

Metaphoric Competence: An Analysis of Iraqi EFL University Learners

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Abstract

Metaphoric competence is the knowledge of and ability to use metaphor appropriately and effectively. It contributes to all aspects of communicative competence, and is therefore highly relevant to foreign language learning, teaching and testing. This study investigates the effect of instruction on the use of the conceptual metaphors. The sample of this study consists of forty students. Twenty students were enrolled in an experimental group that received instruction designed to increase their ability to use and understand metaphors. The other twenty students were enrolled in a control group, which received no instruction. The results show that, compared to the control group (traditional-based approach), systematic presentation of the target figurative expressions on *life* around the two conceptual metaphors they instantiate improves comprehension and spontaneous preservation of these expressions among Iraqi EFL learners.

Key words: competence, metaphoric, life, journey, gambling.

الخلاصة

ان القابلية على استعمال التعبيرات المجازية تشمل المعرفة والقدرة على استعمال المجاز على نحو مناسب ومؤثر. فهي تسهم في كل الجوانب المتعلقة بالقدرة على التخاطب. ولهذا فهي مرتبطة اشد الارتباط بعملية تعلم وتعليم واختبار اللغة الاجنبية. تبحث هذه الدراسة في اثر التدريب على استعمال التعبيرات المجازية. تتألف عينة الدراسة من اربعين طالبا. ٢٠ طالبا هم المجموعة التجريبية تلقوا تدريبا مصمما لزيادة قدرتهم على استعمال وفهم التعبيرات المجازية اما المجموعة الاخرى (عشرون طالبا) والذين يمثلون المجموعة الضابطة لم يتلقوا تدريبا مماثلا. تبين نتائج البحث بعد مقارنة المجموعة الضابطة مع المجموعة التجريبية ان العرض المنتظم لاثنتين من التعبيرات المجازية المتعلقة بالحياة والتي تدور حولهما الدراسة تحسن من الاستيعاب والحفظ التلقائي لهذه التعبيرات لدى متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية، لغة اجنبية في الجامعات العراقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكفاءة، المجاز، الحياة، رحلة، المقامرة.

1. Metaphor in English

1.1 Defining Metaphor: The metaphor has drawn scholars' attention for more than 2000 years. Traditionally, scholars regarded it as a matter of language, a linguistic phenomenon and defined it as a figure of speech. Figure of speech is a word or phrase which is used for special effect, and which does not have its usual or literal meaning (Richards et al., 1992: 139).

This definition connects in with the notion of metaphor as defined in traditional rhetoric. The word itself derives from the Greek 'meta' expressing change, and 'pherein' meaning 'to carry' (Lawrence 1972:11). In this respect, metaphors imply a 'carrying across' of meaning from one object to another (ibid.). Hence, a comparison is made between two essentially different things by identifying one with the other. So, in that (by now clichéd) poetic metaphor *My love is a rose*, a comparison is made between the loved one and a rose. where the qualities of the rose (beauty, fragrance, softness, etc.) are carried over to the loved one.

From literary perspective on metaphor, Kittay (1987:14) asserts that "metaphor provides the linguistic realization for the cognitive activity by which a language speaker makes use of one linguistically articulated domain to gain an understanding of another experiential or conceptual domain, and similarly, by which a hearer grasps such an understanding".

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) surely state that "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action". To take *Argument is war*, for instance, despite the difference in domain, with the former being linguistic behavior while the latter being armed conflict, in everyday discourse, *Argument* is usually constructed and understood through the concept of *War*, which is the mapping of the two domains in which the two belong to respectively.

Kövecses (2002: 4) defines metaphor as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain called conceptual metaphor. Thus, it is possible to talk about *life* in terms of *journeys*, *arguments* in terms of *war*, *love* also in terms of *journeys*, *theories* in terms of *buildings*, *ideas* in terms of *food*, and *social organizations* in terms of *plants*. Technically speaking, every conceptual metaphor "consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another". The source domain is a more concrete or physical concept that helps us draw metaphorical expressions and understand another conceptual concept. The target domain is a more abstract concept that is understood. Thus, *argument*, *love*, *idea*, and *social organizations* are all target domains, and *war*, *journey*, *food*, and *plant* are source domains, respectively.

According to King (2000:216), metaphor is "describing something by using an analogy with something quite different". Furthermore, the ability to explain a complex vague expression making it more understandable and clear is the beauty of metaphors. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992:182) understand metaphor as a kind of violation of the expected collocational range of a particular phrase or chunk of language. They suggest that much of the language we use is made of prefabricated chunks, into which different lexical items can be slotted. So, for example, the phrase 'a year ago' is a variation on the pattern 'a ago' which is used to indicate a specific past time.

1.2 The Uses of Metaphors

Obviously, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 4) remark that metaphor is omnipresent in everyday language, and therefore part of the non-native speaker's competence in the foreign language will include the ability to understand and use the metaphors conventionally used by native speakers of English in both academic and non-academic contexts. They (ibid.: 145) also give some other affirmations about the uses of metaphor. They claim that metaphors cause changes; it means changes are made as a result of the available metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson state that "new metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it."

Metaphors undoubtedly stand as an essential tool for investigating our understanding and conception of education with its many components as the teacher, the learner, the teaching/learning context and so forth. Cameron (2008: 321-38) believes that language use in educational settings shows important uses of metaphor, where it fulfills ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. And, of course, this is also true in tertiary educational settings. In fact, when it has been compared with conversation, journalism or literary texts, academic discourse has been found to display the densest use of metaphor.

In science, Lewis (1996: 487) comments that "metaphors are essential to the conception, development, and maintenance of scientific theories..." In the field of workplace performance, several scholars have indicated the potentials of metaphors in motivating employees to excel in the disposition of their functions.

Metaphors play a role in the therapeutic domain, Wirtztum (1988: 2) states that often in psychotherapy the therapist is at first the creative force. Certainly, patients describing their situations with metaphors are acting creatively. The problem is that their creative activity has stalled, and their metaphors have become frozen. The therapist's task is to thaw the patient's creative energy and impel it into problem-solving activities.

1.3 Metaphor Awareness

Understanding figurative language involves a process of inference, Hawkes 1972 (cited in Lazar, 1996:45-6) points out that understanding figurative language requires an act of 'completion' from the reader, in which a 'linkage' is established between the two disparate elements being compared. For the language learner, this process of decoding is applicable not only to poetic or literary language, but to many other instances of figurative language as well. Thus, in example *Violence is the cancer*, the learner is required to find the similarities between *violence* and *cancer* in order to make sense of the sentence. This involves the learner in inferring the features of *cancer* (it spreads in an uncontrolled way, often with fatal results) which are salient for understanding the subject of the sentence.

For Lazar (ibid.), decoding figurative language seems to involve a number of states:

1. Comprehending that two things which do not normally collocate together are being compared or brought together.
2. Deducing which features of the one are salient in the comparison.
3. Reinterpreting how the meaning of the other is altered when these salient features are applied to it.

In other words, in order to understand figurative language the learner needs to untie the covert connections in the utterance through a process of inference.

According to Little more (2002: 40), helping students to work out the meaning of unknown idioms and metaphors based on metaphorical vocabulary guessing strategies comes with certain benefits, since it has been proven that learners' metaphorical awareness was raised significantly.

Since metaphoric expressions are not normally used in isolation but within a discourse context, they can be stored and related to similar contexts of usage. Cameron (1996:58) asserts that "metaphorical language uses may be stored along with the memory of the context, and thus be available when a similar or related context occurs again..... not only do they remember the context, but they have also stored images and words as they were encountered in those contexts." Thus, the use of image and context in children's movies might be beneficial for the understanding and retention of metaphoric expressions in addition to the creation of mental networks of metaphors based on shared images and contexts.

1.4 Metaphoric Competence

1.4.1 Metaphoric Competence – Related Studies

There are two kinds of study on metaphorical competence: one is on awareness and the other is on competence itself. Survey on awareness and competence are not completely independent, because surveys on awareness also examine competence. Low (1988: 25-49) discusses the pervasiveness and centrality of metaphor, and argues that students need to develop 'metaphoric competence': awareness of metaphor, and

strategies for comprehending and creating metaphors. Low advocates that all learners of English as a second language need to develop at least some metaphor-related skills. He advises us to know that learning 'one-off' examples is not always helpful. Furthermore, he discusses approaches and areas in which learners should improve some skills connected to metaphor (e. g. the ability to interpret and construct plausible meanings by using metaphor, knowledge of the boundary of metaphor and awareness of some features of metaphor, and proposes activities for language lessons (ibid.: 129).

Wang 2006 (cited in Gao and Meng, 2010:114) carries out an experiment on 60 non-English majors in a university to test the effect of teaching of metaphorical expressions to enhance learners' 'metaphorical thinking on learners' vocabulary learning strategy and thinking patterns via questionnaire and think-aloud. The result demonstrates that the teaching of metaphorical expressions helps learners rely less on rote while being effective in improving learners' metaphorical and multi-directional thinking.'

In a number of psychological processes linking metaphor interpretation, Little more (2001: 460-61) discusses and examines metaphorical competence and its relationship to L2 learning and teaching. According to Little more, metaphorical competence consists of (a) originality of metaphor production, (b) fluency of metaphor interpretation, (c) ability to find meaning in metaphor and (d) speed in finding meaning in metaphor. She examined whether or not metaphorical competence is a unitary concept, identified cognitive qualities that may help it develop, and investigated its relationship with communicative language ability (ibid.).

Eliciting explicit metaphors from research participants, Deacon (2000 3-4), in his market research, suggests that the participants describe either themselves or product-relevant happenings in terms of color, as a fairy tale, television show, object, piece of music, etc. By using this metaphoric transformation they are able to get valuable and surprising narratives.

1.4.2 Metaphoric Competence in EFL

Traditionally, the teaching of figurative language has been deserted in the EFL classroom. Teachers and materials alike tend to present metaphoric expressions in isolation, as though they were peculiarity, as a quirk of language, therefore, their levels of English proficiency differ from low to high. However, adequate understanding and use (if possible) of metaphorical expressions are desirable for learners to enable understanding of the delicate and subtle nuances of expressions in English. Cameron (2001:45) remarks that without underestimating the positive effects of early language acquisition, one also needs to recognize that young age also presents some drawbacks for the teaching of EFL. First, the materials and methodologies used need to suit the cognitive and emotional maturation of children as well as their interests. Second, teachers need to be trained in solid programs and, finally, the rigors of the academic setting as well as the amount of time devoted to EFL instruction call for the need of a flexible and dynamic approach towards the teaching of EFL.

According to Danesi (1995: 5), L2 learners do not reach the fluency level of a native speaker until they have knowledge of "how that language 'reflects' or 'encodes' concepts on the basis of metaphorical reasoning".

Little more and Low (2006: 4) argue that 'metaphoric competence' is far from recondite, and needs to be seen as playing an important role in all the component parts of the model. They add our aim is not to 'sell' any particular theory of metaphor, but rather to show that metaphor is involved in virtually every area that language learners

need to use, understand or learn, and that it may even help their learning in cases where native speakers may not actively process metaphorically.

Johnson and Rosano (1993: 56) assert that idioms and metaphors should not be ignored by L2 curricula any longer. Their urge is to implant in L2 learners a more functional communicative competence over a traditional form alcompetence. Lazar (1996: 43-51) argues for more teaching of figurative language, and suggests some activities designed to help students develop strategies for comprehending and generating metaphor.

1.4.3 Factors Possibly Affecting Metaphorical Competence

Factors which may affect learners' metaphorical competence are (1) vocabulary knowledge (2) semantic elements (e.g. associations with words) (3) cognitive elements (e.g. schemas and image schemas) and (4) cultural aspects. Learners' vocabulary knowledge is a key factor not only in metaphorical competence but in all aspects of competence performed by foreign language learners. McCarthy (2001: 21-30) highlights the significance of the metaphorical extension of words, stating that "metaphor, as a device for creating a and extending meaning, is very important for the study of vocabulary". He says that native speakers are unconsciously aware of the metaphorical use of the lexical field, hence the range is not unlimited. However, this does not seem to be applicable to EFL situations, because non-native speakers may not have fully acquired linguistic and semantic abilities. His suggestion is to pay attention to the notion of the central or focal, or peripheral meaning of a word and the notion of metaphorical extension.

Kintsch and Bowles (n.d.: 11) arise the question, "what makes a metaphor easy or difficult according to the predication model?". One obvious candidate is the semantic distance between the argument and predicate of a metaphor. One might suppose that if the two terms are very far apart in the semantic space, it might be difficult to find something they have in common.

Piaget 1966 (cited in Arbib and Hesse 1990: 44-6) first used the English term "schema" and then the French "scheme." Piaget traces children's cognitive development and claims that a complex schema network arises through assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation refers to "the process whereby the data of the world are assimilated to currently available schema" and accommodation refers to "the process whereby the individual's repertoire of schemas changes over time to reflect better other aspects of the world beyond those assimilable to current schemas" (ibid.). Schank and Abelson's (1977: 37) classification of two classes of knowledge in understanding processes are general knowledge and specific knowledge. General knowledge enables a person to understand and interpret another person's actions or meaning based upon certain standard methods people usually use. Specific knowledge or specific detailed knowledge is used to interpret and participate in specific (but experienced) events, for example, ticket examination at a theatre or identification of seats at the theatre.

Kovecses (2000) claims that there are wide cultural discrepancies between any two cultures, which make the argument for universally valid conceptual metaphors unlikely. Figurative language in general encodes customs, cultural beliefs, specific features of a language, social attitudes and norms. Idioms, metaphors, metonymies and other types of figurative vocabulary enable a learner to immerse in the way speakers of the target language express inner thoughts, views, ideas and emotions. Therefore, learning metaphors provides learners with a good opportunity to acquire information about a language's culture (Glucksberg, 2001: 16).

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This section attempts to display a practical representation of what is theoretically presented in section one. It investigates the effect of instruction on the use of the metaphors motivating some figurative expressions used to talk about *life* nurtures awareness and spontaneous retention of these expressions among Iraqi EFL learners. The purpose of this instruction is to increase the students' understanding and use (if possible) of metaphorical expressions in their learning English language.

2.2 Hypothesis and Research Questions

The hypothesis of this study is that raising awareness of the metaphors motivating some of the figurative expressions used to talk about *life* nurtures understanding and spontaneous preservation of these expressions among Iraqi EFL learners. The researcher decides to study the semantic field of *life* because it is interesting for English learners for two reasons. The first, expressions about *life* are quite common in everyday language. The second, many expressions used when talking about *life* are metaphorical and are based on source domains, like the *journey* and *gambling* domains. In this regard, the researcher addresses the following two research questions:

1. Does overt knowledge of the motivations behind certain *life* idioms assist learners understand and retain them spontaneously in the short-term?
2. Are the advantages of this teaching strategy preserved in the middle-term?

2.2 Sample

The subjects in this study are (40) third year students at the University of Al-Qadissiya, College of Education, Department of English. They are informed of the fact that they are selected to take part in this research and the obtained data will be used merely for the sake of research. The students are enrolled in a three-week session of instruction. Throughout the sessions, students receive instruction on two concepts of metaphor: *life is a journey* and *life is a gambling*. Each session plan is carried out in a two-hour period once a week with a ten minute break in the middle.

The (40) subjects are equally distributed into two groups: the control group (henceforth CG), and the experimental group (henceforth EG), although CG has a higher number of female than male ones, the mean age of both groups is similar: 21.5 years for CG and 21.7 for EG (see table 1).

Sex		Mean Age	Number	Group
M	F			
6	14	21.5	20	Experimental
9	11	21.7	20	Control

Table (1): The Subjects

2.3 Materials

The materials comprise two-page handout, a pilot test, a test, and a posttest which is administered two weeks after the test. The first handout, provided in Appendix 1, contained (10) of quotes (1) and one text is an extract from an article (2). The second handout is selected from *Top 50 Quotes about Gambling* (3) and *Luck and Money and Gambling Quotes* (4) (see Appendix 2). The subjects are familiar with the class material provided. The items comprise the following multi-word and one-word lexical units such as *between the paths*, *signposts previous generations*, *footprints*, *destination*, *lottery*, *win a large jackpot*, *risk taking*, *snooker chess*, *race track to win a bet on a horse*, *the stakes*, *luck* etc. The researcher intentionally selects expressions of varying degree of difficulty ranging from the more transparent to the more opaque

expressions: the more transparent expressions are expected to be easier to acquire, while learning the more opaque expressions are expected to be more difficult.

Furthermore, most of the items of the test and post-test are borrowed from: **Idioms Organiser** by Wright (1999), as well as from the two handouts. **Idioms Organiser** takes a broad view of idioms derived from the 12 conceptual metaphors (see Appendix 3).

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

First, pilot test is conducted to examine the appropriateness of the items of the test, guarantee the homogeneity of the subjects, prior to the instruction, check the amount of time required by the researcher to present the target items. The pilot test has revealed that reading all the contents of handout (1) and handout (2) required an excessive amount of time. So the average time required to do the task is about one hour. In addition, this test includes figurative and metaphorical language and comprises (16) target items and (22) fillers from handouts (1) and (2). The results of the test have revealed that the students are familiar with two items, *luck* and *lottery*, which are subsequently discarded from the list of target items that the students have to be taught in the experiment.

After administering the pilot test, session plans are developed for the sake of instruction. These session plans contain activities that aim to teach metaphorical expressions, their meanings, and the logic behind them in order to boost learners' metaphorical perceptions in the target language (see 2.5).

Finally, the researcher asks both CG and EG to answer the test. Two weeks later, the two groups take a post-test, which is identical to the first test, to examine if the students cognitively understand the figurative meaning of the metaphors and to explore the medium-term effects of the teaching approach (see Appendix 3).

2.5 Techniques of Instruction

The instruction involves several activities that are included as part of the normal flow of the experiment. In the first instruction session meeting, the researcher presents various explanations on conceptual metaphors, some idea of what metaphorical expressions, idioms are, and how applicable are such conceptual metaphors and many idioms deriving out of them. In the next session, the researcher distributes handout (1) and handout (2) among the subjects. The subjects are asked to read handout (1) and handout (2), and write a list of all the words they do not know. In the CG the researcher proceeds as if it is an ordinary lecture: she provides the meanings of the target items and gives the necessary explanations to ensure that everyone of the students understands the quotes and the text. Students write down the vocabularies of the target items in their notebooks. In the EG the participants read the two handouts and also make a list of words unknown to them. The researcher explains the notion of conceptual metaphor in simple terms and organizes the target items around two concepts of metaphor: *Life is a journey* and *Life is a gambling*. The following is a transcript of the explanation presented:

There are some expressions, especially idioms and phrasal verbs, that must not be comprehended in a literal meaning. At times there is a metaphor lies beneath these expressions, which inspire their figurative sense. Metaphorical use of a word is more common today than its literal use. But it is important to know the literal meaning because the literal meaning creates a picture or image in the mind and this picture or image makes the other meanings easier to understand. Metaphorical language is important because it is fun to learn and use. This kind of language is very useful when we need to talk about our mental states because it is not easy to explain our feelings, thoughts, and views in the same way we talk about physical things. In English, *life* is

compared to *journey*, perhaps because both have a similar effect on us, for instance, they make us go places, tracks, and crossroads or fill us with lessons, heartaches, joys, celebrations and special moments. Because *life* is full of uncertainties, *Life* is also compared to *a gambling*, for example, they talk about luck, winning, odds, chances. These comparisons permit us to connect the figurative expressions of *life* in the quotes and text of handouts (1) and (2) to the two metaphors: *Life is a journey* and *Life is a gambling*.

After that, the students in the EG write down the vocabularies and the meanings of the target items in their notebooks. One aspect of this part of the treatment is to focus further the learners' attention to notice metaphoric expressions, thus highlighting their awareness. It is worth mentioning, learners' vocabulary knowledge and semantic elements are key factors of the metaphorical competence (see 1.3 and 1.4.3).

Throughout the session instruction, all participants are actively engaged on task. Many commented on the direct relevance of the instruction to develop their conceptual fluency and metaphorical competence after several sessions of studying English metaphorical expressions.

2.6 Data Analysis

To analyze the obtained data, the correct answer of any subject to any question in the test and post-test is scored one mark. The data obtained from the test and post-test are subjected to statistical analysis to explore the probable effect of the treatment, applying matched t-test.

2.7 Results and Discussion

2.7.1 The Test

Descriptive statistics data of the test are demonstrated in table (2). In this table the results show that the achievement of the subjects of the EG outweighs considerably that of the CG. This is so since mean score obtained by the EG is (13.8) with a standard deviation of (75.31), whereas the mean score of the CG is (9.45) with a standard deviation of (65.15).

Results of the application of the t-test formula for two independent samples to point out the significant differences in the achievement scores between the EG and the CG are as follows: the computerized t-value is (2.64), the tabulated one is (1.98), with degree of freedom of (38). Since the computerized t-value is higher than the tabulated one, the difference in the mean scores of the two groups is significant at (0.05). In other words, there is a highly significant difference between the achievement of the subjects of the EG who were instructed various explanations on conceptual metaphors, and many idioms deriving out of them and subjects of the CG who did not receive instruction. This difference is in the favour of the EG.

Significance Difference at the Level of 0.05	d.f	t- value		Standard Deviation	Mean	N	Group
		tab	com				
Statically different	38	1.98	2.64	75.31	13.8	20	Experimental
				65.15	9.45	20	Control

Table (2): The t- test Value Achievement Scores Between the Subjects of the CG and the EG in the Test

It follows from the analysis of the results in table (2) that explicitly relating idioms/figurative expressions to their underlying conceptual metaphors helped learners comprehend and spontaneously retained the target items in the short-term.

In order to achieve the aim of the study and to answer the two research questions mentioned above (see 2.1 and 2.2), learners' responses were scored by the researcher (see 2.6). Accordingly, the achievement scores of the CG and the EG in the test were compared (see table 3).

Experimental Group	Control Group		
Score	Score	Item	No.
28	20	Toss	1
20	8	hit the jackpot	2
29	18	against all odds	3
14	7	at stake	4
36	32	Footsteps	5
9	3	side-tracked	6
16	8	dead-end	7
35	31	take my chances	8
16	11	up your sleeve	9
17	14	light at the end of the tunnel	10
16	12	at a crossroads	11
17	11	separate ways	12
8	2	taken off	13
15	12	Destination	14
276	189		Total

Table (3): Achievement Scores of Subjects of the CG and the EG in the Test

In the light of the statistical results, table (3) shows that the students in the CG employed a total of (189) correct responses of idioms/figurative expressions to their underlying conceptual metaphors; whereas in the EG employed a total of (276) correct ones.

The table above illustrates similar trends in the acquisition of the lexical items in the EG and the CG. Both groups got their highest scores in the same items (*footsteps*, *take my chances*, *light at the end of the tunnel*, and *destination*) and their lowest in the same items (*at stake*, *side-tracked*, *dead-end*, and *taken off*). The results are uncomplicated. The items with the highest scores are more transparent, i.e. a metaphor is comprehensible if some link is found between topic and vehicle, even though the two may be unrelated overall (Kintsch and Bowles, n.d.: 13).

Conversely, the items which were more difficult for both groups (*at stake*, *side-tracked*, *dead-end*, and *taken off*) are rather opaque because the subjects may hardly understand the meanings or find equivalent words or expressions of these four items which may cause real problems and present a bigger challenge for them, for instance, one of the items, *side-tracked*, does not have an equivalent word or expression and paraphrasing is required to explain its meaning, making it more difficult to be remembered by the subjects.

The table also shows clear differences in the performances of the two groups. Firstly, the students in the EG are more successful in the comprehending and retention of the new lexical items than their counterparts in the CG. The EG obtained the best results in some of the expressions which represent the conceptual metaphor *Life is a gambling* (e.g. *toss*, *against all odds*, *take my chances*, *up your sleeve*), the only exceptions being *side-tracked* and *at stake*, which proved to be to some extent difficult for both groups as noticed by the low number of correct responses they prompted. Secondly, the students in the CG obtained lower scores than the students in the EG in the whole target items, comprising the items which have also caused difficulty for the EG, such as *at stake*, *side-tracked*, *dead-end*, *taken off*, with the exception of *up your*

sleeve. Briefly, this validates the first research question: the introduction of the metaphors underlying the expression of *life* helps students maintain the new expressions. However, the better results can also be due to either the Halo effect, the effect of a feature which is not being tested, but which changes or influences the results (Richards et al., 1992: 165). Or Hawthorne effect, the effect, is that it is an experimenter effect whereby participants, in any human-centered study, may exhibit atypically high levels of performance simply because they are aware that they are being studied (Macefield, 2007: 145). Furthermore, one may be tempted to attribute the difference in the results between the EG and the CG to the difference in gender between the two groups since there are almost 50% more male students in the EG than in the CG as shown in table (1). According to Lack and Gallego (2012: 47), a great number of studies have been devoted to researching gender differences in several areas of second language acquisition such as reading comprehension by Brantmeier 2003, learning strategies by Jiménez 2003 or error production by Llach et al., 2006. The results of these studies point out contradictory findings, because some highlight the superiority of males over females, others emphasize girls being better language learners than boys and still some others demonstrate that gender is irrelevant in second or foreign language acquisition. They conclude from the analysis of their own data that the relationship between gender and lexical acquisition is indecisive.

2.7.2 The Post-Test

To address the second research question, specifically, whether the usefulness of explaining the underlying conceptual metaphors for the comprehending and acquisition of figurative language are preserved in the medium term, the students took a post-test two weeks after the test was first conducted. Descriptive statistics for the post-test are shown in table (4). This table displays, the mean score of the EG is (11) with a standard deviation of (60.2), whereas the mean score of the CG is (9.25) with a standard deviation of (55.7).

To determine whether there is a significant difference between the mean scores between the EG and the CG, the t-test formula for two independent samples is applied. The results indicate that the computerized and tabulated t-values are (1.87) and (1.98) respectively, with the degree of freedom (38). Since the computerized t-value is lower than the tabulated one, then it can be said that there is no significant difference between the achievements of the two groups at the level (0.05). Moreover, it cannot be concluded that the metaphor awareness approach assists the spontaneous retention of the meaning of idiomatic/figurative expressions in the middle term.

Significance Difference at the Level of 0.05	d.f	t- value		Standard Deviation	Mean	N	Group
		tab	com				
No statistical difference	38	1.98	1.87	60.2	11	20	Experimental
				55.7	9.25	20	Control

Table (4):The t- test Value Achievement Scores Between the Subjects of the CG and the EG in the Post-Test

The resultsof the two groups in the post-test are given in table (5).

Experimental Group	Control Group		
Score	Score	Item	No.
19	15	Toss	1
14	6	hit the jackpot	2
21	18	against all odds	3
11	9	at stake	4
34	31	Footsteps	5
6	2	side-tracked	6
11	7	dead-end	7
32	29	take my chances	8
11	13	up your sleeve	9
15	14	light at the end of the tunnel	10
12	14	at a crossroads	11
16	10	separate ways	12
5	6	taken off	13
13	11	Destination	14
220	185		TOTAL

Table (5): Achievement Scores of Subjects of the CG and the EG in the Post-Test

As table(2)above shows,lower scores in the post-test than in the test for all the target items.This suggests that the subjects need reinforcement and must give the amount of reinforcement to acquire new meanings and vocabularies, Richards et al., (1992: 165-66) states thatif a new teaching method is used, there may be an improvement in learning which is due not to the method, but to the fact that it is new. Later on, the improvement may disappear. The resultsalso indicate that the EG still do better than the CG in (8) items out of (14).Surprisingly,the CG is better performed than the EG in (3) items in the post-test (e.g. *up your sleeve, at a crossroads,taken off*). This can be ascribed to the students'stimulationto know the meanings of some of the target items after the first test, according to Nattinger (cited in Carter and McCarthy, 1988:71-2), techniques that enhance production will have to be centered on the meanings of words rather than on their forms. He adds most of our production has to do with searching for an appropriate meaning to fit the particular occasion.

In addition, the two groups scored low in (4) items which have also obtained low results in the earlier test (e.g. *hit the jackpot, at stake, side tracked, dead-end*). Faced with the seemingly difficult task of finding aninterpretation for such metaphors, the subjects do not give up; instead they come up with something, and there is acertain consistency among the subjects in how they respond. The subjects' responses may, however, not derive from having successfully interpreted adifficult metaphor, but may simply reflect word-based constraints.This supports the idea that difficult items need to be specifically worked on and strengthen.

The items that obtain better retention results in the test also have better results in the post-test (e.g. *against all odds, footsteps, take my chances, light at the end of the tunnel*).

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn in the light of the results of the study:

1.Statistical results indicate the differences of metaphorical competence regarding *life*betweenthe EGandthe CG in the test that is conducted after the period of instruction i.e. the short term.

2. In the short term, the EG performed better than the CG for both kinds of expressions: *life is a journey* and *life is a gambling*. In the same direction as the results of studies conducted by Boers (2000: 553-71), and Kövecses and Szabo (1996:326-55), that the metaphor approach facilitates the acquisition of figurative language in the short term.

3. Iraqi EFL learners have difficulty to understand and retain of some figurative expressions concerning *life*. Some expressions are transparent, others are opaque.

4. The metaphorical competence is directly or indirectly influenced by some factors such as type of instruction, frequent employment, period of exposure to the target language i.e. the more exposure to metaphorical expressions to express certain ideas and thought, the more competent and fluent.

5. Iraqi EFL learners require to be made aware of the existence of conceptual metaphors underlying the target items in the foreign language in order to be able to use this knowledge as a learning strategy.

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Appendix 1: Handout1

Quotes 1

- "Be bold enough to live life on your terms, and never, ever apologize for it. Go **against the grain**, refuse to conform, take **the road** less traveled instead of the **well-beaten path**."
- "Myths, legends and stories are the **signposts** previous generations have left us so we don't have to figure out our own personal journey in solitude!"
- "My journey in life, my **footprints** in the world."
- "**Destiny's Gate** is filled with darkness and light. If you identify with the darkness, this is a good sign as we all have to embrace the darkness within us in order to heal and be brought into the Light as One."
- "It's amazing how many **different roads** we can take, but they all lead home."
- "The termination; final chapter of **endless road**."
- "Every journey starts with **the first step** and the thousands upon thousands steps before you reach the end. Enjoy **every step**."
- "Life is a **daring adventure**. I am enjoying every bit of the joyful journey."
- "Life is **an individual race**"
- "I have a spiritual journey on earth.
Lord anoint and empower me to accomplish **my great task** on earth."

Text 1

LIFE IS A JOURNEY

Life is a journey filled with lessons, hardships, heartaches, joys, celebrations and special moments that will ultimately lead us to our **destination**, our purpose in life. **The road** will not always be smooth; in fact, throughout our travels, we will encounter many challenges.

Some of these challenges will test our courage, strengths, weaknesses, and faith. Along the way, we may **stumble upon obstacles** that will come **between the paths** that we are destined to take. In order to follow the right path, we must overcome these obstacles. Sometimes these obstacles are really blessings in disguise, only we don't realize that at the time.

When things don't always go our way, we have two choices in dealing with the situations. We can focus on the fact that things didn't go how we had hoped they would and let life **pass us by**, or two, we can make the best out of the situation and know that these are only **temporary setbacks** and find the lessons that are to be learned.

Appendix 2: Handout2

Top 50 Quotes about Gambling, Luck and Money and Gambling Quotes

- "**Lottery**: A tax on people who are bad at math."
- "**Luck** sometimes visits a fool,
but it never sits down with him."
- "**risk taking** is inherently failure-prone. Otherwise, it would be called sure-thing-taking."
- "Whoever called **snooker chess** with balls was rude, but right."
- "This person sees not her own hand depositing the next dollar in a slot machine, but the hand of fate, or God. It's her true conviction that there are forces at work for her to **win a large jackpot**— or at least to win back the money lost."
- "**A race track** is a place where windows clean people."
- "One of the worst things that can happen to you in life is to **win a bet on a horse** at an early age."

- "If you would be wealthy, think of **saving as well as getting**."
- If you must play,
decide upon three things at the start:
the rules of the game,
the stakes, and the quitting time.
- " **Living at risk** is jumping off the cliff and building your wings on the way down."
- "A **racehorse** is an animal that can take several thousand people for a ride at the same time."
- "Men have made an **idol of luck** as an excuse for their own Thoughtlessness."

Appendix3: The Test and Post-Test

Dear students,

I am conducting a study on metaphoric competence of language learners at the Department of English. Your responses are completely anonymous and confidential. Please feel free to respond to the questions. Your responses will be of great value to the findings. Thanks a lot for your contribution!

Name ----- Group -----

Q1. Fill in the gaps using the words in the box bellow:

1. before a football match, the captains a coin to see who will start the game.
2. I've passed my exam, got the travel grant, and been offered a fantastic job when I get back. I guess I've
3. Sh! Listen! Can't you hear the sound ofoutside?
4. I can't make up my mind. It's either stay where I am or apply for a job abroad. I seem to be at ain my present job.
5. Our partnership didn't last. In the end we agreed to go our
6. If you want my opinion. Stop spending all your time talking about football. Do you realize your job's?
7. Sorry it took so long. I got
8. I don't know how they found that Yachtsman in South Atlantic. But he survived
9. It's been a very difficult year, but I'm happy to say now seems to be some
10. There's no prospect of promotion. I'm in a job.
11. Thanks for your advice but I don't want to go to university. I'll in the real world.
12. She's getting frustrated. Her career hasn't really

Q2. Match the words on the left with their meanings on the right from 1 to 8:

was successful	A		take my chances	1
no further progress	B		at stake	2
seem impossible	C		footsteps	3
two choices are equally possible	D		side-tracked	4
trust to luck	E		dead-end	5
sound of walking	F		toss	6
risk losing	G		against all odds	7
did different things	H		hit the jackpot	8

			at a crossroads	9
			taken off	10
			light at the end of the tunnel	11
			separate ways	12

Q3. Choose the correct option for each sentence:

1. Life is a journey filled with lessons, hardships, joys, celebrations and that will eventually guide us to our.....

a. destination b. track c. steam

2. A is a place where windows clean people.

a. living at risk b. race track c. snooker chess

3. It's astonishing how many we can take, but they all lead home.

a. ruts b. different roads c. rails

4. We can't decide where to go on holiday this year. It's between Spain and Italy.

a. a toss-up b. against all odds c. bluff

5. There's no way we can afford to go on holiday this year.

➤ Don't worry. I've got an idea I haven't told you about yet.

Thank goodness you've always got something

a. hit the jackpot b. up your sleeve c. take my chances