

The Effect of Explicit Instruction versus Input Enhancement Teaching of Metaphors on Comprehension and Retention

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Abstract – The fact that language plays the most important role among human beings is of no question. The impact of conceptual metaphors are more significant when it comes to second and foreign language contexts where the target language is being learned with the hope of being used for successful communication. In the present study, a group of 60 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected and their performance on metaphors was analyzed after the treatment sessions which were based on two ways of teaching metaphors, namely explicit instruction and input enhancement. A pretest, post-test experimental design was conducted to investigate the effect of explicit teaching of conceptual metaphors and linguistic enhancement of linguistic metaphors and see their effect on comprehension and retention of idioms in two intermediate English classes in the EFL context of Kermanshah, Iran. The results of statistical analysis, independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test, showed that the conceptual way of teaching had a statistical significant priority over that of input enhancement in both the post-test and the delayed posttest.

Keywords: metaphorical expressions, idioms, conceptual metaphors, explicit instruction, input enhancement

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between culture and language communication success was not so significant before. With the emergence of social factors in language communication, this point got significance to the point that it has become noticeable for those in the field of ELT that language and culture are in fact inseparable. Thus, culture elements in teaching are gaining more and more importance, and we must have enough knowledge about second language we are targeting as language under study. Learning a new language while living in the cultural environment of that language involves to come to terms with the new ocean you are going to live in.

Yet, the impact of conceptual metaphors are more significant when it comes to second and foreign language contexts where the target language is being learned by many people, young and old, for various purposes. In the case of idioms, their meaning was taken to be arbitrary, unpredictable and an alternative way of expression given the existence of literal equivalents during the time when language contact in virtual environments was not that common. For example, instead of using the idiom ‘spit fire’, a student might have

been encouraged to use the equivalent 'get very angry/mad'. Such beliefs influenced the teaching of this vocabulary strongly, with metaphors being neglected or marginalized and idioms being learned through alphabetical listings at a random order and by de-contextual focus on their meaning. To this end, the present study was intended to explore whether raising learners' awareness of conceptual metaphors can facilitate their comprehension of idioms in the FLT context of Iran where real life contact with the native speakers of English is very rare.

II. LETRATURE

The prevalent emergence of figurative language in everyday communication and participation especially in routine conversational discourse has gained increasing importance since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's in (1980) which was instantly followed by their individual publications on outlining the paradigms of cognitive semantics (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987). To add more flesh to the bare bone of precise interpretation of metaphorical instances, in this line with what Low (1988) claims, polysemous lexical items appear more in their derived figurative sense than in their literal sense and this in turn places a huge burden on the shoulders of both learners and teachers regarding how to shed logical light on figurative, metaphorical interpretation of literal meaning of the expressions. As an instance of polysemy, one can refer to economic field where, for example, words like *decline* and *growth* do not seem to refer to what they probably mean in a discourse field such as *relationships* and *family relationships*, but to *economic duress* and *prosperity* respectively. Still it must be noted that their figurative meanings in both field are substantially inspired by their ordinary literal meaning which according to Boers (2000), for the in-depth comprehension of semantic metaphors, drawing learners careful and contingent attention to the literal meaning of metaphoric chunks is inevitable. That is, according to Boers (2000), mere focus on depicting connotative interpretation of expressions could not come about without some understanding of the real literal components, the claim which, I think, is in need of elaboration and empirical validation before it is considered as a scientific truth and the issue is quite debatable. However, the tendency to focus more on metaphorical expressions and figurative speech come from the fact that conveying the conceptual meaning through metaphorical expressions is much fine-detailed than expressing it through everyday conversational chunks which are thought of, from the part of the lay people, as the building block of the language. It is of course more problematic when the language learner finds the opportunity to engage in a conversation with a person who doesn't share the same native language as him. If such a person finds the opportunity to engage in conversation with a person who does not speak the same language as him/her, s/he might face communication breakdowns at times and that some concepts are not easily grasped. This in itself, however, necessitates paying closer attention to figurative language and metaphorical expressions besides literal meaning of the words. Moreover, since the proponents of the views of language learning as a general learning do not know any room for language endowment and predispositions, it is necessarily urgent that research on metaphorical chunks and idioms which are conveying holistic

meanings be conducted so that empirical findings can come to support the theoretical claims put forward in this up to now.

III. METHODOLOGY

A pretest, post-test experimental design was conducted to investigate the effect of explicit teaching of conceptual metaphors and linguistic enhancement of linguistic metaphors and their effect on comprehension and retention of idioms in two intermediate English classes in the EFL context of Kermanshah, Iran. In this design, the effect of conceptual teaching of metaphors was compared to that of their teaching by input enhancement and random noticing and their effect was assessed on idiom retention and comprehension, so depending on the research questions of the study, a t-test was used to compare the performance of the groups and each group with itself on two situations. To compare the performance of the two groups on each other on pretest and posttest, independent sample t-test was used. That is, an independent sample t-test was used to compare the performance of the control and experimental group on two measures, namely their pretest and posttest. To compare the performance of each group on two different situations, that is to compare their performance on posttest and delayed posttest, paired sample t-test is used. The study was carried out in a formal school setting located in the city of Kermanshah, Iran.

A. Participants

The selection of the participants of this study was carried out based on random sampling procedure since the researcher selected the participants from among 150 intermediate EFL learners in Fahim Institute, Zaban Sara Institute, and Fanavar Institute in Kermanshah, Iran. Of the 60 boys and 90 girls who were studying in the intermediate level, ACC 15, in the mentioned Institutes, 45 boys and 70 girls who had their scores of the preceding semester within the range of 85 to 95 and expressed high interest to participate in the study were selected. Among those 115 students who were almost at the same level of proficiency based on their score on previous semester, within the range of 85 to 90, a 40 multiple choice idiom test was distributed. Of the attending participants, 60 who had the highest scores were chosen as the participant of the study. The 60 chosen participants who, despite having a homogeneous range of scores in the idiom test, highly expressed their satisfaction with regard to their participation in the study were divided into two 30- student classes each containing 15 male and 15 female students.

B. Instrument

Two different instruments were used in this study: scores gained by the participants from their previous test to pass the level ACC 14 and three series of 40 multiple-choice tests assessing learners' performance on selected idioms in the pretest, posttest and delayed post-test phase. To assess the learners' performance on comparative comprehension of idioms taught by accidental enhancement of metaphors versus their conceptual teaching, another set

of 40 item multiple-choice idiom comprehension test devised based on English idioms from the same book, *Vocabulary Organizer*, was delivered to the learners one week after the treatment sessions were over.

C. Procedures

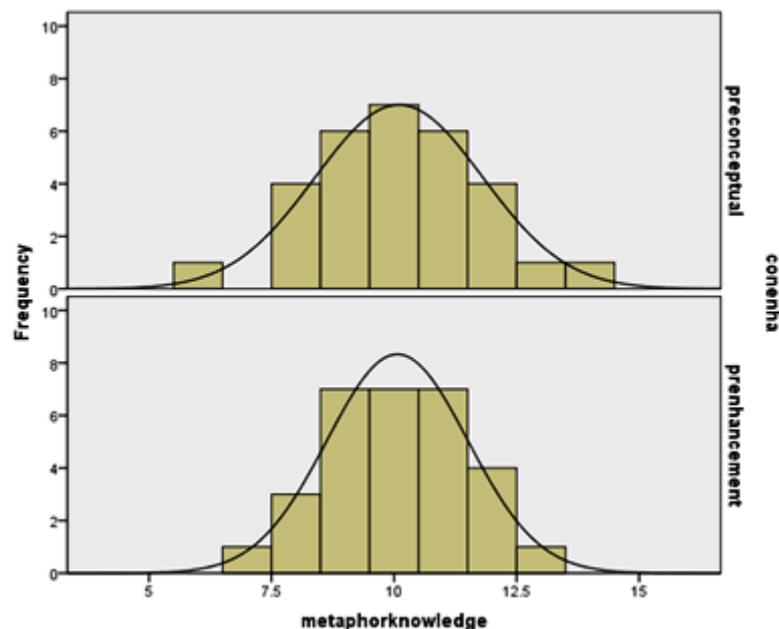
In order to conduct the study and collect the required data related to the research questions and hypotheses, the following procedure was followed.

Of the 60 selected participants from three language teaching institutes. 30 were assigned to idiom enhancement group and the other 30 were assigned to conceptually teaching group. To control for the sex variable as a possible intervening variable, 15 participants of each sex were assigned to each group that is each group consisted of 15 male and 15 female participants.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the first statistical analysis, for the experimental group (conceptual) compared to the control one (enhancement) regarding the average of holistic score (0-40) is highly noticeable. Figure 1 is a good indicator to show the normality of measures of the two groups in their pretest.

Figure1: Normal distribution of the groups



Comparing the performance of each group on a posttest and a delayed posttest is of significance. So, as it is clear from the histograms, the distribution is not skewed but normal, although the measure for enhancement group is a bit steep.

A. Descriptive statistics of the Data

Before probing into analyzing the data related to the research questions of the study, a descriptive statistics for the pre-tests data is presented to better help the reader make a rough guide into subsequent interpretations as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the groups

<i>Case Processing Summary</i>							
conenha		Cases					
		Valid		Missing		Total	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
metaphor knowledge	1 preconceptual	30	100.0%	0	.0%	30	100.0%
	2 pre enhancement	30	100.0%	0	.0%	30	100.0%

Next, the preliminary t-test conducted to probe more into the statistical information related to both groups of the study can be more illuminating.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for pretest

<i>Group Statistics</i>					
	conenha	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Metaphor knowledge	1 preconceptual	30	10.10	1.709	.312
	2 preenhancement	30	10.07	1.437	.262

Table 3: Independent t-test of pretest measure

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Metaphor knowledge	Equal variances assumed	.495	.485	.082	58	.935	.033	.408	-.783	.849
	Equal variances not assumed			.082	56.338	.935	.033	.408	-.783	.850

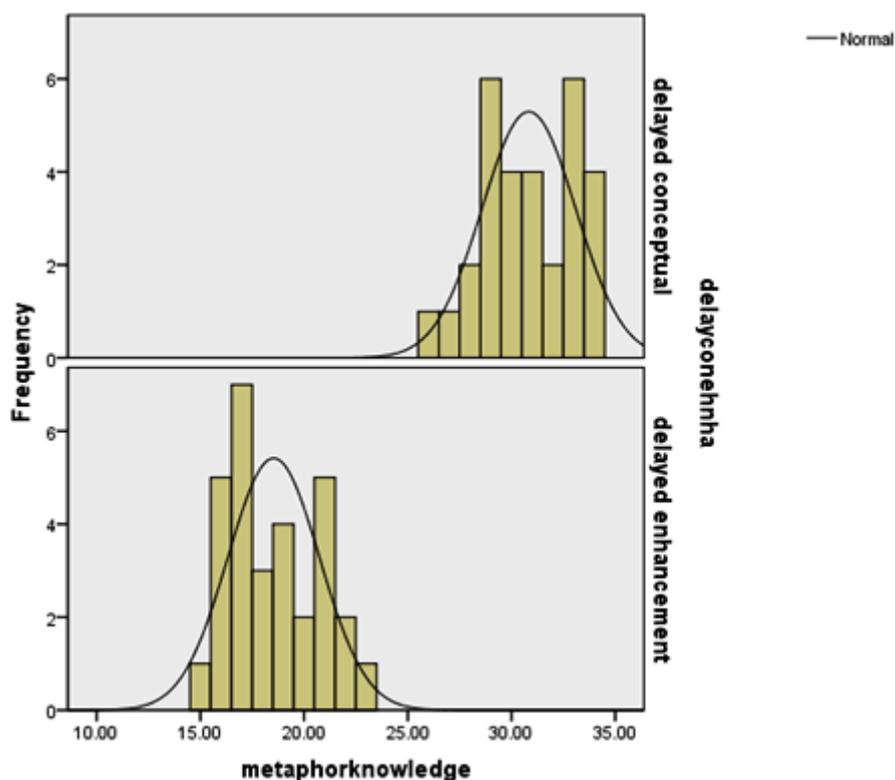
Another important assumption is that the parametric techniques are obtaining populations of equal variance so that type 1 or type 2 errors are not committed. In fact, it is highly important that the variability of scores of each group is similar. As the first section of the table 4.4 shows, the Leven's test for equality of variance is assumed. Since the sig. value for Leven's test is larger smaller than .05, the second line of the table is a good indicating measure for the present study. The independent sample t-test results show that, there is no significant difference in scores for conceptual ($M=10.10$, $SD=1.70$) and enhancement ($M=10.07$, $SD=1.43$; $t(58) = .08$, $p=.9$ two-tailed).

Also, the critical level of significance is significantly beyond .05 (.93 as the table show), and this can clearly indicate that there is no statically significance difference between the groups which could in itself be an evidence for normality of measures and equality of variance between the means of the two groups of the present study.

Table 4: Paired samples t-test for posttest and delayed posttest of conceptual group

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	postcon - delaycon	1.70000	2.21515	.40443	.87285	2.52715	4.203	29	.000

Figure 2: Histogram representation of delayed posttest of conceptual and enhancement group



As figure 2 shows, the dispersion of scores for conceptual group is positively skewed while it is negatively skewed for the enhancement group. Compared to figure 1, which shows normality of the distribution before treatments, and based on the results achieved in table 4, we can see how different metaphor teaching styles have affected our samples in different ways.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of statistical analyses, one conclusion that can be drawn is that the conceptual teaching of metaphors to Iranian EFL learners can have much better effect than teaching them by input flooding by way of bringing the metaphor knowledge accidentally to their attention.

One important thing to note here is that the way Iranian English teachers deal with metaphor teaching, as the input enhancement group shows, must be looked at very cautiously and carefully. Since the metaphor knowledge is highly linked to cultural knowledge of the target language, it is highly urgent that Iranian EFL teachers try to teach the metaphor knowledge conceptually so that learners can better shape their mental knowledge of the metaphors. Today, it is crystal clear that metaphor proficiency of the Language learners as a leading technique for success is need of close scrutiny on part of English scholars and practitioners. Also, based on the results, one can conclude that metaphor teaching and

metaphor comprehension should not be looked at as something accidentally which can take care of itself automatically without the need of being attended to. That is metaphor teaching and metaphor comprehension, besides other components required for the communicative competence, is in urgent need of being carefully attended to and practiced during the classroom practice in essence and by conceptual understanding of their roots and similarities, if the learners are required to perform well on the metaphorical knowledge assigned to them both inside the classroom and beyond that in the authentic communicative contexts.

Moreover, the second finding of the study regarding metaphor comprehension seems to be of concern. The difference between performance of the learners of both conceptual and input enhancement group in delayed posttest compared to that of posttest raises huge concerns. As the results of the study showed, the performance of both conceptual and input enhancement group on the delayed with two months interval very significantly decreased. This might originate from several reasons.

The first one is that EFL learners in Iran are not supplied with metaphorically rich contextual input both inside and outside the class which in consequence resulting in their forgetting the vocabulary knowledge they have received no matter which way. Unfortunately, due to poor metaphorical knowledge of Iranian EFL teachers, due to cultural distance between their own native language and English, the students are most probably deprived of rich metaphorical contextual knowledge, resulting in their not being able to recall the metaphor expressions in the long run.

The second cause of insignificant retention after long run might be due to insufficient emergence of metaphorical expressions in the books designed for EFL classes not only in EFL context of Iran, but all over the world. Rough look at the content of EFL books clearly shows that such books are not acquisition rich, thereby not resulting in making the learners actively involved in dealing metaphoric knowledge.

To sum up, on the basis of the findings of this study, there is a strong indication that improving metaphoric proficiency of Iranian EFL learners can be best developed through well-proposed teaching models as that of conceptual way of teaching metaphors is in itself and in principle and philosophy following the well-attested theories of teaching embedded in the process of language learning. The results of the present study suggest that the striking potential role of conceptual models such positively enhance different aspects of metaphor proficiency in a second language and hence should not be underestimated in the current activities of Iranian English language context.

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