

Research article

EFL Students' Use of the Verb 'See': A Conceptual Metaphor Analysis

Nanang Zubaidi^{1*}, and Durotun Nasihah²¹Universitas Negeri Malang²Universitas Islam Malang**ORCID**Nanang Zubaidi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0840-6374>**Abstract.**

This study investigated Indonesian EFL university students' use of conceptual metaphor with the English perception verb 'see'. The idea of a conceptual metaphor refers to how people understand someone's idea represented by linguistics elements. The use of perception verbs in everyday life combined with other words that do not correlate with the five senses can inform readers of the state of language use in certain contexts. The methods employed in this research were descriptive and qualitative. The data were collected from the essays of Indonesian EFL university students (n = 27 students and 390 essays) and were processed and analyzed using AntFileConverter and AntConc concordance software. The researchers classified the perception verb 'see' based on its form, structure and meaning, and analyzed the conceptual metaphors. Five concepts of metaphors were found for the English perception verb 'see', including impression, fantasy, understanding, assumption, and prediction.

Keywords: conceptual metaphors, source domain, target domain, English perception verb, verb 'see'

Corresponding Author: Nanang Zubaidi; email: nanang.zubaidi.fs@um.ac.id

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1. Introduction

Metaphor is one of language phenomenon which combined everyday topics such as time, action, change, cause and effect, emotion, goal, value part of body and its movements create a system that describe language speaker cognition. Metaphor can be found in many aspects of language and operate in noun and verb categories. Lakoff and Johnson [1] defined metaphor as 'understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another'. Part of body activity, especially five sense verbs (sense of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste) preceding or following other words cognitively can form metaphor [2]. Metaphors related to these human sense activities are manifested in the form of perception verbs 'see', 'hear', 'smell', 'touch', and 'taste' [3, 4].

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1. I can **smell** burning

2. *By the dawn, the house smelled of Sunday: chicken frying, bacon sizzling, and smoke sausages baking.*

Verb 'smell' (1) and (2) have the same lexical meaning to have a particular quality that others can notice with their nose (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/smell>). Literally, verb 'smell' (1) explains the activity of smelling something burning, while smell (2) is followed by Sunday, which does not have a property related to nose or smell. Example (2) needs to understand in different ways. The verb 'smell' is understood in a different domain, which shows a transfer of speaker experience about holiday situation with fried chicken, bacon sizzling, smoke sausage baking to the experience of smelling the odor. Those foods are used to serve when the holiday comes, so it seems like a holiday when people dish out foods at different times.

The example shows the use of smell with the word Sunday implies a new concept of the speaker, which is called metaphor. Two points should be emphasized in the conceptual metaphor that is source domain and target domain. Source domain deals with how people describe metaphorical expression to understand other conceptual domains, while target domain is being understood [5]. Those two conceptual domains mutually understand each other, which relate to the speaker's experience.

Perception verbs are related to the human's sensory activity. The perception verb describes an activity of perceiving something concrete, that is, something that can be seen, smelled, heard, tasted, and felt. Perceptual verbs are used in linguistic expressions to express different activities according to the experiences that language speakers have experienced. Perceptual verbs are not always used in connection with the human's sensory activity, but other meanings depend on the context in which they are used. For example, the meaning of the perceptual verb refers to the speaker's experience of the world he is experiencing. In addition, the verb of perception is able to explain a speaker's evolving cognition, which may be difficult to express, so in this case, the verb of perception can explain it. Viberg [6] classified perception verbs into visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory.

According to the associated semantic role, perception verbs can be classified into experiencer-based (i.e., activity and experience) and source-based (i.e., percept) perception verbs [6, 7, 8]. Experiencer-based verbs have animate being with mental experience as a subject, while source-based verbs have experienced entity as a subject [3, 9, 10]. Verb 'see' is considered as the most common, neutral, and representative of English sensory verbs.

1.1. 1.1. Sweetser's MIND-AS-BODY conceptual metaphor

Sweetser [2] suggested that the MIND-AS-BODY metaphor shows the relationship and is driven by the correspondences between ones' external experience and internal states of emotion. These correspondences are parts of a bigger system. MIND-AS-BODY metaphor involves experiences in one's mind (a whole area of psychological experience) as described in another form of the word represented by the human body (a whole area of bodily experience) [2]. Thus, Sweetser [2] suggests that MIND-AS-BODY is comparable to Lakoff and Johnson's [1] conceptual metaphor. Moreover, the correspondences between mind and body domains are unidirectional [2], from bodily experience to psychological states. In the abovementioned examples of perception verbs, the metaphorical mappings occur between the physical perception vocabulary (source domain) and the internal self and sensations vocabulary (target domain). Sweetser proposed routes of semantic change from and to the physical perception domain, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Sense	Semantic sources	Target domain
Vision	Physical domain: sight	Physical sight → knowledge, vision
Hearing	Physical domain: ear	Content of heard speech
Smell	Physical domain: general sense perception	Abstract connotations
Taste	Physical domain: sight	Personal like and dislike in mental world
Touch	general sense perception	Emotional feeling

Figure 1: Sweetser's [2] English sense-verbs.

Regarding vision words, Sweetser [2] identified that the connection of vision to intellectual activity are driven by three reasons: (i) Vision is the primary source to collect objective information of the world; (ii) The high focusing ability of vision enables one to pick up one stimulus from many stimuli at will; (iii) people who use the same viewpoint will have identical vision (shared public knowledge). *Hearing* verbs that denote the sense of hearing is among the most salient sense similar to vision sense. However, one cannot control hearing sense and the excellent reception voluntarily, although he/she can choose which sound to pay attention to. Hearing is regarded as a means of intellectual and emotional influence. Thus, Sweetser [2] suggested that hearing sense is connected to two concepts: (i) Heedfulness and internal receptivity "which might subsequently lead to compliance with the speaker's requests" (p. 41), (ii) Internal reception of ideas, understanding what is heard (p. 43) [see also 3]. Vision and hearing senses are also called distant senses [7, 11] because no contact is needed to perceive through both senses. The *touch* sense is related to the general sense of perception

and emotional feeling. As Sweetser [2] stated, words that denote 'emotional feeling' such as wounded, stroked, touched, in many languages are related to the domain of physical feeling (p. 37). Consequently, these expressions can also be used for emotional sensations. The sense of *taste* in the mental world seems to be related to personal likes and dislikes, as well as fine discrimination [3]. The sense of taste is descriptively very accurate as it allows one to express him/herself very precisely. In contrast, the sense of *smell* lacks any independent classification. Many smell verbs originate from particular physical sensations or perception acts. Sweetser [2] established two mental connotations for smell: (i) bad smell to indicate bad character or characteristics (e.g. stink), and (ii) the detection of the characteristics (e.g. smell).

1.2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Lakoff and Johnson [1] Introduced conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) to map two unrelated conceptual domains, a conceptual 'source domain' onto a conceptual 'target domain.' The theory aims to map the target domain structure if the target domain does not have an invariant structure. In mapping, the source domain and target domain do not replace each other because every domain has a different role explained speaker experience. In PEOPLE ARE MACHINE metaphor, the source domain (machine) provides the necessary conceptual information and structure to conceptualize the target domain (people), and the concept cannot be replaced by MACHINE ARE PEOPLE because the latter concept explains a different experience [12]. In addition, the same target domain (e.g., people) can be conceptualized using different source domains (e.g., people are machines, people are animals, etc.).

Determining the source and target domains needs a specific motivation to determine that both targets is still correct and logical. Mapping the source domain and target domain of metaphorical linguistic expressions is often tricky. The target domain is abstract and not physical, so it is more difficult to understand than the concrete source domain [5].

CMT was employed to analyze the conceptual metaphor in this study because it is a valuable theory to explain speakers' minds through conceptual domains of metaphors in their linguistic expressions, which correspond to their experience.

1.3. Previous studies on vision verb "see"

Some previous studies have investigated the conceptual metaphor of perception verbs [2, 3, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16]. Sweetser [2] studied literal and figurative meanings of perception verbs and proposed the mind-as-body metaphor where aspects related to the mind were conceptualized using body-related metaphors. One example of the metaphor proposed is KNOWING IS SEEING. Ibarretxe-Antuñano [3, 9, 10] investigated conceptual metaphors of perception verbs in three languages (English, Basque, and Spanish) using the data collected from monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, corpora (i.e., the British National Corpus [BNC], Basque Reference Corpus [EEBS], and Reference Corpus for Present-day Spanish [CREA]), and the researcher's constructed utterances. Ibarretxe-Antuñano [3, 9] found that vision verbs in the three languages contain the following nine conceptual metaphors: *understanding is seeing*, *foreseeing is seeing*, *imagining is seeing*, *considering is seeing*, *studying/examining is seeing*, *finding out is seeing*, *making sure is seeing*, *taking care is seeing/looking after*, *witnessing is seeing*.

Juanhong [15] investigated the perception verb 'touch' based on socio-culture of gender differences using the British National Corpus (BNC) data. Juanhong found that men are likely to use 'touch' metaphors more frequently than women. In addition, gender does influence how men and women recognize the world, although both have the same foundation of language expression. Gunnarsdóttir [14] compared the conceptual metaphors of English and Icelandic. Gunnarsdóttir classified vision into knowledge and intellectual, reliability, and certainty, hearing into internal receptivity and heedfulness, touch into feeling and contact, taste into involvement and preference, and smell into intuition and miscellaneous. More recently, Jumaah et al. [16] analyzed English fiction writing compiled from different sources (N = 1 million words) and selected 1000 sentence samples of perception verb see. The researchers found that verb see contain various conceptual metaphors related to the domains of knowledge, intellections, and understanding.

Within Indonesian context, at least one study has investigated the conceptual metaphor. Citraresmana [13] examined the conceptual metaphors contained in the verb 'break' and found that the orientational metaphor in the word 'break' shows foreign speakers' thinking concept, leading to a 'spatial' orientation of up and down metaphors.

The current study intended to investigate Indonesian EFL university students' use of the perception verb see. English speakers (native and non-native speakers) explain various activities using perceptual verbs. The researcher chooses the perception verb

see as the object of research because the perception verb see can describe the abstract thinking concept of speakers. By examining the metaphors in these perceptual verbs, the researchers hope to understand the concept of thinking and cognition of English speakers seen in their use of English perceptual verbs.

2. Method

The linguistic data were collected through a corpus study. Corpus analysis has been used in many previous studies exploring CMT [e.g. 17, 18]. We examined a large number of vision verb see and its derivations (see, saw, seen, seeing) from a corpora created from first-year university students' (N = 27) essays submitted to an Essay Writing course at a university in Malang, Indonesia, in the even semester of 2020-2021 academic year. The researchers collected 390 essays written using five essay types: description, narration, process, comparison-contrast, and persuasion. Students were tasked to practice writing and submit their essay drafts following the process-based approach to writing. For each topic, students were asked to write three subsequent essay drafts using the format: drafting – feedback (peer, teacher, or electronic feedback) – rewriting. Students submitted the essays to Google Drive prepared by the teachers. The essays were then downloaded, and all files (word document format) were converted into txt file using AntFileConverter software. The data were then analyzed using AntConc concordance software. The researchers run a simple search to identify the concordance, word list, and frequency of verb see. The researchers included all variations of the verb see, including see (base verb), saw (verb 2), seen (past participle), and seeing (the present participle). The researchers did not include other variations (e.g., *sight*) and synonyms (e.g., *peer, gaze, watch, look, etc.*). Afterward, the researchers classified verbs that have denotative and connotative meanings.

To investigate conceptual metaphors of perception verb see, the researchers classified the verb see into metaphor and non-metaphor through syntactic and semantic analysis. The word which comes before or after perception verbs influences the meaning of the perception verb. Through metaphorical linguistic expression of perception verb, the researchers classified the same topic or a related topic to map the concept. The linguistics expressions determine the conceptual metaphor and domains mapping.

The researchers then identified the word preceding and following the perception verb to ensure that the data is a metaphor. The verb was categorized as a metaphor if the perception verb was in close proximity with part of body and was related to senses. The researchers also analyzed new meanings of the perception verbs based

on the combination with other lingual elements in context. Afterward, the researchers mapped the domain to determine the source and target domains and then formulated the conceptual metaphor.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Conceptual metaphors of verb "see"

Analysis of the data showed 388 linguistic expressions using the verb see. Of this number, 337 verbs have literal (non-metaphoric) meaning, and 51 utterances are metaphoric expressions describing speaker experience, emotion, and cognition. The determination metaphoric and non-metaphoric word depends on the word combination, context and meaning. The analyses focused on the concepts of L2 speaker cognition through metaphoric verb 'see' expression and conceptualization of intellect and mental activity into five types, such as impression, assumption, fantasy, prediction, and understanding.

Intellect and mental activity means the ability to understand and to think the intelligent way (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intellect>) while mental activity presents expressions to understand something by such verbs involve remember, hope, pretend, know, think, learn, understand, perceive, feel, guess, recognize, notice, want, wish, decide, expect, prefer, forget, imagine, and believe [19]. In this category, the mapping takes place between the physical domain and mental process. This category showed that verb 'see' was commonly used to represent the speaker's experience physically. Besides, Sweetser [2] claims the visual sense is the "primary source of objective data about the world" and also considers it "the strongest and most reliable" (p. 39).

3.1.1. Understanding is seeing (understanding)

Analysis showed that the intellect and mental activities with the concept of 'understanding' were contained in the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. For example,

(3) *"But my mother can see my heart is not in it."*

In this data, verb 'see' was combined with noun 'heart' which meaning the heart thought of as the place where emotions are felt. Heart is something abstract and cannot be sensed by the eye, so the verb 'see' with heart gave a new meaning to understand someone thinking. The speaker wanted to express his thought using verb

‘see’, which is more physical activity. Verb ‘see’ was used to demonstrate something abstract is described with concrete perception which can be easier to understand. Understanding is a process of someone knowing the meaning of the object noticed realized the knowledge accompanies that. The conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING was mapped in a transfer between entity understanding and seeing showed in the table below,

TABLE 1: Conceptual metaphor of UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING.

Source domain (seeing)	Target domain (understanding)
People who perceive something	People who understand
See an object	Understand someone
A concrete object	The thing that becomes desire a person’s heart
Sense of sight (eye)	Something thinking

Aspects of *understanding* such as knowing meaning and understanding a person’s heart are explained concretely using the verb ‘see’.

3.1.2. Foreseeing is seeing (prediction)

The second concept is a prediction which is represented by the conceptual metaphor of FORESEEING IS SEEING. It indicated that domain *seeing* was explained by domain *foreseeing*. The domain *foreseeing* describes human thinking to predict something which may happen in the future. The prediction comes from the knowledge that occurs based on humans’ experiences. The conceptual metaphor is expressed in the following linguistic expression.

(4) “That is why the Dayaks could see past and future time.”

(5) “How long should we pretend to see love in those fake friends?”

The word ‘*past and future time*’ shows how people try to imagine that something has already happened and predict something that will happen in the future. The data show how the *Dayaks* can estimate accurately what will happen in their life. VERB ‘see’ is the concrete expression to perceive something uncertain. Sentence (5) contains love, which means the feeling of strong or constant affection for a person. People cannot perceive love by their eyes because love is related to people’s feelings, hearts, and minds. The verb ‘see’ in the data shows a fantasy concept which is represented by *foreseeing is seeing*. Foreseeing is a thinking activity to examine essential events in the future. With the knowledge, people give conjecture of the future life, fate, event, or weather. The relation of conceptual metaphor *foreseeing is seeing* is illustrated in the table below,

TABLE 2: Mapping the conceptual metaphor foreseeing is seeing

Source domain (seeing)	Target domain (foreseeing)
People who perceive something	People who predict the future
See an object	Thinking to examine something
An concrete object	romantic life something in the past and future
Sense of sight (eye)	Human thinking

The aspects in the foreseeing include the concept of thinking. Foreseeing an activity is explained by a concrete source domain (i.e., *seeing*). Those aspects are connected with seeing aspects, seeing something to know the object’s existence, imagining that something will happen, and estimating an event. This mapping explains that foresee an event is thinking of activity and examining event are understood concretely by the sensory sense.

3.1.3. Considering is seeing (assumption)

The third concept is assumption, which is expressed by the conceptual metaphor CONSIDERING IS SEEING, which illustrates how the domain *considering* is explained with the domain *seeing*. *Considering* is the way how people think carefully about something that occurred. The conceptual metaphor can be seen in the following linguistic expressions.

(6) “Indonesians are different from Americans who see black people are money.”

(7) “After that night, I began to see my father differently.”

The linguistic expression (6) shows the use of the verb ‘see’ to consider or appreciate poor people (black people) as an asset or a profit. The discrimination towards black people is a classical problem in America where white people have better and more accessible in many sectors. Black people are considered a low-level class of society that can be an economic commodity and money source for white people. The phrase *black people are money* shows that white people (Americans) are happy with the black people’s existence because the whites can get many benefits.

Expression (7), ‘see my father differently’ explains how people try to think about someone else. The mental activity ‘*thinking*’ which is considered as the target domain is expressed by the physical work ‘*seeing*’ as the source domain. The use of the verb ‘see’ demonstrates how one gives perception toward another person. Metaphorically, the verb ‘see’ in the data refers to an assumption, which is represented by CONSIDERING IS SEEING mapped in the following transfer.

TABLE 3: Conceptual Metaphor of CONSIDERING IS SEEING.

Source domain (seeing)	Target domain (considering)
People who perceive	People who consider
See an object	Consider an object
A concrete object	A black people
Sense of sight (eye)	Human thinking

Seeing and *considering* correspond to each other. *Seeing* is physical activity to perceive an object by eye while *considering* is mental activity to examine an object. *Considering* is an abstract domain which is understood by *seeing* as a concrete domain.

3.1.4. Visualizing is seeing (fantasy)

Other mental processing with fantasy concept which is explained by verb ‘see’ is shown by the conceptual metaphor of VISUALIZING IS SEEING. Visualizing as the target domain describes how people figure out that something take place around them. This conceptual metaphor is constructed for example by the linguistic expression below.

(8) “He knew the place instantly. He could see the garden and plants in his mind.”

The expression ‘see the garden and plants in his mind’ shows the people’s ability to dream up about something based on their experience. *Dreaming up* is one of the mental processes happened in the speaker’s mind, which shows the creativity to express ideas or fantasy concepts. Fantasy is an activity that involves people thinking. This concept is explained by the verb ‘see’ as the physical activity to perceive a concrete object and imaginary. Fantasy also describes how people use their imagination creatively to express an idea. This concept is demonstrated by the conceptual metaphor VISUALIZING IS SEEING and the mapping of meaning transfer is illustrated in the table below.

TABLE 4: Conceptual Metaphor of VISUALIZING IS SEEIN.

Source domain (seeing)	Target domain (visualizing)
People who perceive	People who visualize
See an object	Visualize an object
A concrete object	Pool and nature around
Sensory sense (eye)	Human thinking

Table 4 illustrates the mapping of how *visualizing* (a mental activity to think) is understood by *seeing* as the source domain. Seeing is a physical activity to perceive a concrete object.

3.1.5. Believing is seeing (impression)

Another concept connected to intellect and mental activity is BELIEVING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor. This metaphor illustrates that believing as the target domain is understood with the physical movement of the eyes. *Believing* is the target domain, which is explained by *seeing* as the source domain. *Believing* is a thinking process to accept the truth that people say or something in people’s lives. This conceptual metaphor is taken from the linguistic expressions below.

(9) “I thought I could make them see the reason.”

(10) “My father might see hope in those colorful capsules and tablets because his health kept falling.”

(11) “She has a unique singing skill. She sees possibilities for her future.”

The words *reason*, *hope*, and *possibilities* express the target domain and construct a concept of belief. *Reason* relates to the power of thinking to understand something, *hope* refers to someone’s feeling when expecting something, and *possibilities* refer to things that may occur. These words are investigated as concrete entities which the eyes can perceive. The structure of *see reason* shows people’s ability to create opinion, so others will assume that something is true or make a wise judgment. The ability to argue and believe what is in their mind is one of the mental processes which can be expressed by the verb ‘see’. The structure of *see hope* presents that something is true and concrete based on proof or a test.

Expecting something is a mental activity to trust, which is demonstrated by *seeing*. Similarly, the expression *see possibilities* also shows abilities or qualities that can make someone or something better in the future. In this case, the verb ‘see’ shows the metaphoric form with a concept of belief and is described with BELIEVING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor. The relation between *believing* as target domain and *seeing* as source domain is illustrated in Table 5.

TABLE 5: Conceptual Metaphor of BELIEVING IS SEEING.

Source domain (seeing)	Target domain (believing)
People who perceive	People who believe
See an object	Believe of something
A concrete object	A possibilities, hope and reason
Sense of sight (eye)	Human mental

The above mapping describes that verb ‘see’ needs a subject to perceive something and other subjects to believe. *Seeing* is a physical activity to perceive concrete objects,

and *believing* is a mental activity to believe or to be sure about chance, expectation, and cause.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the current study found that students use the verb 'see' to represent intellectual and mental activities. Verb 'see' contains five concepts, namely impression, assumption, fantasy, prediction, and understanding. The impression concept constructs BELIEVING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor; the assumption concept constructs CONSIDERING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor; the fantasy concept constructs VISUALIZING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor; the prediction concept forms FORESEEING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor; and the understanding concept builds UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING conceptual metaphor.

As previously mentioned, this study was very limited because it did not look into other variations and synonyms of verb 'see'. Vision can be actualized using different verbs. Each verb may have contained metaphorical and literal meanings. Further investigation should focus on other categories of the verb 'see' to give in-depth understanding of concepts contained in English vision verbs and to better map students' vocabulary mastery. In addition, this study is limited to essay writing collected from first-year EFL university students. Further studies on other populations of L2 learners, as well as analysis on other forms of data using a corpus-based approach, are also needed to deepen our understanding of EFL students' English metaphor use in conveying their messages, how these expressions can be comprehended accurately, and finally how effective our EFL teaching and learning practices.

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