



# The Impact of L1 Metaphorical Comprehension on L2 Metaphorical Comprehension of Iraqi EFL Learners

Mahmoud Arif<sup>\*</sup>, Imran Ho Abdullah School of Language Studies and Linguistics, FSSK, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia **Corresponding Author:** Mahmoud Arif, E-mail: mahmoud.ariff@yahoo.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history Received: May 12, 2017 Accepted: July 15, 2017 Published: August 31, 2017 Volume: 8 Issue: 4 Advance access: August 2017	The major goal of this research is to investigate learners' metaphorical comprehension in L1 and its effect on the metaphorical comprehension in L2 by Iraqi EFL learners at secondary school. In which, they encounter difficulties understanding English texts and lectures, primarily when metaphor is included, which leads to the misunderstanding of some or even the whole material. To this end, the research will utilize the 'Conceptual Metaphor Theory' by George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1980), and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (1979). The type of the survey of the data collection is a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire is classified
Conflicts of interest: None Funding: None	into two divisions: the demographic part that gives a general background of the participants, and the part that includes 30 Arabic metaphoric proverbs and other 30 English proverbs. Each proverb is followed by four distractors from which a participant is required to choose the correct meaning for a certain proverb. The questionnaire was administered to 252 Iraqi convenience
Key words: Metaphor Performance, Metaphor Comprehension, Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis,	sampling. The findings showed that the participants who are more skilled in Arabic metaphor performed better in English metaphor. In addition to the significance of this study to the literature where, up to the researcher knowledge, no study has tackled the effect of the L1 on L2 in the Iraqi context, it presents a pedagogical contribution. In which, the study will draw the attention of the syllabus designers to the significance of developing cognitive skills of learners in L1 to achieve a better cognitive skills in L2.

INTRODUCTION

EFL Learners, Arabic EFL Learners

Common Underlining Proficiency,

Many scholars side with the point of view that the lack of metaphor competence in L2 is the lack of significant and big amount of L2. Such lack negatively affects the language outcomes when learners miss the comprehension of the L2. Many studies tackled the difficulties that face L2 learners and announce it as a problematic and challenging area (De Cunha, 1993; Nacey, 2010; Aardal, 2014). Most of these studies dealt with either production or recognition of metaphor in L2 and many facets were involved. However, up to date, there is no study investigates the effect of transferring cognitive skills represented by metaphor from L1 to L2 in the Arabic context as related to the English context.

This research examines the Iraqi EFL learners' L1 metaphorical competence in relation to their L2 metaphoric competence. To this end, the current study applies two theories: the first is the 'Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and the second is the 'Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis' (LIH) by Cummins (1979). The rational for this research is that Iraqi EFL learners still facing difficulties in comprehending many English language contexts and it is more obvious when it is related to contexts that are more loaded with metaphorical expressions than other contexts. An example to such case, a lecturer may notice that his/her students raise their hands for a permission to ask him/her the meaning of a certain context when it is metaphorical one. This issue is conductive to ask the question that 'Why are some students confused when facing metaphorical expressions while others are not?' After reviewing the literature, the Cummins' theory suggests that subjects who develop their L1 proficiency can use it as a helping factor in achieving better proficiency in L2. Consequently, the study has been designed to investigate whether developing cognitive skills in the L1 of the Iraqi learners can be helpful in advancing the cognitive skills in the English comprehension context including metaphorical expressions.

As it is well-known, EFL learners face difficulties to learn English language (which is mainly a result of their remoteness from the sufficient contact to practice English in their own societies (Khan, 2011), researchers are better to investigate different language perspectives particularly those which are more neglected in the EFL learners' context (i.e., 'Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis' in relation to the Arabic context in the current study). Thus, the study aims to identify the effect of the 'Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis' (LIH) by Cummins (1979) that compares the L1of

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the Iraqi EFL learners at secondary school whose age is from 14-17 on the L2 metaphor competence. To sum up, the current study attempts to collect an answer to the following research question: "To what extent do Iraqi EFL learners apply their metaphoric competence in L1 to conclude the meaning of metaphor in L2?"

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Many fields of study began studying metaphor after George Lakoff and Mark Turner's 1980 publication, 'Metaphors We Live By' (AL-Zuraiki, 2004, p. 9). One of these fields concerns L2 metaphor acquisition which received extensive treatments. Some of these studies are to be narrated chronically as follows:

De Cunha (1993) studied the bilingualism of L2 learner (Punjabi and English) metaphoric proficiency as related to different variables of: verbal and nonverbal communication faculty, length of residence, age, and common competence proficiency. The learners were submitted to a task of interpreting and recognizing a number of metaphoric proverbs which are derived from both, their mother tongue (Punjabi) and the target language (English) in both L1 and L2. He found that the learners hold the same skill in L1 and L2. In other words, the metaphoric reasoning level in L2 is significantly linked to the level of skills in LI. The length of residence of the learners was not significantly related. While time with increasing age had effects on the changing proficiency in both L1and L2.

Sasaki (2010) examined the difficulties of non-native learners when trying to comprehend metaphoric expressions. The method he used was the direct observation which took place in an American Classroom of the International Students. The results of the study was that, the non-native learners had difficulties in comprehending metaphors. The main reason behind that issue was that their instructors were unconsciously using metaphoric language; adding to that they did not reflect the metaphors to that class. Doiz and Elizari (2013) carried out an experiment which was applied to the first year baccalaureate of the EFL students whose mother-country is Spain. Those Spanish learners were distributed handouts containing metaphorical tasks. After applying the test and analyzing the data, the conclusion indicated that the Spanish EFL learners were in need to be aware of the conceptual metaphor that underlined L1 to memorize and comprehend lexicons with similar/same conceptual metaphor in L2. This process appeared to be effective and productive in the issue of L2 vocabulary acquisition. Az-Zuwar (2010) tested the problematic issue of Iraqi EFL students in comprehending and recognizing political reports including metaphor. Two groups of respondents were tested for the comparison purpose. Both groups were provided with varied reports handouts. In which, those who have higher academic ranks of their professors scored higher than those who have less academic ranks. Other findings were found within the area of the difficulties that EFL learners face at metaphoric tasks like: even for the English native speakers, metaphorical comprehension is not an easy task. This conclusion was derived when he tested the native lecturers through sending them the same test and asked them to respond to. He discovered that those English native speakers were able to comprehend metaphors but unable to identify them. In addition, metaphors of simple, short, sentences appeared to be easier for the non-native learners to be recognized/comprehended. The linguistic knowledge of those learners had very effective share in assisting the process of recognition as well as comprehension of metaphors. Finally, metaphor is not only applied in poetic language, otherwise, it is also applied in politics to fulfill some specific purposes as being attractive and effective in that field of communication. This section shows that some recently studies have been recurring which reflects that the field of metaphorical acquisition has not yet reached the level of studies' saturation, and accordingly, this research has been conducted. At this juncture, the following sections are going to discuss the theories that guide this study.

#### **Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

In 1980, with the George Lakoff's and Mark Turner's publication, 'Metaphors We Live By' a great shift in the area of metaphor has been initiated. This publication has converted the narrow traditional view that counts metaphor as an ornamental and poetical usage of language into more open view that reviews metaphor as the phenomenon that is basic to human cognition, speech, and action. In addition to the fact that metaphor is pervasive that cannot be avoided in any society and people have no choice other than submitting to its existence whether consciously or unconsciously. With this declaration, scholars become aware that metaphor is not limited to rhetorical devices and start to study it in wider fields of study. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain metaphor as the experiencing and comprehending of a thing in terms of another. Accordingly, metaphor travels farther than the scope of merely words and linguistic items to the scope of thinking and abstract concepts. For instance, Lakoff utilizes the example "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" to discuss the conceptual mapping of metaphor which is a faculty of human's mind. In such case, as Lakoff explains, people will think of the meaning not in the exact words of this example due to the irrelevant information that these exact words may contribute to the context of situation. Otherwise, the reasonable unconscious process that is executed in the humans' mind is that to look for a suitable meaning which can be specified in the attributes that match between the two lexemes LIFE and JOURNEY. To paraphrase, the connection between that source domain (journey) and the target domain (life) is as the following: people daily move somewhere, there is a place where they begin, a place where they aim to reach, and there is a certain direction. Such image-schemas in the humans' minds contribute to the mapping system of the conceptual metaphors. Hence, the concept of 'JOURNEY' has matching traits with the lexeme 'LIFE'. To compare the lexemes of 'LIFE' and to highlight its similar traits to 'JOURNEY' lexeme, life has the following: a starting point that is 'birth' of the creatures to end with their 'death', after a period of difficulties, people usually 'carry on' to practice their lives. Consequently, with the help of such mapping, humans can

activate a comparison between LIFE and JOURNEY, and comprehend one domain in terms of another one. Getting back to the example "LIFE IS A JOURNEY", it shows the capacity of cognitive application of metaphor which is essentially conceptual in nature and located in the people mind as a results of people's experiences gathered from their everyday life.

## CMT and classical metaphor

Since the contribution of Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, metaphor turns to be a controversial phenomenon in a way that controls scholars' attentions to direct them to a number of other multiple fields. To mention some: philosophy, linguistics, cognitive sciences, and others. Accordingly, the area of metaphor is frequently circulated in most of the sciences (Al Jumah, 2007). The reason that leads to this controversy in this theory is that it interferes with most of those sciences and contributes explanations to numerous sciences to which the classic theory of metaphor lack. Accordingly, the following is a brief explanation of the basic principles that distinguish the CMT from the classical metaphor theory. And this will be made clearly by highlighting the principles of CMT which differ from the principles of traditional metaphor, in which: in the CMT, metaphor is located in the humans' cogitation. And, accordingly, is attainable to be expressed metaphorically which schemata is chiefly resulted from the human bodily experiences. Metaphor is seen to be pervasive in thought and language. As well as to its attribute to be a systematic structure. Contrary to the traditional theory, metaphor has roles to play not exclusively in rhetorical language as a rhetorical devices, but also in people's culture, communication, and psychology, Second Language Acquisition and different other fields of study. Finally, CMT reviews metaphor as two-sided ends concerning weather metaphor is specifically or generally express the same concepts of different cultures. In which, Despite the fact that metaphorical expressions are universal, their selectin in the world interpretation indicates them to be cultural specific (Liu, 2002). To paraphrase, the cultural specific side of metaphor is reflected in the sense of metaphor (Snell-Hornby, 1988).

#### Types of conceptual metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) divided conceptual metaphors into three types (which are: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and the ontological metaphor.

Structural metaphor: is the formulation of one concept (as mention above in TIME example) in terms of another domain (i.e. MONY in the same example). A further explanation is supported by Kovecses (2002) who refers to the structural metaphors as the process where a source domain contributes a comparatively rich knowledge structure to a target domain.

Orientational metaphor: this kind of metaphor is relatively unlike the other two types of conceptual metaphor. In which, it does not depend on a structure of one concept in terms of another concept, but it provides a spatial orientation to another concept that is not spatial domain which results from bodily experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For example: 'I am feeling down this day', implies the meaning 'I am tired'.

Ontological metaphor: Kovecses (2006) contacts this type of metaphor to the humans' physical world that provides the opportunities for the ontological metaphors to be utilized extensively. Accordingly, it gives a wide range of conceptualization to people involving: activities, ideas, emotions, events, and many others. For instance, people may view events, ideas, activities, and the like in terms of substances as the following example shows: are you going to be in that race next Saturday? The word 'race' in the example is given the container shape which sources from the humans' everyday experiences life.

At this juncture of the research, and after presenting a quick overview on the most prominent principles of the CMT, the turn is for the effect of L1 on L2 as it is the main factor that the study aims to test. This effect is framed by the Interdepended Hypothesis by Cummins (1978) which is discussed in the following section.

#### The Interdepended Hypothesis

Since nearly the beginning of 1970, there were a series of studies that tried to investigate the link between the relative development of L1 and L2. But none of the researches tackled the case as broadly as "linguistic interdependence Hypothesis" by Cummins (1979, 1981) (Huguet & Llurda, 2000). The Interdepended Hypothesis as developed by Cummins suggests that a certain first language (L1) competence can be positively transferred into the second language (L2) processing. In other words, the skills that a child possesses in L1 can be as an instrument in the process of developing the abilities in L2. "The level of L2 competence that a bilingual child attains is partially a function of the type of competence the child has developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins" (Cummins, 1979, p. 23). In addition, Cummins's hypothesis may assist to predict if the reason behind their immaturity of the learners L1 metaphorical competence has any relation to their level of L2 metaphorical competence.

Most of the new skills are acquired on the basis of existing knowledge. In which, one important source for acquiring metaphorical language in L2 is through the phenomenon of 'language transfer' (Nacey, 2010). Such transfer can activate many angles of the L2 (Jervis and Pavlenko, 2008). This kind of productive transfer (i.e. transferring the existing knowledge to the new knowledge) is frequently called as 'Positive Transfer', as it helps facilitate the learning of the new skills that results from the similarities that exist in the two skills. Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH) stresses that the skills that exist in the language are highly transferable and intertwined, which are promoted to be called interdependent. Thus, language learners of L2 are able to get benefits from their L1 skills to make it functional in the L2 learning.

The case of inattention to the minority language and culture in any educational program can result in the consequences of extra dropout rates, undesirable degrees in the academic field, and, consequently, academic failure. Cummins declares that being aware of these factors, what is needed is a research course in bilingual education to check mutual interaction between what children bring with them to the educational field as input, and the target program which is called 'educational treatment' (Cummins, 1979).

All these elements have created a series of multiple hypotheses discussing the mutual relationship between the L1 and L2 in the minority language educational contexts, as well as the establishment of the LIH. The Cummins's LIH conveys that a good amount of developed L1 academic proficiency is highly of great value for the academic success in the L2 studied. Conversely, the insufficient development in the L1 when it is joined by a big amount of exposure to L2 can hinder the next development of the mother tongue. Thus, the LIH supports that the development of competence in a certain L2 is a consequence of the competence in the previously developed skills in the L1, and that the cognitive and academic benefits from the bilingualism could be achieved solely on the adequate development of L1 skills (Cummins, 1978).

Cummins (1984b) argues that all languages are absolutely sharing an underlying cognitive/academic faculty. And it is this faculty of common proficiency that establish the transferring phenomenon of the cognitive/academic abilities or other many related tasks from an individual's L1 to L2. Cummins gives a representation to this phenomena by using a dual-iceberg metaphor as figure number 1 shows. This dual-iceberg is classified into two divisions. The bottom part of the dual-iceberg is under the water which represents the Common Underlining Proficiency (CUP) that exist among languages in general. And the second division is shown above the water which represents the 'surface features' which is more specific as an obvious features for every individual language. In more details, Cummins specifies that this interdependence can utilize both, the experiences and exposures of the individuals to L1 and L2 can promote proficiency development underlying both languages.

After the above discussion about the LIH, the turn comes to the practical part of the study to test the LIH effect in relation to metaphorical proverbs comprehension tasks in both languages, L1 and L2.



Cummins' Iceberg model

# METHOD

#### Participants

The participants of this research consisted of 252 Arabic native speakers who are students at the high preparatory schools in capital city of Iraq (i.e. Baghdad). Their ages range between 14 -17. Those students have been taking English as a syllabus among other syllabuses that are taught in the Arabic language, except for the English lesson which is taught in a method that mixed Arabic with English at different occasions and different portions depending on their teachers' decisions. Those learners have been learning English at the fifth stage of their primary school. Through their primary and secondary stages. They are obligatory required to pass ministerial examinations for three times. The main way that they have been submitted to English contexts is through their traditional classes. However, some of the learners go online and other means of communication in which, they intentionally or unintentionally may practice English language.

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collections starts with the procedure of getting a formal permission from the Ministry of Education in Iraq to collect the data from the secondary school students. The researcher was able to collect the permission on 12<sup>th</sup> January-2016. The data collection process was achieved on 20th February/2016. The instrument of the study has been adopted from a previous study (Mahmoud & Imran, 2016) and, therefore, it does not need a pilot study. A survey design is the method that was depended to gather the data of the study which is, following a previous study, suitable to provide answers to the research questions. The study is guantitative in a survey design. The convenience sampling was adopted with the only useful copies to be 252 participants who are learners at the secondary school (age from 14-17). The researcher made sure that all the participants voluntarily participated in the research as they were aware of their wright to withdraw from the test at any time they desire to do so, as their rights were highlighted by the researcher in addition to the formal paragraph in the questionnaire form that discuss this mater. As the instrument is mainly Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ), the time limits was 20 minutes since the answer requires to tick in the space in front of the correct choice. The researcher simplified the task to the students by explaining the test briefly without giving any hints that may affect the results of the study.

#### Instrument

The instrument of this research was the questionnaire which involves the following two parts: the first part which is the demographic part that investigates the general background about the students. The second part which comprises of two sub-parts. Sub-part (a) which consists of 30 Arabic metaphorical proverbs which are written in Arabic. And sub-part (b) which consists of 30 English metaphorical proverbs which are written in English. Each proverb is followed by 4 distractors for both sub-parts. Only one sentence among the 4 distracter represent the correct interpretation to the meaning of a certain proverb. While there is only one correct meaning. The other three sentences function as distracters to check the responders' faculty in identifying the correct meaning for each proverb. The correct answer will be given one mark while the incorrect will be given zero. The border between failure and success in the test will match the scale that is utilized in Iraq. It is determined by the Iraqi rule of educational system since 1977 (online). In which, the highest mark will be 100. The lowest mark for passing an examination is decided to be 50% (i.e. 49% means failure). The mark will be divided further into four parts as the following: less than 25 is weak. Thus, in Iraqi primary and secondary schools, there are no grade divisions before the university stage like excellent, very good, good, and average. Consequently, the researcher is going to mark the results out of 30 mark, and then use some equation to convert it in terms of 100 mark. For example:

If a student mark is 15 out of 30, then that means his/her mark is 50 out of 100. This estimation can be made by the following equation.

 $15 \ge 100 = 1500 \% 30 = 50$  (thus, any mark can be converted out of 100 mark by using the equation)

# **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data analysis of the current research utilized SPSS which is a sophisticated piece of software used by social scientists and other professionals for statistical analysis (Coakes & Steed, 2009). The regression testing is between the level of accuracy of the L1 metaphoric competence (L1M), and L2 metaphorical performance by using the liner regression in SPSS. From the answers that are given by the respondents, the study found that there are many respondents agreed regarding the relationship that exists between the two factors ( $\beta = .564$ ), with significant level at (.000). This statistics mean that metaphoric competence in L1 has a positive relationship metaphorical competence level in L2. The table below illustrate the statistics of the results.

#### CONCLUSION

The study examined the metaphorical comprehension of L1 and its effect on the metaphorical comprehension in L2 by Iraqi EFL learners at secondary school. The learners who scored higher on the Arabic comprehension test also scored higher on the English comprehension test. Correspondingly,

Results of regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	В	Standard error	Beta		
1					
(Constant)	1.446	0.106		13.632	0.000
LM	0.426	0.039	0.564	10.811	0.000

a.Dependent variable: MP

those who scored low on the Arabic comprehension test also scored low on the English comprehension test. The researcher concludes that the findings of his research are consonant with what Cummins declares in his LIH that the second-language development relies on the first-language proficiency. The researcher concludes that the findings of his study "consonant with the LIH of Cummins' Cummins (1979, 1981) that second-language development relies strongly on first-language proficiency. The results of the current research have approved that a cognitive competence in L1 can be positively transferred into L2. In other words, the cognitive skills that a learner possesses in L1 can be as an instrument in the process of developing the abilities in L2. In which, the participants who show a relatively better skill in L1 than others, were able to perform better in L2 metaphorical tasks. The study implies that the LIH is productive for acquiring L2. Thus, it is highly recommended that learners are to be made aware of the figurative language of their L1, as a scaffold for acquiring skills in their L2. Being aware of this fact, a big amount of barriers that EFL learners face while trying to comprehend L2 contexts will be diagnosed and treated with the help of the suggestions that LIH provides. This study can draw the attention of the syllabus designers in the academic fields to apply the principles of the theory in the target fields. For instance, EFL learners can be more qualified to acquire L2 if they are submitted to a course of study that is designed to activate their awareness of the L1 conceptual mappings between the source domains ad the target domains in the metaphorical expressions. As a result, and according to the principles of the LIH, EFL learners will be more able to comprehend the meaning of the metaphorical expressions in L2, and that is the answer for the current study.

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