

# From Context-Free to Context-Embedded: A Comparative Study on the Interpretation of Metaphors in Sentence-Level and Situation-Based Tests in Saudi EFL Learners

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## Abstract

This research delved into the understanding of metaphoric competence among Saudi EFL learners, particularly in the context of situational contexts, linguistic and conceptual similarities, and differences. With a backdrop that accentuates the significance of metaphors in language proficiency, the study addressed the lack of attention to metaphoric competence in EFL settings, especially in Saudi Arabia. The study embraced a quantitative paradigm, utilizing a cross-sectional design, and engaged a sample of 94 Saudi EFL students. Data was collected through instruments such as the Receptive Language Proficiency Test, Receptive Metaphoric Competence Test (R-MC), and Familiarity Scale (FAMscale). Key findings indicated a notable difference in students' scores between sentence-level tests (SLT) and situation-based tests (SBT) about the interpretation of metaphors. Furthermore, significant differences emerged among three linguistic and conceptual categories of metaphors for both SLT and SBT. In essence, the research underscored the paramount role of situational context and linguistic-conceptual nuances in influencing EFL learners' metaphoric interpretations. The study underscores the important differences in Saudi EFL learners' interpretations of metaphors across varied linguistic and conceptual categories. These findings advocate for targeted pedagogical approaches in EFL curricula that emphasize the integration of linguistically and conceptually congruent metaphoric expressions, paving the way for enhanced comprehension and proficiency among learners.

**Keywords:** metaphoric interpretation, situational context, knowledge, EFL, SLT

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

Metaphoric competence is an important element in language proficiency (Zhao et al., 2014). Although all of us use many metaphors every day and we are not always aware of this phenomenon. And though metaphor has been with human beings since the genesis of language, it only began to be studied seriously in the 20th century. Metaphor is intriguing because of their connection with the mind (Deriso, 2011; Wilson & Kearns, 1989). Linguists are eager to understand more deeply the origins and usage of metaphor. The metaphor was and is one of the most captivating and central aspects of linguistics. More emphasis was laid on linguistic competence with the rise of formal linguistics. According to Chomsky (1965), as a theoretical construct for establishing the ideal knowledge of language possessed by the language users.

While research findings on metaphors are prevalent both nationally and internationally, there's limited research on the application of metaphors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or Second Language Acquisition (SLA) contexts. Azuma (2005) asserted that some of the causes could be attributable to the low availability of the intended language. Another reason might be that the significance of teaching metaphors in the classroom has been overlooked. Whether in native or secondary language learning, reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process where the reader uses their cognitive abilities to derive meaning from the text. According to Richards (2003), in Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and learning, the conversational procedure has reduced interest and evolution, engrossing EFL learners completely in the foreign or second language scenario. As a result, it is instinctual for students to come into contact with far more natural language learning resources (such as book recommendations for light reading) that undoubtedly feature a range of English metaphoric phrases. Richards in 1965 concluded that L1 or L2 learners of the English language could not make three sentences of fluent conversation without using metaphor. It could be deduced that an EFL learner's metaphoric competence may impact or perhaps constrain her or his reading comprehension to a certain degree.

Additionally, metaphor has been deemed as a part of not only literal expressions but also of everyday life after the conceptual metaphor perception of Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, and it is further highlighted by Littlemore and Low (2006) when talking about the application of metaphor as a teaching tool of instruction. They are of the view that the teaching of metaphorical principles should "make significant

headway into mainstream pedagogical practice and the design of teaching materials” (p. 4). But still, not enough attention has been given on the part of instructors and researchers with regard to the utilization of metaphor as an instructional methodology in language teaching, hence the researcher has attempted to fill a gap that is left by previous researchers, which points to the significance of the present study.

Considering the gaps in earlier research on EFL learners' understanding of metaphors, this study seeks to explore the influence of situational context on EFL learners' metaphor interpretation, focusing on university-level students. There's a pressing need for this kind of empirical research that evaluates the interpretation and application of metaphors in tasks with and without context, as exhibited by Saudi EFL learners. Although there have been various studies on metaphor and metaphorical competence, a detailed and empirical study like this remains missing, especially when aiming to contribute fresh insights to applied linguistics in the Saudi context.

### *1.1 Research Question*

Considering the aim of the present investigation, our study is guided by the following research question:

RQ. How do situational context, linguistic nuances, and conceptual similarities and differences influence the interpretation of metaphors among Saudi EFL learners?

### *1.2 The Phenomena of Metaphor*

Metaphor is not considered merely as a literary device designed to embellish language but as a cognitive phenomenon that diffuses all types of language from the most literary to the most mundane. Metaphor comprehension also involves an appreciation of the differences between domains (Littlemore, 2001). This makes competency in metaphoric interpretation an important element in overall language proficiency (Zhao et al., 2014). The following section provides a comprehensive background about metaphors, covering the definitions, importance of metaphoric competency, and similarities as well as differences at conceptual and linguistic levels.

### *1.3 Metaphors – From Classical Views to New Perspectives*

Historically, metaphors were primarily perceived as linguistic constructs or figurative expressions. Yet, in recent decades, the perspective on metaphors has evolved considerably. Experts from diverse fields such as linguistics, philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and anthropology have delved into the study of metaphors. In the mid-20th century, A. Richards, a literary scholar, reignited the philosophical debate on metaphors, though his ideas were initially met with resistance for two reasons. Firstly, his pivotal work on metaphors predated the waning influence of positivism, which was antagonistic towards figurative language. Secondly, he wasn't given the same reverence typically reserved for established philosophers. Thus, it was Max Black, a philosopher, who not only supported Richards' assertions but also clearly outlined a fresh perspective on understanding the role of metaphors in cognitive processes (Stallman, 1999, p.43).

### *1.4 Metaphors Competence in Related Research*

Metaphors have gained prominence as crucial tools for communication and persuasion in recent years. Consequently, the importance of mastering metaphors, or metaphoric competence, has grown significantly. Many researchers are examining metaphoric competence across various languages, drawing upon the conceptual metaphor theory as their foundational framework. This same theory underpins the current study, which seeks to assess the understanding of metaphors among Saudi EFL learners and explore the relationship between reading proficiency and their ability to grasp metaphors.

Factors such as participants' IQ, conceptual grasp, vocabulary proficiency, language skills, age, and other cognitive capabilities can influence how nonliteral statements are comprehended, as highlighted by various studies (Cain et al., 2005; Holyoak & Stamenković, 2018; Norbury, 2004). Wiśniewska-Kin (2017) explored the metaphorical understanding of emotions among 8-9 and 9-10-year-old children, observing that the older group displayed superior abilities, associated with enhanced language competencies. Therefore, age and linguistic capabilities seem to be pivotal in shaping a child's metaphor interpretation abilities. Beyond these factors, characteristics such as executive function, creativity, and theory of mind also play a role in influencing metaphor comprehension, alongside age and linguistic proficiency.

Given the significance of metaphors as vital tools for communication and persuasion, the importance of metaphoric competence has grown substantially over recent years. Many researchers have delved into assessing metaphoric competence across various languages, drawing upon the conceptual metaphor theory as their guiding framework. This study also seeks to examine the metaphorical understanding of Arabic EFL students and the relationship between their reading skills and metaphoric competence.

The growing body of research on metaphors has increasingly captured the interest of language scholars in the realm of metaphorical competence. The concept of metaphorical competence is defined in a variety of ways. "The ability to understand and construct metaphor," (English & Nacey, 2010) is defined as metaphorical competence (p.32). In other words, a person who can interpret metaphors created by others and employ them in communication is deemed metaphorically competent.

Metaphorical competence falls under the broader umbrella of conceptual fluency. As defined by Danesi (1998), it's the capability to articulate oneself in a second language (L2) using its conceptual framework, rather than predominantly depending on the first language (L1) conceptual system (p. 243). Gardner and Winner (1978) defined metaphorical competence as: "The ability to paraphrase a metaphor, explain why a metaphor works, create a metaphor that is acceptable for a certain situation, and assess the suitability of multiple metaphoric phrases".

On the other hand, Kövecses (2015) defined the concept of metaphoric competence as "the by now dominant view of

metaphor—conceptual metaphor theory—still suffers, in general, from a lack of integrating context into its modal of metaphorical meaning-making” (p. 143). Likewise, Tang (2019) talked about metaphoric competence in these words “originality of metaphor production, fluency of metaphor interpretation, and ability to identify and interpret metaphors in context” (p. 38). A couple of studies (Azuma, 2005; Iijima & Murrow, 2006) deemed metaphoric competence as a means of identifying, interpreting, comprehending, and producing metaphors in a real context in the target language. Littlemore (2001) explored metaphoric competence and its correlation to second language learning and instructional practices and a multitude of cognitive states encompassing metaphor perception. He defined metaphoric competence as:

1. Innovativeness in metaphor output.
2. Verbal proficiency in metaphor perception.
3. The quest to reach significance in metaphor.
4. The pace in interpreting in metaphor.

These days, metaphorical competence is regarded as a multi-dimensional process that must be researched from a multidisciplinary standpoint, taking into account linguistic context and intellectual, interpersonal, psychosocial, and traditional elements. Metaphorical competence entailed far beyond just being cognizant of metaphorically structured connotation and its interpretation; it is a lot more than simply learning about metaphor (Witte, 2014, p.284). Metaphorical competence is not confined to linguistic expertise; it is linked to our outlook on things because it is common for humans to assume and implement metaphorically (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). It also established the map for a firm understanding of modeling within specific cognitive designs and/or criteria. It is asserted that metaphorical competence derives from behavioral sciences, as its basis is related to cognitive innovation (Wang & Hao, 2013, p. 84).

Metaphorical competence is an indication of what is known as 'conceptual fluency' (Danesi, 1998, p. 493), which denoted advanced instruction of cognitive modeling and theoretical tracking as well as a thorough knowledge of idea-object interactions and their contribution inability to comprehend the reality. Littlemore (2008, p. 201) defined 'metaphoric competence' as the ability to comprehend and develop metaphoric correlations among various concepts.

### *1.5 Metaphors Competence in EFL*

Though there is a rich amount of attention being devoted concerning the concept of metaphor and metaphoric competence as far as theoretical consideration and research are concerned very little attention has been paid regard to the implication and adaptability of metaphoric competence in L2 or EFL. The reason behind this is being lack of practical resources and low-level accessibility to the target language. In addition, much attention has not been paid to this practical aspect of metaphorical competence in the language classroom.

Research into the understanding and application of metaphors or metaphorical expressions in a target language is relatively unexplored in Saudi Arabia. A primary factor might be the restricted exposure to metaphors when learning a foreign language. Moreover, even though EFL learners frequently encounter English metaphorical phrases in listening and reading, they often approach them as isolated learning experiences. The other reasons could be (a) time limit, and (b) lack of awareness of metaphor and its concept. Metaphor in language education plays a crucial role as they can provide an opportunity to learn how our conceptual system is organized and how it functions in language. This can be a great opportunity for EFL language learners not only to enhance their foreign language proficiency but also to develop the comprehension of views between mind, body, and language. According to Azuma (2005), in an EFL setting, metaphorical proficiency in English is defined by a learner's ability to understand and use English metaphorical phrases. This proficiency encompasses: (1) identifying English metaphorical terms in various contexts like discourse, news, and academic materials during listening and reading sessions; (2) effectively employing English metaphorical phrases in both written and spoken forms; and (3) grasping the underlying ideas of English metaphors as well as the conceptual foundations behind both English and their native language's metaphorical expressions.

### *1.6 Familiarities with Metaphors*

According to Blasko and Connine (1993), a learner's specific experience with metaphors is described as their familiarity. Dulcinati et al. (2014) characterized this familiarity as the sum of a learner's encounters with metaphors. In their research examining the role of familiarity in metaphor interpretation, Blasko and Connine (1993) found that understanding the figurative meaning of well-known metaphors was just as straightforward as comprehending their literal interpretations. However, for less familiar metaphors, the interpretation of their figurative meaning didn't align with the understanding of their literal sense.

According to research, the more established a metaphor grows, the quicker and faster people may come up with an interpretation, according to Bowdle and Gentner's (2005) career-of-metaphor hypothesis. For instance, a phrase that often carries a figurative implication in a specific language, like "roller coaster" (as in, "marriage is like a roller coaster"), becomes customary (Jones & Estes, 2006). To decode these well-known expressions, we must first recognize them as part of our mental vocabulary and then interpret them automatically. In an EFL context, Alsadi (2016) looked into the challenges Qatari EFL students have in understanding and producing metaphors. The study's findings revealed that participants were unable to interpret the figurative meaning of metaphors they were unfamiliar with, as well as the cultural aspect embedded in them, but were effective with metaphors they were familiar with.

### *1.7 Conceptual and Linguistic Perspectives: Comparing and Contrasting*

Some metaphors are universal, whereas others differ theoretically and linguistically across languages. A concept that is prevalent in one

language and culture may not be found in the conceptual framework of another language Deignan et al. (1997). The metaphor interpretation process is influenced by more than just cultural differences. Türker (2016) found that some concepts can be represented in linguistically diverse ways. Differences and similarities, both linguistically and conceptually, between the native language (L1) and the target language (TL) play a pivotal role in shaping how learners perceive and employ metaphorical phrases in the TL (Alsadi, 2016; Charteris-Black & Ennis, 2001; Alice Deignan, 2003; Dong, 2004; Jeannette Littlemore, 2003; Lowery, 2012; Nam, 2010; Saygin, 2001; Türker, 2016).

Studies on metaphors in EFL situations have found that metaphors that are common in both languages are easier to perceive and produce, whereas metaphors that are unique to each language, such as those that are culturally specific, are more difficult for EFL learners to process (Alsadi, 2016; Deignan, 2003; Dong, 2004; Littlemore, 2003; Lowery, 2012; Nam, 2010). Deignan et al., (1997) studied Polish EFL learners' metaphor learning process in four categories: 1) similar lexical/different conceptual levels; 2) same conceptual/different lexical; 3) different conceptual/different lexical; and 4) similar lexical/different conceptual levels. The participants had no difficulty with the metaphoric terms in category 1 according to the results. Students in category 2 had no trouble understanding the notion because it was equivalent in their L1, but it was more challenging to find suitable words to describe these concepts in the TL. For categories 3 and 4, it was observed that learners were able to render these elements into the target language. Such observations underscore the significance of linguistic and conceptual parallels and distinctions between languages when it comes to interpreting metaphors, as they can either facilitate or impede comprehension for L2 learners.

### *1.8 Presenting Situational Context*

The context in which metaphors are presented is one factor that can influence their interpretation. Many researchers have found that situational context is important in metaphor interpretation (Littlemore, 2003; Peleg et al., 2001; Türker, 2016). The majority of the research found that L2 learners only understand the correct figurative meaning in metaphors when there is sufficient context information. In conclusion, when there was more contextual information, it was quicker to interpret metaphors and process figurative meaning, and when there was less background information, it took longer to process figurative meaning. However, in terms of expressing contextual information in metaphors, Türker (2016) came to a different conclusion. When the quantity of information offered in the metaphors increased, American participants studying L2 Korean in the United States fared poorly with metaphors that had similar conceptual and grammatical elements in L1 and L2. According to him, the participants accurately interpreted the identical metaphors when there was no context, which could indicate that individuals pay greater attention to language forms when there is no context. As a result, students use their L1 conceptual understanding to interpret these similar items, allowing them to correctly grasp the figurative meaning.

## **2. Method**

Considering metaphors' crucial role in communication and persuasion, there has been a notable rise in the emphasis on metaphoric competence in the past years. Several scholars have undertaken studies to evaluate metaphoric understanding across different languages, using the conceptual metaphor theory as their foundational model. This research further aims to explore the metaphorical comprehension of Arabic EFL learners and the connection between their reading abilities and their grasp of metaphors.

### *2.1 Sample and Sampling Technique*

The study focused on Saudi EFL students specializing in English language and translation at a state university in Saudi Arabia. Students were categorized into three groups according to their receptive language skills: Low, Intermediate, and Advanced. From the total, 94 students (representing 63% of the group) were chosen using a random sampling method. Such a sampling approach aims to provide an unbiased representation of the entire study group (Lodico et al., 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2015; Shields & Twycross, 2008). Participants' ages varied between 18 and 29 years.

### *2.2 Instruments*

In this study, data were collected through 3 instruments: a) A receptive language proficiency test (ILTES: Listening and Reading) to measure their receptive language skills and reading comprehension, b) a receptive metaphoric competence test (R- MC), and a familiarity scale (FAMscale). The R-MC test structure and evaluation are based on Azuma's (2005) metaphoric competence test and R-MC items were originally adopted (Kökcü et al., 2022). The details of these scales are given below:

- a) **Receptive Language Proficiency Test:** In order to measure the participants' L2 receptive language proficiency, the ILTES was deemed the most suitable test for our research purpose. There is an advantage to this, as a high-stakes, standardized test, IELTS scores are readily convertible to CEFR levels, which can be used to compare the findings of the present study with other research. Data on participants' L2 receptive proficiency were collected based on Listening and Reading sections scores and based on the reading comprehension test scores the participants were divided into Three-level groups: low (if the overall score is lower than band 6), intermediate (if the overall score is band 6) and advanced (if the overall score is 6.5 or higher). The reading comprehension section results were also used to examine the correlation between Receptive MC and the reading proficiency of Saudi EFL learners.
- b) **Receptive Metaphoric Competence Test (R-MC):** The R-MC test is based on Mazumi Azuma's (2005) metaphoric competence test. The researcher modified the testing items from idioms into three categories of metaphors, considering similarities and differences at conceptual and linguistic levels. The three categories of metaphors were originally adopted (Kökcü et al., 2022).

This test was into two sections. The first phase was the XY-test (MC-XYT), and the second portion was the Receptive-metaphoric competence test (MC-RT).

- c) Familiarity Scale (FAMscale): The FAMscale was adapted from (Kökcü et al., 2022) and this scale was used to assess the participants' level of familiarity on a 5 points scale (1: heard or seen it many times before; 5: never heard or seen it before). In the present study, the first draft of the FAMscale was piloted with Saudi EFL learners to determine the suitability and validity of the research tools. According to the results, essential modifications such as using more frequent vocabulary items, and removing the most unfamiliar metaphorical expressions were made to further improve the tool. In this research, the FAM scale was aimed to investigate Saudi EFL learners' familiarity with three categories of metaphors to examine the role of familiarity with metaphors in the L2 receptive metaphoric competence of Saudi EFL learners.

2.3 Procedure and Pilot Testing

The research took place in the English Language and translation department of a state university in Saudi Arabia. After the tools for the study were ready, the institution gave its approval for data collection. A preliminary test was conducted a week before the main test to clarify any unclear instructions. Additionally, the responses were analyzed to ensure validity and reliability, leading to modifications for a more effective test. For the actual study, participants were grouped based on their language proficiency. The receptive language proficiency test took 90 minutes in total—30 minutes for listening comprehension and 60 minutes for reading comprehension. Once completed, the researcher reviewed the results. Using the CEFR framework as a benchmark, scoring criteria were established: scores below band 6 placed learners in the low level, scores at band 6 were considered intermediate, and scores above band 6.5 indicated an advanced level. From the preliminary test results, each level—low, intermediate, and advanced—included 30 participants. It is believed that these test scores adequately represent the participants' receptive language skills.

2.4 Data Analysis Technique

The data was coded and converted into SPSS 25.0 for statistical analysis. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Particularly, the repeated-measure ANOVA was performed to assess the significant differences in three categories of context-provided (SBT) vs context-free (SLT). Each student was provided three categories of questions context-provided and context-free. The three categories are named: conceptually and linguistically similar metaphors (category 1); conceptually similar, but linguistically different metaphors (category 2); and conceptually and linguistically different metaphors (Category 3). All students were given tests based on the above three categories. Each student was measured multiple times for each category for SLT and SBT. Therefore, repeated measure ANOVA was used to determine the mean differences based on students' proficiency level (Field, 2013; Hair et al., 2013).

3. Results

3.1 Significant Difference between SLT and SBT

A paired t-test, sometimes referred to as a dependent t-test, was employed to determine the significant disparity between the sentence-level test (SLT) and the situation-based test (SBT). The results from the paired t-test showed a marked difference between the scores of the sentence-level test and the situation-based test, with  $t(93) = 6.66, p < .001$  (refer to Table 1). Notably, the scores from the sentence-level test were considerably higher than those from the situation-based test. The average score difference between SLT and SBT for the entire student cohort was 5.90. When broken down by student groups, the paired t-test was again used to analyze the mean discrepancies between SLT and SBT, revealing consistent patterns. The mean variations stood at 5.19, 7.40, and 7.03 for the advanced, intermediate, and low-proficiency student groups, respectively.

Table 1. Paired t-test Result

Paired	Mean	Std. Deviation	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
			Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Sentence Level Test - Situation-Based Test	5.899	8.714	0.899	4.114	7.684	6.563	93	0

3.2 Analysis of Three Categories of SLT and SBT

The point of the R-MC test was based on two broad sub-tests SBT and SLT. As described in Table 1, there is a significant difference in student scores between SBT and SLT. In this research question, the researcher tries to investigate the difference in students' SBT and SLT scores based on three linguistic and conceptual categories. The three categories are named:

- Category - 1: Metaphors that are alike both conceptually and linguistically.
- Category 2: Metaphors that are conceptually akin but linguistically distinct.
- Category - 3: Metaphors that differ in both conceptual and linguistic aspects.

All 94 students were given tests based on the above three categories. Since students' were measured multiple times for each category for SLT and SBT. Therefore, repeated measure ANOVA was used to determine the mean differences based on students' proficiency levels (Field, 2013).

3.3 Analysis of SLT Tasks and three Linguistic and Conceptual Categories

A repeated measure ANOVA was used to determine the significant difference among three categories of SLT scores. A repeated measure ANOVA analysis revealed that there is a significant difference in three categories of SLT scores,  $F(2, 92) = 49.21, p < .001$ . The corresponding Wilks' Lambda value was .48. This concluded that these three categories have a 52% effect on SLT.

Table 2. Repeated Measure ANOVA result for SLT

		Multivariate Tests <sup>a</sup>					Partial Eta Squared
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	
factor1	Pillai's Trace	.517	49.210 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.517
	Wilks' Lambda	.483	49.210 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.517
	Hotelling's Trace	1.070	49.210 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.517
	Roy's Largest Root	1.070	49.210 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.517

a. Design: Intercept  
 Within Subjects Design: factor1  
 b. Exact statistic

Results concluded that there is a significant difference in the SLT three categories. Category two (conceptually similar, but linguistically different metaphors) has the highest mean value as compared to Category 1 (conceptually and linguistically similar metaphors) and Category 3 (conceptually and linguistically different metaphors). Moreover, category 1 has relatively higher values than category 3 students' scores. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in EFL learners' interpretation of metaphors in context-free (SLT).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of SLT Three Categories

	Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
CAT1 SLT	11.697	2.9750	94
CAT2 SLT	12.122	3.1071	94
CAT3 SLT	8.505	4.3052	94

Category - 1: Metaphors that are alike both conceptually and linguistically.

Category - 2: Metaphors that are conceptually akin but linguistically distinct.

Category 3: Metaphors that differ in both conceptual and linguistic aspects.

3.4 Analysis of SBT Tasks and Three Linguistic and Conceptual Categories

Another repeated measure ANOVA was used to determine the significant difference among the three categories of SBT scores. A repeated measure ANOVA analysis revealed that there is a significant difference in three categories of SLT scores,  $F(2, 92) = 53.18, p < .001$ . The corresponding Wilks' Lambda value was .46. This concluded that these three categories have a 54% effect on SBT and there is a significant difference among the three category scores.

Table 4. Repeated Measure ANOVA result for SBT

		Multivariate Tests <sup>a</sup>					Partial Eta Squared
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	
factor1	Pillai's Trace	.536	53.180 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.536
	Wilks' Lambda	.464	53.180 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.536
	Hotelling's Trace	1.156	53.180 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.536
	Roy's Largest Root	1.156	53.180 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	92.000	.000	.536

a. Design: Intercept  
 Within Subjects Design: factor1  
 b. Exact statistic

Results concluded that there is a significant difference in SBT's three categories. According to Table 5, category 1 (conceptually and linguistically similar metaphors) has the highest mean value compared to Category 2 and Category three. While category two (conceptually similar, but linguistically different metaphors) has a relatively higher mean value as compared to category 3 (conceptually and linguistically different metaphors). Figure 1 is the visual display of the mean value of three categories of both SBT and SLT. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in EFL learners' interpretation of metaphors in context-free (SLT) and context-based (SBT).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of SBT three categories

	Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
CAT1 SBT	10.122	3.3293	94
CAT2 SBT	9.739	5.5850	94
CAT3 SBT	6.973	3.9624	94

Category - 1: Metaphors that are alike both conceptually and linguistically.

Category - 2: Metaphors that are conceptually akin but linguistically distinct.

Category 3: Metaphors that differ in both conceptual and linguistic aspects.

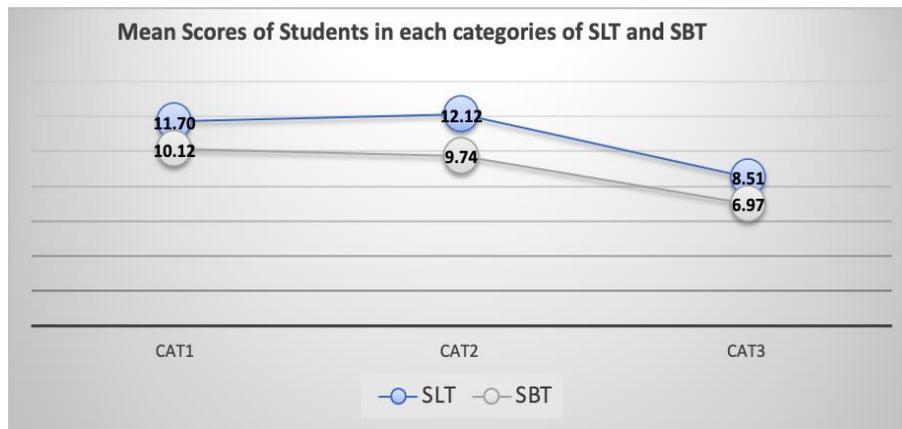


Figure 1. Mean Scores of Students in each category of SLT and SBT

#### 4. Discussion

The present study attempted to examine the role of situational context in EFL learners’ metaphor interpretation by comparing their test scores in context-free i.e., (SLT) and context-provided (SBT). The differences in students’ SLT and SBT scores were successfully investigated based on three linguistic categories and hence three different situations have arisen. Category one included metaphors that were linguistically and conceptually identical. Category two included metaphors that were different linguistically but were similar conceptually. Category three included metaphors that were different both linguistically as well as conceptually. To find the answers to the final research question RQ (3) For each of those three categories, 94 students were measured multiple times, and hence multiple ANOVA tests were used.

A measure that is repeated There is an appropriate difference in three categories of SLT scores, according to an ANOVA analysis. This same Wilks’ Lambda value was .48. According to the findings, these three criteria have a 52 percent impact on SLT. According to the findings, there is an appropriate variation in SLT categories. In comparison to Category 1 (conceptually and linguistically identical metaphors) and Category 3 (conceptually and linguistically distinct metaphors), category 2 (directly analogous but linguistically different metaphors) does have the greatest average value (conceptually and linguistically different metaphors). Furthermore, the scores of Category 1 pupils are greater than those of Category 3. As a result, it may be argued that EFL students’ interpretations of metaphors in context-free situations varied significantly (SLT).

Some other measures to be performed were the substantial change between three groups of SBT scores determined using ANOVA. a quantity that is repeated The Wilks’ Lambda value was 46, indicating that there is indeed a substantial difference in the 3 groups of SLT scores, according to the ANOVA test. According to the findings, these three factors have a 54 percent influence on SBT although there is a substantial variation in the results of the 3 groups. According to the findings, there is a considerable difference between the three SBT groups. In comparison to categories 2 and 3, category 1 (conceptually and linguistically related metaphors) has the greatest mean value. Whereas Category two (metaphors that are conceptually similar but linguistically distinct) has a greater total mean value than Category Three (metaphors that are conceptually similar but linguistically distinct) (conceptually and linguistically different metaphors).

The data was summed up in Table 5 where the mean value of each SBT category is given together with the standard deviation calculated. Category 1 of the SBT has a mean value of 10.122 with a standard deviation of 3.3293. whereas category 2 of the SBT has a total mean value of 9.739 with a standard deviation of 5.5850. The last SBT category (conceptually and linguistically different) has the lowest mean value of 6.973 with a standard deviation of 3.9624. Thus, the role of presenting various situational contexts, different linguistics, conceptual similarities, and different sorts of different linguistics and conceptual similarities and different sort of differences in various Saudi EFL learners is properly defined.

The differences in students’ SLT and SBT scores were successfully investigated based on three linguistic categories and hence three different situations have arisen. Category one included metaphors that were linguistically and conceptually identical. Category two included metaphors that were different linguistically but were similar conceptually. Category three included metaphors that were different both linguistically as well as conceptually. Category 1 of the SBT has the highest mean value of 10.122 with a standard deviation of 3.3293, whereas SBT category 3 (conceptually and linguistically different) has the lowest mean value of 6.973 with a standard deviation of 3.9624. These results are consistent with the findings of K ckü and Hart (2022) which suggested that conceptual and linguistic similarities and differences played a significant role in Turkish EFL learners’ interpretation of metaphors.

The findings from this study offer an illuminating perspective on the influence of situational context, linguistic and conceptual similarities,

and differences in Saudi EFL learners' interpretation of metaphors. Firstly, the significant difference between the sentence-level test (SLT) and situation-based test (SBT) scores indicates that the context in which metaphors are presented can significantly impact learners' comprehension. In particular, students perform better when interpreting metaphors in isolated sentences as opposed to situation-based contexts. This underscores the complexity introduced by context in metaphor interpretation. Furthermore, the results drawn from the three categories: category – 1 (metaphors that are alike both conceptually and linguistically), category – 2 (metaphors that are conceptually akin but linguistically distinct), and Category – 3 (metaphors that differ in both conceptual and linguistic aspects) provide additional insights. EFL learners demonstrated varying levels of metaphoric competence based on the linguistic and conceptual characteristics of the metaphors. Notably, metaphors that are conceptually similar, regardless of their linguistic differences, seemed to be better understood, emphasizing the primacy of conceptual familiarity in metaphor comprehension.

#### *4.1 Implications of the Study*

This study offers several implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy, especially within the Saudi context: considering the difference in scores between SLT and SBT, educators should emphasize the role of context in understanding metaphors. By integrating both context-free and context-based metaphor exercises in the curriculum, learners can be better equipped to interpret metaphors in diverse situations. Given that learners demonstrated different levels of comprehension based on the linguistic and conceptual categorization of metaphors, it's imperative for curriculum designers to consider this aspect. It might be beneficial to introduce metaphors sequentially, starting with those that are both linguistically and conceptually similar, moving to those that are linguistically different but conceptually similar, and finally, introducing the most challenging category, which is both linguistically and conceptually different. Lastly, given that metaphorical competency is key to overall language proficiency, increased exposure to and practice with metaphors can enhance EFL learners' proficiency levels. Moreover, educators should ensure that learners are made aware of the presence and importance of metaphors in daily language use, helping them recognize and interpret them more effectively.

#### *4.2 Direction for Future Research*

This study proposes a landscape for further research. Firstly, further research can delve into exploring the effects of diverse contexts on metaphor interpretation, for instance, analyzing the difference in comprehension when metaphors are presented in narratives, news reports, or conversations. Secondly, this study was cross-sectional, capturing a single moment in time. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into how metaphoric competence evolves as learners advance in their language studies. Thirdly, pedagogical Interventions: Experimental research can be undertaken to assess the impact of specific teaching strategies on improving metaphor interpretation in EFL learners. For instance, the efficacy of teaching metaphors through stories, multimedia, or collaborative tasks can be explored. Lastly, future research might also explore the influence of cultural backgrounds on metaphor comprehension. As metaphors often carry cultural connotations, understanding the interplay between culture and metaphor can be insightful.

#### *4.3 Conclusion*

The current study found that EFL learners' metaphoric interpretation significantly differed when compared between SLT and SBT scores. Furthermore, we tested the significant differences in their scores based on three linguistic categories, and hence three different situations have arisen. Category one included metaphors that were linguistically and conceptually identical. Category two included metaphors that were different linguistically but were similar conceptually. Category three included metaphors that were different both linguistically as well as conceptually. Category 1 of the SBT has the highest mean value of 10.122 with a standard deviation of 3.3293, whereas SBT category 3 (conceptually and linguistically different) has the lowest mean value of 6.973 with a standard deviation of 3.9624.

This research offers valuable insights into English linguistics, yet it comes with certain constraints. Initially, the limited sample size and regional specificity of data collection suggest that extrapolating these findings to a broader context should be approached judiciously. Additionally, the tools for data collection were borrowed from earlier studies, potentially making them less aligned with the current student context and proficiency levels. Various factors, such as the testing environment, administration procedures, student mindset, their test anxiety levels, and their prior language competencies, can influence test scores. These were not systematically adjusted for in the study, implying that results might be affected by these variables. Finally, due to time and resource limitations, there was no comparative data collection from other regions. Summarizing, this research underscores the nuanced nature of metaphoric competence in Saudi EFL students, highlighting the importance of specialized teaching methods and further investigations to deepen our grasp on this vital linguistic component. In conclusion, this study has shed light on the multifaceted nature of metaphoric competence among Saudi EFL learners, emphasizing the need for targeted teaching approaches and further research to enrich our understanding of this crucial aspect of language proficiency.

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**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Informed consent**

Obtained.

**Ethics approval**

The author obtained approval to conduct the study from the Deanship of Scientific Research, Qassim University.

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**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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