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Metaphor, Meaning, and Mind: University Students' Perceptions of Literary Metaphors

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement of the Master Degree in

Didactics of English

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Dedication I

To my beloved parents, the unbreakable wall, my father; and to the light of my life, my mother, whose unconditional love, endless support, and unwavering encouragement.

To my late aunt; may her soul rest in peace, who always wished to witness my graduation and share this special moment with me. Her love and memory will forever remain in my heart.

To my older brother who has always been my supporter, Aymen…To my brother whom I cherish the most, Amir.

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Every ending makes space for a new beginning, and sometimes a closure is just the start of a brighter path.

I dedicate this dissertation to those who shaped the life journey of my lovely parents.

To My grandma Massouda.

To my little brothers Abdou and Yassin.

To my dearest sisters Manel, Rim and little one Chahra I pray to Allah that she succeeds in her medium level certificate.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates students' understanding of metaphors in English literature and the challenges they face while interpreting figurative language. The study focuses on how EFL students perceive metaphors, the strategies they use to understand them, and the role of classroom instruction in developing their interpretive abilities. Since metaphors are widely used in literary texts, understanding them is considered an important aspect of literary comprehension and critical thinking. The research follows a qualitative approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with six third year students of English. The participants shared their experiences, opinions, and difficulties related to metaphor comprehension in literary texts. To analyze the collected data, thematic analysis was adopted in order to identify the main recurring ideas and patterns in students' responses. The results of the study show that students generally understand the importance of metaphors in literature, but they still encounter several difficulties when trying to interpret hidden meanings or culturally specific expressions. The findings also reveal that students rely on different strategies such as context, previous knowledge, personal interpretation, and teacher explanations to understand metaphors more effectively. In addition, classroom interaction and guidance were found to play an important role in facilitating metaphor comprehension.Based on these findings, the study suggests the integration of more interactive and practical activities in literature classes to help students improve their interpretation skills and develop better understanding of figurative language

Key words: Metaphor comprehension, Figurative language, EFL literature instruction, Reading strategies, Cultural barriers, Qualitative research.

List of Abbreviations and Symbols

CMT : Conceptual Metaphor Theory

EFL : English as a Foreign Language

L1 : First language/ Native Language

L2 : Second Language/ Target Language

TBLT : Task-Based Language Teaching

ZDP: Zone of Proximal Development

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Résumé

الملخص

1. Background of the Study

While Conceptual Metaphor Theory has significantly explained how metaphors function inhuman cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), limited attention has been given to how EFL students in Algerian universities understand and interpret literary metaphors in authentic English texts. Traditional language instruction in Algeria often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary over metaphorical competence, which may limit students' ability to engage deeply with literary discourse. Metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but fundamental cognitive mechanisms that shape human thought and conceptualization. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that abstract concepts such as time, emotion, and morality are structured through metaphorical mappings from concrete domains. Similarly, Kövecses (2010) highlights the cultural dimension of metaphor, emphasizing that although metaphorical thinking is universal, interpretation varies across sociocultural contexts. From a cognitive perspective, metaphor comprehension involves mapping a source domain onto a target domain (Gibbs, 1994). Neuroscientific research further suggests that figurative language activates both linguistic and sensory-motor brain regions (Bohrn, Altmann, & Jacobs, 2012), indicating that metaphor processing is grounded in embodied cognition. Despite these theoretical advances, empirical research examining how Algerian EFL students cognitively Process literary metaphors remain scarce. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring students' metaphor comprehension within the EFL classroom context.

2. Statement of the Problem

Understanding metaphors is essential for academic success in higher education; particularly in literature-based courses. However; many Algerian EFL students struggle with interpreting figurative language in English texts This difficulty often results in superficial reading, where students focus solely on literal meanings while overlooking deeper symbolic interpretations. Consequently, their critical thinking and analytical skills may be hindered.

Although metaphorical competence plays a crucial role in advanced language proficiency, limited research has investigated how Algerian EFL students perceive and process literary metaphors. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring how Algerian EFL students understand and interpret literary metaphors, the difficulties they encounter during this process, and the strategies they use to construct meaning. In doing so, the study contributes to filling a noticeable gap in the existing literature on metaphor comprehension within the Algerian EFL context.

3. The Research Questions

In order to address the research problem and achieve the objectives of the study, a set of research questions was developed:

1. How do university students perceive and interpret literary metaphors in authentic English texts?
2. How do cognitive and linguistic factors, particularly language proficiency, influence students' perceptions of figurative language?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of students' metaphorical interpretation strategies for developing metaphorical competence in the EFL classroom?

4. Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore university students' perceptions of figurative language, through qualitative inquiry, focusing on the interpretation of literary metaphors and the cognitive processes involved in meaning-making. In order to achieve this overarching aim, the research sets forth the following three specific objectives:

Specific Objectives

1. To examine how third-year EFL students interpret selected literary metaphors in authentic English texts.

2. To investigate the cognitive and linguistic factors, specifically language proficiency, influencing their ability to construct metaphorical meaning.
3. To formulate pedagogical implications that may enhance metaphorical competence in EFL instruction.

5. Significance of the study

This This study addresses a significant gap in English language teaching and didactics in Algeria. Traditional EFL instruction at the university level has largely emphasized grammatical and structural competence, often neglecting the development of metaphorical competence. However, understanding metaphors is essential for interpreting meaning beyond the literal level and for developing higher-order thinking skills.

The theoretical significance of this research aligns perfectly with three core dimensions: metaphor as a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, meaning as a process of interpretation and construction, and mind as the cognitive system underlying metaphor comprehension. By connecting this these three dimension, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of metaphor processing within the Algerian EFL context.

Moreover, by adopting a qualitative approach, this study significantly contributes to the field by giving a gives voice to students as active meaning-makers. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, it explores their interpretive strategies and cognitive processes rather than reducing their linguistic performance to numerical scores. Thus, this inquiry contributes to a deeper, more nuanced, and human-centred understanding of figurative language comprehension in higher education.

6. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design to explore university students' perceptions and cognitive processing of metaphorical language. The sample consisted

of six third-year EFL students selected through purposive sampling based on specific research criteria.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured, text-centered, audio-recorded interviews incorporating verbal protocol elements. Participants were asked to look back and reflect on their personal experiences, struggles, and strategies when dealing with metaphors in their university literature classes. This allowed the researcher to get deep, qualitative answers about how students actually understand figurative language.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to examine and code the interview transcripts. Recurring patterns related to learners' interpretation strategies, cognitive processing mechanisms, and influencing factors were systematically identified and categorized.

Ethical Considerations

To maintain strict research ethics, the participants' identities were kept completely confidential. Pseudonyms such as "Participant A" and "Participant B" were utilized throughout the text to guarantee absolute anonymity. Furthermore, verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to conducting and audio-recording the interviews, ensuring they were fully aware of the research purpose and their right to withdraw at any time.

7. Structure of The Dissertation

To provide a clear framework for this study, the dissertation is divided into two main chapters. Chapter One (Theoretical Framework) reviews the relevant literature on metaphor theories, figurative language in the EFL context, the cognitive linguistics perspective, and metaphorical competence. Following this conceptual foundation, Chapter Two (Data Collection and Analysis) presents the administration and analysis of the student's interview

using a thematic analysis approach, followed by a summary of the findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations for students, teachers, and future researchers.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Secrion one: Theoretical Foundations of Metaphor and Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Introduction

Metaphor is a device of the poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish, a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson state: “Metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action” (1980, p. 3). This quote highlights the classical assumption that metaphor belongs only to artistic or literary expression, implying that it is not essential for ordinary communication or cognition. Moreover, it is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, which is a matter of words rather than thought and action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor.

On the contrary, metaphor is pervasive in our ordinary lives, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system which we both think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect; they also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. This demonstrates that metaphor is pervasive in our ordinary life, not just in language but in thought and action. “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). This quote directly challenges the traditional view by emphasizing that metaphor is not limited to language. Instead, it plays a crucial role in structuring how individuals think and act in their daily lives. Unquestionably, our ordinary conceptual system in terms of which we both think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state, “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which

we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (p. 3). This means that metaphor is deeply embedded in the human mind. It is not just a way of speaking, but a way of understanding reality, organizing experiences, and guiding behavior.

1.1.1. Definition and Historical Evolution of Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. "A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). This simply means that metaphor is when we use a word in a non-literal way to give a clearer or stronger meaning.

Theorizing about metaphor is usually believed to have started with Aristotle. But obviously, metaphorical language, or at least language we would call metaphorical, has been used since much earlier times. The oldest written texts, such as the Mesopotamian epics and the Homeric poems, are replete with language that looks roundly figurative to us: "Figurative language, especially metaphor, appears very early in human texts and reflects basic ways of thinking" (Gibbs, 1994, p. 22). This shows that metaphor is not something new. Even in very old texts, people were already using it naturally. This means humans have always used metaphor to explain ideas and describe things in a simple and understandable way.

1.1.1.1. The Traditional/Aristotelian View: Metaphor as a Decoration.

According to Aristotle, one of the earliest scholars to theorize metaphor, a metaphor is: "The application of a name belonging to something else; either from genus to species, from species to species, or by analogy" (Aristotle, trans. 1984, p. 21). This definition emphasizes the idea of a transfer of meaning, where a term normally associated with one entity is applied to another based on perceived similarity.

For example, Aristotle's classic example was "The ship plows the sea." This means that the action of plowing, which is usually related to farming, is used to describe how a ship moves through water, showing similarity in movement.

In contrast, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but a fundamental mechanism of human thought. They define metaphor as: "Understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). This simply means that metaphor is not just about language, but about how we understand things. We use something familiar to explain something more abstract.

While the Aristotelian view dominated for centuries by treating metaphor as a decorative feature of language, it could not explain why metaphor is so common in everyday speech, which later led to the cognitive approach developed by Lakoff and Johnson.

1.1.1.2. The Cognitive Shift: Metaphor as a Fundamental Mental Faculty

A new and most influential perspective on metaphor, challenging the traditional theoretical approach, was systematically introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their work. This research has defined, in part, cognitive linguistics as we know it today. Moreover, metaphor, as a means by which one thing is described in terms of something else, has been described as a central tool of the human cognitive system.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor plays a crucial role in our understanding of how language, thought, and discourse are structured. "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). This quote shows that metaphor is not something limited to language only. It is deeply connected to how we think and how we understand everyday experiences. In other words, we often use metaphor without realizing it because it is part of our mental system.

It would be difficult to view metaphor only as a phenomenon of everyday language use or merely as a tool of poetic imagination, limited to literary contexts. Instead, metaphor should

be understood as a basic element of human thinking that shapes how we interpret reality in daily life.

1.1.2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory was introduced in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), which marked the beginning of a new way of understanding metaphor in cognitive linguistics. The theory goes back a long way and builds on centuries of scholarship that takes metaphor not simply as an ornamental device in language but as a conceptual tool for structuring, restructuring, and even creating reality.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, our conceptual system is largely metaphorical; this means that people understand abstract concepts through more concrete and familiar experiences. "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). This quote means that metaphor is not only used in language, but it is part of how we think and organize ideas. We understand abstract things like life, time, or emotions by using more concrete experiences.

For instance, conceptual metaphors such as "ARGUMENT IS WAR" are reflected in everyday expressions like "defending a position" or "attacking an argument" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). These expressions reveal an underlying cognitive mapping between a source domain (war) and a target domain (argument), showing how we understand abstract ideas through familiar physical experiences.

Demonstrating how metaphor structures both language and thought, Zoltán Kövecses provides a practical overview of metaphor theory. He explains how conceptual metaphors operate across cultures, offering examples of emotion metaphors and health metaphors. He also introduces the idea of embodiment, showing how human physical experience shapes metaphorical thought. "Conceptual metaphors are not arbitrary linguistic expressions but are motivated by bodily experience and cultural patterns that structure human understanding"

(Kövecses, 2010, p. 4). This quote means that metaphors are not random. They come from how we experience the world physically and culturally. For example, emotions are often described using body-based experiences like temperature or movement, which shows the link between body and thought.

1.1.2.1. The Contributions of George Lakoff and Johnson

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson revolutionized the study of metaphor by demonstrating that it is not merely a decorative feature of language but a fundamental mechanism of human thought. Their central claim is that conceptual metaphors structure how we understand and experience abstract concepts. As they famously state: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). This is clearly illustrated in examples such as TIME IS MONEY ("You're wasting my time") and LIFE IS A JOURNEY ("She's at a crossroads in her life"), where abstract domains are understood through more concrete experiences.

In addition to this contribution, Mark Johnson (1987) developed the idea of embodiment in cognition, arguing that meaning is fundamentally grounded in bodily and sensory experience. In other words, our conceptual system is shaped by the way we physically interact with the world. This is reflected in spatial metaphors such as "up" being associated with positive states (e.g., happiness, success) and "down" with negative states (e.g., sadness, failure). Johnson's work emphasizes that abstract meaning cannot be separated from physical experience, as the body provides the basis for conceptual structure.

Another key insight from Lakoff and Johnson is that language reflects underlying conceptual structures rather than creating them or determining them. In this view, language is not the source of thought but a manifestation of pre-existing mental frameworks. We think in terms of conceptual systems, and language simply expresses these systems. As they explain:

"Our conceptual system is largely metaphorical" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). This means that linguistic expressions are surface realizations of deeper cognitive patterns. For example, when we say "time is running out," we are not inventing meaning through language; rather, we are expressing an already existing conceptual metaphor in our minds where time is understood in terms of movement and physical resources.

Overall, Lakoff and Johnson's work shifts the understanding of metaphor from a purely linguistic phenomenon to a cognitive and embodied process that structures both thought and language.

1.1.2.2. The Mechanics of Mapping: Source and Target Domains

One of the central components of CMT, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, is the notion of mapping between conceptual domains. Mapping refers to the systematic set of correspondences established between two domains: the source domain, which is concrete and grounded in physical or everyday experience, and the target domain, which is more abstract and conceptually complex.

This idea is clearly supported by Lakoff's explanation of metaphor in cognitive terms: "The locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203). This quote emphasizes that metaphor is fundamentally a cognitive process rather than a linguistic ornament. In other words, metaphors operate at the level of thought by structuring one mental domain (the target) through the structure of another more familiar domain (the source). The importance of this statement lies in shifting attention from words themselves to the underlying conceptual system: language simply reflects these mental mappings rather than producing them.

In CMT, the source domain functions as the structural framework that is projected onto the target domain. This projection is not random; it follows stable and systematic correspondences. For example, in the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, elements

from the source domain of journeys, such as travelers, paths, destinations, obstacles, and directions, are mapped onto the target domain of life, where they correspond to individuals, life paths, goals, difficulties, and choices. This allows individuals to understand an abstract and complex concept like life through the more concrete and familiar experience of physical movement through space.

Another key mechanism of mapping is systematic projection, meaning that only selected aspects of the source domain are transferred to the target domain. These mappings are organized and coherent rather than arbitrary. For instance, in the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, participants in an argument are mapped onto adversaries, while ideas or claims are mapped onto positions that can be defended or attacked. As a result, the focus is placed on conflict, opposition, and strategy.

However, not all elements of war are projected onto argumentation; aspects such as physical weapons or bodily injury are generally not part of the metaphorical mapping. This selectivity demonstrates that conceptual mappings are structured systems that highlight certain relationships while excluding others.

Overall, mapping in CMT provides a powerful cognitive mechanism for understanding abstract concepts by organizing them through structured, experience-based correspondences drawn from more concrete domains.

1.1.2.3. Embodied Cognition: the Physical Basis of Figurative Language

Embodied cognition proposes that human thought, language, and abstract reasoning are deeply grounded in bodily, sensory, and motor experiences rather than being purely abstract mental operations. This means that cognition is shaped by how the body interacts with the physical world. This idea is strongly supported by Lakoff and Johnson, who state: “The mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious, and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 3). This quote highlights two key points. First,

cognition is not separate from the body; instead, it arises from embodied experience. Second, abstract thinking is not independent or purely logical but is structured through metaphorical processes rooted in physical experience. In other words, when we think about abstract ideas such as time, emotions, or life, we rely on patterns originally formed through bodily interaction with the world.

Metaphors therefore function as conceptual bridges that connect physical experience (source domains) to abstract meaning (target domains). For example, the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY draws on bodily experiences of movement, direction, and navigation to help us understand the abstract progression of life events. Similarly, emotional states are often conceptualized through physical orientation, such as "feeling down" for sadness or "feeling up" for happiness (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) further argue that abstract concepts are structured through recurring sensorimotor patterns that emerge from everyday bodily experiences. These patterns form the foundation of conceptual metaphors, meaning that meaning itself is not purely linguistic but is shaped by repeated interactions between the body and the environment. Thus, the human body plays a central role in constructing meaning and organizing thought.

In addition, the theory of conceptual blending, developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, expands this idea by explaining how meaning is created through the integration of multiple mental spaces, including embodied experience and abstract knowledge. In blending, elements from different domains are combined dynamically to produce new meanings that are not present in either input space alone. This shows that cognition is not static but actively constructed through interaction between perception, memory, and imagination. As Fauconnier and Turner (2002) explain: "Meaning is not in the input spaces themselves, but in the blend that emerges from their integration" (p. 48). This quote emphasizes that meaning arises from the *interaction* of mental spaces rather than from isolated concepts. When embodied

experiences are blended with abstract ideas, new cognitive structures are formed, allowing humans to reason about complex and unfamiliar domains.

1.1.2.4. Mental Representation and the Perception of Figurative Meaning

Mental representation refers to the way the human mind encodes, organizes, and stores information about concepts, including figurative language. Figurative expressions such as metaphors, idioms, and metonymies are not merely linguistic structures; rather, they reflect underlying cognitive processes that connect abstract ideas to more familiar and concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this sense, understanding figurative language involves activating and manipulating mental representations that are already stored in memory.

Perception, in this context, refers to the cognitive ability to recognize, interpret, and situate figurative expressions within a meaningful context. This process does not occur randomly but follows a sequence of interrelated cognitive steps.

Firstly, the mind engages in the activation of literal meaning, where the brain automatically processes the surface or literal interpretation of the words. Subsequently, if this literal interpretation does not fit the surrounding context, a detection of incongruity occurs. This clash between literal meaning and contextual expectations signals that the expression is likely figurative rather than literal. Afterwards, the mind initiates figurative mapping, searching for a conceptual relationship between the expression and relevant knowledge stored in memory. This involves linking a source domain (concrete experience) to a target domain (abstract concept), allowing meaning to emerge through conceptual association. Finally, the interpreted figurative meaning is integrated into mental representation, meaning it becomes part of the overall understanding of the situation, enriched by both linguistic and contextual information (Glucksberg, 2001).

It is important to note that this process is not strictly linear but dynamic. The initial failure of literal interpretation is essential because it triggers deeper cognitive processing.

Without this mismatch, the mind would not search for alternative (figurative) meanings. In other words, incongruity acts as a cognitive signal that activates metaphorical interpretation.

Figure 1: The Cognitive Process of Metaphor Perception

Literal word processing

↓

Detection of incongruity

↓

Figurative mapping

(Source domain → Target domain)

↓

Integration into mental representation

↓

Contextual and cultural influences

↓

Perception and comprehension

In this model, the process begins with literal interpretation. When this interpretation fails to align with contextual expectations, the cognitive system detects incongruity, which acts as a trigger for deeper processing. This disruption forces the mind to search for a figurative interpretation that resolves the mismatch.

During figurative mapping, the mind establishes structured correspondences between a source domain and a target domain, allowing abstract meaning to be constructed through familiar experiential patterns. This stage is crucial because it transforms linguistic input into conceptual understanding.

The final stage involves integration into the mental representation, where the figurative meaning is incorporated into the overall cognitive model of the situation. At this point, comprehension is influenced not only by linguistic cues but also by contextual and cultural knowledge, which shape how meaning is interpreted across different situations.

Importantly, the resulting mental representation is multimodal, meaning it involves not only linguistic processing but also sensory, emotional, and cognitive components. This explains why figurative language often feels vivid, intuitive, and emotionally rich, as it activates multiple layers of human experience simultaneously.

1.1.3. The Cultural Dimension of Metaphor

Metaphors are not only linguistic tools but also cognitive structures that are deeply shaped by culture. Cultural background plays a major role in how individuals conceptualize abstract ideas, and consequently, it influences both the formation and interpretation of metaphors (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In other words, while some metaphors may appear universal, many are culturally specific because they are grounded in shared experiences, values, and belief systems within a given community.

This idea is strongly supported by Kövecses (2010), who emphasizes that "metaphors are not just a matter of language, but of thought and culture" (p. 4). This quote highlights that metaphorical meaning cannot be fully understood without considering cultural context. Metaphors are shaped by the way a society experiences the world, which means that different cultures may conceptualize the same abstract idea in different ways.

For example, the concept of time is metaphorically structured differently across cultures. In many Western cultures influenced by industrialization, time is often conceptualized as a resource or commodity, as seen in expressions like "wasting time" or "saving time." This reflects a cultural value system where efficiency and productivity are highly prioritized. However, in other cultures, time may be understood more cyclically, connected to natural rhythms and life cycles rather than as a limited resource.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also support this view by stating: "The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details" (p. 3). This quote explains that metaphorical concepts are deeply

embedded in everyday life and behavior, not just language. Therefore, when a culture values time as a resource, this metaphor influences how people plan, speak, and even make decisions in daily life.

Overall, metaphors reflect both universal cognitive patterns and culturally specific experiences. They reveal how human thought is shaped not only by bodily experience but also by the social and cultural environments in which individuals live.

1.1.3.1. Universal vs. Culture-Specific Metaphorical Mapping

Metaphorical mappings can be broadly divided into universal and culture-specific patterns, depending on their cognitive and experiential origins.

Universal metaphorical mapping refers to metaphors that arise from shared bodily experiences and basic cognitive structures common to all human beings, regardless of cultural background. These metaphors are typically grounded in fundamental sensorimotor experiences such as spatial orientation, movement, force, and perception. A clear example is verticality metaphors, where "good" or positive states are associated with "up" and negative states with "down," as in HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Such patterns are considered embodied, since they originate from universal human experiences such as standing upright when healthy or physically collapsing when unwell. As Barsalou (2008) explains: "Conceptual knowledge is grounded in perceptual, motor, and introspective states of the body" (p. 37). This supports the idea that universal metaphors emerge from shared bodily experiences that shape human cognition across cultures.

In contrast, culture-specific metaphorical mapping refers to metaphors that are shaped by particular cultural values, environments, and historical experiences. These metaphors reflect how different societies conceptualize abstract ideas in ways that are meaningful within their own cultural systems. For example, in English, the metaphor TIME IS MONEY emphasizes productivity, efficiency, and economic value, reflecting a capitalist worldview where time is

treated as a limited resource. In Japanese, expressions such as “the heart blooms like a flower” reflect a cultural sensitivity to nature, aesthetics, and emotional subtlety. Similarly, in Arabic, metaphors like “the heart is a candle” express emotions through imagery linked to light, warmth, and spirituality, highlighting cultural associations between inner feelings and symbolic illumination. These variations demonstrate that abstract concepts are shaped by culturally embedded ways of thinking (Gibbs, 1994; Kövecses, 2010).

Overall, this comparison shows that metaphorical mapping operates at two levels: a universal level, grounded in shared bodily experience, and a cultural level, shaped by social values, history, and environment. Together, these two dimensions demonstrate that metaphor is both biologically grounded and culturally constructed.

This dual perspective highlights the complexity of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, showing that meaning is simultaneously embodied and culturally situated. Building on this theoretical framework, the following section will introduce the empirical study, which aims to examine how these metaphorical processes are reflected in real linguistic and cognitive data.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this first section has demonstrated that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device used to beautify language, but also a fundamental cognitive tool that helps individuals understand and explain abstract ideas. The section traced the evolution of metaphor studies from the traditional Aristotelian view to the cognitive approach developed by Lakoff and Johnson. It also explained major concepts such as source and target domains, conceptual mapping, embodied cognition, and mental representation. Furthermore, the section demonstrated that culture has a significant influence on metaphor interpretation because meaning is shaped by individual experiences and social backgrounds. Overall, this section provided the theoretical foundation for understanding the close relationship between metaphor, cognition, meaning, and culture.

Section 2: Metaphor in the EFL Context

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is not just about mastering grammar rules and vocabulary; it also requires the ability to understand non-literal meanings. This section focuses on the role of metaphor within the EFL context. First, we will examine the importance of figurative language in achieving advanced language proficiency, along with the main linguistic and cultural challenges that students face. After that, this chapter looks at the cognitive aspect of interpreting literary metaphors, discussing models like the "Career of Metaphor" and the use of think-aloud protocols to discover how students think. Furthermore, we will define "metaphorical competence" as a key pedagogical element, exploring its components, its place in the EFL curriculum, and how the first language (L1) affects this process. Finally, this section presents different teaching approaches, comparing explicit and implicit instruction, and suggests practical strategies to help students better interpret metaphors in literature.

1.2.1. Figurative Language in Language Learning

Figurative language encompasses a wide range of non-literal linguistic expressions such as metaphors, similes, idioms, hyperboles, and personification, which convey meaning indirectly rather than through the literal definitions of words (Kövesces, 2019). In the context of EFL instruction, learners are often exposed to literal language first, which makes the interpretation of figurative expressions a cognitively demanding task. According to Boers (2013), learners' ability to comprehend and produce figurative expressions, often referred to as figurative competence, involves not only linguistic knowledge but also pragmatic awareness, which is the understanding of how language functions in social and cultural context. Littlemore

(2019) further explains that figurative thinking helps learners connect linguistic forms with conceptual and cultural meanings, which enhances communicative competence and intercultural understanding.

1.2.1.1. The Importance of Figurative Competence in Advanced Proficiency

At advanced stages of language learning, learners are expected to move from basic grammatical accuracy to pragmatic and interpretive fluency. Figurative competence plays a key role in this transition. As highlighted by Bachman (1990) in his model of communicative language ability, language proficiency includes not only grammatical knowledge but also pragmatic and strategic competence. Mastering figurative language allows learners to engage with authentic texts, including literature, media, and conversational discourse, in ways that literal comprehension alone cannot support (Shen, 2015). For instance, understanding a metaphor like "Time is a Thief" requires recognizing the abstract mapping between the concept of time and the human experience of loss; this is not explicitly stated but is culturally and cognitively understood by native speakers (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Without figurative competence, learners often misinterpret such expressions, leading to gaps in reading comprehension, listening, and even verbal expressions,particularly in advanced EFL tasks where nuanced meaning is critical (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). Recent empirical research by Chen (2021) demonstrated that learners who received explicit metaphor instruction achieved significantly higher scores in reading comprehension and literary interpretation tasks than learners taught through traditional approaches.

1.2.1.2. Linguistic and Conceptual Challenges Faced by EFL Learners

EFL learners often face two main challenges when dealing with figurative language. One primary obstacle is that figurative expressions often defy literal translation rules, requiring learners to access conceptual and cultural knowledge that extends beyond vocabulary memorization (Littlemore & Low, 2006). For example, idiomatic expressions such as "kick the

bucket" cannot be understood by translating individual words; learners must interpret the phrase as a culturally conventionalized metaphor for death. Another challenge arises from traditional EFL curricula, which tend to prioritize grammar and vocabulary acquisition while underemphasizing figurative forms, leaving learners less prepared for real-world communicative situations (Alm, 2014). Consequently, learners may fail to decode underlying meanings in authentic discourse, limiting their receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (speaking and writing).

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that learners' success in figurative language comprehension is influenced by several factors, including linguistic proficiency, cognitive maturity, exposure to the target culture, and explicit instruction (Boers, 2013). Learners with higher language proficiency can detect patterns in metaphoric mappings and infer meanings from context, whereas beginners often rely on literal interpretations that hinder comprehension (Shen, 2015). This suggests that integrating figurative language instruction into EFL curricula is essential for developing advanced linguistic and pragmatic abilities. Pedagogical approaches may include metaphor awareness exercises, exposure to authentic texts, and guided interpretation tasks that connect figurative forms to learners' prior knowledge and cultural experiences (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008). Deignan (2005) explains that many metaphorical expressions are deeply rooted in cultural and contextual usage patterns, making them difficult for foreign language learners to interpret through vocabulary knowledge alone.

In sum, figurative language is a vital component of foreign language learning because it fosters deeper cognitive engagement, enhances cultural understanding, and enables learners to communicate effectively in authentic contexts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Its acquisition is challenging yet essential for achieving comprehensive language proficiency, and it requires deliberate instructional attention within EFL programs to ensure that learners move beyond literal comprehension to grasp the full range of linguistic and conceptual nuances.

1.2.2. Literary Metaphor Comprehension

Literary metaphor is one of the most complex forms of figurative language, as it inherently involves layered meanings, an aesthetic function, and intricate cognitive processing. Understanding a literary metaphor requires a dynamic interaction between linguistic knowledge, cognitive mechanisms, and interpretive strategies; specifically, within an EFL context, this comprehension process demands the integration of both target-language proficiency and conceptual mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

1.2.2.1. Cognitive Models of Metaphor Comprehension (the Career of Metaphor)

One of the most influential models explaining metaphor comprehension is the "Career of Metaphor" hypothesis proposed by Bowdle and Gentner (2005). This model suggests that metaphors evolve from comparison-based processing to category-based assignment as they transition from novel expressions to highly familiar structures. Specifically, novel, early-stage metaphors require a conscious, analogical alignment between the source and target domains, while conventionalized metaphors become stored in the mental lexicon as abstract categorical categories (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). This evolutionary perspective closely complements the foundational cognitive linguistic theories developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argue that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a fundamental mechanism of thought. Furthermore, Gibbs (1994) argues that this dynamic metaphor comprehension remains deeply grounded in embodied cognition, meaning that even structural metaphorical reasoning is closely linked to physical and experiential understanding.

1.2.2.2. The Use of Verbal Protocols (Think-Aloud) in Exploring Mental Processes

To investigate the real-time cognitive mechanisms underlying how learners process literary metaphors, researchers often use verbal protocol analysis, commonly known as the think-aloud methods. Think-aloud protocols help reveal the hidden operations of the mind, explicitly showing whether learners utilize literal translation, lexical inferencing, or contextual

reasoning strategies during reading comprehension. For instance, Yasuda (2018) demonstrated that verbal protocols effectively reveal these essential cognitive strategies, trailing how foreign language learners derive meaning using analogical mapping and contextual hints. By capturing these immediate verbalizations, this methodological approach directly supports the claim made by Gibbs (1994), who emphasizes that metaphor comprehension is deeply grounded in embodied cognition; think-aloud data provides the empirical window into how learners actively rely on experience-based and physical reasoning when interpreting figurative expressions.

1.2.2.3. The Impact of Language Proficiency on Metaphorical Reasoning

Language proficiency significantly influences metaphor comprehension. Learners with higher proficiency levels are more likely to recognize metaphorical intent and use contextual clues effectively, whereas lower-proficiency learners tend to rely on literal word-by-word decoding.

Learners with higher proficiency tend to demonstrate greater accuracy in interpreting and producing metaphors because they have larger vocabularies, richer exposure to idiomatic expressions, and more robust schematic knowledge of conventional metaphorical patterns (Kövecses, 2010). In contrast, learners with lower proficiency often depend on literal interpretation and their native language conceptual structures, which can result in misunderstandings or misinterpretations of metaphorical expressions (Gibbs, 1994). Therefore, integrating metaphor comprehension strategies into EFL instruction is essential, rather than assuming that metaphorical understanding will develop automatically alongside general language skills (Littlemore & Low, 2006). Techniques such as the explicit teaching of conceptual mappings, the contextual analysis of literary texts, and guided practice in metaphor interpretation can significantly enhance learners' metaphorical competence.

In addition, research highlights that cultural background and prior knowledge influence metaphor interpretation. Learners often need to access shared cultural or literary schemas to

correctly interpret metaphors, especially when dealing with idiomatic or literary metaphors (Boers, 2000). Consequently, teaching literary metaphors in EFL settings should incorporate cultural references, visual supports, and comparisons with learners' native language metaphors to foster deeper understanding and prevent misinterpretation (Gibbs, 1999).

1.2.3. Metaphorical Competence in Didactics

Metaphorical competence refers to the ability to recognize, interpret, and produce metaphorical expressions appropriately in both spoken and written discourse. It is increasingly recognized in didactics as a teachable component of communicative language proficiency and cultural knowledge. In practical terms, metaphorical competence enables learners not only to understand metaphorical expressions but also to use them effectively to enhance clarity, creativity, and persuasive power in communication (Kövecses, 2010). Furthermore, Boers et al. (2017) emphasize that metaphorical competence should be treated as a central component of communicative competence because it enhances both receptive comprehension and creative language production.

1.2.3.1. Definition and Components of Metaphorical Competence

Littlemore (2006) defines metaphorical competence as the cognitive ability to process figurative language through associative conceptual mapping between source and target domains. According to this framework, the construct comprises four core interconnected components: the recognition of metaphor, semantic interpretation, contextual production, and intercultural awareness. From a pedagogical perspective, metaphorical competence also involves vital strategic skills such as context-driven inferencing and cognitive flexibility in meaning construction.

1.2.3.2. Metaphorical Awareness

Metaphorical awareness refers to the learners' ability to detect the presence of figurative expressions in spoken or written discourse. Awareness is foundational because it allows

learners to shift from a literal interpretation of language to a figurative one (Shen, 2005). Without this metalinguistic skill, metaphors may be misunderstood or overlooked, thereby reducing comprehension and cultural understanding.

1.2.3.3. Metaphorical Interpretation

Metaphorical interpretation involves understanding the intended meaning behind a metaphor. Interpretation requires connecting the source domain (a familiar, concrete concept) to the target domain (an abstract or less familiar concept), often through cognitive mapping strategies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In an EFL learning, context, successful interpretation depends simultaneously on a learner's language proficiency and their familiarity with the cultural conventions embedded within metaphorical expressions.

1.2.3.4. Metaphorical Production

Metaphorical production focuses on using metaphors in speech or writing, either creatively or conventionally following the patterns of the target language (Littlemore & Low, 2006). Production demands flexibility and sensitivity to context, including the social and pragmatic appropriateness of metaphors. Learners with high metaphorical competence can employ figurative language to convey complex ideas, emotions, and evaluations with sophistication.

1.2.3.5. Cognitive and Metacognitive Dimensions

Metaphorical competence also involves cognitive strategies, such as analogical reasoning and conceptual mapping, which allow learners to relate new metaphorical expressions to known concepts (Kövecses, 2010). Additionally, metacognitive strategies play a significant role, including the monitoring of comprehension, reflecting on one’s interpretation of metaphors, and the self-correcting misinterpretations (Boers, 2011). These strategies ensure that metaphorical knowledge is not only stored but also applied flexibly in communication.

1.2.3.6. Integrating Figurative Language into the EFL Curriculum

The integration of figurative language into the EFL curriculum has become increasingly important in contemporary language education. Rather than being viewed as an optional or peripheral aspect of language learning, figurative language is now recognized as an essential component of communicative competence. Metaphors, idioms, similes, and other figurative expressions occur frequently in both spoken and written English, making their understanding necessary for effective communication. As Littlemore and Low (2006) argue, learners need exposure to figurative language because it constitutes a significant part of authentic language use and contributes to the development of advanced language proficiency.

From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, figurative language instruction should move beyond the traditional practice of rote memorization. Instead, learners should be encouraged to explore the conceptual structures that motivate figurative expressions. According to Boers (2013), helping students identify the underlying conceptual metaphors behind groups of expressions enables them to understand and remember vocabulary more effectively. This approach not only facilitates vocabulary acquisition but also enhances learners' ability to infer the meanings of unfamiliar metaphorical expressions encountered in authentic contexts.

Furthermore, figurative language can be integrated across the four language skills to create a more comprehensive learning experience. In reading activities, students can analyze metaphorical and figurative expressions found in literary and non-literary texts. Writing tasks may encourage learners to employ figurative language to improve the richness and creativity of their written production. Similarly, listening activities can expose students to authentic metaphorical language used in everyday communication, while speaking activities provide opportunities to practice figurative expressions in meaningful interaction. Hilliard (2017)

emphasizes that the systematic incorporation of metaphor instruction across language skills contributes to the development of both linguistic and communicative competence.

Another important consideration is the cultural dimension of figurative language. Many metaphors and figurative expressions reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of a particular speech community. Consequently, integrating figurative language into the curriculum can also support the development of intercultural awareness. Through comparing figurative expressions in English with those found in their native language, learners become more sensitive to cultural similarities and differences. Such awareness helps reduce misunderstandings and enables learners to interpret figurative meanings more accurately in cross-cultural communication (Yahia, 2020).

Despite its pedagogical value, figurative language continues to receive limited attention in many EFL programs and instructional materials. In numerous textbooks, metaphorical and idiomatic expressions are presented as isolated vocabulary items rather than as interconnected elements of a broader conceptual system. For this reason, researchers advocate the inclusion of explicit figurative language instruction within curriculum design. A curriculum that systematically incorporates figurative language can help learners develop metaphorical competence alongside grammatical, lexical, and communicative competence, ultimately preparing them for more authentic and effective use of English (Gutiérrez Pérez, 2016).

At the university level, metaphor awareness can be integrated into literature, civilization, and advanced reading and writing courses. It can also be included in oral expression and communication modules to help learners use figurative language more effectively in academic and everyday interaction. Moreover, integrating figurative language into the curriculum contributes to the development of communicative competence because it enables EFL learners to better understand authentic discourse and express abstract ideas more naturally and appropriately. Integrating metaphor into EFL teaching requires a shift from traditional

grammar-focused instruction to meaning-oriented approaches. Boers (2013) argues that cognitive linguistic insights can be effectively used to design vocabulary and grammar instruction that includes metaphor awareness. This integration can be achieved through tasks such as metaphor identification, the comparison of literal and figurative meanings, and the analysis of metaphors in authentic texts.

1.2.3.7. Conceptual Metaphor Transfer: L1 Influence on L2 Figurative Processing

An important aspect of metaphorical competence in EFL learning involves understanding the impact of cross-linguistic transfer, particularly the influence of learners' first language (L1) on the interpretation of figurative expressions in a second language (L2). From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, people interpret abstract concepts through cognitive structures that are largely shaped by their native language and cultural experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consequently, when encountering metaphorical expressions in an L2, learners frequently rely on conceptual patterns established in their L1 to facilitate interpretation and meaning construction (Kövecses, 2010).

The transfer of conceptual metaphors may have either facilitative or obstructive effects on comprehension. Positive transfer takes place when similar metaphorical mappings exist across both languages, allowing learners to understand figurative meanings more efficiently and accurately (Charteris-Black, 2002). In contrast, negative transfer, also referred to as conceptual interference, arises when metaphorical structures in the target language differ significantly from those found in the learners' native language. Under such circumstances, learners often resort to literal interpretation strategies, focusing on individual lexical items rather than the intended figurative meaning. This may lead to misunderstandings, pragmatic inaccuracies, or even complete failure to recognize metaphorical intent (Littlemore, 2001; Nacey, 2013). For this reason, effective metaphor instruction should explicitly address cross-

linguistic similarities and differences in conceptual mappings to enhance learners' figurative awareness and interpretative abilities.

1.2.4. Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Metaphor

Effective metaphor instruction should combine theoretical explanation with practical classroom activities such as group discussions, contextual analysis, role-play, and creative writing tasks. Using authentic materials and interactive learning strategies can further encourage learners to engage actively with figurative language and develop deeper interpretive and communicative skills.

1.2.4.1. Explicit vs. Implicit Instruction of Figurative Language

Pedagogical approaches to teaching metaphor in the EFL context have undergone a significant evolution, moving from implicit exposure to explicit instruction methods.

Traditionally, metaphors were introduced incidentally through reading, listening, or literary texts, with learners expected to infer meanings based on context alone (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). While this implicit approach provided some exposure, research indicates that many learners struggle to recognize or interpret metaphorical language without direct guidance, particularly in a foreign language context (Littlemore, 2009).

Contemporary approaches emphasize explicit metaphor instruction, which combines a theoretical understanding from cognitive linguistics with practical classroom activities. For instance, teaching learners how to recognize conceptual mappings, the process of linking a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain, helps them decode and produce metaphorical expressions effectively (Kövecses, 2010). Classroom implementation may include guided exercises where students identify metaphorical expressions in texts, discuss their meanings, and relate them to cultural or cognitive frameworks.

1.2.4.2. Strategies for Improving Metaphorical Interpretation in Literature

One practical strategy involves the visual representation of metaphors, such as metaphor-mapping charts, diagrams, or graphic organizers, which allow learners to see relationships between source and target domains. Role-play and creative writing tasks that incorporate metaphorical language are equally effective, as they encourage learners to produce metaphors actively and reflect on their usage in meaningful contexts (Gibbs, 1994). Group discussions about the cultural and contextual significance of metaphors can further enhance learners' pragmatic and intercultural competence (Shaw, 2010). By actively engaging in such tasks, learners develop both linguistic awareness and cognitive strategies for processing figurative language (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008).

Another powerful approach is integrating Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) with metaphor instruction. In this framework, learners engage in communicative tasks that require the use or analysis of metaphors, both before and after task completion. Pre-task activities may involve exploring metaphorical patterns or brainstorming source-target mappings, while post-task reflection encourages learners to discuss the effectiveness and appropriateness of their metaphorical language use. This strategy not only reinforces understanding but also fosters metaphorical competence in both receptive (recognition) and productive (generation) modalities (Littlemore & Low, 2006).

Finally, assessment in metaphor instruction should balance receptive and productive skills. Receptive tasks include exercises where learners identify and interpret metaphors in authentic texts, whereas productive tasks require them to create metaphor-rich sentences or short texts. By combining both types of assessment, educators can build learner confidence, provide meaningful feedback, and ensure that students can apply metaphorical language in real communicative situations, rather than merely memorizing figurative expressions (Boers et al., 2017).

In summary, effective teaching of metaphors in the EFL classroom involves a combination of explicit theoretical instruction, engaging and meaningful classroom tasks, visual and interactive tools, and integrated assessment methods. Such approaches not only enhance comprehension but also empower learners to use metaphorical language creatively and appropriately, contributing to overall linguistic and cognitive development.

1.2.5. Review of Empirical Studies on Metaphor in EFL

Establishing a connection between theoretical perspectives on metaphor instruction and actual learning outcomes requires methodological approaches capable of examining learners' cognitive processes as they occur. In this regard, think-aloud protocols and verbal report methods provide valuable tools for investigating metaphor comprehension in real time. Unlike conventional outcome-based assessments, such as vocabulary or comprehension tests, which primarily measure final performance, process-oriented methods offer insights into the cognitive mechanisms underlying learners' interpretations (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). Through the analysis of learners' verbalized thought processes, researchers can identify points of conceptual difficulty, evaluate the effectiveness of instructional interventions, and explore the strategies students employ when interpreting metaphorical expressions (Gibbs, 1994, 2006).

1.2.5.1. International Research Perspectives

Over the past few decades, a considerable amount of international research has investigated how metaphors are used and understood in EFL classrooms. Scholars have emphasized that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but cognitive tools that reflect how learners conceptualize abstract ideas in a second language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, studies conducted in Saudi Arabia examined how teachers' awareness of figurative language instruction influences instructional approaches and classroom interactions. These studies revealed that teachers who consciously incorporate metaphorical language into their teaching tend to create more engaging and interactive learning environments. Moreover,

learners exposed to metaphor-focused instruction demonstrated higher levels of comprehension, retention, and expressive use of metaphorical expressions in English (Al-Zahrani, 2015).

Meta-analyses in applied linguistics have further confirmed that the explicit teaching of metaphorical competence can significantly improve learners' understanding and productive use of figurative language. For example, intervention programs that included metaphor explanation, conceptual mapping, and contextual practice led to measurable gains in learners' metaphorical awareness and their ability to generate original metaphors (Shin, 2017). These findings suggest that deliberate pedagogical strategies targeting metaphorical knowledge can enhance both receptive and productive skills in EFL contexts.

1.2.5.2. The Algerian Context: Identifying the Research Gap in University Education.

In the Algerian EFL context, research on figurative language and metaphorical competence has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly within university-level education. However, despite this growing interest, metaphor remains a relatively underexplored area in terms of systematic classroom integration and assessment practices.

Recent studies highlight that Algerian EFL learners often encounter significant difficulties when interpreting figurative language, especially metaphorical expressions embedded in literary and academic texts. For instance, Idri (2020) found that the application of cognitive linguistic approaches in Algerian classrooms shows promising results in improving learners' awareness of conceptual metaphor; however, the study also emphasizes that such approaches are still not widely implemented in EFL curricula, which limits learners' exposure to figurative thinking strategies.

Similarly, Boulifa and Arbaoui (2021) investigated metaphorical competence among Algerian university students and revealed that learners generally demonstrate low to moderate levels of metaphor interpretation ability. Their findings suggest that students tend to rely

heavily on literal translation strategies, which negatively affects their ability to interpret abstract or culturally loaded expressions. The study also points out that metaphorical competence is closely linked to overall language proficiency, but it is rarely assessed explicitly in EFL evaluation systems.

In addition, Hamitouche (2021) explored the representation of Algerian identity through figurative language, showing that metaphor plays an important role in expressing cultural and social meanings. This study highlights how figurative language is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cultural tool that reflects identity, ideology, and social values within Algerian discourse.

Taken together, these studies reveal a clear research gap in the Algerian university context. While metaphor is recognized as an important component of language use, it is still insufficiently addressed in teaching practices, curriculum design, and assessment methods. Consequently, there is a need for more pedagogically oriented research that bridges cognitive linguistic theory with classroom application, particularly in developing learners' metaphorical competence in EFL settings.

Conclusion

To conclude with, the second section explored how EFL learners understand and interpret metaphors in English literary texts. The findings revealed that metaphor comprehension is a complex process that requires imagination, cognitive skills, contextual interpretation, and cultural awareness. Learners considered metaphors an important element that makes literary texts richer and more meaningful; however, they also encountered difficulties when interpreting indirect, abstract, or culturally specific meanings. The section further emphasized the important role of teachers, classroom interaction, and collaborative discussion in improving learners' figurative language comprehension. Furthermore, it

highlighted the necessity of adopting explicit teaching methods and practical classroom activities to strengthen students' interpretive, analytical, and communicative abilities. Overall, the section confirmed that metaphor comprehension in EFL learning is influenced by cognitive, linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical factors.

Chapter 2: Data Collection and Analysis

This chapter investigates university participants' perceptions of figurative language at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. This research is based on interviews conducted with six undergraduate EFL learners. The main objective of this study is to explore how EFL students within the sample understand and interpret literary metaphors in authentic English texts. It aims to assess the participants' cognitive ability to go beyond literal meaning and decode implicit textual messages, as well as to examine how linguistic proficiency and cultural factors influence their comprehension of literary texts.

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to collect and analyze the data gathered from the participants' interviews, highlighting their cognitive processing strategies and pedagogical experiences. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into several main parts. It begins with an overview of the research design and a description of the student sample. Next, it details the design and implementation of the semi-structured interviews. The final sections are dedicated to presenting the qualitative data obtained from the participants, followed by a thorough discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and their direct relevance to EFL pedagogy.

2.1. The Participants' Interview

This interview consisted of 14 questions and was conducted in English. It was conducted with participants from the third-year level at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. The primary objective was to explore their opinions, difficulties, and strategies when interpreting figurative language. The interview included several questions about the participants' reading habits, and their ability to understand metaphors and hidden ideas. It also focused on how the learners think when they face difficult metaphors and what strategies they use to understand them.

In addition, the interview examined the role of teachers and classroom interaction in helping the participants understand figurative language. The learners were also asked to share their personal experiences and suggest ways to improve the learning of metaphors. Overall, the interview helped gather valuable qualitative data about the participants' understanding of metaphors and the barriers they face when reading English literary texts.

2.2. Administration of the Interview

The interview was conducted with six third-year English students. Third-year students were chosen specifically because they are in their final undergraduate year and have studied a literature module in each academic year. This means they have more experience with literary texts than first-year students, but they still represent the undergraduate level before graduation. The participants were selected based on their level and experience with English literature using a purposive sampling method. This selection permitted the researcher to collect clear data about students' comprehension of metaphors and figurative language.

The interviews were carried out face-to-face in a quiet and comfortable environment at the university, which helped students express their ideas freely and without pressure. Each interview lasted approximately between 20 and 30 minutes, giving enough time for students to answer the questions in detail. Ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and anonymity, were respected throughout the research process. To collect the data accurately, the interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' explicit consent and then transcribed word-for-word for qualitative analysis.

2.3. Analysis of The Students' Interview

2.3.1. The Approach Used in the Study

This research followed a qualitative approach because it focused on understanding how EFL students perceive and interpret literary metaphors. Since the study aimed to explore students' personal experiences, opinions, and strategies when dealing with figurative language,

qualitative research was considered the most suitable method. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their thoughts in detail while addressing the main topics of the study.

To process this data, the analysis followed the six classic steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved getting familiar with the transcripts, breaking down the text into initial codes, and grouping these codes into broader, recurring themes. These themes were then checked and refined to ensure they accurately represented the participants' views. As Braun and Clarke (2006) stated, thematic analysis is highly effective because it provides "a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p. 78). This coding approach was utilized to isolate common patterns and themes related directly to metaphor comprehension and figurative competence.

2.3.2. Themes Analysis

2.3.2.1. Theme 01: Metaphor as a Cognitive and Meaning-Making Process

2.3.2.1.1. Conceptualizing Metaphor as an Active Cognitive Construction

The findings related to the first theme reveal that the participants perceive metaphor comprehension as a cognitive process that goes significantly beyond the literal meaning of words. Participants consistently described metaphors as conceptual tools that require interpretation, reflection, and deliberate mental effort. Rather than relying on direct word-for-word translation, the learners emphasized the importance of searching for hidden meanings and understanding the deeper message conveyed through figurative language. This finding suggests that metaphor comprehension involves active meaning construction and supports the cognitive linguistic view that metaphors play a significant role in human cognition and architectural thought processing.

2.3.2.1.2. Micro-Analysis of Participant Perspectives: Architectural Exploration and Mental Activation

The responses of the participants demonstrated that understanding metaphors requires the use of various cognitive skills. The learners explained that they often rely on imagination, reasoning, and contextual analysis when interpreting metaphorical expressions. For example, Participant A stated that when encountering a metaphor, they attempt to discover the deeper meaning behind the words. This response indicates that the participant does not approach metaphor comprehension as a simple linguistic task. Instead, the learner engages in a process of exploration in which meaning is gradually constructed through reflection and interpretation. The use of the word "discover" implies that metaphorical meaning is not immediately accessible but must be inferred through careful conceptual analysis.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that metaphor comprehension encourages the participants to engage in higher-order thinking processes. Participant B explained that metaphors "activate the mind" and make readers "think differently." This statement reflects the cognitive complexity involved in metaphor interpretation. Unlike literal language, metaphors require readers to establish relationships between different concepts and identify symbolic meanings. Such processes involve analysis, inference, and evaluation, which are considered essential components of critical thinking within foreign language didactics.

2.3.2.1.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Domain Mapping

This finding is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which argues that metaphors are not merely decorative linguistic devices but fundamental mechanisms of thought. According to this perspective, individuals understand abstract target concepts by relating them to more familiar source domains, derived from sensory-motor experiences and conceptual structures. The participants' responses suggest that they engage in this cross-domain process when interpreting metaphors. Rather than focusing

on isolated lexical items, they attempt to connect figurative expressions to broader ideas and contextual meanings, thereby executing mapping procedures that validate cognitive-linguistic models.

2.3.2.1.4. The Development of Cognitive Flexibility and Textual Engagement

Another important finding concerns the role of metaphor in promoting cognitive flexibility. Participants indicated that metaphors encourage them to consider multiple interpretations rather than relying on a single, fixed meaning. This ability to view ideas from different perspectives contributes to the development of interpretive and analytical skills. The learners become more capable of exploring alternative explanations and examining the relationships between language, context, and meaning. Consequently, metaphor comprehension can be viewed as an intellectual activity that supports both language development and cognitive growth.

The findings also suggest that metaphor interpretation enhances the participants' engagement with literary texts. By searching for symbolic meanings, the participants become more attentive readers and interact with texts more actively. Instead of passively receiving information, they participate in a process of meaning negotiation that requires concentration and reflection. This deeper engagement allows the learners to develop a richer understanding of literary works and appreciate the complexity of figurative language.

2.3.2.1.5. Creativity and Conceptual Layering in L2 Literary Literacy

Moreover, the participants' responses indicate that metaphor comprehension contributes to the development of creativity. Through metaphorical thinking, the learners learn to establish connections between seemingly unrelated concepts and generate new interpretations. This creative aspect of metaphor interpretation enables readers to move beyond surface meanings and explore the multiple layers of significance present in literary texts. Such experiences enrich the reading process and encourage intellectual curiosity within the advanced EFL seminar.

Overall, the findings of this theme demonstrate that the participants perceive metaphor comprehension as a complex cognitive activity that involves reasoning, interpretation, imagination, and critical thinking. The participants consistently viewed metaphors as powerful tools for constructing meaning rather than as simple linguistic expressions. These results support previous research emphasizing the cognitive function of metaphor and confirm that successful metaphor interpretation requires active mental engagement. Therefore, metaphor comprehension can be considered an essential component of literary understanding, cognitive development, and effective meaning-making in the context of EFL learning.

1. **2.3.2.2. Theme 02: Figurative Language as an Emotional and Imaginative Experience**

2.3.2.2.1. The Relationship between Emotion and Aesthetic Engagement in Literary Interpretation

Traditional approaches to language learning often emphasize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition as the primary components of linguistic competence. However, the findings of this study suggest that advanced EFL learners engage with literary texts through much more than linguistic decoding. Their responses indicate that metaphorical language stimulates both emotional involvement and imaginative engagement, making the reading experience richer and more meaningful.

From the perspectives of Cognitive Linguistics and Foreign Language Didactics, this type of engagement represents an important dimension of higher-level language proficiency. Literary metaphors encourage learners to move beyond literal interpretations and actively construct meaning through imagination. Rather than processing language. Mechanically, the participants are invited to create mental representations that transform the foreign language into a vivid and personally significant experience.

Gibbs (1994) argues that the interpretation of figurative language relies heavily on human imaginative capacities. Understanding metaphors requires readers to establish connections

between concepts that may initially appear unrelated, thereby creating new layers of meaning. Within EFL contexts, this imaginative process allows students to appreciate language not only as a communicative system but also as an artistic medium.

Consequently, vocabulary is no longer perceived as a collection of isolated dictionary definitions. Instead, language becomes a dynamic and emotionally meaningful structure through which learners experience literary texts. The findings reveal that the emotional impact of metaphors can increase the participants'motivation to read, transforming literary engagement from a purely academic requirement into a rewarding intellectual and personal experience.

2.3.2.2.2. Micro-Analysis of Participant Perspectives

A closer examination of the participant responses provides valuable insight into the cognitive and emotional processes involved in metaphor comprehension.

Participant D: Mental Imagery and Visual Construction. When discussing their reading experience, Participant D explained: "I imagine scenes in my mind when I read metaphors." The participant's use of the verb imagine reflects the central role of mental visualization in understanding figurative language. For this student, successful interpretation depends on the creation of internal visual representations. Rather than remaining at the level of linguistic symbols, the words are transformed into vivid mental scenes.

This response challenges traditional models that describe comprehension as a straightforward decoding process. Instead, it illustrates the reconstructive nature of metaphor interpretation. Through metaphorical language, the learner actively builds a mental environment that includes visual, spatial, and contextual elements. Such imagery enables the student to connect concrete experiences with abstract concepts and ultimately derive meaning from the text.

Participant E: Emotional Engagement and Literary Vitality. Participant E emphasized the emotional dimension of figurative language, stating: "Figurative language makes literature alive and emotional." This statement reveals how figurative language contributes to the perceived vitality of literary texts. According to the participant, texts expressed solely through literal language may appear flat and unengaging. In contrast, metaphors infuse literature with emotional depth and expressive power.

By associating figurative language with emotionality, the student highlights that metaphor comprehension extends beyond intellectual interpretation. It facilitates an emotional connection between readers and the narrative, allowing abstract ideas to be experienced on a personal level. In this sense, metaphor functions as a bridge through which readers access the emotional world embedded within the text.

2.3.2.2.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Embodied Cognition and Literary Understanding

The experiences described by the participants can be interpreted through the theoretical framework of Embodied Cognition, developed by scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Gibbs (2006). This perspective argues that human thinking and language comprehension are deeply rooted in bodily and sensory experiences rather than existing as purely abstract mental operations.

The comments provided by Participants D and Ereflect this principle. Their descriptions suggest that understanding metaphorical language involves the activation of sensory and experiential knowledge acquired through interaction with the physical world.

2.3.2.3. Theme 03: Cultural and Linguistic Challenges in Metaphor Interpretation

2.3.2.3.1. The Intersection of Cultural Schema and Linguistic Decoding in Literary Texts

The empirical data reveal that Algerian EFL participants face significant cultural and linguistic difficulties when trying to understand literary metaphors. In English literature

classes, students do not only struggle with difficult vocabulary; they also face problems understanding the cultural background of British and American authors. Since metaphors are often inextricably connected to the history, traditions, and everyday life of a target culture, learners cannot always understand them simply by checking the meanings of words in a dictionary.

When readers encounter metaphors that are based on Western cultural ideas, they often experience cognitive dissonance. This statement highlights an important point about language learning: metaphors require more than vocabulary knowledge. According to Cognitive Linguistics, words are linked to larger systems of cultural and conceptual knowledge. Therefore, understanding a metaphor requires more than knowing the dictionary meaning of individual words. When students lack the necessary cultural background, they may understand the literal words but still fail to understand the deeper meaning intended by the writer. This often leads to confusion and frustration.

2.3.2.3.2. Micro-Analysis of Participant Perspectives: Cultural Background and Comprehension Barriers

A closer examination of individual accounts reveals a clear relationship between cultural schema and comprehension. Participant B described an experience that clearly illustrates this challenge, noting,

> Yes, I remember once I struggled with an American idiom in a text. At first, I felt confused, but later I searched for the meaning and understood it. It was a bit frustrating but also interesting... the main difficulty is that metaphors are often culturally or emotionally deep, so they require more than just vocabulary knowledge.

A similar idea was expressed by Participant F, who emphasized the vital role of target-culture familiarity for interpreting metaphors correctly, stating, “If I do not understand the culture, I cannot fully understand the metaphor... I had difficulty with some British expressions

before. I felt confused, but later I understood them after explanation." Without cultural knowledge, the participants encounter barriers accessing the intended meaning of literary texts. As a result, they often need additional explanations from teachers or classmates to achieve comprehension.

2.3.2.3.3. Cognitive Strategies: Word-by-Word Translation and Negative Conceptual Transfer

Because the participants frequently experience these difficulties, the data indicate a reliance on translation as an initial coping strategy. Participant D explained, "Yes, I often feel lost when the metaphor is cultural. I usually wait for explanation... My first strategy is translation word by word, but honestly it doesn't always help." Participant C reported a similar experience, stating, "Yes, I sometimes find cultural expressions difficult, especially idioms from British or American culture... My first reaction is usually translation. If I still don't understand, I ask a classmate or check notes."

These responses show that several participants depend on literal translation when they encounter unfamiliar metaphors. However, translating expressions word by word is not always effective. Literary metaphors often carry meanings that cannot be transferred directly from one language to another. When students translate English metaphors into their native language literally, the original meaning may disappear or become confusing. As a result, students may misunderstand the text or become dependent on external explanations.

2.3.2.3.4. Experiential Variation: Image-Schematic Familiarity versus Cultural Specificity

The findings also reveal that the participants do not find all metaphors equally difficult; rather, comprehension levels fluctuate based on the abstractness of the source domain. For example, Participant C stated, "Yes, metaphors that use physical ideas are easier for me

compared to abstract ones." Participant E shared a similar opinion, remarking, "Yes, physical metaphors are easier for me because they are more familiar and easier to imagine."

These comments can be explained through Embodied Cognition Theory. This perspective suggests that people understand many abstract ideas through their physical experiences and interactions with the world. Metaphors based on common human experiences, such as darkness, warmth, movement, or coldness, are usually easier to understand because they are familiar to people across different cultures. For example, when sadness is represented through darkness or when kindness is associated with warmth, the participants can often understand the metaphor without much difficulty. These experiences are shared by most human beings regardless of their cultural background.

However, problems arise when metaphors are based on cultural experiences that are unfamiliar to the learners. Metaphors connected to specific historical events, social practices, or cultural traditions may be difficult to interpret because the participants do not have direct knowledge of those experiences. In such cases, personal experience alone is not enough to support understanding.

2.3.2.4. Theme 04: Classroom Interaction and Collaborative Meaning Construction

2.3.2.4.1. The Socio-Cognitive Dimension of Metaphor Interpretation in EFL Seminars

The second major finding of this study highlights the pivotal role of classroom interaction and collaborative learning in helping the participants decode literary metaphors. The interview data indicate that several learners encounter cognitive bottlenecks when attempting to interpret metaphors when studying alone. In isolation, they often remain focused on the literal meaning of words and struggle to discover the deeper symbolic import of the text. However, classroom discussions and peer group work help the participants explore divergent interpretations and build a richer understanding of literary texts.

From a socio-cognitive perspective, meaning-making in literature classrooms is not merely a solitary psychological act. Instead, it relies on shared dialogue to unlock figurative domains. Rather than processing text in isolation, learners benefit from external cognitive scaffolding, which expands their interpretive boundaries and makes the foreign language more accessible.

2.3.2.4.2. Micro-Analysis of Participant Perspectives: Peer Scaffolding and Collaborative Decoding

A closer examination of the empirical data shows that discussing metaphors with classmates yields significant interpretive shifts. Participant B explained the value of this cooperative dynamic, noting, "Yes, definitely. When we discuss in groups, I notice that each student has a different interpretation, and that helps me see meanings I didn't think of before. It makes the understanding deeper and more complete compared to studying alone... Class discussion helps me discover meanings I did not notice before." This response suggests that group discussions encourage the participants to consider alternative conceptual mappings that they might not have discovered independently. When learners share ideas, they are exposed to different ways of interpreting the same metaphor, allowing them to move beyond surface-level semantic constraints.

Other members of the sample highlighted similar cooperative benefits. Participant E noted, "Yes, discussing with classmates helps me understand better because everyone shares different ideas... Sometimes context helps me understand." Similarly, Participant F stated, "Group discussion is helpful because classmates can explain ideas in an easier way," while Participant C remarked, "Talking with classmates helps a bit. Sometimes they explain in a simpler way, and that makes it easier for me to understand."

These responses indicate that the participants often find peer explanations more accessible than formal academic explanations. Classmates tend to utilize shared, familiar linguistic codes,

which can demystify complex metaphorical expressions. Consequently, collaborative learning creates a supportive environment where learners feel more comfortable negotiating meanings and sharing interpretations.

2.3.2.4.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in Literary Didactics

This finding can be explicitly explained through Lev Vygotsky's ZPD. According to this framework, learners can achieve higher levels of cognitive processing when they receive support from a more knowledgeable peer or instructor. In classroom discussions, more advanced participants can help peer learners understand difficult metaphors by explaining concepts in a clear, accessible manner. This peer-to-peer scaffolding helps learners gradually internalize these interpretive strategies, transforming a socially shared activity into an independent cognitive skill.

2.3.2.4.4. The Role of Teacher Guidance and Expert Scaffolding

In addition to peer support, the interviews reveal that teacher guidance plays a crucial role in helping the participants shift from literal decoding to conceptual mapping. Several participants described situations where instructor interventions completely changed their understanding of a literary text. Participant B recalled a specific instance in a poetry class, stating,

> Yes, I remember once in a poetry class, we were analyzing a poem and I didn't understand a specific metaphor at all. After the teacher explained it in detail, I realized it had a very deep emotional meaning. It completely changed my perspective on the poem because I initially thought it was simple, but it turned out to be very rich.

Participant F reported a similar experience with expert scaffolding, noting, "Yes, in one poetry class the teacher explained a metaphor step by step, and it helped me appreciate the poem more." Likewise, Participant A stated, "It happens sometimes that you misinterpret or

you don't get the meaning of the metaphor correctly, but teacher helps you understand the right meaning of the metaphor by changing how you see the whole story."

These statements demonstrate that targeted teacher guidance can significantly improve the participants' architectural processing of literary metaphors. When instructors unpack metaphors step by step, they assist students in tracing the structural links between the concrete source domain and the abstract target domain. This guided process allows learners to move beyond surface-level reading and appreciate the emotional and artistic depth of literary works.

2.3.2.5. Theme 05: The Didactic Gap Between Intuition and Academic Analysis

2.3.2.5.1. The Bifurcation of Affective Apprehension and Formal Literary Analysis

The final theme identified in this study reveals an important discrepancy between the participants' intuitive understanding of metaphors and their ability to analyze them academically. The interview data indicate that while advanced Algerian EFL learners can intuitively grasp the emotional or imaginative meaning of a metaphor, they often struggle when required to explain that meaning using formal metalanguage and structured literary analysis.

This issue was clearly expressed by Participant A, who remarked, "Sometimes I understand the metaphor emotionally, but I do not know how to analyze it academically... Teachers in my classes not only explain how to analyze a metaphor, they occasionally ask us to give the metaphor meaning. Sometimes they do explain it by themselves... I think that it would be highly beneficial if there is a list of dedicated specialties to understand figurative language at university." This response highlights the distinct cognitive boundary between emotional reception and academic processing. While learners may recognize the general feeling or message conveyed by a metaphor, they often lack the analytical tools needed to explain the structural mappings between domains. Formal analysis requires learners to identify relationships between concepts, decode figurative layers, and support interpretations with logical arguments, which are skills for which several participants felt underprepared.

2.3.2.5.2. Micro-Analysis of Product-Oriented Teaching Practices and Learner Dependency

The interview data suggest that this analytical deficit is directly linked to current instructional methodologies. Several participants reported that classroom practices tend to be product-oriented, meaning that teachers often provide finalized interpretations directly instead of modeling the procedural steps of metaphor analysis.

Participant B explained how this dynamic fosters passive learning, noting, “In most of my classes, teachers usually focus more on giving us the direct meaning of the metaphor rather than teaching us how to analyze it step by step. Sometimes they briefly explain the idea behind it, but they don’t really guide us through the process of interpretation. I feel like we are expected to understand it on our own after hearing the explanation.” Participant C expressed a similar view regarding semantic dependency, stating, “In class, teachers usually give us the meaning of the metaphor directly. They don’t really explain the method of analysis, so we just memorize the explanation.” Furthermore, Participant D confirmed this reliance, stating, “Teachers usually just tell us what the metaphor means. They don’t explain how to analyze, so I depend on their explanation.”

2.3.2.5.3. The Methodological Consequences of Interpretation Memorization

These comments indicate that multiple members of the sample have become structurally dependent on teacher explanations. Instead of internalizing the process of interpretation, the participants are routinely conditioned to memorize ready-made semantic definitions. As a result, they may perform adequately when dealing with familiar, pre-explained texts but struggle significantly when faced with novel metaphors that require independent cognitive processing.

This finding reveals a critical pedagogical issue in university didactics. When instructors provide only the final interpretive product, learners are denied the opportunity to observe,

deconstruct, and practice the cognitive steps involved in reaching that conclusion. Consequently, the participants display a lack of systemic confidence and procedural experience when asked to evaluate literary texts independently.

2.3.2.5.4. Participant Desiderata for Metaphor Awareness Training

Because of these structural difficulties, the participants expressed a strong desire for explicit instruction and practical training in figurative language processing. Participant B stated, “Figurative language is a key part of literature, and we don’t practice it enough. More focused lessons would help students improve both their analytical skills and their understanding of texts.” Participant F agreed, adding, “Usually teachers explain the meaning directly, but I would like them to teach us more analysis techniques... there should be more lessons and activities about figurative language to help students practice more.”

These responses suggest that the learners are highly conscious of their own metacognitive needs. They actively seek opportunities to practice procedural interpretation rather than simply receiving prescriptive answers. Implementing targeted classroom activities, guided exercises, and analytical tasks could effectively transition students into autonomous readers.

2.3.2.5.5. Strategic Synthesis: Bridging the Pedagogical Divide

From an educational perspective, these findings emphasize the urgent need for a shift toward systematic metaphor awareness and explicit analytical training in university literature courses. Students should be encouraged to explore metaphors actively, identify conceptual mappings, and articulate their interpretations using appropriate academic metalanguage. In conclusion, Theme 05 demonstrates that while advanced Algerian EFL participants appreciate literary metaphors on an affective level, they frequently lack the procedural skills necessary for formal academic interpretation. Addressing this didactic gap requires a shift from teacher-centered, product-oriented instruction toward process-based, interactive approaches. By providing learners with explicit analytical frameworks and regular opportunities for

application, university contexts can better cultivate independent critical thinking and advanced literary analysis.

2.3.2.6. Theme 06: The Development of Learner Autonomy and the Need for Curriculum Improvement

2.3.2.6.1. Gaps in Language Programs and the Need for Better Instruction

In many EFL university programs, curriculum design often emphasizes grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition because these areas are traditionally considered the primary pillars of linguistic competence. While these foundational skills are important, they are not sufficient to help students fully decode the conceptual architecture of literary texts. Figurative language, especially metaphors, is often given less attention in the classroom, even though it plays a major role in both literary discourse and advanced communication.

The findings of this study show that there is a noticeable discrepancy between the participants' metacognitive needs and the current curriculum provided at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. The participants understand that figurative language is important, but they often struggle to interpret metaphors because they have not received explicit procedural training. As a result, several members of the sample remain dependent on literal translation or teacher explanations instead of developing their own independent interpretive skills.

Traditional pedagogical approaches often assume that students who possess a large vocabulary will automatically understand metaphorical expressions. However, understanding figurative language requires distinct cognitive processing operations. Students need to learn how to connect concrete source domains with abstract target domains. Without explicit instruction and targeted practice, learners may find it difficult to transition into autonomous readers of literary texts.

2.3.2.6.2. Micro-Analysis of Participant Perspectives: Curricular Needs and Metacognitive Awareness

The interview data clearly indicate that the participants believe more structured attention should be given to figurative language in English classes. Participant B stated, “Yes, I strongly think so. Figurative language is a key part of literature, and we don’t practice it enough. More focused lessons would help students improve both their analytical skills and their understanding of texts.” This response suggests that the participants experience a deficit in classroom practice related to figurative language. Participant B believes that dedicated lessons would help learners analyze texts more effectively and understand literary meanings better. The statement also shows that metaphor interpretation is a procedural skill that can be systematically developed through targeted teaching and practice.

Similarly, Participant F explained, “Yes, there should be more lessons and activities about figurative language to help students practice more... I think practice is very important for understanding metaphors.” Participant F highlights the critical role of classroom activities and regular practice. The participant believes that understanding metaphors becomes easier when students are given opportunities to work with figurative language in different contexts. This response indicates that the learners favor active learning methods rather than remaining passive recipients of teacher-provided explanations. Together, these responses demonstrate that the participants are highly aware of their own learning difficulties and believe that more focused instruction would improve their metaphor comprehension skills.

2.3.2.6.3. Theoretical Interpretation: The Career of Metaphor and Cognitive Processing Shift

The experiences described by the participants can be explicitly interpreted through Bowdle and Gentner’s (2005) Career of Metaphor Theory. According to this framework, when learners initially encounter a novel metaphor, they find it difficult because they must actively

compare different concepts and search for structural alignments between the source and target domains. This online processing requires considerable mental effort and cognitive load.

However, with repeated exposure and practice, metaphorical expressions shift from novel mappings to conventionalized schemas. Learners gradually recognize common metaphorical patterns and can interpret them more quickly. In other words, systematic practice helps transform difficult, novel metaphors into familiar, easily accessible concepts.

The opinions expressed by Participants B and F support this theory. Their request for more lessons and activities reflects the need for repeated practice that can reduce confusion and improve understanding. Through explicit instruction, students can develop strategies that help them interpret figurative language more independently, thereby fostering learner autonomy.

2.3.2.6.4. Conclusion: Answering the Pedagogical Mandate

The analysis of this theme shows that the participants believe the current curriculum does not provide enough opportunities to practice figurative language. The participants emphasized the need for more lessons, activities, and structured instruction focused on metaphor interpretation.

These findings directly answer the third research question by showing that the participants view metaphorical competence as a skill that requires direct teaching and continuous practice. The results also connect to the main concepts of this dissertation, metaphor, meaning, and mind, by demonstrating how instruction can actively influence the way students understand and interpret figurative language.

In conclusion, the participants expressed a clear need for curriculum improvement. More explicit teaching of figurative language would help students become more confident, independent readers and would improve their ability to understand authentic English literary texts.

2.3.3. *Discussion of Findings*

The findings of this study revealed that metaphor comprehension is a complex process that involves cognitive, emotional, cultural, and educational dimensions. The analysis of the participants' responses showed that the participants do not view metaphors as simple linguistic expressions. Instead, they perceive them as conceptual tools that help them construct meaning, develop critical thinking, and engage more deeply with literary texts.

The first theme demonstrated that the participants consider metaphors a cognitive and meaning-making process. Participants explained that understanding metaphors requires interpretation, reflection, and reasoning rather than direct translation. This finding supports the view of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argued that metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of human thought. The learners actively searched for hidden meanings and attempted to connect metaphorical expressions with broader concepts and experiences, validating the core premises of Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

The second theme highlighted the emotional and imaginative role of metaphors. The participants reported that metaphors help them visualize scenes and create emotional connections with literary texts. This finding confirms that metaphor comprehension is not only a cognitive activity but also an imaginative and affective experience. Through visualization and emotional engagement, the learners develop a deeper appreciation of literature and become more involved in the reading process, supporting the framework of Embodied Cognition.

The third and fourth themes revealed that cultural and linguistic factors represent major challenges in metaphor interpretation. Many participants relied on literal translation when encountering unfamiliar metaphors, which often led to misunderstanding and confusion. The learners also emphasized that limited knowledge of English-speaking cultures prevented them

from understanding culturally specific metaphors. These findings suggest that successful metaphor comprehension depends not only on linguistic proficiency but also on cultural awareness and conceptual understanding.

The fifth theme focused on the participants' pedagogical suggestions for improving metaphor comprehension. Participants expressed a strong need for explicit instruction in metaphors, idioms, and figurative language. They believed that current learning practices are often insufficient because metaphors are usually encountered incidentally rather than taught systematically. The learners recommended the integration of cognitive linguistics principles, cultural explanations, guided practice, and digital learning tools into language courses.

These findings suggest that metaphorical competence can be improved through structured and supportive teaching approaches. The participants emphasized that understanding the conceptual and cultural foundations of metaphors would help them move beyond literal translation and develop greater confidence in interpreting figurative language. This finding highlights the important role of pedagogy in facilitating metaphor comprehension and promoting deeper engagement with literary texts.

Another important finding concerns the role of classroom interaction. The participants reported that discussions with teachers and classmates helped them discover meanings they had not previously considered. Collaborative learning encouraged the exchange of interpretations and supported deeper understanding of figurative language. This finding highlights the importance of social interaction in the process of meaning construction, strongly aligning with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

Finally, the study revealed a gap between intuitive understanding and academic analysis. Although many participants were able to recognize the general meaning of metaphors, they experienced difficulties explaining their interpretations using literary terminology. For this reason, participants recommended more explicit instruction, practical activities, and greater

attention to metaphor analysis within the curriculum, which can be addressed through the systematic structural shifts outlined in the Career of Metaphor Theory.

Overall, the findings indicate that metaphor comprehension among EFL learners is influenced by cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, cultural knowledge, classroom interaction, and pedagogical support. The study confirms that developing metaphorical competence requires not only language proficiency but also cultural literacy, critical thinking skills, and appropriate instructional guidance.

2.4. Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insights into EFL students' understanding of metaphors, several limitations should be acknowledged in order to contextualize the findings and avoid overgeneralization.

First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only six undergraduate students from Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. While this allowed an in-depth qualitative analysis, it limits statisticalgeneralizability of the results. A larger and more diverse sample, including students from different universities or academic levels, could provide a broader and more representative understanding of metaphor comprehension among EFL learners.

Second, the study relied exclusively on semi-structured interviews as the sole data collection instrument. Although interviews are effective for obtaining rich and detailed qualitative data, the absence of additional tools such as classroom observations or questionnaires may have restricted the triangulation of data. Combining multiple methods could have strengthened the reliability and depth of the findings.

Third, the study focused only on third-year English students. This specific academic level may have influenced the results, as students at different stages of their studies (first-year or master's level) might demonstrate different levels of metaphor awareness, linguistic proficiency, and interpretive strategies.

Fourth, time constraints also represented a limitation. The limited duration of data collection restricted the possibility of conducting follow-up interviews that could have provided deeper clarification of the participants' responses.

Finally, it is important to note that qualitative interpretation always involves a certain degree of subjectivity. Although efforts were made to ensure objective thematic analysis, own conceptual understanding of figurative language may still have influenced how the students' metaphorical interpretations were categorized and constructed into final themes.

2.5. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry important pedagogical and theoretical implications for EFL teaching and learning within the university context.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results highlight the necessity of explicitly teaching figurative language, especially literary metaphors, in EFL classrooms. Students demonstrated that they often rely on intuition, imagination, and personal reasoning when interpreting figurative expressions, which suggests that structured guidance is needed to help them develop more systematic interpretive skills. Teachers are therefore encouraged to integrate activities that promote critical thinking, inferencing, and contextual analysis. For example, classroom discussions, group interpretation tasks, and the guided analysis of literary texts can help students move from an intuitive understanding to more analytical and academically appropriate interpretation.

In addition, the findings emphasize the importance of encouraging students to verbalize their interpretations. The data revealed that while the participants understand metaphors emotionally, they frequently struggle to express them academically. This conceptual gap suggests the need for pedagogical strategies that focus on developing academic language and analytical writing skills, specifically aligned with figurative competence.

From a theoretical perspective, the results strongly support the tenets of Cognitive Linguistics, particularly Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The findings confirm that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device but a cognitive mechanism through which individuals construct meaning and understand abstract concepts. Students' responses demonstrate that metaphor comprehension involves mental effort, conceptual mapping, and experiential understanding. Moreover, the study contributes to existing research by reinforcing the idea that metaphor interpretation in EFL contexts is influenced by cognitive, linguistic, cultural, and educational factors, thereby confirming its nature as a highly multidimensional process.

2.5. Recommendations for Students, Teachers, and Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to improve the teaching and learning of metaphors in EFL contexts.

2.5.1. Recommendations for Students

Students are encouraged to engage more actively with figurative language by practicing regular reading authentic literary texts that contain complex metaphors. Developing an awareness that metaphors require interpretation beyond their literal meaning can help learners improve their analytical and inferential skills. It is also recommended that students try to verbalize andexplain metaphors in their own words, as this practice can strengthen both their cognitive comprehension and academic expression. In addition, learners should expose themselves to diverse genres of reading materials in order to become more familiar with various metaphorical expressions and cultural references. Finally, students need to consciously shift away from direct, word-for-word translation methods when faced with figurative language, emphasizing the importance of recognizing theconceptual correspondences between their native culture and the target language.

2.5.2. Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating students' understanding of metaphors. It is therefore recommended that they provide explicit instruction on how to interpret figurative language rather than assuming that students will understand it intuitively. Classroom activities should encourage discussion, interpretation, and the comparison of different metaphorical meanings in order to develop students' critical thinking skills.

Moreover, teachers are encouraged to integrate interactive and student-centered approaches, such as the guided group work and guided analysis of literary extracts. This can help learners share interpretations and benefit from multiple perspectives. Teachers should also support students in bridging the gap between intuitive understanding and academic analysis by introducing appropriate literary terminology and and conceptual mapping frameworks. Additionally, instructors should also include clear cross-linguistic comparisons in the classroom to help students understand Conceptual Metaphor Transfer between their native language and English.

2.5.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of this study by including a larger and more diverse sample of participants from different universities or academic levels. This would provide more generalizable findings regarding metaphor comprehension in various EFL contexts.

It would also be beneficial to use multiple research instruments, such as classroom observations orcomprehension tests, in addition to interviews, in order to enrich the data and ensure methodological triangulation. Further studies could also explore the comparison between university students' comprehension of metaphors in literature and other forms of figurative language.

Additionally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine how learners' metaphorical competencedevelops over time with explicit instruction and practice.

General conclusion

This dissertation has explored EFL undergraduate students' understanding of metaphors in English literature at Abdelhafid Boussouf Mila University. The main aim of the study was to investigate how learners interpret figurative language, the cognitive and imaginative processes involved in this interpretation, and the challenges they encounter when dealing with metaphorical expressions. It also sought to highlight the extent to which students are able to move beyond literal meaning and engage in deeper levels of textual interpretation.

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with six third-year English students. The data collected were analyzed through thematic analysis, which allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns in students' responses. Five main themes emerged from the analysis: metaphor as a cognitive and meaning-making process, figurative language as an emotional and imaginative experience, cultural and linguistic challenges in interpretation, the role of classroom interaction in meaning construction, and the gap between intuitive understanding and academic analysis.

The findings revealed that students generally perceive metaphors as complex cognitive tools that require interpretation rather than direct translation. Most participants reported relying on imagination, inference, and personal reasoning to understand figurative meanings. At the same time, they emphasized the emotional and aesthetic role of metaphors in making literary texts more engaging and meaningful. However, the study also identified several difficulties, particularly related to cultural references, linguistic complexity, and limited ability to articulate interpretations in academic language.

Overall, the results confirm that metaphor comprehension is an active interpretive process influenced by cognitive effort, linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, and classroom interaction. These findings are consistent with Cognitive Linguistics theory, especially Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which views metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of thought rather than a purely rhetorical device.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of explicit instruction in figurative language within EFL classrooms. Teachers should support students in developing both intuitive understanding and academic analytical skills in order to bridge the gap identified in the findings. Despite its limitations, this research contributes to a better understanding of how EFL learners process metaphors and emphasizes the need for further studies in this field with larger samples and varied methodologies.

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Appendix

Appendix: Students' Interview

The Student's Interview Questions

Section1:General

1. Can you introduce yourself and tell me about your experience reading English literature (novels, poems etc.)?

2. When you read in English, do you enjoy finding hidden meanings, or do you prefer it when the language is direct and simple?

3. In your opinion, how important is it for an English student to be able to understand metaphors and "read between the lines"?

Section 2: Conceptual Awareness & Metaphorical Mapping

4. When you see a metaphor (for example: "Life is a roller coaster" or "Education is the passport to the future."), do you think it is just a way to make the writing "beautiful," or does it help you understand the idea better?

5. When you see a complex metaphor, how do you find the connection between the two things being compared?

6. Do you find metaphors easier to understand when they relate to physical feelings (like "warmth" for kindness or "cold" for loneliness)?

Section 3: Cognitive Processing and Interpretation Strategies

7. When you come across a difficult metaphor, what is the first thing you do? Do you look at the surrounding words, use your imagination, or try to translate it into your own language?

8. Do you "see" images or pictures in your mind when you read figurative language? Does this help you understand the author's message?

9. Have you ever been unable to understand a metaphor because it was related to a culture (British or American) that was different from yours? How did you feel?

Section 4: Pedagogical Experience and Classroom Interaction

10. In your classes, do your teachers explain how to analyze metaphors, or do they just tell you what the metaphor means?

11. When you discuss a story in class, does talking with your classmates help you understand the metaphors better than studying alone?

12. Can you think of a time a teacher helped you understand a metaphor that completely changed how you felt about a story or poem?

Section 5: Final Reflections and Suggestions

13. Do you think there should be more lessons dedicated specifically to understanding figurative language at the university level?

14. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the difficulties you face, or the strategies you use, when you try to understand metaphors in English

The student's Answers

Section 1: General Information & Linguistic Profile

1. Can you introduce yourself and tell me about your experience reading English literature (novels, poems, etc.)?

Student A: Hello! my name is A, i'm third-year English student at Mila university,

Regarding my experience with English literature, i read novels and short stories in my free time. I'm really into novels that you can experience the narrator's perspective, that we call point of view, especially when it offers an escape where you take a deep psychological journey to a character's psychology.

Student B: My name is B, I am a third-year English student at university. I have always been interested in English literature, especially novels and poetry. During my studies, I have read works like The Great Gatsby, some Shakespeare extracts, and also modern short stories.

Honestly, I don’t read literature only for exams; sometimes I read it because I enjoy discovering how language can express emotions in indirect ways.

Student C: My name is C, I am a third-year English student. I read English literature mainly when it is required in class. I have read some novels and short stories, but I don’t read regularly outside university.

Student D: My name is D, I am a third-year English student. To be honest, I don’t read much English literature outside the classroom. I mostly focus on what is required for exams.

Student E: My name is E, and I am a third-year English student. I enjoy reading short stories and sometimes poems in English. I like literature because it helps me learn new ideas and vocabulary.

Student F: My name is F, and I am a third-year English student. I read English literature mostly for my studies, but sometimes I enjoy reading novels in my free time.

2. When you read in English, do you enjoy finding hidden meanings, or do you prefer it when the language is direct and simple?

Student A: I have no difference if the meaning is hidden or direct. It depends on the whole meaning. If it's good, I don't like the way if it's hidden or direct. It doesn't matter for me.

Student B: Personally, I prefer texts that include hidden meanings. I find direct language easy to understand but sometimes a bit boring. When there is something to interpret, it makes me feel like I am “participating” in the text, not just reading it. It motivates me to think more deeply.

Student C: To be honest, I prefer direct and simple language. When there are hidden meanings, I sometimes feel a bit lost, especially if the text is long or complicated.

Student D: I prefer direct language because it is easier to understand. When the text has hidden meanings, I feel confused most of the time.

Student E: I like both direct and hidden meanings, but I prefer when the text is not very complicated. Hidden meanings are interesting when I can understand them.

Student F: I prefer simple language because it is easier for me, but I also enjoy hidden meanings when they are explained clearly.

3. In your opinion, how important is it for an English student to be able to understand metaphors and "read between the lines"?

Student A: Without a doubt, English students need to know and understand metaphors and between the lines, because most of the literature contains this kind of, any kind of different kind of metaphor between lines, hidden meanings, so it is part, at least not.

Student B: Yes, I think it is very important for English students to understand metaphors. In my opinion, literature is not just vocabulary and grammar, it is also about interpretation.

Without understanding figurative language, we might miss the real message of the author.

Student C: I think it is important, but not easy. We need it for understanding literature, but sometimes I need extra time to understand it.

Student D: I know it is important, but for me it is one of the most difficult parts in English literature.

Student E: I think understanding metaphors is important because they are common in literature and help us understand the writer’s ideas and emotions.

Student F: Yes, it is important because metaphors help students understand deeper meanings in literature.

Section 2: Conceptual Awareness & Metaphorical Mapping

4. When you see a metaphor (for example: "Life is a roller coaster" or "Education is the passport to the future."), do you think it is just a way to make the writing "beautiful," or does it help you understand the idea better?

Student A: Metaphors, of course, help you understand more. It makes you imagine how it looks like, and then make your imagination, create the scene, create the commands, and it's more enjoyable, it's beautiful and enlightening, and it makes understanding easier. Sometimes there are difficult metaphors, but in general, it could be if it helps understanding the things.

Student B: When I see metaphors, I usually feel that they are not just for decoration. For example, when I read “Life is a roller coaster,” I immediately think about emotional ups and downs, so it actually helps me understand the idea better.

Student C: Sometimes metaphors help me understand the idea, but other times I only understand them after the teacher explains.

Student D: When I see metaphors, I usually don’t understand them immediately. I need explanation from the teacher

Student E: I think metaphors make writing more interesting and also help explain ideas in a creative way.

Student F: I think metaphors are useful because they make ideas clearer and more emotional.

5. When you see a complex metaphor, how do you find the connection between the two things being compared?

Student A: It depends. Sometimes you read and read and you don't get the meaning because he language used or the metaphors used are high. So, it is both. It is both.

Student B: What I usually do is try to identify what the two elements have in common. I ask myself: what does “roller coaster” represent in real life, and how does it connect to life experience?

Student C: I usually try to guess the meaning from the sentence, or I translate it into Arabic first to understand better.

Student D: It is difficult for me to connect the two ideas. Sometimes I just try to memorize the meaning instead of analyzing it.

Student E: I usually try to compare the two ideas and think about what they have in common. Sometimes context helps me understand.

Student F: I try to understand the meaning by reading the whole paragraph and connecting the ideas together.

6. Do you find metaphors easier to understand when they relate to physical feelings (like "warmth" for kindness or "cold" for loneliness)?

Student A: Take out the metaphor and try to connect between the two things. I try to find something in common, try to find something that connects both sides and understand the common thing between them. From this point, you can understand the whole metaphor.

Student B: Yes, metaphors related to physical sensations are definitely easier. Words like “warmth” or “coldness” immediately create emotional associations.

Student C: Yes, metaphors that use physical ideas are easier for me compared to abstract ones.

Student D Only very simple metaphors are understandable for me, especially those related to common feelings.

Student E: Yes, physical metaphors are easier for me because they are more familiar and easier to imagine.

Student F: Yes, metaphors connected to feelings or physical experiences are easier to understand.

Section 3: Cognitive Processing and Interpretation Strategies

7. When you come across a difficult metaphor, what is the first thing you do? Do you look at the surrounding words, use your imagination, or try to translate it into your own language?

Student A: I find it a bit challenging when metaphors are used to describe feelings. And it depends on how it is used.

Student B: When I face a difficult metaphor, I first read the whole sentence, then I look at the context. If I still don't understand, I try to relate it to my personal experience or sometimes discuss it with classmates.

Student C: My first reaction is usually translation. If I still don't understand, I ask a classmate or check notes.

Student D: My first strategy is translation word by word, but honestly it doesn't always help.

Student E: First, I read the sentence again and look at the context. If I still don't understand, I translate some words.

Student F: When I find a difficult metaphor, I first look at the surrounding words and then try to guess the meaning.

8. Do you "see" images or pictures in your mind when you read figurative language? Does this help you understand the author's message?

Student A: I will cross the difficult metaphor, I try to understand surrounding words to get the general meaning. Sometimes I use my imagination.

Student B: Yes, I usually visualize scenes in my mind. I think this mental imagery really helps me understand what the author is trying to express.

Student C: Sometimes I imagine pictures in my head, but not always. It depends on the metaphor.

Student D: No, I rarely form images in my mind because I focus more on understanding the words.

Student E: Yes, sometimes I imagine pictures in my mind, and this helps me understand the meaning better.

Student F: Sometimes I imagine scenes in my mind, especially when the description is strong and clear.

9. Have you ever been unable to understand a metaphor because it was related to a culture (British or American) that was different from yours? How did you feel?

Student A: I do think that images is trying to understand the written language. It is helpful sometimes, but not always. You can't always get the author's message that he wants to deliver.

Student B: Yes, I remember once I struggled with an American idiom in a text. At first, I felt confused, but later I searched for the meaning and understood it. It was a bit frustrating but also interesting.

Student C: Yes, I sometimes find cultural expressions difficult, especially idioms from British or American culture.

Student D: Yes, I often feel lost when the metaphor is cultural. I usually wait for explanation.

Student E: Yes, sometimes cultural metaphors are difficult for me because they are different from our culture. I feel confused at first, but I try to search for the meaning.

Student F: Yes, I had difficulty with some British expressions before. I felt confused, but later I understood them after explanation.

Section 4: Pedagogical Experience and Classroom Interaction

10. In your classes, do your teachers explain how to analyze metaphors, or do they just tell you what the metaphor means?

Student A: It happens sometimes that you can't comprehend the metaphors that are related to a culture, and you don't get the meaning.

Student B: In most of my classes, teachers usually focus more on giving us the direct meaning of the metaphor rather than teaching us how to analyze it step by step. Sometimes they briefly explain the idea behind it, but they don’t really guide us through the process of interpretation. I feel like we are expected to understand it on our own after hearing the explanation.

Student C: In class, teachers usually give us the meaning of the metaphor directly. They don’t really explain the method of analysis, so we just memorize the explanation.

Student D: Teachers usually just tell us what the metaphor means. They don’t explain how to analyze it, so I depend on their explanation.

Student E: Most teachers explain the meaning directly, but sometimes they also explain how to analyze the metaphor.

Student F: Usually teachers explain the meaning directly, but I would like them to teach us more analysis techniques.

11. When you discuss a story in class, does talking with your classmates help you understand he metaphors better than studying alone?

Student A: Teachers in my classes not only explain how to analyze a metaphor, they occasionally ask us to give the metaphor meaning. Sometimes they do explain it by themselves.

Student B: Yes, definitely. When we discuss in groups, I notice that each student has a different interpretation, and that helps me see meanings I didn't think of before. It makes the understanding deeper and more complete compared to studying alone.

Student C: Yes, talking with classmates helps a bit. Sometimes they explain in a simpler way, and that makes it easier for me to understand.

Student D: Yes, sometimes classmates help me understand better, especially when they explain in simple words.

Student E: Yes, discussing with classmates helps me understand better because everyone shares different ideas.

Student F; Yes, group discussion is helpful because classmates can explain ideas in an easier way.

12. Can you think of a time a teacher helped you understand a metaphor that completely changed how you felt about a story or poem?

Student A: It happens sometimes that you misinterpret or you don't get the meaning of the metaphor correctly, but teacher helps you understand the right meaning of the metaphor by changing how you see the whole story.

Student B: Yes, I remember once in a poetry class, we were analyzing a poem and I didn't understand a specific metaphor at all. After the teacher explained it in detail, I realized it had a very deep emotional meaning. It completely changed my perspective on the poem because I initially thought it was simple, but it turned out to be very rich.

Student C: I remember one time in poetry class, I didn't understand a metaphor at all, but when the teacher explained it, I finally got it. It made the poem clearer for me.

Student D: I don't really remember a specific moment, but usually when the teacher explains, I understand better than reading alone.

Student E: Yes, one teacher explained a metaphor in a novel, and after that I understood the character's feelings much better.

Student F: Yes, in one poetry class the teacher explained a metaphor step by step, and it helped me appreciate the poem more.

Section 5: Final Reflections and Suggestions

13. Do you think there should be more lessons dedicated specifically to understanding figurative language at the university level?

Student A: I think that it would be highly beneficial if there is a list of dedicated specialties to understand figurative of language at university.

Student B: Yes, I strongly think so. Figurative language is a key part of literature, and we don't practice it enough. More focused lessons would help students improve both their analytical skills and their understanding of texts.

Student C: Yes, I think there should be more lessons, because metaphors are difficult and we don't practice them enough.

Student D: Yes, I think we need more lessons because metaphors are very difficult for me.

Student E: Yes, I think universities should give more lessons about figurative language because it is important and sometimes difficult.

Student F: Yes, there should be more lessons and activities about figurative language to help students practice more.

14. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the difficulties you face, or the strategies you use, when you try to understand metaphors in English?

Student A: Difficulties that I see in trying to understand metaphorical language, sometimes you get, you don't get the right meaning. You misinterpret or you misunderstand. It may be something and you understand it's something else because it looks similar.

Student B: I think the main difficulty is that metaphors are often culturally or emotionally deep, so they require more than just vocabulary knowledge. My strategy is usually to analyze the context and relate it to real-life experiences. I also think that regular practice would make understanding much easier over time.

Student C: For me, the main difficulty is understanding abstract ideas. I usually translate and then try to understand slowly. I think more exercises would really help.

Student D: I face many difficulties with metaphors. I usually translate word by word, but it is not always helpful. I think I need more practice and simpler explanations.

Student E: One difficulty is understanding abstract meanings. I usually use context and examples to help me understand metaphors better.

Student F: I think practice is very important for understanding metaphors. Reading more literature also helps improve interpretation skills.

Résumé

Ce mémoire examine la manière dont les étudiants de troisième année de licence en anglais langue étrangère (EFL) perçoivent et interprètent les métaphores littéraires, en mettant l'accent sur les facteurs cognitifs, linguistiques et socioculturels qui influencent leur compréhension. Adoptant une approche qualitative, les données ont été recueillies au moyen d'entretiens semi-directifs menés auprès de six participants, puis analysées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique.

Les résultats montrent que les étudiants considèrent les métaphores comme des outils actifs de construction du sens. Toutefois, ils rencontrent souvent d'importantes difficultés liées aux barrières culturelles et à leur niveau de compétence linguistique lorsqu'ils tentent de décoder des expressions implicites. Ils ont tendance à recourir à une traduction littérale mot à mot comme première stratégie de compréhension. Néanmoins, l'analyse du contexte et l'activation des connaissances antérieures constituent des stratégies cognitives essentielles qui facilitent l'interprétation. En outre, l'interaction en classe et l'accompagnement pédagogique ciblé de l'enseignant jouent un rôle déterminant pour combler l'écart entre la compréhension intuitive et émotionnelle des étudiants et l'analyse académique formelle.

À la lumière de ces implications pédagogiques, l'étude recommande l'intégration d'activités interactives centrées sur le processus d'apprentissage plutôt que sur le produit final, afin de développer une compétence métaphorique autonome et de renforcer les compétences avancées en lecture littéraire.

الملخص

تبحث هذه المذكرة في كيفية إدراك طلبة السنة الثالثة ليسانس في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) للاستعارات الأدبية وتفسيرهم لها، مع التركيز على العوامل المعرفية واللغوية والسوسيوثقافية التي تؤثر في فهمهم. واعتمدت الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا، حيث جُمعت البيانات من خلال مقابلات شبه مهيكلة مع ستة مشاركين، ثم حُللت باستخدام التحليل الموضوعاتي (Thematic Analysis).

كشفت النتائج أن الطلبة ينظرون إلى الاستعارات بوصفها أدوات فاعلة لبناء المعنى، إلا أنهم يواجهون صعوبات ملحوظة مرتبطة بالحواجز الثقافية ومستوى الكفاءة اللغوية عند تفسير التعبيرات الضمنية، وغالبًا ما يعتمدون على الترجمة الحرفية كلمةً بكلمة كاستراتيجية أولية للتعامل معها. ومع ذلك، يساهم تحليل السياق وتفعيل المعرفة السابقة في تسهيل عملية الفهم. كما أظهرت النتائج أن التفاعل داخل القسم والتوجيه المستهدف من قبل الأستاذ يؤديان دورًا أساسيًا في ردم الفجوة بين الفهم العاطفي الحدسي والتحليل الأكاديمي المنهجي للاستعارات.

وبناءً على هذه الدلالات التربوية، توصي الدراسة بدمج أنشطة تفاعلية تركز على عملية التعلم بدلًا من التركيز على المنتج النهائي، بهدف تنمية الكفاءة الاستعارية المستقلة وتعزيز مهارات القراءة الأدبية المتقدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فهم الاستعارة، اللغة المجازية، تدريس الأدب للمتعلمين باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، استراتيجيات القراءة، الحواجز الثقافية، البحث النوعي، التحليل الموضوعاتي.