

Metaphorical Analysis of Iranian High School Students' Beliefs about conceptual themes of Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

Metaphor analysis has been used as a cognitive tool to raise awareness about assumptions and beliefs held by teachers and learners about the process of learning and teaching. Motivated by such an ambition, this study conducted with a quantitative and descriptive design examined the metaphors produced by Iranian high school students in an EFL context about the concept

of English teacher, EFL learner, teaching, learning, English textbook, and English language classroom. The study used the convenient sampling technique. The participants of this study included 200 individuals (female= 100, male=100) from Khajenasir and Rahmany high schools in Maragheh, Iran. For gathering the data, a metaphor elicitation instrument adapted from Can, Bedir, and Kiliańska-Przybyło's (2011) study was employed. It consisted of six prompts to elicit students' associations and images related to the selected concepts of foreign language education: "1. English teacher is like...." "2. English learner is like...." "3. Teaching English is like..." "4. Learning English is like..." 5. English textbook is like...." "6. English classroom is like...." According to the findings, participants conceptualized selected components with about 370 metaphors categorized under 19 categories. There were similarities and differences in learners' conceptualization of these concepts regarding the participants' gender. The findings of this study might shed light on the view cultural linguistics represents a framework that provides a basis for understanding cultural conceptualizations and their realization in language.

Keywords: Metaphor analysis; EFL learner; Gender; conception of English teaching; conception of learning.

1. Introduction

Metaphor analysis is "widely recognized as a tool for examining teacher' and learners' thinking, studying the evolution of their beliefs and attitudes or serving as an example of awareness-raising tasks" (Cortazzi & Jin 1999, p. 150). Metaphors can provide insights into some complex concepts such as teaching, learning, or schooling and help to comprehend personal experiences. In other words, metaphors can act as 'translators of experience' (Miller, 1987). Educational research focusing on examining learners' and teachers' thinking using metaphors as a tool showed that metaphors represent important ways of communication, conveying meaning about professional and life experiences (e.g., Inbar, 1996; Saban, 2003, 2004, 2010, Leavy et al., 2007; Saban et al., 2014). In this light, finding out these hidden beliefs and views, turning implicit insights into explicit ones for learners to reflect on, is one of the many solutions to the myriad of problems in English language education. Revealing some of the basic predispositions and underlying assumptions teachers possess about students and students about teachers may be an effective route to better understanding and deeper insight into some of the problems and difficulties with which schooling is faced.

So far, several studies have investigated the role of metaphor in constructing the beliefs of teachers and learners in education. Some of these studies were carried out to explore such phenomena as “teacher” (Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, and Saleh, 1998; Saban, 2004; Saban, Koçbeker, & Saban, 2007; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Saban, 2010b; Ozgenel & Gokce, 2019), “student” (Bozlk, 2002; Saban, 2010a), “school” (Inbar, 1996; Ozgenel & Gokce, 2019), “school administrator” (Bredeson, 1988), learning (Martinez, Sauleda, & Huber, 2001; Ellis, 2008; Saban, 2014), language teaching and learning (Pishghadam, Askarzade, Torghabeh, & Navari, 2009; Pishghadam & Pouali, 2010), academic self (Bozlk, 2002), principal (Ozgenel & Gokce, 2019). For example, the role of the teacher was metaphorically explored by Oxford et al. (1998). They asked the participants to write six weekly journals about the teaching and learning processes of each class. They grouped the metaphors based on four perspectives: 1) social order, 2) cultural transmission, 3) learner-centered growth 4) social reform. The findings showed a variety of metaphors (teacher as manufacturer, conduit, nurturer, acceptor, entertainer, and learning partner) describing language teachers and how language teaching methods are related to these four philosophical viewpoints.

In the same vein, Saban, Koçbeker and Saban (2007) investigated the metaphors that prospective teachers in Turkey formulated to describe the concept of “teacher”. Participants completed the prompt “A teacher is like because.” by focusing on only one metaphor to indicate their conceptualization of teaching and learning. The analysis of the data followed the methodology of metaphor analysis (Moser, 2000), encompassing the following stages and actions: (1) naming/labeling stage, (2) sorting (clarification and elimination) stage, (3) deciding the unit of analysis, (4) sample metaphor compilation and categorization stage, (5) establishing the inter-rater reliability rate, and (6) analyzing data quantitatively. Altogether 64 valid personal metaphors were analyzed, and ten main conceptual themes were identified. For authors, metaphors can provide a powerful cognitive tool for gaining insights into teachers’ professional thinking. In another study, Nikitina and Furuoka (2008) focused on metaphors produced by 23 Malaysian students about language teachers. The main purpose of the study was to identify whether the metaphors produced can fall into four categories produced by Oxford et al. (1998) and to explore whether gender can influence the metaphor production. The qualitative analysis revealed that metaphors could be gender-related, but the quantitative phase did not indicate any statistical difference related to gender.

Ozgenel and Gokce (2019) analyzed the metaphors used by 197 students (99 females and 98 males) related to school, teachers, and principals studying at two state schools in Istanbul. According to the findings, students manipulated 26 metaphors regarding the school (for

example, as home), 27 metaphors regarding the teacher (family), and 27 metaphors regarding the school principal (leader).

The role of the learner was metaphorically explored by Bozlk (2002). In Bozlk's study, 49 freshmen enrolled in a general education cluster course at a mid-western university in the United States created 35 well-articulated metaphors for themselves as learners at four points during an academic year (the first day of class, at mid-term, the last day of class, and the following semester). The results of this study indicated that most students tend to come to higher education seeing themselves as passive learners, ready to soak up the teachers' knowledge (e.g., sponge). In the same vein, Saban (2010b) investigated the metaphorical images that prospective teachers in Turkey formulated to describe learners. Several major understandings have emerged out of the study. First, metaphorical images of learners varied widely, revealing multiple realities of students in the act and process of learning. Second, various factors (such as gender, program type, or teacher trainee status) appeared to influence how prospective teachers conceptualize learners. Third, the metaphor offered important insights into the structure of the Turkish education system. Fourth, the associations of teacher trainees' status in the programme with their learner-images evidenced the existence of both stability and change in their beliefs of learners.

Inbar's (1996) study comprised 409 pupils (51 percent girls and 49 percent boys) from 15 different schools and 254 educators with different roles. The analysis was organized in four sections: the pupil, the teacher, the principal, and the school, underscoring what seems to be one of the major contradictions in schooling: the free educational prison. Perhaps a more critical finding of the study was that about 43.5 percent of the students conceptualized school as a 'square-framed world,' a 'bolted and barred fortress' and a 'house of compulsion.'

The role of school principals was metaphorically explored by Bredeson (1985), who analyzed the metaphors produced by five principals of school principals. His analysis focused on the generative metaphors of three predominant concerns: maintenance, survival, and vision.

Regarding the learning and teaching process, Martinez, Sauleda, and Huber (2001) studied the metaphorical conceptions of learning based on the reflections of 50 experienced teachers and compared them with those of 38 major education seniors in Spain. They aimed at categorizing the metaphors into three main dimensions of the learning space: behavioristic/empiricist, cognitive/constructive, and situative/socio-historic perspective. According to the results, about 57% of experienced teachers and 56% of prospective teachers depicted teaching and learning as "transmission of knowledge". Moreover, about 38% of experienced teachers and 22% of preservice teachers expressed "constructivist metaphors".

While only 5% of the metaphors of experienced teachers conceptualized learning as a “social process” 22% of preservice teachers’ metaphors reflected this conceptual theme.

In another study, Pishghadam, Askarzade, Torghabeh, and Navari (2009), used the Iranian contexts of education, aimed to collect the metaphors produced by language teachers, and analyze the metaphors based on the guidelines laid down by Martinez (2001). The findings indicated that high school teachers still opt for running their classes under the rules of behaviourism while language institute teachers have more tendency toward principles of cognitivism and wish to form the bedrock of their teaching paradigm based on situative learning concepts. In a similar study, Pishgadam and Pouali (2010) examined the metaphors produced by Iranian MA students about learning and teaching both in ideal and current situations. According to findings, MA university students had different conceptions of learning and teaching, wishing to form the bedrock of their teaching and learning paradigm based on situative learning concepts. In the same vein, Saban (2014) examined Turkish primary teacher candidates’ experienced and ideal conceptions of learning. The results revealed that participants conceptualized their experienced learning with 18 metaphorical images and ideal learning with 25 metaphorical images. The three categories and some of the corresponding metaphors representing the participants’ experienced learning include the following: (1) “learning as an involuntary/compulsory activity,” (2) “learning as memorization/ accumulation of knowledge,” and (3) “learning as a temporary/momentary activity.”

Following such tradition, pedagogically, a fair amount of research has taken into account and investigated the various functions of metaphor in teaching and teacher education. However, few studies directly explored mentioned concepts regarding the concept of gender in the Iranian context. The conventional research on second language learning attitudes addressing gender differences treats gender as something biologically fixed and women and men as two independent groups. New theorizations of gender have raised alternative conceptions which suggest multiple and fluid identities. In fact, there is a shift in view from perceiving gender as an individual concept to perceiving it as a social construction (Aslan, 2009). Whereas the first approaches view gender as dichotomous implying one-to-one relations between gender and language, the new ones see gender as dynamic and socially constructed, implying no universally applicable gender differences (Kubota, 2003).

1.1 Theoretical framework

The word metaphor is defined as “a word or phrase used to describe somebody/ something else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have

the same qualities and to make the description more powerful” (*Oxford Learners’ Dictionary*, online). Metaphor is also defined “as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 202). From Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980, pp.3-6) point of view, metaphors structure large parts of our conceptual system, and these structures are reflected in language by means of metaphorical expressions. Since language works by means of transference from one kind of reality to another, metaphors do not simply reflect reality but also help to establish it (Taylor, 1984). In fact, it comes up with ideas from the thought that reflects the real mind and behavior (Mey, 2006; Gibbs & Matlock, 2008; Bergen & Feldman, 2008; Zhang & Hu, 2009).

Another essence of metaphor is that “when conceptual metaphors are expressed in the form of metaphorical linguistic expressions in discourse, they may serve culturally distinct social-cultural functions” (Kövecses, 2010, p.284). Conceptual metaphor is central to cultural linguistics in that it focuses on exploring the cultural basis of conceptual metaphor and its important implications for the cognitive nature of conceptual metaphor (e.g., Kövecses, 2005; Sharifian et al., 2008; Yu, 2009). The term “cultural linguistics” (see, e.g., Palmer, 1996), which was used to refer to the general area of research on the relationship between language and culture (Peeters, 2016) offers both a theoretical and an analytical framework for investigating the cultural conceptualizations that underlie the use of human languages. Its analytical framework provides some useful tools to examine language features and analyze the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations. They include the notions of “cultural schema,” “cultural category,” and “cultural metaphor” (Sharifian, 2017, pp. 476–478).

Unlike cultural schemas and cultural categories, *cultural* metaphors involve a form of conceptualization across different domains known as the source domain and the target domain. This is very much like *conceptual* metaphors first developed by Lakoff, Johnson (1980). In their view, metaphors, most broadly understood as conceptual constructs allowing for the perception of what is abstract in terms of what is experiential and physical (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980),” vary within cultures, along with a number of dimensions including the social, regional, ethnic, style, subcultural, diachronic, and individual dimensions” (Kövecses 2010, p.217).

The cultural dimension of metaphor has been studied with a particular emphasis on identifying and explaining cross-cultural variation (Díaz Vera, 2014; Idström & Piirainen, 2012; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003; Kövecses, 2005; Musolff et al., 2014; Sharifian, 2014, 2015; Sharifian et al., 2008; Yu, 2008). For example, in a study of cultural conceptualizations

among a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, Sharifian (2005a) employed conceptual-associative analysis, one of the research methods that have already been used in cultural linguistics research. The study was composed of two phases: an “association” phase, in which a number of English words were used as prompts to elicit conceptualizations in a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and an “interpretation” phase, in which the associative responses given by the participants were analyzed in an attempt to define the cultural conceptualizations that they appeared to instantiate. The study revealed that the degree to which what appears to be metaphorical/rhetorical is based on cultural conceptualizations that constitute the speaker’s worldview. Thus, it might be argued that explorations of the cultural basis of conceptual metaphor have significant implications for conceptual metaphor theory, and using data from different languages and language varieties can contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay among culture and conceptualization.

Following such assumptions, having the Iranian socio-cultural context as background, the study had the following aims: (1) to identify the metaphors that students use to describe the concept of “English teacher”, “English learner,” “teaching the English language,” “learning English language,” “English textbook,” and “English language classroom” (2) to explore the categories in which these metaphors are organized, (3) to reveal the possible relations between the dominant conceptual themes and the participant’s gender, and finally, (4) to relate the conceptual themes identified with those of other socio-cultural contexts. In this regard, we assumed that some of the dominant metaphors about conceptual themes of foreign language education identified in the extant studies conducted particularly in Iran would be present in our study also. For example, the metaphor of learners as a prisoner, teacher as a *jailor*, and language classroom as a *jail* that is based on the idea of teaching knowledge transmission and learning as knowledge acquisition were expected to be dominant. Because, at present, behaviorism dominates the current environment in the process of teaching and learning in the Iranian context. Furthermore, because of the Iranian male-dominated and gender-biased learning/teaching EFL context, we assumed that the independent variable, gender, would have a significant impact on participants’ metaphors. In sum, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What are the metaphors produced by EFL learners about conceptual themes of foreign language pedagogy (English teacher, English learner, teaching the English language, learning English language, English textbook, and English language classroom)?

- What are the differences between males and females in terms of using metaphors about selected concepts of foreign language education?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and setting

The total population participating consisted of 200 individuals (female= 100, male=100) from Khajenasir and Rahmany public high schools in Maragheh, Iran. The learners were studying in the third grade of high school, and both groups were truly eager to take part in the study. The average age of the students at the schools was 17, with no experience of studying English at private institutes but having studied English at schools for almost six years. Convenience sampling was adopted for the selection of the participants. In Iran, English and Arabic are two compulsory foreign languages in secondary schools. By adopting a cultural linguistics perspective and analyzing the use of metaphors in the English language, this study aims at providing a better understanding of how metaphors can instantiate abstract conceptualizations of “English teacher”, “English learner,” “teaching the English language,” “learning the English language,” “English textbook,” and “English language classroom.”

2.2. Instrumentation

In order to address the research question, the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire, which was adapted from Can, Bedir, and Kiliańska-Przybyło's (2011) study. In this study, for gathering the data, a metaphor elicitation instrument was employed and consisted of six prompts: “1. English teacher is like....” “2. English learner is like....” “3. Teaching English is like...” “4. Learning English is like...” 5. English textbook is like....” “6. English classroom is like...”. The questionnaire's purpose was to elicit students' associations and images related to the concept of English teacher, English learner, teaching, learning, English textbook, and English language classroom. Word association has been mainly used in quantitative studies of cognitive structures of various kinds. However, it was partly modified by Sharifian (2005) to suit the qualitative analysis and targeted to explore cultural conceptualizations. Thus, this study had two phases: an “association” phase, in that a number of English words were used as prompts to elicit conceptualizations, and an “interpretation and descriptive” phase, in which the associative responses produced by the participants were analyzed in an attempt to define the cultural conceptualizations that they appeared to instantiate.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The present study was conducted with a quantitative and descriptive design. The process of data collection started in October (2019) and continued until December (2019) to gather all the data. The first stage was to organize the metaphors alongside their entailments. At this stage, we eliminated a total of 200 poorly structured metaphors of 600 produced metaphors by students based on the following criteria: 1. a plain description or no mention of a metaphor at all. For example, *language class is a place for studying a new language*². Difficulty placing the metaphor under one clearly recognizable conceptual theme. For example, *language learning is a wrench or Cactus*. After eliminating 200 metaphors in the second stage, we identified a total of 400 well-articulated metaphors. In the coding and elimination stage, all the metaphorical images supplied by the participants were simply named/labeled (such as *compass, friend, dictionary*, etc.). Then, we adopted the following criteria for analyzing gender variables: categories should be based on metaphors that were mentioned (a) by more than one participant and (b) by both male and female participants. As a result of these criteria, we eliminated 30 more metaphors. In the sorting and categorization stage, the conceptual categories that they represented best abstracted from the 370 exemplar metaphors. As a result, 19 major conceptual categories were identified. To sustain the reliability and validity of the study findings, we discussed all the conceptual themes and codes, as well as the interpretations made by the researchers, with the colleague (expert) several times in-person to resolve any differences. Finally, we used the chi-square test to compare the dominant metaphorical themes based on gender.

3. Results

This section first introduces the conceptual themes that were abstracted from the metaphorical images by highlighting their main characteristics. Subsequently, it deals with the effects of the learners' gender on their conceptualizations of "teacher," "learner," "teaching," "learning," "textbook," and "language classroom," respectively.

3.1. Main conceptual categories of teacher

3.1.1. Teacher as a counselor

There were 71 (35%) students, and nine metaphors altogether constituted this conceptual theme, with the metaphors of a father (17) and mother (13) being dominant. This category had the highest frequency among the categories. Metaphors of this category probably represent a

notion of teaching which is based on *cognitive* ideas which define teachers as facilitators and learners as active participants reconstructing knowledge (Martinez, Sauleda, & Huber, 2001).

Table 1: *Distribution of three dominant conceptual categories of teacher*

Metaphorical Group	Teacher is like:	Female	Male	Total
Counselor	Father, mother, sister, aunt, brother, lover, uncle, positive energy, angel	29(14%)	42(21%)	71(35%)
Providing Knowledge	Preacher, lamp, prophet, narrator, flower, wise, poet, language scientist, reference, dictionary, recording, translator	25(12%)	25(12%)	50(24%)
Superior authoritative figure	Bully, Dave, Annoying, Dracula, broken radio, Jailor, talkative, Mother-in-law	11(5%)	11(5%)	22(10%)

As you might notice in Table 2, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=2.38$, $p=0.12$). Male and female students equally favored the counseling-oriented metaphors. It seems that both groups' (female and males) metaphors consisted of positive attitudes toward English language teacher. Just like a child depends on his or her parents, mother and father, to grow and survive, the learner needs the teacher to get new information.

Table 2: *Results of chi-square test for main conceptual categories of teacher gender*

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Teacher as counselor	2.380 ^a	1	.123
Teacher as knowledge provider	.000 ^a	1	1.00
Teacher as superior authoritative figure	.000 ^a	1	1.00

3.1.2. Teacher as knowledge provider

Altogether, there were 50(24%) students and 15 metaphors that presented this conceptual theme, with the metaphors of flower (10), narrator (10), light (5), preacher (5), and prophet (4) being dominant. This category had the second highest frequency among the categories. In this category, the majority of metaphors created by students might represent a notion of teaching based on *behaviorist/empiricist* ideas which define the learners as passive recipients and teachers as transmitters of knowledge (Martinez, Sauleda, & Huber, 2001).

As Table 2 shows, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=0$, $p=1$). Male and female students equally favored the transmission-oriented teaching perspectives. Since the teacher is defined as the main source of knowledge and the learner as an inactive and passive

person in the classroom whose job is to receive whatever the professors dictate. It seems that both groups' (female and male) metaphors consisted of negative attitudes toward English language teachers.

3.1.3. Teacher as superior authoritative figure

There were 22(10%) students, and eight metaphors altogether constituted this conceptual theme, with the metaphors of talkative (6), bully (5), and jailor (3) being dominant. This category had the last highest frequency among the categories. In this category, like the previous one, the majority of metaphors created by students might represent a notion of teachers as the only active person in the class, controlling everything until knowledge as a determined product is transmitted to the passive learner.

As you might notice, Table 2 markedly shows that the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=0$, $p=1$). Male and female students equally favored the controlling-oriented teaching perspectives. It can be seen from the metaphors generated by both groups (females and males) that the metaphors about the English teacher included negative attitudes.

3.2. Main conceptual categories of learners

3.2.1. Learner as explorer

Altogether there were 44(21%) students and 20 metaphors under this conceptual theme, with five metaphors of scientist (11), thirst for knowledge (5), champion (4), mighty (4), and mountain digger (4) being dominant. The metaphors of this category reflect that the learner strives for meaning and understanding, for example “a **scientist** who is after knowing the world through examining and testing new things” or “a **thirst for knowledge** which is strong enough to find waters (knowledge) to satisfy it.”

Table 3: Distribution of three dominant conceptual categories of learner

Metaphorical Group	learner is like:	females	males	Total
Explorer	Challenger, skilled, Thirst for knowledge, champion, Hard worker, Brave man, mountain digger, rectifier, explorer, Thirsty tree, Scientist, Mighty, conquer, tireless, High- flying, Little professor, Brave woman, Patient, eager	31(15%)	13(6%)	44(21%)
Absolute Complaint	Unemployed prisoner, Slow brain, Lazy bear, Mischievous, sleepy, Forced labor, Deaf ears, Sheep, geeky, Indifferent, statue, sick, Deaf-mute	9(4%)	19(9%)	28(13%)

Knowledge recipient	Student, language learner, recorder, owl	3(1%)	20(10%)	23(11%)
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As you might notice in Table 4, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 7.3$, $p = 0.007$). More female students conceptualized learners as “explorer” than male students did. In other words, positive metaphors toward learner-generated by females are higher (31%) than those of the males’ metaphors.

Table 4: Results of chi-square test for main conceptual categories of learner regarding gender

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
learner as explorer	7.364 ^a	1	.007
learner as absolute complaint	3.571 ^a	1	.059
learner as knowledge recipient	12.565 ^a	1	.000

3.2.2. Learner as absolute compliant

Altogether there were 28(13%) students and 13 metaphors under this conceptual theme, with the metaphors of prisoner (7), unintelligence (4), and forced labor (3) being dominant. Using these metaphors, students expressed that the Lerner is a captive being, like “a **prisoner** because s/he is always punished for some reason”. The teacher decides about what and how to teach in the classroom because “A student is **unintelligent** one who never is asked about what s/he wants to do (or learn)” “just as **forced labors** follow their boss by doing what s/he commands, students also need to follow their teachers in every aspect of their schooling life”.

As Table 4 indicates, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2= 3.57$, $p = 0.059$). Male and female students equally conceptualized learners as “absolute Complaint.” Accordingly, both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of negative attitudes toward English language learners.

3.2.3. Learner as knowledge recipient

Altogether 23(11%) students and four metaphors constituted this conceptual theme, with the metaphor of student being dominant. The metaphors of this category reflect learning as a process of observing and recording facts and events, like “a **recorder**”.

As you might see, Table 4 markedly shows that the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 12$, $p = 0.00$). More male students conceptualized learners as “knowledge

recipients” than female students did. In other words, negative metaphors toward learner-generated by males are higher (20%) than those of the females’ metaphors.

3.3. Main conceptual categories of teaching

3.3.1. Teaching as nurturing

Altogether, there were 32(16%) students and eight metaphors under this category, and the following three metaphors were dominant: love (11), fresh air (6), and chatter (6). In this category of metaphors, the teaching is viewed as providing an environment to promote growth. The teacher fosters the potential capabilities of students. A learner is a developing organism (e.g., a baby) and learning is growth and development, which is affected by nature and nature.

Table 5: *Distribution of three dominant conceptual categories of teaching*

Metaphorical Group	Teaching is like:	females	males	Total
nurturing	poetry, Feeding the baby, Lighting, Nice weather, fresh air, Get the light, Love, Mother with baby, chatter	22(11%)	10(5%)	32(16%)
guiding	Learning science, Knowing about another world, Learning a new culture, Connect with the world, Different learning, Something new, intellectual Helping others, Improve knowledge, Steering the ship	8(4%)	19(9%)	27(13%)
boring	Annoying, Lullaby, Foreigner network, Doctor visit, Nothingness, boring, wasting time, Not understanding well,	8(4%)	9(4%)	17(8%)

As you see in Table 6, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 4.5$, $p = 0.03$). Female students generated more nurturing-oriented teaching perspectives than male students did. In fact, positive metaphors for teaching generated by females are higher (22%) than those of the males’ metaphors.

Table 6: *Results of Chi-Square test for main conceptual categories of teaching regarding gender*

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Teaching as nurturing	4.500 ^a	1	.034
Teaching as guiding	4.481 ^a	1	.034

Teaching as boring	.059 ^a	1	.808
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3.3.2. *Teaching as guiding*

Altogether, there were 27(13%) students and ten metaphors under this category, and the following metaphor was dominant: learning science (9). In this category of metaphors, the teaching is viewed as leading students to new knowledge. The teacher guides/directs students to achieve goals, and learning is working toward a goal.

As Table 6 indicates, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 4.4$, $p = 0.03$). Male students generated more transmission-oriented teaching perspectives than female students did. It seems that negative metaphors toward teaching generated by males are higher (19 %) than those of the females' metaphors.

3.3.3. *Teaching as boring activity*

There were 17(8%) students and eight metaphors under this category. No metaphor in this category appeared to be dominant. In this category of metaphors, the teaching is viewed as a “repetitive, dull and unrewarding process. Thus, it seems that both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of negative attitudes toward English language teaching. In their view, the teacher implements classroom activities in a predictable manner and makes classroom proceedings routine” (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008, p.211). As you notice, Table 6 shows that the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2= 0.59$, $p = 0.8$). Male and female students equally favored the boring-oriented teaching perspectives.

3.4. Main conceptual categories of learning

3.4.1. *Learning as effort and achievement of personal goal*

There were 29(14%) students and ten metaphors under this category, and the following two metaphors were dominant: intellectual progress (8) and good life (4). Using these metaphors, the participants expressed that learning is being able to develop students to see things from different perspectives and give them basic tools to cope in society.

Table 7: *Distribution of four dominant conceptual categories of learning*

Metaphorical Group	Learning is like:	Females	Males	Total
Effort and Achievement of personal goal	Intellectual progress, effort, Growth, Good life, futurism, New work, Fruit tree, New person, comfort, rebirth	21(10%)	8(4%)	29(14%)

Exploring and meaning making	knowing the new world, Connecting with the world, Conquering new mountains, Communication with people, Get the light, rebirth, Coming out of the well, Enjoyable travel, Fly	8(4%)	19(9%)	27(13%)
Nice and entertaining	Love, enjoyable, interesting, story, Eating vitamins, chocolate, Play with toys, Sweets and cake	12(6%)	10(5%)	22(11%)
Compulsory activity	Doom, Moving on water, sleeping, Death, phony,	8(4%)	14(7%)	22(11%)

As Table 8 indicates, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 5.8$, $p = 0.01$). More female students conceptualized learning as “effort and achievement of personal goal” than male students did. In other words, positive metaphors toward English learning generated by females is higher (21 %) than those of the males’ metaphors.

Table 8: Results of chi- square test for main conceptual categories of learning regarding gender

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
learning as effort and achievement	5.828 ^a	1	.016
learning as exploring	4.481 ^a	1	.034
learning as Nice and entertaining	.182 ^a	1	.670
learning as compulsory activity	1.636 ^a	1	.201

3.4.2. Learning as exploring and meaning-making

There were 27(13%) students and 9 metaphors under this category, and the following three metaphors were dominant: knowing the new world (12), connecting with the world (9), and conquering new mountains (5). Using these metaphors, the participants expressed that learning is a process of discovery that can take a long time, but at the end of this process, learners can always get a new and different perspective about phenomena and events in the world.

As you might notice in Table 8, The χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2= 0.18$, $p = 0.6$). Male and female students equally conceptualized learning as “exploring and meaning-making.” Accordingly, both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of positive attitudes toward English language learning.

3.4.3. Learning as nice and entertaining

There were 22(11%) students and nine metaphors under this category, and the following two metaphors were dominant: enjoyable (9), Sweets, and cake (5). Using these metaphors, the participants expressed that learning a language relieves them by isolating them from the situation they are in and enables them to experience nice and entertaining moments.

Table 8 markedly shows that the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=0.18$, $p = 0.6$). Male and female students equally conceptualized learning as “nice and entertaining.” It can be argued that both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of positive attitudes toward English language learning.

3.4.4. Learning as compulsory activity

There were 22(11%) students and five metaphors under this category, and the following metaphor was dominant: doom (5). Using these metaphors, the participants expressed that learning is an undesired activity and the learner is a receiver who absorbs information with no control over them.

As Table 8 indicates, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2= 1.6$, $p = 0.2$). Male and female students equally conceptualized learning as a “compulsory activity.” In fact, both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of negative attitudes toward English language learning.

3.5. Main conceptual categories of textbook

3.5.1. Textbook as nice and entertaining

There were 57(28%) students and eight metaphors under this category, and the following three metaphors were dominant: story (17), poem (9), and good text (8). Using these metaphors, the participants expressed that the English textbook is just like a poem which is a piece of writing that expresses emotions, experiences, and ideas, or a story that is designed to interest, amuse or instruct the hearer or reader provides students physical, psychological and emotional comfort.

Table 9: *Distribution of three dominant conceptual categories of English textbook*

Metaphorical Group	English textbook is like:	Females	Males	Total
Nice and entertaining	Poem, story, Good text, Sweets, Peace of mind, Sweet secrets, Good feeling, Love	20(10%)	37(18%)	57(28%)
Nonsense	Giant, Sleeping pill, having cold tea, nonsense, exam,	22(11%)	14(7%)	36(18%)

	Cuneiform, Doctor handwriting			
Educative	New information, Learning new life, Tree branches, Exchange of information, New world, guide, Laptop, Launchpad, tutorial, escalator	6(3%)	9(4%)	15(7%)

As you might notice in Table 10, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 5$, $p = 0.02$). More male students conceptualized textbooks as “nice and entertaining” than female students did. In other words, positive metaphors toward English textbooks generated by males is higher (37 %) than those of the females’ metaphors.

Table 10: Results of chi-Square test for main conceptual categories of textbook regarding gender

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
textbook as nice and entertaining	5.070 ^a	1	.024
textbook as nonsense	1.778 ^a	1	.182
textbook as educative	.600 ^a	1	.439

3.5.2. Textbook as nonsense

There were 36 (18%) students and eight metaphors under this category, and the following two metaphors were dominant: nonsense (17), and Cuneiform (7). In this category of metaphors, students develop negative attitudes toward language textbooks, and they do not perceive it as valuable sources.

Table 10 shows that the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=1.7$, $p = 0.1$). Male and female students equally conceptualized “textbook as nonsense.” In fact, both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of negative attitudes toward English textbooks.

3.5.3. Textbook as educative tool

There were 15(7%) students and ten metaphors under this category, and the following metaphor was dominant: New information (8). In this category of metaphors, the participants expressed that textbooks are necessary tools in providing knowledge to the learners.

As Table 10 shows, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=0.6$, $p = 0.4$). Male and female students equally conceptualized “textbook as an educative tool.” Accordingly,

both groups' (female and male) metaphors consisted of positive attitudes toward English textbooks.

3.6. Main conceptual categories of language classroom

3.6.1. English language classroom as community of knowledge and development

There were 52(25%) students and 17 metaphors under this category, and the following five metaphors were dominant: a place of studying the new language (8), second house (7), place of consultation (5), a small community (5), and place of education (5). Using these metaphors, the participants expressed that a classroom runs as a learning community that operates on the understanding that the ends of importance are the growth and development of the people, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Table 11: *Distribution of three dominant conceptual categories of language classroom*

Metaphorical Group	Language classroom is like:	Females	Males	Total
Community of Knowledge and development	A place of studying new language, Second house, place of education Place of consultation, Small community, International place, place of flourishing, place of progress,	9(4%)	43(21%)	52(25%)
Educational prison	Dorm, Prison, hospital,,boring, wasting time, military service, cage,torture room catapult, desert, Stress station,	21(10%)	19(9%)	40(19%)
World of leisure	Happy place, Break time, place for playing football, enjoy time, rest room, Amusement park, friendship, happiness place	7(3%)	9(4%)	16(7%)

As you might notice in Table 12, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was significant ($\chi^2= 22$, $p = 0.00$). More male students conceptualized the language classroom as a “community of knowledge and development ”than female students did. In other words, positive metaphors toward English classroom generated by males is higher (43 %) than those of the females' metaphors.

Table 12: *Results of chi-square test for main conceptual categories of classroom regarding gender*

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Classroom as community of knowledge	22.231 ^a	1	.000
Classroom as educational prison	.100 ^a	1	.752
Classroom as world of leisure	.250 ^a	1	.617

3.6.2. English Language classroom as educational prison

There were 40(19%) students and 12 metaphors under this category, and the following four metaphors were dominant: dorm (7), Prison (7), doom (5), torture room (4). This category includes metaphors containing psychologically negative situations on humans. Using the metaphors of *jail* and *military service*, the participants expressed that the language classroom is a boring and unpleasant place for students and its activities require a number of discipline rules that restrict the freedom of humans.

As Table 12 indicates, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=0.1$, $p = 0.7$). Male and female students equally conceptualized the language classroom as “educational prison.” Accordingly, both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of positive attitudes toward the English classroom.

3.6.3. English Language classroom as world of leisure

There were 16(7%) students and nine metaphors under this category, and the following metaphor was dominant: happy place (9). As Table 12 shows, the χ^2 analysis regarding gender was not significant ($\chi^2=0.2$, $p = 0.6$). Male and female students equally conceptualized the language classroom as a “world of leisure.” In fact, both groups’ (female and male) metaphors consisted of negative attitudes toward the English classroom.

4. Discussion

In the present study, we identified the metaphors that students use to describe the concept of “English teacher”, “English learner,” “English teaching,” “English learning,” “English textbook,” and “English language classroom” and explored the categories in which these metaphors are organized to reveal the possible relations between the dominant conceptual themes and the participants’ gender. Our findings are in accordance with our hypothesis that predicted that some of the dominant metaphors of teacher, learner, and classroom, teaching and learning identified in the extant studies would be present in our study also, and the independent variable, gender, would have a significant impact on participants’ metaphors. In fact, our

findings suggest that there are similarities and differences in students' conceptualization of these concepts regarding the participants' gender.

With regard to the concept of "teacher," male and female students equally favored the counseling-oriented, transmission-oriented, and controlling-oriented teaching perspectives. These similarities might indicate the effect of the cultural behaviors of Iranians regarding teaching and learning. According to Namaghi (2006), in Iranian school settings, sociopolitical forces play a significant role in the performance of teachers. The Ministry of Education introduces the curricula and syllabi for each grade and expects students to only learn the introduced issues. Hence, the teachers' roles change into the implementers of schemes, policies, and programs.

Regarding the concept of "learner," while female students conceptualized learners more as "explorer," male students conceptualized learners more as 'knowledge recipients.' It might be argued that it is possible that the female students probably develop more autonomous language learning activities inside and outside of the classroom than male students (Varol, & Yilmaz, 2010; Nasri, et al., 2017). Arabski (1999) argued that females are more willing to do out-of-class activities than male students. For example, they were interested in reading story books, listening to songs, and watching movies. Moreover, while males are more dependent on the teacher in deciding the contents of the syllabus, females tend to show a higher degree of autonomy (Koçak, 2003; Hajizadeh, Nakhle, & Naghavi, 2013).

With regard to the concept of learning, more female students conceptualized learning as "effort and achievement of personal goal" than male students did. This may not be unrelated to the fact that females are more motivated to learn foreign languages than males (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2002; Dörnyei, Csizer, & Nemeth, 2006; Mori & Gobel, 2006). It is believed that socialization and achievement experiences play an important role in the development of gender differences in motivation. In other words, women's attitudes toward English might be affected by a composite of social and educational elements of a community. It might be due to the fact that, in some contexts, English offers women an advantage in the marketplace (Kobayashi, 2002). It also becomes a means of empowerment and a lens that offers a critical perspective on their lives and society (McMahill, 2001). Today, Iranian women consider higher education as the only way to progress and the most assured and reliable way to shape their destiny.

With regard to the concept of "teaching," while female students generated more nurturing-oriented teaching perspectives, male students generated more transmission-oriented teaching perspectives. This may mean that female students have been exposed to caring and nurturing

experiences more than their male peers or that this conception fits best with the female role stereotype. As Anastasi (1985, p. 22 cited in Dewaele 2005) noted, “From early childhood, girls may learn to meet problems through social communication, while boys may learn to meet problems by spatial exploration and independent action.” Kerka (1993, p.2) points out that a number of studies support a preposition that “for women, identity is linked to relationships, connection with others, and intimacy rather than being a separate, self-defined individual.” A number of studies confirmed that female learners tend to assign greater importance to interpersonal relationships than do male students (e.g., Knox, Funk, Elliott & Bush, 2000).

Regarding the concept of “textbook,” while more male students conceptualized textbooks as “nice and entertaining,” more female students conceptualized textbook as “nonsense.” This may not be unrelated to the fact that women are mostly absent from the book, and “their weak presence [...] is the result of the subordinate status given to women in the context of instructional materials” (Fatemi et al., 2011, p.42). This is while men were put in the foreground, with the best kinds of adjectives, adverbs, and occupation names (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010).

With regard to the concept of “language classroom,” while more male students conceptualized a language classroom as a “community of knowledge and development,” more females conceptualized a language classroom as “educational prison.” This might be an indication of higher levels of social participation, sense of community, and social well-being among male students, especially Iranian ones, consistently with the traditional gender role expectations in the Iranian society (Cicognaniet al., 2008). Social differentiation between men and women in Iran originates from the deepest layers of social actors’ minds and extends beyond the social structures such as education, family, and economy (Rafatjah, 2012). In fact, educational, institutional, and political contexts that individuals experience during infancy and adolescence confirm and consolidate the role of gender, contributing to an unbalanced social/political participation between males and females (Owen & Dennis, 1992; Zimmer, 1988).

In sum, the findings of this study shed light on the view that behaviorism dominates the current environment in the process of teaching and learning in the Iranian context (see, e.g., Pishghadam, Askarzadeh, Elahi, & Khanalipour, 2009; Pishghadam & Pourali, 2011; Pishghadam & Navari, 2010; Pishghadam & Naji Meidani, 2011). This might be proved through the metaphors chosen by students about teacher, learner, teaching, and language classroom. In fact, more than half of the metaphors pictures *teacher* in the classical roles of teacher as knowledge provider and superior authoritative figure (*narrator, bully, jailor*), which

are all related to the ideas of behaviorism. The learner is merely a prisoner, unintelligent, a *recorder*, and *forced labor* whose job is to receive whatever the professors dictate.

Teaching is viewed as *learning science*, a one-way process of knowledge transmission which is something external to the students and is transferred to them by the teachers in a repetitive, dull, and unrewarding process (Saban, 2004). Finally, the language classroom is like *jail* and *military service* where Lerner is a captive being, like “a *prisoner* and needs to follow his-her teacher in every aspect of their schooling life”. In Bennet’s (2003) words, Asian students have a high tendency to be quiet in classes, while European American students were known to take part in active classroom discussions.

Moreover, using the metaphors such as *nonsense* and *Cuneiform* for English textbooks, students develop negative attitudes toward language textbooks, and they do not perceive it as valuable sources. Such metaphors might imply the fact that English books for junior and senior high school classes assigned by the Ministry of Education in Iran followed the principles of the Grammar-Translation Method, enhancing the use of reading and writing skills while ignoring speaking and listening. In addition, seen from another perspective, females’ weak presence in English textbooks may not be unrelated to male-dominated and gender-biased learning/teaching EFL contexts. In the same vein, conceptualizing the language classroom as a *community of knowledge and development* by males and as *educational prison* for female students might also be a sign of social differentiation between men and women in the Iranian EFL context.

5. Conclusion and Implications of the Study

In a nutshell, our findings shed light on the view that cultural linguistics represents a framework that provides a basis for understanding *cultural conceptualizations* and their realization in *language*. (e.g., Sharifian, 2003,2011). In fact, cultural linguistics focuses on the interrelationship between language and *cultural conceptualizations*. In other words, the findings of this study extend existing knowledge by showing that metaphors are not independent of socio-cultural settings; they are closely linked with culture (Kövecses 2005; Su 2008). In this light, as Sharifian (2017) truly argues, explorations of the cultural basis of conceptual metaphor have significant implications for conceptual metaphor theory in that what appears to be metaphorical is based on cultural conceptualizations reflected linguistically via metaphor.

Accordingly, our findings strongly suggest that metaphor analysis can assist teachers in identifying learners’ beliefs about language learning and their effects on language and in

adapting their methodologies to bridge the gap between classroom practices and language learners' beliefs of the learners for better results. In fact, metaphor as a pedagogical strategy for supporting students can be a fruitful investigation to offer benchmark opportunities for teachers to craft, analyze, expand, revise, and discuss (either with faculty or classmates) metaphors representing their understandings of teaching and learning.

This study has some limitations with the participant pool and its methodological approach. First, this study was limited to the high schools in Maragheh. Future studies should endeavor to obtain data from other cities in Iran. Second, the language proficiency level of the participants in terms of vocabulary was not considered in our study. Third, we used a questionnaire as a valid research tool in this study. Other methodologies (e.g., ethnographic) involving observations and interviews would have strengthened any claims about the nature of learners' beliefs.

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