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## Metaphorical Perceptions of Turkish EFL Instructors in Relation to Their Students

Gencer Elkılıç<sup>a\*</sup>, Nilüfer Aybirdi<sup>b</sup>

\* Corresponding author: Gencer Elkılıç, gencerkilic1322@gmail.com

<sup>a</sup>Kafkas University Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of English Language and Literature, Kars, Turkey,  
gencerkilic1322@gmail.com

<sup>b</sup>Kafkas University Faculty of Science and Letters, Turkey, niluferaybirdi@hotmail.com

### Abstract

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**Problem Statement:** Despite the fact that the metaphorical perceptions of university instructors about their students are important in teacher-student interactions in the classroom environment, as they pave the way to an effective teaching-learning process, in Turkey there are a limited number of studies on them.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to determine the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish EFL Instructors in relation to their students.

**Method:** In this study both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used, by requesting 120 instructors to fill in forms containing prompts such as “students are like....., because they.....”.

**Findings and Results:** The results of the study revealed that Turkish EFL instructors created 98 valid metaphors. The most frequently repeated metaphors were baby (f=10), soil (f=8), seed (f=7), flower (f=5), child (f=5), puppet (f=4), son/daughter (f=4), white page (f=4), empty box (f=4) and slave (f=4). In accordance with the metaphorical perceptions of the subjects, five conceptual metaphorical categories were determined: 1) Student as raw material, 2) Student as significant other, 3) Student as plant, 4) Students as absolute compliant, 5) Student as animal.

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**Keywords:** Turkish EFL Instructors; metaphor; students; conceptual category.

## 1. Introduction

Metaphors have been very important not just in the social lives of human beings, but also in their educational domains. The reason why they are so important is that they tell so many things with only one image. “If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures! For a picture provides only a static image, while a metaphor provides a conceptual framework for thinking about something” (Shuell, 1990: 102). “Metaphor is employed when one wants to explore and understand something esoteric, abstract, novel, or highly speculative. As a general rule, the more abstract or speculative it is, the greater the variety of metaphors needed to grapple with it” (Yob, 2003: 134). “what we teach” and “how we teach it” are closely linked to metaphor and emphasize the need to understand it to comprehend our actions (Herron, 1982: 235). According to Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 5), metaphor pervades everyday language as well as human thoughts and actions.

On the other hand, much research has been carried out on metaphors during the last three decades, some cases defining them (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2009; Massengill Shak & Mahlios, 2008), or focusing upon teachers (Saban, Kocber, & Saban, 2007; Leon-Carillo, 2007), or students (Saban, 2010), or school environments and languages (Mahlios & Maxson, 1998; Arıoğul, & Uzun, 2011).

For example Ellis & Barkhuizen (2009: 313), define metaphor as “a comparison between two dissimilar notions where one notion is to be understood in terms of the other notion.

In their study on prospective teachers’ conceptions of teaching and learning, Saban, Koçbeker and Saban analyzed 64 valid personal metaphors and identified 10 main conceptual themes.

Musiał (2002: 477) maintains that teaching is creating metaphor functions as a superordinate metonym for the following linguistic manifestations: *Teaching is like sculpting/composing music/carving wood; The teacher is like a sculptor; Learners are like flower buds/unexplored territory.*

On the other hand, Strugielska (2008: 111) states that one of the most important aspects of a metaphor is the roles it creates for the self and others. Thus, if I am a shepherd, my students must be sheep. If I am a gardener, my students are plants.

### 1.1. Problem

Although the metaphorical perceptions of university instructors about their students are important in teacher-student interactions in the classroom environment, as they pave the way to an effective teaching-learning process, in Turkey there are limited number of studies on them.

### 1.2. Rationale

The purpose of the study is to determine the metaphorical perceptions of Turkish EFL Instructors in relation to their students, therefore, in order to achieve the aim of the study, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. What are the metaphors used by Turkish EFL instructors in relation to their students?
2. How many conceptual categories can be determined in accordance with the metaphors used by Turkish EFL instructors?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

In order to seek answers to the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used, by requesting the participants to fill in forms eliciting information in relation to their metaphorical perceptions about their students.

### 2.2 Participants

The participants in this study were 120 Turkish EFL instructors, 80 male and 40 female, from five universities in Turkey. However, due to forms returned empty or improper descriptions, data evaluation was carried out on the forms obtained from 112 instructors.

### 2.3 Instrument

Forms containing prompts such as “students are like....., because they.....” were used as data collection instruments. The participants were required to complete the prompts in accordance with the metaphors which best described their students.

### 2.4 Procedure

Data collection for the study was performed during the first month of the 2015-2016 academic year. One hundred and twenty university instructors were sent the forms eliciting information on metaphors describing their students. However, only 112 of them completed and returned them properly.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The metaphors determined were analyzed in four steps: 1) Coding and selecting, 2) Categorizing, 3) Reliability, 4) Using SPSS for qualitative data analysis.

Coding and selecting: the metaphors written on the forms by the participants were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet in alphabetical order. Forms returned empty and improper descriptions were eliminated. Thus, data evaluation was carried out on 112 valid metaphors.

Categorizing: 112 metaphors created by the participants were examined in relation to subject matter, source, and the subject matter-source relationship. 14 metaphors were eliminated at this stage, as they could not be put in to any conceptual category and, thus, 98 metaphors were accepted as valid. Accordingly, five different conceptual categories were determined.

Reliability: In order to ensure reliability, a consistency study was carried out. Both researchers worked on the conceptual categorization and sorting out the data. Two experts were given the alphabetical list and the conceptual categorizations made by the researchers and were requested to match the list and the categorization. Based on the reliability formula of Miles and Huberman (1994), the reliability of the study was calculated ( $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{agreement}}{\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}} \times 100$ ). The experts consulted put 6 metaphors into a different category from the researchers, so the reliability was found to be 0,94, which was quite high.

Using SPSS for qualitative data analysis: All the data, metaphors and conceptual categories were

transferred to the SPSS program and the frequencies and percentages of 98 metaphors and 5 conceptual categories were computed and given in tables.

### 3. Findings

The Turkish EFL instructors created 98 valid metaphors. The most frequently repeated metaphors were baby (f=10), soil (f=8), seed (f=7), flower (f=5), child (f=5), puppet (f=4), son/daughter (f=4), white page (f=4), empty box (f=4) and slave (f=4). The valid metaphors created by the participants were put into five conceptual categories: “Student as a raw material”, “Student as a significant other”, “Student as a plant”, “Student as an absolute compliant”, and “Student as an animal.”

#### 3.1 Conceptual Categories

##### 3.1.1. Student as a Raw Material

**Table.1.** Student as a raw material

Metaphor	F	%	Metaphor	f	%
Soil	8	25,81	Empty box	4	12,9
White page	4	12,9	Dough/play dough	3	9,68
Apprentice	2	6,45	Raw precious stone	2	6,45
Crude oil	2	6,45	Flash disk	2	6,45
Food to be cooked	1	3,23	Cook assistant	1	3,23
Novice hunter	1	3,23	Raw steel	1	3,23
Total				31	100

It is clear from Table 1 that, under the category “Student as a raw material,” most of the EFL instructors likened their students to soil (f=8, 25,81), an empty box (f=4, 12,9%), a white page (f=4, 12,9%), dough/play dough (f=3, 9,68 %), an apprentice (f=2, 6,45 %), a raw precious stone (f=2, 6,45 %), crude oil (f=2, 6,45 %), or a flash disk (f=2, 6,45 %), respectively.

The main characteristics of this category of metaphors are as follows:

“A student is like soil, because we can benefit from soil if we cultivate it well. So students can learn well if we teach them well.”

“A student is like a white page, because as we teach her/him, s/he progresses.”

“A student is like an empty box, because when we teach her/him, s/he is filled with information.”

“A student is like dough, because s/he is shaped according to how we handle her/him.”

##### 3.1.2. Student as Significant Other

**Table 2.** Student as a significant other

Metaphor	F	%
Baby	10	45,45
Child	5	22,72
Son/daughter	4	18,18
Brother/sister	3	13,63
Total	22	100

It can be seen in Table 2 that, under the category “student as a significant other,” the EFL instructors likened their students to a baby (f=10, 45%), a child (f=5,22,72%), a son/daughter (f=4, 18,8%), and a brother/sister (f=3, 13,63%), respectively.

Some of the completed prompts are as follows:

“A student is like a new-born baby, because in order to acquire the information s/he is exposed to, s/he observes and imitates.”

“A student is like a child, because s/he isn’t aware of her/his responsibilities.”

“A student is like a son/daughter, because we are living in a family, school and they always need us.”

### 3.1.3. Student as a Plant

**Table 3.** Student as a plant

Metaphor	F	%
Seed	7	38,88
Flower	5	27,77
Young tree	3	16,66
Fruit tree	1	5,55
Leave	1	5,55
Tree	1	5,55
Total	18	100

Table 3 shows that, under the category “student as a plant,” most of the EFL instructors likened their students to a seed (f=7, 38,88%), a flower (f=5,27,77%), or a young tree (f=3, 16,66%), respectively. Some of the written statements of the instructors are as follows:

“A student is like a flower, because s/he needs special care in order to flourish.”

“A student is like a young tree, because s/he grows up depending on her/his surroundings.”

“A student is like a seed, because seeds flourish when they are sown and a student flourishes when s/he is educated.”

### 3.1.4. Student as Absolute Compliant

**Table 4.** Student as an absolute compliant

Metaphor	f	%
Puppet	4	30,77
Slave	4	30,77
Sheep	3	23,07
Wage worker	2	15,38
Total	13	100

In Table 4 it is clear that 4 (30,77%) instructors consider students as puppets, 4 (30,77%) as slaves, 3(23,07%) as sheep, and 2 (15,38%) as wage workers, respectively. The following sentences are the samples from the prompts completed by the instructors:

“A student is like a puppet, because s/he cannot decide by herself/himself.”

“A student is like a slave, because s/he has to do what the instructors say.”

“A student is like a sheep, because s/he has no rejection to instructors’ commands.”

“A student is like a wage worker, because s/he has to study every day.”

### 3.1.5. Student as an Animal

**Table 5.** Student as an animal

Metaphor	F	%
Sheep	3	33,33
Horse	2	22,22
Cat	2	22,22
Fox	1	11,11
Hungry wolf	1	11,11
Total	9	100

It is obvious from Table 5 that, in this category, 3 instructors (33,33%) consider students as sheep, 2 (22,22%) as a horse, 2 (22,22%) as cat, 1 (11,11%) as fox, and 1 (11,11%) as hungry wolf.

Main characteristics of this category of metaphors are as follows:

“A student is like a sheep, because s/he is always guided by the instructors.”

“A student is like a cat, because s/he isn't loyal to her/his teacher, as cats aren't to their owners”

“A student is like a horse, because s/he has to run for the exams.”

“A student is like a fox, because s/he is cunning about getting high marks by means of flattering.”

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

**Research Question 1:** What are the metaphors used by Turkish EFL instructors in relation to their students?

In a study on culture and teacher metaphors used in the educational system, Çelikten (2006) determined that teachers were mostly seen as a doctor or a gardener. In another study, Oktay and Osam (2013) examined the metaphors students at a university chose to describe the roles of foreign language teachers and compared them with metaphors chosen by teachers of English at the same university. It was found that three roles-- conductor, shopkeeper, and entertainer-- were favored most by both the participating students and teachers.

Kesen (2010) carried out a study on 150 EFL Turkish learners in relation to their perceptions of English language course books and she found that most of the participants likened language course books to a planet, a foreign country, a secret garden, and space, which indicates the uncertainty and enigma experienced by the learners.

In his Master's dissertation on 50 ELT and 50 non-ELT students at Cukurova University, Ahkemoğlu (2011) found that, whereas some metaphors are peculiar to English language teachers, such as oracle, schizophrenic, and gum, others are common to other field teachers as "light", "guide" and "bridge".

In our study the most frequently repeated metaphors in relation to students were baby (f=10), soil (f=8), seed (f=7), flower (f=5), child (f=5), puppet (f=4), son/daughter (f=4), white page (f=4), empty box(f=4), slave (f=4) and sheep (f=3).

**Research Question 2:** How many conceptual categories can be determined in accordance with the metaphors used by Turkish EFL instructors?

In a study on 40 EFL student teachers, Wen-Chuan, Paichi and Shu (2012) discovered 8 conceptual categories in relation to teachers. In another study, on 365 pre-service teachers, Konaklı and Göğüş (2013) determined 12 conceptual categories, analyzing the metaphors, sources of metaphors and the

relation between the metaphors and the metaphor sources.

On the other hand, a study by Akbaba-Altun and Apaydın (2013) on 165 teacher candidates studying at a private university, revealed that while female teacher candidates used five conceptual themes of water, sapling, baby, child and eating among the concrete metaphors, males used the concept of a fruit tree.

In another study on the metaphorical conceptualizations of Arab learners of Turkish, Arioğul and Uzun (2011) determined 40 metaphors in response to the cue “learning Turkish is like.....” and categorized them under 4 conceptual categories.

In his study on 2847 prospective teachers, Saban (2010) investigated metaphorical conceptualizations of the learner, and discovered 98 metaphorical concepts under 12 conceptual themes. These were as follows: student as raw material, student as an empty vessel, student as a developing organism, student as a significant being, student as absolutely compliant, student as knowledge recipient, student as knowledge reflector, student as knowledge constructor, student as a defective being, student as social participant, student as knowledge carrier, and student as social capital.

In our study, 98 valid metaphors were determined and grouped under 5 conceptual categories, which were as follows: Student as a raw material, student as a significant other, student as a plant, student as absolute compliant, and student as an animal. Thus, this study is in parallel with Saban’s in relation to three categories: student as a raw material, student as a significant other and student as absolute compliant.

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