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Exploring prospective English Language teachers' perceptions of the 'Internet' through metaphorical conceptualizations

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This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore prospective English language teachers' perceptions of the 'Internet' through metaphors. The study has been conducted with the participation of 143 Grade 1 and Grade 2 students attending the English Language Teaching (ELT) Programme at Ondokuz Mayıs University. A form with a simple Internet-related metaphor question has been employed as the major data collection tool and metaphorical analysis has constituted the chief data analysis technique. The reliability of the study has been calculated as 91%. The first stage of the qualitative analyses carried out under this study has yielded a total of 127 valid metaphors and, following the unification of the identical ones, 79 distinct metaphors produced by the participants. The metaphor with the highest frequency has been 'Internet is *an infinite world*' (f=12). The second stage of the qualitative analyses has yielded 9 conceptual categories of metaphors: Internet as 'something that damages people', Internet as 'an enormous realm', Internet as 'something that helps people', Internet as 'a real source of information', Internet as 'something that contains both positive and negative things', Internet as 'something that provides escape from real world', Internet as 'something that commands people', Internet as 'something that connects people', and Internet as 'something that reflects the user'. These findings have been discussed in relation to the existing literature; and considering the limitations of this study, suggestions have been introduced for prospective studies.

Key words: Internet, metaphor, prospective English language teachers, perception.

INTRODUCTION

Internet is now an indispensable part of our casual and professional lives. Its roots can be traced back to 1960s and 1970s; however, its popularity and usage area expanded unprecedentedly as of 1990s (Thomas and Wyatt, 1999). Since the turn of the 21st century and development of the 'information era' concept, Internet has become an integral part of our lives. We now send e-mails instead of letters, receive 'likes' instead of oral compliments, employ e-banking instead of waiting in queues, share selfies instead of showing printed photos, read e-books instead of going to the library, and so on. This list can be easily extended to a number of pages.

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These apparently show that our lives have changed to a considerable extent and the core source of this change is technology and its fruit 'Internet'. From an educational perspective, Warschauer et al. (2000) list five sound reasons for language teachers to integrate Internet into their teaching processes: authenticity, literacy, interaction, vitality, empowerment (ALIVE). Nevertheless, this partially new magic tool does not always bring advantages to human life. It may provide information; but what kind of information? It may motivate learners; but what about distractions? It may facilitate transactions; but what about viruses? It may enable social networking; but what about privacy? It may help students with their assignments; but what about copy-paste? And the list can go on with many other examples from real life.

Under the framework drawn earlier, Internet turns out to be a multi-faceted topic for people. Therefore its understanding depends on the person who experiences it.A possible way to explore people's perception of Internet is having a look at the metaphors they produce concerning it. A metaphor can be defined as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) mention metaphors as "one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practice, and spiritual awareness". A quite famous use of metaphors is shown in the following lines by Shakespeare:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances…
(http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/247640)

Metaphors constitute an integral part of our daily interactions. We establish an analogy betweena less familiar thing and a familiar one to express our opinion as to the less familiar one. The fact that metaphors are broadly used in everyday life is discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980):

"Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature".

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors provide:

"the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world. Metaphor is as much a part of our functioning as our sense of touch, and as precious".

Considering this prevalence of metaphors in our lives, it is quite plausible to try to understand people's views on certain concepts and novelties through metaphorical analysis. Literary critic and philosopher I. A. Richards (Montgomery et al., 2007) introduced three components of a metaphorical analysis: *tenor*, *vehicle*and *ground*. Tenor is the main object at hand and undertakes a literal meaning while vehicle adopts a figurative meaning through which tenor is referred to. On the other hand, ground reflects the similarity established between the tenor and vehicle. For instance, in the earlier metaphor example by Shakespeare, 'world' is the tenor; 'stage' is the vehicle; and 'the temporary stay' is the ground. The ground is not clearly stated in all metaphor examples as is the case with the one above by Shakespeare; therefore, it needs to be deduced by the reader in some cases.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), or in other words Contemporary Theory of Metaphor (CTM),that gained popularity through the writings of Lakoff (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999) introduces another framework to understand metaphors within the context of cognitive linguistics. According to this theory, metaphors are composed of mappings from one conceptual domain to another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). While the source domain can be regarded as the concept available, the target domain can be considered as the intended meaning. In the example by Shakespeare, 'stage of a theatre' constitutes the source domain while 'temporariness of the world' forms the target domain; and the established relationship between these two domains can broadly be defined as mapping.

As for the relevant studies in the existing literature, it can be said that 'there is a paucity of research on how *users* metaphorically understand the Internet' (Hogan, 2008). In recent years, there has been a partially mounting interest in this issue; however, as the coverage and popularity of the Internet change so rapidly, there is an obvious need for more and more up-to-date studies. In her comprehensive doctoral study with a sampling of 244 participants, Hogan (2008) finds out that expert users of the Internet define it through ordered and structured metaphors while novice users define it via chaotic metaphors. This finding supports the findings reported by Ratzan (2000).

Giving place to specific metaphors on the Internet, Cunningham (1996) mentions 'surfing' and 'the information superhighway' as the two popular metaphors used for Internet in the mid-1990s. To find the commonly used metaphors for the Internet, Palmquist (1996) examined 100 different published articles from three indexing services and found the following major categories: travel (20%), buildings/politics (15%), anthropomorphic (15%), commerce (14%), space (12%), frontier (12%), fire/water (6%) and animals (6%). In his study entitled 'The Internet in six words or less', Schwartz (2010) defines Internet under six umbrella terms: infrastructure, organization, commerce, governance,

linkingand interface. In addition, Fırat and Kabakçı (2012) conducted an Internet-related metaphorical study with the participation of 112 undergraduate students attending the Department of Computer and Instructional Technologies at a state university in Turkey. Their findings indicate that the participants mostly produced metaphors related with categories like 'sharing of and access to information', 'network', and 'open space'. The authors also say that considering the existing literature Internet metaphors could be categorized under four titles: a closed space, an open space, a live thing, and an inanimate thing.

Wu and Chen (2013) compiled the most common metaphors used to define the Internet and listed them as 'Internet is a highway', Internet is a person', 'Internet is Cyberspace', Internet is a community', 'Internet is a library', 'Internet is a market', and 'Internet is a sea'. Focusing on the recent orientations of the Internet-related metaphors, Hsu (2015) discusses the 'cloud' metaphor and states:

"As a metaphor, the cloud seems easy to grasp: our data is somewhere in the ether, floating, drifting and wireless, available wherever and whenever we need it." (Available at http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-the-metaphor-of-the-cloud-changed-our-attitude-toward-the-internet)

As for other relevant studies, Eren et al. (2012) investigated 162 undergraduate biology students' conceptions of the Internet through metaphors. The findings of the study yield 8 categories of metaphors concerning the Internet: Internet as 'a source of knowledge', 'an informational and communicational tool', 'a center of entertainment and shopping', 'a basic need', 'a source of addiction', 'a source of evil, 'a tool that requires careful use' and 'a source of vagueness'. In their qualitative study conducted with the participation of 500 undergraduate nursing school students, Şenyuva and Kaya (2013) investigated the metaphorical Internet-related perceptions of the participants and found top three metaphors as *library, world* and *book*. As for categorical findings, they reported 'Internet as a source of information', 'Internet as a harmful tool', 'Internet both as useful and harmful'and 'Internet as a comprehensive tool'as the dominant categories.

The findings of the set of studies clearly show that there are positive, negative, and neutral metaphor categories. That is, the impression left by the term 'Internet' tends to vary broadly from person to person. The earlier-mentioned studies reflect the limited body of research on the perception of the Internet through metaphors. Focusing on a fairly important and up-to-date issue and aiming to contribute to the existing literature, the current study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the metaphors produced by prospective English language teachers concerning the term 'Internet'?
2. What kinds of categories are yielded by the common features of the produced metaphors?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

Qualitative phenomenological research design through metaphors has been used in this study. In phenomenological design,"the researcher identifies the 'essence' of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study" (Creswell, 2003:15). As this study focuses on the participants' perceptions of the 'Internet', metaphorical analysis technique turns out to be a feasible way to draw details from the collected qualitative data.

Participants

The subject group of the study is composed of 143 undergraduate students attending the English Language Teaching Programme at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun, Turkey. The number of the participants can be regarded as enough for a qualitative study (May, 1993; Dörnyei, 2007). 76 of the participants are Grade 1 and the remaining 67 are Grade 2 students. As for the gender factor, the female students outnumber males 99 to 44 in the study.The study adopted the widely used convenience sampling strategy through which the researcher selects a sample group that is readily accessible (Dörnyei, 2007). Each participant was assigned a number (for exmple, Participant 1) to ensure the anonymity of the gathered data (Ciambrone, 2004).

Data collection

Metaphors constitute the chief data under this study, and a form with a simple Internet-related metaphor question in fill-in-the-blanks format was employed as the main data collection tool.In order to find out the participants' perceptions of theInternet, the researcher asked them to fill in the blanks on a piece of paper on which the following information was written:

In accordance with your sincere belief, fill in the following blanks with a **metaphor and its reason** respectively. **DO NOT**use an adjective in the first blank. Feel free to write anything you wish.

Internet is…………………………………….. because…………...
………………………………………………………………………………

e.g.   Internet is a pool of information because it provides people with a lot of information.
Internet is a teacher because it teaches us a lot of things.
Internet is a devil because it shows us many bad things.

Before handing out the papers, the researcher informed the participants about the aim and coverage of the study. Then they were briefed about metaphors, and asked to have a look at the covered examples of the Internet-related metaphors on the paper. Considering the present data collection tool in relation to the metaphor analysis model proposed by I. A. Richards (Montgomery et al., 2007), it is clear that 'Internet' is the common tenor for all participants. The first blank asks the participants to write down a vehicle and the second blank demands a ground as to the link between the tenor and vehicle. On the other hand, considering the

framework provided by CMT by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), it can be said that the first blank is intended to constitute a source domain while the second one is expected to give clues about the target domain.

Data analysis

A three-stage model adapted from the studies of Şimşek and Yıldırım (2008) and Ekiz (2009) have been used during the data analysis phase under this study:

1. Naming and elimination stage
2. Classification and categorization stage
3. Validity and reliability stage

In the naming and elimination stage, the papers of the all participants (n=143) were checked by the researcher, and 16 of the papers were eliminated as they either did not provide a meaningful and acceptable metaphor or skipped the blank following 'because'. Before eliminating these 16 papers, an expert who specialized in the field of English language teaching was consulted. Following the agreement on elimination, the remaining 127 metaphors were then alphabetically listed by the researcher. The alphabetical listing put the identical metaphors in successive order and enabled the researcher to identify them. Taking the identical metaphors generated by the participants (n=127) into consideration, the researcher identified 79 different metaphors in total.

In the classification and categorization stage, the researcher conducted content analysis on the produced metaphors (n=79) and placed them under 9 conceptual categories (for example, Internet as 'an enormous realm', Internet as 'something that damages people'). While forming the categories, the researcher first coded the papers with keywords such as positive, negative, neutral, information, infinity, and so on. Then the metaphors that possessed similar coverage were brought together and listed under a specific category.

In the last stage, the researcher tried to ensure validity by giving specific details concerning each stage covered throughout the study process and experts were consulted both before determining the research design of the study and during all of the methodological stages. As for reliability, the researcher asked 3 English language teaching professionals to match the alphabetically listed metaphors produced by the participants (n=127) with the 9 categories determined by the researcher. In order to ensure sheer objectivity, the researcher did not show his categorization to them. Then the matching of the experts and that of the researcher were compared. The reliability of the study was calculated via the reliability formula offered by Miles and Huberman (1994):"reliability = agreement / (agreement + disagreement) x 100". In qualitative studies, the percentage of agreement is expected to be at least 90% as a strong indicator of reliability (Saban, 2009). The comparison of the matchings shows that the experts disagreed with the researcher about the categorization of 7 metaphors (answer, laziness, light, mother, space, and teacher, trash bin). Under this framework, the reliability of this study was calculated as 91% (reliability=72 / (72+7) × 100).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part covers the results of the qualitative analyses conducted on the metaphors produced by the participants about the Internet. The alphabetical list of the metaphors accompanied by frequency and percentage information is given in Table 1.

Table 1 makes it clear that 79 distinct metaphors on the Internet were produced by 127 participants. The ones with the highest frequency among these are 'infinite world (12, 9.44%)', 'thief (8, 6.29%)', 'addiction (5, 3.93%)', 'monster (5, 3.93%)', 'resource (4, 3.14%)', and 'drug (4, 3.14%)'. These are followed by 'mother (3, 2.36%)', 'candle (3, 2.36%)', 'good friend (3, 2.36%)', 'information bank (3, 2.36%)', 'life (3, 2.36%)', 'counsellor (2, 1.57%)', 'girlfriend (2, 1.57%)', 'information treasure (2, 1.57%)', 'ocean (2, 1.57%)', 'space (2, 1.57%)', and 'trash bin (2, 1.57%)'. Each of the remaining 62 metaphors was produced uniquely by different participants.

It is obvious from Table 1 that the participants produced a broad range of metaphors while expressing their opinions concerning the Internet. Each of the produced metaphors is quite important in that they reflect the personal comments of prospective English language teachers who are mostly active users of the Internet. So as to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the produced metaphors, the researcher placed them under nine conceptual categories:

1. Internet as 'something that damages people'
2. Internet as 'an enormous realm'
3. Internet as 'something that helps people'
4. Internet as 'a real source of information'
5. Internet as 'something that contains both positive and negative things'
6. Internet as 'something that provides escape from real world'
7. Internet as 'something that commands people'
8. Internet as 'something that connects people'
9. Internet as 'something that reflects the user'

Table 2 shows these categories with the metaphors included under them. It is apparent from Table 2 that the 9 conceptual categories are aimed at accounting for the produced 79 distinct metaphors as correctly as possible. The category with the highest frequency appears to be "Internet as 'something that damages people' (32, 25.1%)". It is followed by the other categories, "Internet as 'an enormous realm' (28, 22.0%)", "Internet as 'something that helps people' (20, 15.7%)", "Internet as 'a real source of information' (19, 14.9%)", "Internet as 'something that contains both positive and negative things' (14, 11.0%)", "Internet as 'something that provides escape from real world' (4, 3.1%)", "Internet as 'something that commands people' (4, 3.1%)", "Internet as 'something that connects people' (3, 2.3%)", and "Internet as 'something that reflects the user' (3, 2.3%)".

The coverage of the 1st category indicates that a considerable number of the participants (f=32) regard theInternet as something that damages people through metaphors like *thief, addiction, monster, drug,* and so on. This category suggests a clear negative attitude towards the Internet. However, the total frequency of the 3rd, 4th, and 8th categories (f=42) points out a considerable amount of positive stance towards the Internet. The

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of the produced metaphors concerning Internet.

S/N	Metaphor	f	%
1	Addiction	5	3.93
2	Another planet	1	0.78
3	Answer	1	0.78
4	Assistant	1	0.78
5	Baby	1	0.78
6	Bad friend	1	0.78
7	Big party	1	0.78
8	Borrowed book	1	0.78
9	Boss	1	0.78
10	Brain	1	0.78
11	Broad environment	1	0.78
12	Break	1	0.78
13	Candle	3	2.36
14	Chocolate	1	0.78
15	Cigarette	1	0.78
16	Connector	1	0.78
17	Counsellor	2	1.57
18	Deep ocean	1	0.78
19	Deep sea	1	0.78
20	Deep well	1	0.78
21	Dessert	1	0.78
22	Devil	1	0.78
23	Drug	4	3.14
24	Entertainment	1	0.78
25	Escape	1	0.78
26	Everything	1	0.78
27	Fraud	1	0.78
28	Gambling	1	0.78
29	Genius	1	0.78
30	Girlfriend	2	1.57
31	Globe	1	0.78
32	Good friend	3	2.36
33	Gossip girl	1	0.78
34	Government	1	0.78
35	Hell	1	0.78
36	Helper	1	0.78
37	Human being	1	0.78
38	Infinite world	12	9.44
39	Infobesity	1	0.78
40	Information bank	3	2.36
41	Information treasure	2	1.57
42	Laziness	1	0.78
43	Library	1	0.78
44	Life	3	2.36
45	Life-saver	1	0.78
46	Light	1	0.78
47	Maze	1	0.78
48	Medicine	1	0.78
49	Mirror	1	0.78
50	Mix salad	1	0.78

Table 1. Contd.

51	Monster	5	3.93
52	Mother	3	2.36
53	Murderer	1	0.78
54	Nuclear energy	1	0.78
55	Ocean	2	1.57
56	Pawnshop	1	0.78
57	Pole star	1	0.78
58	Pool	1	0.78
59	Power	1	0.78
60	Resource	4	3.14
61	Robber	1	0.78
62	Ruling man	1	0.78
63	School without rules	1	0.78
64	Servant	1	0.78
65	Sour plum	1	0.78
66	Source	1	0.78
67	Source of inspiration	1	0.78
68	Space	2	1.57
69	Spider	1	0.78
70	Teacher	1	0.78
71	Thief	8	6.29
72	Trash bin	2	1.57
73	Tube	1	0.78
74	Two-side medallion	1	0.78
75	Utter chaos	1	0.78
76	War	1	0.78
77	Warehouse	1	0.78
78	Water	1	0.78
79	Wise man	1	0.78

participants whose metaphors are listed under these three categories express a favourable opinion on theInternet through metaphors like *candle, mother, resource, information bank, connector,* and so forth. On the other hand, the metaphors placed under the 2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th (total f=53) categories express a neutral stance towards the Internet. Considering the categories from a holistic perspective, it can be said that the frequency of the neutral categories outnumbers that of the positive and negative categories; and from a dual perspective it is evident that the frequency of the positive categories outnumbers that of the single negative category. The coverage of the categories is elaborated with sample quotations from the participants as follows:

Internet as 'something that damages people': Under this category,the participants state that the Internet somehow harms them and express this through metaphors like *addiction, drug, thief, murderer,* etc.
For example,
Participant 5: Internet is*an addiction* because *lots of people spend most of their time on Internet.*

Table 2. Conceptual categories yielded by the qualitative analysis of the produced metaphors concerning the Internet.

S/N	Categories	f	%	Metaphors	f	%
1	Internet as 'something that damages people'	32	25.1	thief (8), addiction (5), monster (5), drug (4), bad friend (1), cigarette (1), devil (1), fraud (1), gambling (1), gossip girl (1), hell (1), murderer (1), robber (1), war (1)	14	17.7
2	Internet as 'an enormous realm'	28	22.0	infinite world (12), life (3), ocean (2), space (2), broad environment (1), deep ocean (1), deep sea (1), deep well (1), everything (1), globe (1), maze (1), pool (1), tube (1)	13	16.4
3	Internet as 'something that helps people'	20	15.7	candle (3), mother (3), good friend (3), counsellor (2), girlfriend (2), assistant (1), helper (1), life-saver (1), light (1), pole star (1), servant (1), water (1)	12	15.1
4	Internet as 'a real source of information'	19	14.9	resource (4), information bank (3), information treasure (2), answer (1), borrowed book (1), brain (1), genius (1), library (1), mix salad (1), source (1), source of inspiration (1), teacher (1), wise man (1)	13	16.4
5	Internet as 'something that contains both positive and negative things'	14	11.0	trash bin (2), chocolate (1), dessert (1), human being (1), infobesity (1), medicine (1), nuclear energy (1), pawnshop (1), school without rules (1), sour plum (1), two-side medallion (1), utter chaos (1), warehouse (1)	13	16.4
6	Internet as 'something that provides escape from real world'	4	3.1	another planet (1), break (1), entertainment (1), escape (1)	4	5.0
7	Internet as 'something that commands people'	4	3.1	boss (1), government (1), power (1), ruling man (1)	4	5.0
8	Internet as 'something that connects people'	3	2.3	big party (1), connector (1), spider (1)	3	3.7
9	Internet as 'something that reflects the user'	3	2.3	baby (1), laziness (1), mirror (1)	3	3.7
	Total	127	100	-	79	100

Participant 32: Internet is *a drug* because *it causes addiction and takes your time.*
Participant 43: Internet is *a thief* because *it steals our time.*
Participant 88: Internet is *a murderer* because *it kills our time.*

Internet as 'an enormous realm': Under this category, the participants draw attention to the enormousness of the Internet. They use metaphors like *space, world, ocean, deep well,* etc.
For example,
Participant 3: Internet is *space* because *it is endless and*

unknown.
Participant 22: Internet is *a world* because *you can find anything you wish there.*
Participant 65: Internet is an *ocean* because *there is endless information in it.*
Participant 102: Internet is *a deep well* because *when we go down deeper and deeper we discover unknown things.*

Internet as 'something that helps people': Under this category, the participants express their conviction that the Internet somehow contributes to them in their lives. They produce metaphors such as *light, water, good friend,*

mother, etc.
For example,
Participant 1: Internet is *light* because *it helps people find what they look for.*
Participant 42: Internet is *water* because *we cannot do without it.*
Participant 47: Internet is *a good friend* because *it always accompanies us.*
Participant 99: Internet is *a mother* because *it helps us about everything.*

Internet as 'a real source of information': Like the previous one, this category reflects a positive approach towards the Internet and focuses on the contribution of it to people as a source of information. The participants here use metaphors like *library, brain, teacher, wise man,* etc.
For example,
Participant 6: Internet is *a library* because *you can find any information there.*
Participant 19: Internet is *a brain* because *we get information via it.*
Participant 40: Internet is *a teacher* because *it provides answers and lightens your way.*
Participant 71: Internet is *a wise man* because *it can answer all of your questions.*

Internet as 'something that contains both positive and negative things':This category concentrates on the double-edgedness of the Internet and reflects both pros and cons. Sample metaphors include *nuclear energy, warehouse, medicine, chocolate,* etc.
For example,
Participant 11: Internet is *nuclear energy* because *if you use it for good purposes it can create miracles, but when you use it for bad purposes it can destroy the whole world.*
Participant 20: Internet is *a warehouse* because *you can find anything in it, both useful and useless.*
Participant 55: Internet is *medicine* because *it may have side effects.*
Participant 115: Internet is *chocolate* because *it makes you feel happy but its overuse causes problems.*

Internet as 'something that provides escape from real world':Under this category, the participants express their opinions that the Internet enables them to experience an escape from the concerns of real life. They use metaphors like *escape* and *break*.
For example,
Participant 33: Internet is *a break* because *I can get rid of the boring and busy life thanks to it.*
Participant 81: Internet is *an escape* because *it is easier to manage life there.*

Internet as 'something that commands people': This category focuses on the authoritative aspect of the

Internet. The participants use metaphors like *boss* and *government*.
For example,
Participant 15: Internet is *the boss* because *it rules all of us.*
Participant 29: Internet is *a government* because *it knows everything about us and we depend on it.*

Internet as 'something that connects people': This category attracts attention to the vast network covered by the Internet and its function as bringing people together. Related metaphors are such as *spider* and *big party*.
For example,
Participant 51: Internet is *a spider* because *its net embraces the entire world.*
Participant 59: Internet is *a big party* because *it helps people meet new friends.*

Internet as 'something that reflects the user': This last category is about the reflection of the users' motives on the Internet use. Sample metaphors include *mirror* and *baby*.
For example,
Participant 8: Internet is *a mirror* because *its usage reflects you.*
Participant 66: Internet is *a baby* because *its replies are shaped by your behaviours.*

The findings shown and discussed in detail bear certain similarities to those of the several studies cited while reviewing the relevant literature. For example, the 9 conceptual categories yielded by this study overlap considerably with the categories yielded by the study of Eren et al. (2012). Here are the matching categories: Internet as 'a real source of information' and Internet as 'a source of knowledge'; Internet as 'something that connects people' and Internet as 'an informational and communicational tool'; Internet as 'something that helps people' and Internet as 'a basic need';Internet as 'something that damages people' and Internet as 'a source of addiction' and 'a source of evil';Internet as 'something that contains both positive and negative things' and Internet as 'a tool that requires careful use';Internet as 'an enormous realm' and Internet as 'a source of vagueness'. Likewise, the dominant categories yielded by the study of Şenyuva and Kaya (2013) that are 'Internet as a source of information', 'Internet as a harmful tool', 'Internet both as useful and harmful', and 'Internet as a comprehensive tool' possess clear matchings with the ones obtained in this study. Furthermore, the metaphor with the highest frequency in this study appears to be *infinite world* which overlaps with the *world* metaphor which turns out to be among the top three metaphors in the study of Şenyuva and Kaya (2013).

Beside the earlier mentioned overlappings, the attained categories here possess common points with those

obtained in the study of Fırat and Kabakçı (2012). The categories of Internet as 'a real source of information' and Internet as 'something that connects people' match with thecategories of 'sharing of and access to information' and 'network'; and alsothe category of Internet as 'an enormous realm' matches with the 'open space' category. As for the similarities to the categories introduced by Palmquist (1996), metaphors like *baby, mother, teacher, friend,* and *human being*correspond to the 'anthropomorphic' category, metaphors like infinite *world, space, everything,* and *globe* to the 'space' category, metaphors like *ocean, sea, water,* and *pool* to the 'fire/water' category, and the metaphor *spider* to the'animals' category. In addition, some of the Internet-related metaphors mentioned by Wu and Chen (2013) (that is, 'Internet is a person', 'Internet is a library', 'Internet is a sea') are covered among the produced metaphors under this study.

Other than the similarities, the findings of this study introduce some new categories that have not been mentioned in the related literature covered above. These are Internet as 'something that provides escape from real world', Internet as 'something that commands people', and Internet as 'something that reflects the user'. In addition to these new categories, some interesting metaphors like *infobesity, nuclear energy, pawnshop, sour plum,* and *big party* that have not been covered in the earlier-cited studies are freshly introduced in relation to the Internet under this study.

Conclusion

This qualitative study that aimed to explore prospective English language teachers' opinions concerning the 'Internet' through metaphorical analysis was carried out with the participation of 143 freshman and sophomore students studying in the ELT Programme at Ondokuz Mayıs University. The conducted qualitative analyses yielded a total number of 79 distinct metaphors generated by the participants. The metaphor with the highest frequency is 'Internet is *an infinite world*' which was produced by 12 participants. A further analysis put these metaphors under 9 categories which cover different aspects of the participants' perception of the Internet. The category with the highest frequency is Internet as 'something that damages people'. However, this finding may be somewhat misleading when taken separately as there is only one negative category among the nine. Taken holistically, the high-to-low frequency order turns out to be

1. The neutral categories
2. Positive categories
3. Negative category

This frequency order does not change the fact that a notable part of the participants hold a negative stance towards the Internet, though. These evidently attest to that there is a broad range of opinions as to the Internet among the participants.

The findings of this study bear obvious similarities to some of the studies from the existing literature (Eren et al., 2012; Şenyuva and Kaya, 2013; Fırat and Kabakçı, 2012; Palmquist, 1996; Wu and Chen, 2013). On the other hand, it introduces some new metaphors and categories concerning the Internet. To broaden the existing body of research, prospective researchers can carry out a metaphorical study focusing on the perceptual differences between digital natives and immigrants about the Internet. Also, the predictions as to the future of the Internet may be investigated through a prospective metaphorical study. Lastly, another metaphorical study could be designed to explore the link between theInternet and foreign language learning.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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