

The Impact of Output Communication on EFL Learners' Metaphor Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of output communication on EFL second language metaphor acquisition by preparatory school students. In which, they encounter barriers understanding English texts and lectures when metaphor is involved causing them misunderstand some or even the whole material. To this end, the study will utilize Merrill Swain's 1985 'Comprehensive Output Theory'. The data collection is based on a self-administered questionnaire survey. The questionnaire is divided into three parts: the demographic part that supports a general background of the learners, questions about the learners' output English communication and a collection of metaphoric proverbs followed by four distractors. The questionnaire was administered to 90 Iraqi convenience sampling students at the preparatory stage. Findings showed that the students who practice English language outside the class are more efficient at metaphoric recognition task than those who do not. Those who used the second language more frequently were better than those who practice the second language less frequently. Further, the time of exposure to the second language proved to have an effect on the proficiency level of second language metaphor. This study is significant to those who are concerned in cognitive linguistics and second language acquisition. Moreover, it draws the attention to the effectiveness of output communication in metaphor second language acquisition.

Key words: Metaphor performance, output communication, metaphor comprehension, EFL learners, Iraqi EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Authors believe that the lack of second Language (L2) metaphor competence is the lack of important and big part of L2. This defect usually leads to undesirable outcomes of missing the comprehension of the target language. L2 metaphoric competence is a problematic and challenging issue that has been recurring in many studies (Cunha, 1991; Hoang, 2014). The majority of these studies focus on either production or recognition of metaphor L2 in many facets. However, up to date, there is no study investigates metaphor acquisition through practicing a method to acquire L2 as a whole for acquiring metaphor as specific.

This study investigates the aspect of L2 metaphor competence in relation to output communication in L2. To this end, the study applies the Comprehensive Output Theory (COT) of Swain (1985) as the guide of the study. The rationale for this study is as of the following: the author, being an EFL lecturer and one of EFL society, notices that with controlling the variable of input in EFL L2 learning, students still lack comprehension of many English language contexts especially when facing metaphoric contexts. In addition, this case is not general

for all learners in which there are some individual differences which distinguish one student's English level from another. The justification of the role of COT in metaphor L2 acquisition is that: since metaphor is pervasive in everyday life (Lakoff and Kovecses, 1987) to the extent that a native English speaker might use four different type of figures per minute in discourses. Then acquiring the L2 in itself is the same acquisition of L2 metaphor. And as it is well-known that the EFL learners are facing difficulties to learn English language, mainly because of their remoteness from the contact to practice English in their societies (Khan, 2011). Then, the best method to acquire L2 is through a method that activates the cognitive processing through practicing output communication. In searching about a method that matches such description, then COT fingerprints the need of EFL learners. Thus, with the overcoming stage of SLA, the way to acquire the L2 metaphor will simultaneously be paved to more attainable L2 metaphor competence.

This study aims to identify the effect of output communication of Iraqi EFL learners on L2 metaphor competence. And also to find out the effect of the frequency of exposure (e.g., amount of time) on the level of metaphoric proficiency. In gist, this study attempts to

find answers to the following research question: what effect has the output communication in L2 on the L2 metaphor acquisition? What is the relationship between the time of exposure to output communication in L2 and the level of L2 metaphor competence, if any of EFL learners?

Literature review: After 1985 with the birth of CMT, researchers began to study metaphor in many fields. One field that has been receiving extensive studies is the L2 metaphor acquisition. As an example, Cohan tackled the bilingualism (Punjabi and English) metaphoric proficiency in relation to different factors: length of residence, verbal and nonverbal communication faculty, common competence proficiency and age. The test was a task of recognizing and interpreting a number of metaphoric proverbs in both L1 and L2. He discovered that the respondents have the same proficiency in L1 and L2. Example, the metaphoric reasoning in L2 is significantly related to proficiency in L1. The length of residence was not significantly related while time with increasing age had effects on the changing proficiency in both L1 and L2. In the rest of this section, some recent studies have been recurring which reflect that these fields of study have not yet reached the level of studies' saturation.

Sasaki (2010) investigated the difficulties of non-native speakers in comprehending metaphoric expressions. His method was direct observation in an American classroom of International students. The outcome of the study was that, non-native speakers had difficulties in understanding metaphors. And the reason behind that was that their instructors were not aware of their own usage of metaphoric language and without reflecting the metaphors to the class. Doiz and Elizari (2013) made an experiment of the first year baccalaureate EFL students in Spain by distributing them handouts with metaphor tasks. The test yielded the conclusion that Spanish EFL students needed awareness of approaching the conceptual metaphor underlining L1 to memorize vocabulary with similar conceptual metaphor in L2. The researcher of the current study recognizes that the findings of this study match the findings of Danesi who stresses that figurative language helps in overcoming the difficulty of memorizing vocabularies in L2. Az-Zuwar (2010) investigated the problematic area of Iraqi EFL learners in recognizing and comprehending metaphoric reports particularly in political reports. The comparison was between two groups of respondents. The test was done by providing both groups with varied report handouts. The respondents with high academic ranks of professors scored higher than those with less academic ranks. He also declared other findings concerning the EFL

learners' difficulties at metaphoric tasks such as: metaphoric comprehension not being easy task even for the English native speakers (as he sent the same test for native lecturers to be responded on). In which they are able to understand metaphors but cannot identify them. Also, metaphors of short, simple sentences are easier for the non-native learners to be recognized and comprehended. In addition, the linguistic knowledge of the learners has crucial effective role in helping the recognition and comprehension of metaphors. His last finding is that metaphor is used not only in poetic language but also in politics to achieve some purposes as being effective in that particular range. In evaluating this findings, the researcher of the current study concludes that the understanding of the figurative of L2 is a challenging issue because as Imran asserts, different ethnic groups of cultures tend to manifest certain conceptual metaphorisations in particular ethnocentric aspects. And this means that the cognitions of EFL learners are already culturally constructed automatically to concepts associated to their cultures. To have a closer view on the issue of conceptual metaphors, the following sections, offer a brief overview.

Conceptual metaphor theory: A revolutionary change in the area of metaphor occurs after the publication of the book, 'Metaphors We Live By' by Lakoff and Kovecses (1987) which shifts metaphor from its narrow traditional ground to the new ground of cognitive sciences. Accordingly, metaphors are not limited to rhetorical devices otherwise, they are basic to the thought, speech and action. In addition, metaphor cannot be avoided or because of its 'pervasiveness' in everyday life. In which people use metaphor to reason matters and make sense of different perspectives.

Lakoff and Kovecses (1987) refer to the metaphor's essence as the comprehending and experiencing of a certain thing in terms of another. Thus, metaphor goes further than the area of words and linguistic expressions to the area of abstract concepts and thinking. For example, Lakoff (1987) uses the sentence "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" to explain the conceptual mapping of human's mind in terms of metaphor. As he explains, it is not unusual to think of meanings other than the meaning of each single word of this sentence. The normal unconscious process that is activated in minds is that they search for matching attributes between the words LIFE and JOURNEY. To analyze further the relationship between that source domain journey and the target domain life is as the following: Everyday people move anywhere there is a place where they start, a place where they end up at and there is a direction. Such image-schema contributes to the

mapping system of conceptual metaphors. Thus, the concept of journey has matching attributes with the term life. As in a journey, life has a starting point which is a birth to end with death. Also, after times of difficulties, people carry on with their lives. Accordingly, in such mapping people can compare life with a journey and conceive one domain in terms of another domain. The example shows the faculty of cognitive phenomenon of metaphor which is fundamentally conceptual in nature and sources from people's experiences in everyday life.

Uniqueness of CMT over classical metaphor: After 1985's development as a result of the contribution of Lakoff and Kovecses (2006), metaphor becomes a controversial phenomenon which draws scholars' attentions in a number of different fields. To mention some: philosophy, linguistics, cognitive sciences and many other fields. Thus, the area of metaphor is widely circulated in most of sciences. The reason behind this controversy about the theory is that it touches most of the sciences and gives explanations to numerous sciences that the classic theory of metaphor is not open to. Hence, it is valuable to know briefly the basic principles that differentiate CMT from the traditional metaphor that stem from Aristotle up to CMT as of the following:

- Metaphor is a cognitive process
- Metaphor is mainly a result of human bodily and social experience
- Metaphor is pervasive in thought, language and it is conventional
- Metaphor has a systematic structure.

Types of conceptual metaphor: Conceptual metaphors are classified into three types which are: structural metaphors, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor.

Structural metaphor: is the formulation of one concept (as in TIME in the above example) in terms of another domain (as in MONEY). Further explanation is given by Kovecses (2010) who defines structural metaphors as the process where the source domain offers a comparatively rich knowledgeable structure to the target domain.

Oriental metaphor: This type of metaphor is relatively different from the two other types of conceptual metaphor in that it does not depend on a structure of one concept in terms of another concept, otherwise it gives a spatial orientation to another concept which is not spatial domain (Lakoff and Kovecses, 1987). For instance: I am feeling down today which indicates the meaning 'I am tired'.

Ontological metaphor: Kovecses (2006) links this type of metaphor to the physical world that gives opportunities for the ontological metaphors to be extensively utilized. And consequently, it supports people with a wide range of conceptualization involving: ideas, activities, events, emotions and many others. An example when people view ideas, activities, events and the like in terms of substances in the following example: are you going to be in the race next week? The word 'race' in this example is given the shape of a container which sources from everyday life experiences.

Comprehensive Output Theory (COT): Originally, output is used to communicate meaning regardless of its function in SLA via creating the situation where learners practice language which in turn facilitates automatization of the target language usage. The output functions massively in methodology when measuring the outcomes of different kinds of treatments or learning in SLA studies. (Anderson, 1982; 1992). Swain (1985) points out that output has an outstanding role in drawing the learners' attention towards the form of L2. In which when learners face difficulties in expressing meaningful messages, they become 'aware' of the problem in their interlanguage (IL).

This processes can direct their attention towards output forms and consequently to their IL in search for ways to use their existing linguistic resources of the L2 to find solution to those problems (Swain, 1985; 1993; 1995). By evaluating the series that occur in such successive activities and the result of each stage in this series, one can decide that the role of output should not be understated in the domain of learning. Thus, it is of high value to dig deeper into the chronological development of this theory and its effects on learning process. The following sections shed light on the contribution and developing the role of output theory in the field of SLA.

The beginning and development of COT in SLA: The beginning of the role of output in SLA was in 1985 when Swain declared that, despite years of access to comprehensible input in L2, learners still lagged behind their native speaker peers. Her conclusion was that input alone may not score successful in language learning and output is the crucial element in reaching a desirable result in both SLA pedagogy and theory. According to the theory when a learner encounters difficulty in producing outputs, he or she may become aware of the shortcoming of their input which exposes the learners to two choices: they either abandon the communication of their message or they may try using a more syntactic analysis of his or

her IL. Swain (1985; 1993; 1995) points out that when pushing to a greater syntactic analysis, learners reformulate their output and also consolidate their existing knowledge of the L2. This process of consolidating knowledge includes recombining structures via applying rules to result in realizations in L2. In other words, consolidation may cause in triggering the cognitive processes to activate new linguistic knowledge in the linguistic input of learners. The consideration of the existing knowledge in L2 learning is also confirmed by Bot (1996) who indicated that the existing knowledge is consolidated as a result of noticing problems in the output which contributes to creating a greater automaticity of the already existing knowledge.

Then, the output enhances learners' awareness to recognize defects in their linguistic structure and this directs their attention to input in a way that stimulates SLA. This process was named a "sudden moment of insight" by Rumelhart and Norman. In this process, learners test their existing knowledge with the new form of input. Consequently, the learners make adjustments of their existing knowledge and thus, learning occurs gradually over time. All in all, the combination of the above mentioned processes results in modification of the IL in the short term and over time. Swain (1985) declares that these gradual modifications and changes contribute to a greater 'automatization' to the learners' knowledge in L2 in the longer term which is the outcome of a collection of short terms of output processes. Hence, automatization is an important element that can free the learners' attention to acquire new higher features of L2 and that supports more opportunities to restructure their IL (Bot, 1996).

Attention and awareness: As Swain (1985) refers, attention is the crucial element in the relationship between output and input that leads to orient awareness to certain problems in the input. This relationship has specific sequences. It begins with attention to output that strikes the awareness to indicate that some forms are needed to be involved in the input forms, followed by the attention to search for those needed forms. Finally, in the case that the needed forms exist in the input, then the learner may distinguish and use them in the future output contexts. The concept of awareness is also controversial which leads scholars to produce different definitions for this term. From those scholars are Schmidt (1990, 1995) and Bialystok (1994) who discuss awareness in relation to consciousness, noticing the gap and second language learning. According to Bialystok the way to awareness is attention of psychological reality. Thus, it is the attention that is responsible for bringing something to the

awareness. They proceed in adding that using a rule is not the same as knowing a rule in which the former means to be aware while the later does not have this function. For Schmidt (1990, 1995) and Robinson (1995), awareness, which they sometimes refer to as 'conscious awareness,' is the critical factor in noticing the gap, that is a specific type of attention claiming to be necessary for SLA.

Swain has borrowed the term "noticing the gap" from Schmidt's (1990). It plays a great role in SLA through orienting the attention towards input to be modified and adjusted with L2. All these successive processes lead to the benefits of the learners' IL a step further development over time of output exposure.

In summing up the literature, comprehensive output theory has been discussed from many sides such as: learners' linguistic production and consolidation of the learners existing knowledge, the role of output communication in altering attention to L2 forms online production, output in written forms (Izumi, 2002), the role of output communication in altering attention to L2 forms online production in written forms and the role of output communication in altering attention to L2 forms online production in oral/aural communication (Izumi and Izumi, 2004). Thus, to the researcher's knowledge, this is another clue which asserts that, from the angle of COT, the study of metaphor acquisition is still untrodden. Moreover, this study deals with the EFL learners of the Arabian countries whose mother languages and English belong to distinct language families that have not submitted to similar study. The rational link between COT and SLA is that: since the best method to acquire L2 is through output communication, and since L2 is full of figurative elements, then acquiring L2 is the metaphor acquisition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is quantitative of a survey design. The items of methodology are explained below as:

Participants: The subjects of this study consist of 90 students at the high preparatory schools of Baghdad in Iraq. Their ages range between 16-18. All the students have been studying English for almost 8 years among other subjects that have been taught in Arabic. In Iraq, pupils used to learn English at the 5th year primary school. They are required to pass ministerial examinations three times during primary and secondary stages. They are mainly exposed to English language through their classes and some of them would use the internet and other communication means to practice English language as it is the main mean of communication. The textbooks that they have been submitting during school stages are

that, after the year of 2007, the Iraqi government tries to improve the level of students' proficiency in English with more communicative approach textbooks for all stages of schools. The title of the series is 'Iraq Opportunities' which is adopted by many Arab countries. This series is promising if it is followed seriously and accurately as it involves a wide variety of activities in real life situations. In which these textbooks shift learners from being passive receivers to active participants. They are taught by teacher-staff who graduated from colleges of education in the last 4 years period majoring in English language.

Data collection procedure: After direct interviews and enquiries from the author to those learners about their low level in English language, the answers vary to match into three groups: those who are active and comprehend English contexts are practicing, English language outside the class; those who are less active and are able to comprehend English contexts but less than the first group who are practicing English language outside the class less frequently than the first group. The third group is passive and inadequate in L2 who complains that it does not have the opportunity to practice English language in its society. The conclusion of their weakness in English language in general and in metaphoric L2 comprehension in particular seem to have relationship with Swain's theory of output communication. In which the output communication in L2 can make difference in L2 competence level and it concurs as Swain refers, the variable time of exposure.

The data collections began with obtaining a formal permission from the Iraqi Ministry of Education on Monday, January 4, 2016. Then the researcher was allowed to apply the test with the help of a trained agent within one month involving the pilot study. The convenient sampling was adopted with 90 respondents out of 120 respondents. They are at the first, second and third preparatory stages between the ages of 16-18. The researcher selected 30 students at each stage and further classified male and female in equal number (e.g., 15). With such classification, the researcher ensures that all the stages at the preparatory schools were involved with equal matching varieties. While for the pilot study, 50 respondents were selected. Those students voluntarily participated in the study as the researcher declared that the test was optional. The 25 min was suitable time for them to finish the task since the biggest part of the questionnaire was multiple choice questions. The researcher explained the task to the students and was ready to answer any enquiry from them but in a way that did not affect the test's results.

Instrument: In order to answer the research question of this study, questionnaires were distributed to the high preparatory schools. The questionnaire comprises three parts: which is demographic that gives a general background about the participant which asks about the time of using English language in real situations that matches the comprehensive output theory. Moreover, it involves questions which are also derived from the COT. Most of the questions are designed according to Likert 5 points scale as being most accurate than other number divisions. Involves 30 English metaphoric proverbs which is adapted from a previous study. Each proverb is followed by four sentences which give different meanings to the proverbs, while there is only one correct meaning. The other three sentences act as distractors to ensure the responders' ability in guessing the correct metaphoric meaning for each proverb. The correct answer will be given one mark while the incorrect will be given zero. The decision of failure or success will follow the same scale that is dependable in Iraq. It is determined by the Iraqi law of educational system in 1977. In which the highest mark is 100. The lowest mark for passing any examination is 50% (e.g., 49% is fail). So, in Iraqi primary and secondary schools, there are no grades like that of the university stages, e.g., average good, very good and excellent. Accordingly, the researcher will mark the results out of 30 marks but then use some equation to transform it in terms of 100 marks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Validity and reliability: The questionnaire was tested for both validity and reliability. Content and face validity were assessed by a panel of experts. One professor is in Malaysia and five are in Iraq. All of them have PhD and one of them is a professor. Their major is in the target area of the study. The instrument was discussed from different angles like this: are the meanings and the wordings of the distractors in the multiple option questions leading or facilitating arbitrary guessing? Are the proverbs too difficult to be interpreted to the extent that they might be difficult even for an advanced person in English language who can comprehend metaphor in actual English contexts? So, the questionnaire was modified according to their suggestions. The meetings with each expert involves not less than three rounds at different days, till they were satisfied with the final form. Only then the researcher was able to obtain their signatures on the

Table 1: Reliability test of pilot study

Variables	Crombach α	No. of items
Output	0.700	5
Time	0.720	4

Table 2: Time with EMP

EMP	Time
Group 1	0.868 (0.000)
Group 2	0.228 (0.030)
Group 3	0.096 (0.367)

revised copy of the questionnaire and in a separate table all together for the ethics of the study. While the reliable analysis was achieved by computing the Cronbach's α Table 1 shows that the items result in acceptable reliability according to Cronbach α a ranging from 0.700-0.720, which points out that the acceptable value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.70 or above for instruments to be considered reliable. Thus, there were no need to modify any of the items.

Data analysis: The data analysis is done in SPSS Software because it handles my data perfectly. And the following tables show the results' analysis. Table 2 shows the comparison of direct relationship between independent variable (time) and dependent variable (English metaphor performance) between 3 groups. Liner regression analysis was used to test the direct effect.

And it shows that group 1 spends more time and has high beta vale (0.868) with highly significant effect on English metaphor performance. On the other hand group 2 spends less time and has low beta vale (0.228) with less significant effect on English metaphor performance.

Finally, Table 2 also shows that group 3 spends no time and has very low beta vale (0.096) with no significant effect on English metaphor performance.

Table 3 shows the comparison of direct relationship between independent variable (output theory) and dependent variable (English metaphor performance) between 3 groups. Liner regression analysis was used to test the direct effect. And it shows that group 1 spends more time and has high output communication with beta vale (0.763) and highly significant effect on English metaphor performance. On the other hand group 2 spends less time and has low output theory with beta vale (0.064) and no significant effect on English metaphor performance. Finally, it also shows that group 3 spends no time and has no output communication with negative beta vale (-0.032) with no significant effect on English metaphor performance.

Table 4 shows the comparison of moderation effect of (time) between the independent variable (time) and dependent variable (English metaphor performance) between 3 groups. Moderation analysis was used to test the moderator effect and the moderation analysis technique recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was

Table 3: Output communication with EMP

EMP	Output communication
Group 1	0.763 (0.000)
Group 2	0.064 (0.564)
Group 3	-0.032 (0.765)

Table 4: Moderation effective

EMP	Output theory×Time
Group 1	0.644 (0.031)
Group 2	0.074 (0.902)
Group 3	0.490 (0.423)

used. Independent and the moderator variables were entered in the step 1. In the step 2, the interaction term of independent and moderator variable (OPT×T) was entered. It shows that group 1 had high moderation effect due to spend more time spent between output communication in L2 and English metaphor performance with beta vale (0.644) and highly significant effect. On the other hand group 2 had no moderation effect due to spend less time between output theory and English metaphor performance with beta vale (0.074) and no significant effect. Table 4 also shows that group 3 spent no time and had no moderation effect between output communication in L2 and English metaphor performance with negative beta vale (0.490) and no significant effect. The data analysis also shows that 28% of the respondents do not communicate in English outside the class and most of them are females (19%). And 72% communicate in English mostly online but the time of communication differs among respondents.

CONCLUSION

There are two main objectives of this study which are: to investigate the effect of the output communication in L2 in relation to L2 metaphoric competence through identifying the correct meaning of metaphoric proverbs. And secondly to measure the effect of the time exposure to L2 via output communication on the level of L2 metaphoric proficiency. From example, does the longer time exposure to L2 results in better metaphoric proficiency? The findings showed that the learners who practice L2 most extensively in some L2 context of communication perform better at metaphoric tasks than those who communicate in less time. And in turn, although the relation is not significant, those who communicate in L2 even relatively short time can perform at L2 metaphoric tasks better than those who do not communicate at all. In this context, the time variable appears to be a significant moderator in relation to performance. In such case, there is a match between the quantitative findings and Swain theory. The study indicated that metaphoric performance is not an easy task

especially for non-native speakers. The ideal standard rule in EFL countries is that the input is the tidy-smart way to SLA. While in reality, acquiring L2 and consequently the metaphors of that target language, require real life situation for practicing L2. The study indicates that the longer the time a learner communicates in L2 the better he or she becomes in L2 in general and in L2 metaphoric competence in particular. Conclusively, output helps to acquire the metaphors of L2 and that comes inconcordance with the time of exposure to output communication in L2.

IMPLICATION

The researcher asks himself that if he was one of the readers, then what questions he would ask? So, the following questions are the most expected: How could the interlocutor's level of English proficiency effect the learner's SLA in the process of output communication? In other words who is the interlocutor that the EFL learner communicate with? Is he an English native speaker or peer learner? The answer to this question is that, the COT of Swain (1985) is primarily concerned with sending information (e.g., the learner himself/herself exercises the output) and not receiving information. In which receiving information is the area of 'input' that Swain (Ibid) expresses an objection to. Through what medium of communication (written or spoken) the learners of this study have been using? Swain sees no relevant difference between the spoken or written methods of output. And producing output, either in oral or written form, leads to paying attention to the means of expression that are needed to successfully convey his or her intended meaning" (1985).

Is the written or spoken output of the learners done synchronically or asynchronously? The Russian Education and Society agency (2004) differentiates between the synchronous and asynchronous communication. A synchronous communication includes the exchange of messages that takes place in real time while the participants are present at the time of communication. For example; face to face, telephone conversation, instant messaging and conference call. While the asynchronous communication is when a communication occurs with a considerable amount of time passage between sending a message and receiving a reply processes. Examples are, text messaging over cell phones, e-mail etc. So, the answer for the above question is that, it is out of the context of the swain's COT. Consequently, it is not the concern of this study but for those who want to know it is linked with the study of Perez (2003) who compared between the two channels with EFL Spanish learners. The results were that there were no significant differences between the two modes. However, a higher

number of learning was produced in the chatroom discussions than in the email messages.

What is the significance of the frequency of exposure to output communication in this study? As Swain (1995) refers, the more the opportunities for learners to produce meaningful language output, the better their language proficiency will be. Accordingly, time is a moderator variable that moderates the relationship between the independent variable (output) and dependent variable (performance in L2) that increases or decreases the relationship between them.

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