Exploring Iranian University Students' Beliefs about Professors' Roles:

A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

This article examines the metaphors about university professors' roles in current and ideal situations chosen by a group of 200 Iranian BA students. The aim of the study is to determine whether there is any mismatch between the roles that the professors take on currently and the ones they are expected to adopt ideally. To this end, the participants were asked to select their preferred metaphors among twenty one metaphors of the checklist about their professors. Then, the metaphors were organized according to three roles of animator, author, and principal (Goffman, 1981). Chi-square was run to determine whether there is a significant difference among the roles of the professors as animator, author, and principal. The results revealed that university professors teaching TEFL and English Literature at BA level mostly take on animator and author roles in the current situation while principal and author roles are the ones the students prefer their professors to adopt. Identifying the students' hidden beliefs can heighten teachers' awareness, help them to modify their roles, and make the language classroom more welcoming environment for the students.

Keywords: Animator, Author, Principal, Metaphor analysis

1. Introduction

1.1 Metaphor Analysis

Metaphor, unconscious part of our daily life and communication (Stegar, 2007), is a tool for trying to "comprehend partially what can not be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.114). Metaphorical thinking involves employing a familiar object and event as a conceptual tool to clarify features of a more complex phenomenon or situation (Oxford, etal., 1998).

In classical theories, metaphor was looked at as a matter of language rather than thought. In these theories, metaphor was a novel linguistic expression in which a group of words were used outside their normal meanings to define another similar concept (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, the contemporary theory of metaphor, proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), questions the traditional borderline between literal and figurative language. As Pishghadam, Torghabeh, and Navari (2009, p.9) stated, unlike traditional view in which metaphors were considered to be ornamental figures of speech in literary texts, contemporary view gives credit to cognitive function of metaphor. Within cognitive approach to metaphor, the focus has been on "the conceptual rather than linguistic level of metaphor analysis" (Semino, Heywood & Short, 2004, p.1273). According to Saban (2004), metaphors are not just literary fancies, but they are a tool facilitating communication of complex ideas. Providing a way toward a person's cognition and affection, metaphors help us in expressing our abstract concepts in concrete ones (Pishghadam, Toghabeh, Navsari, 2009).

Metaphor can play a significant function in assisting teachers and students to understand themselves and connect this understanding to their practices in the educational context. More specifically, metaphors help learners express their ideas and viewpoints about teaching and classroom (Leavy et al., 2007). Furthermore, metaphor acts as a frame through which teachers' philosophical orientations, preferred theories, practices, and roles can be examined (Saban, 2004). In particular, metaphors applied in a classroom "act as a referent for given actions of a teacher" (Tobin & Tippins, 1996, p.716). To sum up, metaphors provide researchers with "a holistic way of thinking about teaching and learning" (Tobin & Tippins, 1996, p.728).

Metaphor analysis is characterized as a research tool which reveals participants' beliefs without using direct questions (Pishghadam, Torgabeh & Navari, 2009). Exploiting such a function, Pishghadam and Navari (2010) compared the context of English teaching in Iranian high school to English teaching in Iranian institutes from learners' point of views. In this study, language learners at high schools selected metaphors such as *conduit* that pictured teachers as providers and transmitters of knowledge. This indicated that behavoristic guidelines are highly dominant in Iranian high schools. On the other hand, institute learners selected metaphors like *teacher as friend* or *teacher as artist* which emphasized the existence of cognitive/constructive premises in institutes.

Likewise, Pishghadam, Torgabeh, and Navari (2009) investigated the metaphors 40 language teachers in Iranian high school and institute generated about teacher and learner. The conceptual metaphors such as TEACHER AS CONDIUT and TEACHER AS RECEPIENT indicated that behavoristic approach dominates teaching practice at schools. However, institute teachers teaching in institutes considered themselves as followers of the premises of cognitive and constructive approaches.

A recent study by Pishghadam and Pourali (2011) aimed at examining the metaphors generated by 50 Iranian MA students to express their hidden ideas and beliefs about learning and teaching in both ideal and current situations. 190 metaphors, produced by students to describe university professors and students, were categorized based on three perspectives of behaviorist/empiricist, cognitive/constructive, and situative/sociohistorical approaches. According to the findings of this study, metaphors such as *teacher as dictator* or *teacher as manager* showed that behaviorism dominates the current environment in the process of teaching. On the other hand, metaphors like *teacher as sun* revealed that students prefer to have professors believing in the guidelines of situative approach to learning. In the same vein, metaphors like *student as sheep* or *student as receiver*, generated by students about themselves in the current situation, showed that they perceive themselves as followers of their professors and inactive persons in the classroom. On the contrary, metaphors such as *student as critical thinker* or *student as active researcher* represent an ideal student who prefers to change his/her role to an active partner in learning.

Saban, Kocbeker, and Saban (2007) analyzed metaphors that 1142 prospective teachers articulated about the concept of teaching. The generated metaphors were categorized into ten main conceptual themes in order to find association between the participants' gender and categories of metaphors. The metaphors such as *provider*, *nurturer*, and *parent* generated by females indicated that female participants generated more transmission-oriented, growth-oriented, and counseling-oriented metaphors than males. On the other hand, metaphors like *lighthouse* and *coach* articulated by males revealed that male participants provided more facilitative-oriented and cooperative-oriented metaphors than female.

1.2 Footing Theory

Goffman introduced the concept of Footing in conversation in 1981. Footing is the alignment that participants in interaction take with regard to one another (Goffman, 1981). As Lock and strong (2010) believed, "Footing was Goffman's way of showing how people shifted the ground of their conversation"(p.211). In other words, "the alignment of an individual to a particular utterance can be referred to as Footing" (Goffman, 1974, cited in Goffman, 1981, p.221).

According to Goffman (1981), the terms speaker and hearer are too gross to provide us with anything beyond sound. Furthermore, the term speaker does not decompose the role of the one who speaks into smaller and more detailed elements. Attacking the general and oversimplified notion of speaker, Goffman proposed the theory that three roles of animator, author, and principal are taken on by the one who speaks.

As Goffman (1981, p.145) explained, reciting a fully memorized text or reading aloud from a prepared script allows us to animate words we have no hand in and to express opinions, beliefs and sentiments we do not hold. To put in other words, animator is identified as the "talking machine, the thing that sound comes out of" (p.167), and "the one just moving his lips up and down to the accompaniment of his own facial gesticulations and issuing sounds from the locus of his mouth" (p.144). Animator and recipient are in the same level of analysis.

Author, the second role of speaker identified by Goffman (1981, p.144), is "someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded". Reading off from a text or a group of utterances which has not been memorized gives the speaker the role of author. In other words, "authoring an utterance means formulating and scripting the statements that have been made".

Finally, as Goffman (1981) clarified, principal is "someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken; someone whose beliefs have been told; someone who is committed to what the words say" (p.144), and the one "believing personally in what is said" (p.167). The principal role entails "the extraporaneous, ongoing assembly and encoding of the text under the exigency of immediate response to one's current situation and audience, in a word, fresh production" (p.227).

Each of the roles animator, author, and principal taken by the speaker gives him/her a different production format. Various "production formats provide the speaker with different relationships to the words he utters", and "different grounds for his relation to his hearers" (Goffman, 1981, pp.229-230). In a conversation, when the speaker takes all three roles, the production format is said to be complete. In cases in which the speaker does not take on the role of principal the production format is incomplete and his/her language is cited (Hancock, 1997). The peculiar quality of cited language is that, firstly, it is not taken as a challenge of cited code. The teacher merely repeats or paraphrases the words without challenging them through inserting his/her point of view and language. Secondly, in cited language, the focus is on wording not message. In other words, the teacher just imitating or reformulating the statements ignores the message which is the central point of any language. Finally, by using cited language, the teacher "reads or repeats a line sometimes without understanding it" (Hancock, 1997).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Research studies in the fields of general education and language pedagogy recognize the importance of metaphor as a research tool. Although the majority of these studies adopted a qualitative approach to metaphor analysis, the present study, which departs from this format, employs a quantitative analysis to explore student selected metaphors about university professors. Hence, this research is conducted to find out answers to the following questions:

1- Is there any significant difference between the roles of professors teaching English Literature or TEFL at BA level as animator, author, and principal in the current situation?

2- Is there any significant difference between roles of university professors as animator, author and principal in the ideal situation?

These research hypotheses were formed to examine the research questions:

> 1- Is there any significant difference between the roles of professors teaching English Literature or TEFL at BA level as animator, author, and principal in the current situation?

> 2- Is there any significant difference between roles of university professors as animator, author and principal in the ideal situation?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 200 Iranian male and female students studying English Literature or TEFL at B.A level. The participants were chosen from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Tarbiat Moalem University of Sabzevar, Semnan University and Tabaran University. The average age of the students was twenty three. No distinction was made between male and female students.

2.2 Instrument

2.2.1 Checklist

A metaphor checklist, employed in this study in order to address the research questions, constituted three types of metaphors representing three roles of animator, author and principal. This checklist comprised two prompts: "I think my professor is like a _____" and "I think a professor should be like a _____". The prompts were followed by some options which had been selected from the checklists designed by Saban, Kocbeker, and Saban (2007), Saban (2010), Saban (2004), Pishghadam, Torghabeh, and Navari (2009), Nikitina and Furuoka (2008), Oxford, etal. (1998), and De Guerrero and Villamil (2002). The options consisted of seven metaphors reflecting animator role, seven metaphors representing author role, and seven ones identifying principal role. The participants were required to choose the metaphors which best described their professors' roles currently and ideally. Two experts in the field substantiated the content validity of the checklist. The reliability of the checklist, which was computed by the Cronbach's Alpha, was found to be 0.83. It shows that the results of the checklist are satisfactorily reliable in terms of their internal consistency.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the students received a metaphor checklist. The participants were asked to select the metaphors that reflected to the highest degree their views about the roles that the professors take on currently and the roles they are expected to adopt ideally. As Moser (2000) believed, metaphor analysis helps the researchers to determine the hidden beliefs and ideas behind metaphorical concepts. In the first step, the metaphors that have been used randomly in the checklist were organized according to the three roles of animator, author and principal. Then, the frequency of metaphors of each group was computed, and Chi-square was run to find whether the differences are meaningful.

3. Result

Table 1 presents the results of Chi-square for the metaphors representing the roles of the professors as animator, author, and principal, which are chosen by 200 BA students. As it can be clearly seen, there is a significant difference among metaphors determining the roles of professors based on Goffman's Footing Theory ($p < 0.001$). The result rejects the first hypothesis that *there is no significant difference between the roles of professors teaching English Literature or TEFL at B.A level as animator, author and principal in current situation*. According to table 1, metaphors reflecting animator and author roles (N=840 and N=800, respectively) were selected more than expected (N=743.3). The results reveal that the professors mostly take on the roles of animator and author. On the other hand, metaphors reflecting principal role (N=590) is less than expected (N=743.3). It shows that principal role is the least dominant role taken on by the university professors.

animator > author > principal

<Table 1 about here>

Table 2 exhibits the results of Chi-square for the metaphors chosen by 200 BA students about an ideal professor role. As the results point out, there is a significant difference among metaphors determining professors' roles based on Goffman's Footing Theory ($p < 0.000$). This result rejects the second hypothesis that *there is no significant difference between the roles of university professors as animator, author and principal in ideal situation*. As evident in this table, metaphors representing author and principal roles (N=1307 and N=1486, respectively) outnumber what is expected (N=1007.7). This implies that students prefer a professor who takes on principal and author roles respectively. However, metaphors reflecting animator role (N=230) is much less than expected (1007.7). This shows that animator role is the least preferred one selected by students.

principal > author > animator

<Table 2 about here>

In Figure 1, the percentage of metaphors which manifest roles of university professor as animator, author, and principal in both current and ideal situations are illustrated comparatively. Evidently, there is a rather great difference between the roles that the professors take on and the roles they are expected to adopt. More specifically, the professors' dominant role seems to be animator (37.6%), yet it is the least preferred role as chosen by the learners (7.6%). In addition, while, in current situation, the principal role is the least frequent one adopted by the professors (26.4%), learners selected it as their most desired role in ideal situation (49.1%).

<Figure 1 about here>

4. Conclusion

New millennium has created a radical shift in the focus of education. In fact, the time of injecting soon-to-be-obsolete information is over. No more does educational system need teachers concerned with the injection of information into students' minds. Rather, teachers are demanded to modify their roles to fulfill the primary aim of education which is development of agency in learners and themselves. To do so, teachers should think critically and reform rather than fit into the current intellectual framework (Green & Jax, 2011; Ghaemi & Taherian, 2011). Moreover, the professors' major responsibility is not to transfer the information to the students, but to provide opportunities for them to use higher-level intellectual skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking (Badely & Habeshaw, 2006).

In the present study, the metaphors BA students provided to talk about their professors revealed that the university professors take on animator and author roles respectively in the current situation. The metaphors *copy machine, cassette player,* and *microphone* picture professors as individuals who just recite a text without expressing their own original opinions. In other words, instead of projecting their own thinking pattern, professors transfer the information exactly from the books. In the same vein, the metaphors *missionary*, *summarizer*, and *mixer* reflect the role of professors as authors who restate, paraphrase, and simplify the concepts presented in the materials. To put it in other words, the professors' main responsibility is to reformulate and summarize what is provided in the books.

Hence, the production format of university professors is incomplete. As Hancock (1997, p.221) claimed, when a speaker takes on all three roles of animator, author, and principal , his production format is complete, yet when the speaker does not embody principal role, his production format is incomplete. In this case, the language used is "an artifact rather than a language in use" and it is called "cited language". There are many drawbacks with cited language. The first downside is that cited language is not taken as a challenge of cited code. The speaker repeats or paraphrases the words without critically challenging them. Moreover, the focus of cited language is on wording not message. This means that the speaker imitating or reformulating the statements may ignore the message. Finally, it may happen that the speaker repeats the words without understanding it.

The result indicating that the professors dominantly take on animator role has a consistency with the findings gained by Pishghadam, Torghabeh, and Navari (2009) and Purali (2011) who pointed out that Behaviorist Approach is highly dominant in Iranian educational context. A language learning context which is run based on the premises of Behavoristic Approach is centered on rote learning of materials (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In such a context, learners are robbed of the opportunity to move beyond memorization of the concepts and to think critically. Such characteristics are compatible with a teacher who does not open the space for challenging pre-made concepts and thinking in a new way as s/he is merely concerned with transmission of the concepts of the book rather than providing the opportunity for critical and creative thinking.

Considering the ideal situation, BA students would rather have professors who take on principal role as their dominant role. The metaphors *artist*, *spring*, and *writer* imply the idea that professors should generate and transfer their own original ideas and refrain from mere repetition or paraphrasing the concepts presented in the materials. Besides, the findings show the inclination of the students toward having a professor who creates challenge and brings about change. Metaphors such as *window to the world* and *challenger* prove this attitude among students.

On the whole, it can be concluded that there is a mismatch between the roles that the professors adopt in the current situation and the roles that the students prefer them to take on. Currently, the professors' teaching practice is oriented toward replication and reformulation of the pre-made concepts. Indeed, no opportunity is provided for the students to think in new ways. Such an educational context is not the one ideally preferred by the students, for the students opt for classroom setting in which they can be trained to think critically, challenge taken-for-granted knowledge, and project their own identities. As a result, since any mismatch between the teacher's and the learners' beliefs may severely hamper the process of learning (Ellis, 2008), it is highly recommended that the teachers take the students' ideas into account and modify their roles based on the students' expectations.

The difference between the roles that the professors take on in the current situation and the roles they are expected to adopt in ideal situation, gained in this study, has a consistency with the findings obtained from similar studies. For instance, comparing what teachers are obliged to do based on policy documents and what they actually do, Harley, Barasa, Bertman, Mattson, and Piilay (2000) concluded that one of the major responsibilities of teacher is to promote creative and critical thinking, yet they mainly act as content transmitter. In addition, Sahan (2009) indicated that while some characteristics like providing opportunities for students to self-reflect and have critical consciousness are ideally expected, the teachers do not do these behaviors often enough currently.

5. Limitations of the Study

In this study gender and age of the participants were not taken in to account, so other studies can take these two points in to consideration. Besides, this study was done just at BA level in English field in a few universities in Iran; therefore, other researches can be conducted to compensate these limitations.

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Table 1. The results of Chi-square for the metaphors selected by students about   professors teaching English Literature or TEFL at B.A level in current situation

	Observed N	Expected N	df	x^2	Sig.
Animator	840	743.3	2	48.520	.000
Author	800	743.3	2		
Principal	590	743.3	2		
Total	2230				

Table 2. The results of Chi-square for the metaphors selected by students about university professors in ideal situation

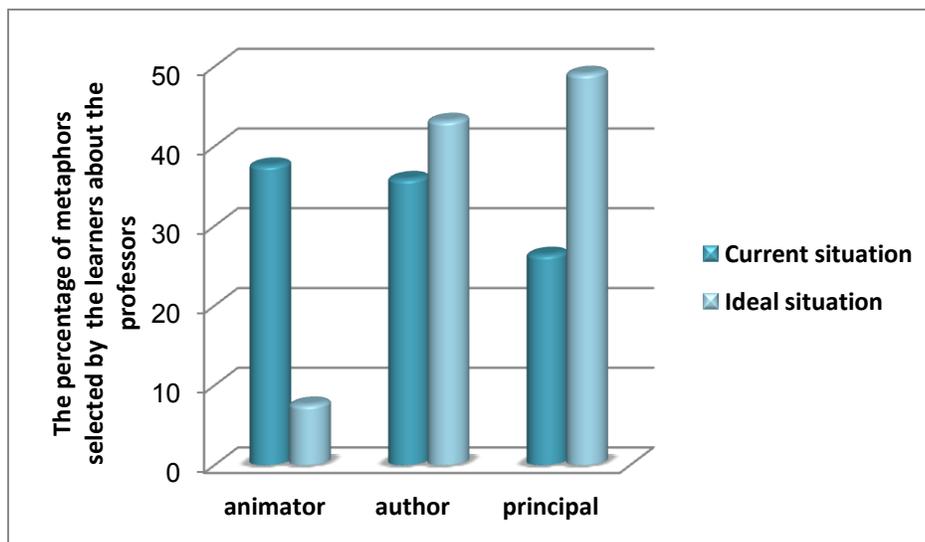|	Observed N	Expected N	df	x^2	Sig.
Animator	230	1007.7	2	916.145	.000
Author	1307	1007.7	2		
Principal	1486	1007.7	2		
Total	3023				

Figure 1. The percentage of metaphors determining professors' roles as animator,

author and principal in current and ideal situations