

Investigating the effectiveness of using Figurative Expressions in Mastering EFL Written Communication

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the effectiveness of figurative expressions in mastering EFL written communication. The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical method; the questionnaire has been used as a tool for collecting the data for this study, which distributed to 70 English university teachers from various universities. The data analyzed statistically using SPSS program. The results have shown that; figurative expressions are necessary for effective written communication among EFL students.

Keywords: figurative expressions, effective written communication, EFL students

1. Introduction

Communication is an art and process of creating, sending and sharing ideas with others, and it is the most important tool ever invented for doing so. Effective communication heavily depends on the richness of those ideas and depends on the level of the language we use to send those rich ideas, we can achieve such level of communication just through the use of figurative language effectively in our speech and writing tasks, it completed the effectiveness of communication, and send ideas in a short way. Everyone can communicate but a few can communicate effectively, especially in the written communication because to communicate in an attractive way it's not an easy task.

Aims and Scope of the Study

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of figurative expressions in mastering EFL written communication. The scope of this study is Sudanese EFL university students. The sample of the study is composed from 70 EFL university teachers who responded to the questionnaire.

2. Literature Review

The concept of Figurative Expressions:

Figurative language is the intended meanings of the words, sentences and expressions used do not coincide with their literal meanings (Gluksberg, 2001). When speaking figuratively, speakers mean something other than what they literally say (Gibbs and Colston, 2012). Therefore, to understand figurative language, an individual must be able to grasp the speaker's intention in a given context (Rapp and Wild, 2011).

Traditionally, figurative language has been regarded as deviant of so-called literal language. By contrast, it is now well established that figurative language is ubiquitous part of daily language and social communication. For instance, approximately 8% of adult utterances in conversations among friends contain some irony (Gibbs, 2000)

Types of Figures of Speech

In this paper, the researcher uses some of the kinds of figurative language had been mentioned by Rozakis (1995) and other types – to provide ideas about some types of figurative language been mentioned:

Simile

Simile is to show the comparison between two things in certain features, or to say something is like another thing explicitly. As observed by Wren and Martin (in Siswantoro, 2005: 24), they said that “Simile is a comparison made between two objects of different kinds which have, however, at least one point in common. Furthermore, Rozakis (1995) explained that “A simile is comparison between unlike objects introduced by a connective word such as *like*, *as*, or *than* or a verb as *seems*.” The concept of simile is *A is like B*.

Personification

According to Barnwell (1980) “Personification is a figure of speech in which an abstract idea, or something which is not alive, is treated as though it were a person.” It means personification is the style of language that gives the characteristics of human to inanimate objects. Furthermore, Rozakis (1995: 35) explained that “Personification is the attribution of human characteristics and/or feelings to nonhuman organisms, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas.” This statement is supported by Murfin and Ray (2003: 339), “Personification is a figure of speech (more specifically a trope) that bestows human characteristics upon anything nonhuman, from an abstract idea to a physical force to an inanimate object to a living organism.” Briefly, personification is the expression of language to create non human life as if human. So, this kind of figurative language makes non human can act, speak, and has emotional feeling like human. Personification often appears in fairy tale written for children. The use of figurative language will create the story imaginatively because the readers will find nonhumans such as animal, plant, and other objects have dialogue each other and they also have the attribution like human.

Irony

Irony derived from the word *eironia*, it means deception. Galperin (1977: 146) stated “Irony is a stylistic device also based on the simultaneous realization of two logical meanings—dictionary and contextual, but the two meanings stand in opposition to each other.” In short, irony is the style of language to express something captured by the reader that should be opposite from the literal meaning. The things that should be noted when interpreting irony expression is the context of its expression. Similar to Galperin, Rozakis also stated that “Irony states one thing in one of voice when, in fact, the opposite meaning is intended (1995: 33).”

Humor

From a psychological point of view, Ruch (2001) has analyzed the link between personality and humor appreciation, providing interesting observations about this property and the kind of necessary stimuli to produce a response. Some linguistic studies, on the other hand, have explained humor by means of semantic and pragmatic patterns. Attardo (1994, 2001) attempts to explain verbal humor as a phenomenon which supposes the presence of some knowledge resources, such as language, narrative strategies, target, situation, logical mechanisms or opposition, to produce a funny effect. From a sociological point of view, cultural patterns are ones of the most studied features regarding humor appreciation.

Hyperbole

Barnwell (1980: 49) proposed that “A hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration, used for emphasis and dramatic effect.” This statement is supported by Murfin and Ray (2003: 205), “A figure of speech that uses deliberate exaggeration to achieve an effect, whether serious, comic, or ironic.” It means hyperbole is the style of language in expressing something exaggeratedly even beyond of human logic. Hyperbole or overstatement is used to cause the effect and reaction from the reader such as serious, ironic, and humorous. Hyperbole has the keywords that indicate them as an expression of hyperbole.

Metaphor

The word *metaphor* is a Greek one; it means *to carry over*. Rozakis (1995: 33) stated that “A *metaphor* is a comparison without the words *like* or *as*.”

It's supported by Perrine (1983: 571), he declared that “In metaphor the Comparison is implied—that is, the figurative term is *substituted for* or *identified with* the literal term.” From those statements, we can get the point that metaphor is the process of comparing two unlike things as if they are one. This thing happened because metaphor does not have connective words such as *like, as, than, similar to* and *seems* determining them as figurative. Metaphor and simile have close relation because comparing the different things. Metaphor also often called an implied simile. In simile, the comparison is seen clearly. This is contrary to metaphor that compares the thing implicitly. If the concept of simile is *A is like B*, then the concept of metaphor is *A is B*. Actually, metaphor has the way to determine the process of carrying meaning in this expression.

Idioms

One of the definitions given by Oxford English Dictionary (1993) as “a form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, peculiar to language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a signification other than its grammatical or logical one” while Fromkin et al. (2011), clarify that idioms are expressions whose meanings are unrelated to the principle of compositionality, that is, may be not connected to the meaning of their parts. Cruse (2004) argued that idiomatic meanings are based on literal word meanings within a particular context. Fotovatnia & khaki (2012) focused on viewing idioms as decomposable structures since their meanings, either literal or figurative, contribute independently to their overall figurative interpretation of idioms.

3. Materials and Methods

The researcher follows the descriptive analytical method for collecting data concerning the issue in question. The population of this study is EFL University students. 70 Sudanese university teachers were selected purposely because of their experience in teaching English.

Tools of the Study

The questionnaire has been used as a tool in gathering data for this study, which has been approached to Sudanese university teachers.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher used a questionnaire as a tool for collecting the data to measure teachers' attitude towards using figurative language in written communication among EFL students.

The Analysis of the Questionnaire

Statement no (1): When figurative language in EFL has been studied, it has been approached from its application to intermediate and advanced students

Table (1) EFL student's levels

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	30	42.9
agree	29	41.4
Uncertain	3	4.3

disagree	4	5.7
Strongly disagree	4	5.7
Total	70	100

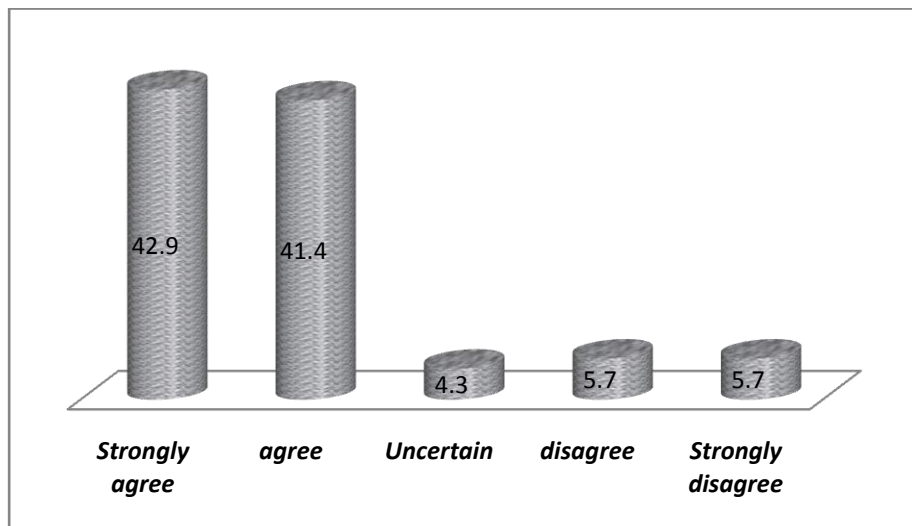


Figure (1) EFL student's levels

It is clear from the above table (11) and figure (11) that there are (30) persons in the study's sample with percentage (42.9%) strongly agreed with "When figurative language in EFL has been studied, it has been approached from its application to intermediate and advanced students." There are (29) persons with percentage (41.4%) agreed with that, (3) persons with percentage (4.5%) were not sure, (4) persons with percentage (5.7%) disagreed. and (4) persons with 5.7% are strongly disagreed which indicate that students do not study figurative language when they start learning language.

Statement no (2): Fully competent students use figurative language more than other students.

Table (2) students' competency

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	57.1
agree	25	35.7
Uncertain	2	2.9
disagree	3	4.3
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	70	100

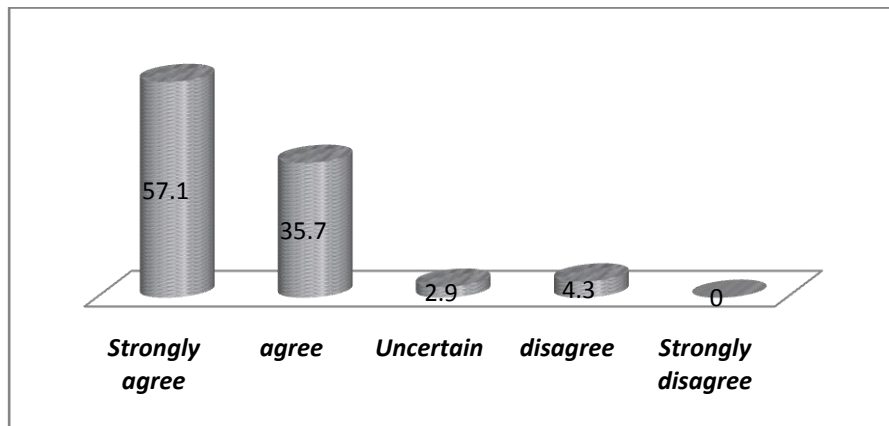


Figure (2) students' competency

It is clear from the above table (12) and figure (12) that there are (40) persons in the study's sample with percentage (57.1%) were strongly agreed with the statement, there are (25) persons with percentage (35.7%) agreed with that, (2) persons with percentage (2.9%) were not sure, (3) persons with percentage (4.3%) disagreed. and (0) persons with 0.0% are strongly disagree what make figurative language necessity in teaching and in all syllabus to reach competency in the language for all students or at least most of them.

Statement no (3): The use of figurative language can be considered as an indication of mastery of language.

Table (3) mastery of language

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	20	28.6
agree	29	41.4
Uncertain	10	14.3
disagree	10	14.3
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
Total	70	100

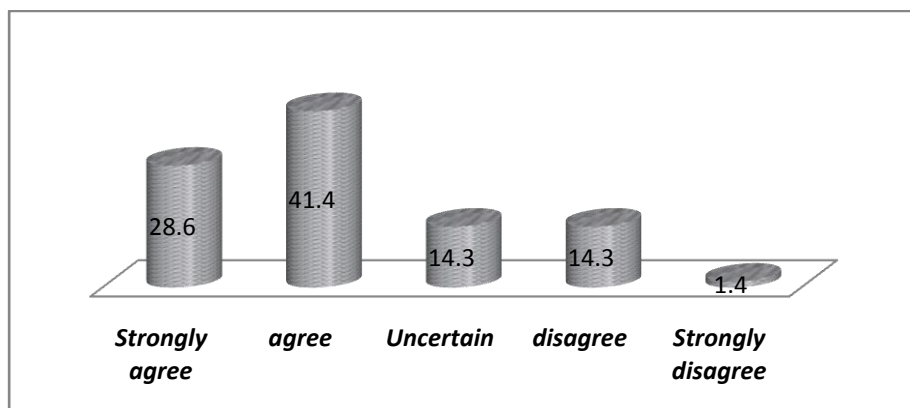


Figure (3) mastery of language

From the above table (13) and figure (13) It is clear that there are (20) persons in the study's sample with percentage (28.6%) strongly agreed with "The use of figurative language can be considered as an indication of mastery of language." There are (29) persons with percentage (41.4%) agreed with that, (10) persons with percentage (14.3%) were not sure, (10) persons with percentage (14.3%) disagreed. and (1) persons with 1.4% are strongly disagree this indicates that only qualified enough students use figurative language regularly.

Statement no (4): EFL learners know how to use the right figure of speech in the right situation.

Table (4) appropriateness in using figures of speech

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	21	30.0
agree	39	55.7
Uncertain	4	5.7
disagree	2	2.9
Strongly disagree	4	5.7
Total	70	100

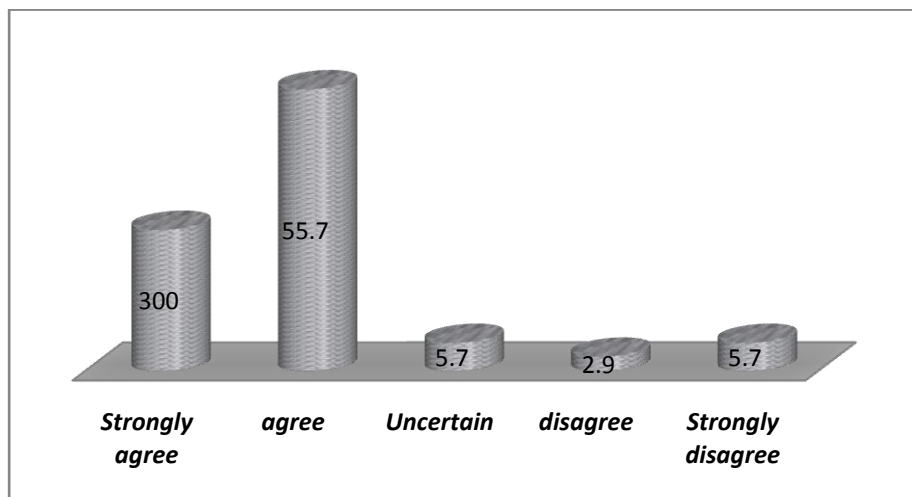


Figure (4) appropriateness in using figures of speech

From the above table (14) and figure (14) It is clear that there are (20) persons in the study's sample with percentage (30.0%) strongly agreed with "EFL students do not know how to use the right figure of speech in the right situation." There are (40) persons with percentage (55.7%) agreed with that, (4) persons with percentage (5.7%) were not sure, (2) persons with percentage (2.9%) disagreed. and (7) persons with 5.7% are strongly disagreed which clearly

indicate that even if EFL students aware of figures of speech they do not know how to use them appropriately.

Statement no (5): EFL students do not have an ability to distinguish the figurative expressions whenever they are exposed to them.

Table (5) distinguishing figurative expressions

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	40	57.1
agree	25	35.7
Uncertain	0	0
disagree	3	4.3
Strongly disagree	2	2.9
Total	70	100

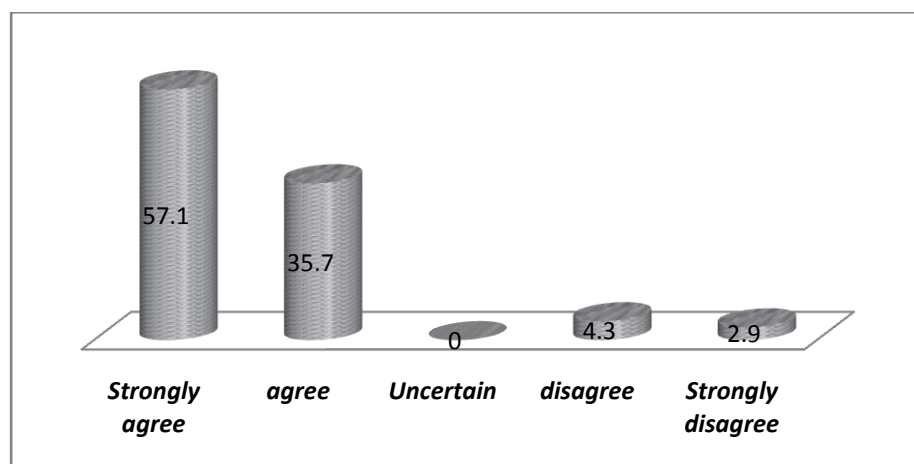


Figure (5) distinguishing figurative expressions

It is clear from the above table (15) and figure (15) that there are (40) persons in the study's sample with percentage (57.1%) strongly agreed with the statement "EFL students do not have an ability to distinguish the figurative expressions whenever they are exposed to them." There are (25) persons with percentage (35.7%) agreed with that, (0) persons with percentage (00.0%) were not sure, (3) persons with percentage (3.4%) disagreed. and (2) persons with 2.9% are strongly disagreed which clearly indicate that EFL students do not qualified enough to communicate effectively because they do not just unable to use figurative expressions but also they do not have an ability even to distinguish them.

5. Report Discussion

The data has been collected and analyzed statistically using SPSS. After analyzing the data in the light of the hypothesis, the results have shown that; figurative expressions are necessary for mastering written communication among EFL students.

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