Examining English Language Teachers through Metaphorical Analysis

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Abstract—**This paper investigated students' conceptualizations of English language teacher. Metaphors play an essential part in understanding of a variety of disciplines and educational issues. It is regarded as a powerful means to examine students' conceptualizations. This study elicited an exploratory angle, describing student participants' conceptualizations of English language teacher through an analysis of metaphors they created in the 'X is Y' format (e.g., "EFL teacher is … because…"). The elicited metaphors were collected, categorized and analyzed. Through the understanding of students' beliefs of English language teacher, it provided insightful suggestions for EFL teaching.**

Index Terms— **EFL teachers' identity, Metaphor analysis, University Student**

I. INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have witnessed a large sum of research which has focused on teachers' identity. One important factor in driving this research into teachers' identity is the realization that we cannot properly understand teachers and their teaching practice without understanding students' cognition generally and in particular their beliefs towards teachers' identity. Therefore, it is quite important to make explicit and uncover students' initial cognition in EFL teachers' identities. Wan, Low and Li (2011, p.403) noted that "Metaphor functioned as a powerful cognitive tool in gaining insight into students' and teachers' beliefs". Through an understanding of students' conceptualisations, teacher can adapt their teaching, which includes their beliefs, teaching setting, as well as constructing and reconstructing their teachings (Gebhard, 2009).

In the past decades have witnessed increasing number of researches adopted metaphor analysis. The research area covers from difference level, such as elementary level, college level. It also investigated from different perspectives, such as from pre-service teacher, administrator, student teacher. In addition, it studied at a variety aspects involved with education issue, such as teaching and learning, teachers' identities, writing, the concept of research.

Besides researches on the general teachers' role, a few recent research studies (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; wan, Low & Li, 2011) have focused on the field of ESL or EFL context. Driven by the widely-held hypothesis that metaphor might reveal the practices in the field of education, this paper investigated EFL teachers' identities from the understanding of students' conceptualization.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Conceptual Metaphor

The notion of metaphor used in this study is the one proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), with the definition of metaphor is one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Lakoff and Johnson first developed the conception "cognitive linguistic view of metaphor" in 1980. They believed that metaphor is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning. Furthermore, one important argument is that metaphor is not simply a matter of words or linguistic expressions. The essence of metaphor is under-standing and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.6). They claim that the majority of normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured. In all aspects of life, we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors (Lakeoff and Johnson, 2003, p.158).

As Kovecses (2002) suggested, conceptual metaphors employ a more abstract concept as a target and a more concrete or physical concept as their source. Concrete or physical concepts provide a better understanding of abstract concepts. On the other hand, our experiences with the physical world serve as a natural and logical foundation for the comprehension of more abstract domain (Kovecses, 2002, p.6).

Metaphor analysis is a systematic method of analyzing the metaphors that people use to express themselves (Pitcher and Akerlind, 2007, p.164). Metaphor analysis always uncovers "the metaphorical nature of our activities" (Lakoff and Johnon, 2003, p.8). It shed light on interpreting beliefs or understandings in a more sophisticated method.

Therefore, metaphor has been recognized as a means of cognitive tool, which used to understand complex concept and ideas. As an increasingly research tool, metaphor analysis is quite helpful in raising reflections in the context of education, revealing the beliefs or conceptualizations of teaching practices (e.g., Jin & Cortazzi, 2011; Wan, Low & Li, 2011; Zhang, 2010).

B.   The Reason for Choosing Metaphor

According to Shaw and Mahlios (2008), the most compelling of the cognitive devices, which were elicited to examine teachers' beliefs, is the metaphor.

Metaphors provide "windows" for examining the cognitions and feeling of learners. Because they are usually employed without consciousness on the part of learners they are arguably less subject to false-representation than learners' direct comments about learning (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 313).

Reification, as Tusi (2007) points out, is an essential source of identity. The nature of reification is consideration of something abstract into something concrete, which shares the same essence of metaphor. Therefore, it seems that metaphor plays an essential role in interpreting the thought.

Although a large number of approaches in which researchers can elicit beliefs, there is an increasing number of researches adopted metaphor analysis (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999; wan, et.al. 2011.). Metaphors now constitute a well-recognized area of inquiry in applied linguistics. Metaphor is consistently regarded as "a device for seeing something in terms of something else" (Cameron, 1999, p.78). Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) regarded metaphor analysis as the major ways of analyzing samples of learner language.

Metaphor plays an important role in educational issues. This is due to the reason that metaphors provide insights into complex concepts of teaching and learning and thus provide a window into the comprehension of participants' personal experiences or conceptualization (Lin, Shein& Yang, 2012). Metaphors might provide inside views for educational practice. Consequently, it leads faculty to raise awareness of the 'inconsistencies the stated beliefs and the implicit framework on which their actions are based' (Marshall, 1990).

C.   Brief Introduction of Metaphor Analysis

Metaphor analysis always uncovers "the metaphorical nature of our activities" (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p.8). It is a sophisticated method of shedding light on people's beliefs or ideas.

As Cameron and Low (1999) suggested, one way of metaphor analysis is 'Collecting examples of linguistic metaphors used to talk about the topic… generalising from them to the conceptual metaphors they exemplify, and using the result to suggest understandings or though patterns which construct or constrain people's beliefs or actions' (p.88). In other words, one approach of metaphor analysis is grouping linguistic metaphors into conceptual categories. In order to reduce or condense the data, it is vital to group the data into categories. Consequently, it leads to more efficiently in metaphor analysis. On the basis of meanings of the vehicle terms, linguistic metaphors should be grouped into categories. They worked as evidence for conceptualization.

The general procedures of metaphor analysis listed as follows:

(a) collecting informants' metaphorical linguistic expression (MLE) of the topic,

(b) generalising from MLEs to the conceptual metaphors they exemplify,

(c) using the results to suggest the understanding or thought patterns which construct or constrain people's beliefs or actions. (Cameron & Low, 1999, p.8).

D.   Related Research: Metaphor in Educational Issue

Metaphors, as Cortazzi and Jin (1999) suggest, play essential part in the development of variety disciplines and educational issues. Metaphors often carry out from one discipline to another (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p. 153). Furthermore, metaphor analysis was often employed to find out participants' conceptions or beliefs toward the particular issues or dimensions in education.

In Groth and Bergener's (2005) research, metaphors were employed to examine pre-service teachers' conceptualizations of statistical sample. They processed metaphors elicited from 54 pre-service teachers' writing prompts and found out seven different types of conceptualizations of statistical sample through metaphor analysis.

Metaphors were adopted to investigate elementary pre-service teachers' understanding of diversity and teaching in diverse settings in Brown, Parsons and Worley's (2005) research. In this study, the metaphorical expressions revealed that reflections on diversity were 'misapplied or missing together' (Brown, Parsons and Worley, 2005).

In vocabulary learning section, the participants were asked to use metaphorical expressions to describe vocabulary in Farjami's (2012) research. In this study, analogies were examined and divided into different categories. The five most frequent themes which emerged from the analysis were FOOD & DRINK, COLLECTING, JOURNEY, PUZZLE/PROBLEM, and MUSIC (Farjami, 2012, p. 75). According to data which had been carefully examined and analyzed, tentatively vocabulary teaching implications were proposed.

Within the field of higher education, Batten (2012) employed metaphor analysis in order to investigate the use of conception "learning outcomes". In this case, the author argued "learning outcomes" is an ontological metaphor. Metaphor highlight some parts, while conceal others. Similarly, the learning outcomes focused on dominant values in teaching and learning, as Batten (2012) insisted, while other parts in teaching and learning were eliminated or ignored. The article provides a glimpse into the consequences which were resulted by this kind of situation.

With the concern of the term "research", metaphor analysis was employed to reveal post-doctoral researchers' conceptions toward it. The study divided metaphor analogies into four types. In addition, those four categories were identified "research is spatial", "research is constructive", "research is explorative", "research is organic" (Pitcher & Akerlind, 2009).

In order to finding out future educational leaders' the underlying beliefs of the principalship, metaphor analysis was elicited. The metaphorical expression was identified and labeled into four different types: protection and nurturing; sill, adventure, or problem solving; challenge, risk, and threat; chance and luck (Linn, Sherman & Gill, 2007).The paper revealed participants' conceptions of leadership and beliefs which might influence their behavior.

E.   Related Research: Metaphor in Teachers' Identities

Metaphorical expressions of teaching, as Connelly and Clandinin (1998) noted, is not only a way of talking about teaching practices, but also a way of examine teaching practice. A number of studies have been investigated the metaphors used by elementary, secondary and college teachers to state their beliefs about teachers' role (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Zhang, 2010; Wan, Low & Li,2011). The participants involved with different levels of teachers and students. The results of those studies not only provided the insights of concepts in the field of education, but also provided implications in education. Even more, some researches got a picture of participants' previous experience or affective factors.

In wan et al' (2011) study, it examined a 35 Chinese college EFL teachers' and two groups of English major students' underling beliefs about teachers' role through analysis of their metaphor prompt 'An English teacher is … because…'. The results identified mismatches regarding the interpretations of the teachers' roles both between students and teachers and between student groups at different levels of English proficiency (Wan et al., 2011, p.403).

According to Lin, et al.'s (2012) research, it examined forty pre-service teachers' beliefs about EFL courses and EFL teachers' roles through metaphor analysis. The results indicated that the metaphor provides a framework in which the participants "solidify their views of teaching and learning" (Lin, et al., 2012, p. 196).

F.   Problems with Using Metaphor Elicitation Tasks

In order to prevent failing in elicited metaphor analysis, it is essential that provided efficient training involving with metaphors which promote the creation of metaphor. Several metaphor-based researches have demonstrated frequency of invalid responses to some extent. Even more, some researches (Wan, 2011; Eren and Tekinarslan, 2013) indicated that participants had problems in completions of researcher-constructed prompts or elicited metaphors. For instance, Eren and Tekinarslan (2013), researching prospective teachers' conceptualizations of instructional material and evaluation concepts, collected 4351 metaphors, in which only 1260 responses provided valid metaphors. It means that only 28% response were fulfilled the criteria.

To reduce the risk of task failure, basic training of the creation of metaphor and sample of elicited metaphors had provided.

III.   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Following previous researches, the prime target of this study is to undercover learners' conceptualizations about teachers' roles through the metaphors they had created. Therefore, through the analysis of the research results, relevant pedagogies adjustment could be taken to improve teaching in EFL context. Following research questions were planned to be explored. (a) What are the elicited metaphors about teachers' role presented by non-English major students from a key university in Guangdong Province, China? (b) How do Chinese students use metaphor to indicate the EFL teachers' roles in the classroom?

IV.   METHODOLOGY

A.   Participants

The study was conducted in the English Language Center at a key university in China. English Learning Centre was instituted to teach English to non-English major students, which provides five compulsory levels (foundation level, level 1 to level 4) English courses, optional advanced courses and ESP courses. According to students' scores from both national college entrance exam and an IELTS-based placement test, students were assigned into 5 levels. The subjects were 50 first-year students who were assigned to foundation level.

B.   Instrument and Procedure

A short questionnaire was distributed to the participants. The questionnaire included a brief introduction of metaphor and a completion task. It provided both Chinese and English version and participants feel free to finish the task in English or in Chinese. The questionnaire was designed to collect subjects' elicited metaphor regarded with EFL teacher via a metaphor completion task (An EFL teacher is… because…). Besides that, it collected participants' reason for the metaphor they had chosen. The participants received a brief training session regarded with metaphor and metaphor analysis in class. Enough time were given to participants to reflect their opinion about teachers' identities out of the classroom. The participation was completely voluntary and their responses would remain anonymous. Then, all the responses were translated into English and the translation were checked by the professional translator. The final step of the analysis, all the elicited were grouped into different categories.

C.   Data Analysis

This research had adopted the approach developed by Cameron and Low (1999, p. 88) which "collect examples of linguistics metaphors, generalizing from them to the conceptual metaphors, using the results to suggest understandings or construct people's beliefs". Then, 4 steps had been taken to deal with the data. The four steps listed as follows: (a) naming/labeling, (b) sorting (clarification and elimination), (c) categorization, and (d) analysing data (Seban & Seban, 2007).

In order to indentify the conceptual categories which were produced by the remaining 47 metaphors. The conceptual categories for teachers' role listed in this paper were adopted from those used by Saban et al. (2007) and De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) with the consideration to Wan, Low and Li (2011). The 47 metaphors and the entailments produced by the participants were categorized into 7 categories.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Seven conceptual categories from non-English-major students were EFL TEACHER AS PROVIDER, NURTURER, INSTRUCTOR, INTEREST AROUSER, CO-WORKER, AUTHORITY and DEVOTEE. The three main concept metaphors are listed as follows. As many as 21 exemplar metaphors from the participants presented EFL TEACHER AS INSTRUCTOR. Next came EFL TEACHER AS NURTURER with 15 metaphors, and immediately following it in number of metaphors was EFL TEACHER AS AUTHORITY, with 13 metaphors. The conceptual metaphors about EFL teachers' identities produced by Chinese non-English-major students with frequency and entailments were as follows:

The most noticeable category (30%) of metaphorical concept for EFL teachers' roles is "EFL TEACHER AS INSTRUCTOR" including metaphors such as light, lamp, key, navigator and sheepherder. The entailments for this category were that an EFL teacher provides guidance for students in their study; helps students finding right way in the ocean of knowledge; leads student to success and tells students where the way is.

The second most common category (21.4%) was summarized thematically into "EFL TEACHER AS NURTURER" combined out of several metaphors such as gardener, farmer, kettle, and big sister. The entailments for theses metaphors and figurative images were that an EFL teacher cultivates students carefully; helps students grow up quickly; takes care of students and broadcasts knowledge to students.

The third common group of metaphorical images (18.5%) was entitled as "EFL TEACHER AS AUTHORITY" composed of metaphorical images such as scholar, fairy, foreigner and team leader. The entailments for this category were that an EFL teacher is a scholar has a large sum of knowledge; a fairy or a foreigner who can speaks foreign language fluently; a team leader who takes charge of every activity in the classroom.

The fourth category (12.85%) named as "EFL TEACHER AS DEVOTEE" included metaphors such as candle, flower and workaholic. The entailments for this category were that an EFL teacher is a candle who scarifies himself or herself; is a flower who shares beauty to others without any return, and is a workaholic who devotes himself or herself.

The fifth metaphorical groups of images (10%) which was generated by non-English-major student regarded as "EFL TEACHER AS PROVIDER" included metaphors such as dictionary, book, sun and library. The entailments for this category were that an EFL teacher is a dictionary which translates many words; the sun which give students the light; and a library which has a large sum of knowledge.

The sixth common conceptual category is "EFL TEACHER AS INTEREST AROUSER" (4.26%) and consisted of metaphorical concepts such as   sun, entertainer. The entailments for this category were that an EFL teacher is the sun which makes language learning anxiety go away; and the entertainer who designed a lot of interesting games to facilitate students learning English.

The seventh group of elicited metaphor (2.85%) produced by the participants named as "EFL TEACHER AS CO-WORKER" contains metaphors such as partner, colleague. The entailments for this category were that an EFL teacher is working together and tackling problems together.

B. Discussion

In general, analysis of the data collected students generated 7 conceptual categories for EFL teachers, and offered some substantial findings. First, TEACHER AS INSTRUCTOR was the most common belief held by participants, with TEACHER AS NURTURER next. It revealed that the students stressed the help provided by teachers with students in a passive position. The participants finished this questionnaire at the beginning of their first semester at college, therefore their responses to ELF teachers' identity mainly towards their high school English teachers. This study revealed that most students had been through teacher-centred teaching. Therefore, it leads to the reliance and guidance from their teacher. On the other hand, In a Chinese context, teacher as "nurturer" (as well as teacher as "devotee") is very much in line with the traditional view of a good teacher and deeply rooted in the culture (Cui and Liu, 2009). It demonstrated some culturally-unique belief such as TEACHER AS candle and gardener. Second, several student participants' beliefs about EFL teacher, revealed that English learning is a tough task involving hardship and bitterness, and even leads to the anxiety. Hardship and bitterness in EFL context might result from (a) poor early education in English, (b) adaptation to a new academic context which requires a more active and independent learning attitude than in high schools, and (c) heavy-loaded, time-consuming, unfeasible and unscientific learning tasks and assessments.

VI. CONCLUDING AND IMPLICATIONS

In sum, this study clearly demonstrated that metaphors could be a rich and stimulating way for students to explain their beliefs towards EFL teachers. Even though the elicited metaphors created by participants could not cover all perspectives of their conceptualizations, they at least reported or emphasis one part of their beliefs. In addition, they make the beliefs more vivid and easy to comprehend. According to the findings from present study, suggestion listed as follows: Firstly, Students response reveals teacher dominant situation. In future, teacher could try different methodologies and transfer to student-center classroom. Communication teaching method should be adopted in college EFL classroom instead of teacher-centered teaching method, which facilitate students develop skills for the challenges of using English in academic courses and professional life. Secondly, reduce anxiety levels and create a low-anxiety classroom are essential in ELT context. Pair-work, group work, role play and other ways could be used to reduce the anxiety.

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