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Reading Comprehension, Figurative Language Instruction, and the Turkish English Language Learner

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Abstract

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Turkish-speaking population in the United States increased significantly in the 1990s and has risen steadily over time. Today, the highest concentration is located in the states of New York, California, New Jersey, and Florida. Kaya (2003) reported a geographical dispersion across the U.S., from New York to Alaska, with the wealthiest living in Florida. Turkish students make up the ninth largest student population in the U.S. and the largest percentage of students compared to their homeland population. This article identifies and explores many of these challenges by observing the transition of Hakan, a Turkish-speaking fifth grade student, as he encounters a new culture and learns a new language. In particular, we focus on the acquisition of figurative language in a Turkish-speaking English Language Learner (ELL). Some issues and questions addressed in the article include effective methodologies for the assessment of

figurative language acquisition in the Turkish and English languages, effective instructional strategies to scaffold Turkish-speaking English Language Learners' (ELLs) acquisition of figurative language, and linguistic factors that might affect Turkish-speaking students' transition to English. The article sets forth theoretical underpinnings for the chosen assessment and instructional strategies, as well as a summary of supporting research in the area of Turkish-speaking ELLs.

"Don't give me a crowd of words," declared Hakan as a book of idioms was placed on the desk.

"What does that mean?" his teacher inquired.

"Well, you need to tell me why you are here...it is not just to see my mother...come on, tell me what lies under your tongue?"

This ten-year-old had acquired a new skill of translating all his thoughts word-for-word into English. He was enjoying the "fun" in learning about figurative language, and he recognized how incredibly funny it really sounded to translate an idiom literally.

"Don't give me a crowd of words" is an idiomatic phrase (*laf kalabalagi yapma*) in Turkish that has the same meaning as "Don't beat around the bush." As an English Language Learner (ELL), Hakan struggled to comprehend passages that contained challenging forms of figures of speech in the classroom and in everyday life.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Turkish-speaking population increased significantly in the 1990s and has risen steadily over time. Kaya (2003) reports that an increasing number of Turkish families are settling in various geographical locations across the United States, with the largest numbers choosing to live in New York, New Jersey, California, and Florida. As this population growth trend continues, so too does the number of Turkish speaking children entering the American public school system. In this article, we explore educational challenges unique to this population by observing the transition of Hakan, a Turkish-speaking fifth grade student, as he encounters a new culture and learns a new language. The assessment and instructional strategies used with Hakan focus specifically on figurative language interpretation and reading comprehension, an area that challenges many ELLs. As work with Hakan began, several questions became paramount:

1. Why is it important to incorporate direct, or explicit, instruction in figurative language for English Language Learners?
2. What is the nature of Hakan's first language (L1) (Turkish) and the figures of speech in that language?
3. What instructional model will best scaffold Hakan's proficiency in understanding English figurative language?

We address each question in the following sections.

Question #1: Why is it important to incorporate direct, or explicit, instruction in figurative language for English Language Learners?

Many words and phrases have both literal and figurative meanings. Tompkins (2002) explained that, "literal meanings are the explicit, dictionary meanings, and figurative meanings are metaphorical or use figures of speech" (p. 233). Among researchers, there is an increasing interest in the use of figurative language partly because of the growing awareness of such phenomena as metaphor and figurative idioms in everyday language (Charteris-Black, 2002). Those students who are not able to interpret figurative language will most probably fail to comprehend oral or written messages containing such language.

As texts become more challenging across grades and the frequency of figurative language usage increases, the problem of comprehension potentially becomes more serious; therefore, children in the early grades must learn how to identify and interpret less complex figures of speech so that they can interpret more complex forms effectively as adolescents (Nippold & Taylor, 2002). As Ortony (1984) and Vosniadou and Ortony (1983) pointed out, very young children can understand some forms of figurative language. Given that students encounter figurative language in both oral and written expression every day, the introduction of figurative language instruction must start as early as possible. According to Boers (2000), "language learners are bound to be confronted with figurative discourse at various stages of the learning process" (p. 553). Language learners must develop the ability to understand and use figurative language through years of practice as they mature (Palmer, Zirps, & Martin 1992). Research addressing several forms of figurative language revealed that children could better understand texts, including figurative language phrases, when related instruction was provided (Cacciari & Levorato, 1998; Ezell, 1996; Tompkins, 2002). For example, Cacciari and Levorato (1998) found that young children may successfully sort out figurative elements as they develop figura-

tive competence, but they may give inexact explanations due to their developing knowledge of semantic analysis.

Developing the ability to comprehend and use figurative language has significant importance because “researchers see figurative language not just as special rhetorical devices for communication, but as reflecting pervasive figurative schemes of thought” (Gibbs, 2001, p. 318). Gibbs (1994) explains, “people may not need to analyze the literal interpretation of the metaphorical utterances before deriving their intended metaphorical meanings” (p. 100). Gibbs (2001) also points out the following:

Numerous reading-time and phrase-classification studies demonstrate that listeners and readers can often understand the figurative interpretations of metaphors, irony and sarcasm, idioms, proverbs, and indirect speech acts without necessarily having to first analyze and reject their literal meanings when these expressions are seen in realistic social contexts. (p. 318)

Since the literal meaning of a word or an expression requires only the knowledge of facts and the dictionary meanings of the words, “literal language can be understood via normal cognitive mechanisms” (Gibbs, 1999, p. 467). However, the readers or the “listeners must recognize the deviant nature of a figurative utterance before determining its nonliteral meaning” when they encounter figurative language in oral and written expression (Gibbs, 1999, p. 468).

Gibbs (2001) stresses that “understanding whether figurative language is processed directly or indirectly may best be explained in terms of very flexible models that specify the exact dynamics of how different linguistic and nonlinguistic sources of information interact to create figurative meanings” (p. 325). In order for students to use figurative language effectively, it is often necessary to design instruction that models how to think at an abstract level and how to make use of words and expressions with meanings other than the ones in dictionaries. If a teacher of a second language makes students aware that “metaphor involves treating (or describing) one entity in terms of another, apparently different entity” by providing them with sample texts that have metaphors and then analyzing them together, students will become more aware of figurative language and how to use a process for interpretation (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 9). As Palmer and Brooks (2004) explain, “if they [students] are thinking metaphorically, then they not only can understand experiences that have been depicted metaphorically but can also construct metaphors that reflect their own schematic experiences” (p. 373).

Figurative language interpretation instruction is imperative for the reading comprehension curriculum of today's elementary school students in the U.S. (Palmer & Brooks, 2004). When students encounter figurative language in their daily lives through conversations and texts that increasingly become more advanced, they may also function within a community of learners that is culturally and linguistically diverse. Therefore, students, especially ELLs, must learn how to deal with idioms that do not translate easily across languages.

While ELLs arrive at school with language knowledge of their first language, that knowledge reflects a different culture than texts they are asked to read and comprehend. According to Graves, Juel, and Graves (2007), it is not that they “come to school with a language deficit” it is that “they come with a lack of knowledge of the particular language that is used in the schools they will be attending—English” (p. 400). When asked to interpret figurative language, which is based on schematic experiences completely different from their cultural backgrounds, the students may be unsuccessful. The challenges are evident and the focus for instructional design, by necessity, requires attention to building background experience as part of the learning process. According to Palmer and Brooks (2004),

To begin the process of comprehending a figurative phrase, the student must be familiar with the cultural values and beliefs that form the context of the phrase. Next, having knowledge of the different forms of figurative language enables the student to recognize more readily nonliteral text. Finally, knowing the context in which the figurative phrase is being used increases the student's ability to interpret it accurately. (p. 373)

Question #2: What is the nature of Hakan's first language (L1) (Turkish) and figures of speech in his language?

Turkish belongs to the Ural Altaic language family (Republic of Turkey, 2002) while English is an Indo-European language. These two languages share some commonalities, termed positive transfers. The most significant positive transfer from Turkish to English is the fact that both are built on the Latin alphabetic system of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. However, there are some major differences (negative transfers) between these two languages, which restrain, and in some cases, block the Turkish learners from mastering English. Table 1 illustrates some of these negative transfers.

Table 1: A Contrastive Analysis of English and Turkish (Negative Transfers)

English	Turkish
Pronunciation	
A stress-timed language (i.e., the stressed syllables are not only emphasized but also take more time to pronounce). For example, in the sentence “I was sick yesterday”, the stressed words are pronounced longer. If the person is stressed, “I” will be emphasized. If time is not stressed, for example, “was” will be very weak and will almost not be heard by the listener.	A syllable-timed language. Each syllable has almost the same emphasis and takes equal time to pronounce. For example, in the sentence “Ben dün hastaydým,” (I was sick yesterday) each syllable has equal importance including the stressed ones. Syllables with equal length will take equal time to pronounce.
The stressed word is usually pronounced more loudly with emphasis. For example, in the sentence “I am going to Istanbul tomorrow,” the emphasized word will be stressed without changing the word order.	The stressed word usually comes just before the verb. For example, in the following sentences, the word just before the verb is emphasized and stressed. “Ben yarýn Ýstanbul’a gidiyorum.” (I will be going to Istanbul tomorrow) (Ýstanbul’a is emphasized and stressed.) “Yarýn Ýstanbul’a ben gidiyorum.” (Tomorrow, I will be going to Istanbul) (“ben” not “someone else”.) “Ben Ýstanbul’a yarýn gidiyorum.” (Tomorrow, I will be going to Istanbul) (“Yarýn”, not some other day.)
“t” and “th” are pronounced differently.	There is no “th” sound. Turkish learners of English usually use only “t” for “t” and “th”.
An irregularly spelled phonetic language (deep orthography). In other words, pronunciations and spellings of words are often different. Extreme examples: “colonel” is pronounced in the same way as the word “kernel” although their spellings are different. Also, the words “wright,” “write,” and “right” are pronounced in the same way though their spellings are different.	A regularly spelled phonetic language (shallow orthography). The words are pronounced in the same way they are spelled. Therefore, Turkish learners of English tend to pronounce English words as they are written.
Grammar (Syntax)	
Word order is important and changing the order usually causes a change in meaning. For example, “The tiger ate the man” is not the same as “The man ate the tiger.” Especially if the places of the subject and the object are changed, the meaning changes.	An agglutinating language. In other words, new words are made by adding suffixes. Therefore, changing the place of a word does not change the meaning but the emphasis only. For example, “Kaplan adamý yedi” (The tiger ate the man) has the same meaning as the sentence “Adamý Kaplan yedi” (The tiger ate the man); only the emphasis is different. Changing the places of the object and the subject does not change the meaning of the sentence. In both sentences, the “doer” of the action is the same: the tiger.

<p>Pronouns are written as separate words like “I, you, he, she”, etc.</p>	<p>Pronouns as separate words are usually omitted especially in informal speech, but they still exist as suffixes added to verbs. For example, “Ben çalışıyorum” (I am working) has the same meaning as “Çalışıyorum.” (I am working) The “-um” suffix at the end of both sentences means “I.”</p>
<p>Sentences are usually longer, not agglutinating.</p>	<p>Sentences may be as short as a word. For example, the English sentence, “They say that I will pass,” can simply be translated as only one word “Geçecekmişim.” Geç- = to pass; -ecek- = will; -miş- = they say that, -im = I. To give another example, the English sentence, “They said that I had passed out” can be translated as “Bayılmışım”, Bayıl-=(to) pass out; -miş- =they say that (here -miş- also shows time, which is past); -ım=I.</p>
<p>The typical word order is subject + verb + object.</p>	<p>The typical word order is subject + object + verb. Due to this word order difference, learners often miscue. A Turkish ELL might say, “I the man speak with” to mean “I spoke with the man” or “I will speak with the man.”</p>
<p>Grammar (Tenses)</p>	
<p>There are different tenses to express things that happened in the past and that still continue. For example, “I have seen Paris” and “I saw Paris” do not have the same meaning. The first one implies that the person still remembers the place; the second one does not imply anything, it is just simple past.</p>	<p>There is no exact equivalent of the present perfect tense: “I have seen Paris” and “I saw Paris” have only one translation as “Paris’I gördüm.”</p>
<p>Morphology</p>	
<p>The verb “to be” is important. It shows the person and time. For example, “am” implies that the subject is “I” and the time is present.</p>	<p>There is no such thing as “to be”; it is replaced by the suffix “-I-mek.”</p>
<p>There are prefixes. For example, there are such words as “important” and “unimportant.”</p>	<p>There are no prefixes; there are only suffixes.</p>
<p>Sociolinguistic Aspects</p>	
<p>American people do not expect a verbal response when they say “thank you.”</p>	<p>When someone says “Teşekkür ederim” (thank you), a response must come. Not responding with “Bir şey değil,” (not at all), is considered rude.</p>
<p>Moving head from left to right and from right to left means “no.”</p>	<p>Moving head in the upward direction means “no” in Turkish. Usually a “cık!” sound accompanies the head movement. The head movement is very similar to nodding, which means “yes” in English.</p>

For the second person singular and second person plural, there is only one pronoun, “you.”	In informal Turkish, “sen” is second person singular and “siz” is second person plural. In formal Turkish, “siz” is used for both.
Words that express people’s relatives are limited. For example, “aunt” is used for both father’s and mother’s sisters.	Words concerning one’s relatives are rich in Turkish. Mother’s sister is “teyze”; father’s sister is “hala”; husband’s sister is “görümce”; wife’s sister is “baldız.” A woman’s brother’s wife’s sister is “elti”; younger brother or sister is “kardeş”; elder sister is “abla” and elder brother is “abi” (or ađabey).

Hakan (pseudonym) and his bilingual (Turkish/English) reading teacher, Mrs. Bilgili, developed a second table (Table 2) in order to compare many English figures of speech with comparable figures of speech in Turkish.

Table 2: Turkish Expressions and their English Counterparts

Turkish Expressions	English Expressions
Haydan gelen huya gider	Easy come, easy go
Ateş ile oynamak	Play with fire
Gülü seven dikenine katlanýr	Take the bitter with the sweet
Ýki cambaz bir ipte oynamaz	Too many cooks spoil the broth
Ateş olmayan yerden duman çýkmaz	Where there is smoke, there is fire
Taþýma suyuyla deđirmen dönmez	You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink
Dilini yutmak	Cat got your tongue?
Sabrýný taþýrmak	At the end of your rope
Yangýna körükle gitmek	Add fuel to the fire
Gözünü nuru	Apple of your eye
Birisini deli etmek	Drive someone crazy
Tükürdüđünü yalamak	Eat his words
Her işte bir hayýr vardýr	Every cloud has a silver lining
Sinirden köpürmek	Foam at the mouth
Anladýysam arap olayým	Greek to me
Bir taşla iki kuş vurmak	Kill two birds with one stone
Ayný kalýptan çýkmak	Like two peas in a pod
Ýncir çekirdeđini doldurmamak	Nickel and dime
Diken üstünde olmak	On pins and needles
Gözden ýrak olan, gönülden de ýrak olur	Out of sight, out of mind

Question #3: What instructional model will best scaffold Hakan's proficiency in understanding English figurative language?

It is important that students become metacognitively aware that some of the phrases they are encountering in their new language require a figurative, rather than a literal, interpretation. When students become aware of their thought processes, they are engaging in metacognition, or “the monitoring and control of thought” (Martinez, 2006, p. 694). This is a powerful tool for learners. Cultivating this level of perception in students may seem like a daunting task, but it can be explicitly taught (James, 2002; Martinez, 2006). Metacognitive awareness must be introduced to students and be embedded within assignments. These types of assignments allow students to “find rich metaphoric correspondences in ordinary experiences and elements” (James, 2002, p. 32).

Metacognition also helps students achieve self-regulation. Martinez (2006) states that “metacognitive awareness is central to conceptions of what it means to be educated” and advocates modeling metacognitive awareness using “think-alouds” (p. 699). In a think-aloud, teachers verbalize their thoughts as they read selections orally to their students, thereby explicitly illustrating effective reading strategies (Block & Israel, 2004). Teacher modeling of a variety of strategies, from decoding to thinking through the interpretation of figurative expressions, is especially relevant for ELLs and students struggling with comprehension.

Recognizing that “figurative language interpretation...should be taught as a reading skill necessary for text comprehension” (Palmer and Brooks, 2004, p. 375), a plan was carefully designed for Hakan. This plan was designed to enhance Hakan's ability to interpret figurative language accurately, and incorporated several effective instructional strategies: (1) planning a successful reading experience; (2) activating the reader's background knowledge; (3) providing explicit instruction; (4) engaging in reading-in-context; and (5) making real-world connections.

Planning a Successful Reading Experience

Graves, et al. (2007) maintain that “to comprehend text, three factors are always involved: the purpose or purposes for reading (why reading is being done), the selection (what is being read), and the reader (who is doing the reading)—the *why*, the *what*, and the *who*” (p. 236). They also assert that teachers can use these three factors effectively to ensure the improvement of readers' literacy skills. Good planning includes having a defined purpose for each lesson; ideally, students would

participate as much as possible in this process of setting the purpose for reading. Teachers who are scaffolding students to focus on the purpose of the reading assignment can also supply readers with carefully selected texts and related reading material that allow them to accomplish the task at hand. According to Hammerberg (2004), teachers empower ELLs when they build “an atmosphere of respect, support, and academic achievement, coupled with the use of texts and reading for culturally relevant purposes” (p. 655). Moreover, Graves et al. (2007) emphasized the need to reflect on the backgrounds of the learners as lesson plans are finalized; aspects for consideration include “the readers’ needs and concerns, interests, strengths and weaknesses as learners, and background knowledge” (p. 240).

Additionally, Delpit (2006) encourages teachers to honor the home culture of their students by acknowledging that individual identity and cultural contexts are a part of students’ abilities to comprehend and interpret the text. Similarly, Cummins, et al. (2005) argue that the cultural knowledge and the competency students have in their home languages are essential to engaging students in the learning process; they emphasize that, “English language learners will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning” (p. 40).

Activating Background Knowledge

Advocating a sociocultural approach, Hammerberg (2004) recommends that teachers help students identify what resources or knowledge they already possess to understand text. Graves et al. (2007) add that, “selections should not require specific knowledge that is not part of their [ELLs’] schemata” (p. 240). By engaging readers with text using activities that activate their existing schemata, students are able to use their background knowledge to acquire understanding at a deeper level. To activate students’ existing schemata, Delpit (2006) supports using familiar metaphors, analogies, and experiences from the students’ own worlds to connect what they already know to the text at hand. Hammerberg (2004) bolsters this idea as it applies to ELLs by recommending that teachers apply a sociocultural approach to reading comprehension instruction. Being cognizant of the strengths students have in their native languages greatly enhances the confidence of students who are engaging in the learning process. Cummins et al. (2005) note that when students are prompted to activate their background knowledge, they are more likely to transfer understanding from one context to the other.

Direct, or Explicit, Instruction

Palmer and Brooks (2004) affirm that “figurative language interpretation is based on students’ schemata; therefore, direct, or explicit, instruction is often needed to provide the knowledge necessary to understand not only the figurative expressions but the context surrounding them as well” (p. 375). Hammerberg (2004) further contends that readers benefit when instructors take the time to clearly explain how to use reading strategies to determine meaning in text. Simmons and Palmer (1994) present a three-step process for finding meaning in figurative language that focuses the reader on a problem-solving approach:

1. Locate the figurative language (word or phrase) within the passage being read.
2. Decipher the literal meaning and determine if that is the message the author is actually trying to convey to the reader.
3. Use background knowledge about the word or phrase to decide what meaning the author intended. (p. 157)

Engaging in Reading-in-Context

Cappellini (2005) proposes using fables to work with upper-grade elementary students because they are usually short and they teach higher-order thinking skills. Although students may not have heard the particular fable being presented, it is likely that ELLs will recognize or remember a fable of similar content from their home cultures. Palmer, Hafner, & Sharp (1994) also encourage the use of fables, such as Aesop’s from the sixth century B.C. as well as more recent fables from around the globe, to develop reading comprehension and thinking as writers. Cruz and Duff (1996) point out that this recognition creates a bridge between cultures for students who gradually begin to see similarities in the sayings, expressions, and stories told to them by grandparents or other relatives and those in their newly learned culture. Such was the case with Hakan as he remembered fondly the stories told to him by his great-grandmother in Turkey, and he responded well to the instructor’s use of a traditional tale from his homeland. Furthermore, when presented with several proverbs, Hakan indicated that he felt comfortable discussing them with his instructor because he recognized similar expressions in Turkish such as those in Table 2. A next step for Hakan was to identify idioms and other types of figurative language in context using specifically selected texts. Based on Hakan’s

stated interest, the instructor introduced figurative language expressions to him in the form of proverbs found in traditional stories, such as fables and folktales.

Making Real-World Connections

According to Qualls, Treaster, Blood, and Hammer (2003), children's ability to recognize and decipher idioms is directly related to the "amount of meaningful exposure" (p. 247). The findings of Qualls et al. (2003) demonstrate that children who received repeated exposure were better able to quickly differentiate idioms from non-idioms as well as process them for comprehension. Additionally, Qualls and Harris' (1999) findings indicate that culturally based idioms tend to be more easily recognized and comprehended by the children accessing them and that the comprehension of older children is bolstered by the context in which idioms are found. Conversations with Hakan support these findings.

Description of the Study

Hakan was a fifth-grade ELL student attending an international school in his district that utilizes a sheltered English approach. This approach integrates content area instruction with the learning of English at a more rapid rate than traditional models. Thus, students are learning English while developing their academic and cognitive abilities. Hakan was initially identified as a student whose presenting problem was the reading-writing connection. Based on conversations with Hakan's parents and his classroom teacher as well as a series of informal observations of him in his classroom environment, Mrs. Ebru Bilgili—a bilingual (Turkish/English) reading teacher—designed a twelve-week instructional intervention plan to scaffold Hakan's comprehension beyond literal interpretation. Mrs. Bilgili met with Hakan one to two times weekly, dependent upon the family's schedule, for a total of 18 meetings lasting approximately one hour each.

An integral part of this instructional plan included the use of student journaling. Within his personal journal, Hakan was encouraged to use a three-step problem solving process (Simmons & Palmer, 1994) as he encountered figurative language at school and in everyday situations. To this three-step process, Mrs. Bilgili included a fourth step, asking Hakan to consider the significance of the figurative language he encountered as it related to his life (Palmer, Shackelford, Miller, & Leclere, 2007). Additionally, direct, or explicit, instruction was provided in the different types

of figurative language. To gauge Hakan's progress, Mrs. Bilgili administered The Figurative Language Interpretation Test, Form A and Form B, respectively, at the onset and at the end of the intervention (Palmer, 1991; Palmer, et al., 1992).

Hakan

Hakan's family is from Ankara, Turkey. Having earned a bachelor's degree in physics and a master's degree in astronomy in Turkey, Hakan's father decided to pursue a doctoral degree in molecular physics at Oxford University in England, where he was offered a full scholarship. While in England, Hakan's father's fluency in English greatly improved; however, his mother did not have the opportunity to strengthen her fluency in this, her second, language. Choosing to leave behind their families and their heritage was a bold step for Hakan's parents; they made this decision because of educational and economic opportunities that were available to them outside of their home culture.

Hakan's parents had a strong desire to instill native language, culture, and values in their young son, so his elementary school years took place in Kayseri, the family's hometown in Turkey. Kayseri, a very traditional rural Turkish town, is the birthplace of Hakan's parents. In this small town, families stay together, practice their faith, and uphold their time-honored traditions. He described his first school in Kayseri, Turkey, as being small like a "hen's den." After completing first and second grades in his hometown, Hakan was sent to live with his uncle in Istanbul, where he attended a private school for third grade and had access to education in a more urban, yet still traditional, environment. Hakan described this experience with a sad face. When asked why, he explained that he was homesick and the other children were "just different." Comparing himself to other students, Hakan portrayed his academic performance as "poor," especially in a new subject called "English." Hakan's most prominent memory of his struggle in the English class was vocabulary. Understanding that one word could have many meanings was a difficult concept for him. Because idioms do not translate well from language to language, ELL students such as Hakan often have difficulty decoding social and academic phrases that include figurative language. For instance, the following expression made no sense to Hakan: "It's a strange world of language in which skating on thin ice can get you into hot water."

Upon completion of his father's degree, the family returned to Ankara, Turkey. While there, Hakan's father took a position with a major university as a

full-time professor. Although he was involved in scientific work, he desired to expand his research interests at a university in the United States. This decision greatly disturbed their families as Hakan's father was the eldest son and, as such, was expected to set an example for his younger siblings. Hakan's grandparents strongly objected to their leaving by reminding the young family of the Turkish expression, "On teker nereye giderse, arka teker de oraya gider" (Where the front wheels go, the back wheels will follow). They believed that this step would forever affect the entire extended family. Hakan's parents agreed, but recognized the benefits that other educational opportunities outside of Turkey could bring to them and their children. With this in mind, Hakan's father accepted a position in the United States as a scientist.

At the time of this study, Hakan, now a fifth grader in a public school in Florida, had completed two school terms in the United States. Despite his obvious frustration with figurative language, he liked to read as he expressed to Mrs. Bilgili his pride in the number of books he read during the previous summer. Mrs. Bilgili's weekly observations and subsequent intervention with Hakan over a three-month period showed him to be a very enthusiastic and highly motivated student who seemed to show great interest in science fiction. He was also a fluent English speaker with only a slight Turkish accent. However, Hakan reported that he disliked writing. His comments on writing included, "I just don't think my writing expresses what I really feel," and "It is difficult to respond to short response questions because I have to find the right words to write." Hakan also commented on his previous writing experiences in Turkey saying, "We did not do as much writing in Turkey as we do here...that's one thing I liked about my Turkish schools. In Turkey, we just answered questions and wrote stories...but not as frequently and not as structured. I liked free writing" (Hakan, personal communication, November 16, 2006).

Prior to finalizing her instructional plan for Hakan, Mrs. Bilgili contacted his current teacher for her observations of Hakan's progress as an English language learner. His fifth grade teacher stated that Hakan was hesitant when asked to write for testing purposes; however, she noted that he was a very creative student who appeared to enjoy writing poems and stories, especially folk tales. Apparently, his creativity had been fostered by family members during his early school years in his homeland; for example, growing up, Hakan remembered listening to his great-grandmother's folk tales that retold events in history. Hakan indicated that his great-grandmother instilled many values in him. Based on those tales, he imagined going back in time to live through the events that took place in Turkish history,

especially the Ottoman Empire. Hakan even imagined himself to be a ruler of a small kingdom.

Because Hakan reported that he enjoyed reading and showed a recently gained confidence in his ability to appreciate what he was reading, one might conclude that he was experiencing success as a reader and learner. However, his classroom teacher observed that Hakan's comprehension was inadequate beyond the literal level. Knowing that ELLs often struggle with interpreting figurative language, it was hypothesized that Hakan's comprehension deficit might be related to his inability to recognize and interpret English figurative language. To assess Hakan's understanding of figurative language, the instructor administered The Figurative Language Interpretation Test, or FLIT (Palmer, 1991; Palmer, et al., 1992). The FLIT is a multiple-choice, standardized test that can be administered either individually or to a group. The FLIT consists of two equivalent 50-item forms (Form A and Form B) and, while it is untimed, can usually be completed within an hour. Questions ask students to read a figure of speech in context and then choose the meaning of that figure of speech as it is used in the sentence. For example, *Mary was loved by all for she had a heart of gold.* Mary was a) honest; b) rich; c) kind; d) dependable. *Joe asked them to give it to him straight.* Joe wanted a) some help; b) the truth, c) a good price; d) something fixed. Provisional norms are provided for grades four to ten and ages 9 to 16+ (Palmer, 1991; Palmer, et al., 1992).

Although not normed for ELLs, it was felt that the FLIT could nevertheless provide valuable information concerning Hakan's acquisition of English figures of speech. Data from the FLIT revealed that, while Hakan did not demonstrate a significant deficit in all types of figurative language, he did show a particular weakness with the interpretation of idioms. Hakan commented that on some of the test items he did not quite know what the phrases meant, but he had guessed based on his knowledge of figurative language in Turkish.

Following the administration of the FLIT, Form A, a careful analysis of the data, and consultation with his classroom teacher, an instructional plan focusing on figurative language interpretation was designed for Hakan and implemented. To activate Hakan's background knowledge and to build on his perceived strengths, Mrs. Bilgili discussed Turkish expressions and proverbs with which he was familiar prior to exposing him to more examples of figurative language used in English. He noted astutely that some of the phrases could be translated to an almost identical metaphor in Turkish.

During instructional sessions, it became apparent that Hakan was a fluent reader in both Turkish and English. It was also evident that he was interested in making comparisons between what he was reading in English and what he had read in Turkish. Hakan continued to use his knowledge of Turkish figurative language as a steppingstone to familiarize himself with English figurative language. Direct, or explicit, instruction began with an introduction to various types of figurative language through reading a familiar Turkish folktale. Hakan read this folktale in Turkish (L1) as well as an English (L2) translation of the same folktale. Later, when asked to read the Turkish fable aloud in Turkish, he did so enthusiastically. Afterwards, Mrs. Bilgili and Hakan together identified the figurative language found within the text. Next, Mrs. Bilgili, utilizing a think-aloud (Block & Israel 2004; Martinez, 2006), modeled how she understood the meaning of those phrases and how they added to understanding the story. The think-aloud was followed by a discussion with Hakan that focused attention on several key words and their meanings. Hakan wrote these words and phrases and referred to them when answering Mrs. Bilgili's higher-order questions about the story. This questioning led him to discover the intended meaning of the figurative expression. While Hakan's understanding of Turkish is strong, and he continued to retell and discuss what he read in his native tongue, he did have difficulty answering some of the comprehension questions that required figurative language interpretation, even when asked to explain the meanings in Turkish. Hakan was then asked to read a folk tale aloud in English and was asked to identify examples of figurative language, particularly idioms, found within the text without assistance. Once he identified the figurative language expressions, Mrs. Bilgili and Hakan discussed the meanings of each, focusing on how their meanings added to his understanding of the story. Mrs. Bilgili conducted a discussion on several key words and their meanings, and Hakan wrote these words on a list.

To help Hakan make connections between the figurative language used in the text and the real world, Mrs. Bilgili asked him to think of situations in his own life where particular proverbs had application. For example, the proverb, "Easy come, easy go," allowed him to combine story content and humor. Hakan expressed understanding of this proverb by telling Mrs. Bilgili that he had recently experienced this feeling when he found some money that he had unknowingly left in a coat pocket. Unfortunately, when he removed the money from the coat pocket, he realized that he once again misplaced those coins. Hakan grinned and said, "Easy come, easy go!"

For homework, Hakan was asked to create a list of figurative expressions that he encountered in his daily life and write them in his journal. Following this assignment, Mrs. Bilgili and Hakan discussed the many uses of figurative language that occurred on a regular basis outside of school. He noted that before this new awareness he simply translated such expressions literally; now, he seemed to understand why previously these words had made no sense to him. They discussed other figurative phrases, including idioms, that Hakan found and together they created a list of corresponding Turkish-English expressions; almost all of them had English counterparts (see Table 2). Hakan was then presented with more fables, as well as additional native folk tales, and he worked with his instructor to identify the idioms contained within these stories. His familiarity with the stories appeared to make him feel comfortable identifying the idioms and explaining their meanings.

After this explicit instruction, Hakan was administered the FLIT, Form B. He participated with enthusiasm. His demeanor was relaxed during the 20 minutes it took him to finish the test, and he did not ask any questions during the session. An item analysis of the FLIT, Form B, revealed a need for continued practice with idioms, proverbs, and allusions. Mrs. Bilgili and Hakan's classroom teacher, however, observed that he now consistently used a systematic process for tackling and successfully processing figurative language in reading and in his interactions with others. Hakan's comments following the FLIT reflected solid self-confidence, referring to this activity as a "piece of cake."

Implications

Metaphoric expression is present in all languages, and children of all cultures develop metaphorical awareness. Explicit instruction, however, is often needed for ELLs to transfer specific metaphorical expression from a first language to a second. This point became evident following the administration of the Figurative Language Interpretation Test (FLIT) (Palmer, 1991; Palmer, et al., 1992) when Hakan noted that he recognized figurative language in his native tongue. Mrs. Bilgili then began discussing Turkish expressions and idioms with which Hakan was familiar prior to exposing him to more examples of figurative language used in English. Conversations of this type served to activate Hakan's background knowledge and to build on his perceived strengths.

Another method used to enhance Hakan's metaphoric awareness during the pre-reading phase of instruction was to illustrate that "metaphor is a very common

ingredient of everyday language” (Boers, 2000, p. 566). For example, engaging Hakan in a discussion about lost coins revealed his understanding of the practical application of the expression “easy come, easy go.” According to Boers (2000), this type of discussion may lead the student to recognize that figurative language is very much a part of his own conversational definition. Boers (2000) advocates that by interacting with students in this manner, “they will realize that metaphor is not just an ornamental device confined to poetry, but rather a typical aspect of language (and thought) in general” (p. 566).

A discussion of metaphor must also include a discussion of metaphoric themes that can help ELLs make connections. Often the development of background knowledge reflective of the culture of the new language must occur in order for the learner to develop complete understanding of the metaphor. Though many metaphoric themes are culturally specific, Boers and Demecheleer (2001) point out that some figurative expressions share metaphoric themes across languages and cultures. Conversations with Hakan, as well as subsequent observations of him, support these findings. Being able to recognize that figurative expressions are not arbitrary can help ELLs transfer knowledge from their native tongue to the new language. To accomplish this task, ELLs should be encouraged to explore the metaphoric themes, such as love, anger, beauty, etc. If the student does not recognize the theme, this could be an opportunity to teach or remind the student of this concept, i.e. to share a cultural lesson.

Illustrative of these findings, Hakan recounted to Mrs. Bilgili his inability to describe appropriately his emotions in English to a classmate following a lesson on the American National Anthem. When a classmate asked him about the content of the Turkish National Anthem, Hakan tried to express his pride, but realized that the metaphors embedded in this song were too difficult for him to translate and to express. The English translation of the Turkish National Anthem states that the flag is “my nation’s star” and “it is the last hearth burning for my nation.” Hakan indicated that he understood the meaning that these words implied; however, he was frustrated by his inability to express those feelings literally to a classmate and then later to Mrs. Bilgili, both in English and in Turkish.

Boers and Demecheleer (2001) warn that while recognizing that the metaphoric theme may enhance the positive transfer, it can also increase the risk of “negative L1 interference” (p. 258). This situation occurs when the ELL incorrectly associates the idiom with a similarly phrased expression in the native language that has a different meaning (see Table 1). Conversation between the teacher and student

can help remedy this situation as once the student has an idea of the concept being expressed, he or she can then approach the idiom as a problem-solving task (Boers & Demecheleer, 2001; Simmons & Palmer, 1994).

Finally, in the United States, a nation that is more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before, the use of effective strategies for assessing and scaffolding language and literacy development is paramount. According to Palmer, Shackelford, Miller, and Leclere (2007), “to scaffold these students [ELLs], it is imperative that teachers design and implement instruction for figurative-language interpretation to increase student comprehension” (p. 259). Furthermore, communication across cultures will be clarified and enhanced as ELLs and their peers gain a better understanding of the depth and richness of each other’s language. As Mrs. Bilgili’s time with Hakan concluded, she remembered when he first commented that certain phrases in English sounded “silly” if interpreted literally. Hakan was now able to apply a name to these expressions: figurative language. Once he recognized that figurative language was not intended to be interpreted literally, Hakan was more confident in his ability to use this awareness to strengthen his comprehension, both orally and visually.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of students who are learning English as a new language (ELLs) impacts both the public school system and teacher training institutions, particularly when consideration is given to the extent of cultural and linguistic diversity represented in the ELL school-age population. While research in the Turkish-speaking student population appears to be increasing, many important questions remain. Predominant among these questions are those issues related to the ease and methodology of transfer, both culturally and linguistically, from Turkish to English. Finally, there is a need for increased teacher training aimed at translating these research findings into classroom practice. Perhaps Hakan, and many bilingual students like him, can continue to provide some of the much needed, action-oriented answers as educators across the United States strive to scaffold ELLs to literacy success.

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