

## Using pictures in teaching metaphorical expressions to Arabic-speaking EFL learners

Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh and Nimra M. Shahzad  
*English Department, Al Ain University, UAE*

This study compares the effectiveness of using pictures to that of using online dictionaries in teaching metaphorical expressions to 50 Arabic-speaking EFL learners studying *English (2)* at Al Ain University in the United Arab Emirates. The study adopts a pre- and post-test experimental design to measure the participants' comprehension of English metaphorical expressions before and after the treatment. To this end, the participants were divided into two treatment groups: Group A (25 participants), which was exposed to the learning material using an overhead projector and pictures; and Group B (25 participants), which was exposed to the material using an online dictionary and matching exercises. A comprehension test that required the participants to provide meanings to the target metaphorical expressions was employed as the pre- and post-test. The results reveal that while both groups improved on the post-test, Group A outperformed Group B as demonstrated by the results of a paired sample t-test. The results also show that all participants found certain types of metaphor particularly challenging, i.e. Type 6, and this is ascribed to the conceptual and linguistic differences between L1 and L2. The study concludes with some recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** Applied linguistics; semantics; second language acquisition; metaphors; pictures; Arabic-speaking EFL learners

### Introduction

Research studies investigating the form and function of metaphor have gained momentum in the last three decades. It has been suggested that the findings of this research have generated implications for second language teaching (see Littlemore, 2005; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Low, 1988; Zibin, 2016a; 2016b among others). Metaphor has also begun to make some headway in being included in the design of curricula (Kellerman, 2001). However, there are still very few courses, at least in the Middle East, which teach metaphor by establishing a connection between language and thought. Metaphors in the Middle East are usually regarded as a property of language disconnected from thought (Zibin, 2016a, 2016b)).

The findings of this study contribute to the pool of teaching methods that can be employed to teach metaphorical expressions to EFL learners, especially those from Arabic-speaking contexts. The method examined here aims to utilise audio-visual methods, namely projecting visual stimuli of the target metaphorical expressions and using online dictionaries, to help students obtain a better understanding of these expressions and, by extension, enable them to produce these expressions in context. This study focuses on metaphors because of the importance of learning metaphors in the target language and their role in enhancing learners' communicative competence (see Charteris-Black, 2002; Zibin, 2016a).

## General background

### Metaphors

Metaphor is an indispensable aspect of peoples' lives and something they cannot live without (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) to the extent that they use metaphor in their native languages without even noticing they do so. As a result, mastering metaphor is an important requirement for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners as it facilitates communication and interaction. In recent years, metaphors have begun to draw considerable attention; numerous research studies have been conducted on different types of figurative language expressions in different languages based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Boers, 2000; Cameron & Deignan, 2006; Charteris-Black & Ennis, 2001; Deignan, Gabrys, & Solska, 1997; Simó, 2011; Zibin, 2016a, 2016b). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth, CMT) was first introduced in 1980 by Lakoff and Johnson. It focuses on the link that metaphor establishes between language and thought. This theory describes metaphor as a link between two conceptual domains, i.e. the source and target domains. These conceptual metaphors are reflected in language through the use of metaphorical expressions. For example, *LIFE* can be conceived of as a *GAMBLING GAME* where *GAMBLING GAME* is the source domain and *LIFE* is the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). A metaphorical expression which reflects the conceptual metaphor *LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME* is "I will take my chances" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Under CMT, in the source domain, unmarked senses are usually expressed, whereas the target domain carries less unusual or marked senses.

Recently, the importance of teaching metaphor to EFL/ESL learners has been more generally acknowledged. For instance, Shokouhi and Isazadeh (2009) explored the use of conceptual and image metaphors in English by Iranian EFL learners. After ten sessions of instruction, students were given 40 metaphors of both types (i.e. conceptual and image). The data elicitation tool included 'word given' and recognition tests. The results did not show much difference in the participants' performance on the two types of metaphor. While Shokouhi and Isazadeh (2009) used a traditional method to teach the target metaphors to the participants, the current study used pictures alongside instruction, since using pictures in teaching new words has proven to be an effective teaching tool (Altakhaine & Hajjo, 2019).

In recent studies, Zibin (2016a, 2016b) examined whether 100 Jordanian EFL learners were able to comprehend and produce English metaphors through the use of a completion test and a production test. She adopted a contrastive model to compare metaphors in English and Jordanian Arabic. Her model was based on that developed by Charteris-Black (2002) for a contrastive study of English and Malay (Table 1). This model divides metaphors into six types for the purposes of cross-linguistic comparison.

Zibin's (2016a) results showed that students faced difficulties with Type 3 and Type 6 metaphors due to the differences in conceptual basis and culture between L1 and L2. Zibin (2016a, pp. 53-54) proposed several pedagogical implications for teaching metaphors. For instance, she suggested that showing students pictures depicting the metaphors could aid the students in comprehending the concepts behind these metaphors. For example, if students were shown a picture of an iceberg, with a substantial proportion hidden under water and only the tip breaking the surface of the water, this might help them understand the metaphorical expression: the *tip of the iceberg*. The current study is driven by this suggestion, and aims to test the effectiveness of this technique in teaching metaphors to Arabic-speaking EFL learners by adopting Zibin's model of metaphor types.

Table 1. Zibin's (2016a, 2016b) model of metaphor types adapted from the model of Charteris-Black (2002)

Type	Description
Type 1	Equivalent conceptual basis and equivalent linguistic form in English and Arabic.
Type 2	Equivalent conceptual basis and similar linguistic form in English and Arabic.
Type 3	Completely different conceptual basis but similar linguistic forms in English and Arabic.
Type 4	Similar conceptual basis in English and Arabic but completely different linguistic or surface forms.
Type 5	Completely different conceptual bases and completely different linguistic expressions in English and Arabic. Nonetheless, metaphorical expressions in this group are transparent because they are readily accessible on the basis of knowledge that is culturally neutral.
Type 6	Completely different conceptual base and completely different linguistic expressions in English and Arabic. Moreover, the metaphorical expressions are opaque in so far as the conceptual basis reflects the encoding of a culture-specific meaning.

### ***Previous studies on the use of technology and pictures in teaching English***

Some studies have been conducted on the use of technological devices and apps, e.g. iPad, computers, mobile phones, Facebook and Twitter to teach various aspects of English language (Altakhaine & Al-Jallad, 2018; Bin Tahir & Aminah, 2014; Yunus, Salehi, Sun, Yen, & Li, 2011; Zibin & Altakhaine, 2019 among others). In particular, new teaching methods through the use of computers have been adopted by many teachers; such methods include the use of social media websites which can be accessed via mobile phones, computers, laptops, and tablets. Yunus et al. (2011) used Facebook to teach writing in L2. They found that Facebook allowed students to learn and interact with each other through reading the comments written by other students in the group. The results also demonstrated that students make fewer mistakes in writing an essay after having discussed the task via Facebook groups.

Bin Tahir and Aminah (2014) found that Facebook can successfully be used to teach university students how to write a narrative text in English. In another study, Kho and Chuah (2015) recommended that ESL/EFL teachers should provide online sources to encourage students' engagement in interactive lessons because their study showed that students acquired new vocabulary from the comments written by their peers in the group.

More recently, Altakhaine and Al-Jallad (2018) compared the use of Facebook and Twitter to determine which would best help Arabic-speaking EFL learners improve their writing skills. The study was conducted using a pre- and post-test which focused on the ability of EFL students to write a descriptive essay. The writing skill of the participants were judged in terms of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The results revealed that although both Facebook and Twitter developed the participants' use of the mechanics of writing in English, students who used Facebook exhibited more improvement than those who used Twitter. The researchers concluded that the use of writing software had an impact on the participants' achievement.

Altakhaine and Hajjo (2019) examined the effect of using pictures to support the teaching of antonyms to EFL learners and compared the results to a more conventional method which does not use pictures. The pictures used in the study included opposing meanings. The study revealed that the use of pictures projected on a board enhanced the

participants' production of English antonyms. Consequently, pictures seemed to help the participants visualize the meaning of words (Altakhaineh & Hajjo, 2019).

It is clear from the above studies that additional work is needed to discover efficient teaching methods to develop L2 learners' knowledge of figurative language in general and metaphor in particular, and the role of pictures and online dictionaries should also be examined. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted to examine the use of pictures to develop the use of metaphor by Arabic-speaking EFL learners. Therefore, the current study aims to bridge this gap by answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of pictures in teaching metaphors to 25 Arabic-speaking EFL learners improve their understanding and appropriate use of these metaphors?
2. Is the performance of 25 Arabic-speaking EFL learners on various types of metaphor relatively the same and why?

## Methodology

### Sample

The participants in the study were 50 Arabic-speaking EFL learners, studying at Al Ain University in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They were second-year students enrolled in the *English 2* course consisting of 42 contact hours, and their mean age was 22. Based on their IELTS test scores, the researchers ensured that the participants' level of English was homogenous; their IELTS test scores were 5.5 or 6.

For the purpose of this study, the participants were divided equally into two treatment groups: Group A and Group B. Both groups were pre-established classes and they were taught by the same instructor. A *t*-test was conducted on both groups' responses to a pre-test to ensure there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups' at the outset (see Table 2). Both groups were taught English metaphors but the treatment was different (see below). Both groups took the same post-test at the end of the treatment.

Table 2. *t*-test results of pre-test for Group A and Group B

Teaching Mode	Mean	SD	df	t value	Sig.
Group A	24.83	9.54	10	0.4135	0.6879
Group B	22.83	7.03			
P > 0.05					

Finally, it is worth pointing out that, in the present writer's experience as Head of English, instructors normally use (online) dictionaries in teaching metaphorical expressions, idioms and collocations. This is because it was observed that the use of (online) dictionaries helps students remember the meanings of the words and expression they look up for a longer time (Peters, 2007). Thus, teaching metaphorical expression using an online dictionary was chosen here to be compared with the use of pictures.

***Treatment***

The same 24 metaphors adapted from Zibin (2016a) were taught to both groups in this study (see Table 3). The treatment involves a difference in the method employed with each group. The researchers explained the metaphors to Group A while displaying pictures depicting the metaphors on an overhead projector. The same metaphors were taught to Group B using online dictionaries without the use of pictures. The students in Group B were asked to look up the meanings of the target metaphors and put them in sentences. These activities took place twice in two weeks. In order to ensure the validity of the results, the two groups were taught another six metaphors (not included in Table 3) as distractors.

Table 3. Types of metaphor tested in this study (adapted from Zibin, 2016a, pp. 46-50)

Type	Metaphors
Type 1	Iron fist, madly in love, blood boil, to put your finger on it
Type 2	My heart skipped a beat, to fight tooth and nail, to fan the flames, at a snail's pace
Type 3	Break a leg, to be in the black, pulling my leg, to get cold feet
Type 4	Gold digger, to add insult to injury, to give someone the cold shoulder, to fall head over heels in love
Type 5	To keep one's your head above water, to live life in the fast lane, to keep one's his nose clean ,the tip of the iceberg
Type 6	Blue blood, Achilles' heel, off the hook, white-collar

***Instrument and procedure***

The test used in this study to elicit data was a 'provide-meaning' test, requiring students to produce metaphors. This test was used as the pre- and post-test. Following the administration of the post-test, the researchers conducted a semi-structured focus group discussion with the participants in both groups, in order to obtain greater insight into their experience during the test and to know whether they found the writing task difficult to complete. According to Denscombe (2010), semi-structured focus-group discussions can enable the researcher to elicit more in-depth information pertaining to the topic under investigation. During such discussions, participants feel more comfortable because the interviewer provides them with the chance to discuss open-ended questions and to steer the conversation more freely (Denscombe, 2010), with researchers having less control over the discussion. This flexibility gave the participants the chance to talk more freely about their experience, comparing their performance on the pre-test and the post-test. During the focus-group discussion, the researchers asked the participants to elaborate on their experience in learning metaphorical expressions through pictures presented on a projector and whether they found these pictures useful in learning metaphors.

***Statistical analysis***

A paired sample t-test was administered to decide whether the differences between the scores of the treatment groups, i.e. Group A and Group B, were statistically significant. In this type of test, the means of two groups are compared to determine whether they

yield differences that are statistically significant (Hsu & Lachenbruch, 2008). In this study, the observations in both samples were paired, and each group was tested twice, yielding two sets of observations (Hsu & Lachenbruch, 2008). The most common applications of paired sample *t*-tests are studies based on pre- and post-analyses. The current study employs pre- and post-tests to examine the effect of the treatment on the performance of the two groups of participants (cf. Ionin & Wexler, 2002), and paired *t*-tests were applied.

## Results and discussion

### *Quantitative analysis*

To provide an answer to the research questions, which are concerned with the extent to which 25 Arabic-speaking EFL learners can benefit from using pictures to learn metaphorical expressions, Tables 4 and 5 detail the results of the correct answers on both tests.

Table 4. Pre-test and post-test results for Group A (overhead projector + pictures)

Type	Metaphors	Pre-test Number of correct answers	Pre-test Total	Post-test Number of correct answers	Post- test Total
Type 1	Iron fist	1	32	20	84
	Madly in love	7		24	
	Blood boil	13		21	
	To put your finger on	11		19	
Type 2	My heart skipped a beat	5	28	21	78
	To fight tooth and nail	5		21	
	To fan the flames	0		16	
	At a snail's pace	18		20	
Type 3	Break a leg	9	31	18	78
	To be in the black	2		21	
	Pulling my leg	4		19	
	To get cold feet	16		20	
Type 4	Gold digger	5	19	20	74
	To add insult to injury	11		18	
	The cold shoulder	3		15	
	To fall head over heels	0		19	
Type 5	To keep your head above water	2	31	19	73
	To live life in the fast lane	0		21	
	To keep his nose clean	14		18	
	Tip of the iceberg	15		20	
Type 6	Blue blood	1	8	19	78
	Achilles' heel	0		20	
	Off the hook	3		18	
	White collar	4		21	
Totals			149		465

Table 5. Pre-test and post-test results for Group B (online dictionary + matching exercises)

Type	Metaphors	Number of correct answers – Pre-test	Pre-test Total	Number of correct answers – Post-test	Post-test Total
Type 1	Iron fist	1	29	12	55
	Madly in love	5		15	
	Blood boil	12		12	
	To put your finger on	11		16	
Type 2	My heart skipped a beat	7	25	14	57
	To fight tooth and nail	4		16	
	To fan the flames	0		10	
	At a snail's pace	14		17	
Type 3	Break a leg	12	28	15	53
	To be in the black	4		15	
	Pulling my leg	1		5	
	To get cold feet	11		18	
Type 4	Gold digger	2	20	12	51
	To add insult to injury	14		16	
	The cold shoulder	3		12	
	To fall head over heels	1		11	
Type 5	To keep your head above water	5	25	17	62
	To live life in the fast lane	0		12	
	To keep his nose clean	10		15	
	Tip of the iceberg	10		18	
Type 6	Blue blood	2	10	13	49
	Achilles' heel	0		11	
	Off the hook	4		13	
	White-collar	4		12	
Totals			137		327

According to Zibin (2016a, 2016b) and Charteris-Black (2002), metaphors are divided into six types. Zibin's (2016a, 2016b) study reported that students typically have the most difficulty in understanding Types 3 and 6. Type 3 includes *break a leg*, *in the black*, *pulling my leg*, and *to get cold feet*. Type 6 includes *blue blood*, *Achilles' heel*, *off the hook*, and *white-collar*. The results of the current study are similar to Zibin's findings (2016a, 2016b) with regard to Type 6. For the rest of the metaphorical types, the results in Tables 4 and 5 concur with Zibin's (2016a, 2016b) findings that students did not face such difficulty in acquiring them.

Comparing the results of Group A (Overhead projector + Pictures) and Group B (Online dictionary + matching exercises), it can be clearly seen that Group A has improved more than Group B on the post-test. Group A (M=77) performed better than Group B (M=54) on all types of metaphors (see Table 6, pair 4). There is a statistically significant difference between Group A and Group B in terms of comprehending metaphorical expressions; the statistical significance (see Table 7, pair 4) is lower than (0.05).

Table 6. Paired samples statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PretestGroupA	24.8333	6	9.53764	3.89373
	PretestGroupB	22.8333	6	7.02614	2.86841
Pair 2	PretestGroupA	24.8333	6	9.53764	3.89373
	PosttestGroupA	77.5000	6	3.88587	1.58640
Pair 3	PretestGroupB	22.8333	6	7.02614	2.86841
	PosttestGroupB	54.5000	6	4.63681	1.89297
Pair 4	PosttestGroupA	77.5000	6	3.88587	1.58640
	PosttestGroupB	54.5000	6	4.63681	1.89297

Table 7. Paired samples test

	Paired Differences						Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t		df
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1*	2.00000	2.96648	1.21106	-1.11313	5.11313	1.651	5	.160
Pair 2	-52.66667	9.58471	3.91294	-62.72520	-42.60813	-13.460	5	.000
Pair 3	-31.66667	5.64506	2.30458	-37.59079	-25.74254	-13.741	5	.000
Pair 4	23.00000	6.69328	2.73252	15.97583	30.02417	8.417	5	.000

\*To see the paired combinations refer to Table 6.

Displaying visuals seems to have encouraged the students in Group A to engage in the group activity to guess the meanings of the metaphors, whereas this was not available to Group B which was taught by using an online dictionary and cross-matching metaphors with their meanings. The use of pictures correlated positively with the number of correct answers, and this resulted in Group A showing greater improvement between the pre-test and the post-test than Group B. The latter group also exhibited improvement in performance but it was less marked than that of Group A. This difference is consistent with the dual coding system (DCT) theory of cognition which accounts for both verbal and nonverbal cognition, showing the importance of pictures in understanding vocabulary (Paivio, 1991). A language has two types of nouns; abstract and concrete. Whilst concrete nouns such as *table*, *tree* and *chair* are readily depicted pictorially, the meaning of abstract nouns such as *love*, *peace*, and *racism* (Paivio, 1991) cannot easily be rendered in the same way (Rumelhart, 1980).



The results of the current study also accord with those of Altakhaine and Hajjo (2019) and Joklová (2009) which have demonstrated that teaching with pictures is useful in many ways. Using pictures not only assists students to visualise language, but it also motivates them and helps them to gain a better understanding of vocabulary items (Joklová, 2009). Wright (1989) noted that the use of pictures has various advantages as a teaching aide including motivation, drawing learners' attention, contextualising otherwise isolated vocabulary items, and giving specific reference to language regardless of age and level of the students.

### ***Most improved items***

This section looks at the 5 metaphors in which participants' performance most improved from pre-test to post-test.

#### *To be in the black*

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), the metaphor *to be in the black* means to be in possession of money so that one is not in debt. If referring to a company, it can also imply the absence of a loss for a company. The Group A session began with an activity in which students were given a list of 24 metaphors. An image was displayed on the overhead projector, and the students were asked to try and guess what the metaphor might be according to the visual prompt. Most participants were not aware of this metaphor because, in the Arab culture, the colour black has negative connotations. It is also a sign of misfortune or death. As the students in the group were not familiar with the language of business and marketing, they were not aware of the metaphor *to be in the black*. They had not had the chance to experience how companies and banks record their profits and debts in the ledger, this being something new for them. This metaphorical expression was chosen because we expected the students to guess its meaning as they are living close to one of the world's biggest business hubs (Dubai). However, our hypothesis was not confirmed given the low score on the pre-test by both groups. Yet, after explaining the meaning of the metaphorical expression accompanied with the image showing that the colour black in business means no debt and the colour red means debt, the students comprehended the meaning of the metaphorical expression and made a distinction between the connotation of the colour *black* in business compared to its connotation in the Arab culture. The number of students who answered this expression correctly in Group A increased from 2 students (8% of the group) on the pre-test to 21 students (84%) on the post-test. In Group B, the number of students who answered correctly increased from four students (16%) on the pre-test to 15 students (60%) on the post-test. This means that the percentage of improvement in Group A is 76%, whereas that in Group B was 44%. As is consistent with the findings discussed above, while Group B's improvement was less impressive than that of Group A. It can be argued that Group A's enhanced performance was due to the use of pictures.

#### *Gold digger*

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), the metaphor *gold digger* means "a woman who forms relationships with men purely to obtain money or gifts". With Group A, we began with an exercise in which we displayed a picture corresponding to the metaphor, allowing the participants to speculate as to the meaning behind the image. As soon as the group was told that the *gold digger* metaphor accompanied that particular

image, an intense discussion ensued centring on the issue of the male chauvinistic overtones of this metaphor. The participants criticized the metaphorical expression to be unfairly stereotypical, anti-feminist and male chauvinistic. The treatment group was interested in knowing several things like why it is the women who dominated in the picture over men in greed for money. They argued about why it could not be men. Their main concern was about why this term addresses women only, and it provoked them to stand in favour of women as they consider it as favouritism to men and anti-feminist expressions. The discussion that took place in the classroom regarding this metaphor had an impact on the students' performance on the post-test. In particular, the results showed that in the pre-test only five students (20%) were aware of the *gold digger* metaphor. In comparison, after teaching students about metaphors and comparing the pre-test to post-test, the results rose to 20 students (80%). During the focus group discussion, participants from Group A indicated that the picture representing the metaphor *gold digger* provoked them and that helped them to remember the meaning of the metaphor in the post-test.

#### *To live life in the fast lane*

The metaphor *to live life in the fast lane* means "to live in a way that is exciting and slightly dangerous" according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019). This metaphor caught Group A students' attention. The picture used to represent the metaphor displayed the left lane of a road, which denotes the fast lane in the UAE. The pre-test results were extremely poor. No one deduced the correct meaning of the metaphor. However, many of the students reported that they managed to guess the correct metaphor as soon as they saw the picture during the activity. Many students had driving licenses, and often drove in the fast lane (literally). In order to understand the meaning of the metaphor, it seems that their minds made a link between the meaning of the metaphor *to live life in the fast lane*, the aspect of danger and the picture of the fast lane. The visual support made it easy for them to imagine and relate the metaphor to the picture. In the post-test, correct answers for this item increased to from 0 to 21 (i.e. 84% of students in Group A had learned this metaphor). In contrast, the correct answers on the same item increased from 0 to 12 (48%). This showed the positive impact of using pictures in teaching.

#### *Achilles' heel*

Achilles' story can be traced back to the Greek myth, which lauds his superhuman strength and his almost immortal nature. According to myth, Achilles' mother would bathe him in the River Styx as a babe, submerging his entire body into the river, holding him only by one of his heels. It was from the River Styx that Achilles' body acquired an invisible armour, making his body impenetrable to any attack, except his heel. Therefore, an arrow that was shot into his heel ultimately killed Achilles. The purpose of this story was to convey a message concluding that no matter how strong a person is he/she will always have a weak point that may bring about his/her downfall. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2019), to *have an Achilles' heel* means to have a small problem or weakness which can however result in a much more significant failure. In the pre-test, not one participant from either group was able to deduce the correct meaning. However, after Group A was taught the metaphor with the use of images, the participants showed a much better understanding of the *Achilles' heel* metaphor. The picture displayed a heel of a person with a small arrow stuck in. The students showed

their interest in knowing what it meant and what the story was about. We told them the story and explained the meaning of the metaphor. The number of correct answers for this metaphor increased from 0 on the pre-test to 20 on the post-test (i.e. 80% of Group A students had learned the meaning of the metaphor). In comparison, the increase in correct answers for Group B was from 0 to 11. This means that 44% of Group B students learned the metaphor which shows that the treatment used with Group A was more successful. During the focus group discussion, the participants in Group A reported that the myth of Achilles sparked their interest helping them to remember the meaning of the metaphor and use it on a daily basis.

### ***Comparison of results of groups***

The results show that both groups performed better on the post-test than on the pre-test. This is to be expected because both groups received teaching on the metaphors. However, the results also show that Group A out-performed Group B on the post-test and that difference in their performances is statistically significant. This was achieved even though the results of the pre-test demonstrate that there was no statistically significant difference in the starting point of the two groups. Thus, it can be deduced that the cause of this performance difference lies in the treatments received by the two groups. The clear difference in the treatment was that Group A were taught using overhead projectors to display visuals intended to engage the students and to encourage them to contribute in the group activity to guess the metaphors, while Group B was taught by using an online dictionary and by cross matching metaphors with their meanings.

The results of this study indicate that teachers and curriculum designers should integrate visual stimulus, especially pictures, when teaching metaphors and other figurative devices.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study has compared the use of pictures and online dictionaries in teaching English metaphorical expressions to 50 Arabic-speaking EFL learners. The results have revealed that Group A (using pictures) outperformed Group B (using online dictionaries) on the post-test as shown by the results of the paired sample t-test. The results also demonstrated Type 6 was the most challenging to the participants of both groups compared to other types. Metaphors are a highly sophisticated form of expression and reflect a high level of language competency. In the current study, the use of pictorial illustration has been shown to enhance the understanding of these expressions. Therefore, using pictures in order to teach such expressions should be integrated into the curriculum, given that it could enhance teaching metaphorical expressions (cf. Shyamlee & Phil., 2012). More attention should definitely be paid to using visual stimuli for teaching metaphorical expressions to Arabic-speaking EFL learners. However, it seems likely that EFL teachers in other contexts should also consider utilising images to enhance students' understanding of metaphorical expressions. Finally, it is also recommended that further studies can investigate the use of pictures for teaching other figurative language devices, such as metonymy (see Zibin & Altakhaineh, 2018).

## Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editor-in-chief of The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics for their useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper. We would also like to thank the participants of Al Ain University. All remaining errors and inaccuracies are, of course, ours alone.

## About the authors

Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh is an assistant professor of English Language and Linguistics at Al Ain University, UAE. He is currently the Head of the English Department. His research interests lie in the areas of morphology, lexical semantics, morphosyntax, applied linguistics, and psycholinguistics. He has published research papers in several journals, including: *Studia Linguistica*, *Lingua*, *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, *Metaphor and the Social World*, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *Research in Language*, *Lingua Posnaniensis*, *Advances in Autism* and *Sage Open*.

Email: [abdelrahman.takhaine@au.ac.ae](mailto:abdelrahman.takhaine@au.ac.ae)

Nimra M. Shahzad is an undergraduate student majoring in English Language Education at Al Ain University, UAE. Her main research interests lie in the areas of applied linguistics and second language acquisition.

## References

- Altakhaineh, A. R. M., & Al-Jallad, M. Z. (2018). The use of Twitter and Facebook in teaching mechanics of writing to Arabic-speaking EFL learners. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 13(9), 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v13i09.8457>
- Altakhaineh, A. R. M., & Hajjo, M. H. (2019). Teaching antonyms to Arabic-speaking EFL learners. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 14(18), 16-27. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v14i18.11198>
- Bin Tahir, S. Z., & Aminah, A. (2014). Improving students' writing skill through Facebook at University of Iqra Buru. In *Proceedings of the ICT for Language Learning conference* (pp. 235-241). Florence, Italy: Libreriauniversitaria.
- Boers, F. (2000). Metaphor awareness and vocabulary retention. *Applied Linguistics*, 21(4), 553-571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/21.4.553>
- Cambridge online dictionary. (2019). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/be-in-the-black>
- Cameron, L., & Deignan, A. (2006). The emergence of metaphor in discourse. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(4), 671-690. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml032>
- Charteris-Black, J. (2002). Second language figurative proficiency: A comparative study of Malay and English. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(1), 104-133. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.1.104>
- Charteris-Black, J., & Ennis, T. (2001). A comparative study of metaphor in Spanish and English financial reporting. *English for Specific Purposes*, 20(3), 249-266. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(00\)00009-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00009-0)
- Deignan, A., Gabrys, D., & Solska, A. (1997). Teaching English metaphors using cross-linguistic awareness-raising activities. *ELT Journal*, 51(4), 352. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/51.4.352>
- Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects* (4th ed.). Maidenhead, England: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.
- Hsu, H., & Lachenbruch, P. A. (2008). Paired *t* test. In R. B. D'Agostino, L. Sullivan, & J. Massaro (Eds.), *Wiley Encyclopedia of Clinical Trials*. Chicago. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780471462422.eoct969>
- Ionin, T., & Wexler, K. (2002). Why is 'is' easier than '-s'? acquisition of tense/agreement morphology by child second language learners of English. *Second Language Research*, 18(2), 95-136. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0267658302sr195oa>
- Joklová, K. (2009). *Using pictures in teaching vocabulary*. (Unpublished Bachelor's Thesis), Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. Retrieved from <https://theses.cz/id/yuesk0/>
- Kellerman, E. (2001). Teaching English metaphors using crosslinguistic awareness raising activities In J. Ceñoz, B. Hufeisen, & U. Jessner (Eds.), *Cross-linguistic Influence in third language acquisition* (pp. 170-191). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Kho, M. G. W., & Chuah, K. M. (2015). *Encouraging ESL discourse exchanges via Facebook: A study on engineering students*. Paper presented at the Technology and Innovation Conference.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Littlemore, J. (2005). Figurative thought and the teaching of languages for specific purposes. In E. Hernández & L. Sierra (Eds.), *Lenguas para fines específicos (VIII): Investigación y enseñanza* (pp. 16-34). Madrid, Spain: Universidad de Alacala.
- Littlemore, J., & Low, G. (2006). Metaphoric competence, second language learning, and communicative language ability. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(2), 268-294. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml004>
- Low, G. D. (1988). On teaching metaphor. *Applied Linguistics*, 9(2), 125-147.
- Paivio, A. (1991). Dual coding theory: Retrospect and current status. *Canadian Journal of Psychology / Revue Canadienne de Psychologie*, 45(3), 255-287. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0084295>
- Peters, E. (2007). Manipulating L2 learners' online dictionary use and its effect on L2 word retention. *Language Learning & Technology*, 11(2), 36.
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1980). Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In R. J. Spiro, B. C. Bruce, & W. F. Brewer (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension* (pp. 33-58). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Shokouhi, H., & Isazadeh, M. (2009). The effect of teaching conceptual and image metaphors to EFL learners. *The Open Applied Linguistics Journal*, 2, 22-31.
- Shyamlee, S. D., & Phil., M. (2012). *Use of technology in English language teaching and learning: An analysis*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Language, Medias and Culture.
- Simó, J. (2011). Metaphors of blood in American English and Hungarian: A cross-linguistic corpus investigation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(12), 2897-2910. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.05.004>
- Wright, A. (1989). *Pictures for language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yunus, M. M., Salehi, H., Sun, C. H., Yen, J. Y. P., & Li, L. K. S. (2011). Using Facebook groups in teaching ESL writing. *Recent Researches in Chemistry, Biology, Environment and Culture*, 75(1), 75-80.
- Zibin, A. (2016a). The comprehension of metaphorical expressions by Jordanian EFL learners. *SAGE Open*, 6(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016643144>
- Zibin, A. (2016b). On the production of metaphors and metonymies by Jordanian EFL learners: acquisition and implications. *Topics in Linguistics*, 17(2), 41-58. <https://doi.org/10.1515/topling-2016-0012>
- Zibin, A., & Altakhaine, A. R. M. (2018). An analysis of Arabic metaphorical and/or metonymical compounds: A cognitive linguistic approach. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 8(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1075/msw.16023.zib>
- Zibin, A., & Altakhaine, A. R. M. (2019). The effect of blended learning on the development of clause combining as an aspect of the acquisition of written discourse by Jordanian learners of English as a foreign language. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 35(2), 256-267. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12327>