

2020

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### Recommended Citation

Edan, Dr. Mahmoud Arif (2020) "Animation as an Early Source for Metaphor Acquisition by younger children," *Midad AL-Adab Refereed Quarterly Journal*: Vol. 2020: Iss. 1, Article 75.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/midad/vol2020/iss1/75>

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# Animation as an Early Source for Metaphor Acquisition by younger children

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الرسوم المتحركة كمصدر مبكر لاكتساب الأطفال الصغار الاستعارة

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## الملخص:

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو تسليط الضوء على الرسوم المتحركة المصدر الأساسي للأطفال الصغار لفهم الاستعارات. يمكنهم الاستفادة من تلك الرسوم المتحركة للتعرف على الخرائط المفاهيمية وتنشيطها. تقوم الدراسة بتطبيق نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية (CMT) بواسطة العالمان لاکوف و جونسون (1980) ليكون الإطار النظري لهذه الدراسة. إن جمع البيانات عبارة عن مقابلات فردية (وجها لوجه) وهو النوع الرئيسي والأكثر شيوعاً لطرق جمع البيانات في البحث ذات الطبيعة النوعية، إلا أن هذا البحث يطبق النظام المختلط الذي يجمع بين بحث الكمي والطرق النوعية. الأداة هي عبارة عن جهاز التابلت و التي تم تحميلها بصور للرسوم المتحركة التي يعرفها الأطفال. بالنسبة لكل صورة، يُسأل الأطفال بعض الأسئلة التي تم إعدادها مسبقاً لتشخيص قدرتهم على الاستعارة. تتطابق المقابلة مع عدد العينات المحدودة المناسبة ليقصر على 19 طفلاً. تظهر النتائج أن الأطفال بالكاد يفوتون تفسير الاستعارات الخاصة بهذه الصور الكرتونية، ويوضحون أيضاً الرموز التي تطابق الخريطة المفاهيمية المستمدة من تلك الرسوم المتحركة و التي لم شاهدها الاطفال مسبقاً في تلك الرسوم المتحركة. أهمية الدراسة تكمن في تسليط الضوء على المساحة التي نادراً ما يتم تسليط الضوء فيها على فاعلية الرسوم المتحركة في اكتساب قدرة تفسير الاستعارة. وتلفت الدراسة أيضاً انتباه العائلات إلى حقيقة أنه بالإضافة إلى وجهة النظر المتشائمة عند قضاء الأطفال وقتاً أطول أمام التلفزيون، فإن لها أيضاً فوائد استيعابية تساعد أطفالهم على بناء نظامهم المفاهيمي.

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight evidence the animations the primary source for younger children to acquire metaphors. They can make use of those cartoons to recognise and activate their conceptual maps. The study applied the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff, & Johnson (1980) to be the theoretical framework of this study. The data collection is one-on-one method interviews (or face to face) which is the major and commonest type of the data collection methods in research whose nature is qualitative, yet this research applies the mixed method that combines the prose of the quantitative and qualitative methods. The instrument is merely a tablet gadget that has already been uploaded pictures of cartoons that the children are familiar with them. For each picture, the children are asked some question that are already prepared to check their ability to derive metaphors from them. The interview matches the number of the convenience sampling to be limited to 19 children. Findings show that children hardly miss the interpretation of metaphors of those cartoon pictures. They could explain as well the symbolic figures that matching the conceptual map derived from those cartoons which are not in fact found in those cartoons. The study is significant because it shed light on the rarely tackled area on cartoons and metaphor acquisition. And the study draws the attention of the families to the fact that besides the pesemistic point of views when children spend a longer time in front of the TV, it has also comprehension benefits that help their children build conceptual system.

**Keywords:** *metaphor, cartoons, intimation, conceptual system, children comprehension, acquisition*

## Introduction

The word Metaphor belongs to the Greek origins, which indicates the meaning of a container that carries the meaning from a certain place to another. At some recent times, linguists investigated metaphors and concluded that some types of speech figures represent metaphors and their major aim was to obtain a description of the history of such figures. In semantics, Metaphor differs literal form in two distinctive ways. The first way is that metaphor does not has the intention to determine the literary language; otherwise, it belongs to the language as a whole. Secondly, Metaphor, as compared to literary language, is not limited as in the case of literary language but it is a cognition issue in the language. In other words, it goes beyond limits to search on other boundaries of meaning, which is based on the conceptual map that a word holds in peoples' minds. To take an example is the following sentence

-John has been drowned in his thought

As can be seen in the above example, the imagination plays an important role in deciding the meaning of the sentences and the rest of the sentences similar to it. Being drown in something can be associated with a huge amount of water were people could deeply drown and separated from the rest of the world. As such, drown in his thought mean he is separated from the outside on his mind because he is in the depth of his mind and temporarily unaware of his surroundings. Thus, and as Halliday (1997) believes, analyzing metaphoricity in a general sense would not be attainable unless an important condition exists that language should be trusted to be a type of behaviour and is not merely a figures and codes. In other words, language is a behaviour in a certain social situation where meaning could crucially vary. Within the limits of such presentation, metaphors are associated with similar pictures in



the world of reality. Most of the times metaphors are difficult to be recognized in that world of reality, especially for younger children. Yet, children might have other alternatives to coincidentally collect some metaphor comprehensions of some idioms. To put it in a decisive claim is that what makes metaphors more obvious for younger children is through cartoons that majorly represent the metaphors in superficial ways with obvious exaggeration, which makes metaphors mentally more tangible. Accordingly, this research finds the subject to be worthy to be presented through testing children's comprehensions of some metaphors in association with animation films.

### Literature Review

This section signifies the theories and opinions that are related to the focus of this study. Majorly, this section deals with the two theories that are directly related to the core subject matter of this study. The first theory is 'Conceptual Metaphor Theory' by Lakoff, & Johnson (1980), and the second theory is Piaget's theory (1936) of cognitive development that explains how children construct mental models of the world. In the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor Lakoff (1993) makes an objection to the devotion of the classical theory of language that reviews metaphors as matters of language. Lakoff declares that metaphors focus is outside the borders of the language, otherwise, it is in the way people conceptualize a certain mental domain in our minds in terms of another mental domain. For Lakoff, the conceptual system that underlies all languages contains many thousands of conceptual metaphors (Ibid). In the work, *Metaphors We Live By* By George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), the suggestion is made that metaphors do not only turn our thoughts to be interesting and vivid but that they also structure our understanding and perceptions. Those scholars look to metaphor as pervasive in everyday life that we experience and not just in the language but

they deeply exist in our thought and action. Metaphors concepts in the culture of the two scholars Lakoff and Johnson are not strictly necessarily the identical in other cultures. They provided their argument with an example that says ‘He shot down all of my arguments’. They refer their experiences in their real-world with the argument in the daily life to conceptualize the ‘war’. Reddy shows the locus of the metaphor is thought and not language, that metaphors are major and indispensable parts of our ordinary conventional ways of conceptualizing our world and that our everyday behaviour can reflect our metaphorical understandings of the experience (Fearing: 1967).

In the dictionary, the term ‘metaphor’ is defined as the entity being a part of language which is employed imaginatively to characterize someone or something (Oxford Dictionary, 2001). To most of the people, metaphors are figures of speech in which one thing can be compared to another through saying that one is the same of another, as in the case of ‘He is a lion’. The metaphorical indication of the lion is the characteristic of the linguistic expression (Like a lion which gives the meaning of bravery). Thus, metaphor is based on the resemblance between the mentioned two entities that people compare and identify. The term brave has to share certain features with the term ‘lions’ for people to be able to match the two terms. In the Literary studies, metaphors are defined as the analogy identification of one object with another object and ascription of the first object to one or more of the qualities of the second. While In linguistics, metaphors are mostly defined according to the referential functions they carry. Within this scope, Trask (1999) indicates that metaphors refer to the non-literal application of the linguistic shapes, and they are designed to draw the people’s attention to the perceived resemblance. This type of ‘resemblance’ includes a kind of

comparison since metaphor involves a relation of some kind of resemblance or analogy and taking in consideration that such resemblance is not 'explicitly' stated. Therefore, Metaphor Language constitutes the greatest cognitive ability of people. It attracts human observation and records human progress and enterprise, which happens at the same time. Among the language aspects and domains that attract and express the importance of the language is a metaphor (Derrida & Moore, 1974; Jannotta, 2010, Khoshniyat & Dowlatabadi, 2014; Al Jumah, 2007, Ortony, et al, 1978). To sum up the part of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, It offers a novel insight in areas of language research like the language change as well as language acquisition. (Crystal, 2003). To tackle the age factor in this section,

Piaget believes that the development of children occurs through a progressive transformation of the thought processes. A developmental stage involves of a period, of months or years when one development occurs. Piaget has the ideology that a child develops steadily and gradually through the different stages and that the children's experiences in a certain stage form the construction for one movement to the next one. Throughout our life, all people repeatedly pass through each stage ahead of time of starting the next one and no one can skip any stage. (Eggen & Kauchak, 2000). Piaget has identified four primary stages of development, which are as the following: Sensorimotor Stage (from 0-2 years old) is the stage when an infant's mental and cognitive attributes gradually develop from the time of birth until the time of the appearance of language. This period is characterized by the continuous acquisition of the object permanence in which the children become able to get objects after they are displaced, even if the object has been taken out of the field of vision. For instance, the experiments that Piaget



does at this stage of development include hiding a certain object under another thing as a pillow to find out if the child can find that object. Another characteristic of the child at this stage is the ability to relate numbers to different objects (Piaget, et al, 1977) (ex; three pigs, one dog, two cats, four hippos). Preoperational Stage (from 2-7 years old): this stage is characterized by increasing in language ability. This second stage pushes children to engage with the problem-solving activities that integrate available materials like sand, blocks, and water. There is a lack of the logic associated in this stage of development whereas rational thought constitutes little part of appearance. Children can link together many unrelated events and see objects as possessing life, do not understand the point of views, and are not able to reverse operations. To take an example, children at this stage can understand that adding five to four results nine but cannot reverse the operation of taking out four from nine. The third stage is the Concrete Operations Stage Preoperational Stage (from 7-11 years old) that characterized by the growth of the cognition in a remarkable way when a child develops and acquires the basic skills of the language. Children at this stage utilizes his/her senses and, as a result, can consider two or three dimensions at one time instead of in a successive way. For instance, in a liquids experiment, if the children notice the lowered level of the container of the liquid, they also notice the dish is wider through seeing both dimensions not in a successive but at the same time. Furthermore, sequences and classification are shown to be the two prominent logical operations that have their huge development during this stage of development (Piaget, et al, 1977) and both of them are vital for the understanding several concepts. The fourth stage of development is the Formal Operations Stage Preoperational Stage (from 11-upwards years old). At this stage, children typically begin



developing abstract patterns thoughts where reasoning is performed through using symbols without the necessity of perceiving the actual data. The reasoning skills in this stage point out to the mental processes that are involved in the evaluating generalizing of the logical arguments (Anderson, 1990). And the stage also includes inference, clarification, application, and evaluation. At this stage, Students are developmentally being ready to make deductive and inductive inferences, especially in mathematics. Deductive inferences includes the reasoning from some general concepts to other specific instances.

To sum up, this section signifies the theories and opinions that are related to this study. The first theory is 'Conceptual Metaphor Theory' by Lakoff, & Johnson (1980), and the second theory is Piaget's theory (1936) of cognitive development that explains how children construct mental models of the world. The study chooses to study the metaphors in relation to the Preoperational Stage (from 2-7 years old). That because, concerning the metaphor comprehension at this age stage children are underestimated as being qualified thinkers. This view is even more inconvenient when forgetting that children might develop their mental comprehension via a certain experience such as cartoons. Moreover, the issue of individual differences should take its part when it comes to the issue of metaphor comprehension.

### **Materials and Methods**

The method used in this study is One-on-one qualitative mixed-method interviews that is the major and commonest type of the data collection methods in qualitative. This section can be better organized as the following:

The Participant: the subjects of the current study are the arbitrary collected children whose age range is between 5-7. This particular age range has

chosen on purpose because according to Jean Piaget's theory (1997) this range is called 'Concrete operational'. The trait of this range is that children manipulate symbols logically away from the metaphor tendencies. They might solve problems without encountering physical things in their real life. Thus, according to this age, the study needs to find if the cartoons unconsciously build some of their metaphors.

Data collection procedure:

The data collection began on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2020 and lasted for 5 days. The researcher arbitrary asked some neighbours and friend to allow me to ask their kids about the matter of the study. Some parents found the questions weird because they ignore the purpose of the study in full form. There were occasions when the researcher excluded certain participant because one cannot predict the individual differences among children. To put it clearer, some kids were too active to be controlled and asked which forced the researcher to retreat and cancel the interview without letting their parents notice that the researcher was frustrated with their unqualified kids. After 5 days from the beginning of the data collection, the mission is accomplished even though the number is not big since the researcher used the convenience sampling.

A convenience sample is the type of the non-probability sampling where a sample is taken from an easy contact group it is used when there is no other option to collect the sample a researcher desire. This method is applied when it is difficult to reach the required sample because of some difficult situations. Therefore, it is acceptable to have a limited number of participants when it is difficult to collect more. That is the main issue that pushes the study to select the convenience sampling method since the world is suffering from the current epidemic of covid-19. That issue obligated people to stay at

home and make it difficult for the researcher to apply other than this method of sampling (Creswell, 2012).

**The instrument:**

The instrument of this study constitutes simply on a tab gadget that has already been uploaded pictures of cartoons that are familiar to the children. The pictures were colourful and hoped to attract the children's attention. For each picture, the children are asked some question that are already prepared to check their ability to derive metaphors from them. The instrument consists of 15 questions and each correct question is given one mark. The evaluation of being qualified vs nonqualified performance by the responder is measured according to the method of Sheskin (2003: 10) who advised the median mark (i.e. 50%) as a reliable method of evaluation. Generally, According to this scale, the test result is classified into two (or even four). Those who obtain less than the median level (i.e. 50%) will be marked as weak subjects while those who score the median level up will be evaluated as qualified subjects. According to the current study, the test is out of 15 marks, yet by using a certain math equation the mark is converted to be out of 100%. The equation is as the following: the mark out of 15 (for example 10)  $\times 100 = 1000 \div 15 = 67\%$ .

### **Validity and reliability:**

The instrument was validated by a panel of experts (three Ph. D. holders in the field) and many issues were discussed as the suitability of the instrument for the age range of the study, the scoring schema, the time needed for answering the questionnaire, and many other issues. The experts' points were seriously adopted by the researcher and the adjustment was made. For the reliability, the test was applied on 5 kids ahead of time from the actual test and after 10 days the same kids retested for the second time. In comparison between the responses and results of the two tests, the consistency was clearly shown which indicated that the instrument is acceptably reliable.

### **Result analysis and Discussion:**

As it is shown in table 1, participants performances vary and the overall level is satisfactory. The weak participants who did not answer the questions are two only, yet they did answer some questions correctly. Their contributions were evaluated to be weak and unqualified especially when there were 87% qualified students. Other results indicate the following respondents' performance: 13% accepted level, 27% medium level, 7% good level, 33% very good level, 13% excellent level. Thus, the overall performance is qualified.




No. of kids	Correct responses	Incorrect responses	Mark out of 15	Mark out of 100 %	evaluation			
1	9	6	9	60%	Medium			
2	12	3	12	80%	Very good			
3	6	9	6	40%	Weak			
4	14	1	14	93%	Excellent			
5	12	3	12	80%	Very good			
6	9	6	9	60%	Medium			
7	14	1	14	93%	Excellent			
8	3	12	3	20%	Weak			
9	11	4	11	73%	good			
10	12	3	12	80%	Very good			
11	8	7	8	53%	accepted			
12	9	6	9	60%	Medium			
13	13	2	13	87%	Very good			
14	12	3	12	80%	Very good			
15	8	7	8	53%	accepted			
<b>Tota</b> 	Weak 2	Accepted 2	Medium 4	Good 1	Very good 5	Excellent 2	Fail = 13%	Pass = 87%

Table 1: test results

## Conclusion

The study concluded that what children observe in cartoon improve their conceptual system and lead the to match their conceptual maps gotten room cartoon to other metaphors that are not in relation. children did not miss the interpretation of metaphors of those cartoon pictures and this can be exploited, for learning target by people who are in the field or those who are responsible for the Educational System. The study is also significant to open the discussion that metaphors are more obvious in cartoons because producers can depict metaphors more obviously than in any other fields especial it meets the interest of children in general.

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