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## THE PROBLEM OF NAMING, DEFINING, AND TEACHING OF FIGURES OF SPEECH: METAPHOR, SIMILE, METONYMY<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding and expressing skills are the two symmetrical channels of language usage. They are the determinants of success in communication literary texts the language is used with its poetic function to create images with the use of metaphors, similes, metonymies, etc. The figures of speech have a key position in language teaching and play an important role with respect to the acquisition of creative language and creative thinking skills by the students. It is observed that in language teaching there is no agreement in their naming and definitions. This problematic situation makes these terms difficult to teach. The aim of this study is to present the current situation that exists in the related literature and Turkish language education environments. The data of this study were collected by using qualitative approaches and document analysis, which depends on descriptive analysis. Moreover, as a qualitative research method and in order to contribute to the data source of the research, teacher opinions on the subject were collected by means of semi-structured interviews. As a result of the analysis, it is seen that the most important reason of the confusion with terms is the jointly use of the foreign terms and grammatical terms together with the oriental terms that exist in our classic language and literature. The data of this study is interpreted by supporting the data of another study, which was carried out by the researcher that focused on the problem of teaching the aforesaid terms. It has been observed that the artistic language education is mostly based on the teaching of idioms and proverbs. When textbooks and teachers' opinions were evaluated, it has been concluded that the figures of speech were analyzed only in poem analysis tasks for understanding but no activities or exercises to the development of these word figures. It is a necessity to include activities that would allow the students to not only analyze but also produce figures of speech that they are aware of only conceptually. This would develop their creative thinking and also solve the problems of conceptual confusion and teaching.

**Keywords:** Figures of speech, teaching rhetoric, content analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication is realized through two symmetric channels: comprehension and narration. The success in these two areas increases the success at communication. In order to achieve an efficient communication, it is necessary to know the rules of language and to apply them accordingly. However, using a grammatically perfect language is not sufficient for effective communication. The multidimensional and creative use of the language is equally important. Creative language is the transfer of imagination and experiences to writing with different and original similes and descriptions (Maltepe 2006). In terms of language skills, the creative level is the highest level desired to be achieved in the effective use of language (Onan, 2013). The main aim of language teaching is to enhance the receptive and productive skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) of students but also to make them acquire multidimensional thinking habits and human specific sensitivities (Sever, 2010 & Kuzu, 2008). Literature is not only the field that allows the best acquisition of these skills but also the domain in which the language is used in the most competent and creative way. People of letters develop a separate world of meanings by processing and transforming the existing language. In order to be able to get involved, to be included and to contribute to this new world of meanings, it is a necessity to know the structures named as speech art in the traditional education and as figures of speech in the contemporary literary literature (Benzer, 2009; Bisignani, 2010; Kövecses, 2010).

Jakobson points out that the language has six functions. In literary texts, the language is used with its poetic function. The power of imagination, feeling and the emotional value created by the words are the defining features of the poem (İşeri & Demirgüneş, 2008). Metaphors, similes and metonymies, which constitute the power of imaginations, belong to the structures that are referred to as figures of speech in Turkish Literature. When the situation in the domain and domain teaching is analyzed within the perspective of better describing the issue that this study addresses, it is observed that the aforementioned structures are mostly taught with the use of literary texts and with the aim of adding aesthetic expressions to the language. However, the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor developed by Lakoff & Johanson (2005) states that these structures and especially the metaphor is not only a figure of speech but also a figure of thought. In other words, these speech structures by transforming the existing language not only contribute to the development of new, aesthetic and striking expressions, but also set in motion our creative thinking processes. Because of these characteristics, they are accepted as possible tools of a contemporary education that places the individual to the center, that gives the responsibility of accessing the knowledge to the learner and that prioritizes the cognitive and affective improvements of the output development rather than the output itself. Therefore, these structures need to be transferred to the educational settings as tools of creative thinking. This study has been set off with the necessity of evaluating and assessing the situation in our learning environments.

In literary texts, the language is used with its poetic function to create images with the use of metaphors, similes, metonymies, etc., which are known as figures of speech in traditional education (Jakobson, 1987; Kiran & Kiran 2007). The use of the language within this aspect and therefore teaching it correspondingly is significant. The

figures of speech have a key position in language teaching and play an important role with respect to the acquisition of creative language and creative thinking skills by the students (Lakoff & Johnson, 2005; Kövecses 2002). As a matter of fact, creative thinking is important for all education fields; therefore, it can be argued that it is of importance for all domains and levels of education. Researchers mention two different ways of thinking: the convergent thinking that resolves the problems with the existing models and the divergent thinking that controls the knowledge within new perspectives and develops new knowledge. Writing tasks based on the first thinking approach make the writing process boring. On the other hand, the divergent thinking sets in motion the individual characteristics, experiences, affective and cognitive potentials of the student (Beaudot, 1977; Cropley, 1969; Fattori, 1968; Aktaş, 2009, quoting Serafini, 2002). Speech figures, as tools of divergent thinking, may enhance and increase genuineness and creativity. However, it is observed that these mentioned terms are often confused with each other, and that there is no agreement in their naming and their definitions; thus obstructing and complicating their teaching and learning processes (Aksan, 2005; Uğur, 2007; Benzer, 2009; Fass, 1988; Özünlü, 2001; TDK Sözlük, 1980).

The definitions of these terms in the Turkish Language Association (TDK) Dictionary and in the Glossary of Linguistics Terms are as follows:

**Metaphor:** 1. a word or phrase that is used with a meaning different from its real meaning, due to a similarity or relevance 2. the use of a word or an idea in a meaning other than the accepted meaning.

**Simile:** comparing two things that have similarity relationship, with the aim of making the phrase more efficient, mostly by comparing the weak one to the more powerful one.

**Metonymy:** the use of the name of one concept for that of another concept of which it has an association other than resemblance or similarity.

Metaphor comes from Latin "metaphora", from Greek metaphora "a transfer," especially of the sense of one word to a different word, literally "a carrying over," from metapherein "transfer, carry over; change, alter; to use a word in a strange sense," from meta- "over, across" + pherein "to carry, bear". Simile comes from Latin simile "a like thing; a comparison, likeness, parallel," neuter of similis "like". Metonymy comes also from Greek metonymia, literally "a change of name," related to metonomazein "to call by a new name; to take a new name," from meta- "change" + onyma "name".

In the TDK dictionary, the term metonymy or its synonyms were not found. As it can be observed in the earlier mentioned quotation, the definition of the metaphor is a problematic one. Uğur (2007) states that as the term of metaphor is being used with different and varying meanings throughout the course of history, there is a need for a restriction of its meaning. Furthermore, the author mentions that instead of debating on the topic based on the synonym terms of metaphor, the discussion should focus to the word metaphor as it is a concept universally used and accepted. Therefore, with the same reasoning, the term metaphor is used throughout this paper.

The starting point of this study is the deficient and prevalent understanding that the figures of speech are only tools for the efficient, aesthetic and creative use of language. When the complementary relationship between language and thought is considered, it is inevitable to aim the development of creative and critical thinking with the use language learning. Ideas cannot be valued unless they are expressed in an effective, powerful and charming way. In this case naturally, not only the language teaching but also the teaching of thinking is the topic and issue of the language learning domains. Consequently, the emphasis on this study has been laid on metaphors as figures of creative thinking.

There are several studies in the literature referring to this term confusion and subsequent problem (Uğur, 2007; Demir, 2009; Benzer, 2009). In this study not only the characteristics of this problem but also its reflection to the learning environments are examined. The confusion and intricacy between terms and definitions is addressed as a sub-issue that results to the main problem of teaching these terms.

The aim of this study is to present the current situation that exists in the related literature and Turkish language education environments with respect to term formation, definition and teaching of the concepts of metaphor, metonymy and simile in terms of semantics; in other words, to put forward the dimensions of the assumed problem.

It is expected that the study will contribute to the literature, as it will highlight the problems in the academic publications and textbooks for teaching Turkish and the deficiencies in the teaching of such figures of speech.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Model**

The study is a qualitative study that used literature survey and document analysis for data collection and descriptive analysis for data analysis. Document analysis means the analysis of written materials about the phenomenon or phenomena in the focus (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2005). The research aimed to focus on (1) how the terms metaphor, metonymy and simile are used in the textbooks and (2) how these terms are used and taught by language teachers by using the qualitative approach of phenomenology, which means focusing on the facts that we are aware of but do not have detailed knowledge (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2005).

### **Data Collection Tools**

First, the related textbooks are examined to create the main source of data for the study. The data obtained using this source has been analyzed and Table 1, which includes the different usages of the aforementioned terms is arranged. Then, in order to contribute to the data source in accordance with the purpose of the study, teacher's opinions were taken. For this purpose, semi-structured interview method was used. The dictionaries, semantics books and middle school textbooks were examined to identify how these figures of speech are named and defined and these were crosschecked and compared with the opinions of teachers. The participants to the

study are 15 teachers from two state and two private schools. The data were collected in the 2015-2016 academic year.

The interviews were mostly recorded and few of them are conducted via messaging on the social media.

The topics and the interview questions prepared to obtain data on these topics are as follows:

- Teachers' familiarities with the concepts
  - Their awareness on contradiction in terms
  - Their awareness on how these concepts develop creative thinking
  - The state of knowledge about teaching these structures
1. Can you describe the differences between the terms metaphor, simile and metonymy? Do you know of other names to replace these terms? Which ones do you prefer to use? Why?
  2. What can you say about the meanings and definitions of these terms in the textbooks that you use? What is the reason of differences, if there is any, in the definitions of these terms in different sources?
  3. At what stage of the Turkish courses and within which context do you teach these concepts? Why do you think students have difficulty (if they have) in learning these concepts? What can you say about the relationship between the ease of learning and definitional and conceptual consistency?
  4. How do you think the teaching of these concepts contribute to your students?
  5. How are these concepts taught in the textbooks? Do you find it satisfactory? What other activities do you prepare to promote students' production skills besides the activities in the textbooks?

When preparing the interview protocol, two experts in this field were consulted and it was the pilot study with three teachers and necessary changes were made to form the final version of the protocol. To analyze the data, content analysis method was used and the answers of the teachers were categorized. To increase reliability, the data and categories were controlled by the same experts.

## **FINDINGS**

After examining the textbooks and supplementary books in the literature, the findings regarding the terms corresponding to metaphor, simile and metonymy are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Nomenclature Table

<b>Western Origin (universal)</b>	<b>Pure Turkish (linguistic)</b>	<b>Eastern origin</b>
metaphor	[eğretileme, deyim aktarması]	[istiâre]
metonimi	[ad aktarması, düz deęişmece]	[mürsel mecaz - mecaz-ı mürsel]
simile	[benzetme]	[teşbih]

As it can be seen from Table 1, there are five synonymous words that can be used interchangeably, and a total of twelve equivalent words for the three terms.

Based on the findings by Güzel & Kuzu (2016) on their research regarding the creative word teaching that exist on the textbooks, the activity distribution at each level of secondary school is as follows:

*5<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Number of total tasks: 335

Number of total tasks related to word teaching: 149

Number of total tasks related to figures of speech: 59

44% of all tasks are assigned to word teaching, and 39% of these are related to figures of speech.

*6<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Number of total tasks: 321

Number of total tasks related to word teaching: 77

Number of total tasks related to figures of speech: 55

23% of all tasks are assigned to word teaching, and 71% of these are related to figures of speech.

*7<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Number of total tasks: 332

Number of total tasks related to word teaching: 71

Number of total tasks related to figures of speech: 38

21% of all tasks are assigned to word teaching, and 53% of these are related to figures of speech.

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade*

Number of total tasks: 285

Number of total tasks related to word teaching: 93

Number of total tasks related to figures of speech: 67

32% of all tasks are assigned to word teaching, and 72% of these are related to figures of speech.

As it is seen, the number of tasks related to figures of speech are considerably numerous within the tasks that are allocated for word teaching. However, when these tasks are examined qualitatively, it is observed that they fail to display characteristics and properties that would increase the genuineness and the creativity of the students.

The majority of the activities are related to word meanings, connotations, synonyms, antonyms and explanation or matching of the idioms. Examples of activities with and without a figure of speech, which are the basis for classification, are as follows:

Compare the idiom in this story with the idiom in the text in terms of meaning. (Example of word figure activity)

Write the synonyms of the words below (Example of not word figure activity) (Güzel, 2015).

The answers that the teachers have given to the interview questions show high similarities with each other. They do think that there is incomprehensibility of terms but generally they tend to teach the terms to the students in accordance to their own education when they acquired these terms. In the responses of only two teachers, an indirect mention of the thinking characteristic of the figures of speech exists. All other teachers have appraised these terms as tools of elocution. All teachers unanimously agree that the tasks and activities in all textbooks are inadequate. Five of the fifteen teachers have reported that they have enriched the existing tasks and activities by themselves.

### **CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION**

As it is seen in Table 1, having many terms that can be used interchangeably for one another makes the learning and teaching processes of these terms very difficult. This issue is usually named as the term incomprehensibility and it is a common problem not only in speech figures but in many fields of language education. It can be argued that one reason for this problem is the personal or political views of the authors or instructors.

Proverbs and idioms are very valuable with respect to culture and language. However, not being able to break and step out of these stereotyped structures can be viewed as a fact that supports the thoughts and ideas becoming stereotyped. These frozen structures, by being reevaluated with respect to the modern day conditions, can be taught in such a way that they would form the basis of new productions.

Another cause that we considered would be discovered in our term differentiation research was the term interpretation differences of the authors and teachers in the field. However, it is seen that this cause is not reflected to the teaching environment. As it is understood by the interview findings, the teachers seem to be distant from encountering different meanings and interpretations from different sources. Due to the obligation of complying with a specific syllabus, they teach the subject based on a very limited set of “metaphor/simile art” tasks. Some of the teachers have stated that being aware of the importance of a content that would develop student creativity and the related tasks, have carried their own examples to the classroom and have encouraged students to develop their own metaphors/similes as a part of writing tasks and activities.

The findings of this study with respect to the teaching of figures of speech have shown that the artistic language education, which is apart from the teaching of the main meanings of the words, mostly consists of proverb and idiom teaching. Undoubtedly idioms are outputs of a creative linguistic process, but they are also stereotyped structures that do not allow any modifications. Therefore, having the students to learn their meanings and use them in the appropriate contexts will not facilitate and contribute enough to the creative dimensions of their mind. Whereas in the contemporary metaphor theory, the metaphors are not only speech figures but also tools of creative thinking. That requires the formation of relationships such as identification of relationships, comparison, categorization of characteristics, causation, and conditional objectives between two things that do

not have direct similarities with each other, that is the source element and the target element. The students, while making sense of the metaphors in different types of texts their cognitive and affective processes are active; undoubtedly these processes would be much more active when they will be developing their own metaphors, that is when they will be creating something that is not already existing.

The first findings in our analysis have shown that an important reason why these terms that are internationally known as metaphor, simile and metonymy result to a confusion in Turkish, is the fact that western based terms, linguistic terms and terms with eastern roots that exist in our classic language and literature are all used together. Especially metaphor and metonymy are often intertwined. Indeed, it is often not possible to make a clear distinction between these two figures of speech (Çalışkan, 2013:95; Demir, 2009:65). Another reason is the interpretation differences of the authors.

The ground state that has been the inspiration of this study is the prevalent understanding that the figures of speech are only tools for the efficient, aesthetic and creative use of language. The relationship between language and thought is a very important fact that is widely considered in many different domains and levels of language education and guides us. Neither the thoughts that are not communicated in an effective way nor the language that is not communicating powerful, interesting and striking feelings and thoughts will have any importance by itself. In this case, naturally, not only the language teaching but also the teaching of thinking is a topic and issue of the language learning domains. The figures of speech that are subject of this study and especially the metaphors, are considered to be an important tool of creative thinking too.

Metonymies is replacing the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated, without aiming to create a simile. This usage is related to the economy of language. For example, instead of saying "I ate two dishes of food" we prefer to say "I ate two dishes", thus having a metonymy. The word "dish" stands for both the food and the quantity. Such expressions are structures that have taken their place in the language as templates as results of reductions, combinations or alterations. Neither for the analysis nor for the development, an operation, a thinking and creation processes are required. Similes are structures that are mostly used to express the similarity of the weak one to the strong one and furthermore don't require excessive thinking and production performance. As the source and the target elements and moreover as the direction of simile are clear, not a lot of process and operation is left to the receiver. On the other hand, in conceptual metaphors by eliminating these elements the distance between the target and the source increases; thus resulting in a need to the association and interpretation capabilities. Therefore, in order to realize the aim of language education to enhance and to increase the creativity and thinking skills of students, instead of teaching students the template terms and definitions of metonyms and similes, the concept of metaphor, how it is developed and the development of genuine metaphors should be included in the curriculum. A stepwise metaphor development task that can be taught in cooperation between the teacher and the student, and that would make the lecture a more enjoyable one is given below:



- Find out what the metaphor is
- Think about the thing what you are trying to describe
- Associate freely
- Decide what is the mood,environment,felling,emotion you want to form
- Go on with it
- Read everything loudly
- Form your similies and comparisons into metaphor

An empirical study in accordance to this model was undertaken with a group of undergraduate students and it is shown that it has contributed significantly to their writing exercises. In the implementations of this model in a simpler level with secondary grade students, it is observed that students can develop interesting and creative examples, and also that the attention of the students to the lectures increases significantly. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar experimental study with students in the secondary level and to analyze the results to observe any differentiations in the relationship between the age and grade levels of the students and their abstract thinking skills.

Another finding of our study is the fact that teachers prefer to use the word “*istiare*” that has eastern roots instead of the pure Turkish word “*eğretileme*” or the “*metaphor*”. This situation can be associated with the fact that the term is taught in relation with the traditional literature education; in other words, within the scope of Ottoman-Islamic cultural and art education.

When dictionaries, semantic books and middle school textbooks were examined in order to obtain data related to the usage of speech figures, it was observed that the number of different terms is so high that the situation can be referred to as term incomprehensibility. The main reason of this problem is that terms that are originating from the West, terms with Eastern roots that we have in our classic language and Literature and pure Turkish linguistic terms are all used together (Uğur, 2007; Akşehirli, 2005; Benzer, 2009; Özünlü, 2001).

The findings of this study with respect to the teaching of figures of speech have shown that the artistic language education, which is apart from the teaching of the main meanings of the words, mostly consists of proverb and idiom teaching. It is observed that the figures of speech are mostly analyzed within poem analysis in order to reach to the meaning of the text; however, no teaching regarding the development of these figures of speech based on a theory or methodology occurs (Güzel, 2015). On the contrary, alongside with the figures of speech analysis the curriculum should include in-class activities and tasks that would allow the students to develop figures of speech, especially in the conceptual level (Greves, 2005; Oral, 2008).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The ground state that has been the inspiration of this study is the prevalent understanding that the figures of speech are only tools for the efficient, aesthetic and creative use of language. This understanding results to a

wrong perception that the figures of speech are elements that are outside of the tangible and real world, related only to people that show an interest to literature and arts. However, it is obvious that figures of speech can be tools of multidimensional, critical and creative thinking. Imaginary and aesthetic languages using expands the borders of the feeling and understanding. So, it plays a role in the development of critical and creative language (Özdemir 2010:461). The understanding that the creative language and thinking need to be synthesized together and that only then efficient texts can be developed should be made dominant. In accordance with that, the tasks and activities in the textbooks for the acquisition of creative language should be reviewed and reconsidered (Güzel 2015).

As creative thinking and expression are not subjects of language courses only, the topics have characteristics that can contribute to all other disciplines. Hence, metaphors are used with multi purposes in educational sciences, psychology, etc. For example, psychological consultation the answer to the question “which animal or plant would you be?” is an example of a metaphor. It is advisable and accurate to realize a language education that aims the utilization of these multi potential narration tools that are being used extensively either by being aware or not, with our genuine constructions and by being aware of their usage.

#### **ETHICAL TEXT**

This article complies with journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics guidelines, and journal ethics rules. Responsibility for any violations that may arise regarding the article belongs to the author. The data of this study were collected in the 2015-2016 academic year.

**Author(s) Contribution Rate:** The author's contribution rate to this article is 100%.

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