The Perceptions of Students Learning Turkish as a Foreign Language Towards "Writing in Turkish"

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of students who learn Turkish as a foreign language towards "writing in Turkish." The study was conducted using the phenomenology pattern, one of the qualitative research methods. The study sample consisted of one hundred seventy-five (175) students who were from two state universities in Turkey and learned Turkish as a foreign language in the 2019-2020 academic year. The study data were collected using an online form, and the participant students were asked to complete the statement in the form as follows: "Writing in Turkish is like ……, because ……………". As a result of the research, the students generated one hundred and eleven (111) valid metaphors about "writing in Turkish." Ninety (90) of them were positive, and 21 were negative. The categories with the highest number of positive responses were as follows: "Writing in Turkish: an Enjoyable Task" (n: 20), "Writing in Turkish: an Improving Task" (n: 17), "Writing in Turkish: a Similar Task" (n: 13) and "Writing in Turkish: an Achievable Task" (n: 12). The category with the most negative responses was the "Writing in Turkish: a Difficult Task" (n: 12).

Keywords: writing skill, teaching Turkish as a foreign language, writing in Turkish

1. Introduction

Language is an institution that is an inseparable part and creator of humanity, society, and many other fields such as science, art, technique, and culture (Aksan, 2010: 11). It also creates and improves the four basic language skills. As the primary component of language, the metaphor is not only a simple word "design" but also a logical constructor describing the journey of ideas. Metaphors can be acknowledged as the reflection of metaphorical thought and reveal creativity in writing. In other words, the goal is to conceptualize and experience an event from the perspective of another by using the power of thought creation (Pilav & Elkatmış, 2013: 1210).

Metaphor is the basic form of "figurative language" in English and is called "mecaz (i.e., metaphor)" or "eğretileme dili (i.e., metaphorical language)" in Turkish that differs from the standard language in its intention "not to mean what it is written" (Cebeci, 2013: 10). In this sense, there are several explanations about the concept of metaphor in the literature. Some are as follows:

The metaphor, which derives from the Greek word "metaphere," is the combination of the words "meta" (i.e., to change) and "pherein" (i.e., to carry) (Levine, 2005: 172). The word "metaphor" is derived from the Greek word "metaphora" and the French word "métaphore." The words "meta," meaning "beyond," and "pherein," meaning "to carry," form the word metaphor (Corbett & Connors, 1999: 122).

Metaphor stands for the description of the *unknown* with the help of the *known*. Metaphor can also be defined as revealing the meaning of the unknown through the known (Erdem & Sarvan, 2001).

Metaphors (and analogies, to some extent) are used for various purposes as follows:

- Metaphors embellish a language and intensify the expressions.

- Metaphors help avoid criticism or censorship.

- Metaphors are used to indirectly explain certain subjects considered taboo or lofty due to religious or cultural reasons.

- Metaphors fill a lexical gap in a language (Tepebaşılı, 2013: 15).

Metaphor is a cognitive attempt to conceptualize an experience over another (Morgan, 1998; Kalnicka, 2006). Metaphors are tools for explaining events, objects, and especially abstract concepts by using various analogies (Cerit, 2008:694).

Metaphor is not associated with the words but the concepts. It is characterized by an effort to explain the target concept with the familiar ones (Dobric, 2010). Familiar concepts match target concepts, enhancing the information about the target concepts (Sajaniemi & Stützle, 2007).

A metaphor does not involve only artistic or aesthetic concerns but refers to a better understanding of certain concepts. A metaphor does not generally depend on analogy because it is not a linguistic ornament, unnecessary decoration but an integral part of human thought and reasoning. In this sense, metaphors are not only a way of describing something but also a way of learning something (Tuncay & Özçınar, 2009: 2883).

Lakoff and Johnson describe metaphor as follows:

-Metaphors are not about the words but the concepts.

-The function of metaphor does not involve artistic or aesthetic concerns but a better understanding of certain concepts.

-Metaphor does mostly not depend on similarity or analogy.

-Ordinary people use metaphors without making much mental effort.

-Metaphor is not a linguistic ornament, unnecessary decoration stuff, but an integral part of human thought and reasoning" (2015: 12).

Metaphors have various functions in daily life, such as enriching the vocabulary, improving concentration, stimulating imagination, and exploring spiritual aspects, activating and communicating the emotions, creating an aesthetic appeal, entertaining, teaching moral values, and promoting desirable behaviors. Therefore, they are not only a subject of literature but also a valuable data source for other fields (Tepebaşılı, 2013: 22-24).

For most people, metaphor is a poetic imagination and a rhetorical trick—it is not an issue surrounding ordinary/everyday language, yet it is related to unusual language (Lakoff & Johnson, 2015: 27). However, the essence of metaphor is the effort to grasp something by using the knowledge of another thing. Metaphors are not just rhetoric to embellish the daily language, but they are of much importance in human life (Saban, Koçbeker & Saban, 2006; Eren, Çelik & Aktürk, 2014: 638).

Dickmeyer (1989) indicates that metaphors help explain the unknown and convey complicated thoughts and ideas through experiences. Thus, they describe the key features of complex variables and present the whole story in a single image. Metaphors relieve the monotonous and boring feelings and create a new alternative to conventional techniques.

Metaphors create an independent working environment that supports creative thinking, offers the opportunity to share different perspectives, and entirely follows individuals' thought systems without any limitation. Metaphors not only provide researches with in-depth content but also contribute to the practical functioning of studies. Besides, metaphors facilitate seeing the unseen, noticing the details, and suggesting new research questions (Sarikaya, 2018; Koç, 2014).

As can be understood from the definitions, metaphor is a multidimensional concept of interest to several disciplines (e.g., philosophy, literature, linguistics, psychoanalysis). Therefore, it plays a fundamental role in representing the human spirit. Some studies in the literature addressed the primary school students' (Kırmızı Susar & Çelik, 2015; Köksal, 2010) and teacher candidates' (Ulu, 2019; Karakuş & Baki, 2017; Özkan, 2017; Mete & Bağcı Ayrancı, 2016, Tiryaki & Demir, 2016; Bozpolat, 2015; Lüle Mert, 2013) metaphorical perceptions towards "writing." However, there was no research on the perceptions of students learning Turkish as a foreign language towards the concept of "writing." Therefore, the study would contribute to the literature.

1.1 The Aim of the Research

The research aimed to determine the perceptions of students learning Turkish as a foreign language about "writing in Turkish." With this goal, answers to the following questions were sought:

• Which metaphors do foreign students use for "writing in Turkish"?

• What are the conceptual categories of those metaphors?

2. Method

2.1 Research Model

The phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in the study. Such designs focus on the facts that individuals are aware of but do not have detailed information. The phenomenology design also facilitates investigating the phenomena that are not unfamiliar much with but cannot be comprehended entirely (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011).

2.2 Data Collection Process

The data were collected using an online form, and the students learning Turkish as a foreign language were asked to complete the statement in the form as follow: "Writing in Turkish is like ……because.........". The responses were categorized and saved to Google Drive.

2.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed using content analysis techniques that determine the concepts and relationships explaining the collected data. In content analysis, similar data are categorized with similar concepts and themes and interpreted accordingly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). There were three stages in the analysis:

In the first stage, 175 responses in the storage system were saved in a new document so that the raw data texts were collected in a single document. In the second stage, the responses and explanations were thoroughly read, and the inconsistent or missing data (64 responses) were excluded, and 111 valid responses were left. In the third stage, valid responses were analyzed and categorized. Two researchers reviewed the categories to ensure that the responses were related to the given categories. Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula "Reliability = consensus/consensus + disagreement x 100" was calculated 0.90.

2.4 Participants

The data were gathered from one hundred and seventy-five (175) students who learned Turkish as a foreign language. The participant students were from two state universities in Turkey in the 2019-2020 academic year. They were chosen from the C1 level to facilitate the comprehension of the instructions and giving meaningful responses. The gender distribution of the respondents is shown in Table 1, and nationality distribution is given in Table 2 below.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Respondent Number	%
Female	109	62.29
Male	66	37.71
Total	175	100

As seen in Table 1, 109 (62.29%) participants were female, and 66 (37.71) were male.

Table 2. Nationality Distribution of Respondents

	Nationality	Respondent Number
	Syria	69
	Afghanistan	14
	Iraq	13
	Somalia	11
	Nigeria	7
	Iranian	5
	Kazakhstan	5
	Indonesia	5
	Palestine	5
	Malaysia	5
	Egypt	4

	Bangladesh	3
	Jordan	3
	Ghana	3
	Yemen	3
	Pakistan	3
	Benin	2
	Ethiopia	2
	Niger	2
	Rwanda	2
	Kyrgyzstan	2
	Zimbabwe	2
	USA	1
	Myanmar	1
	Thailand	1
	China	1
	South Sudan	1
	Kuwait	1
	Mali	1
	Chad	1
	Morocco	1
	Azerbaijan	1
Total		175

According to Table 2, one hundred and seventy-five (175) international students from thirty-two (32) nationalities participated in the study.

3. Findings

The analysis results showed that the respondents mentioned ninety (90) positive and twenty-one (21) negative metaphors, which were categorized and shown in the tables below.

3.1 Positive Metaphors

Provide dates of recruitment and follow-up and the primary sources of the potential subjects, if appropriate. If the dates differ by group, provide the values for each group.

Writing in Turkish: An Enjoyable Task

Response	Explanation
Make-up	Writing in Turkish is so enjoyable that you cannot stop writing.
Poetry	As you write, you want to write more of it.
Solving puzzles	Writing in Turkish is easy, and Turkish is a systematic language.
Internet	Turkish words and expressions are smooth.
Stars	Every word of Turkish has its beauty.
Traveling	As I write, I feel the freedom.
Arabic	It is a beautiful language.
Hobby	You want to write more of it as you write.
Eating dessert	It is like always wanting to eat more sweets: you would like to write more of it.
Serenity	It alleviates your thoughts.
Unsweetened Turkish Coffee	I do love it.
Music	It is a little complicated, yet it is enjoyable.
A river flowing from a spring	My soul rests as I write.
Entertainment	As time passes, you can learn Turkish better and have fun.
Sea	It has no end. It fascinates us.
Star	The spelling of every word shines like a star.
A good book	Turkish is a very expressive and impressive language.
Beautiful expression	The Turkish language is worthy of pleasant expressions.

Tire	Writing in Turkish is funny and flexible.
Friend	It is my best friend who comforts me.
Total Response	**20**

Writing in Turkish: An Improving Task

Response	**Explanation**
New structures	We always need a refresh.
Running water	The more I write, the better and more systematic I become while writing
Walking	Writing is like walking forward; every word is a step forward.
Middle	My passion for writing improves me.
Art	The more you write, the better you get.
Patience	As we do not precisely know how to start a sentence in a new language, we learn the connections in time.
Silent comprehension	It improves due to studying hard.
Flowers in the garden	It is beautiful but thorny, and it is difficult to understand and write.
To grow a bamboo tree	It develops with effort and hard work.
Weight lifting	You have to study indefatigably.
Sword	The more often you use a sword, the sharper it becomes, just like Turkish. The more I write, the better and systematic writing I have.
Finding your way in a forest	If you want to walk in a forest, it is vital to know the pathways and rules of the forest; otherwise, you get lost.
Puzzle	You can write excellent texts by putting the right words together, just like puzzle pieces.
Treasure	The more you reveal, the more you discover.
Eating candy	You feel satisfaction and pleasure as you write; it is like eating candy.
Chess	Writing strengthens the mind.
Mental gymnastics	Many things come to my mind as I write.
Total Response	**17**

Writing in Turkish: An Achievable Task

Response	**Explanation**
Easy question	It is straightforward.
Water	I find it very easy.
Epic	It has deep-rooted origins and easy to understand.
Lego	It is fun and easy.
Easy Arabic	What is meant to be told is said by using different words.
Beauty	It is an ancient language that has deep roots and is easy to understand.
Dried eggplant	It is tough, but until you string it up. Then, you get a complete and satisfying outcome.
Easy question	Turkish and Turkish letters are very easy to learn.
Book	The Turkish language is written as it is spoken.
English	I found it easy because I already had known English.
Solving a problem	Many things come to mind as I write.
Life	It is not difficult or easy; it is in the middle.
Total Response	**12**

Writing in Turkish: A Continuous Task

Response	Explanation
Reading	It improves and develops with continuous practice.
Wind	It is always windy.
TV Series	It goes on and never ends.
Rope	You should know how to connect every word with the previous and following words.
River	What a person writes is like a river; it goes on and on.
Elevator	Writing in Turkish is learned continuously and gradually, and by reducing mistakes.
Exercise	You improve with continuous practice. Healing does not happen overnight and requires persistence and perseverance.
Chain	Each word or sentence must be connected to the previous sentence or word.
Stream	Because the water always flows in a stream, it does not run out, and neither does the language.
Total Response	**9**

Writing in Turkish: An Extensive Task

Response	Explanation
Sky	Because it is extensive.
Poetry	It is comprehensive and rich.
English	It is a rich language.
Sky	It is diverse and unique.
Water	The water does not run out, and neither does the language.
Arabic	It is a comprehensive and rich language.
Total Response	**6**

Writing in Turkish: An Essential Task

Response	Explanation
English	Our life would be difficult without writing.
Hunting	After a hunter hunt a deer, he ties it to prevent his escape. Similarly, you cannot live without writing.
Obligation	I am learning Turkish because I am studying in Turkey.
Total Response	**3**

Writing in Turkish: A Fluent Task

Response	Explanation
Sea	When you start writing, it flows by itself.
Bird	Since Turkish is an agglutinating language, it is possible to write very long sentences.
European languages	It is fluent, and thoughts are effortlessly expressed.
Total Response	**3**

Writing in Turkish: A Tool to Express Emotions

Response	Explanation
Composing	One can easily express their feelings, deepest pains, happiness, or unhappiness by using Turkish words.
Life itself	It is a tool to express oneself, people, life, feelings, thoughts, and visions.
Great power	We can do anything by writing.
Total Response	**3**

Writing in Turkish: The Context of Belonging

Response	Explanation
Homeland	I love Turkish, like the Arabic language, because I chose Turkey as my homeland.
My language	The Turkish language is considered my language.
Total Response	2

Writing in Turkish: A Diverse Task

Response	Explanation
Rainbow	It has borrowed words from all languages and cultures worldwide, including the Ottoman Empire.
Garden	The Turkish language has borrowed flowers from other languages and planted them in its garden.
Total Response	**2**

3.2 Negative Metaphors

Writing in Turkish: A Difficult Task

Response	Explanation
Water	Some vowels are tricky.
Sky	It is hard to accomplish, like reaching the sky.
Reading	It is challenging due to special characters such as ç, ş, ğ, ü.
Unreachable	It is beautiful but thorny like a rose; it is not easy to understand.
Sky	It is not easy to reach.
English	It is too complicated.
Writing in English	I still do not know Turkish grammar well.
A blended yarn	It is very complicated.
Coffee	Letters and pronunciation are difficult.
Elixir	There are many rules.
Hard stuff	The learning method is not very good and effective.
Article	Only educated people can write.
Total Response	**12**

Writing in Turkish: An Unstable Task

Response	Explanation
German	The letters constantly change.
It is like a season.	Affixation varies widely.
French	Turkish syntax is different from Arabic.
English	Turkish sentences include many affixes.
Translating on the internet	It pushes you to choose the right words to write a meaningful article. If you attempt to translate by only using a smartphone, you cannot obtain much information.
A different language	Turkish grammar is diverse and unique from other languages.
Something different	Turkish syntax is different from English syntax.
Torture	You have to think the opposite in Arabic, and there are also many suffixes in Turkish.
Arabic	Turkish has the same letters but slightly different from Arabic.
Total Response	**9**

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

According to the research results, the participants generated 111 valid metaphors for the concept of "writing in Turkish." Of all, 90 were positive, and 21 were negative metaphors. The positive metaphors generated by the

students learning Turkish as a foreign language were categorized, and the categories with the most responses included: "Writing in Turkish: An Enjoyable Task" (n: 20), "Writing in Turkish: An Improving Task" (n: 17), "Writing in Turkish: A Similar Task" (n: 13), and "Writing in Turkish: An Achievable Task" (n: 12). When the 21 negative metaphors were examined, it was seen that the category with the most responses was "Writing in Turkish: A Difficult Task" (n: 12).

When the generated metaphors were examined, it was notable that most of them were "positive metaphors." These results overlap with the findings in the literature. For example, Tiryaki and Demir (2016: 25) found that most participants generated positive metaphors about "writing." It suggests that students' perceptions of writing skills are generally positive, which provides advantageous outcomes that should be used to develop students' writing skills because using metaphors plays a critical role in improving writing skills. In this sense, it can be inferred that the students who learn Turkish as a foreign language perceive writing in Turkish as a joyous task, which creates a good ground for the instructors to teach writing skills.

Several studies in the literature reached similar results. For example, Ulu (2019) determined the metaphor categories generated by the teacher candidates for "writing": *a prerequisite for skill development, improvable skill, providing information/learning, showing individual differences, expressing feelings and thoughts,* and *interrelations with other language skills*. In Bozpolat's (2015) study, the participants generated "writing" metaphors in the categories of "a relaxation tool," "a creative act," "a recording tool," and "a tool to shape emotions." Lüle Mert (2013) determined the "writing" metaphor categories as follows: "writing as a communication tool," "writing as a valuable tool," and "writing as a need."

Metaphor, beyond a figure of speech, is a mechanism that offers alternative ways to grasp knowledge and sometimes produces a unique reality. Metaphors help people compare and recognize the similarities or explain one thing using another (Güneş & Tezcan, 2019: 4). Thus, future studies on the analysis of metaphors that foreign students use for "speaking Turkish" and "reading Turkish" would contribute to the literature.

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