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### Metaphorical Perceptions of Turkish EFL Students about Themselves: The Sample of Kafkas University

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## Metaphorical Perceptions of Turkish EFL Students about Themselves: The Sample of Kafkas University

Gencer ELKILIC<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*The aim of this study was to determine the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish EFL students about themselves and to group them according to common features. In order to collect data qualitative data collection technique was used. To this end, forms containing prompts “students are like....., because they.....” were given to the participants and requested to fill in them. As a result of the data collected from 160 students, 153 valid metaphors were determined and they were divided into seven conceptual categories as: 1) Student as Something/Somebody to be Given a Shape, 2) Student as a Plant/Tree, 3) Student as Somebody/ Something Obedient, 4) Student as an Animal, 5) Students as Something/Somebody to be Fixed/Cured, 6) Student as Something Bright, and finally, 7) Student as Somebody/ Something Pure/ Good or Somebody/ Something Bad/ Deceiving. Most frequently repeated metaphors were as baby/child (f=15, 12, 0%), empty box/page(f=9, 07, 2%), soil/garden (f=8, 06,4%), flower (f=8, 06,4%), laborer (f=7, 05,6%), sapling (f=6, 04,8%), patient (f=6, 04,8%), angel (f=6, 04,8%), sheep (f=5, 04,0%) seed (f=5, 04,0%), tree (f=5, 04,0%), and innocent person (f=5, 04,0%), respectively.*

**Keywords:** Metaphor, conceptual category, EFL students, Kafkas University.

### 1. Introduction

Metaphors have been used in almost every culture for ages to clarify concrete ideas much more easily. Power of metaphors is considered to be so

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effective that if a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures! For a picture provides only a static image while a metaphor provides a conceptual framework for thinking about something [1 p102].

According to Lakoff and Johnson our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature [2 p3]. Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically, with so little effort that we hardly notice it [3 p66], thus, Steen [4 p5] maintains that metaphor is a deeply embedded part of the way we communicate.

Oxford dictionary defines metaphor as “a word or phrase used to describe sb/sth else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to make the description more powerful” [5 p963]. It is maintained that metaphor involves employing a familiar object or event as a conceptual tool to elucidate features of a more complex subject or situation [6 p4]. Thus, the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another [2 p5], but it is generally considered that metaphors contain the rhetoric’s enriching the speech, yet they are more important than this [7 p270) as Lakoff & Johnson affirm that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action as well [2 p3].

On the other hand, it is asserted that] metaphors exert powerful influences on processes of analyzing and planning in education [8 p966]. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because they are conceptual metaphors in the system of a person [2 p6]. Kittay puts forward that metaphor has cognitive value and that this stems not from providing new facts about the world, but from a reconceptualization of the information that is already available to us [9 p39]. It is stated that as metaphors reveal our educational values, beliefs, and principles, they contain information essential to our growth as professionals [10 p37]. and also it is considered that the dual presentation of language and teacher metaphors within a theoretical framework will reveal their personal theories of language and teaching, and may have important implications for those giving and taking an introductory course like “Approaches to ELT” [11 p231].

There have been different studies in relation to metaphors about students, teachers, lessons, languages as well as school environments [6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22].

For example Cortazzi and Jin [12] carried a study on teachers’ and students’ metaphors of teaching, learning and language, and found out that metaphors are a bridge to learn more about teachers and students.

Cerit [15] investigated the metaphorical perceptions of 600<sup>th</sup> grade students, of 203 teachers working there, and 51 school managers in relation to “school” concept.

In a study performed by Saban [17] on the primary level students it was determined that “school” concept was considered to be a place of love and cooperation, provider of knowledge, a good and beautiful place.

In another study on 2847 prospective teachers, investigating the metaphorical conceptualizations of the learner, Saban [18] determined 98 valid metaphors and categorized them under 12 the metaphorical concepts.

In a study carried out on 105 12<sup>th</sup> grade vocational school Turkish learners by Bülbül and Toker-Gökçe [19] 7 different conceptual categories were determined for “school” concept and it was maintained that most of the participants perceived school as an authoritarian and strict place such as a prison. For them, the second frequently used metaphors were knowledge provider or a place of development. The third were a friendship and cooperation environment.

In a study in relation to the concept of sports on 473 participants Dervent [20] determined 22 valid metaphors and grouped them under 5 conceptual categories.

In their study Elkılıç and Bayrakçı [21] on the metaphorical perceptions of 68 Turkish students in the Department of Translation and Interpretation, Faculty of Science and Letters at Kafkas University, Turkey in relation to their instructors and determined 60 valid metaphors for English language instructors and 58 for French language instructors, and grouped them under 7 conceptual categories .

In another study Dinçer [22] examined 60 EFL Learners related to their beliefs about speaking English and being a good speaker with respect to metaphor analysis and discovered that EFL learners created 46 valid metaphors and he grouped them under five conceptual themes, whereas he determined 27 valid metaphors for being a good speaker of English, and grouped them under six conceptual categories.

## 2. Problem Statement

Students’ metaphorical perceptions about themselves may give clues about how instructors behave or should behave towards them, but in Turkish context there aren’t enough number of studies on the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish EFL students about students themselves.

### **3. Research Questions/Aims of the research**

The purpose of the study is to determine the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish EFL students about themselves and to categorize them according to some common features.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What are the metaphors used by Turkish EFL students at Kafkas University to describe themselves?
2. How many conceptual categories can be determined depending upon the metaphors created by Turkish EFL students at Kafkas University?

### **4. Research Methods**

#### ***4.1 Research Design***

This study has both qualitative and quantitative data collection features in nature, as it contains content analysis as well as descriptive study.

#### ***4.2 Participants***

The study group of this research consisted of 160 randomly selected EFL students who were attending to lectures regularly during the fall season of the 2016- 2017 academic year.

#### ***4.3 Instrument***

Data collection of the study was performed through forms containing prompts as “the students are like .....; because .....” and during the analysis of data and interpretation process, categorization, and metaphor sampling were employed. And for data analysis, statistics SPSS 20 program was used.

#### ***4.4 Procedure***

The data were collected during the fall of 2016-2017 academic year. One hundred and sixty students were distributed the forms eliciting information on metaphors describing themselves.

#### ***4.5. Data Analysis***

For the analysis of the data collected metaphor and content analysis approaches were used. To this end, analyses were done under four stages:1) Coding and selecting, 2) Categorizing, 3) Reliability, 4) Using SPSS for qualitative data analysis.

Coding and selecting: 160 metaphors created by the participants were transferred to an Excel program according to alphabetical orders. Irrelevant metaphors were eliminated and the remaining 153 metaphors were accepted as valid at this stage.

Categorizing: 153 valid metaphors were examined in accordance with subject matter, source, and the subject matter-source relationship. 4 metaphors were eliminated at this stage, as they could not be put into any conceptual category and, thus, 149 metaphors were used for categorizing and accordingly, seven different conceptual categories were determined.

Reliability: In order to ensure reliability, the reliability formula of Miles and Huberman [23] the reliability of the study was calculated ( $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{agreement}}{\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}} * 100$ ). An expert was requested to put 149 metaphors into groups and only 8 metaphors were put into different categories compared to the researcher. So reliability was calculated as 0,95 ( $\alpha = \frac{141}{141+8} * 100 = 0,95$ ).

Using SPSS for qualitative data analysis: The data collected, metaphors, and conceptual categories were transferred to the SPSS 20 program and the frequencies and percentages of 149 were computed and given in tables.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Structure

As a result of the data collected from 160 students, 153 valid metaphors were determined and out of these valid metaphors those which were used at least twice were put into conceptual categories, and thus, the metaphors created by the EFL students at Kafkas University, Turkey, were divided into seven conceptual categories as: 1) Student as Something/Somebody to be Given a Shape, 2) Student as a Plant/Tree, 3) Student as Somebody/Something Obedient, 4) Student as an Animal, 5) Students as Something/Somebody to be Fixed/Cured, 6) Student as Something Bright, and finally, 7) Student as Somebody/Something Pure/Good or Somebody/Something Bad/Deceiving.

### 5.2. Tables

#### 5.2.1. Conceptual Categories

##### 5.2.1.1. Student as Something/Somebody to be Given a Shape

**Table 1.** Student as Something/Somebody to be Given a Shape

Metaphor	Frequency	%
Baby/child	15	41,6
Empty box/page	9	25,0
Soil/Garden	8	22,2
Water	2	05,5
Play dough	2	05,5
Total	36	100

As seen in **Table 1**, there are 5 metaphors under “Student as Something/Somebody to be Given a Shape” category. The most common metaphors under this category are” baby/child” (f=15, 41,6%), empty box/page (f=9, 25,0 %), and soil/garden (f=8, 22,2%), respectively.

Some of the original statements were as follows:

A student is like a child. Because he/she always needs affection as he/she is away from their family.

A student is like a baby. Because he/she needs his/her teachers’ attention and love.

A student is like an empty box/a page. Because teachers fill him/her with knowledge.

A student is like an empty box/a page. Because the more they learn, the fuller the box or page is.

A student is like soil/a garden. Because, what you sow is what you reap.

A student is like soil. Because the more you teach, the more intellectual he/she becomes. As the more you take care of soil, the more productive it becomes.

### **5.2.1.2. Student as a Plant/Tree**

**Table 2.** Student as a Plant/Tree

Metaphor	Frequency	%
Flower	8	33,3
Sapling	6	25,0
Seed	5	20,8
Tree	5	20,8
Total	24	100

It is clear from **Table 2** that there are 4 metaphors under “Student as a Plant/Tree” category. They are as follows: Flower (f=8, 33,3%), sapling (f=6, 25, 0 %), seed (f=5, 20,8 %), and tree (f=5, 20,8 %), respectively.

Some of the statements were as follows:

A student is like a flower. Because, the more you take care of them, the better they become and the more scent they produce.

A student is like a flower. Because the more information you give, the more he/she develops. As the more you look after the flowers, the more they bloom.

A student is like a sapling. Because, if you take care of saplings, they become trees and yield fruit, likewise, if you teach students, they improve themselves and contribute to the society.

### ***5.2.1.3. Student as Somebody/Something Obedient***

**Table 3.** Student as Somebody/Something Obedient

Metaphor	Frequency	%
Laborer	7	28,0
Slave	4	16,0
Puppet	3	12,0
Robot	3	12,0
Prisoner	2	08,0
Porter	2	08,0
Soldier	2	08,0
Leaves	2	08,0
Total	25	100

One can understand from **Table 3** that there are 8 metaphors under “Student as Somebody/Something Obedient” category. Most frequently used metaphors in this category are as follows: Laborer (f=7, 28,0 %), slave (f=4, 16,0 %), puppet (f=3, 12,0 %), and robot (f=3, 12,0 %).

Some of the statements are as follows:

A student is like a Laborer. Because laborers work always to make ends meet, so students study hard to pass their classes.

A student is like a Laborer. Because just as a laborer earns money as long as he/she works, a student learns as long as he/she studies.

A student is like a slave. Because he/she has to obey what teachers say. As slaves obey what their masters want.

A student is like a puppet. Because he/she cannot do whatever he/she does. Always teachers and parents decide about him/her.

#### 5.2.1.4. Student as an Animal

**Table 4.** Student as an Animal

Metaphor	Frequency	%
<b>Sheep</b>	5	20,8
Horse	4	16,6
Cat/lion	3	12,5
Hungry Wolf	2	08,3
Chameleon	2	08,3
Pet	2	08,3
Rabbit/Turtle	2	08,3
Ant	2	08,3
Fox	2	08,3
Total	24	100

It can be understood from **Table 4** that there are 9 metaphors under “Student as an Animal” category. Most frequently used metaphors in this category are as follows: Sheep (f=5, 20,8%), horse (f=4, 16,6%), and cat/lion (f=3, 12,5 %).

A student is like a sheep. Because students are directed by teachers, as sheep go wherever their shepherds direct them.

A student is like a sheep. Because sheep go, wherever their shepherds go.

A student is like a horse. Because horses eat their food and compete at races or carry loads, likewise students have their meals and study lessons and prepare for their exams.

A student is like a horse. Because they go to school without aim, as horses go to their stables aimlessly.

A student is like a cat. Because a cat doesn’t like you even if you do your best to it.

#### 5.2.1.5. Students as Something/Somebody to be Fixed/Cured

**Table 5.** Students as Something/Somebody to be Fixed/Cured

Metaphor	Frequency	%
Patient	6	60,0
Broken Computer	4	40,0
Total	10	100

It is obvious **Table 5** that there are 2 metaphors under “Students as Something/Somebody to be Fixed/Cured” category. They are as follows: Patient (f=6, 60%) and broken computer (f=4, 40 %).

Some of the original statements were as:

A student is like a patient. Because as patients expects their doctors to cure them, students expect their teachers to teach them and overcome their illiteracy.

A student is like a patient. Because he/she seeks cure of knowledge from teachers.

A student is like a broken computer. Because a broken computer needs fixing, similarly a student needs to develop.

#### ***5.2.1.6. Student as Something Bright***

**Table 6.** Student as Something Bright

Metaphor	Frequency	%
Sun	4	50,0
Candle	4	50,0
Total	8	100

**Table 6** shows that there are 2 metaphors under “Student as Something Bright” category. They are as follows: the sun (f=4, 50%) and candle (f=4, 50 %).

Some of the statements are as follows:

A student is like the sun. Because the sun is hidden behind the clouds and when it comes out it enlightens and heats the world. So when a student is learning something nobody discovers him/her, but when he/she shows his/her knowledge, he/she contributes to the society.

A student is like a candle. Because at the beginning a student starts as a candle and he/she enlightens itself and later enlightens its surroundings.

#### ***5.2.1.7. Student as Somebody/ Something Pure/ Good or Somebody/ Something Bad/ Deceiving.***

**Table 7.** Student as Somebody/ Something Pure/ Good or Somebody/ Something Bad/ Deceiving

Metaphor	Frequency	%
Angel	6	27,3
Innocent Person	5	22,7
Poison	4	18,2
Beggar	4	18,2

Gossiping Person	3	13,6
Total	22	100

It is obviously seen from **Table 7** that there are 5 metaphors under “Student as Somebody/Something Pure/Good or Somebody/Something Bad/Deceiving” category. Most frequently used ones are as follows: Angel (f=6, 27,3 %), innocent person (f=5, 22,7 %), poison (f=4, 18,2%), beggar(f=4, 18,2%), and gossiping person (f=3, 13,6 %), respectively.

Some of the statements are as follows:

A student is **like an angel. Because he/she** obeys the teachers without hesitation.

A student is like an innocent person. Because he has no bad thoughts about his surroundings.

A student is like a poison. He can be fatal if he doesn’t learn moral values.

A student is like a beggar. Because he/she wants high marks from teachers even though he/she doesn’t study hard.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, which aimed to determine the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish EFL students’ about themselves, metaphors obtained were categorized under 7 conceptual headings. How students feel themselves is very important in education domains as metaphors can give some clues on this issue. Through metaphors, teachers and education planners can learn the perceptions of the learners and prepare their plans accordingly.

**Research Question 1:** What are the metaphors used by Turkish EFL students at Kafkas University to describe themselves?

Most frequently used metaphors created by EFL Turkish students to describe themselves are baby/child (f=15, % 12), empty box/page (f=9, %07,2), soil/garden and, flower (f=8, % 06,4), laborer (f=7, % 05,6), sapling, patient, and angel (f=6, %04,8), sheep, seed, tree, and innocent person (f=5, %04,0), horse, broken computer, slave, sun, candle, poison, and beggar (f=4, %03,2), cat/lion, puppet, robot, and gossip person (f=3, %02,4), respectively.

So, the present study shows that students feel themselves as passive learners, which is in parallel with the study of Bozlk [24].

**Research Question 2:** How many conceptual categories can be determined depending upon the metaphors created by Turkish EFL students at Kafkas University?

Bozlk [24] carried out a study on 49 first-year university students in relation to how they perceived themselves as students and, as a result 35 valid metaphors were created and they were categorized under 4 conceptual themes, which were as follows: 1) animal metaphors (%37), 2) object metaphors (%29), 3), human metaphors (%26), and (4) action metaphors (%8). According to Bozluk, the students see themselves as passive learners.

In another study on 2847 prospective teachers, investigating the metaphorical conceptualizations of the learner, 98 valid metaphors were determined and the metaphorical concepts were categorized under 12 conceptual themes [18]. The metaphors determined were as follows: student as raw material, student as an empty vessel, student as a developing organism, student as a significant being, student as absolutely compliant, student as knowledge recipient, student as knowledge reflector, student as knowledge constructor, student as a defective being, student as social participant, student as knowledge carrier, and student as social capital.

As for the present study, the metaphors created by the EFL students at Kafkas University, Turkey, were divided into seven conceptual categories as: 1) Student as Something/Somebody to be Given a Shape, 2) Student as a Plant/Tree, 3) Student as Somebody/Something Obedient, 4) Student as an Animal, 5) Students as Something/Somebody to be Fixed/Cured, 6) Student as Something Bright, and finally, 7) Student as Somebody/ Something Pure/ Good or Somebody/ Something Bad/ Deceiving.

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