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USING METAPHOR IN EFL CLASSROOM TO ENHANCE WRITING SKILLS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study discusses the effects of using metaphor in the development of writing skill as well as find out the challenges learners may face, then propose the suitable suggestions to boost metaphoric awareness and competence in learning English. The writer conducted two measuring instruments: pro- and pre-test for two groups (control and experimental) to examine the effectiveness of using metaphor in writing; two questionnaires to measure the attitude of the students towards using metaphor in writing that was conducted basing on a 5 point Likert-scale. The study's participants were 30 English major students at Hanoi Law University. The findings from the study showed that learners with the instruction from teachers on metaphor in songs when writing tended to get the better scores than the other ones. However, they also showed that although it is important to learn metaphor, a lot of challenges still maintain. The paper hopefully helps learners have new insight into aspects of figurative language studies and pedagogical applications.

Keywords: metaphor, metaphoric competence, metaphoric awareness, conceptual metaphor.

Introduction

Foreign language learners have more convenient conditions to practice the new language in a multi-cultural context in which learners are exposed to diverse authentic English uses. That the opportunities in the communication of multi-language community increases merges more challenges for learners to acquire the figurative language which is different from the literal language. Glucksberg, (2001) manifests that one of the most noticeable challenges is learning and using figurative language, whose intended meaning does not coincide with the literal meanings of the words and sentences used. As a result, a second language learner needs to master metaphor to obtain foreign language proficiency. Although the metaphor is one of the important figurative aspects of language, it is not easy to catch its meaning and use it exactly in each particular context. Lakoff & Johnson, (1980) define that figurative language can be approached from two perspectives: stylistic and cognitive one in which the writers focus on meaning and thought through the conceptual metaphor. In the consideration between language and thought, metaphor is considered as “powerful tools for our conceptualization of

the world” (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006, p. 114). To acquire what the writers want to imply in the words, readers need to go beyond the existed language in their mind which helps them to understand the context properly and more deeply. Therefore, it is vital to instruct learners to be aware of figurative language properly, with the concern about semantic transformation, rather than learn words by heart and remember fixed forms mechanically (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2006). A large number of educators and researchers have taken interest into exploring awareness-raising methods in which theory of conceptual metaphor in Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) has already brought about beneficial effects on L2 learners’ awareness, as well as raising the understanding about theory and classroom practice in learning figurative expressions.

Several writing experts have proposed using metaphors for writing. Metaphor spreads so widely and commonly in spoken and written English that it is important for learners to accumulate metaphor awareness and so, they can enhance the ability to tackle the problems and challenges in learning and understanding figurative language (Cooper, 1999). Especially, at the advanced level, English major students have more chances to use metaphor in their writing, which is considered as a short step in a process to language competence.

It can be said that the world we live and work in gets around metaphor. In other words, metaphor is permeating into everyday life, language, thought and action “metaphors are something one lives through” (Kjeldsen, 2009, p.245). According to Jakobson (2003), figurative language proved its pervasive power through its presence in every field from art, to ordinary life. Metaphor, which is traditionally believed to be associated with literary or poetic language, is also an ideal new land in the music world for musicians and the language learners to discover. Metaphor is a wonderful device for musicians to compose love songs through which learners can discover a lot of amazing things and inspire passion for language learning process. Nowhere can learners take interest in metaphors as much as in songs and poems which create a lot of emotion and motivation. It is music that easily touches the soul and interest of listeners so teaching metaphor through songs will be the suitable teaching activity for learners of English. By teaching students how to use metaphor in writing, we can lead them to unleash their creativity and imagination. Metaphor can also be effective in training learners in abstract thought as well as familiarizing them early with literary skills they will need later. The pervasiveness of metaphor in all aspects of language prompt people to study and research more to achieve linguistic proficiency. The present study aims to investigate the importance, challenges, and effects of using metaphor in writing skill; learning strategies on their development of metaphoric competence. The following two research questions will be addressed:

1. To what extent do the metaphoric instructions affect English major students’ writing skill?
2. What are the students’ attitudes towards using metaphor in writing?

Conceptual metaphor

Seen from the cognitive approach, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claimed that metaphor is “not just a matter of language, but a matter of thought” (1980, p7). This was instantiated through how we live and communicate. These writers

considered language as an “indicator of the nature of our conceptual system”, and metaphor features what and how we are aware of and interact with the world around us. The term ‘conceptual metaphor’ appeared in order to distinguish with metaphor from stylistic perspective. Often we treat it only as a stylistic device which features each field such as the metaphors of politics, economy, music with, but in essence, metaphorical expressions express the way of human thinking and reasoning. Metaphor is a way of understanding a concept and according to Lakoff and Johnson, meaning and truth depend on the understanding of human. Truth is not objective, but depends on context; it relies on a human thinker. Thus, metaphor structures what we perceive as truth. Kövecses believes that metaphor involves using one conceptual domain to understand another conceptual domain (Kövecses, 2002, p4). Cognitive Linguistics give prominence to human cognition with the metaphorical thinking which is available in communication.

Metaphor awareness

Metaphor shed a light into using cognitive language flexibly and creatively. However, to approach nearer the metaphoric competence, students must go through a metaphor awareness process. Metaphor awareness is regarded as understanding of the knowledge related to metaphorical theory. Boers (2004) gave some benefits learners can get when obtaining metaphor awareness such as the ability to: recognize the importance of metaphor in daily life, clarify source and target domains of conceptual metaphors, find out the cultural identity and boost intercultural awareness, recognize the cross-linguistic variation metaphors (p. 211). Seen from Boers’s theory, metaphor is not only a specific stylistic device in some certain fields, but also a common cognitive linguistic form occurring in daily life with clearly identifying source domains. More importantly, learners must increase their knowledge of culture to realize the cross-cultural differences and linguistic variation in both conceptual and linguistic metaphor in their L2. According to Boers (2000), to raise metaphoric awareness, there should be a plenty of activities for students to involve in, including inquiring students about theoretical metaphor such as: concepts, features and domains, asking students to explain metaphorical themes based on experience, letting students clarify individual idiomatic expressions, and taking a notice of historical-cultural backgrounds to distinguish cross-cultural differences in the students’ first and second language. Kalyuga & M. Kalyuga, 2008 asserted that knowledge of conceptual metaphor contributes to the speedy success of learning and boost the retention of polysemantic and idiomatic expressions in a second language. Moreover, metaphor awareness plays an important role in raising autonomy and problem-solving skills. As a result, in every situation and context, students themselves can deduce the meanings of metaphorical expressions (Kalyuga & M. Kalyuga, 2008, p. 252). Last but not least, metaphor awareness is imperative to identify and comprehend new metaphorical expressions in the L2, and it is also a basic step to move to the higher standard in practicing metaphor- metaphoric competence.

Metaphoric competence

To achieve the proficiency in using the second language, beside metaphor awareness, metaphoric competence is a dispensable factor. According to Low, (1988), metaphoric competence is the ability to accurately interpret and utilize metaphors. He also recommended a variety of metaphoric competence raising skills, including the ability to form possible meanings, to raise knowledge common metaphorical expressions, to realize metaphorical topics and vehicle combinations, to interpret and utilize hedges, to increase awareness of ‘socially sensitive’ metaphors, to recognize multi-layer metaphors, and interactive awareness of metaphor. Littlemore & Low, (2006a) pointed out the correlation between person’s “associative fluency,” the ability to make a wide range of connections and “metaphor fluency” or metaphoric competence. Thanks to the metaphor competence, language learner can enhance their reasoning and critical thinking skills in which one thing will be understood in a variety of concepts and by a number of ways. From this, in each situation or when facing the problems of interpreting meaning, learners promptly come up with the various ideas and think of multiple source domains and multiple interpretations for a particular metaphorical expression. As a result, learner can easily approach the language competence. Littlemore and Low (2006a, p. 56)) revealed the difficulties and challenges that learners can be confronted, concluding the source and target domain analogies, cultural knowledge, intuition and activation of relevant networks of features to arrive at a correct interpretation. In short, in learning a foreign language, it is important to improve L2 metaphor awareness focusing on knowledge of metaphor and metaphor competence related to recognizing skills, comprehending skills, analyzing ability and appropriate interpretation.

Teaching metaphor for writing skill

In the previous studies, There was a consensus researchers pointed out that increasing metaphor competence in using figurative language in writing has been correlated to increasing fluency and proficiency in a second language. In a research of Littlemore, Krennmayr, Turner, and Turner (2014) by examining two hundred essays written by English language learners for Cambridge ESOL examinations, they assumed that proficient L2 writers could utilize a variety of metaphors in their writing. In addition, metaphor were applied in their writing to increase the sophisticated functions. Furthermore, Nacey (2013) manifested the challenges in using novel metaphor, of which non-native speakers faced was mostly the language error. Furthermore, according to Kathpalia and Carmel (2011), cross-cultural competence has an effect on metaphor competence. The misunderstanding in inter-cultural communication causes inaccurate interpretation toward the metaphors in their writing. Finally, for learner to be easier to gain the metaphor competence, MacArthur (2010) recommended incorporation step into writing instruction process. They should be assigned to write on similar abstract topics, and revising the knowledge of metaphor elements from source domain language relevant to the target domain. A number of metaphor awareness-enhancing activities are recommended by MacArthur (2010) for learners when writing, such as discussing the transfer of metaphor in L1, practicing using the user-friendly metalinguistic terms, consulting large electronic corpora not

depending on bilingual dictionaries too much. Littlemore and Low (2006a, p. 203) suggested that students must be shown how to “use figurative language creatively, appropriately, and, at times, persuasively” in writing. This helps to enhance students writing ability and strengthen their writing in an impressive and persuasive way. In short, it is necessary for EFL students make use of appropriate metaphorical expressions into their writing.

These findings indicated that using metaphor partly has a good effect on writing skill of students despite the mistakes and problems they faced. As a result of fact, teachers somehow introduced metaphor in writing course to increase the figurativeness and diversity in students’ papers. However the effectiveness of this application depended much on the different factors such as language competence, cultural knowledge, and time for practice.

Method

The current study was conducted in a mixed approach in which the data were collected quantitatively. The study was open in the aim of investigating the benefits and challenges and effects of using metaphor in writing, then find out some strategies to support this.

Participants

The study was carried out in a writing classroom with 30 English major seniors at Hanoi Law University whose English proficiency was at the intermediate to high-intermediate level. They were joining in the writing 3 class in the first semester of the third year

Data Collection Instruments

Participants’ Essays

The students in two groups were asked to write two essays about 300 words with the same topic in which the draft essay or pre-test was written according to the students’ own opinion without any interference from teacher and the final essay or pro-test of control group was revised at home and handed in teacher after a week meanwhile the post- essay was revised and submitted under the teacher’s instruction on metaphors in some songs teacher provided.

Questionnaire

Participants were delivered three questionnaires with a variety of items related to benefits, challenges, and frequency of using metaphor in writing. 30 questionnaire sheets collected from students were properly answered, among the rest, some had missing items. The questionnaires were designed on a five-point rating scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Procedures

The paper conducted an experiment in the process of writing 3 course. In this course, students are asked to practice writing complete essays with different types such as narrative, description, opinion. When writing an opinion essay sample, the instructor asked the students of two groups to write an essay on the same topic “what is your opinion about student love at university?” After submitting the first draft, the students in the experimental group were supplied with the knowledge of metaphor: definitions of conceptual metaphor, metaphoric mappings from source domains to target domains. Above 25 quotes cited from the famous love songs in

the late 20th century are introduced to the class as metaphoric examples with the explanation from the teacher to help students figure out metaphoric expressions of love and imagine how “love” is understood in poems and songs. The teacher instructed students to read and complete some handouts including the tasks related to metaphor such as identifying metaphor in several songs and poems and to circle the idiomatic expressions used in them and explain the metaphorical expressions basing on the teacher’s instruction. After that, students themselves were suggested brainstorming the images of love and idiomatic expressions in their own mind. At that time, students had to clarify metaphoric mappings for the metaphoric expressions of love such as love is a journey, love is fire, love is a concrete thing, etc. The handouts were collected back to the instructor to check after the students completed the exercise. At the end of the period, the students in EG were told to revise their first draft at home and were assigned to create as many metaphoric expressions as possible. They submitted both the original and the revised essays a week later. Meanwhile, the students in the control group were also asked to rewrite the essay at home without any instruction on metaphor from teachers. The essays were then analyzed and scored by the instructor to assess how the students used metaphoric expressions and to measure the effects of using in writing. Both students’ pre-tests and post-tests were graded under 5 evaluation criteria namely task fulfillment, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation, using a 10-point scale to assess the students’ writing performance.

Finding and Discussion

Effects of using metaphor instructions in writing.

To answer the first research question, the writer found the results of the essays of two groups. The results of pre-test and post-test of the control class were analyzed then compared and summarized in Table 1 as follows:

Pre-test and post-test of the control group

Table 1: The comparison between CG students’ pre-test and post-test

	Pre-test			Post-test		
Control group	Number	Mean	STdev	Number	Mean	STdev
	15	6.25	0.767	15	6.5	0.863
p-value		0.078				

In this subsection, the results of the pre-test and post-test of the control group were analyzed and compared to find whether rewriting at home impacted writing ability for students. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean score of the post-test was 6.5 (out of 10) that is higher than 6.25 of the pre-test. It was easy to calculate that the decline in the mean score between the post-test and pre-test was 0.25, which implied that there was a little improvement in the writing of the control class after rewriting at home. Also, the result of the paired-samples T-test showed that the critical value of p for a two-tailed test and there was a significant difference in the results of the post-test and pre-test with p-value (0.078) is higher than 0.05.

These findings have proved that rewriting the second essay has very little impacts on writing ability for students without using metaphor.

Experimental Group students' pre-test and post-test results

Table 2: The comparison between EG students' pre-test and post-test results

	Pre-test			Post-test		
	N	Mean	STdev	N	Mean	STdev
Experimental Group	15	6.0	0.702	15	7.25	0.658
p-value		0.000				

In this subsection, the results of the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group were analyzed and compared to find whether that revising at home with the using metaphor in paper has impacts on writing ability for students. The table 4 indicated that there was a significant improvement in writing performance between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. Specifically, the mean score of the post-test rose noticeably from 6.0 to 7.25 points in comparison with that of the pre-test. Furthermore, the p-value between the post-test and pre-test was 0.000 that is much smaller than 0.05, which means that the difference between the post-test and pre-test results reached a statistically significant level. These findings have proved that using metaphor has a significant impact on students' writing ability.

Test results between the pre-tests of control and experimental classes

The results of the pre-test and post-test of the two classes were analyzed and compared by using Independent-samples T-test to reconfirm the starting point in the performance in the pre-test of the two classes before the experiment; and to find the effectiveness of using metaphor in writing of the experimental class compared with that of the control class after the intervention. Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics as well as the comparison of the pre-tests of both groups.

Table 3: Comparison of the pre-tests of both groups

	Pre- test		
	Number	Mean	Steve
Control group	20	6.25	0.767
Experimental Group	20	6.0	0.702
P-value		0.403	

It can be clearly seen from Table 3, the mean scores of the EG students and CG students in the pre-test are 6.0 and 6.25 (out of 10) respectively. The Independent-samples T-test shows p-value 0.403 that is higher than 0.05. This means there is a similarity between the mean scores of both groups. These findings indicated that there is no significant difference in the results of the pre-tests between the CG and EG. It has been implied that before the intervention of treatment, students of the CG and EG were at a similar level of writing skill. Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, the standard deviation (SD) of EG is 0.702 while that of CG is 0.767, which means that the scores of EG students were more various than those of CG students.

Descriptive statistics of post-test of both groups

Table 4. Comparison of the post-tests of both group

	Number	Post- test	
		Mean	Steve
Control Group	20	6.5	0.863
Experimental Group	20	7.25	0.658
P-value		0.007	
SMD		0.869	

Table 4 shows a remarkable difference in the mean scores of the post-tests between EG and CG. From the table above it can be seen that the mean scores of the EG students (7.25 out of 10) are higher than those of CG (6.5). Also, the Independent-samples T-test shows that p-value is 0.007 that is smaller than 0.05. These values indicate that the difference between the two groups reached a statistical significance. Also, with SMD ($0.7 < 0.869 < 0.9$), based on Cohen's d effect size we can see that the treatment has a great effect on practice writing of the students. It could be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference in writing between the two groups in using metaphor. In other words, what could be inferred from the findings above at the end of the intervention is that both the experimental group and control group showed the progress in their writing but the improvement of the EG students who received the treatment of metaphor application was greater than the CG students.

Students' attitudes towards using metaphor in songs in writing

To answer the second research question, the writer collected the data and showed them in figure 1, 2, and table 5.

Figure 1 describes the frequency of using metaphor in writing from participants. 20 % of respondents replied that they do not use metaphor in writing. 40% responded "seldom," while 33% of students said that metaphor is sometimes used in writing and only 7% considered metaphor as a type of frequent figurative language in writing classroom. It can be seen from the data that although these students are the intermediate or upper-intermediate English major seniors, few metaphors are used in their writing frequently. Even, the number of students "never used" counts up to 20%.

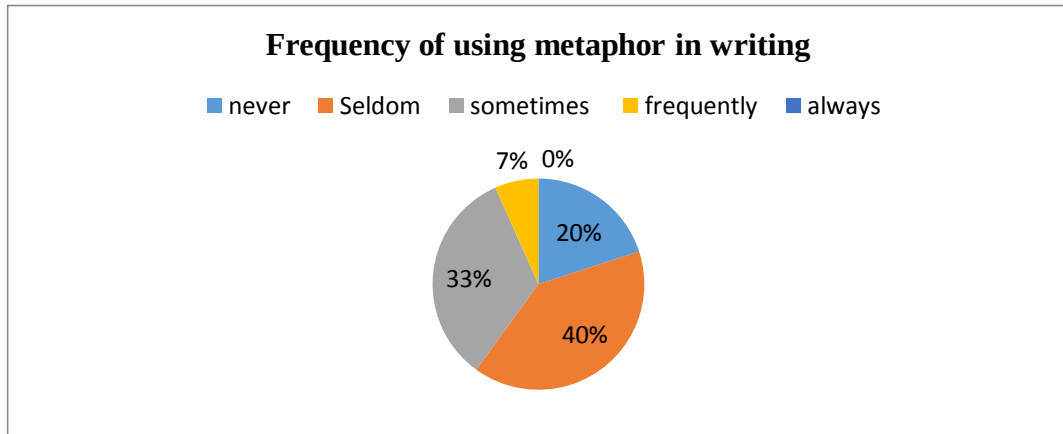


Figure 1: Frequency of using metaphor in writing.

Benefits of Using Metaphor in Writing

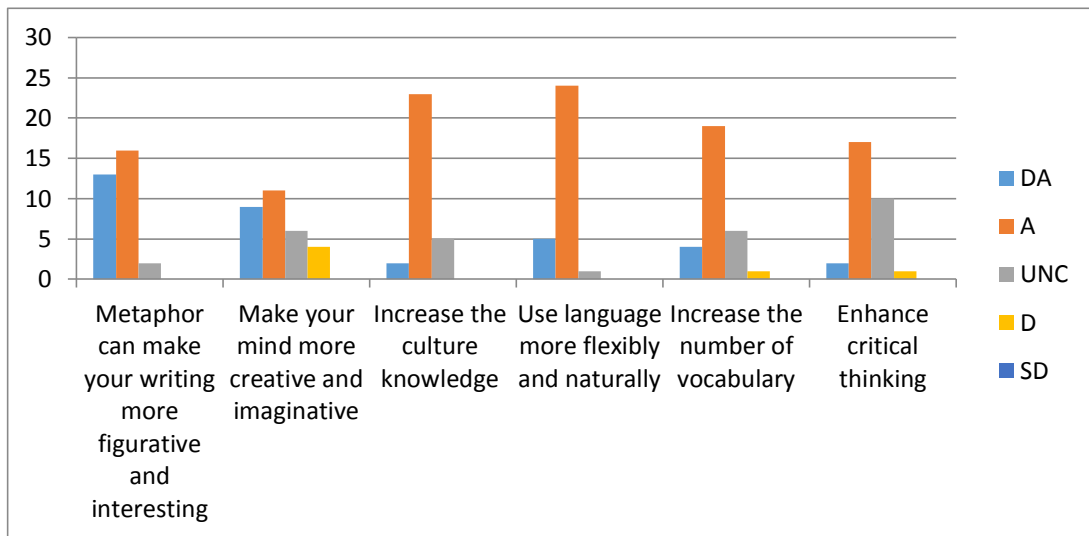


Figure 2: Benefits of using metaphor in writing.

It can be seen from Figure 2 that the respondents took a high interest in expressing their views and perceptions towards the benefits of using metaphor in writing. Most of the students agreed that using metaphor in writing brings about a lot of significances supporting them in their learning. Related to the performance of students in classroom with using metaphor in writing, the data shows that more than half of the students agreed and strong agreed that using metaphor in writing can make your writing more figurative and interesting, make your mind more creative and imaginative, increase the cultural knowledge, use language more flexibly and naturally, increase the number of vocabulary and enhance critical thinking while 2%, 0% or lower reveal their disagreements with those statements.

Challenges of using metaphor in writing

Table 5: Challenges of using metaphor in writing

Challenges	SA	A	UD	DA	SD
					A
Little understanding of words meanings	5	6	15	4	0
Lack of familiar metaphorical expressions in their L2	10	17	3	0	0
Difference in variation for different conceptual metaphors preferred	7	20	2	1	0
Variation of the similar metaphor of different languages	6	12	4	4	0
Lack of vocabulary to use metaphor	7	15	7	1	0
Differences in culture lead to misunderstanding	9	15	6	0	0
Lack of cultural knowledge to interpret metaphor	8	17	6	0	0
Individuals' creative skill, imagination or ideas	5	6	15	4	0

The data above shows that most students encounter the challenges in using metaphor in which the vocabulary, culture and preference problems take majority with 23, 25, 27 students. Most of the students agreed that they have these difficulties in using and learning metaphor. This can explain the reason why students do not use it frequently.

Intending to investigate the effects of using metaphor in writing and the writer conducted experimental tests namely pre-test and post-test. The findings from data shows that The score of pre-test and post-test of each group (post-test > pre-test) revealed that there is an increase in writing ability of students when they had time to rewrite the essay at home and especially with the instructions on metaphor in songs from teacher, the students of experimental group had a significant increase in score. These findings indicated that using figurative language in writing had a certain effect on the result of essays. These findings go in line with the results of the previous studies on the effect of using metaphor in writing by different researchers, MacArthur (2010), Turner (2014) and Boers (2000). In addition, it is clear from the data that the results of pre-test of control and experimental group are similar but after applying the new treatment, the score of post-test of experimental was higher than the one of the control group. This means there was a remarkable increase in the writing performance of experimental students. In short, these findings are a clear answer to the first research question that using metaphor have a positive effect on the writing for English major students to some extension.

To identify the attitudes of students towards using and learning metaphor, the writer conducted a series of questionnaires related to frequency, benefits, and challenges of using metaphor. The data showed that although students do not use metaphor as frequently as expected, they realized a lot of benefits from using metaphor. That is to say, metaphor plays an important role in improving the

writing performance. However, they had a lot of difficulties when using metaphor such as lack of vocabulary, cultural knowledge, and creativeness.

Conclusion

This study is aimed to investigate the effects of using metaphor in the development of writing skill as well as find out the challenges learners may face, then propose the suitable suggestions to boost metaphoric awareness and competence in learning English. The findings from the research coincides with the theory and hypothesis the previous researchers such as Littlemore, Krennmayr, Turner, and Turner (2014), Nacey (2013), MacArthur (2010) gave and asserted that metaphor has a good effect on writing skill, it could enhance language proficiency but there are also certain challenges in using metaphor flexibly and effectively. The results of the study suggest students may need more class instruction to develop their metaphoric competence because students face a lot of challenges in using metaphor.... When studying one language, it is necessary not only to study vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, speaking or listening, but also to know how to use language naturally. Metaphor is specially used in daily life, in any languages, and many situations. In both spoken language and literature language, metaphor can frequently appear. As soon as understanding the message of each metaphor in songs and literal works, learners can easily communicate with native speakers naturally or use metaphor flexibly in their own writing. So, metaphor plays an important role in improving reading and writing skills. It is necessary to write paragraphs containing a metaphor appropriately as possible. Learners should use metaphors in their own writing to train their language competence better. As students become aware of their own metaphors for learning they can recognize how their language competence progresses.

In addition to the above skills, learning literature cannot lack using metaphor. The use of metaphor in poetry is one of the most important aspects of poetic style that must be mastered. Despite being the major students of English, they have few chances to practice using metaphor in writing. They still get a loss to understand and analyze metaphor in song or literary works. Therefore, when learning English literature, they must try their best to identify, analyze and use metaphor steps by steps from sentence to text. More importantly, teachers should spend enough time and create appropriate methods to teach them to learn it in the best way. Encouraging students to use metaphors will help them improve their writing ability and produce interesting pieces that others will enjoy reading. However, there are activities that teachers can use to help students understand metaphors and to inspire the use of these literary devices. Teachers, also, should provide students with knowledge of culture.

Once learners are able to have their metaphors and use them to promote the ideas flexibly, they will become metaphor masters. If the learners know to take advantages of the benefits of using metaphor, they can improve all the skills in learning a second language. Conceptual metaphor provides students with the possibility of understanding one concept in terms of another. From a domain, they can refer to many various domains by the metaphorical expressions. As a result, they will broaden their vocabulary and make them more productive. Learners

should know what a metaphor is if they are studying examples of metaphors in text. Simply knowing the definition, however, is not sufficient. They should be able to identify examples of metaphors in the text on their own. They should be able to explain the purpose of the metaphor and analyze how it contributes to the theme of the work. Thus, applying conceptual metaphors in learning language will help students improve their reading comprehension a lot.

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