A Study of the Relationship Between English Learners' Metaphoric Competence and Writing Proficiency

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Abstract

As one of the four prominent language skills, writing plays an indispensable role in international communication. Meanwhile, writing, particularly writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been broadly recognized as the most difficult part in EFL learning. In recent years, cognitive linguistics has provided a new perspective towards writing, proposing that there's a close connection between the use of metaphor and EFL writing proficiency. To explore the relationship between the two, this study focused on the use of conceptual metaphor in college students' EFL writing. Sixty English majors were invited to write a composition based on the given topic, and then the relationship between metaphoric competence and writing proficiency was investigated. The results showed that: 1) The majority of students are not good at using metaphors correctly and their metaphoric competence is at a relatively low level. 2) Students' writing proficiency and metaphoric competence are correlated positively. This study revealed that more attentions should be paid to enrich students' metaphoric knowledge and cultivate their metaphoric competence so as to improve their writing proficiency.

Keywords: metaphor, EFL writing, metaphoric competence

1. Introduction

Metaphor plays a significant role in both linguistic and psychological studies. In 1980, as Lakoff and Johnson put forward a new perspective metaphor, a proliferation of research on metaphor in a cognitive approach has sprung up recently. Originally, metaphor in traditional view is assumed to be a kind of figurative speech. However, cognitive approach holds that metaphor is also a way human beings conceptualize one thing in terms of another (Lakoff &Johnson, 1980: 3). Lakoff and Johnson take a view that metaphor also influences the way people think, and behave based on their conceptual system. According to the concept of conceptual metaphor they put forward, metaphor is ubiquitous in people's everyday life. As English learning can also be regarded as a kind of human behavior, metaphor undoubtedly will take effect in the process. Consequently, there is a close relation between metaphor and English learning. At the same time, the proposal of a new concept of "metaphoric competence" encourages a great number of scholars to study second language learning with this new perspective on metaphor. Numerous researchers attempt to discover how to improve second language writing based on this teaching.

For Chinese students, English, as one of the compulsory courses, is always been paid great attention. A good knowledge of English is regarded to be of great significance. Writing, as an inseparable component of language proficiency, undoubtedly takes an important part in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Especially in the context of globalization and frequent international communication, making business correspondence and applying to study abroad all require a good command of written English. Writing, as an important language production manifestation, can demonstrate students' basic language proficiency. Great efforts have been made to find effective methods to improve university students' writing proficiency for a long time. Students still have a lot of difficulties writing native-like compositions. In previous studies, researchers have conducted a number of research on students' writing from a viewpoint of cognitive metaphors. However, few investigate the relationship between metaphoric competence and writing performance. Although the cognitive approach of metaphor has endowed metaphor a considerable role in EFL learning, it still fails to receive enough attention on applied linguistics. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how students' metaphoric competence is related to students' writing ability.

This paper aims at exploring what kind of role conceptual metaphor plays in EFL learners' writing performance based on an empirical research. By collecting the compositions from two English major classes and analyzing the errors and mistakes, attempts are made to explore the relationship between metaphoric competence and EFL learners' writing proficiency. More importantly, this paper is aimed at offering Chinese EFL learners some suggestions for developing an in-depth understanding of metaphors, thus helping them to improve their writing proficiency effectively.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will review the theories related to EFL writing, metaphor research in traditional views and contemporary views as well as the cognitive approach to metaphor. Then, the concept of metaphoric competence will be elaborated. It will also review some studies and research concerning metaphoric competence and the application of conceptual metaphor in EFL writing.

2.1 EFL Writing

With a fast pace of globalization, an increasing number of people choose to go abroad for further study. Working in transnational corporations is no longer rare. Whether one applies for studying abroad or writes in letters for business, a good command of English writing is essential. However, among the four language skills, writing is still considered the most difficult one in language learning. Dong (2002) proposed that despite the fact that there are more students passing the important English proficiency tests like Public English Test System, there are still a lot of problems in students' writing. One obvious problem is that they can write correctly in both grammar and vocabulary aspects, but the expressions are not proper. One of the various reasons for that is a lack of metaphoric awareness.

A high level of metaphoric competence contributes to a good writing performance. Writings of students with good performances and high writing capacity are metaphorically structured. It is because that one of the fundamental features of native writing is the appropriate use of conceptual metaphor (Danesi, 1995). Li (2016) has conducted an empirical study to investigate students ability to translate sentences with metaphors. She finds that students who can understand metaphors well can perform better in English learning. Therefore, a proper employment of conceptual metaphor will facilitate students to express themselves like native speakers. Littlemore (2013) also made an investigation into students' writing proficiency. By testing the frequency of their metaphoric use, he finds that students at various levels will use metaphors in their writings differently.

From the above analyses, how to improve students' writing proficiency is an important task. In general, writing proficiency is regarded as the presentation of an individual's writing competence. Improving students writing competence can facilitate their writing proficiency.

2.2 Traditional Views of Metaphors

The concept of metaphor was discussed initially by great philosopher Aristotle in his work *Poetics and Rhetoric.* In traditional views, metaphor is a kind rhetoric which can be divided into three main perspectives: the comparison view, the substitution view and interaction view. The first one is comparison view put forward by Aristotle (1954), the leading figure in the study of metaphor. He explained it as a kind of meaning transference between two different things: "metaphor includes providing an object with a name which is geared to something else, and metaphor if a transference of meaning, the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to species, or on the ground of analogy" (Aristotle, 1954: 69). Ortony (1980) illustrated metaphor as a really literal technique whose respect of similarity left unspecified. In Aristotle's view, metaphor is a figurative speech of language, and can contribute to "certain rhetorical effect" used in some conditions. Obviously, there are some limitations in this comparison view, which claimed that metaphor was only an implied comparison between two similar objects. It considers metaphor as a figure of speech that is used to amuse and entertain the readers. In this respect, metaphor is totally restricted within the rhetorical field.

What follows next is the substitution view, advanced by Roman rhetorician Quintilian. It is a more elaborated theory originated from the comparison view. The substitution view claims that a metaphor is when a corresponding literal expression replaces a metaphorical expression (Black, 1962: 31). For instance, in "*Tom is a lion*", "lion" is a replacement for "a fierce man." The role the metaphor plays in this view is a replacement for a literal description.

In 1936, the interaction view of metaphor was put forward by Richards. This is an extremely different and new view about metaphor, and is a significant breakthrough in the development of metaphor. "Thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive from there," indicating the role of thought in the formation of metaphor. The interaction view of metaphor was further developed by Black. He asserted that

metaphor included "tenor" and "vehicle". "Tenor" refers to the indicated meaning that the metaphor expresses and "vehicle" means the image or figure. Derived from the existence of tenor and vehicle, metaphor comes into being. When we interpret the subjects from the perspective of the "tenor", the perception of the topic was altered.

The above has showed that three traditional views all consider metaphor as a rhetoric. Compared to the first two approaches which completely regard metaphor as decoration in language, interaction view makes progress as it analyzes metaphor without only taking it as an ornamental technique. Interaction view further developed by M. Black firstly brought cognitive psychology into the study of metaphor, paving a way to the occurrence of modern cognitive approach. However, it still fails to provide a clear description of how metaphor works. It is modern cognitive approach that provides a systematic mechanism of metaphor and initiates a new way of metaphor study.

2.3 Contemporary View of Metaphor

In the former chapters, the paper has illustrated three traditional views of metaphor, among which interaction view is the most advanced one as it introduces a cognitive approach into metaphor study for the first time. Recently the recognized cognitive approach to metaphor inherits the correct direction and becomes a significantly influential theory in linguistics.

In 1980, a widely recognized book *Metaphors We Live By* by Lakoff and Johnson was published, marking a completely new era of metaphor study. In this book, a new cognitive perspective of metaphor was proposed. That is conceptual metaphor theory. It argues that metaphor can not only be regarded as a figure of speech but also one way of thinking. "In our everyday life, metaphor is general and acceptable. It not only exists in language, but also the thought and action. Human's ordinary conceptual system which is adopted by humans to think and act is fundamentally metaphoric in nature." (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980). Lakoff (1980) propose that metaphor is pervasive in human life and can be illustrated as a way of thinking and doing things. That is to say, metaphor is a variety of mechanism existing in human's cognitive system by which human beings use to conceptualize the world. Different people have different ways to form a metaphor, which is influenced by their various life experiences and life styles. Therefore, metaphor can be defined as a kind of mechanism used for two major purposes: handling abstraction and conceptualizing the world and conceptual metaphor works as a bridge between two semantics fields from a cognitive perspective.

2.4 Metaphoric Competence

Metaphoric competence was first put forward by Gardner and Winner (1979) just after the distinction of competence and performance was made by Chomsky. Nowadays it is taking an increasingly important role in language learning. Apart from metaphoric competence, there are also another two competences: linguistic competence and communicative competence. In the book written by Gardner and Winner *The Development of Metaphoric Competence: Implication for Humanistic Disciplines*, metaphoric competence is illustrated as a person's ability to comprehend and produce metaphor. It is a kind of capacity to make paraphrase of a metaphor and provide an explanation of a metaphor as well as a proper production of a metaphor.

The appearance of a new concept will inevitably spark more ideas. Another linguist Low (1998) made a distinguished improvement of metaphorical competence. Several elements of metaphoric competence advanced by him provide further explanations of this new concept. Additionally, Jeannette Littlemore also contributed a lot to the development of metaphoric competence. He put forward four aspects of metaphoric competence: (a) originality of metaphor production, (b) fluency of metaphor interpretation, (c) ability to find meaning in metaphor, (d) speeding in finding meaning in metaphor (Littlemore, 2001). Another great contribution of Low and Littlemore is to make a distinction between the linguistic competence and the metaphoric competence. Furthermore, seven "skills needed to work effectively with metaphor" is put forward. The following are adapted from their book (Low, 1998: 120).

1. Ability to construct plausible meanings.

2. Knowledge of the boundaries of conventional metaphor.

3. Awareness of acceptable topic and vehicle combinations.

4. Ability to interpret and control "hedges".

5. Awareness of "socially sensitive" metaphors.

6. Awareness of "multiple layering" in metaphors.

7. Interactive awareness of metaphor.

After that, greater importance is attached to metaphoric competence. Although a variety of linguists provide several different illustrations of what metaphoric competence is, basically all of them try to apply metaphoric competence into educational fields, such as study of children's cognitive ability, second language learning, language transfer, etc.

2.5 Studies of Metaphor and Metaphoric Competence in SLA

As metaphor is introduced from a new cognitive perspective, studies on metaphoric competence and on the relationship between metaphor and other fields of language learning have flourished.

When metaphor was originally considered a new way of thinking, a lot of scholars abroad and home started to devote to it. Boers and Littlemore argued that metaphor played a critical role in vocabulary learning (Boers, 2000; Littlemore, 2004). They claimed that high metaphoric competence facilitates learners' reading ability. Moreover, Littlemore conducted a lot of experimental studies to analyze factors that influence metaphoric competence (Littlemore, 2001). Some other scholars proposed ways to cultivate metaphoric competence. He also made a proposal of awareness-raising approach and discussed the metaphoric competence and reading capacity. Additionally, Low (1994) concluded that there was a need for EFL learners to develop metaphor-related skills, which was necessary to language learning.

Chinese researchers began to investigate metaphor at the end of 20th century. Zhao (1995) provided a basic introduction of metaphor and made a review of *Metaphors We Live By*. Other researchers also did a lot of investigations and research. Yan (2009) made an exploration about how conceptual metaphor theory was related to teaching English vocabularies. Shu (2009) analyzed what kind of role that the concept metaphor played in teaching discourse in classes.

There are a lot of researchers conducting research on metaphoric competence. Yan (1995) attached great importance to metaphoric competence and pointed out its great importance in language learning. Shu (1996) carried a lot of research and investigated the relationship between metaphoric competence and writing proficiency. He proposed that metaphoric competence is a kind of developmental cognitive mapping ability to find meaning in metaphor. It is a largely unconscious strategy to analogy one subject from one domain to another object in another domain. Metaphoric competence should be paid more attention as it plays a significant role in both learning and teaching English.

From a sheer rhetoric to a way of thinking, the understanding of metaphor has subjected to a series of changes. Further studies on metaphor have shown metaphor's increasingly important role in language learning. At first, Aristotle defined metaphor as a figure of speech, and then several linguists and philosophers analyzed metaphor with cognitive approach, proposing new perspective of metaphor — conceptual metaphor theory. Conceptual metaphor theory provides a new way of looking at metaphor, thus bringing about many new research. Therefore, applying conceptual metaphor to fields of language teaching and learning is of great significance. In the process of language learning, writing occupies a very important place. As conceptual metaphor theory proposes that metaphor is a cognitive mechanism, applying it to the writing study is of great value. Thus, this paper will apply conceptual metaphor theory to EFL writing by analyzing the relationship between metaphoric competence and writing proficiency, with a view of finding some effective ways to improve students' writing proficiency.

3. Research Methodology

Quantitative method is adopted in this research. Participants of the study are two classes of English majored students from school of foreign languages at Qingdao Agricultural University. In the beginning, students were invited to write a composition with a given title "A Recommendation of Travel Destinations in China". Then, all metaphors appeared in compositions were identified and accounted for a purpose of exploring the relationship between students' writing proficiency and their metaphoric competence.

3.1 Research Questions

1. How is the metaphoric competence of Chinese college students?

2. What is the relationship between students' metaphoric competence and their English writing proficiency?

3.2 Participants

Participants of the research were junior English majors, who get relatively more intense writing training in English writing than non-English majors. Also, these students were about to take TEM-4 in the second college year, so they are highly motivated to write. A brief talk with their teacher revealed that they had been taught to use metaphors in their writing.

3.3 Instruments

In this experiment, two research instruments were employed: one English writing test and metaphoric identification procedure tool. The English writing test was given to evaluate the participants' metaphorical competence level and writing ability. Pragglejaz's Metaphor Identification Procedure was used to identify all metaphors appeared in students' compositions.

3.3.1 Writing Test

In this part, students were asked to write a composition on a given title "A Recommendation of Travel destinations in China". Reading of the compositions helps to show the relationship between writing proficiency and metaphorical competence. In addition, some important factors should be taken into consideration. In order to acquire valid results, students were required to finish their essays within 45 minutes. During the test, dictionaries or telephones were not accessible.

3.3.2 Metaphoric Identification Procedure

It is Lakoff and Johnson who first put forward an identification of metaphor based on their Conceptual Metaphor theory. Apart from that, Pragglejaz also proposed a detailed version of Metaphor Identification Procedure, which gained great popularity for its reliability. According to him, Metaphor Identification Procedure includes four main steps (2007: 3-13):

1)   Build a basic understanding of the meaning of the discourse by reading it.

2)   Mark all lexical units in the text-discourse.

3)   After determining all lexical units in the text, build its own meaning of each unit in context. That is how one lexical unit applies to one entity, relation, or attributes in the condition evoked by the contextual meaning. Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.

After marking each lexical unit, determine whether it has a more basic contemporary meaning in different contexts than the one in the provided context. Here basic meanings tend to be the following conditions:

— More specific and concrete [what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste];

— Related to bodily action;

— More precise (as opposed to vague);

— Older from a historical perspective;

Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.

On the condition that the lexical unit is endowed with a more basic current — contemporary meaning in other situations than the provided context, make a decision whether the meaning in the specific context contrasts with the basic meaning but can be interpreted in comparison with it.

4)   If the answer is yes, regard the lexical unit as metaphorical.

3.4 Data Collection

Students were asked to write a composition on a specific title. To guarantee the objectivity and reliability of the scoring, the compositions were evaluated by a well-recognized assessment online system. Hence the collected average scores could represent the writing proficiency of participants. When all samples of students' compositions were collected, the process of identifying the metaphors in them would be performed. Then the relationship between students' metaphorical competence and writing proficiency were analyzed.

Then metaphors appeared in students' writing were identified according to metaphor identification procedure steps. Some selective sentences will be put out to show the identifying process.

Step 1: Build a generally basic understanding of the sentence.

Step 2: Identify the lexical units of the sentence. Here is one example. Slashes here are used to divide every unit.

E.g. You/can/enjoy/the/art/of/bargain/coming/back/with/fruitful/results.

Then, different meanings both in context and literal meaning of every lexical entry will be compared, leading to the next step. In the end, this study will move to the four step by making a conclusion of whether it is a metaphor. Here are the contrasted meanings between contextual meanings and basic meanings.

Enjoy

        a)   contextual meaning: "Enjoy" means to derive or receive pleasure from something.

        b)   basic meaning: "Enjoy" is not endowed with a more basically different meaning.

        c)   Relations between the two meanings: The basic meaning is the same as the contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? No.

Art

(a) contextual meaning: The creation of beautiful or significant things.

(b) basic meaning: The products pf human creativity; works of art collectively; an art exhibition.

(c) Relation between the two meanings: Here the meaning in this context is compared with the fundamental meaning, therefore, the former can be interpreted as a comparison of the latter.

Metaphorically adopted? Yes.

Bargain

(a) contextual meaning: A thing bought for less than the usual price.

(b) basic meaning: "Bargain" is not endowed with a more basically different meaning.

(c) relation between the two meanings: The basic meaning is the same as the contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? No.

Coming

(a) contextual meaning: To move to or towards a person or place

(b) basic meaning: "Come" is not endowed with a more basically different meaning.

(c) relation between the two meanings: The basic meaning shares one common meaning with the contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? No.

Back

(a) contextual meaning: "Back" in this sentence is a preposition used to mean the movement toward one direction.

(b) basic meaning: From the normal view the hip part of a human (or animal) body from the neck to the end of the spine; the part of something that is furthest;

(c) relation between the two meanings: The basic meaning is used to be a comparison of its contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? Yes.

With

(a) contextual meaning: "With" in this sentence refers to a state in which a creature is in the company or presence of something or somebody.

(b) basic meaning: For the special uses of with in phrasal verbs, look at the entries for the verbs; having or carrying something; in the company or presence of somebody or something.

(c) relation between the two meanings: The basic meaning is the same as the contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? No.

Fruitful

(a) contextual meaning: In this sentence, producing many useful results.

(b) basic meaning: producing a lot of crops

(c) relation between the two meanings: The basic meaning is used to be a comparison of its contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? Yes.

Results

(a) contextual meaning: In this sentence, results refers to the experiences people got from the travel.

(b) basic meaning: A thing that is caused or produced because of something else

(c) relation between the two meanings: The basic meaning is the same as the contextual meaning.

Metaphorically adopted? No.

Above is the process of identification of metaphors in the collected samples. According to Pragglejaz's requirements for metaphor identification, all metaphors were identified.

3.5 Data Analysis

In this research, two types of data were analyzed. One is the data of writing test and the other is the data of students' writing proficiency. The writings were rated by iWrite, a reputable online assessment system, thus the scoring reliability can be guaranteed, and the scores can be seen as representing students' writing proficiency. As for the data for students' metaphoric competence, SPSS 20.0 is used to analyze the data, specifically related to correlation between student's writing proficiency and correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between students' metaphoric competence and their writing proficiency.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results of Students' Metaphoric Competence

In this section, students' metaphoric competence will be demonstrated. In the methodology part, the whole process of identifying metaphors have been showed. Here is the final results. It can be found that the highest score is 29.0 and the lowest score is 2.0. The mean of the statistics is 4.647 and the standard deviation is 5.2042. Here is the table given by SPSS 20.0.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Metaphoric Competence

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metaphoric Competence	34	2.0	29.0	4.647	5.2042
Valid N (listwise)	34				

From the results, it can be seen that there is great difference between students metaphoric competence. Most students aren't good at writing with a metaphoric awareness. Therefore, most students don't do well in using metaphors and there metaphoric competence is at a relatively low level.

4.2 Relationship Between Students' Metaphoric Competence and Writing Proficiency

The purpose of the writing test is to measure students' writing proficiency. The result provided by SPSS 20.0 is as follows.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Writing Proficiency

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Writing Proficiency	34	10.70	13.70	12.2529	.63971
Valid N (listwise)	34				

Here the English majors' writing proficiency can be demonstrated. Among these subjects, 14 is the highest mark, while 11 is the lowest, showing that the difference between students are small. Most students are marked from 10.70 to 13.70.

Table 3. Correlation between Writing Proficiency and Metaphoric Competence

		Writing proficiency	Metaphoric competence
Writing Proficiency	Pearson Correlation	1	.917[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	34	34

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 has demonstrated that the Pearson Correlation coefficient between writing proficiency and metaphoric competence is .917[*], showing that there is a strong correlation between writing proficiency and metaphoric competence ($p<0.01$).
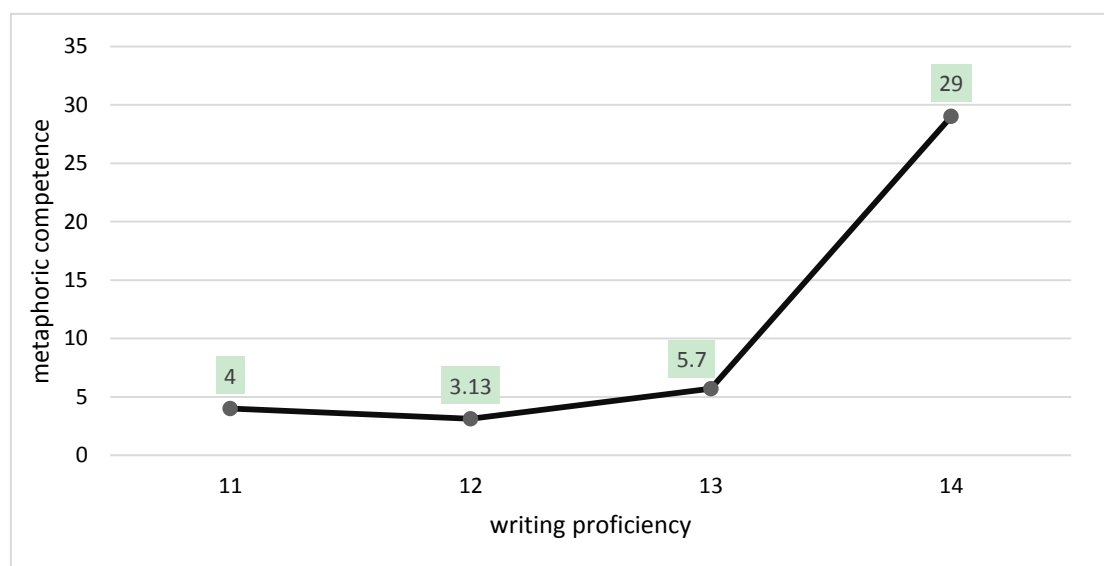

Figure 1. The Relationship between Metaphoric Competence and Writing Proficiency

Here is a figure showing the relation between these two variables. It can be seen that students who got higher grades can write with more metaphors. Here "writing proficiency" refers to the final marks of students, "metaphoric competence" refers to the number of metaphors that were identified in compositions.

4.3 Discussion

In this part, the results of writing proficiency will be discussed. It can be concluded that most students have reached a relatively high level of English writing. They are able to perform their writing according to some specific requirements. Besides, they are capable of taking many factors into consideration, like vocabulary, structure, cohesion and coherence. Undeniably, there are also some problems. Many errors and mistakes are still inevitable. All in all, most students have difficulty in using metaphors appropriately. For students with high marks, metaphors can be found in their writings, while students with low marks rarely use metaphors in their writings.

In this research, metaphoric competence is analyzed from one main aspect — identification, which plays a main role in testing students metaphoric competence. The results have demonstrated that the majority of students is not good at using metaphors. In the process of writing a composition, some students even failed to write with an awareness of using some metaphors. The main reason is that many students are having difficulty in giving more interpretation of one concept. What's more, most students would try to write with a mode of translating Chinese into English. However, as Lu (2016) mentions that great differences exist between English and Chinese, which means that not all English could find its equivalent words in Chinese. Consequently, students will have trouble in writing well for a lack of the conceptual understanding. This study is aim at finding the relation between writing proficiency and metaphoric competence by means of finding the relation between students' writing performance

and their metaphor production. Almost all sentences of students' writings can be seen as produced by themselves. Therefore, the process of metaphor production can be used to measure students' producing ability. From table 3 and figure 1 above, it is showed that the relation between these two items is positive correlation. That is to say, the better students use metaphor, the better they can perform in writing. The reasons for this correlation are as follows. As is mentioned, vocabulary, cohesion and coherence are all factors that influence students' writing. According to research, Hua (2013) proposes that conceptual metaphor is conducive to developing a coherent discourse. Semantic category includes many aspects, in which conceptual metaphor and discourse are all important parts. From the writing samples, we can find that the use of metaphor can help to construct the whole passage better. To some extent, cohesion contributes a lot to achieve coherence, but the appearance of metaphor will help to develop this sort of cohesion. There is an example from one student's writing: "From my point of view, Nanjing is a terrifically attractive city in all facets and the Qinhuai River is exactly the birthplace of the aged Nanjing culture. The Qinhuai River, a branch of the mighty Yangtze River, has nursed the rich civilization of Nanjing." In this example, one metaphor whose core is "river is a mother" occurs. And other vocabularies, such as birthplace, nurse are all related with this main metaphor, leading to a coherent discourse. Dong (2002) makes a conclusion about the ways to achieve coherence, such as substitution, connection, ellipsis. Now we find that by using metaphors, the quality of one passage can be improved. For years many efforts have been made to improve English learners' writing proficiency. It is found that people tend to focus on the grammar level and the correct usage of English, yet the richness and diversity are ignored. However, one major reason for the bad writing performance is the different thinking pattern existing between language. Therefore, it is vital to put more attention to including some metaphoric knowledge to English learning.

5. Conclusion

This study mainly demonstrates the influence of conceptual metaphor competence on students' writing proficiency. In the process of second language acquisition, conceptual transfer mechanism tends to cause students transfer their knowledge of L1 to the application of L2, thus affecting their metaphorical competence and further their writing performance.

In this chapter, conclusions will be represented.

5.1 A Summary of Major Findings

After the analysis and discussions of the above data, some findings related to the research can be listed.

(1) Participants are not good at using metaphors. Most students are at a relatively low level of using metaphors.

(2) There was a positive correlation between metaphorical competence and writing proficiency. To some extent, metaphorical competence improvement will help to develop the writing proficiency.

5.2 Implications of the Study

The implications of the study to language learners are as follows.

First of all, metaphor study plays a necessary role in English study. Therefore, the English learners should look at metaphors from a new perspective and attach great importance to metaphor study. With an increase in students' metaphorical awareness, great progress can be achieved in their writing competence. Secondly, it is very critical for both students and teachers to develop a different attitude towards metaphors. It is implied that the ways of metaphor learning should be changed, which means that students should strengthen their awareness of learning the culture underlying the language. A majority of students can't use metaphors appropriately for a lack of cultural knowledge. However, there is a lot of obvious distinctions between conceptual systems of English and Chinese. Thirdly, students are also supposed to develop a habit of using metaphors. It is advised that students should learn the method of aesthetic thinking, which allows them to make more analogies and write in a more creative way.

5.3 Limitations and Further Suggestions

Constrained by time and resources, there are still some limitations which need to be further improved. First, the participants were merely chosen from two classes. Therefore, it is less convincing that taking only two classes of students' writing materials as a representation of the whole English majors. Additionally, most students of English majors are girls. It is advised that in the future study more boys should be invited to be participated in the test to guarantee the representativeness of the participants. Second, in this process of metaphoric competence test, only one main aspect (identification) is taken into consideration. Other aspects like interpretation and the speed of creating a new metaphor were ignored due to the limitation of resources. To some extent, these factors

also play their role in students' writing proficiency. Finally, in order to measure the cognitive differences, making a comparison of metaphoric competence between English and Chinese is also of great importance. In the further research, more subjects should be selected to take part in this metaphoric competence, making the final results more convincing. It can not only do the research in English majors, but also the non English majors. Additionally, in the further study, more researchers are advised to conduct some empirical studies to figure out the relation between metaphoric competence and other language skills, such as spoken English. Consequently, more information can be collected to find the influence of conceptual metaphor in English learning. More teaching methods can be designed and adopted to help English learners.

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