

Iraqi EFL University Students' Awareness of Metonymy

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Abstract

The present work is about metonymy as one of the lexical relations which exists between words on one aspect, and as a problematic area for students of English on the other. Hence it aims at measuring the students' proficiency in using metonymy and identifying the types of errors and their sources in recognizing and producing metonymic concepts. To achieve these goals, the study has hypothesized that most Iraqi EFL students face difficulties in using them. Then, a test has been planned on a sample of (50) Iraqi EFL university students at the Fourth Year, Department of English, College of Education, University of Kufa during the academic year (2014-2015). The results obtained from collecting and analyzing the students' performance confirm that the students encounter serious difficulty in this area. This clear from the number of their correct responses in comparison with their incorrect ones. Key words: Lexical Relation; Metonymy; Test; Data Analysis

Introduction - \

1-1 The Problem

It is a well-known fact that language is a very natural means of communication through which people convey thoughts, ideas, notions ..etc. via words. As a part of language, meaning covers a variety of aspects of language. Sometimes, the meaning is conveyed through words in a non-literal or unusual sense in order to give or add profound meaning or to create a particular effect. Hence, the current work tries to shed light on one of the lexical relations which exists between words, i.e., metonymy. As far as students of English are concerned, it is expected that most of Iraqi university students tend to show inefficiency in using metonymy and they seem unable to use the suitable expressions for the appropriate situations. In addition, they may hardly differentiate between various types of metonymy.

1-2 The Aims

The study aims basically at:

- 1- Presenting theoretical background about metonymy.
- 2- Investigating the students' ability in recognizing and producing such a concept.
- 3- Finding out the types of the students' errors and their sources.

1-3 The Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

- 1- Most Iraqi EFL students encounter great difficulty in using metonymies.
- 2- Such students are unable to specify the various types of metonymy.

1-4 The Procedures

To validate the hypotheses, the following procedures are to be followed:

- 1- Presenting material about metonymy with its features and its salient types .
- 2- Applying a test on a sample of college students to achieve the objectives of the study.
- 3- Analyzing the students' errors through the results.

1-5 The Limit

The current study is limited to:

- 1- Fourth Year Students at the Department of English, College of Education University of Kufa during the academic year 2014-2015 as the most qualified students.
- 2- Introducing only one type of lexical relationships, i.e. metonymy.

1- 6 The Significance

The findings of the study are hoped to be of some value to the teachers, students and textbook designers.

2- Metonymy in English

2-1 Lexical Relations

The lexical relations are the semantic relationships which appear in sets of words from which a choice has to be made by the speaker or writer. Depending on the intended meaning and factors (such as a style), the choice constitutes the relations of meaning (Greenbaum 1996 : 424). In semantics, the correspondences between lexical items of similar, opposed etc ., meanings are referred to as sense relation and classified under the relations of meaning as Crystal (2003 :410) views , or the relations of affinity and contrast among words as Aarts and McMahon (2006:55) point out.

Another relevant point is suggested by Cruse (2006 : 95) who states that lexical semantics is the study of meaning related-properties of words. Exactly what is included in the field is likely to vary from linguist to

linguist, but the central topic includes: how best to specify the meaning of a word.

For Yule (2006 : 104), words cannot only be treated as containers of

meanings or as fulfilling roles in everyday talks, but they also can have relationships with each other. Hence, the meaning of each word is characterized, not only in terms of its component features, but also in terms of its relationship to other words. Accordingly, this approach is used in semantic description of language and treated as the analysis of lexical relations.

In this respect, Riemer (2010:136) realizes that knowing the expression's meaning does not simply involve knowing its definition . In addition to knowing a word's definitional meaning, a competent speaker knows how it relates to other words of language. Clearly, the lexical relations are those relations which determine the choice of one lexical item over another in the construction of any utterance. He (ibid.) adds that one of the principal task of lexical semantics is describing and accounting for these relations.

Lyons (1977 : 240 - 41) and Cruse (2006 : 95) describe two major relations among lexical items to determine their semantic value in a given context . These different relations are : **paradigmatic** and **syntagmatic** relations of meaning. The first relations hold among words of the same distributional class such as **synonymy** (same meaning as with *couch* and *sofa*), **antonymy**(opposite meaning as with and) and **hyponymy** (the meaning of one word is included of another, as with *boy* and *child*)whereas the second relations of meaning reflect the process of meaning extension, such as **metaphor** (the similarity between two kinds of experience) and **metonymy** which is the concern of the present study (ibid.)

2-2 Metonymy: Definition

Williams (1975: 188) confirms that metonymy is a usual term used to refer to the semantic relation which exists when the name of an attribute shifts to a name of what it is adjust to : **king** = **crown** and when a part represents a whole or a whole a part : **tyre**= **bicycle**; **worker** = **hand**.

According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980 : 38), the idea of metonymy is a non-literal language use in which one entity refers to another that is associated with it in some way. Metonymies are rarely isolated and unrelated to each other. In other words, metonymic conceptions allow people to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else.

For Thatcher (1981 : 532) & Evans (1981:33), the concept metonymy is a word or phrase which denotes change by which one word is put for another on account of some actual relation between the things signified.

1- We read Virgil.

That is his poems or writings and the "Bench" for the magistrates or judges sitting in a court.

Similarly, Guralnik (1982 : 895) asserts that the metonymy is a word or phrase used as a substitute for that of another associated with or suggested by it for special effect and does not carry its usual or literal meaning. For example : " the **White House**" for "the **President**."

Related to this point, Leech (1991 : 152- 3) admits that metonymy is a figure of speech that consists in using all the rules of transference including that of metaphor since similarity is a form of association. However, in practice metonymy is treated as residual category including all varieties of transference.

Furthermore, Brandford (1997 : 26-7) clarifies that the notion metonymy is a logical way of description in which the comparison is founded upon actual, verifiable relation between objects of impression:

crown is used instead of **king , queen or royalty**. For him, metonymy establishes a balanced relationship between the use of language and conventional perceptions of reality.

It is again Finch (2003 : 235) & Crystal (2003 : 291) who also observe that

metonymy is a figurative language used in semantics and stylistics in which the name of a referent is placed by the name of something suggested by it .

For example : **the bottle** is used instead of **the drinking liquid**). (See also Cruse 2006 :108)

In this area, Wehmeier (2004 : 803) looks at metonymy as the act of referring to something by the name of the object that is directly connected with it or that it literally denotes, for example, using the word **head** to denote the **person** who is the owner of the head.

Simpson (2004: 43) sees that metonymy is an important trope through which the conceptual transfer in both literary and everyday language is carried out and it involves transpositions between associated concepts and this commonly results in transfer between its different patterns such as the part and whole, a producer and produced, an institution and its location and so on. Thus, metonymy upgrades certain noticeable characteristics from a single domain to represent that domain as a whole : **a hired hand = a worker**.

Traditional accounts of metonymy define it in terms of person, object or aspect referred to using the vehicle a word whose denotation is somehow pertinently related. For example:

2- All hands are on deck.

The vehicle names the contextually significant aspect of the referent : the **sailors' hands** (Griffiths, 2006 : 85).

Yule (2006 : 108) says that metonymy is a type of relationship between words based on a close connection in everyday language. That close connection may be based on a container- contained relation (**can / juice**), or a symbol relation (**her heart / her love**). He (*ibid.*) adds that although many examples of metonymy are highly conventionalized and easy to interpret, other examples depend on the listener ability to infer what the speaker has in his / her mind. Making sense of metonymic expressions often depends on context, background knowledge and inference.

In short, Matthew (2007 : 244) claims that metonymy is a word or expression normally or strictly used to refer to something physically otherwise associated with it, e.g. 'the **Pentagon**' (strictly a building) when used for the military inhabiting it. However, in the most general sense, metonymy is any figure based on contiguity, i.e. closeness of association.

To conclude, as a form of association, metonymy is one of the basic characteristics of cognition. So it is very common for people to take one well- understood or easy to realize aspect of something and use that aspect to represent either the thing as a whole or for some other aspect or part of it for the purpose of making inference or judgment (web 1).

2-3 Characteristics of Metonymy

Metonymy has several characteristics which set it apart from other lexical relations. First, Lakoff & Jonson (1980 : 38) claim that sometimes the meaning of the utterances and sentences cannot be understood literally. Thus, metonymic concepts need to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else to be interpreted and such interpretation would lead to anomaly. For example:

3- The ham sandwich is waiting to pay his bill.

This means the customer who ordered the sandwich.

A second characteristics is that the structure of metonymic concepts resembles not just our language but our thoughts, attitudes and actions. Therefore, metonymic concepts are grounded in our daily language. In general, the grounding is obvious since it usually involves direct physical or casual association (*ibid.*).

A third feature about the notion metonymy is that although no meaning relation can be said to be totally without significance, metonymy seems to be quite frequent and recurs in a number of pairs or

sets of related lexical units. Some of the metonymic concepts like the part / whole : (**blood** = **person**) are part of the ordinary, everyday way by which people think, speak and act (Cruse, 1987: 49).

Metonymy involves only one conceptual aspect or part of an experience to stand for the whole of that experience: (**Spielberg** = **a film**). As a result, it plays an important role in the technique of caricature which is a form of a metonymic distortion, much favoured by humorists, which involves the distortion of some aspects of human appearance, such that the exaggerated body part assumes sufficient prominence to symbolize the whole being (Simpson, 2004: 43).

A another property for metonymy is expressed by Cruse (2006: 108) who says that what distinguishes a metonymic use of an expression is the relationship between its figurative meaning and literal meaning. Metonymic changes typically involve contiguity- a shift in meaning from one thing to another that is present in the context : **his breath** = **his life**. This means that metonymy needs a relation of association and does not rely on a relation of resemblance or analogy.

As a matter of fact, in metonymy, the kinds of associations between entities that allow us to refer to one entity by means of another via metonymy are principled and not arbitrary . For example:

4- The buses are on strike today.

This means the services / drivers. This fact shows that metonymies are highly

structured and not random or haphazard but they are very systematic (Hurford et. al., 2007 : 339- 40).

The last point related to the characteristics of metonymy is that metonymic concepts serve double purposes. They add flavor to the writing and break up any awkwardness of repeating the same phrase over and over and change the wording to make the sentences more interesting (Web 2).

2-4 kinds of Metonymy

Various linguists specify different metonymic patterns. Some of them are suggested by Lakoff & Johnson (1980 : 38-9) who list the more popular and salient ones :

- **The Part for the Whole Relation:** The part of something refers to the whole of something else.
5. The giants need a **strong arm** in right field.(= strong person)
 6. We fill up the **car**. (= fuel tank)
- **The Place of the Event Relation:** The place stands for an event associated with it.

7. Let's not let Thailand become another **Vietnam**. (= the war)
 8. **Watergate** was an important scandal in American politics.(=the scandal)
 - **Object used for User Relation:** The object stands for the user.
 9. The **sax** has the flu today. (= the musician)
 10. The **gun** he hired wanted 50grand. (= the guard)
 - **The Place for the Institution Relation:** A location name refers to a representation of the standard referent.
 11. **Hollywood** keeps putting out mediocre movies. (= U. S. film industry)
 12. **Washington** is intensive to the needs of people. (= U. S. Government)
 - **Producer for Product Relation:** The producer stands for the product.
 13. He bought a **Ford**.(= a car manufacturing company)
 - 14- He has got a **Picasso** in his den. (= a painting by Picasso)
 - **Controller for Controlled Relation:** The controller stands for the controlled.
 15. **Nixon** bombed Hanoi.(= the commander / air force)
 16. **Napoleon** lost at Waterloo. (ibid.)
 - **Institution for People Responsible Relation:** The name of the institution refers to any person or organization associated with it.
 17. The army needs many new soldiers.(= organization)
 18. You'll never get the **university** to agree to that.
 - **The Face for the Person Relation: The face stands for a person.**
 19. She's just another **face**. (= person)
 20. We need some new **faces** around here. (ibid.)
- In this context, Richard et. al. , (1987 : 105) propose a simple classification of metonymy in which new other possibilities are not adopted by other scholars which are :
- Profession - Means Relation:
 - 21.1 live on my pen.(= by writing)
 - 22. My Tyson lives on **his gloves**.(= by boxing)
 - Material - Object Made of It Relation:
 - 23. All our **glass** is kept in the cupboard. (= the objects made of glass)
 - 24. You can get our **gold** in the upper drawer. (= jewelry made of gold)
 - Container- Contained Relation:
 - 25- The **kettle** is boiling.(= the water)

26- As the teacher entered, **the class** stands up. (= the students)
(ibid.)

To sum up , the examples above reveal that there are many other types

of relations which may serve as a basis for metonymy. The patterns are based on the relation that (X via Y means that the entity X referred to using an expression that normally refers to Y(Cruse, 2006:108).

2 -5 Metonymy and Metaphor

What is important to note is that there are striking similarities and dissimilarities between these two concepts. As noted by Lakoff & Johnson (1980 : 39) that metonymic concepts are systematic in nature in the same way that metaphoric concepts are. They are highly structured, and rule governed. As metaphoric concepts, metonymic concepts structure our language and are grounded in our experience. But, in fact, the grounding of metonymic concepts is in general more clear than the grounding of metaphoric concepts, because it usually requires association.

Another point of similarity is suggested by Cruse (2006 : 106) who looks at metaphor and metonymy as two closely related terms. They have been considered as varieties of figurative (i.e. non literal) use of language. This means that the literal meaning is intended in using these figures and what characterizes that metaphorical or metonymical use of an expression is the relationship between its figurative meaning and its literal meaning.

In contrast with metaphoric concepts, metonymic concepts require a relation of association (i.e. simple contiguous relations) between objects whereas metaphoric concepts rely on a relation of resemblances or analogy (i.e. similarity) (ibid.).

Another point of dissimilarity is that conceptual metaphors involve a single domain or concept. The purpose of metonymy is to provide mental access to domain through a part of the same domain (or vice versa) or to a part of a domain through another part in the same domain. Thus, metonymy, unlike metaphor, is a "stand for" relation (i.e. a part stands for the whole or part stands for another part) within a single domain. On the contrary, metaphors involve two different conceptual domains. They are known as the target domain and the source domain. That is, one word or thing is used to refer to something different from its literal meaning, so that one idea is linked to a

different idea (Gibbs, 2008: 381).

3- Test and Data Analysis

As far as testing is concerned , Wehmeier (2004 : 1342) remarks that the notion test is an examination of the learners' knowledge or proficiency consisting of questions for them to answer or activities to be carried out to find something out. With Elder and Davies (2004: 765) a test is a process of gathering information or a means of drawing inferences about test- takers from their performance. This is done in order to predict the test- takers' ability to cope with the demands for which the test is made.

As Brown (2004 : 3) comments that a test, in simple terms, is a set of techniques, procedures, or items that requires performance on the part of the test takers so as to measure what is intended to measure.

Based on the information above, a diagnostic test is carried out to assess the achievement of the sample of the study which consists of (50) students of the fourth academic year (2014-2015) / Department of English / College of Education / University of Kufa. The test is of two questions, the first one deals with measuring the students' skill at the recognition level, it comprises ten items. The highest percentage of the correct responses is (82%) in item (9).

Broadly speaking, this result explains that the students are aware to answer this item properly as they get many occasions to deal with the situations used this item, whereas the lowest percentage of the correct responses is (10%) in item (7). This low percentage reflects the students' unconsciousness since they choose the irrelevant answers. This can be seen in Table (1) below.

Table (1)
The Students' Achievement in Question (1) : the Recognition Level

<i>No. of Items</i>	<i>No. of Correct Items</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Items</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	10	20	40	80
2	14	28	36	72
3	7	14	43	86
4	7	14	43	86
5	9	18	41	82
6	9	18	41	82
7	5	10	45	90
8	21	24	29	58
9	41	82	9	18
10	35	70	15	30
Total	158	31.6 %	342	68.4%

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The following points are concluded from the table above :

The total number of the correct responses is (158, 31.6 %).

The total number of the incorrect responses is (342, 68.4 %).

It has become obvious that the students have failed to give the right responses for the items of this question since the total number of the incorrect responses is (342, 68.4 %) which is greater than that of the correct ones (158,31.6 %). This result reveals the students' inability and inefficiency at the recognition level due to the limited exposure of language use.

The second question is put to measure the students' ability at the production level, it is also of ten items. The highest percentage of the correct responses is (36%) in item (10), whereas the lowest percentage of the correct items is (4%) in items (8) and (9).

Actually, these two low percentage of the items related to this question expose the students' inadequacy in dealing with these items as they are incompetent in producing them. This can be seen in Table

Table (2)

The Students' Achievement in Question(2) : the Production Level

<i>No. of Items</i>	<i>No. of Correct Items</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Items</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
1	8	16	42	84	
2	4	8	46	92	
3	14	28	36	72	
4	12	24	38	76	
5	14	28	36	72	
6	8	16	42	84	
7	10	20	40	80	
8	2	4	48	96	
9	2	4	48	96	
10	18	36	32	64	
<i>Total</i>	92	18.4 %	408	81.6%	

Table (2) illustrates the following results :

The total number of the correct responses is (92, 18.4 %).

The total number of the incorrect responses is (408, 81.6 %).

From these results, it can be affirmed that the students show real weakness in their use for the items of this question since the total number of the right responses constitutes (92, 18.4 %), whereas that of the incorrect responses constitutes (408, 81.6 %). This result reveals the students' incompetence and deficiency in producing the different types of metonymy as they lack the necessary skill to deal with such structures. From the highest rates of the students' incorrect responses as shown in

Table (1) and (2), we can infer that the students face real difficulty in mastering metonymy at both levels, however, they encounter more difficulty at the production level since the total number of their incorrect responses at the production level is greater than that of their incorrect responses at the recognition one.

Considering the types of errors made by the largest number of the students are: incorrect choice of metonymy, wrong arrangement of sentences, no use punctuation marks, failure to give the right metonymy in grammatical sentences and giving no responses.

Concerning the causes of such errors, Corder (1973 : 290) suggests that the identification of the exact source of errors committed by the students cannot be precise. This means that an error may be ascribed to more than one source of error. To account for particular errors made by the learners, there is a large area of uncertainty and speculation.

Hence, in this study the sources of the students' errors can be divided into: interlingual transfer which is the negative influence of the native language on the performance of the students; intralingual transfer which may be attributed to some strategies such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rules restriction; context of learning which reflects the negative influence of learning elements such as the teacher, the classroom and the materials and communication strategies such as guessing, approximation and avoidance.

4 -Conclusions

The study has yielded the following :

- 1- The findings of this study proved that most of Iraqi EFL students face difficulty at the recognition level as they are unable to choose the relevant answers correctly and to specify the types of metonymy.
- 2- Such students seem to be unaware of metonymies and their different kinds in the sense that they did not know how to give metonymies in certain situations. In addition, they are incapable of distinguishing between them, that is, they cannot use the appropriate expressions for the suitable situations.
- 3- It is worth observing that the students' erroneous responses may be caused by using the rules of the first language or ignoring of rule restriction or insufficient application and practice or giving no emphasis to some aspects of the second language and neglecting others. One or more than one of these reasons may be ascribed to cause the errors made by the students.

ملخص البحث

لقد كرس هذا البحث لتناول احد تعابير اللغة الانكليزية وهي الكناية كواحدة من انواع العلاقات بين الكلمات من جانب وبيان كونها احد التراكيب التي يواجه الطلبة صعوبة في تعلمها من جانب اخر. لذلك تهدف الدراسة الى تقويم اداء الطلبة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الانكليزية في استعمال هذه التعابير علاوة على اكتشاف اخطائهم واسبا بها على مستوي التمييز والانتاج. ولتحقيق اهداف الدراسة صمم الباحث اختبارا تشخيصيا ونفذه على عينة من خمسين طالب وطالبة من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة / قسم اللغة الانكليزية / كلية التربية / جامعة الكوفة. وبعد جمع البيانات وتحليلها اظهرت النتائج صعوبة فعلية ليس فقط في تمييز انواع الكناية بل كذلك في استعمال تلك التراكيب وذلك في ضوء نسبة الاجابات الخاطئة مقارنة مع نسبة الاجابات الصحيحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : علاقة المفردات، الكناية، الاختبار، تحليل البيانات

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- **Appendix 1**

The Test

Q1: From the list of metonymies given below, label the most suitable type of metonymy for the underlined word(s).

(a. part for the whole / b. place for the event / c. place for institution / d. object used for user / e. producer for product / f. controller for controlled / g. institution for people responsible / h. face for person / i. container - contained / j. material - object made of it).

- 1- The kettle is boiling.
- 2- Have you read Shakespeare ?
- 3- I have got a new set of wheels.
- 4- The guitar has got a headache today.
- 5- You will never get the university to agree to that.
- 6- All our glass is kept in the cupboard.
- 7- Hollywood keeps putting our mediocre moves.
- 8- Let's not let Iraq become another Vietnam.
- 9- He has a pretty face .

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10- The young singer controls the hearts of the audience.

Q2: In each of the following sentences, give the metonymy of the underlined word (s).

- 11- The guard he hired wanted 500 \$.
- 12- As the teacher entered, the students stand up.
- 13- Hitler lost the last battle .
- 14- The U. S. President is not saying anything.
- 15- My tyre got a puncture .
- 16- The armed force bombed Hanoi.
- 17- We have got new workers in the organization.
- 18- You can get our jewelry in the upper drawer.
- 19- This is not a painting by Picasso.
- 20- It is nice to see a familiar person.

Appendix 2
The Possible Answers

Q1:

- 1- i- Container- Contained
- 2- e- Producer- product
- 3- a- The part for the whole
- 4- d- Object used for user
- 5- g- Institution for people responsible
- 6- j- Material- object made of it
- 7- c- The place for the institution
- 8- b- The place for the event
- 9- h- The face for the person
- 10- f- Controller-controlled

Q2:

- 1- The gun he hired wanted 500 \$.
- 2- As the teacher entered, the class stands up.
- 3- Hitler lost Waterloo .
- 4- The White House is not saying anything.
- 5- My bicycle got a puncture .
- 6- Nixon / The commander bombed Hanoi.
- 7- We have got new blood in the organization.
- 8- You can get our gold in the upper drawer.
- 9- This is not a Picasso.
- 10- It is nice to see a familiar face.