



Zanjan University
English Language Department

**The Relationship between Iranian EFL
Teachers' Metaphorical Conceptualizations of their Roles
and their Self- perceived Sense of Efficacy**

A Thesis Submitted to
the Department of English Language
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of MA in TEFL

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on examining the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' sense of efficacy and their metaphorical conceptualization of the role they play in class. The participants were 59 English teachers at high schools of Zanjan. They were asked to rate their sense of efficacy for student engagement, instructional strategies and classroom management on a 9-point Likert scale developed by Tschannen- Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). They were also asked to present a metaphor in order to picture their actual role in class by completing the prompt "Practically speaking, in the classroom, I am like.....".Neither teachers' years of experience nor their academic degrees were found to significantly correspond to teachers' metaphors or affect their sense of efficacy. The final results indicated that teachers' metaphors, as classified by Oxford et al.'s (1998) typology of metaphors, were weakly related to teacher efficacy for student engagement and instructional strategies but did not correspond to their efficacy for classroom management. Discussions focused on the necessity of considering teachers' conceptions of their role in teacher efficacy studies.

Keywords: EFL teachers, Teachers' sense of efficacy, Metaphor, Teachers' metaphors, Teacher's role

CHAPTER ONE

Preliminaries

1.1 Introduction

Throughout the history of language teaching methodology, teachers have been assigned different roles to fulfill in class. An account of such roles, with varying types across methods, is provided in Larsen-Freeman (1986). For instance, while teachers of Grammar Translation method were required to take on the authoritative role in class, direct method teachers were considered as facilitators of language activities, Audio lingual method teachers were expected to behave like an orchestra conductor, and Silent Method teachers, metaphorically speaking, acted like a technician or an engineer. Suggestopedia conceived of a similar role to the language teacher as Grammar Translation Method, while the community language learning teacher mostly resembled a counselor. Total Physical Response teachers were regarded as directors of student behavior. In the same vein, interestingly enough, communicative approach to teaching language viewed language teacher's role as facilitator, motivator, manager, and communicator inside the classroom (ibid.).

From the above-mentioned examples, one can infer that it was the method that prescribed teachers how to appear in class. As teachers themselves did not decide on their role in class, success or failure of the language program was attributed to the method rather than the teacher. That was the reason why teachers and researchers looked for the best method of teaching language.

The search for the best method of teaching language continued until Prabhu (1990) argued over the futility of looking for the best method. Instead, he considered

the need for teachers to learn "to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to the desired learning" (p.172).

The shift of attention from methods to teachers made the researchers look for the factors contributing to the effectiveness of teachers, including teachers' beliefs (Michael & Katerina, 2009), teachers' characteristics (Babai shishavan & Sadeghi, 2009), and teachers' behavior in class (Geving, 2007).

One important belief, which has been vastly investigated by researchers, is teachers' self-efficacy conception. This notion was first proposed and defined by Bandura (1997) as "peoples' judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions required to attain designated types of performance"(as cited in Pajares, 2002, p.4). Self-efficacy belief is believed to be the most influential factor in human functioning (Pajares, 2002), because it influences what people choose to do, how much effort they expend on the activities, and how long they persist in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1982, p.123).

In educational domain, researchers have studied teachers' self-efficacy belief in relation to student achievement (Akbari & Karimi Allvar, 2010), teachers' behavior in classroom (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), and teachers' attitude toward implementation of new strategies (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997). The same concept, i.e., teachers' sense of efficacy has also been examined in relation to teacher concerns and teacher characteristics (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999), teachers' job satisfaction (Capara, et al., 2006), teacher burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 1999; Skaalvik & skaalvik, 2010) and teachers' extra role behavior (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2000). Yet little or no research has been done to investigate the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and teachers' conceptions of their role.

Now that teachers as autonomous figures in class are promoted "to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 541), the need is felt for researchers to investigate language teachers' location-specific theories and practices, to see what they assume a language teacher should do, and what they themselves have found as practical and possible in their classes.

Since assumptions and beliefs are not easily observable, researchers turn to language as a credible means for revealing inner world of educational practitioners (Jensen, 2006, p.4). According to Munby (1986) "one fruitful way to begin to understand the substantive content of teachers' thinking is to attend carefully to the metaphors that appear when teachers express themselves (as cited in McGrath, 2006, p.305).

Recently, metaphor elicitation has been used as a powerful research method to examine teachers' beliefs about various issues related to teaching and learning (Boulton-Lewis, 2001), i.e., images that correctly picture students (Saban, 2010), textbooks (Kesen, 2010; McGrath, 2006), and teacher' roles (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003). Metaphors are seen as reflectors of beliefs and perceptions which influence teacher classroom behavior (Thornbury, 1991; Saban, 2004).

In the present research, EFL teachers' notions of an ideal language teachers' role as well as their understanding of the actual role they play in class are conceptualized through metaphors. This dual elicitation aims at helping teachers differentiate their actual role, which is the main focus of the study, from the ideal image they have in mind concerning language teachers' roles.

In reduced terms, this study revolves around two main pivots: first, to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers' metaphorical conceptualization of their role in class and their sense of efficacy, and second to explore if there is any

significant difference in the level of self- efficacy of EFL teachers who use different types of metaphors to describe their role in class.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the study

The past decade of language instruction witnessed no substantial change in our own setting with respect to teaching English at high schools. It is more than a decade that the same textbooks are taught at schools. The basic orientations of textbooks are the reading skill and grammatical structures which fail to meet students' needs regarding the use of language for communication. On the other hand, teachers, though familiar with communicative approaches to teaching language, may lack adequate professionalism and updated teaching skills to meet such needs. Students' demands are not met satisfactorily at school; consequently they rush into language institutes to learn language through communicative methods. Diversity of approaches and methods across institutes and high schools and resulting differences affect high school teachers' efficacy belief regarding language instruction. They occasionally find it difficult to effectively engage students in class or manage the class in a productive way. The situation becomes even worse when teachers persist in the traditional image of a teacher. This state of affairs seems to jeopardize EFL teachers' position at schools and render them as less capable in bringing about the desired outcome.

The statements made above are based on the researcher's own experience and observation as a language teacher at high school. The present study attempts to empirically examine high school EFL teachers' self-perceived sense of efficacy. Further attempt is made to uncover EFL teachers' metaphoric images of their role in a language class, because teachers have different conceptions and expectations of their role which implicitly direct their actions and behavior in class. What seems necessary is that teachers must be assisted to make those unconsciously-held conceptions explicit, by

reflecting on what they actually do, as well as what they must do in class. Metaphor generation helps teachers to take the role of external observer and reflect on what usually goes on in their class. In fact "...metaphor has the power to enhance the subject's understanding of educational problems and thus increase perspective-consciousness (Oxford et al., 1998, p.5).

Finally, types of teachers' metaphoric images are studied in relation to their sense of efficacy in order to test the probability pointed out by Ben-Peretz et al. (2003), who believed that "...the sense of efficacy might be dependant on teachers' general views of themselves as professionals" (p.278), i.e., to check if there is any consistent pattern in the use of metaphors with regard to teachers' levels of self-efficacy belief.

In particular, the present study is also carried out to fulfill the following purposes:

- To reveal Iranian high school EFL teachers' conceptions of a language teacher's role as well as their practical role in class through metaphors;
- To examine Iranian EFL teachers' sense of efficacy for classroom management, student engagement, and instructional strategies;
- To explore if there is any significant relationship between teachers' metaphorical conceptualizations of their roles and their sense of efficacy;
- To investigate if there is any significant difference in the level of sense of efficacy of teachers who have different perspectives toward their roles.

1.3 Significance of the Study

In the absence of strict guidelines regarding teaching language in the era of post method pedagogy, language teachers are left to decide on their own how to organize language classes. What teachers do in class remains unknown because no observation of any form takes place in high school classes in our own setting. This study tends to

uncover and portray EFL teachers' attitudes and practices through metaphor elicitation, so that educational experts can better identify and tackle the problem wherever it lies. Similarly, those who are in charge of educational reforms can draw on the results of this study.

Furthermore, the study will exhibit representative high school EFL teachers' sense of efficacy for instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. High sense of efficacy can be as critical to educational experts as low sense of efficacy. This idea was pointed out by Wheatley (2002) who considered teachers' low judgments of efficacy as not being problematic, but as an important prerequisite and a valuable incentive for teachers' learning and educational reforms.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following questions are addressed in this research:

1. Is there any relationship between the type of metaphors teachers use to describe their roles in class and their level of efficacy?
2. Is there any significant difference in teachers' sense of efficacy across the categories of social order, cultural transmission, learner-centered growth, and social reform?

On the basis of the above questions, the following hypotheses are attempted:

H0 1: There is no relationship between the type of metaphors teacher use to describe their roles and their level of efficacy.

H0 2: There is no significant difference in teachers' sense of efficacy across the categories of social order, cultural transmission, learner-centered growth, and social reform.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

The following terms have been used throughout the study:

1.5.1 Metaphor.

Metaphor is an imaginative way of describing something by referring to something else which has the qualities that you want to express (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

1.5.2 Teachers' metaphors.

In this study, teachers' metaphor refers to what teachers think they are like, or what they think a language teacher should be like in class.

1.5.3 Teachers' self- perceived sense of efficacy.

Teachers' sense of efficacy refers to "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy &Hoy, 1998, p.22).

Other terms that have been used interchangeably in this study include teacher sense of efficacy, teacher efficacy belief, or simply teacher efficacy.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

More reliable results would be gained if the study was conducted in teachers' gathering occasion where teachers could receive extra explanation and help if necessary while they were filling the questionnaires. This was not possible because of the time of data collection procedure which happened at the end of school year when teachers were preparing the students for the exams and could not provide such an opportunity for the researcher.

Furthermore, the scarcity of research on EFL teachers' metaphors and EFL teacher efficacy belief (the two variables of the present study) made the researcher rely on the relevant studies on content teachers, as well; consequently, in the literature of Chapter two, no distinction is made between language and content teachers.

1.7 Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Introduction

The first section of this chapter considers metaphor as a research tool and elaborates on the educational studies which have employed such a tool for collecting teachers' ideas about their roles in class.

The second part of the chapter introduces the theoretical framework for self-efficacy and pinpoints relevant considerations in this regard.

2.2 Review of Literature on Metaphor as a Research Tool

2.2.1 Why metaphor?

"The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another"(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.5). Metaphor does not create similarity but invites people to make comparisons and notice similarities (Lyon, 2000). In McCormac's (1990) words, "...to describe the unknown, we must resort to concepts that we know and understand" (as cited in Saban, 2010).

Metaphor was once considered as an ornamental feature of poetic language. This belief was a prevailing notion until Lakoff and Johnson (1980) compiled a book