

# TEACHERS AS PATIENCE STONES: A METAPHOR ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF EFL TEACHERS IN TURKEY

**Melike Baş & Betül Bal-Gezegin**

*Amasya University, Turkey*

*Article History:*

*Submitted: 02.06.2015*

*Accepted: 18.06.2015*

## **Abstract**

With the application of cognitive linguistics to language teaching and learning, metaphor analysis has gained interest among researchers in recent years. This study, which is conducted in an EFL language environment in Turkey, aims to investigate students' metaphors that underlie their conceptualizations on English language teachers. Participants are students of English (n=83) studying at a university in Turkey during 2014-2015 academic year. Students were first instructed on the concept of metaphor, then they were asked to complete the metaphor elicitation sheet including the prompt "An English teacher is like ... because ...". Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Conceptual Metaphor Theory defined and developed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), who consider metaphors as mental constructs that shape human thinking about the world and reality, is used as the theoretical background for this study. The linguistic metaphors provided by the participants were first categorized thematically and then examined in parallel with previous studies (Oxford et al., 1998; Saban et al., 2006). Results revealed a variety of underlying conceptualizations that reflect different individual mappings across conceptual domains. The findings yielded new categories, which imply that culture as well as students' personal experiences might shape their perceptions on language teachers. The study is significant in the sense that it highlights the use of metaphor as an effective cognitive tool to better understand students' beliefs of their language teachers and their language learning process. In addition, it provides an opportunity for the teachers to have a self-reflection on their roles as language teachers.

**Key words:** conceptual metaphor, learner perception, English language teacher, EFL, Turkish

## 1. Introduction

With the rise of cognitive approach to language learning in recent years, the number of studies focusing on learners' beliefs has increased dramatically. The study of perception and beliefs in language learning is important since it provides the evidence to figure out how language learners view the learning context. There are several ways which enable researchers to elicit the beliefs and conceptualizations of learners and practitioners. One increasingly popular method is metaphor analysis, whereby participants generate metaphors for relevant activities and concepts and then actively work on them.

Metaphors, in the sense of Lakoff & Johnson (1980a), are fundamental mental operations by which we understand the world through mapping from known domains to unknown domains, and that some conceptualizations are metaphorically organized in our minds. Cognitive theory sees metaphor as a process and a product of mapping across concept domains. For instance, in the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY, *time* (a more abstract entity) is viewed as *money* (a more concrete entity) as in the examples "You're *wasting* my time", "You're *running out* of time", etc. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b, p.454). Conceptual metaphors are usually expressed in an A IS B format, using capital letters.

It is believed that metaphors of language learners may help teachers to develop professionally by revealing students' experiences of language learning activities and situations (see for example, Cameron, 2003; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002). Students' beliefs and perceptions of their teachers can be an indicator of their attitudes to language learning and even their overall success of the target language. It is important for the language teachers to find out these hidden perceptions which might help them to obtain more insights on their students' overall perceptions of language teachers. This, in turn, helps the teachers to foster language learning and focus on the reasons of negative attitudes and eliminate them as possible.

There are a number of studies that investigate how teachers of English are metaphorically conceptualized by both students and teachers themselves. These studies can be grouped into three in terms of the providers of metaphors on language teachers, namely, (prospective) teachers themselves, students, and both teachers and students. It should be noted that the majority of studies on metaphor analysis in EFL contexts (see e.g. Ellis, 2001, 2003; Zapata & Lacorte, 2007; Erkmen, 2010) have centered on metaphors from teachers, not the language learners themselves except for a few studies (e.g. Ahkemoğlu, 2011). The studies that explore metaphors from teachers' perspectives generally aim to help the teachers to

express and “construct representations of themselves and their experience” (Kramersch, 2003, p.125) and “to promote awareness of professional practice” (Cortazzi& Jin, 1999, p.155).

Within this framework, this study aims to explore students’ beliefs about their English language teachers through an analysis of metaphors they produced within an EFL context with the guidance of the research question “What metaphorical images do Turkish EFL students use to describe the English language teachers?”

## **2. Methodology**

In this study, we follow the general approach to metaphor collection and analysis by Cameron & Low (1999), which involves "collecting examples of linguistic metaphors...,generalizing from them to the conceptual metaphors they exemplify, and using the result to suggest understandings or thought patterns which construct or constrain people's beliefs and actions” (p.88).

### **2.1. Participants & Setting**

The study took place in the Department of Foreign Language Studies at Amasya University in Turkey. The participants were 83 preparatory class students studying English at 2014-15 academic years. The participants’ age ranged between 18 and 20. They had been studying English since their secondary school, and their English level could be considered A1 (CEFR).

### **2.2. Instrument and Data Collection**

Data were collected through a self-designed metaphor elicitation sheet adopted from previous studies (Oxford et al, 2006; Saban et al., 2006). The students were first presented with a general definition and description of the concept of metaphor followed by examples and excerpts obtained from previous studies (e.g. a child is like a notebook because whatever falls on it makes a trace). As the next step, the metaphor elicitation sheets written in students’ first language were distributed. The sheet aimed to elicit their metaphors of English teachers via the prompt “An English teacher is (like) ... because ... .” This prompt requires the participants to express their ideas about what they believe of the language teachers. This personal metaphorical reasoning was later used to classify the metaphors in the data analysis phase and understand the rationale for choosing these specific metaphors.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

The metaphor analysis methodology employed by Saban, Koçbeker & Saban (2006) and Oxford et al. (1998) was adopted in the study. The steps followed for data analysis are:

- i) listing the collected examples of linguistic metaphors (e.g. *Student-13* “meyve” [fruit]),
- ii) identifying main categories of metaphors in accordance with the students’ rationale behind choosing specific metaphors (e.g. teacher as a basic need-fruit),
- iii) constructing conceptual themes based on the main categories identified (e.g. SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE, GUIDE, etc.),
- iv) grouping the metaphors under main themes, and
- v) establishing inter-rater reliability. In order to ensure inter-rater reliability, we asked three outside researchers to independently review eight categories obtained from the data. Discrepancies were discussed and a consensus was reached on for disagreements.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of data yielded 67 properly-structured metaphors. These metaphors are grouped under 15 conceptual categories. Table-1 presents these categories, with their definitions, frequencies and linguistic metaphors in each category.

*Table-1 Teacher metaphors by students and their descriptions*

Categories	Definition	n	Examples
1. teacher as a guide	Teacher provides guidance and directs students, helps them achieve goals, supports the students, corrects them when necessary	12	guide in a desert, director, family, guide, map, pilot, star, the sun, supporter, mother, worker who guides the mine workers in a coal mine
2. teacher as the source of knowledge	Teacher is the source and/or conduit of language: dispenses language knowledge to students	11	book, transporter, primary school teacher, computer, daily newspaper, library, parents, treasure, a collection of all the

				books in the world
3.	teacher as basic need	Teacher is a vital element to survive. She meets the basic needs of the students learning a language	8	fruit, pencil lead, rain, fountain, water, water and oxygen
4.	teacher as a patient person	Teacher is someone who has to be very patient in the process of teaching	7	mother, Darwin, patience stone
5.	teacher as an instrument	Teacher provides the students with the necessary tools and opportunities to learn the language	5	transporter on a river, piano, brain, key, window
6.	teacher as a care giver/repairer	Teacher takes care of the students especially when they are in need of correction	4	nurse, doctor, intensive care unit nurse, maintenance
7.	teacher as a cultivator	Teacher takes care of the growth and improvement of the students. Teacher's job is to construct the optimal environment in which the inner nature of the mind could grow and nourish	4	gardener, farmer
8.	teacher as an authority	Teacher is the superior power, authoritative figure, and the decision maker. She controls the students	3	brain, God, boss
9.	teacher as an entertainer	Teacher is funny, friendly, energetic, entertaining the students in the language learning process. Such a teacher does not bore her students	3	soap opera, smurfs, toys
10	teacher as a	Teacher never stops learning	2	sunflower headed to the

.	chaser of knowledge	new things		sun
<b>11</b>	teacher as a molder/crafts-person	Teacher shapes the students' minds	2	interior designer, cook
<b>12</b>	teacher as a reflector	Teacher reflects her own experience, background and knowledge, as well as the culture of the target language	2	mirror, a Turkish citizen who went to Germany in 1960s
<b>13</b>	teacher as an effective agent	Teacher plays a significant role in students' lives, i.e. she affects the students and yields change in their lives by leaving a trace on those she teaches	2	ink, revolution
<b>14</b>	teacher as a harmful agent	Teacher punishes students when they are not good enough	2	cactus, hammer
<b>15</b>	teacher as a builder	Teacher helps students to be successful	1	construction worker

The qualitative analysis of the metaphors generated by the participants shows that almost all of the students participated in the study have a positive attitude towards language teachers. There are only four images out of 67 contained a negative description of the teachers, namely, cactus, hammer, boss and God. In the cactus metaphor, the teacher is depicted as an unsuccessful person who spends long time to teach but cannot improve students' language skills. Similarly, the student who uses the metaphor of "cactus" indicates that the teacher punishes the learners especially if they do not understand English. In both of these metaphors students attribute the notion of punishment with teachers. In the other two negative metaphors, boss and God; teachers are perceived as people who have the sole power and authority.

There is diversity in the metaphors found. As can be seen in Table-1, there are 15 categories and the metaphors include images of plants, various jobs, entities, and instruments. The analysis shows that language teachers are seen as enjoyable (soap opera, smurfs, toys);

effective (ink, revolution); productive (interior designer, cook); self-reflective (mirror); necessary (fruit, pencil lead, rain, fountain, water, water and oxygen); growth providing (gardener, farmer) agents.

In this study, *teacher as a guide* (n=12) is the most recurrent metaphor, and quite similar in number, the next category was *teacher as source of knowledge* (n=11). It is obvious that students consider their language teacher both as the one who teaches them the target language but also guides them in their learning procedure. These metaphors reflect the image of a teacher type who has all the knowledge and skills that students may need. TEACHER AS GUIDE metaphor entails that the language learning is seen a goal-oriented and teacher-facilitated process. TEACHER AS THE SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE metaphor, on the other hand, implies that teachers are the ultimate providers of knowledge whereas learners are the receivers of the information.

Another point to be discussed based on the metaphors found is that, as it is known, within the communicative language teaching; the focus has changed from teacher to student. This indicates that teachers should not be regarded as the sole source of knowledge but the guide to help the students find their ways in learning and exploring the target language. As can be seen above in Table-1, there is a large amount of metaphors indicating that students see their teachers both as a guide and source of knowledge. This might mean that there is a shift from what is called classical teacher role of “knowledge provider” to the role of “guide”. Thus, it is satisfying to see that metaphors, which show that students see their language teacher as an authority in class, are very limited (brain, God, boss).

Although this study shares some of the metaphors formed by teachers and learners in previous studies about language teachers such as gardener (Oxford et al, 1998), parent, map, etc. (Saban et al, 2006), mother, water, book, cook, doctor (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008), director, the sun (Guerrero & Villamil, 2002), it also reveals some metaphors unique to the present study (e.g. Darwin, stone of patience, google, sunflower headed to the sun, etc). It seems likely that these differences are due to cultural and contextual factors of this particular teaching atmosphere. The metaphor “stone of patience”, for example, is a common expression used in the Turkish culture. It is mostly used for people and it indicates that the person who is the stone of patience shows an unusual patience towards a difficult situation or task. There are five students who form this metaphor. With this metaphor, they indicate that their language teachers are very patient people who put a lot of effort in the procedure and have to wait for a long time to see improvement of their students. The students underscore

that the language learning is a gradual and difficult procedure, and the teachers are doing their best to wait for the success of their students patiently.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the present study, we investigated and classified students' metaphors about the concept of English language teacher. The analysis of the metaphors has yielded some fruitful and insightful understandings of the roles of these teachers in this particular teaching context. To begin with, the study shows that the diversity and richness of the metaphors provided is an indicator of how varied metaphorical images students have on the same concept. The study also highlights the value and significance of metaphor analysis as a tool to assist students in examining their values, beliefs, and conceptualizations of their teachers. In addition, it is a useful pedagogical tool for teachers to review and revise their teaching practices, their roles as language teachers and their attitudes if necessary.

Another important finding is that students continue to identify their teacher with a series of traditional teaching roles, such as leader, provider of knowledge, agent of change, and nurturer; however, these students also have a more "facilitating" role of their teachers which is relatively a more recent teacher role appeared with communicative teaching methodology. With the rise of this theory in language classrooms, the roles of teachers have shifted from being the only source of knowledge to the one who guides to seek and find knowledge. As this study shows, the two most commonly used metaphors come from both of these roles of teachers, namely, teacher as the knowledge provider and teacher as the guide. It is inferred that with a few exceptions (boss and God), students, in fact have come to the realization that the classroom is not teacher-centered anymore. Students should also actively participate in the learning process and teachers are there to foster their learning.

It should be within the objectives of the teacher development programs to uncover students' perceptions of their teachers through use of metaphors by which students' conceptual frameworks are analyzed. Becoming more aware of their beliefs and strategies by means of metaphors, language teachers can develop better insights into their existing roles according to students and thus they can adapt their teaching styles and strategies accordingly if necessary.

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