A REVIEW OF THEORIES FOR METAPHORE EXAMINATION IN THE EXPOSITORY WRITING OF EFL LEARNERS

Mohammad Nour Yaser Alhroob & *Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi

Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 21030 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia.

*Corresponding Author: mohdnazri@unisza.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the relevant literature and theories adopted to examine the comprehension of semantics interpretation of metaphors in the expository writing of EFL learners. Three related theories are discussed; the cognitive theory of metaphor, the conceptual theory of metaphor and scaffolding theory. These theories constitute the paradigms related to figurative language in linguistics and are concerned with cognition, conceptualisation of meaning, and the usage of language in a particular context. Whereas the cognitive metaphor theory explicates the cognitive processes which prompt the EFL learners to acquire, reconstruct and map both written and spoken English metaphorical expressions in mind, the conceptual metaphor theory enables the EFL learners to make perceptual comparisons between the metaphorical concepts in their native language and those in English. The third theory, the scaffolding theory is useful to assess whether the comprehension of the semantic interpretation of metaphorical expressions in a binary discussion, between Arabic and English, helps the EFL learners to comprehend the metaphorical expressions in English language and use them in their expository writing. This paper concludes that metaphors are not mere literary elements for a particular group or a specified language speaker, but are integral elements of daily human interaction with their environment and can be shared across languages, based on their conceptual connotation.

Keywords: Metaphor; expository writing, cognitive theory; conceptual theory; scaffolding theory.


1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of metaphors has been a tradition in various intellectual fields and disciplines including philosophy of language, literary study, and linguistics. Taking this notion into consideration, metaphor has been recognized as the exclusive territory and field among literary scholars. Furthermore, the concept of metaphor could be traced back to the Rhetoric and Poetics era of Aristotle (Raii, 2009). Metaphor is considered as a special territory and field for most
scholars in literary studies (Ungerer & Schmid, 2013). Imre (2010) stated that the subject of metaphor has been the focus of numerous studies over centuries. The nature of metaphor is one of the dedicated subjects for debate back to the time of Aristotle who explained metaphor in the position of a noun, describing that metaphor normally ‘happens’ to the noun (Imre, 2010).

The major reason to study metaphors in expository writing is that the use of metaphors tends to make up a greater part of many areas of everyday reasoning. The interest of analysing metaphors in the expository writing of EFL learners developed because of its usefulness in improving the writing skills of EFL learners. Many writers use metaphors to explain their expository thoughts and conceptions without realising it.

Writing is one of the fundamental language skills, which requires a high linguistic knowledge and grammatical background. The term ‘writing’ is conceptualised by many scholars to refer to an integrative skill and an important constructive and complex learning process. Connally (2013) defines writing as a process as well as a product that requires creativity, concentration, and determination. Some researchers also defined writing as an important skill in foreign language (FL) learning that aims to provide language learners with the chance to develop the proficiency they require to write and produce personal letters, written essays, or research papers. Also, writing as an important language skill enhances the cognitive and metalinguistic awareness (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2011).

In addition, learning to write in EFL context poses a lot of difficulties for learners due to the complexity that requires comprehensive and systematic writing instruction. As stated by (So & Lee, 2013) the learning and teaching of L2/FL writing include various factors, such as the responses from teacher and peer, the process of writing, writing instructions, and writing activities. Besides this, the learners of L2/FL need to address the organisation, content, mechanics, and structure in an appropriate manner for the purpose of conveying meaning with the help of writing concurrently (So & Lee, 2013).

2.0 THE COGNITIVE THEORY OF METAPHOR

Cognitive linguistics is a branch of linguistics that emerged in the 1970s. It opposes the previous structural and generative approaches to language description. It basically concerns the relationship between language and the mind. It also attempts to explain the cognitive processes which trigger the attainment, storage, fabrication, as well as comprehension of writing and speech (Marashi & Dadari, 2012). Cognitive linguists hold that language is based on the human subject’s experience and interaction with the world. Language form and usage emerge from conceptualisation, from the way in which human experience is perceived and conceptualised.

Cognitive linguists view metaphors from the pragmatic point of view that emphasises more on comprehension of the semantic interpretation of metaphors. They are the symbolic expressions grounded in cultural and cognitive meanings (Lakoff, 1993). In this view, metaphors are reflections of mental models which represent the likeness of reasoning and the process of solving problems of the narrator (East, 2009). Moreover, the cognitive theory of metaphor opposes the conventional perspectives that conceive metaphors as literary tools used basically in the poetic language and literary works. In addition, most of the cognitive researchers (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993; Sweetser, 1990) have perceived metaphor as the universal phenomenon in routine communication, and this tends to reflect a conceptual process output that assists in understanding one domain regarding the other (Coulson, 2005).
In other words, cognitive metaphor is the manifestation of complex processes of perceiving, acting, and remembering linguistic expressions. Leary (1994) posits that cognitive metaphor is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but also related to comprehension of meaning in semantic-metaphoric expressions. Thus, cognitive metaphors can refer to phenomena of language learning pedagogy, perception, monitor skills and problem solving—indeed to any phenomenon under cognition that occurs in natural language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993). In addition, metaphors are described as a reference to one area by using words that are more commonly connected with one another. Every metaphor is also perceived as a structural mapping from one domain to another. Based on this perspective, metaphors depict the cognitive system where they form an important part for symbolising the structure of those abstract concepts. This helps in comprehending the abstract concepts by the use of more concrete ones (Lakoff, 1993).

It is continually argued by cognitive linguists that the notion of metaphor is at the centre of human dialect. Besides, the fundamental belief is that metaphorical expressions depend on people’s physical experience, and they offer a foundation for the investigation of depictions in a synchronic frame (Hart, 2011; Wilson, 2011). The awareness of metaphorical dialect is subject to deep comprehension of the words. Literal language is exact and clear while a non-literal dialect is vague, and is to a great extent the area of novelists as well as poets. While literal language is an ordinary way of discussing things, metaphoric dialect is literary and exotic (Moran, 1997).

3.0 CONCEPTUAL THEORY OF METAPHOR (CMT)

Conceptual metaphor theory is a theoretical framework for metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). According to Hamdi (2010), the motivating factor of conceptual theory of metaphor was on the difference that it has been drawn between the conceptual metaphors in relation to linguistics metaphor. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) challenge the common conceptions of metaphor used to prevail among linguistic circles. They discard the notion of metaphor as a property of words that was deliberately used to depict a type of figurative speech used without and as something that required talent to be used properly (Kövecses, 2010). They also challenge the common cognitive assumption that mind is separate from the body (Ritchie, 2006).

Furthermore, the conceptual theory of metaphor implies that metaphor is used constantly and effortlessly by everyone. According to the theory, metaphor is a property of concepts, not words, and it is an irrevocable process of human comprehension and interpretation (Kövecses, 2010). Notably, the major postulation of conceptual metaphor theory is that it rejects the notion of metaphor as being just a linguistic pattern and a poetic device that is the sole property of literary and rhetorical discourse. Metaphor is so pervasive in people’s lives and a considerable amount of everyday discourse is actually metaphorical, whether people know it or not (Aldokhayel, 2014).

Hamdi (2010) posits that scholars (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010) have revolutionised people’s conception of metaphor. They have shown, on the basis of language data, that metaphor is not a merely linguistic tool used by poets to embellish their language; rather, it is concerned with thought, action, and language. It shapes actions and thoughts. Metaphor is a conceptual mapping of a source domain to a target domain, where elements of the source correspond to elements of the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These
cognitive correspondences enable people to think about the target domain in terms of the source domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

To illustrate with an example, English native speakers understand and conceptualise the concept of ‘love’ in terms of the concept of ‘journey’ through the conceptual metaphor ‘love is a journey’. In this case, the term ‘lovers’ is conceptualised as ‘travellers’. Thus, ‘love’ relationship is like the vehicle while the complexity in a relationship is compared to the obstacles in travelling (Lakoff, 1993). In another example given by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), quantity could be interpreted figuratively through verticality; less is down and more is up. Another example could be of price where prices fall or they might rise, or they can even hit the bottom as well. Looking at these examples, quantity can be seen as the target domain while verticality can be seen as the source domain. Lakoff (1993) asserts that metaphor is charting from verticality onto the quantity.

The basic claim made by Conceptual metaphor is that it conceptualises the cognitive representation of two expressions or words from two different domains apparently linked at the primary level. On the other hand, the conceptual metaphor could be considered as an abstract concept that is derived by means of linguistic metaphor. For instance, the use of English linguistic metaphor, when one talks about time, such as ‘use your time wisely’ and ‘I am wasting my time’, are considered as some of the linguistic comprehensions of the basic conceptual metaphor, and time is one of the constrained resources (Hart, 2011). Therefore, it is argued by the conceptual metaphor theory that the core conceptual metaphor tends to comprise the understanding of one notion regarding the other (Hamdi, 2010).

Compared to definitions of metaphors in general, Lakoff’s and Johnson's (1980) definition of metaphor is somewhat controversial. In their opinion, most people think that a metaphor is not considered as part of everyday language, but is more a special or extraordinary type of language. In addition, they claim that people link metaphors to words and how they are strung together, rather than ideas or action. As a result, people might even think that metaphors are unnecessary in communication. They also claim that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphoric in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This generally means that people are not aware of their conceptual system when they think or interact with other people. Mostly, this is done unconsciously. They argue that human thought processes are largely metaphoric (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

4.0 SCAFFOLDING THEORY

The term ‘scaffolding’ is introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross in 1967. Vygotsky (1980) predated them with the development of this notion. He introduced the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Later, almost after a decade, ZPD was included in his social learning theories. In these theories, Vygotsky claimed that learning is most likely to occur in a social environment by means of interaction with knowledgeable, people and peers as well. Therefore, a learner according to Vygotsky comprises an actual level for his development as well as the potential to develop (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). According to Vygotsky (1980), this difference is called the zone of proximal development that is between these two elements.

Henceforth, Vygotsky describes the distance between the actual developments as the zone of proximal development which is achieved by means of independent problem-solving. In contrast, the level of potential development is recognised by means of problem-solving
under the guidance of an adult, or in cooperation with more knowledgeable peers (Daniels, 2016). The notion of scaffolding in many contexts of academic language and learning commonly refers to ‘teaching’ or ‘support’. It is routinely used by tertiary teachers and particularly in the field of ‘academic language and learning’ (ALL). However, it is frequently not obviously understood or satisfactorily theorized (Smit, van Eerde, & Bakker, 2013).

Accordingly, scaffolding is pedagogically significant, as it allows the instructor to adopt a framework in order to help learners tackle some problematic issues beyond their efforts. Hence, the scaffolding framework is based on the adult “controlling” those components of the assignment that are at the ability of the learners. Based on this view, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1967) suggest six major functions of scaffolding.

The six key roles of scaffolding include recruitment, reduction, maintenance, marking, control, and demonstration. Recruitment enables the tutor to involve the learners in an attractive and productive learning activity that could encompass a lively and interactive sessions. The second function, reduction enables the tutor to develop the named activities around the manageable components, for instance, the tutor is to address only the essential elements pertaining to the outlined tutorial. Also, the maintenance ensures that the learner is gainfully engaged an on-task program. As such, they are entitled to acquire the specified knowledge content according to the Vygotsky’s (1980) model. Meanwhile, marking accentuates the principles parts of the activity that the leaners may not deviate.

The scaffolding theory also offers a practical control approach to the outlined learning activities by keeping the tutor and the learner within the realms of the named curriculum. To illustrate, the tutor will only introduce the learners to the simple metaphors at the early stages of learning enable stress-free transition. Lastly, demonstration enables the tutor to provide a modelled up sample guide to solving given solutions for the learners. Demonstration is crucial in comparative cases where in the case of English and Arabic metaphorical expressions.

In addition, Holton and Clarke (2006) emphasise on the two main functions of scaffolding: i) The act of teaching tends to support the immediate construction of knowledge by the learner, and ii) The act of teaching tends to offer the foundation for the independent learning of individuals in the future.

In the case of the present study, scaffolding theory will be employed to teach the students English metaphors based on the semantics interpretation of metaphors of both English and Arabic languages. The teaching framework is designed based on the Albrici’s (2016) three levels of metaphor classifications and Zibin’s (2016) five types of metaphors. Lakoff’s and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and Vygotsky’s (1980) scaffolding theory discussed some important issues to understand the research area.

5.0 RATIONALE FOR EMPLOYING THE THEORIES IN EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The Cognitive theory was found pertinent to the research which aims to investigate the comprehension of the semantic interpretation of metaphors in the expository writing of EFL learners. This theory claimed that the human language was organised based on its cognitive usage (Evans & Green, 2006). The major assumption of this theory is that metaphors are viewed as aspects of pragmatic linguistics that emphasises more on comprehension of the semantic interpretation rather than literary devices used mainly in the literary works and poetry.
Moreover, conceptual theory of metaphor is a major theory under the premises of cognitive linguistics. Lakoff (1992) posits that metaphors are cognitive aspects of language usage which play important roles in exemplifying the organisation of abstract notions which contribute to understanding the abstract concepts with the help of more concrete ones. Metaphors are properties of concepts, not words (Kövecses, 2010). Thus the meaning of metaphors is conceptualised beyond the stylistic view of figurative usage of words (Gibbs, 2011). This theory postulates that metaphors are conceptualised as the mental representation of two apparent expressions or words from different domains that might be linked at the primary level.

Furthermore, Scaffolding theory was found relevant to the present study as it postulates that learning as a change of behaviour involving training or teaching. Learning also tends to occur in social environments by means of interacting with knowledgeable persons or educated peers. Scaffolding instruction is reported to allow prospective gains for EFL learners (Bodrova & Leong, 1998; Eickholdt, 2004; Schwieter, 2010). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also claim that the pervasive nature of metaphors is that they are entities of day-to-day expressions and not only restricted to poetic literary style or rhetoric.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Metaphors and metaphorical inferences arise from various instances in human interaction with the environment, and this review has discussed the various theories that attribute the conceptualization of such interactions to the art of metaphors in the everyday language usage. The cognitive theory of metaphors, conceptual theory, and the scaffold theory broadly discuss the semantic interpretation and use of the metaphorical expressions in EFL writing across languages in a universal approach. The cognitive theory of metaphors supports the EFL learners to acquire and construct the English metaphors in their mind to obtain the meaning. The conceptual theory of metaphors enables the leaners to map out the expressed concepts in the given metaphor thereby establishing their relationships across languages. The scaffolding theory empowers the learning process thereby enabling the EFL learners to develop an understanding to semantically interpret and use English metaphorical expressions in the expository writing.

The three theories empower the EFL learners to interpret and develop a strong understanding the English metaphors their correct usage in expository writing. This review has illuminated the significance of the three theories in the aiding the expository writings of the EFL learners. Further, this paper has presented the three theories in a view to demonstrating the universal concept of the metaphors as ingrained elements of human interactions, rather than literary or poetic continents. As such, the EFL leaners are presumably in a position to gain the capabilities to interpret and use the English metaphors in the expository writing. Notably, the scaffolding theory framed a tutor-based approach to equip the learners with the needed capabilities for the semantic interpretation and use of the English metaphors in the expository writing. Hence, this review provides a theoretical approach to the use and interpretation of the English metaphorical expression in the expository writing by the EFL learners.
REFERENCES


