

Tamari Narimanishvili (DE): The role of L2 proficiency in figurative language production: a cross-linguistic study of Georgian learners of English

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of L2 proficiency on figurative language production among Georgian learners of English and to examine the relationship between proficiency levels and the accurate use of figurative language.

Background. There are limited studies on the production of figurative language among L2 learners that utilize natural texts, and there is no cross-linguistic research investigating Georgian learner metaphor production in English. The most comprehensive data on this topic come from Littlemore et al. (2014), who examined how the native language influenced metaphor errors in essays by A2-C2 Greek and German learners of English, noting the most substantial L1 influence at the upper-intermediate level, which gradually decreased at the advanced level.

Method. The Georgian EFL essay corpus, specifically compiled for the current study, consists of argumentative essays written by 60 Georgian learners of English who obtained B1, B2, and C1 proficiency levels based on *The Oxford Placement Test*. Metaphors were identified by the MIPVU procedure (Steen et al., 2010), and the metaphorical errors were subsequently categorized into six major error categories (Nacey, 2010, 2011). The evidence for L1 influence was gathered from diverse sources, including bilingual English-Georgian dictionaries, Georgian monolingual and bilingual corpora, and the method of reversed translation.

Data and Analysis. To measure the frequency of metaphors across three different proficiency levels, I examined a total of 10250 lexical units, identifying 1132 units as metaphorical. The highest metaphor density was found at the C1 level (13.3%), gradually declining at B2 (10.2%) and B1 (9.4%) levels. Secondly, I analyzed a total of 153 metaphorical errors, with the highest proportion, 18.6%, occurring at the B2 level. This analysis revealed distinct patterns in metaphorical errors across different proficiency levels. Grammatical errors were more prevalent at the B1 and B2 levels compared to the C1 level, while confusion of sense relations remained relatively consistent across all three levels. In contrast, phrasal errors were more frequent at the C1 level and less common at the B1 and B2 levels. Finally, in analyzing the influence of learners' L1 backgrounds on metaphor use across proficiency levels, I identified 46 L1-influenced errors, of which 32 were metaphorical. The highest percentage (27.3%) of L1-influenced metaphorical errors occurred at the B2 level, followed by the C1 (22.7%) and the B1 levels (9.3%).

Conclusion. The analysis of metaphor usage across proficiency levels illustrates the complex relationship between L2 proficiency and L1 influence in figurative language production. The increasing metaphor density aligns with proficiency growth, indicating advanced learners' growing confidence in using figurative language. Nevertheless, this is accompanied by a significant rise in metaphorical errors among B2-level learners, possibly attributed to their willingness to experiment with figurative language at this stage. Learners in the intermediate stages mostly struggle with the semantics and grammatical structures of metaphors, while at the advanced level, phrasal errors prevail, suggesting a tendency for using complex metaphorical expressions. In line with Littlemore et al. (2014), the data highlights that learners often transfer metaphorical patterns from their L1, resulting in usage errors, which are particularly noticeable among B2-level learners who rely most on L1 metaphorical patterns.

References

- Littlemore, J., Krennmayr, T., Turner, J. and Turner, S. (2014). An investigation into metaphor use at different levels of second language writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(2), 117–144. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amt004>
- Nacey, S. (2013). *Metaphors in Learner English*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam and Philadelphia. <https://doi.org/10.1075/milcc.2>
- Nacey, S. (2010). *Comparing Linguistic Metaphors in L1 and L2 English*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Oslo. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4593.1609>
- Steen, G. J., Dorst, A. G., Herrmann, J. B., Kaal, A. A., Krennmayr, T. and Pasma, T. (2010). *A Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification: From MIP to MIPVU*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia. <https://doi.org/10.1075/celcr.14>