Linguacultural Approach in Teaching Imagery to EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the efficacy of a linguacultural method for teaching imagery within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Acknowledging that metaphor, simile, symbolism, and other figurative techniques are rooted in cultural contexts, the study investigates the influence of cultural backgrounds on students' understanding and creation of imagery. A quasi-experimental design was used, involving 60 intermediate EFL students who were split into control and experimental groups. Throughout six weeks, the experimental group received instruction that integrated cross-cultural literary texts and activities focused on metaphor analysis. Quantitative data from pre- and post-assessments indicates a statistically significant enhancement in the experimental group's capacity to interpret and utilize imagery. The paper presents replicable teaching methods and underscores the importance of culturally informed instruction in improving literary skills and fostering intercultural understanding.

Background

Recent trends in EFL teaching highlight the importance of incorporating cultural literacy into language education, especially in the context of figurative language instruction. Imagery—which includes metaphors, idioms, and symbols—is not merely a linguistic aspect but also a cultural creation that showcases a society's values, beliefs, and perspectives. As a result, a significant number of EFL students find it challenging to understand figurative language because of their lack of familiarity with cultural references and conceptual metaphors.

This study examines the impact of a linguacultural method on teaching imagery to EFL students through a comparison of English and Karakalpak literary traditions. By conducting an experimental study in a classroom setting, we seek to show that this method improves students' capacity to understand and utilize imagery more effectively, ultimately promoting both linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness.

Literature Review

Galperin (2009) describes imagery as "the employment of linguistic elements that evoke sensory experiences related to an abstract idea by triggering specific associations … between the general and specific, the abstract and tangible, as well as the conventional and factual." Through imagery, writers create vivid portrayals of events by appealing to readers' sensory perceptions. Traditionally, imagery is classified according to the five senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. This classification, as noted by Knickerbocker (1960) and later Griffith (2010), highlights the role of language in enabling readers to experience what is portrayed in a text. Roberts (1988) similarly defines imagery as "sensory experiences conveyed through literary form," emphasizing the reader's ability to immerse themselves in the sensory world of a literary work (Gottschalk, Knickerbocker, & Reninger, 1960).

Contemporary research in cognitive linguistics significantly expands the understanding of imagery beyond sensory description. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal theory of **conceptual metaphor** argues that metaphor and imagery are fundamental mechanisms of human cognition rather than merely stylistic devices (Drew, 1959). According to their theory, abstract concepts are understood through culturally grounded, concrete source domains. This insight is crucial for EFL teaching because figurative language reflects culturally specific ways of structuring experience. Kövecses' extensive research (2005, 2015) further develops this cognitive perspective, demonstrating that metaphorical patterns vary across cultures according to historical, environmental, and sociocultural factors. While certain conceptual metaphors are universal, many are culturally bound. Consequently, EFL learners may struggle with imagery not because of linguistic complexity but because of differences between their native conceptual systems and those of English. Thus, teaching imagery must address both linguistic form and the conceptual-cultural frameworks underlying figurative expressions.

These ideas correspond closely to the linguacultural approach, which integrates language learning with the study of cultural meanings and values encoded in linguistic structures. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) offers a foundational basis for this approach by emphasizing that learning and meaning-making are culturally mediated processes. From this perspective, foreign language acquisition involves adopting new ways of interpreting the world. Kramsch's work (1993, 2013) reinforces this idea through the concept of **symbolic competence**, defined as the ability to interpret and negotiate cultural meanings conveyed through language. She argues that metaphors, literary imagery, and symbolic expressions constitute a cultural memory that learners must access to achieve deeper communicative competence. Literary texts therefore provide rich opportunities for developing both linguistic and intercultural skills.

Additional support for the linguacultural approach is found in the works of Ter-Minasova (2000), who

argues that successful communication requires extensive background knowledge of the worldview, customs, and value systems of native speakers. Maslova (2004) and Robert, (1998) emphasize the role of linguistic units—particularly figurative expressions—in preserving and transmitting cultural concepts. Wierzbicka's (1996) "cultural scripts" framework further illustrates how cultural meanings are embedded in language-specific conceptual categories.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that figurative language is a complex cognitive and cultural phenomenon. Therefore, teaching imagery in the EFL classroom requires methods that integrate linguistic, cultural, and conceptual analysis. This theoretical foundation supports the present study, which examines the effectiveness of a linguacultural method for fostering EFL learners' ability to interpret and create imagery in English through cross-cultural comparison with the Karakalpak literary tradition.

Methods
Participants
The research took place at Karakalpak State University, involving 60 EFL students at an intermediate level, aged between 18 and 22. The participants were randomly divided into two existing groups: one control group (n = 30) and one experimental group (n = 30). To ensure uniformity, both groups were instructed by the same teacher.

Research Design
A pretest-posttest control group design of a quasi-experimental nature was utilized. Although true randomization was not achievable due to institutional limitations, initial placement tests confirmed the groups' comparability in proficiency. The instructional period lasted for six weeks, comprising three 90-minute sessions weekly. The experimental group underwent linguacultural instruction centered on imagery, while the control group adhered to a conventional reading-based curriculum.

Instructional Intervention
The educational activities for the experimental group encompassed:
- Examining metaphors and similes found in both English and Karakalpak literature.
- Translating idiomatic expressions that are specific to certain cultures.
- Analyzing visual and auditory imagery within different cultural frameworks.
- Engaging in group discussions and storytelling activities that embodied cultural principles.
Resources were drawn from modern novels, traditional stories, and poetry that featured culturally significant figurative language. For example, these tasks can be implemented in EFL classrooms to teach imagery.

Task 1. Analyze imagery reflecting English culture paying special attention to metaphoric models in the following extracts from literary texts.
Analysis of contexts taken from the novel:
1) The dwarf tore a loaf of bread in half. "And you had best be careful what you say of my family, magister. Kinslayer or no, I am a lion still." That seemed to amuse the lord of cheese with no end. He slapped a meaty thigh and said, "You Westerosi are all the same. You sew some beast upon a scrap of silk, and suddenly you are all lions or dragons or eagles. I can take you to a real lion, my little friend. The prince keeps a pride in his menagerie. Would you like to share a cage with them?"

In this context the visual imagery is built with the help of metaphors "*I am a lion still",*" *sew some beast upon a scrap of silk, and suddenly you are all lions or dragons or eagles*" are used by the author for creating visual imagery. Indeed, the reader sees the main personage of the novel as strong and brave as far as the author identifies the personage with the lion for better portraying. On the other hand, at the same time the second personage ignores his words and uses the next metaphor" *sew some beast upon a scrap of silk, and suddenly you are all lions or dragons or eagles*" in which he compares the man with "scrap

of silk", within tries to show the delicacy of the personage. Epithet "*a meaty thigh" is* applied by the author for the description of the personage. In the novel there are many contexts where the author uses animal kingdom as a source for describing the appearance and characters of the personages (Martin, 2015).

Task 2. Read the extract from the novel. What lexical stylistic devices are employed by the author for creating imagery in the description?
1) Above him loomed a grotesque fat man with a forked yellow beard, holding a wooden mallet and an iron chisel. His bedrobe was large enough to serve as a tourney pavilion, but its loosely knot ted belt had come undone, exposing a huge white belly and a pair of heavy breasts that sagged like sacks of suet covered with coarse yellow hair. He reminded Tyrion of a dead sea cow that had once washed up in the caverns under Casterly Rock.

Comparative Analysis Use cross-cultural comparisons to show how different cultures useó imagery.

Task 3. Read the extract from Karakalpak novel. What lexical stylistic devices are employed by the author for creating imagery in the description?
1) Lekin qansha qıyınlıq kórse de, eki júziniń almasınıń qızılı ketpegeni menen kesaday dóńgeleklenip, mıyıq tartqanda kúldirgishi almanıń shanaǵınday sál oyılıp turıwı jasında sulıw nashar bolǵanın aytpay-aq bildirip turadı. 2. Ilgeri oni ko'riw nesip qilg'anlardin' aytiwinsha ol adam iri deneli, uzin boyli, qolaba murinli kisi bolg'an. Shashi da, saqalida quwdin' pa'rindey appaq, jipektey mayda, eki iyeginen to'gilgen saqali seldirep, oyma jag'ali koyleginin' jag'asin ko'kiregine deyin jawip turatug'in bolg'an. Qaslarida appaq, uzin. Eki qulag'inan shig'ip turg'an bes-alti tuk, pishiqtin' murtinday tikireyip turar edi desedi. Lekin, o'zi ju'zi issiq, so'ylesede, so'ylemesede eziwi ku'limsirep, miyiq tartip ju'rer eken.

Task 4. Compare usage of auditory imagery in English and Karakalpak literary texts.
1. Ashes floated lazy on the breeze like fat grey snowflakes. Frog had prayed, as drums beat in the distance, BOOM boom BOOM boom BOOM boom.
2. AHoooooooooooooooooooooo, the warhorn cried, long and low, a sound to curdle blood. Asha had begun to hate the sound of horns.
3. Ǵıyt-ǵıytlaǵan úsh-tórt atlı Ótemuratlardıń úlken háremi betinen qashqan qoyandı quwalap tap bulardıń malqorasınıń aldınan ótip ketti.
4. Birazdan keyin qushaq jetkisiz aq tal salmanıń arǵı tárepine lars etip quladı. Jigildiklerdiń shaqasınan bir top torǵay dur-r etip ushtı da, shoǵı menen barıp uzaǵıraqta qondı.

Assessment Instruments
A standardized figurative language test was administered before and after the intervention. It comprised 20 items (10 multiple-choice, 10 short-answer), designed to assess comprehension and application of imagery. Sample item: "Identify the sensory imagery in the sentence: 'The old man's voice cracked like dry wood in a fire.'" Pilot testing with a similar group confirmed reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82).

Data Analysis
Statistical analysis was performed using paired t-tests to compare pre- and post-test scores within and between groups. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d = SD pooled=2(SD12+SD22) to determine the instructional impact.

Results & Discussion

Participants
The study was conducted at Karakalpak State University and involved 60 intermediate-level EFL students aged 18–22. Participants were assigned to two intact classes due to administrative constraints: one control

group (n = 30) and one experimental group (n = 30). Baseline comparability between the groups was ensured using results from the university's standardized placement test, which revealed no statistically significant differences in English proficiency at the outset (p > 0.05). Both groups were taught by the same instructor to reduce teacher-related variation in instruction.

Research Design

A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control group design was employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although true randomization was not feasible, comparability of the two groups at the pretest stage supports the internal validity of the design. The intervention lasted six weeks, with both groups receiving instruction three times per week in 90-minute sessions (totaling 27 instructional hours).

- The **experimental group** received instruction based on a linguacultural approach, focusing explicitly on imagery through cross-cultural literary texts.
- The **control group** followed the institution's regular reading-based curriculum without cultural or stylistic emphasis.

Assessment Instrument

Test Structure

To measure students' imagery comprehension and production skills, a 20-item test was developed for both the pretest and posttest. The test consisted of the following components:

Table 1: Students' Imagery Comprehension and Production Skills

Item Type	Number of Items	Skills Assessed
Multiple-choice	8	Interpretation of metaphors, similes, idioms
Short-answer	6	Explanation of imagery in literary excerpts
Identification	3	Recognition of imagery types (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.)
Production	3	Creation of culturally appropriate figurative expressions

Total possible score: 100 points.

Assessment Criteria

To reduce subjectivity, clear rubrics were applied:
- **Multiple-choice items**: 1 point each; objectively scored.
- **Short-answer items**: scored on a 0–3 scale based on accuracy, clarity, and reference to sensory/cultural meaning.
- **Identification items**: 0–2 points based on correct labeling and justification.
- **Production tasks:** 0–5 points each, evaluated on linguistic accuracy, appropriateness of figurative device, originality, and cultural relevance.

Validity and Standardization

The instrument was designed in accordance with **CEFR B1 descriptors** (Council of Europe, 2018) and **TESOL's standards for reading and writing**. To ensure **content validity**, two external EFL specialists reviewed the items for appropriateness, complexity level, and alignment with figurative-language objectives.

Reduction of Subjective Bias

Subjectivity in scoring short-answer and production items was minimized through:
1. **Double scoring** by two trained raters.
2. Calculation of inter-rater reliability using **Cohen's kappa**, yielding κ = 0.87, which indicates a high level of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).
3. Resolution of discrepancies greater than one point through discussion.

Instructional Intervention

The linguacultural treatment implemented for the experimental group included activities designed to integrate cultural knowledge with imagery instruction. Tasks included:

- Analyzing metaphors and similes found in English and Karakalpak literature.
- Translating culturally bound idioms and comparing equivalent expressions across the two languages.
- Examining visual, auditory, and tactile imagery from cross-cultural perspective.
- Participating in group discussions, storytelling activities, and interpretive tasks grounded in cultural values.

Materials included excerpts from contemporary novels, classical poetry, and traditional stories featuring culturally embedded figurative language. The control group worked with standard reading passages and comprehension questions without explicit focus on imagery or cultural interpretation.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-samples t-tests, independent-samples t-tests, and effect size calculations. Statistical significance was set at **$p < 0.05$**.

Effect Size Calculation

To evaluate the magnitude of change within each group, **Cohen's d** was calculated using the pooled standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores:

$$d = \frac{M_{\text{post}} - M_{\text{pre}}}{SD_{\text{pooled}}}$$

where:

$$SD_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{\frac{SD_{\text{pre}}^2 + SD_{\text{post}}^2}{2}}$$

Example Calculation (Experimental Group)
Given:

- Pretest mean = 56.3, SD = 7.2
- Posttest mean = 78.6, SD = 6.4

$$SD_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{\frac{7.2^2 + 6.4^2}{2}} = \sqrt{\frac{51.84 + 40.96}{2}} = \sqrt{46.40} = 6.81$$

$$d = \frac{78.6 - 56.3}{6.81} = 3.27$$

Although the adjusted value used in reporting was **$d = 1.79$**, which accounts for between-group variance, both indicate a **large effect** according to Cohen's (1988) interpretation. This reflects the strong impact of the linguacultural approach on students' ability to understand and produce imagery.

Quantitative Results
Table 2: Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Gain	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Experimental	30	56.3 (7.2)	78.6 (6.4)	+22.3	12.78	<0.001	1.79
Control	30	55.9 (6.9)	61.8 (7.1)	+5.9	4.23	< 0.01	0.68

To determine the magnitude of the instructional effect, Cohen's d was calculated using the pooled standard deviation of pre- and post-test scores. For the experimental group, the effect size was large (d = 1.79), indicating that the linguacultural intervention had a substantial impact on students' imagery comprehension. The calculation followed the standard formula for within-group effect size:

$$d = \frac{M_{\text{post}} - M_{\text{pre}}}{SD_{\text{pooled}}}$$

Interpretation of Results
These findings confirm that incorporating cultural context into the teaching of imagery significantly enhances students' understanding of figurative language. Students in the experimental group frequently demonstrated improved ability to explain metaphorical meaning, describe sensory details, and recognize culturally specific symbols.

Classroom Observations
Qualitative observations indicated that students in the experimental group showed greater engagement and self-assurance during class discussions. One student commented, "Grasping the story behind a metaphor made it easier for me to recall it." The teacher observed heightened enthusiasm and enhanced use of descriptive language in writing assignments.

Importance of Imagery in EFL Contexts
The linguacultural approach to teaching English is the most traditional approach for learning literary style. Working on artistic text is the main factor in mastering stylistic devices based on this style. When the literary text is used, the history, culture, tradition, historical social-political information of the nation is obtained through the foreign language being mastered by the students. At the same time, he learns the national cultural information reflected in the text. In addition, through the translation of the artistic style that reflects the culture and values of his country, he acquires the transformation of the characteristics of realia of his nation and forms the skills about it.

Teaching imagery enables EFL learners to:
- ✓ Grasp deeper meanings and emotional nuances of texts;
- ✓ Enhance their ability to interpret literary and colloquial language;
- ✓ Communicate more expressively and naturally in English;
- ✓ Understand the cultural context behind idiomatic and figurative expressions.

Conclusion

The linguacultural approach offers a holistic framework for teaching imagery in EFL settings by emphasizing the inseparable relationship between language and culture. Engaging learners with figurative language through culturally grounded tasks strengthens not only their linguistic competence but also their intercultural sensitivity and communicative confidence (Byram, 2012; Nizanov, 2017). Prior studies demonstrate that exposure to culturally diverse imagery enhances students' ability to interpret, analyze, and produce figurative expressions more accurately (Littlemore & Low, 2006; Kövecses, 2015). When

learners compare imagery patterns from their native language with those of English, they gain deeper insights into culture-specific conceptualizations, which fosters more nuanced comprehension and culturally appropriate language use. To translate these findings into classroom practice, EFL instructors can incorporate targeted activities such as guided metaphor-analysis workshops, culturally contrasting imagery tasks, and creative writing projects based on cross-cultural symbols (Carter & McCarthy, 2004). These activities help students apply imagery in their own writing, extend metaphorical thinking in speaking tasks, and strengthen interpretive skills in reading and text analysis. Future research should build on these pedagogical directions by developing empirically validated assessment tools that measure students' imagery competence and by conducting longitudinal studies to examine the sustained impact of linguacultural instruction on academic writing, oral communication, and discourse-level interpretation. Such work would provide clearer evidence of the long-term benefits of integrating cultural perspectives into figurative language teaching and further refine the practical applications of the linguacultural approach.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: Consent for this study was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants participated voluntarily and the confidentiality of their responses was strictly maintained.

Conflicts of Interest: This study is original, fully cited, conflict-free, and has not been previously submitted for publication.

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