

## اكتساب واستخدام اللغة المجازية في الكتابة من قبل الطالب الجامعي في كلية التربية بالزنتان

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### ملخص الدراسة :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة تعلم واستخدام اللغة المجازية من قبل طلاب الجامعة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية بالزنتان. والفرق بين الناطقين باللغة الأم وغير الناطقين بها من حيث استخدام اللغة المجازية. عيّنة الدراسة تتكون من سبع طالبات يدرسن في كلية التربية ، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية و تنقسم إلى فئتين: الأولى تتضمن المتحدثين باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة الأم (طالبة واحدة) ، وفئة الأخرى تتضمن متعلمين اللغة الانجليزية. تتكون هذه الفئة الأخيرة من ثلاث فئات فرعية : أ- مستوى ذو الكفاءة العالية ، ب- المستوى ذو الكفاءة المتوسطة ، و ج- فئة المستوى ذو الكفاءة منخفض (طالبتان في كل فئة فرعية).

طُلب من الطالبات (عينة الدراسة) كتابة مقالات حول مواضيع معينة. تم فحص البيانات من حيث استخدام أسلوب الاستعارة و الأفعال الدلالية ، ومن ثم يتم تحليلها من حيث المواقف التي تُستخدم فيها ، أو تعقيدها أو بساطتها ، وترددها. ظهر فرق كبير واضح بين كتابة الطالبة المتحدثة باللغة الانجليزية (NSS) وكتابة الغير الناطقين بها (NNS). أحد الاختلافات هو عدد الكلمات المكتوبة ، تعقيد اللغة المستخدمة. في حين أن (NNS) استخدموا جمل بسيطة في معظم كتاباتهم ، إلا أن (NSS) قامت بتنويع كتاباتها بين الجمل البسيطة إلى المركبة باستخدام ادوات الانتقالية والربط المناسبة. بينما أظهرت (NSS) قدرتها على التعبير عن نفس الأفكار باستخدام أفعال وتعابير مختلفة.

ما لفت انتباهنا أثناء تحليل البيانات هو أوجه التشابه بين (NNS) في استخدام نفس المستوى اللغوي تقريباً من حيث البساطة والقواعد النحوية. بمعنى آخر ، الفرق بين الطالبات ذو المستوى المنخفضة (LLS) و ذو المستوى عالي (HLS) ليس كبير. و الأهم ملاحظة استخدام أسلوب الاستعارة و الأفعال الدلالية من هذه الطالبة و لم نلاحظ اي استخدام لهذه الاساليب من قبل (NNS).

بناءً على هذه النتائج فإن مجموعة من الاقتراحات تم طرحها كتفسير لهذه النتائج مثل: إجادة اللغة ، التدريس ، أو (overshadowing) وبناءً على نتائج هذه الدراسة ، اقترحنا مجموعة من التوصيات.

## **The Acquisition and Use of Figurative Language in Writing by University Student in Zintan Education College**

### **Abstract**

This study aims at investigating the learning and use of figurative language by the university students at the English department in Zintan Education College, and the difference between the native speakers and the-non-native speakers in terms of using figurative language. The subjects of the study are seven female students studying at the Education College, English department. These subjects are divided into two categories: the English-native speaker (one subject), and the non-native speaker category. This latter category consists of three subcategories: A- the high-proficiency level, B- the average level, and C- the low level category (two subjects in each subcategory). This is to track the learning and using of metaphor and connotation in their English write. The subjects were asked to write essays about certain topics. The verbs used in the essays are counted, and then be analysed in terms of the situations in which they are used, their complexity or the simplicity, and their frequency to detect whether they are used connotatively or denotatively. The results showed that there is a big difference between the native speaker's (NSS) writing and that of the non-native speakers (NNS) in terms of using figurative language in that the figurative language has not been used by the (NNS).



**Key words:** figurative language - connotations – metaphoricity  
– native speaker – non-native speaker

## **Literature Review**

### **0. Introduction**

In this study, figurative language is used to cover the meaning and use of metaphor and connotation. Besides these two main aspects, some other related aspects are also discussed such as phrasal verbs, idioms, and implicature, but the focus here is mainly on the former two aspects ‘metaphor and connotations’.

### **1. Metaphoricity and Connotations**

The discussion of these two language aspects does not cover all of their facets; rather, it only focuses on the definitions and types of metaphoricity and connotations, including the methods of distinguishing between metaphoricity and connotations, and the acquisition or learning of metaphoricity and connotations. That is, the facets which are related to this particular topic.

#### **1.1. Metaphoricity**

Metaphor has been defined as ‘a violation of selectional restrictions in a given context “my car drinks gasoline”’, Nayak and Mukerjee e.g. (2012). Clearer definition has been provided by Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014) who say that: “A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to describe something it does not literally denote, P 2”. In this definition Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi restricted metaphor to speech though it also exists in written forms of languages.

Both definitions simply indicate that metaphor means that something or someone resembles something or someone else in performance or appearance. This is explained by Hong-mei (2010) who says that the structure of one concept can be used to

form another concept. For example, words originally used to talk about river (concept of river) can naturally be used to talk about time (concept of time) as in 'Time flows'. The word 'flows' is commonly used to express the movement of fluids, so here the time is depicted as a river. According to this nature of metaphor as it is used across concept domains, it is now considered as a cognitive instrument of expressing a way of thinking about things not just a way of expressing ideas by means of language. In other words, metaphor is fundamentally conceptual rather than linguistic in nature (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, and Hong-mei 2010).

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) distinguish two types of metaphor, structural metaphors and orientational metaphors. The former means one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. For instance, argument can be metaphorically viewed as a battle. That is, when talking about an argument, it is possible to say: *in the midst of a heated argument, attack a position, indefensible, strategy, new line of attack, win, gain ground etc.* Orientational metaphors, on the other hand, organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. For example, when the concept of "HAPPY" is oriented as "up" and "SAD" as "down", English expressions like "I'm feeling *up* today" or "I'm feeling *down* today" can be uttered.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) go on saying that orientational metaphors usually have a basis in people's physical and cultural experiences, i.e. may the concept of "happy" be oriented differently in some other cultures.

Besides, with regard to the argument about whether metaphoricity is a cognitive or a linguistic issue, Hong-mei.



(2010), claims that orientational metaphors can be said to be both cognitive and linguistic in that when the concept of happy is cognitively viewed as up, many linguistic expressions can be coined such as: I am feeling up, my spirits rose, you are in high spirits, he is really low these days etc.

Although these definitions and types of metaphor suggest that literal meanings can be distinguished from non-literal (metaphor) meanings, Cacciari and Gluksberg (1995) claim that there are no accepted criteria for discriminating literal and non-literal expressions. However, they mention some strategies. One of these strategies is what is termed ‘the semantic clash’ by which the listener detects semantic deviance. For example, inanimate objects cannot think, so it would be a violation to say ‘the chair believes in God’. The deficiency of this strategy lies in the fact that even when there is no semantic violation, an utterance can bear either literal or non-literal meanings. Another alternative approach suggests that it should be the context pragmatic not the linguistic analysis that should be applied for recognising a metaphor. This pragmatic approach focuses on the pragmatic violations of conversational principles (see Cacciari and Gluksberg, 1994- chapter 13).

In this paper, the criterion used for determining metaphoricity is based on the definition- mentioned above- provided by Aleshtar and Dowlatabadi (2014) which says that: “A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to describe something it does not literally denote”. Thus, the sentences that are written by the students will be checked according to the literal meanings. If the literal interpretation of the sentences

matches in the context in which they occur, they marked as literal, if not, a metaphoric expression is signalled.

## 1.2. Connotations

For better explanation of the term connotation, it must be contrasted to 'denotation'. Denotation means the primary meaning of a word. That is, its dictionary definition, which is what the word stands for. It is concerned with the relationship between a word and the thing it refers to. Connotation, on the other hand, is the wider meaning of the word that refers to some additional emotive meaning. For example, the word 'family' denotes parents and siblings, but it could connote closeness, trust and love. Rabab'ah and Al-Saidat (2014) conducted a study on the connotations of colours in Arabic in which they say that the colour 'white' denotes the colour of snow or pure milk, but it can connote kindness and righteousness as in: قلبه ابيض *galbah abyadh*. His heart is white, i.e. he is a kind man.

Cacciari and Gluksberg 1994, Zhou (2011), and Dickins (2014) mention that connotation is subject to culture, personal experience, emotion and/or imagination. For instance, while the colour white has the connotation of kindness in Arabic, it symbolises death in Chinese culture, (Rabab'ah and Al-Saidat, 2014). The word 'nurse' (Dickins 2014) is associated with the idea of female gender while 'engineer' is associated with male gender in most European nations. The word 'private' does not have the connotation such as secret or confidential. Some connotations are idiosyncratic and are not part of the meaning of a word (personal), others are conventional within linguistic community (cultural).



Based on these views of connotation, Dickins (2014) distinguishes three types of associative meaning – according to him, associative meaning is one type of connotative meaning, but in this paper, however, we will use the term ‘connotation’ instead of ‘associative meaning’ - extralinguistic-based, linguistic-based, and scalar implicature-based. Extralinguistic based connotations are those which are determined by the facts of the extralinguistic world. The examples of ‘nurse’ and ‘engineer’, mentioned above, explain this type. Linguistic based connotations are those which are linguistically determined, i.e. determined by the semantics of the language involved, rather than by features of the extralinguistic real world. For example, the word ‘drive’ intrinsically has the meaning of directing something to a destination. The third type is scalar implicature-based connotations. The quantifier ‘some’ in sentence, ‘There are some chairs in the room’, indicates that not many chairs are available. Thus, the conclusion that can be drawn from all this, is that while denotation is the linguistic representation of objects and ideas around us, connotation is the additional meanings and interpretations that language speakers associate with a word or an utterance. This addition is based on personal experience and/or culture. That is why connotations are termed as ‘idiosyncratic’, mentioned above. This idiosyncrasy explains the fact that unlike denotation, there is no synonymy on connotations.

### **1.3. A Comparison and Contrast of Metaphor and Connotation**

Many researchers and linguists such as Lakoff and Johnson (2003), and Boers (2011) who have investigated connotation and metaphoricity do not seem to draw a clear division line between

these two language aspects. Some researchers such as Davies (1982), Papagno (2001), and Glucksberg and Haught (2006) discuss the differences between metaphors, idioms and similes.

These language aspects, connotation, metaphors, idiom and simile, are discussed under the generic term 'figurative language'. As mentioned a few lines ago, there is not explicit comparison between connotation and any of the other three aspects. Metaphor and simile are classified under the category of 'comparison', and they are contrasted and compared to idioms. Papagno (2001) distinguishes between idioms and metaphors in terms of their understandability and interpretation. He says that idioms and metaphors differ in that the former is: 'a string of words whose meaning cannot be derived from the analysis of words' typical meaning, and the latter is the use of language that designates one thing to represent another. Similar to this distinction is the one discussed by Davies (1982). He differentiates between idioms and metaphors with relation to translation and a second language. He mentions that idiom is certainly an obstacle to word-by-word translation and that a French idiom, for example, could have a corresponding idiom in Spanish and Italian, but not in English.

As for the differences between metaphor and simile, Glucksberg and Haught (2006) say that 'the literal meaning of a metaphor ... is the same as the literal meaning of the counterpart simile'. They claim that a metaphor can always be paraphrased as a simile, and that one way to interpret a metaphor is to convert it into a simile. Thus, there is no a semantic difference between metaphor and simile. The difference seems to be linguistic or syntactic in that simile uses the comparison words and phrases



such as ‘as’ and ‘like’. ‘A simile is a comparison made between A and B, and a metaphor expresses that A actually is B, even though that's not literally true’ (Glucksberg and Haught 2006). For example: *He is like an angel. He is an angel.*

Connotation, as discussed in section (1.2) above, is the wider use of the word that refers to some additional meaning. For instance, the white colour connotes kindness and peace in Arabic language as in: قلبه ابيض *galbah abyadh*. His heart is white. Furthermore, in some cases, as in some Libyan dialects, the connotation is sometimes represented with what resembles that connoted word as in: نهارك حليب *nahark haliib*, literary means ‘your day is milk’ meaning ‘have a trouble-free day’. The noun ‘حليب haliib’ represents white colour which in turn is connoted as ‘peace’.

In these two examples of connotation, the subjects ‘قلبه *galbah* (his heart)’ and ‘نهارك *nahark* (your day)’ are connoted as white and trouble-free respectively without using the comparison words ‘as’ or ‘like’. With this regard, it could be generally claimed that a metaphor is the actual use of a connotative meaning of a word. However, in the sentence ‘I sneak out of bed’ which is written by a student, mentioned in section (1.5) below, the word ‘sneak’ is used to describe that the writer left his/her bed quietly. There is on any kind of comparison or simile, but the concept of the word ‘sneak’ is used to describe the way of leaving the bed.

Thus, it is claimed, at least in this particular research, that the simplest form of metaphors deal with nouns and adjectives in comparisons without comparison words such as ‘as’ and ‘like’, and that connotation deal with verbs where the concept of a word is used to describe another concept as is the case of the verb ‘sneak’ above. In turn, for the purpose of validity and clarity,

these types of metaphors and connotations are targeted in this research. Of course, the type of metaphor as presented by Lakoff and Johnson is also considered, but it is dealt with as a very high level of metaphor use because such use is not determined by the language proficiency alone, but also by the environment and culture. According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lakoff and Johnson (1980), people, for example, conceptualise 'Ideas' as 'Food' as in:

- What he said left a bad taste in my mouth.
- There are too many facts here for me to digest them all.
- I just can't swallow that claim.
- We don't need to spoon-feed our students. (Hoang

2014)

Finally, there is another aspect of figurative language called implicature. There are several types of implicature and the widely accepted one is what is termed conversational implicature. Simply put, what is said is sometimes different from what is implicated. It is highly context-dependent. For example:

- Speaker (A) – Are you coming to dinner tonight?
- Speaker (B) – I have some guests tonight.

When examined separately, there is no any semantic relationship between the question of the speaker (A) and the reply by speaker (B), but in context, speaker (B) is implicitly apologising for not coming. Grice (1989), who was the first to introduce the notion of 'conversational implicature', discussed this idea in terms of conversation, i.e. in the spoken form. Thus, since implicature is mainly spoken, it is not included in this research.

## **1.4. Metaphoricity and Connotative verbs**

### **Acquisition/Learning and Use**

Before the 19th century, metaphor was considered to be largely literary and a ‘device of the poetic imagination and the rhetoric flourish. It was isolated from the language of communication, (Nayak and Mukerjee 2012). The study of metaphor is an infant branch of linguistic study and now researchers suggest that it should be taught in classrooms. Boers (2011) strongly supports this claim by saying that if learners recognise the conceptual metaphors, they will be in a better position to work out the meaning of newly encountered L2 figurative expressions. MacArthur (2010) also says that when learners have a relatively impoverished stock of words, metaphor is the most powerful tool to make meaning from many everyday words.

Hoang (2014) mentions the importance of introducing metaphorical and figurative language in language teaching saying that ‘it is advisable to consider the value of metaphor in language research and pedagogical contexts.’ Furthermore, metaphorical and figurative language can be used to determine learners’ proficiency in an L2. According to Boers (2004), beginners will have difficulty with figurative language due to the lack of lexical knowledge; advanced learners, will be more hesitant about producing figurative language while learners at intermediate level are those who may actually produce figurative language.

However, Cecilie (2014) confesses that metaphorical expressions in English pose a challenge to EFL learners. Metaphorical expressions seem more difficult to comprehend than ordinary lexical expressions. She says that metaphoric competence seems

to be neglected in the EFL classroom, and she suggests that more focus on metaphors teaching is needed.

Thus, many ways have been suggested for teaching metaphorical and figurative language. Doiz and Elizari (2013) say that metaphorical and figurative language can be presented to the learners just like introducing vocabulary. For instance, one way is focusing on the literal meaning of the key word which is used figuratively e.g. 'joint' in 'joint account'. The teacher may point out the semantic purpose for the figurative meaning of this particular word or a phrase without interrupting the communicative activity any further at that point. For example, on encountering 'a snap decision', the teacher can easily inform the students of the literal sense of the action verb by snapping fingers. Another way of teaching metaphorical and figurative language is through grouping them as follows: more is up; less is down: *cut down expenses; turn up the heating; the story was blown up*. Active is up; inactive is down: *they set up a business; the car broke down; the factory closed down*. Good is up; bad is down: *cheer up; feel up to a task; feeling down*. knowing is seeing and visible is up (in your field of vision): *the teacher turned up late; she never showed up; look it up in the dictionary*. knowing is seeing and visible is out (in the open): *I figured it out; it turned out difficult; she found*. (Doiz and Elizari 2013: p 3). Direct translation of instantiations of figurative language is also suggested.

Thus, it is clear from the discussion above that the metaphoric competence seems to be neglected in the EFL, and that researches on the teaching of metaphor and figurative language are still 'infant'. Few studies on the use of metaphor and



figurative language have been published revealing the difficulty faced by learners when attempting to use metaphor and figurative language. For example, Cecilie (2014) says: ‘overall score on metaphor comprehension of about 80% points to a lack of metaphoric competence’. Also Doiz and Elizari (2013) reveals that: ‘students’ productions of linguistic metaphors do not sound native-like, and, instead of conveying their ideas with precision, students end up making errors that hinder their communicative goals’. Apart from the few suggestions, some of which have been mentioned in this section, there are no any suggestions or techniques for teaching metaphor and figurative language.

## **2. Research Methods**

This study aims to investigate the learning and use of figurative language, mainly metaphoricity and verb connotations, by university students at the English department in Zintan college of education. It focuses on the following questions:

- 1- What is the difference between the native speaker and the English language learners in terms of the using figurative language?
- 2- At what level (low proficiency – average proficiency – high proficiency) is figurative language used?
- 3- Does the use of metaphoricity and verb connotations improve proficiency, or does proficiency improve the use of metaphoricity and verb connotations?

The reasons for choosing writing as a means for the investigation generates from the following facts:

- 1- According to the Monitor Hypothesis (Krashen 1982), second language performers can use conscious rules only when three monitor conditions are met: time, focus, and

knowledge. This means that in order for a learner to use what he/she has learned must have time to think, focus on correctness, and sufficient knowledge. All this makes it clear that writing is the best domain to investigate the learned knowledge.

2- According to Crystal (2005), the pressure to think while talking and spontaneity of speed makes speaking more difficult than writing.

3- Speaking can be affected by some other factors like listening and comprehending before replying.

4- The subjects of the study are from an education college which relies heavily on the written form of the language. The students are considered to be more advanced in reading and writing than in listening and speaking.

As has already been mentioned that the investigation of the topic will be carried out in a written form, that is, the data will be gathered in form of writing during which the subjects will be asked to write essays about certain topics. When teaching writing, we usually write different topics on the board and ask the students to choose one for next week's lecture. This is to give our students enough time to gather information about the topic. On the day of the writing, we ask our students to write tips, pieces of information, ideas, expressions that are related to the topic in hand and we discuss them together before we ask them to write. The same steps will be followed, but in this particular topic, we will give the students some information about using metaphor and figurative language.

The subjects of the study are seven female students studying at the Education College, English department. They are in their

graduation year. These subjects are divided into two categories: the English-native speaker (one subject), and the non-native speaker category. This latter category consists of three subcategories: a) the high-proficiency level b) the average level, and c) the low level category (two subjects in each subcategory). This is to track the learning and using of metaphor and connotation. The English native speaker was born and grew up in United Kingdom. The two high-level subjects spent four years in the UK, and the other four subjects, two average and two low students, are exposed to the English language in classrooms only .i.e. foreign language learners (FLL).

The reason for choosing one subject for the native speaker category stems from the fact that this subject is the only available native speaker who agreed to participate in this study. Also, the research methods are, to greater extent, adapted from a similar study conducted by Barry (2014) in which she used one native speaker subject although she was an English native speaker herself and the study was done in an English speaking country, the USA.

Thus, the subjects are arranged in a continuum ranging from low level to a native speaks as schematised below:

Native speaker category	Non-native speaker category		
	Non-native speaker subcategory		
Native speaker subject	High level subject	Average level subject	Low level subject
NSS	HLS	ALS	LLS

**Table (1) Level continuum**

The data was gathered during a normal class where the whole students, the targeted ones and the other students in the class, were asked to write on the targeted topics, The Internet, My

Town, and My Daily Routine. As mentioned in the previous section, we usually write different topics on the board, but for the purpose of this study we chose the topics this time. At the stage of writing, we asked the students to write tips, pieces of information, ideas, expressions that are related to the topic. After discussing those expressions and ideas, we dedicated the rest of the time for the writing which took about one hour and a half.

For the clarity and validity of this research, the criterion of ‘semantic violation’, mentioned in section (1.1), is used for determining the occurrence of figurative language. It is also mentioned in section (1.3) that for the purpose of this research, metaphor is distinguished from connotation in that the former is concerned with adjectives and nouns while the latter is related to verbs. For example:

- The Internet *carries* a huge range of information.
- He is a *library*.

Both these sentences are marked as figurative language as they violate the semantic of the verb ‘carry’ and the noun ‘library’. Furthermore, the first sentence is considered as connotation and the second as metaphor in that in the former it is the verb that violates its semantic meaning and in the latter the violation occurred through the noun.

### **3. Data Analysis Procedures**

The data will then be examined for metaphors and connotative verb usages. Any instances of metaphor or figurative language used are underlined. The verbs used in the essays are counted, and then be analysed in terms of the situations in which they are used, their complexity or the simplicity, and their frequency to detect whether they are used connotatively or denotatively.



When the comparison between the native speaker subject and the non-native subjects is drawn, the subcategories of the non-native subjects are all referred to as non-native subjects (NNS).

#### **4. Results**

Before discussing the main points of this study (the use of metaphors and connotative verb meanings), some other aspects are also mentioned here.

One of the most noticeable differences between the native speaker subject (NSS) and the non-native subjects (NNS) is the number of words written. While the (NSS) wrote about (250) to (300) words within the allocated time (1:30), the other subjects (NNS) only wrote from (50) to (120) words. The (NSS) mentioned some actions in details, for example when writing about her daily routine, she mentioned how much time she spends preparing herself and how she moved from place to place:

- I have precisely one hour to get out of the door.
- I head straight to the kitchen

The (NNS) only wrote simple sentences expressing the main actions only:

- I have my breakfast and I go to the college.
- I have my dinner and I go to bed.

Another difference is the variation of the grammatical structures used by the (NSS). She used a variety of sentence structures such as present participles, models, phrasal verbs, transitional etc. For example:

- I would just surf the Internet. (model)
- After making my bed and heading to the kitchen,...  
(participles)

While none of the (NNS) have used any of these structures. Their sentences were mostly simple-structured ones: I watch TV. And I cook dinner.

Only the (HLS) attempted to use compound sentences but the result was run-on sentences error: \*My first lecture starts at 9:00 so I go by the car to be there quickly.

Similar to the use of the compound sentences, the use of participle clauses is only occurred in the (NSS) writing. For example:

- After making my bed and cleaning, .....
- I go to sleep knowing that I am ready for tomorrow.

Such these structures have not been used by the (NNS) except for one use by one of the (HLS) when she wrote: After eating lunch, I take a nap.

#### **4.1. Phrasal Verbs**

The use of phrasal verbs occurred in the writing of the (NSS) many times:

- My alarm goes off at about 6:00 am.
- I go over my schedule ...
- When 3 pm finally rolls around.... etc.

The only phrasal verb that is used by the (NNS) is ‘get up’ or ‘wake up’ which does not seem to have a one-word equivalent i.e. this is the only way to express the situation of becoming conscious again after being a sleep.

#### **4.2. Connotations and Figurative Language**

Before discussing the use of connotation and figurative language, it is also noticed that the (NSS) showed her ability in manipulating verbs and expressions to vary her method of presenting the ideas in a topic and to avoid monotonous

expression that are casual in the (NNS) essays. For example, she used different verbs and expressions to express the same action, for example, she used (head, go, make my way) to express the action of moving one place to another.

- I make my way to the kitchen to prepare breakfast.
- I head home.
- I go to bed.

Similarly, she used one verb for different actions as is the case with the verb 'get' which she used to express the actions of (making something ready, arriving, going).

- I like to arrive earlier to get thing ready.
- As soon as I get home, I head to the kitchen.
- I have precisely one hour to get out of the door.

This ability of varying expressions in such a way is totally lacked in the essays of the (NNS). As mentioned above, they only used simple expressions such as 'I eat my lunch', 'I do my chore'.

Based on the definitions and the discussions of the terms 'connotation' and 'denotation' in section (1.2), connotations and figurative language are also vividly used in the essays of the (NSS). This is clear in the sentences:

- I sneak out of bed.
- My roots lie in Zintan.

In the first sentence, the (NSS) used the connotation of the verb 'sneak' to express the way she left the bed. According to English dictionaries, the denotative meaning of the verb 'sneak' is 'to move somewhere quietly and secretly so that no one can see you or hear you'. This verb has the connotation of moving quietly without being seen, so, (NSS) used it to express the fact that she left the bed quietly but not necessarily secretly.

The second sentence is extracted from the topic ‘My Town’ where the subject (NSS) used the verb ‘lie’ to refer to her original as she was born and grew up a different place, the UK. Generally speaking, the verb ‘lie’ expresses the idea of ‘be, remain, or be kept in a specified state’, therefore, the meaning ‘remain’ or/and ‘kept in a specified state’ is borrowed to express the idea that the subject’s original has not changed and remained ‘Libyan’.

Many more similar connotative expressions are used by this subject such as ‘People can finish work while they are comfortable at home’ and ‘... without needing to slip out of their doors’, ‘... use it for a long period of time which kills their precious time’ ... etc.

No any instances of connotative verbs have occurred in the writings of the (NNS), not even the advanced ones (HLS).

To sum up, while the compound structures, phrasal verbs and figurative language have been used by the native speaker subject (NSS), these features have not been tracked in the writings of the non-native subjects (NNS). A few, and in many cases ungrammatical, compound structures have been noticed in the writings of the high level subjects (HLS). It has also been noticed that there is a significant gap between the native speaker category and the non-native speaker category, while the gap between the subcategories .i.e. (HLS), (ALS), and (LLS) seems to be closer to each other. The following table summarises all this.

structure	Subjects			
	Native speaker	Non-native speaker		
	NSS	HLS	ALS	LLS
Sentence Complexity	+	+	-	-
Phrasal verbs	+	-	-	-
Connotations	+	-	-	-

Table (2) summary of the targeted structures used

## 5. Discussion

As mentioned in the previous section, there is a big difference between the native speaker's (NSS) writing and that of the non-native speakers (NNS). One of the differences mentioned above is the number of words written in the allocated time. The (NSS) wrote about some details of the actions (when talking about her daily routines, and her home town) and she elaborated on the benefits and disadvantages of the Internet (when writing about the Internet). The non-native speakers (NNS) only mentioned the main ideas when describing actions and facts.

Another difference, which is the focus of this study, is the complexity of the language used. While the non-native speakers (NNS) used simple sentences in most of their writings, the native speaker (NSS) varied her writings between simple to compound sentences using transitional devices and proper conjunctions. Whereas the native speaker (NSS) showed her ability to express the same ideas using different verbs and expressions, only one of the advanced subjects attempted using compound sentence but resulted in run-on sentences. Phrasal verbs and figurative language are also marked as 'non-existent' in the writings of non-native speakers (NNS).

What drew our attention during the analysis of the data is the similarities between the non-native subjects in using almost the same language level in terms of simplicity and grammaticality. In other words, the difference between the low-level subjects (LLS) and the high-level ones (HLS) is not that obvious.

Different explanations can be suggested as the factors for these findings such as: language proficiency, pedagogy, or overshadowing.

### **5.1. Language Proficiency and Pedagogy**

It is obvious that the language proficiency between the (NSS) and the (NNS) is beyond questioning, the discussion is focused on the language proficiency of the (NNS). Naturally, the language proficiency of the high-level subjects is higher than that of the average and low-level subjects (ALS, LLS) in that one of the (HLS) has spent four years in the UK and the other stayed in Ireland for four years. Also, we, as teachers, noticed this language proficiency level. However, as mentioned a few lines ago that the difference between the (LLS), (ALS) and (HLS) in terms of using complex and figurative language is not as it is supposed. Thus, it seems that the effect of language proficiency on the simplicity of the language used by these subjects and the non-occurrence of figurative language does not seem to have direct influence. Barry (2014) attributed the error of run-on sentences to L1 influence in that this type of error is acceptable in Arabic language. Barry's conclusion could be possible explanation for the error of the run-on sentences and the non-occurrence of compound sentences, but not for the avoidance of figurative language. Avoidance means that the subjects avoided using figurative language and complex sentences due to insufficient knowledge. Ellis (2008) says that it is not easy to identify avoidance; however, three conditions are suggested as markers of avoidance. The first condition says that avoidance occurs when learners are aware that there is a problem and do not have full understanding of the target language form. That is

‘incomplete learning’. The second one says that avoidance occurs when learners know the target language form but find it too difficult to use in certain circumstances. This means that only in some certain situations a language structure is avoided. The last condition suggests that avoidance occurs when learners are aware of the correct form, but unwilling to use it, that is, personal preference. Thus, this conclusion raises the statement mentioned in the literature review which says that connotation is culture and personal experience and that figurative language is language proficiency indicator i.e. only learners with high proficiency level can use figurative language. This, in turn, makes us conclude that even the (HLS) are not generally proficient enough to use figurative language. This means that although the (HLS) have the ability to express themselves fluently in speaking and writing in a way that are considered among the high students in the English department, they still not advanced enough to use complex sentences and figurative language. If this is the case, it would be the problem of the teaching-learning processes (discussed below).

## **5.2. Pedagogy**

As has just been mentioned that the gap between the high and the low subjects is not that big, and that the high subjects are not proficient enough to use figurative language, the cause of all this is mostly assumed to be teaching methodology deficiency and learning strategies.

The issue of the teaching methodology deficiency appears in the inclusion of metaphor and figurative language in the teaching processes is still new and it seems that these language forms have not taken into considerations by teachers yet. This is supported

by Boers (2011) who says that the introduction of metaphor in linguistic study is an infant branch and that metaphor has been considered to be largely a ‘device of the poetic imagination. It has been isolated from the language of communication, (Nayak and Mukerjee 2012). Orafi and Aljdee (2013) add that teachers pay no attention to vocabulary learning strategies used by their students and that these learning strategies remain a secondary concern in many second language classrooms.

As for the learning processes, the common vocabulary learning strategies that are used by Libyan language learners are guessing the meaning from the context which is used by only high vocabulary knowledge (HVK) students, and using monolingual and/or bilingual dictionaries, (Orafi and Aljdee 2013). The use of dictionaries seems to be the most common strategy which means that the vocabularies are mostly learned denotatively as the connotations of any word are not usually indicated in dictionaries.

### **5.3. Overshadowing and Blocking**

This phenomenon in second language acquisition (SLA) is used to describe the effect of one language structure on the acquisition of another. According to Ellis (2008), overshadowing and blocking means that “when one cue is perceived by the learner as more salient than another cue, as this is repeated, blocking occurs”. For example, when some adverbial are used for expressing temporal actions, they will overshadow aspectual markers, hence, learners will not acquire aspect, thus, the adverbial use block the acquisition of aspect. The effect of overshadowing and blocking seems to be evident in vocabulary acquisition, or the use connotations, in that the more dominant





word overshadows its synonymous. For instance, the verb ‘go’ is more commonly used to express the idea of moving from one place to another. Once this verb is learned, it overshadows its synonymous verbs and its connotative use such as the verb ‘head’, ‘leave for’ and/or the expression ‘make way to’.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6.1. Conclusions**

In terms of using figurative language, it has been revealed that there is a big difference between the native speaker subject’s (NSS) production and that of the non-native speakers’ (NNS). Also, with this respect, there is no any difference between the non-native speakers themselves in that none of them has used any form of figurative language. This finding contradicts with the finding of some of the previous studies such as Boers (2004) who says that only learners at intermediate level who may produce figurative language arguing that beginners will have difficulty with figurative language due to the lack of lexical knowledge and advanced learners avoid producing figurative language.

Many explanations have been suggested such as the teaching methodology in that figurative language, especially metaphor, is neglected in teaching, and that vocabulary learning and teaching strategies do not seem to encourage using figurative language. It also seems that teachers usually encourage their students to use simple language structures and straight forward vocabularies in order to avoid ambiguity and/or inappropriate words. For example, a study conducted by Hamed (2018) showed that a number of the students used inappropriate words such as using the word ‘work’ instead of ‘job’ as in ‘\*I will starting my work as a teacher.’

Another suggestion for the non-occurrence of figurative language is the phenomenon of overshadowing and blocking during which a lexicon overshadows its synonymy and, as a result, blocks the use of that synonymy.

Thus:

1- What is the difference between the native speaker and the English language learners in terms of the using figurative language?

The difference appears quite clear in that the native speaker subject (NSS) used figurative language while the non-native subjects (NNS) did not.

2- At what level (low proficiency – average proficiency – high proficiency) is figurative language used?

Figurative language is not used by any of the three targeted levels.

3- Does the use of metaphoricity and verb connotations improve proficiency, or does proficiency improve the use of metaphoricity and verb connotations?

According to the findings of this study that even the advanced subject did not use figurative language, it is not really clear which one affects that other.

## **6.2. Recommendations**

Some recommendations have already been proposed such as the one suggested by Doiz and Elizari (2013) that metaphorical and figurative language can be presented to the learners just like introducing vocabulary. Also, direct translation of instantiations of figurative language is suggested.

Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, we, the researchers, add some other recommendations.



First, when teaching comprehension, teachers usually focus on the synonymous and/or antonymous of the new vocabularies such as the synonymous of the verb ‘bounce’ in a sentence ‘The rabbit bounced in the field’ is ‘sprang’. However, teacher should also focus on teaching the idea or the thought (the concept) that is expressed by a certain vocabulary, not only its meaning in a certain context. In other terms, when a new vocabulary is learned, it should not be learned only according to that context in which it is first encountered, but, whenever possible, any possible meaning that vocabulary may have should also be considered. For example, the verb ‘bounce’ in the previous sentence ‘The rabbit bounced in the field’ should not be taught to express the action of moving up and down only, but also to represent the concept of returning and not going through as in ‘the cheque bounced’ meaning ‘rejected’ and ‘the email bounced’ meaning ‘it cannot be sent’. It could be said that this process may cause confusion. To avoid this, the teaching of the connotations of the new vocabularies can be done in separate classes or in different subjects such as writing or speaking lessons. Teaching the new vocabularies in different subjects is recommended to minimise the effect of Transfer Appropriate Processing model (TAP) suggested by Lightbown (2008) which says that: ‘we can better remember what we have learned if the cognitive processes that are active during learning are similar to those that are active during retrieval... p 27’. According to this model, what is learned in a text during comprehension classes is better retrieved when similar settings are available i.e. comprehension texts. Thus, when vocabularies learned in a lesson say ‘comprehension’ are re-practised in a different one, say ‘speaking’ and/or ‘writing’

classes, the retrieval of those vocabularies will not be restricted to one context. The teaching of the verb concept and its connotative usage should not be neglected.

The second suggestion is teaching paraphrasing in writing. Paraphrasing is conventionally taught in academic writing only; however, it should also be introduced to teaching writing in general as it helps learners to use synonymy, difference expressions, and even figurative language.



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