# Birds and Bats in the L2 Class: Varying Views on Language, Teaching and Coursebooks

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## Abstract

*Long known as a literary device for poetic expression, metaphor has recently emerged as a popular tool for reflection and data collection in teacher education. Since it enables researchers to develop insights into the subjects' underlying theories of (future) action, metaphor analysis was used in the current study for investigating how 56 beginning teachers conceptualised language, teaching and coursebooks in the two similar contexts of English and Turkish as a foreign language class (EFL, TFL). Therefore, the EFL and TFL participants were given a list of language-teacher-coursebook metaphors in the literature, and asked to provide an explanation for their preferred images. 168 metaphors, chosen by the two groups of beginning teachers, were examined through the content analysis method, and a comparison of their self-chosen metaphors revealed that: (1) the EFL and TFL participants were equally oriented towards a functional view of language (57%), even though there were more structuralists (32%) in the TFL and interactionists (18%) in the EFL group; (2) despite their traditional view of language, both groups adopted the more egalitarian and transformative roles of the teacher as a cooperative leader (39%, 53.5%) and as an agent of change (32%, 18%) in the foreign language class, and (3) the EFL group (46%) showed a greater tendency to assign a guiding role to coursebooks than the TFL group (32%), whereas the more dependent role of the coursebook as resource was appreciated by only 7% of the TFL group and by 29% of the EFL group.*
*Keywords: beginning teachers, metaphor analysis, teacher education*

## 1. Introduction

Having its origins in cognitive linguistics, metaphor analysis has emerged as a popular method of interdisciplinary research for three main reasons: (i) it combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, (ii) works with all kinds of texts (visual or not) and (iii) reveals the underlying reasons behind actions [5], [8], [17]. As it influences our thoughts, experiences and daily activities, metaphor can be used as a versatile tool for problem-solving in language learning and teaching [6], [10]. There is a plethora of research available on the beliefs of students and teachers about language, learning and teaching as well as the roles of the L2 teacher and coursebook, whereas a substantial number of comparative studies focused on the variations in metaphor use by pre- and in-service teachers, and investigated the effects of the cultural context, length of teaching and practicum experience on their professional growth [1], [2], [3], [9], [11], [12], [14], [15]. However, it remains underexplored how candidate teachers of two different foreign languages (i.e. English and Turkish) viewed language, their role as a language teacher and the function of coursebooks in the EFL and TFL class. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to determine and compare the tacit theories of language and learning that beginning teachers of EFL and TFL classes adopt and the coursebook policy they favour. The analytical framework for the analysis of language metaphors drew on Richards and Rodgers' structural, functional and interactional views [13]. As for teacher and coursebook metaphors, Guerrero and Villamil's categorization of teacher roles along with McGrath's classification of coursebook images were used in the current study [4], [7].

## 2. Method

The participants were 56 beginning teachers in the EFL (6 male, 22 female; aged 22-28) and TFL (8 male, 20 female; aged 24-31) context. The EFL participants were seniors at the department of foreign language education, whereas the TFL participants were graduates of (i) Turkish education, and (ii) Turkish language and literature, attending a seminar on foreign language teaching methods in a Turkish university. Both groups were administered a list of language, teacher and coursebook

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metaphors and provided explanations for their preferred images in 90 min [2], [4], [7]. 168 metaphors were examined through content analysis and the results were tabulated below.

## 3. Results

When their language metaphors were categorised according to Richards and Rodgers' model [13], it was found: although there were more structuralists (32%>25%) in the TFL group and more interactionists in the EFL group (18%>11%), both were equally oriented towards a functional view of language (57%).

Table 1. Language metaphors

| Type | EFL | | TFL | | Total | | Exemplars |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Structural | 7 | 25 | 9 | 32 | 16 | 29 | spider's web, jigsaw puzzle |
| Functional | 16 | 57 | 16 | 57 | 32 | 57 | brain, recipe |
| Interactional | 5 | 18 | 3 | 11 | 8 | 14 | family, life |
| Total | 28 | 100 | 28 | 100 | 56 | 100 | - |

The dominance of structural and functional metaphors suggested a rather traditional linguistic theory, reducing the language to a combination of grammatical items used for expressing messages or fulfilling actions as in EFL15's recipe metaphor: "If you prepare a recipe, you choose proper ingredients. If you tell something, you choose suitable words for different situations". It was disturbing to have only five interactional metaphors in the EFL group, considering the amount of weight modern communicative approaches received in their program. Despite their lack of a solid background in L2 theories, three participants in the TFL group viewed language as a vehicle for building social relations: "People speaking same language are like family members. They know each other well, become close, share same ideas" (TFL4).

Table 2. Teacher metaphors

| Role | EFL | | TFL | | Total | | Exemplars |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Cooperative leader | 11 | 39 | 15 | 53.5 | 26 | 46 | coach, trail guide |
| Provider of knowledge | 2 | 7 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 7 | moon, TV |
| Agent of change | 9 | 32 | 5 | 18 | 14 | 25 | window to the world |
| Nurturer | 2 | 7 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 9 | gardener |
| Innovator | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3.5 | 2 | 4 | explorer |
| Provider of tools | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | tool carrier |
| Artist | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.5 | 1 | 2 | potter |
| Repairer | 2 | 7 | 1 | 3.5 | 3 | 5 | mechanic of the mind |
| Gym instructor | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | aerobics instructor |
| Total | 28 | 100 | 28 | 100 | 56 | 100 | - |

Table 2 displayed the frequency of different teacher roles. There was an overall tendency to adopt the more egalitarian and transformative conceptions of the teacher as a cooperative leader (46%) and as an agent of change (25%). Yet, it was in the TFL group that more people liked the former concept (53.5%>39%), as in the "symphony/movie director" metaphor (f=9): "Musicians have talents, so do students. The teacher guides students and lets them discover their abilities" (TFL18). This trend was reverse in the agent of change category (32%>18%). The EFL participants, equipped with the knowledge of an international language, can be more willing to introduce learners into new realms: "A language teacher is like a window to the world. Thanks to us, students see various people, countries... different cultures, a lot of different lifestyles" (EFL17).

One could logically expect from the conventional nature of language metaphors that these participants would have preferred images of a teacher monitoring learners and remedying their problems as in TFL24's repairer metaphor: "...like a mechanic fixing cars, a teacher fixes students' point of view about language". It was optimistic to see the lessening effect of such behaviourist interpretations, as there were either fewer proponents or even none, supporting the metaphors in the teacher as provider of knowledge/artist/gym instructor categories. The reason why constructivist images of innovator and

provider of tools were popular with neither groups might be about the uneasiness of the inexperienced teachers with experimentation. Therefore, only one in each identified the teacher as someone that "is like an explorer, always curious about new worlds, new experiences, cultures and... [one] willing to learn with students" (EFL26), whereas the nurturer category was opted by not more than three participants: "Teacher treats them with love, respect, students will be a beautiful garden but poisonous weeds grow with stress" (TFL7).

Table 3. Coursebook metaphors

| Function | EFL | | TFL | | Total | | Exemplars |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Guidance | 13 | 46 | 9 | 32 | 22 | 39 | compass, map |
| Access | 4 | 14 | 7 | 25 | 11 | 20 | bridge, key |
| Support | 1 | 4 | 7 | 25 | 8 | 14 | backbone, crutch |
| Resource | 8 | 29 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 18 | box of tools, good friend |
| Constraint | 2 | 7 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 9 | dictator, straitjacket |
| Total | 28 | 100 | 28 | 100 | 56 | 100 | - |

Table 3 showed the EFL group primarily assigned a guiding role to the coursebook (46%>32%) and valued it as a helping hand (resource: 29%>7%). On the other hand, 25% of the TFL group supported the more independent roles. The lower concentration of these liberating metaphors in the EFL group can be explained by the teacher composition: unlike the TFL group, the EFL participants were non-native speakers of English, which meant a greater coursebook dependence due to their insecurity. There were two EFL and three TFL respondents that were clearly discontented with its debilitating effect when used as follows: "A dictator sets the rules, you have to do what he says. A coursebook has a frame and teachers cannot digress from it. They have to teach what is written there" (EFL2).

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

In the light of the findings, it can be argued that the beginning L2 teachers predominantly had a traditional view of language, even though its interactional uses within a community had been strongly emphasized throughout the EFL group's pre-service education. The same tendency was detected in [2], where the cumulation of structural and functional themes was related to task difficulty and first-year students' lack of background, and in [15], where it concerned their grammar-based mode of instruction and lack of L2 contact outside the class.

The analysis of teacher metaphors revealed that the majority identified themselves with the more participative figures of the L2 teacher facilitating learners' transformation, while the typical transmitter of L2 knowledge was adopted by fewer of them unlike [4]. This suggested the present respondents were more willing to be seen as democratic learning partners rather than authoritarian leaders or behaviour controllers. However, it could have provided a more positive picture of the future L2 class if they had chosen more constructivist metaphors as in the case of the 28 ESL teachers in [4].

Although the two groups displayed a similar pattern of language and teaching preferences, their coursebook conceptions varied much. The idea of using the coursebook as a basis for determining pedagogic goals was shared by the majority not only in the current study but also in [7]. Another similarity between this and [7] concerned the second most frequent function of the coursebook as resource. It was not surprising because both subjects were non-native teachers of English that liked to resort to coursebook more when they were in need [7]. The TFL group assigned a facilitative rather than a definitive role to the L2 coursebook, and being native-speakers of the target language, they were possibly more confident to use it sparingly. Unlike [7], where constraint metaphors amounted to only 2.7%, both groups in the current research had more negative images of the coursebook presumably due to their previous learning experiences with the low-quality, local English coursebooks officially mandated at schools or the scarcity of appropriate materials in the newly-developing field of TFL (Şimşek & Dündar, 2015).

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