



A Can of Worms: Exploring EFL Learners' Struggles with Figurative Language

Dr. Abdelaaziz Ziadi

University of Mascara, Algeria

Abstract

Figurative language plays a pivotal role in enriching literary texts, yet it remains one of the most challenging aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. This study investigates the struggles that EFL learners face in interpreting and applying figurative language, with a particular focus on metaphor. Drawing on data collected from a detailed questionnaire administered to first-year university students, this research identifies core barriers to comprehension, including hidden meanings, cultural unfamiliarity, and limited instructional emphasis on figurative devices. The findings reveal that while many learners recognise the importance of figurative language in understanding literature, they often lack the necessary strategies to decode complex imagery, leading to frustration and disengagement. The paper further examines students' coping mechanisms, such as dictionary use, teacher negotiation, and contextual inference, and explores pedagogical gaps in current approaches to teaching figurative language. By highlighting these challenges, this study aims to inspire discussion on innovative, culturally responsive strategies to make figurative language instruction more accessible and impactful in EFL classrooms. This research contributes to the growing discourse on integrating literary analysis into language teaching, underscoring the need for interdisciplinary collaboration among educators, linguists, and curriculum designers.

Keywords: Cultural literacy; EFL learners; Figurative language; Language education; Literary analysis; Metaphor comprehension; Teaching strategies