

**The Impact of Metaphor Prime on Metaphor Comprehension:
Option-limiting and Prominent-making**

Omid Khatinzadeh (MA), Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz

khatinzadeh.omid@yahoo.com

Zohreh Gooniband Shooshtari (PhD), Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz

z.gshooshtari@scu.ac.ir

Sedigheh Vahdat (PhD), Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz

s.vahdat@scu.ca.ir

Abstract

When a metaphor is primed with another metaphor, comprehender's interpretation of the second metaphor might undergo dramatic changes. How metaphor comprehension is influenced by the prime depends on the type of information provided in the prime. Several previous studies such as Gernsbacher et al. (1995), Glucksberg et al. (1997), and Glucksberg et al. (2001) have found that metaphor prime facilitated the understanding of metaphor-relevant probe sentences.

The present study aimed to examine how a metaphor prime impacts on the second language learners' comprehension of metaphoric statements. Participants of the study were a group of 30 undergraduate students in the English Department of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. Half of the participants were English Translation students and the other half were English Literature students. Two tests of metaphor comprehension and a metaphor judgment test were designed. In the first part of test one, each metaphor was preceded by a literal prime. In the second part of test one, the same metaphorical statements were preceded by metaphor primes. Each prime and its following metaphoric statement were designed in a way that their grounds were similar. Test two intended to investigate the role of context on metaphor comprehension. The metaphor judgment test was designed to examine comprehenders' judgments on the acceptability of some

metaphorical statements, their reversed forms, and the corresponding similes. The obtained results showed that metaphor prime had a significant impact on the comprehenders' interpretations of metaphorical statements and it made their interpretations more convergent. Also, the Literature group participants outperformed the Translation group on metaphor comprehension test. Therefore, the researchers of the current study suggest that similarity of the ground shifts comprehender's attention to some specific aspects of the vehicle which can logically and relevantly be attributed to the topic. In other words, metaphor prime, when its ground is similar to the following metaphoric statement, limits the ways in which a metaphor can be interpreted. It narrows the list of characteristics of the vehicle which can be attributed to the topic and filters out irrelevant characteristics. So, the role of metaphor prime can be conceived in two ways. Firstly, it is option-limiting; it restricts the set of properties based on which a comparison between topic and vehicle is made. Secondly, it is prominent-maker; it makes more prominent the properties based on which a logical comparison can be made between topic and vehicle.

Keywords: Metaphor prime; Metaphor comprehension; Vehicle; Topic; Ground

References

- Gernsbacher, M.A., Keysar, B., & Robertson, R. R. (1995). *The role of suppression in metaphor interpretation*. Paper presented at the 36th annual meeting of Psychonomic Society, Los Angeles.
- Glucksberg, S., McGlone, M. S., & Manfredi, D. (1997). Property attribution in metaphor comprehension. *Journal of Memory and language*, 36, 50-67.
- Glucksberg, S., Newsome, M. R., & Goldvarg, Y. (2001). Inhibition of the literal: Filtering metaphor-irrelevant information during metaphor comprehension. *Metaphor & Symbol*. 16,277-293.