 sentences into Turkish within 25 minutes. Sentences selected for this research are given in the Table 1.

2.3. Data Analysis

Each sentence has been evaluated as complete, partial, wrong on the basis of the student's translations and untranslated ones have also been clarified. Evaluation results have been scrutinized by SPSS 16.0 for Windows.

Translations of the given sentences have been analyzed from statistical and linguistic point of view. Data inputs have been analyzed statistically on the level of frequency depending on the following two variations;

- a. Each sentence's translation frequency as complete, partial, wrong, and untranslated,
- b. Each sentence's translation frequency depending on the students' prep-school attendance.

From linguistic viewpoint mentioned translations are analyzed on semantic and conceptual basis of English and Turkish.

Table 1

Sentences selected for metaphorical competence research

Number	Sentence
1.	The computer industry has spawned a lot of new computers.
2.	This new machine will emancipate us from all the hard work we once had to do.
3.	Their national airline consists of three or four rather elderly planes.
4.	She has a good line in funny stories.
5.	They continued with a long litany of complaints.
6.	They loaded me with gifts.
7.	The lovers were locked into a senseless dispute with the management.
8.	The threat of war loomed.
9.	They've lopped a few pounds off the price.
10.	We lubricated his tongue with wine.
11.	The government can't just wave a magic wand and make this problem go away.
12.	The newspaper gave a very mangled version of what happened.
13.	They have a manicured garden.
14.	He writes stories of deep sadness with an overlay of humour.
15.	Prices have plunged.
16.	He pumped his enemy full of lead.
17.	You're speaking in riddles.
18.	With her latest novel she takes her claim to greatness.
19.	These government restrictions are going to throttle our trade.
20.	The baby's sufferings wrung its mother's heart.

3. Findings

When the translations are evaluated by SPSS 16.0 for Windows, any significant difference has not been clarified depending on the prep school attendance and the type of the graduated high school.

Within twenty sentences, Sentence 6 "*they loaded me with gifts*" is the only sentence that has been translated completely by 28 participants and its ratio is %80. Similar concept, expressed in the given sentence, exists in Turkish. Participants easily understood the intended meaning in the given sentence through establishing a conceptual link between the concepts existing in English and Turkish. The only difference from the standpoint of

semantics between English and Turkish is that in English the verb “load” whereas the verb “boğmak” (literally suffocate) is used in Turkish.

“They loaded me with gifts.”

“Beni hediyelere boğdular.”

Compared with other sentences, Sentence 2 “*This new machine will emancipate us from all the hard work we once had to do*” has been translated completely by 14 participants, and rest of the sentences have been translated completely with changing number of participants from 1 to 10.

The concept expressed in Sentence 2 by the verb “emancipate” has also an equivalent concept in Turkish and the word “kurtarmak” (literally liberate; set free) is used in Turkish.

“This new machine will emancipate us from all the hard work we once had to do.”

“Bu yeni makine bizi bir zamanlar yapmak zorunda olduğumu tüm zor işlerden kurtaracak.”

The concept expressed in Sentence 13 by the adjective “manicured” is understood by 6 of 25 female and by 1 of 10 male participants, and translated completely, though the word “manicure” is closely related to females’ world, other 19 female participants could not figure out the concept expressed with the word “manicured”.

“They have a manicured garden.”

“Düzenli bir bahçeleri var.” (literally, they have a well-organized garden)

The concepts expressed by Sentence 12 “*The newspaper gave a very mangled version of what happened*”, Sentence 14 “*He writes stories of deep sadness with an overlay humour*”, and Sentence 16 “*He pumped his enemy full of lead*” are not understood. These sentences are either partially or wrongly translated, or not translated.

The concepts expressed by Sentence 7 “*The lovers were locked into a senseless dispute with the management*”, Sentence 10 “*We lubricated his tongue with wine*”, Sentence 5 “*They continued with a long litany of complaints*”, and Sentence 9 “*They’ve lopped a few pounds off the price*”, were not understood, and not translated by the participants 26, 22, 21 and 21.

Translation frequency and percentages of the given sentences have been shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Frequency and Percentage of the Translations*

Sentence	Complete		Partial		Wrong		Untranslated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	10	28.6	6	17.1	16	45.7	3	8.6
2	14	40.0	3	8.6	8	22.9	10	28.6
3	7	20.0	5	14.2	14	40.0	9	25.7
4	1	2.9	12	34.3	19	54.3	3	8.6
5	1	2.9	2	5.7	11	31.4	21	60.0
6	28	80.0	1	2.9	4	11.4	2	5.7
7	1	2.9	4	11.4	4	11.4	26	74.3
8	6	17.1	1	2.9	12	34.3	16	45.7
9	9	25.7	6	17.1	-	-	20	57.1
10	3	8.6	1	2.9	9	25.7	22	62.9
11	2	5.7	8	22.9	8	22.9	17	48.6
12	-	-	3	8.6	21	60.0	11	31.4
13	7	20.0	8	22.9	15	42.9	5	14.3
14	-	-	14	40.0	12	34.3	9	25.7
15	3	8.6	7	20.0	18	51.4	7	20.0
16	-	-	2	5.7	14	40.0	19	54.3
17	5	14.3	4	11.4	15	42.9	11	31.4
18	1	2.9	5	14.3	18	51.4	11	31.4
19	2	5.7	7	20.0	13	37.1	13	37.1
20	8	22.9	11	31.4	4	11.4	12	34.3

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Within the framework of briefly mentioned findings and data shown at Appendix 2, students, who are attending English Language Department, are not good at metaphorical competence. Their vocabulary is limited both in size and depth. Taking into consideration their translations it is also possible to say that even in their native language they have problems on lexical competence.

The students can understand the intended meaning of a sentence in target language if it corresponds to a similar concept in their native language. In some cases, they can understand the intended meaning, but they cannot express it in their own language as they do not know the equivalent expression in their native language. That's why a course such as "Lexical Competence" gains importance so as to enlarge ELT Department students' vocabulary both in quantity and quality from the perspective of L1 and L2.

Materials used in the course, Lexical Competence, must be well prepared and make students familiar with the metaphorical usage of the target language. And this course must also be supported with almost adjunct courses such as Translation, Advanced Reading and Writing, and Speaking. Through the activities that will be done in above mentioned courses, students' both verbal fluency and metaphorical competence can be improved and developed. Students can learn the conceptualization of the target language, and they can begin to think and speak with the concepts of L2.

Especially those who are preparing English Language Teaching books both in homeland and overseas must devote specific sections for vocabulary activities and they must focus on developing the associative reasoning, analogical reasoning and figurative usage formation of the second / foreign language learners. While associative reasoning makes possible getting an association for both the source and target domains utilized in metaphorical language use, analogical reasoning makes contribution to learner's cognitive development in order to make sound inferences about new or unheard metaphors or figurative use of the language, and figurative usage formation causes production of new figurative usages in L2.

As a conclusion, it must be kept in mind that today English is taught mostly by non-native speakers of English all around the world. Level of English of those who will teach it must be good at from grammatical and lexical perspectives. Future English teacher candidates should expose the conceptual world of target language during the courses such as Lexical Competence, Advanced Reading and Writing, Translation, and Speaking. Their fluency both in verbal and metaphorical use of language must be the end goal. So as to

achieve this, during their education at the Department, future language teachers' awareness of having a rich vocabulary both in size and depth and developing their metaphorical competence as a part of their lexical competence will support their teaching practice in their classroom as a good and an effective role model for their students. Having a good command of vocabulary besides grammar knowledge will contribute professional development of the future teachers' as well.

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