

In the Name of God



Shahrekord University
Faculty of Letters & Humanities
English Department

**Investigating the Corpus-Based Approach Towards
Teaching Metaphorical Expressions to Iranian L2 Learners**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of M.A. in TEFL

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This Is to Certify That the Content and the Quality of the Presentation of
the M.A. Thesis Submitted by **Ala Saeidfar** Entitled:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	▶▶▶▶	Analysis of Variance
CM	▶▶▶▶	Conceptual Metaphor
DDL	▶▶▶▶	Data-Driven Learning
EFL	▶▶▶▶	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	▶▶▶▶	English Language Teaching
L1	▶▶▶▶	First Language
L2	▶▶▶▶	Second Language
OPT	▶▶▶▶	Oxford Placement Test
SPSS	▶▶▶▶	Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software
SLA	▶▶▶▶	Second Language Acquisition
SLT	▶▶▶▶	Second Language Teaching
TEFL	▶▶▶▶	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TOEFL	▶▶▶▶	Test of English as a Foreign Language

ABSTRACT

Learning metaphorical expressions is one of the momentous challenges among Iranian EFL learners, as there is a lack of research in the literature concerning corpus-based approach towards teaching in an Iranian EFL context. Ninety participants were classified to 2 groups of intermediate and advanced learners based on the results of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) prior to the course. Two lists of 50 metaphorical expressions were developed by the researcher, one based on the frequent English metaphors used in 2 contexts that were randomly chosen from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), whereas the other list included the same expressions along with their definitions. Investigating the interdependence of gender and level of English language proficiency with the repercussions of using corpus-based materials on the learning of metaphorical expressions among the Iranian EFL learners, we came to several conclusions: (1) Corpus-based materials had a positive effect on learning of metaphorical expressions among Iranian L2 learners; (2) female L2 learners outperformed males in both learning groups on the test of metaphor; (3) corpus-based teaching materials did not make any significant difference among L2 learners' metaphorical competence at different proficiency levels; and (4) there is not any significant interaction between L2 learner's gender (male and female) and proficiency levels. These results will help EFL instructors and material developers to provide the learners with the most pertinent contents for teaching metaphorical expressions and pave the way for further investigations.

Key Words: Corpus-based approach, Metaphorical expressions, Metaphorical competence, Gender differences, Proficiency level

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Overview

In recent years, more attention has been allocated to learning and teaching of metaphorical expressions because metaphorical language has been described as an important tool by which words can carry both cultural and semantic meanings (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

In metaphor studies, it is extensively believed that metaphor is a frequent phenomenon. People make regular use of metaphors in everyday, conversational language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); Scholars use metaphors in technical (Brown, 2003) and educational discourse (Salager-Meyer, 1990) and also in formulating theory; newspaper and magazines are abundant with metaphors (Koller, 2004); metaphors also exist greatly in religion (Charteris-Black, 2004), politics (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff, 2002; Musolff, 2004; Partington, 2003), and education; (Cameron, 2003; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999), to point out only a few of the domains of human activity and experience. All in all, metaphor is everywhere; as Richards (1936, p. 92) had observed, “we cannot get through three sentences of ordinary fluid discourse without it.”

However, many second language (L2) learners find metaphors the most difficult and confusing aspect of learning English as an L2. According to Bortfeld (2003), L2 learners often try to understand metaphorical expressions in discourse because they cannot access the supply of prefabricated and easily understood figurative phrases like what the native speakers do, and therefore, L2 learners might try to interpret each word in a figurative multiword item separately. As a result, reading time increases, and there might be a failure in communication, and as Danesi (1994) believes, when L2 learners produce the language, their speech often appears nonnative because of its literalness or absence of metaphor use. But as we know, learning metaphors one by one and in isolation is an almost impossible endeavor. Context is the key to make the difficult task of understanding and using idiomatic English not only possible but also enjoyable.

One approach that has changed the view about L2 teaching and use in recent decades is the corpus-based approach. According to Barbieri and Eckhardt (2007), “corpus linguistics is an approach to the study of language that involves the use of principled computerized collections of texts to investigate patterns of language use” (p. 321). In the definition of Biber et al. (1998), corpus-based analysis has four fundamental features:

- It is experimental and analyzes the real models of use in authentic texts.
- It makes use of an enormous and principled compilation of natural texts, known as a *corpus*, as the basis for analysis.
- It makes extensive use of computers for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques.
- It depends on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques.

As Biber and Conrad (2001) and Mauranen (2002) have demonstrated, a corpus can be used to distinguish the most important linguistic patterns to teach. Even though a single corpus cannot provide an inclusive selection of metaphorical expressions, it is probably a much better starting

point than a made-up list of metaphorical expressions, partly because such lists are generally without a rational focus on a particular language domain.

Considering the fact that the use of corpus linguistics in L2 teaching materials and the L2 classroom should be informed by the theories and principles of second language acquisition (SLA), this research investigates how corpus-based findings on metaphorical expressions can be integrated into a classroom model of instruction.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

L2 learners often have difficulty understanding and using metaphorical language whether written or spoken despite the instructions and pedagogical materials that they have. Regardless of the great importance of the metaphorical language use, obvious in the large amount of research done in the area of L1 and L2, no significant improvement has been made in the pedagogical practices and the design of teaching materials for metaphor comprehension and production (Kellerman, 2001). The L2 research field is copious with many successful theories and models for teaching metaphors, but the domain of practice still falls behind in its pedagogical applications (Kondaiah, 2004; Littlemore & Low, 2006). Even though there already exist books aimed to teach metaphors in L2 courses, they offer little more than idiomatic expressions and proverbs without providing necessary contexts of their authentic use in discourse. It seems like L2 learners gain linguistic and communicative competence after several years of studying English, but are not successful in developing metaphorical competence. It also seems that metaphors are ignored in L2 textbooks.

As believed by some scholars (e.g., Fernando, 1996; Schmitt, 2000; Wray, 2000), knowledge of metaphorical expressions is often associated with native speaker fluency, but it is difficult for L2 teachers and materials developers to make important decisions about how metaphorical expressions should be taught, given the diverse methods of teaching and materials that

exist. This necessitates the fact that some fundamental pedagogical changes should be introduced into the traditional teaching of metaphor, which is parallel to new L2 methodologies and textbooks.

There is also a shortage of information on how metaphorical expressions are actually used in everyday communication, and it is argued that better information on actual use might benefit pedagogy (Simpson & Mendis, 2003). However, it is obvious that there are problems of not knowing enough about how L2 learners and teachers experience the use of corpora in the classroom, when and how it should be used as part of the teaching of a language, and whether there should be an appropriate balance between the corpus-based approach and more traditional classroom methods and also the appropriateness of using corpora for all kinds of learners.

Therefore, it stands to good reason to have an investigation into such corpus-based materials for metaphorical language pedagogical use in an L2 classroom context, and as a result, utilize the findings in our teaching profession to improve L2 learners' metaphorical competence. Taken together, if metaphorical understanding of language use is so essential for L2 learners' success, both in their academic studies and in their communication in an L2, it seems right to try and explore such a novel pedagogical approach.

This study will attempt to make use of a corpus-based analysis of metaphorical expressions in order to see whether it improves the learning of these important elements of the English language. It is hoped that the results of this study can shed some light on the processes involved in metaphorical production and comprehension in an L2 context. The study, therefore, seeks answers to the following research questions:

1.3. Research Questions

In the present study, efforts have been made to find answers to the following questions:

1. Do corpus-based materials have any impact on learning of metaphorical expressions by Iranian L2 learners?

2. Does the corpus-based approach to teaching metaphorical expressions make any significant difference between male and female L2 learners' metaphorical competence?
3. Do corpus-based teaching materials make any differentiation among L2 learners' metaphorical competence at different proficiency levels?
4. Is there any significant interaction between L2 learners' gender (male and female) and proficiency levels?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

Consequently, the subsequent null hypotheses are formulated:

- H₀₁: Corpus-based materials do not have any impact on teaching of metaphorical expressions to Iranian L2 learners.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference between males and females' metaphorical competence and the corpus-based approach to teaching metaphors.
- H₀₃: Corpus-based materials do not make any difference among L2 learners' metaphorical competence at different proficiency levels.
- H₀₄: There is not any significant interaction between L2 learner's gender (male and female) and proficiency levels.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Metaphor is used in the everyday moments of our lives. In family and work situations, people use metaphor to explain their feelings and opinions to other people, and to convey joy, consideration, appreciation, along with negative thoughts and ideas. Metaphor is around us as we go about our everyday profession, affecting the way we understand ourselves and others. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) repudiate the endorsed impression as “metaphor is for most people a device of poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language . . . a characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action” (p.