

A Semantic Study of Iraqi Students' Production of Metonymic words

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Abstract

Metonymy is a type of figurative language that plays an important role in everyday communication as well as in literary work . It helps us to express ourselves effortlessly as it provides a mental access to entities or objects . The main aim of this study is to investigate fourth-year students' production of metonymy at the College of Education for Humanities and the College of Arts in the academic year 2020_2021 . A diagnostic test is used in order to investigate students' production of metonymy . The test is applied to some students chosen randomly . Analysis , discussion and commentary are also presented based on statistical methods . Findings show that students have major problems concerning the production of metonymic words.

Keywords: metonymy , figurative language , diagnostic test.

Introduction

Language plays an important role in everyday communication and it contains many processes by which we can express conceptual things effortlessly through the mediation between these processes and the things we intend to refer to like , for example , the use of figurative language . Metonymy is a type of figurative language that plays an important role in everyday communication and literary work as well . The current study aims at assessing and evaluating students' production of metonymy . In order to gain a more probable account of performance of metonymy , this study is

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based on the hypothesis that students tend to avoid using metonymies in their use of language which may be ascribed to their tricky nature . It also hypothesizes that there are differences concerning the production of metonymy between males and females on one hand and between students of the two colleges on the other . This study limits its boundaries to present a clear theoretical account of metonymy and conduct a diagnostic test given to fourth-year students at the Department of English at the College of Education for Humanities and those at the Department of English at the College of Arts as well .

Metonymy in English

Cruse (2000 : 224) defines metonymy as a non-literal process which is used to mediate between what is said and what is actually intended . It provides a full idea even if it is not said depending on background knowledge , social knowledge and cultural knowledge . Geeraerts (2010:214) states that metonymy structures language and language users' thought as well . Language users usually connect what is in their mind with the thing they want to refer to . For example :

▪ **The pen is mightier than the sword .**

In the example above , the word “ pen ” is an example of metonymy which refers to the written words .

Littlemore (2015 : 5) defines metonymy as a property of both conceptual and linguistic processes. It uses a property or feature to refer to something with which it has an association . It is used widely in language as it plays an important role in our daily communication , it uses the main aspect of something in order to refer to the whole thing . Consider the following example:

▪ **We have a new face in our company .**

In the example above , the word “ new face ” is used metonymically to refer to a new person .

As far as semasiology and etymology are concerned , Hawks (1972 : 4) states that metonymy in English is imported from the Greek word “ metonymia ” . This term means that the name of a thing is substituted by another with which it has an association . Nerlich and Clarke (2001b : 245) state that metonymy is investigated for at least two thousand years by a number of rhetoricians . Nevertheless ,

it has been tackled for more than two hundred years by many historical semanticists and for more than ten years by a number of cognitive linguists .They also state that metonymy helps speakers to say something more quickly in order to shorten or reduce the conceptual distance between what is said and what is intended , i.e., the referents and the referring expression , for example :

▪ **Baghdad wins the negotiations .**

In this example , the word “ Baghdad ” is used metonymically to refer to the Iraqi government .

Metonymy is also described as something which uses a word that describes a feature or quality of another thing (Brown and Miller, 2008 : 285) . Metonymy , then , is a process of extension which is based on contiguity between two things where there is an association between them . In other words , metonymy depends on the actual association between two things within one domain . Consider the following famous example :

▪ **The ham sandwich wants his order .**

This example shows that the customer is distinguished from others as he has ordered a ham sandwich (Cruse , 2004 : 224) . Metonymy is used to ease communication by rendering the expressions so that the referent is easily attainable through using metonymic expressions . In other words , metonymy is used to account for economy of effort , easy access for a referent and emphasize the associative relation between entities . (Cruse , 2000 : 227) . Thus , metonymy is the case where one entity is used to refer to another entity that is related to it . Consider the following examples :

▪ **He likes to read Shakespeare .**

The word “ Shakespeare ” in the above example is used metonymically to refer to the writings of Shakespeare (Lakoff and Johanon , 1980 : 35) .

▪ **I drank three bottles of water .**

The word “ bottle ” is used metonymically to refer to the liquid inside it as it is associated with the bottle . Therefore , the sentence means that I drank the water but not the bottles .

▪ **We need more hands for the job .**

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The word “ hands ” is used metonymically to refer to people . The part of the body , the source domain , is used to refer to people , the target domain .

Methodology

The study is classified into a descriptive quantitative research as it describes students' production of metonym . It is in accordance with Bist (2015: 36) who states that a descriptive research is conducted so as to describe the characteristics of the variables of interest . Two statistical methods are used : percentage formula to estimate students' correct answer percentage , and Z-test to estimate differences between variables .

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{R}{N} * 100$$

Where :

R = the number of correct answers.

N = the total number of participants .

Heaton (1975 : 172) .

The Z formula:

$$Z = \frac{(\bar{x} - \mu_0)}{\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

\bar{X} = means of sample

μ_0 = means of population

σ = standard deviation of population

n = number of observations

Scoring procedure

According to Bachman and palmer (1996 : 199) , right / wrong scoring can be used to score selected and limited production responses . A response gets “0” if it is incorrect and “1” if it is correct .

Analysis and discussion

The following tables illustrate the responses of males and females :

Table (1)

Comparison between males and females at College of Education for Humanities

College of Education for Humanities				
Items	Males	Scale	Females	Scale
1	13%	Poor user	11%	Poor user
2	77%	Good user	75%	Good user
3	75%	Good user	72%	Good user
4	0%	Poor user	0%	Poor user
5	13%	Poor user	8%	Poor user
6	13%	Poor user	11%	Poor user
7	0%	Poor user	0%	Poor user
8	13%	Poor user	5%	Poor user
9	80%	Very good user	66%	Modest user
10	30%	Poor user	55%	Modest user

Table (2)

Comparison between males and females at College of Arts

College of Arts				
Items	Males	Scale	Females	Scale
1	35%	Poor user	28%	Poor user
2	85%	Very good user	85%	Very good user
3	50%	Modest user	71	Good user
4	0%	Poor user	0%	Poor user
5	0%	Poor user	28%	Poor user
6	35%	Poor user	0%	Poor user
7	7%	Poor user	0%	Poor user
8	0%	Poor user	14%	Poor user
9	64%	Competent user	85%	Very good user
10	14%	Poor user	21%	Poor user

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The first item is frequently used in a restaurant situation : the waiter usually uses expressions in order to identify his customers . Since the customer is unknown to him , he may use the number of the table or what he orders in order to familiarize him . The waiter's common knowledge provides the basis for the ability to use part of something that he is familiar with to stand for the customer . That is the most salient for him is used to identify his customer . Therefore , “ 13 ” or “ table 13 ” is used metonymically as an access to refer to the customer . As far as the variance between males and females is concerned , the data shows that most of the students at both colleges fail in the production of metonymy as the data at the College of Education states that 13% of males and 11% of females succeed in producing metonymic expression correctly and they are thus considered as poor students while 35% of males and 28% of females produce metonymic expression correctly at the college of Arts ; therefore , they are considered as poor students too.

In the second item , although this expression is acceptable , people usually use an alternative for it . Since the word “ bed ” is associated with sleeping , it can be used metonymically as an access to refer to sleeping as it is directly associated with it . Therefore “ going to bed ” can refer implicitly to going to sleep . As far as the difference between males and females is concerned , the data shows that most of the students at the College of Education succeed in the production of metonymy regarding this item as 77% of males and 75% of females succeed in producing metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , they are considered as good students whereas 85% of males and females produce metonymic expression correctly at the college of Arts and are considered as very good students .

In the third item , although this statement is acceptable and it is full of information that might be useful , people use an alternative in order to shorten it . They may use expressions such as “ the college ” , “ the department ” or “ the university ” . The interpretation of this statement depends on the common knowledge of people . As far as the difference between males and females is concerned , the data shows that most of the students at the College of Education succeed in the production of metonymy . The data reveals that 75% of males and 72% of females produce metonymic expression correctly ;

therefore , they are considered as good students whereas 50% of males and 71% of females produce metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , males are considered as modest students while females as good students .

In the fourth item , this statement can be converted to produce metonymic expression that can stand for the whole event . The most important thing can stand to represent the event as a whole . The most salient thing in this statement is the word “ summer ” which can be used metonymically to stand for the whole event itself . Therefore , it can be used as “ they summered in Hawaii ” . The word “ summer ” represents the whole event as it is associated with it . In relation to gender difference , the numerical data shows that both males and females at the two colleges fail in producing this type of metonym as 0% of them succeed in producing the metonymic expression ; therefore , they are considered as poor students regarding this item .

In the fifth item , the word “ Shakespeare ” can be used as an explicit term to stand for the writings of Shakespeare . It can be used explicitly to stand for the writings of Shakespeare implicitly since it is associated with them . As far as the variance between males and females is concerned , the data shows that most of the students at both colleges fail in the production of metonymy as the data at the College of Education states that 13% of males and 8% of females succeed in producing metonymic expression correctly . They are considered as poor students while 0% of males and 28% of females produce metonymic expression correctly at the college of Arts ; therefore , they are considered as poor students too .

In the sixth item , the expression “ the US government ” can be replaced by “ Washington ” , “ Whitehouse ” or “ America ” in order to refer to the US government . The production and the interpretation of this statement depend on the common knowledge , the context and the meaning of the word . In relation to gender difference , the data at the College of Education states that 13% of males and 11% of females succeed in producing metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , they are considered as poor students while 35% of males and 0% of females produce metonymic expression correctly at the college of Arts ; therefore , they are considered as poor students too .

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In the seventh item , this statement describes an action that is done by a soccer player . The most salient thing in this statement is the word “ head ” which can be used metonymically to stand for the whole event as there is an association between them . Therefore , it can be converted as “ the player headed the ball ” . The word “ head ” is used metonymically to represent the whole event . In relation to gender difference , the numerical data shows that both males and females at the two colleges fail in producing this type of metonym as all of the students at the College of Education fail in producing the metonymic expression ; therefore , they are considered as poor students . The data at the College of Arts shows that 7% of males produce the metonymic expression correctly while none of the females succeed in the production of metonymy for this item . Therefore , both males and females are evaluated as poor students .

In the eighth item , this statement is frequently used at the school or college . Although it is acceptable , it can be replaced by “ this class ” to refer to students since there is an association between them . It is used explicitly to make an indirect reference to students . As far as the difference in gender is concerned , the data shows that most of the students at both colleges fail in the production of metonymy as the data at the College of Education states that 13% of males and 5% of females succeed in producing metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , they are considered as poor students while 0% of males and 14% of females produce metonymic expression correctly at the college of Arts ; therefore , they are considered as poor students too .

In the ninth item , although this expression is acceptable , people may use an alternative for it . Since the word “ bed ” is associated with sleeping . Therefore , the word “ sleep ” can be used to refer to bed which means sleep too. As far as the difference between males and females is concerned , the data shows that most of the students at the College of Education succeed in the production of metonymy as 80% of males and 66% of females succeed in producing metonymic expression correctly . Males are considered as very good students whereas females are considered as competent students . At the college of Arts , the data shows that 64% of males and 85% of females produce metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , males

are considered as competent students while females are considered as very good students .

In the final item , alternatives can be used instead of the word “ sheep ” since there is an association between them . A part of something is used to stand for the whole ; therefore , the word “ heads” is used metonymically to represent “ cattle ” . On the other hand , the whole of something can be used to stand for the part ; therefore , the word “ animals ” can be used metonymically to represents “ cattle ” . In relation to difference in gender , the numerical data at the College of Education reveals that 30% of males succeed in the production of metonymy regarding this item , they are considered as poor students while 55% of females produce metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , they are considered as modest. At the College of Arts , 14% of males and 21% of females produce metonymic expression correctly ; therefore , they are considered poor students .

Concerning the difference between students at the College of Education for Humanities and the College of Arts , the following table illustrates students’ percentages of their correct responses :

Table (3)

Comparison between students at College of Education for Humanities and College of Arts

Items	College of Education for Humanities		College of Arts	
	Students	Scale	Students	Scale
1	13%	Poor user	32%	Poor user
2	76%	Good user	85%	Very good user
3	73%	Good user	60%	Competent user
4	0%	Poor user	0%	Poor user
5	11%	Poor user	14%	Poor user
6	13%	Poor user	17%	Poor user
7	0%	Poor user	3%	Poor user
8	10%	Poor user	7%	Poor user
9	73%	Good user	75%	Good user

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10	43%	Poor user	17%	Poor user
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As shown in table (3) above , it is clear that most of the students at the two colleges fail in producing metonymic expression as an alternative for the underlined expression in the first item . The percentage shows that 13% of students respond to this item correctly and understand the meaning properly ; therefore , they are evaluated as poor students . On the other hand , approximately half of the students at the College of Arts did not succeed in producing metonymic expression for this item . The percentage shows that 32% of students answer this item and understand its meaning ; therefore , they are evaluated as poor students too .

In the second item , the data shows that 76% of students at the College of Education for Humanities answer this item correctly and are evaluated as good students whereas students at the College of Arts are evaluated as very good ones since 85% of them provide metonymic expression for this item .

In the third item , the numerical data shows that 73% of students at the College of Education for Humanities succeed in the production of metonymy and understand the meaning of this item correctly , they are evaluated as good students whereas 60% of students succeed in producing metonymic expression for this item correctly and understand its meaning properly ; therefore , they are considered as competent students .

In the fourth item , the data shows that all students at the College of Education for Humanities and the College of Arts fail in producing this type of metonymy as none of them succeed in determining the salient thing . They also fail in producing metonymic expression ; therefore , students at both colleges are evaluated as poor ones .

In the fifth item , students' responses at the College of Education for Humanities show that 11% of them respond to this item correctly and 14% of students at the College of Arts respond to this item correctly ; therefore , students at both colleges are evaluated as poor students .

In the sixth item , the data reveals that 13% of students at the College of Education for Humanities and 17% of students at the College of Arts succeed in producing metonymy for this item and

understanding its meaning properly ; therefore , they are evaluated as poor students .

In the seventh item , the data shows that students at the two colleges fail in producing this type of metonymy as none of the students at the College of Education for Humanities and only 3% of them at the College of Arts succeed in determining the salient thing in this statement . They also fail in producing metonymic expression ; therefore , students at both colleges are evaluated as poor ones .

In the eighth item , It is clear that most of the students at the College of Education for Humanities and at the College of Arts succeed in recognizing this item correctly and understanding its meaning as the percentages show that 84% of students at the College of Education for Humanities and 85% of students at the College of Arts succeed in recognizing this item and understanding its meaning . Therefore , students at the two colleges are evaluated as very good students .

In the ninth item , the numerical data shows that 73% of students at the College of Education for Humanities and 75% of students at the College of Arts succeed in producing metonymy and understanding the meaning of this item correctly ; therefore , they are evaluated as good students

In the final item , the data reveals that 43% of students at the College of Education for Humanities and 17% of students at the College of Arts succeed in providing metonymic expressions for this item . Therefore , students at both colleges are evaluated as poor students .

Z test analysis

The estimated Z values are compared to the tabulated value of 1.960 at 0.5 in the Z-test between two independent ratios . Below , the tables illustrate the statistical difference between the variables :

Table (4)

Z-test for males and females at College of Education for Humanities

Gender	No.	Test
M	36	0.3194
F	36	0.3100
Z_test		0.086
Sig.		Non. Sig.

Table (5)

Z-test for males and females at College of Arts

Gender	No.	Test
M	14	0.2857
F	14	0.3500
Z_test		0.366
Sig.		Non. Sig.

Table (6)

Comparison between students at College of Education for Humanities and College of Arts

College	No.	Test
Education	72	0.3704
Arts	28	0.5080
Z_test		1.248
Sig.		Non. Sig.

As shown in tables (4,5,6) , there are no significant differences between students at the both colleges on one hand and there are no significant differences between males and females at the both colleges on the other .

Conclusions

The analysis of the test is intended to investigate students' performance of metonymy . It describes their ability for the production of metonymic expressions. It validates the hypothesis that students avoid using metonymies as they are nuance and vital. Students' responses reveal that more than half of the students fail to answer the test ; this failure is ascribed to the following reasons : they have limited knowledge concerning the notion of metonymy and they have very poor knowledge regarding the production of metonymic expressions . However , Z-test analysis rejects the hypotheses that there are differences first between students of College of Education for Humanities and students of College of Arts in University of Mosul and second between males and females ; there are non-significant differences between males and females on one hand and between the two colleges on the other . Moreover , students are also unaware of the economical function that metonymy serves to ease communication since it refers to the desired aim implicitly depending on inference and background knowledge .

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Appendix**Test items**

Provide metonymic expressions for the underlined word/words .

- 1- **The customer at table 13** is waiting for his order .

- 2- I am going to go to sleep soon .
- 3- I am on the way to Department of English at the College of Education for Humanities .
- 4- They spend the summer in Hawaii .
- 5- I would like to read the writings of Shakespeare .
- 6- The White House staff wins the negotiation .
- 7- The player sent the ball into the gall with his head .
- 8- Students in this class are more intelligent than the last one .
- 9- Mom to son : it's time for bed .
- 10- All of his cattle are affected; he'll lose more than fifty sheep.

دراسة دلالية في إنتاج الكناية للطلبة العراقيين

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المستخلص

الكناية هي نوع من اللغة المجازية التي تؤدي دورًا مميزًا في التواصل اليومي وكذلك في العمل الأدبي، وهي تساعدنا على التعبير عن أنفسنا دون عناء، والهدف الرئيس من هذه الدراسة هو التحقق من إنتاج الطلبة السنة الرابعة في مجال للكناية في كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية وكلية الآداب للعام الدراسي 2020_2021، وتم استخدام اختبار تشخيصي من أجل التحقق في التعرف على قدرة الطلبة في استخدام الكناية، وقد تم تطبيق الاختبار على بعض الطلبة الذين تم اختيارهم بشكل عشوائي، كما تم عرض التحليل والمناقشة والاستنتاجات بالاعتماد على الأساليب الإحصائية؛ إذ تظهر النتائج أنّ الطلبة لديهم مشاكل كبيرة فيما يتعلق بإنتاج الكلمات المجازية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكناية , اللغة المجازية , اختبار تشخيصي.

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