The use of metonymy and metaphor in descriptive essays by intermediate and advanced EFL students

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Abstract

This article involves an empirical linguistic study aimed at elucidating the use of metonymy and metaphor in descriptive essays written by a group of intermediate EFL students (further referred to as 'participants'). 20 participants were recruited at Stockholm University, Sweden and matched with a control group comprised of 20 advanced EFL students at the same university. The participants and their respective controls were given five pictorial stimuli containing famous architectural landmarks in Sweden. The participants and the control group were instructed to write a one paragraph descriptive essay about each pictorial stimulus using either i) an imaginary and creative approach or ii) a non-imaginary and purely descriptive approach. The corpus of the participants' and controls' essays was subsequently analysed in the computer program WordSmith (Scott, 1996). Quantitative analysis in WordSmith yielded descriptive statistics involving word frequencies. Then, the corpus was analysed manually for the presence of metonymy and metaphor. Qualitative findings seem to support previous research (MacArthur, 2010; Haghshenas & Hashemian, 2016), which suggests that the use of metonymy tends to be associated with the intermediate level of EFL writing, whilst both metonymy and metaphor are predominantly found in the writing by advanced EFL learners.

Keywords: advanced EFL level, essay, intermediate EFL level, metonymy, metaphor

1. Introduction

This article involves an empirical investigation of the use of metaphor and metonymy in short descriptive essays written by 20 intermediate and 20 advanced students of English as a foreign language (EFL) whose first language (L1) is Swedish. The importance of metaphor and metonymy in educational settings is well-established (Boers, 2003; Cameron, 2003; Littlemore, 2009; Littlemore et al., 2011; Littlemore & Low, 2006). In Applied Linguistics and in EFL studies, there is sufficient research exploring linguo-didactic aspects of metaphor and metonymy in foreign language acquisition (Boers, 2003, p.231). The ability to produce metaphor and metonymy is deemed to be of great importance for foreign language learners (Kecskes, 2000; Radic-Bojanic, 2013). EFL literature suggests that an EFL student's comprehension and production of metaphor and metonymy positively correlates with general knowledge of the

foreign language (Littlemore, 2010), and in particular, with grammatical, communicative (Kecskes, 2000), and textual competencies (Littlemore & Low, 2006).

Current literature in EFL studies seems to favour the view that EFL learners need to understand the metaphors and metonymies used by native speakers of English, and produce them in oral and written tasks (MacArthur, 2010, p. 156). Previous research suggests that metaphoric and metonymic production may provide important insights into an EFL learner's competencies, which involve different levels of language proficiency (MacArthur, 2010, p. 158). In this regard, Kecskes (2000) posits that the level of the students' EFL proficiency maps onto the production of metaphor and metonymy, especially in written tasks. Research literature indicates that metonymy tends to be associated with an intermediate level of EFL proficiency, whilst the ability to produce metaphor is deemed to be a feature of the advanced EFL students' language mastery (Littlemore et al., 2011). However, even at the advanced EFL levels of proficiency metaphor is thought to pose difficulties for EFL learners (Littlemore, 2009).

Whilst there is an ever growing body of research in Applied Linguistics and EFL studies associated with metaphor and metonymy comprehension (Cameron, 2003; Kecskes, 2000; Littlemore, 2012; Littlemore et al., 2011; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Rundblad & Annaz, 2010), there is still a need to explore the use of metaphor and metonymy in EFL production tasks, especially in EFL writing. A meta-analysis of the current literature in EFL is suggestive of an underrepresented status of metaphor and metonymy in the textual competency enjoyed by an EFL student. Within the field of Applied Linguistics and EFL studies, textual competence is regarded as "the ability to understand and produce well-organized and cohesive text in both written and spoken context" (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 282).

Set within the context of EFL textual competence, the novelty of this empirical investigation consists of these two foci: i) the research design further presented in this study involves intermediate and advanced groups of EFL students, whose L1 is Swedish; and ii) the present study elucidates the production of metaphor and metonymy in EFL descriptive essays based upon pictorial stimuli, which involve famous architectural landmarks in Sweden. The present article is structured as follows: First, previous research involving metaphor and metonymy in EFL will be outlined. Second, the present study will be introduced, focusing on the participants, experimental stimuli, results and discussion. Third, the conclusions of the present investigation will be discussed within the light of pedagogical implications to the field of EFL writing.

1.1. *Metaphor and Metonymy in EFL: A Brief Outline*

Research in Applied Linguistics and EFL studies indicates that metaphor and metonymy involve semantic principles of meaning extension (Gao & Meng, 2010; Horowitz, 1990; Kalyuga & Kalyuga, 2008; MacArthur & Piquer Píriz, 2007). Metaphor and metonymy are viewed as two distinct, yet related tropes (Cameron & Deignan, 2006; Charteris-Black, 2003; Littlemore, 2012; Turker, 2016). Within the field of EFL, metaphor is regarded as a trope, which involves a description of one entity in terms of another (Littlemore, 2012). Metonymy is considered a trope based upon a stand-for relationship (de Mendoza Ibanez, 1997; Kovecses, 2013; Littlemore, 2009; Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 269), where one entity refers to another contiguous

entity (Lin, 2015, p. 43). A traditional view of distinguishing metaphor and metonymy as relying on similarity versus contiguity (Rundblad & Annaz, 2010, p. 548) is specified by Warren (1999, p. 130), who posits that the difference between metaphor and metonymy is "said to be that metaphor is based on resemblance relations whereas metonymy is based on contiguity". To exemplify, let us examine the following example of metonymy provided by Warren (2002, pp. 1-2), e.g. *She married **money**.* Here, 'money' implies a person who is rich and has money. Hence, the metonymic transfer takes places from a person onto the properties associated with that person (i.e., money). Further, Warren exemplifies metaphor by referring to the following sentence: *You scratch my **back** and I will scratch yours.* The metaphor in this sentence is based upon a metaphoric mapping from a body part that is difficult to reach (*back*) onto a situation which is difficult to cope by one person. In other words, this situation involves an interaction between one person (A), who helps another person (B) with what B cannot do, but which can easily be done by A, and B will return such a service to A (Warren, 2002, pp. 1-2).

Whilst the present research is not carried out within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics (Gibbs & Steen, 1999; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Langacker, 2002), it should be, nevertheless, noted that there is a growing number of publications which address the use of metaphor and metonymy in EFL from a cognitive perspective (Littlemore, 2009). In Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are defined as "cross-domain mappings, in that elements from a source domain are mapped onto a target domain" (Burgers, 2016, p. 250), whereas metonymy is seen as a mapping within the same or contiguous domain.

In Applied Linguistics and in EFL studies, metaphor and metonymy involve lexical, morphological, syntactic, and collocational characteristics of the expressions (Littlemore & Low, 2006; Roldán-Riejos & Úbeda Mansilla, 2013). In particular, research findings suggest that the use of metaphors in the form of set phrases for conveying abstract ideas constitutes a specific rhetorical pattern in EFL writing (Gonzalez et al., 2001, p. 630). It is inferred from previous studies (Cameron, 2003; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Littlemore et al., 2011) that metaphor and metonymy in EFL involve a plethora of other characteristics, such as description, explanation, exemplification, clarification, summation, and evaluation. Previous research indicates that

> an ability to use metaphor and metonymy appropriately can thus contribute to a language learner's communicative competence. One might, therefore, expect an ability to understand and produce metaphor and metonymy to contribute to language proficiency (Littlemore, 2012, p. 15).

According to MacArthur (2010, p. 157), metaphor awareness is embedded into a dynamic context of EFL acquisition in an instructed setting, "where it is normal to find a mix of abilities as well as a range of cognitive styles, learning strategies, attitudes and so on". Within a wider context of EFL textual competences, metaphor is believed to be used to facilitate the structuring of the argument within the units of text (Littlemore & Low, 2006, p. 282). Metonymy as a universal language feature is deemed to be multifunctional within the context of an EFL student's textual competency. Metonymy in EFL writing is associated with evaluative and euphemistic language usage, humour, and pragmatic inferencing (Littlemore, 2009).

Whilst MacArthur (2010, pp. 157-159) does not seem to address the issue of metonymy in EFL writing, it is, nevertheless, inferred from her research that metonymy, amongst other forms of figurative language, affects numerous aspects of EFL students' learning systems, for instance semantic competence and vocabulary development. MacArthur (2010, p. 161) emphasises that "metaphorical uses of language will become increasingly necessary for FL learners as they move from talking or writing about the here-and-now and move into the realm of abstraction". Presumably, the metonymic usage of language is of equal importance in EFL speaking and writing competencies. It is inferred from MacArthur's (2010, p. 166) seminal work on metaphor production in EFL classroom that the exploration of metaphor by an EFL learner may occur at different moments, which are necessitated by a variety of tasks, such as writing.

It should be noted that theoretical models of figurative language processing and acquisition in EFL seem to factor in the input of the first language (L1) figurative language processing (Littlemore et al., 2011; Turker, 2016). Theoretical tenets of L2 and EFL figurative language processing involve the applicability of the students' L1 to their L2 and/or EFL metaphor comprehension and production. The findings by Littlemore (2010) suggest that the ability to understand and produce metaphor in the L1 is related to the ability in the L2, i.e. those students who produce metaphors in their L1 are likely to do so in their L2. Littlemore (2010, pp. 302-304) argues that metaphoric competence is a relatively stable individual difference variable, which may partially account for differences in an EFL classroom.

However, the relationship between a student's L1 and L2 metaphoric competence is not straightforward. For instance, Danesi (1993) suggests that high level proficiency students in L2 continue to operate in terms of their L1, and perform poorly on L2 metaphor comprehension. This finding is echoed by Chen and Lai (2014), who posit that even advanced L2 and EFL learners experience difficulties with metaphor and metonymy comprehension. Arguably, more research avenues should be explored in terms of establishing possible differences in metaphor and metonymy production by intermediate and advanced EFL learners. The research further described in the following sections of the article addresses the above-mentioned problem through the lenses of Applied Linguistics.

2. The Present Study: Its Hypothesis and Specific Research Aims

The present research is carried out within the framework of an applied linguistic approach to the study of metaphor and metonymy in EFL. It involves a corpus of descriptive essays written by 20 intermediate and 20 advanced EFL university students. Set within the applied linguistics paradigm, this research focuses upon linguistic metonymies, which involve stand-for relationships, and linguistic metaphors understood as a stretch of language that has the potential to be interpreted metaphorically (Cameron, 2003; Chapeton, 2010).

The point of departure of this investigation is based upon Chapeton's (2010) contention that an insufficient number of empirical studies involving the use of linguistic metaphor and metonymy in written production by EFL learners does not exhaustively elucidate the usage and occurrence of metaphors and metonymies by EFL learners in essay writing. Taking this argument further, **the Hypothesis** of the present research involves the following assumption: It

is assumed that a descriptive essay writing task in EFL based upon a set of visual stimuli involving famous architectural landmarks would result in EFL essays marked by the presence of metaphors and metonymies. Following Caballero (2013), it is assumed that pictorial stimuli involving architecture would be suggestive of potential metaphoricity, thus resulting in predominantly metaphorical essays based upon those stimuli. Concurrently with this assumption, however, it is theorised that architectural pictorial stimuli would be conductive to writing descriptive essays characterised by the occurrence of metonymy. The latter assumption is based upon the findings reported by Roldán-Riejos & Úbeda Mansilla (2013), who indicate that metonymy and, predominantly, metaphor have been identified in EFL essays involving architecture. Factoring in previous research (MacArthur, 2010) that indicates that metaphors are likely to be produced by advanced EFL students, it is hypothesised that EFL essays written by intermediate EFL students would be characterised by the instances of metonymy, in contrast with the essays produced by the advanced EFL students, which would be associated with the usage of metaphor. Hence, **the specific research aims** of the present investigation are i) to identify the instances of metonymy and metaphor in the EFL students' essays, and ii) to compare the usage of metaphor and metonymy, respectively, between the groups of intermediate and advanced EFL students.

2.1. Participants

40 participants in total were recruited for the present study, consisting of a group of 20 intermediate EFL university students (M age = 21, 12 females and 8 males), matched with a group of 20 advanced EFL university students (M age = 23, 11 females and 9 males). All the participants attended Stockholm University at the time of the experiment. The participants indicated that Swedish was their L1 and English was a foreign language to them (EFL). Students whose L1 was English were excluded from the experiment. The group of intermediate EFL learners was comprised of the students of the second semester of the study of English who were enrolled in the secondary school teaching programmes, whereas the group of 20 advanced students consisted of EFL students enrolled in the advanced course of Psycholinguistics conducted in the English language and offered after the third semester of the study of English. The participants' real names were coded to ensure confidentiality. The intermediate participants were coded as INT1, INT2, …, INT20, whilst their controls were coded ADV1, ADV2, … and ADV20, respectively.

2.2. Materials

The materials used in the present study involved five pictorial stimuli of the well-known architectural landmarks in Sweden, namely the castles of Gripsholm, Läckö, Rosersberg, Tullgarn, and Ulriksdal. For the purpose of consistency, the author of the present article took pictures of all the above-mentioned castles on summer days, with some sunshine and clouds present in each of the photos. In all the photos, the castles were foregrounded and centrally located, with the whole façade being captured. It was ensured that all the photos had been taken

without people or animals in them. The photos did not contain any identifying information, such as the castles' names and their locations.

2.3. Procedure

Both the advanced and the intermediate groups received identical instructions about the task. The groups were instructed to access the pictorial stimuli available for download and viewing online on the student portal (Mondo) and to write a short essay of no more than 300 words about each pictorial stimulus. It was explained in the instructions that five short essays were expected within a two weeks deadline. It was specified that all the essays should be either purely descriptive or descriptive with the use of imagination. Both the groups were instructed to be consistent and to choose either a purely descriptive approach in all their essays or, alternatively, choose a descriptive approach with the use of imagination when describing the stimuli. All the participants as well as the control group were asked to label each of their five essays with the labels 'Descriptive' or 'Imagination'. Both the groups were instructed to send their essays to the researcher via e-mail. The participants in both the groups received a percentage of their course mark for the assignment.

2.4. Methods

This study involved a mix-methods methodology, consisting of a quantitative and a qualitative part. The quantitative statistics involving the total number of words and word frequencies were computed by the WordSmith (Scott, 1996) software program. The qualitative methodology of metaphor and metonymy identification followed the guidelines described in detail by Littlemore and her colleagues (2011), who operationalised their metaphor and metonymy identification procedure by examining any stretch of the discourse "whose surface meaning appears to be anomalous or incongruous with the surrounding co-text" (Littlemore et al., 2011, p. 4). In accordance with Littlemore et al. (2011, p. 4), the present qualitative methodology involved the following steps: i) the first step consisted of the textual analysis of those language stretches, which could include idioms, metonymy, and other figurative language types; ii) the second step involved the testing for metaphoricity by examining a 'domain incongruity' between the item and the topic to which it referred; iii) the third step involved the testing for metonymy by analysing whether or not the relationship between the lexical item and the topic to which it referred was based upon contiguity.

2.5. Results

All the participants and their respective controls completed the whole array of the descriptive essays tasks. Their performance was analysed in the software program WordSmith (Scott, 1996), which yielded the descriptive statistics represented in Table 1 and the measure of the most frequent words summarised in Table 2. It should be noted that the cut-off was arbitrary set at 100 most frequent words (unfiltered).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of the Essays Written by the Intermediate and Advanced Groups*

Group of Participants	Total Number of Words Per Group	Total Number of Sentences Per Group
Intermediate	10792	625
Advanced	17569	894

Table 2: *The Occurrences of 100 Most Frequent Words per Group*

Group of Participants	100 Most Frequent Words per Group
Intermediate	the (1008), a (363), of (320), and (271), in (233), building (194), it (186), to (185), I (169), this (157), on (145), picture (143), that (142), there (124), castle (113), are (104), as (98), with (92), be (90), would (83), or (75), which (74), like (67), have (67), was (63), one (60), has (58), not (55), but (54), also (51), windows (50), they (47), built (47), by (45), for (45), from (43), house (43), some (43), palace (43), at (42), previous (38), looks (37), can (37), main (34), very (34), three (34), white (34), during (33), lawn (32), time (31), front (31), entrance (30), other (29), color (28), large (28), façade (27), been (27), look (27), so (26), people (26), more (25), an (24), towers (24), all (24), see (24), sky (24), since (24), me (23), side (23), than (22), period (22), roof (22), many (21), taken (20), beautiful (20), wall (20), architecture (19), pictures (19), well (19), right (19), if (18), blue (18), grey (18), tower (18), assume (18), style (18), red (18), green (17), must (17), could (17), no (16), perfect (16), description (16), walls (16), around (16), couple (16), sort (16), rather (15), summer (15), think (15)
Advanced	the (1468), a (601), of (573), and (537), to (390), in (341), is (313), on (249), it (241), there (233), that (191), are (191), I (165), castle (147), with (141), house (131), be (129), not (127), they (123), he (114), this (113), she (104), picture (101), building (101), was (101), have (97), as (96), one (87), but (86), like (84), which (84), her (82), would (81), for (81), has (76), windows (73), also (67), could (66), two (66), his (64), looks (61), by (61), front (60), people (60), or (59), side (59), at (58), towers (55), top (55), all (54), right (54), from (53), white (53), man (52), tower (51), been (50), about (50), so (48), up (48), had (48), some (47), them (46), when (46), middle (45), their (44), out (42), red (42), since (41), where (40), do (39), other (39), very (37), my (36), black (36), who (36), king (35), time (35), left (35), were (35), three (35), can (34), see (34), more (33), old (33), you (33), walls (32), entrance (32), day (32), small (32), never (32), if (31), around (31), many (30), any (30), seems (28), big (28), get (28), how (27), only (26), different (26)

Instances of metaphor and metonymy in the descriptive essays written by the participants and their controls were identified manually in accordance with the methodology provided by Littlemore et al. (2011). Based upon the labels 'Descriptive' and 'Imagination', the total number

of the participants and the controls who wrote purely descriptive essays and essays with the use of imagination was calculated manually. Those statistics were compiled in Table 3 below.

Table 3: *Instances of Metaphor and Metonymy Occurrence per Group*

Group of Participants	N of Metonymies Per Group	N of Metaphors Per Group	N of Participants/ Controls Who Wrote Purely Descriptive Essays	N of Participants/ Controls Who Wrote Descriptive Essays with the Use of Imagination
Intermediate	13	8	14	6
Advanced	15	17	8	12

2.6. Discussion

As evident from Table 3 in the Results section, the total number of the intermediate EFL students who have written purely descriptive essays is 14, whilst the total number of those intermediate students who have written descriptive essays with the use of imagination is six. These findings are in contrast with the group of advanced EFL students, 12 of whom have chosen to write descriptive essays with the use of imagination, and eight of whom have written purely descriptive essays. The results of the quantitative analysis indicate that the differences between these groups involve the following statistics: the total number of words, the total number of sentences and the occurrence of the most frequent words. It should be reiterated that both the groups have received identical instructions as far as the maximum number of words per paragraph is concerned (no more than 300 words per paragraph). Judging from the data, the advanced students have exceeded the word limit by producing substantially longer essays (17569 words in total) compared with the intermediate group (10792 words in total).

The results of the quantitative analysis of the word frequencies in WordSmith (Scott, 1996) have revealed several quantitative differences involving lexico-semantic categories. In particular, the group of the advanced students has resorted to the lexico-semantic category PERSON more often compared to the intermediate students. Specifically, whilst the essays written by both the groups contain the first person singular *I* (165 occurrences in the advanced group and 169 in the intermediate group), the essays written by the advanced group are characterised by the frequent occurrence of the pronouns in the third person singular, which have not been identified in the essays by the intermediate students, e.g. *he* (114), *she* (104), *her* (82), and *his* (64).

At the same time, the intermediate group's essays are marked by a more lexically dense lexico-semantic category BUILDING, compared to the advanced group. For instance, in the intermediate group's essays this lexico-semantic category is represented by the following category members: *building* (194), *castle* (113), *windows* (50), *built* (47), *house* (43), *palace* (43), *lawn* (32), *front* (31), *entrance* (30), *façade* (27), *towers* (24), *side* (23), *roof* (22), *wall* (20), *architecture* (19), *tower* (18), and *walls* (16). In comparison, the lexico-semantic category

BUILDING is less dense in the essays produced by the advanced group, cf. *castle* (147), *house* (131), *building* (101), *windows* (73), *front* (60), *side* (59), *towers* (55), *top* (55), *walls* (32), and *entrance* (32). Arguably, this quantitative difference can be accounted for by the predominance of purely descriptive and non-imaginary essays written by the intermediate students. An example of a purely descriptive essay is provided in Excerpt 1, written by an intermediate student (coded for confidentiality as INT 5):

(1)   *Picture 1. First picture shows a castle, a palace. The palace was done in rococo, Gustavian style. It was built of stone. The palace has three floors and consists of the main building, and two adjacent buildings. Dominant colors are beige and red. One of the main characteristics of the palace is long arched windows. The main building has three large wooden doors. Two lanterns hang next to the doors. There are also two lions at the main entrance with two coats of arms and the crown. There is a tower with the clock on it and King´s flag waves above it. In front of the palace there is a large beautiful park. This palace is a royal summer palace where Swedish royalty spend their summers for centuries.* (Student INT 5)

Excerpt 1 exemplifies a descriptive approach to architecture, focusing on the lexico-semantic category BUILDING and backgrounding other lexico-semantic categories, such as, for instance, COLOURS. Whilst instances of metaphor have not been identified in (1), this excerpt, nevertheless, contains metonymy, which is based upon the WHOLE – PART relationship, e.g. '*The palace has three floors and consists of the main building, and two adjacent buildings*'. It should be mentioned that in this article, the WHOLE – PART relationship is treated as metonymy, in accordance with the approach found in Radden and Kövecses (1999). However, some authors do not consider it as metonymy, and refer to it as synecdoche (Seto, 1999).

Interestingly, the intermediate group exhibits a tendency to employ more metonymy (the total number of metonymy occurrence is 13) than metaphor (the total number of metaphors is eight) in their essays. To illustrate the point, let us examine Excerpt (2) written by the intermediate student coded INT 11. Excerpt (2) involves a description of the same castle as in Excerpt (1):

(2)   *Picture 1. Description. This is probably a castle. It looks like this building is on a hill which makes me wonder what can be found on the other side of the building. In front of the building there is a green lawn which looks to be taken well care of. On the lawn, in front of the entrance, there are flowers. The colors of the flowers are mainly yellow. The castle has three different doors which function as an entrance. There is a decoration on the top of the house. It has two shields, one with the three gold crowns on a blue background, a typical Swedish symbol. There is also a lion on the shield. Two statues of lions are situated on either side of the doors. I wonder why lions are often portrayed on castles and shields. Everyone knows that there are no lions in Sweden.* (Student INT 11)

Similarly to Excerpt (1), in (2) there is an occurrence of metonymy, which involves the WHOLE – PART relationship, e.g. '*The castle has three different doors which function as an entrance*'. Another instance of metonymy is based upon the relationships of contiguity between the CROWN and the SWEDISH COATS OF ARMS: '*It has two shields, one with the three gold crowns on a blue background, a typical Swedish symbol*'. Whereas metaphors have not been identified in (1) and (2), the essays written by the intermediate group appear to be marked by a limited number of metaphors (the total number is eight per group), as evident from Excerpt (3) written by the intermediate student coded as INT 17:

(3)   *The picture shows a three-story, rectangular building with a great many windows in three rows across the façade. In front of the building there is an orderly green lawn, which is decorated with flowers planted in the shape of some official insignia. There is a small clock tower, topped with a flagpole, which sits in the middle of the roof directly above a pediment decorated with two coats of arms. All the windows on the second floor have French balconies except the three in the centre, which share one large balcony. Directly below are three large wooden doors with windows, flanked at each end by stones statues. The façade is white trimmed with red. The photo was taken on a sunny day and the sky is very blue but it's quite cloudy too. The sunlight on the lawn makes the grass look almost yellow.* (Student INT 17)

The instances of metaphor production in (3) have been identified in i) '*flowers planted in the shape of some official insignia,*' i.e. the flowerbed is metaphorically seen as an official signature or a coats of arms, and ii) '*a flagpole, which sits in the middle of the roof*', where the flagpole is thought of as metaphorically sitting on the top of the roof. In (3), these metaphors seem to be embedded into a descriptive account of what the student observes in the picture.

The results of the qualitative analysis indicate that the intermediate group's essays involve more occurrences of metonymy, e.g. 13 per group, rather than metaphor (eight per group). These findings are indirectly supported by the quantitative statistics yielded by WordSmith (Scott, 1996), which reveal the lexically dense usage of the lexico-semantic category members associated with BUILDING. Presumably, the usage of the concrete lexico-semantic category BUILDING positively correlates with the relative predominance of metonymy identified in the intermediate group's essays. This finding appears to be in contrast with the data garnered from the essays written by the advanced group. As evident from Table 2 in the Results section, the advanced group's writing is characterised by the frequently occurring members of the lexico-semantic category PERSON. In addition to such category members as *I* (165), *people* (60), *man* (52), *my* (36), *you* (33), this category is represented in the advanced group's essays by the occurrence of the third person singular (it should be noted that this phenomenon is not observed in the intermediate group's writing).

The data summarised in Table 2 indicates that the essays written by the advanced group are characterised by a more lexically dense category PERSON, compared with the intermediate students, whose writing appears to be marked by the presence of the category BUILDING. The category PERSON in the advanced group's essays is associated with both metonymic and metaphoric usage. In particular, all 12 advanced students who have written their descriptive essays with the use of imagination, employ a metonymic relationship BUILDING – A PERSON WHO LIVES IN THE BUILIDNG. The metonymic mapping from a dwelling onto a dweller is frequently referred to in current literature (Blackston, 1993; Dickerson, 2012). In the present study, this mapping can be illustrated by the following two excerpts, namely (4) and (5), which are written with the use of an imaginary inhabitant of the castle. Specifically, the whole essay in (4) is structured by a metonymic relationship BUILDING – A PERSON WHO LIVES IN THE BUILIDNG: '*Growing up in a white enormous house with staff cleaning your room … For Maria who lives in that reality the dream looks a little different*'. (Student ADV 12).

(4)   *Growing up in a white enormous house with staff cleaning your room and who do anything you tell them to do might seem like a big dream for a lot of people. For Maria who lives in that reality the dream looks a little different. A big house may be absolutely hilarious for a child where there are a lot of spaces you can run and play on. But Maria does not have any siblings to play with and almost no friends either. Many people are jealous*

of Maria and her life and want therefore nothing to do with her. She is dreaming of a normal life with a normal size of the house and no staff that are taking care of everything. Her parents does not understand it, she can buy anything she want and does not have to lift a finger if she does not want to. But Maria thinks that her parents can not say anything about the subject, because they were raised in a normal family without much money or staff. The only reason they are living in such a big house is because Maria parents are both very successful business men. This also means that Maria does not see so much of her parents in periods. She often wishes that they would lose a lot of money so they could not afford living in the house anymore, but they never do. Once she wrote a note about selling the house for only 100 Swedish crones and put it up all over the city. Unfortunately, Maria's teacher saw the notes and called her parents, who were not exactly happy with her. Now, Maria has accepted that she will have to live there until she turns 18. She has promised herself never to buy such a big house herself, but if she does, she will have more than one child, because she never wants her child to feel as lonely as she did. (Student ADV 12)

Similarly, in (5) the metonymic relationship between the castle and its owner is mapped onto an adventure story taking place on the island of Gotland, off the coast of Sweden: '*The legend says that the old castle in Visby is haunted by its first king who was a very mean man.*' (Student ADV 9):

(5)   *The legend says that the old castle in Visby is haunted by its first king who was a very mean man. He did not care about anyone but himself. A gang of four teenagers who always push each other to do things they really do not want to do, have decided to visit the castle to see if they can see the old and mean king. Linus, who always brags about how brave he is and teases the others for being afraid, enters the castle first and laughs scornfully towards the rest of the gang who are behind him. What he does not know is that the others are tired of his mean comments about how afraid they are and they have been putting up some traps to scare him. They have been in the castle for about ten minutes before they hear some noises. The gang, except Linus, is looking at each other and one of them whispers "Show time". The noise gets louder and Linus directly starts to mock the others by making baby voices and saying "are you babies scared?" and then he laughs loudly. Suddenly, he feels someone putting a hand on his shoulder, he turns around, and there stands a very old man, who is ghost-white all over his body except his long gray hair. Linus screams like he had never screamed before and runs away so fast that he trips in the stairs. He lies down and watches the "ghost" come closer and now, Linus is so scared he almost cries. As he watch up on his friends to see how scared they are he gets really surprised to see them laughing. The he understands that everything is made up by them and he also starts to laugh and so is the "ghost". Linus looks at his friend and says "You really got me their! I will never mock you for being afraid again and honestly, I would prefer us not to visit any castles for a long time".* (Student ADV 9)

Excerpts (4) and (5) provide typical examples of those 12 advanced students' writing, who have chosen to produce their descriptive essays with the help of imagination. The essays are marked by a substantial presence of the lexico-semantic category PERSON. The focus of those essays seems to be on the people who live in the castles rather than on the castles as a piece of architecture per se. In this regard, it should be, perhaps, reiterated that the essays written by the intermediate group appear to foreground the lexico-semantic category BUILDING, thus focussing more on the architectural details and providing a more specific description of the five pictorial stimuli with the castles. Arguably, metonymy associated with the category BUILDING plays a facilitative role in the castle descriptions by the intermediate students.

However, the presence of metonymy (15 instances in total per group) in the essays by the advanced group is also substantial, even though it is instantiated by the relationships of contiguity between the PERSON WHO LIVES IN THE BUILDING, i.e. the dweller, and the

dwelling, or a BUILDING. As evident from (4) and (5), for instance, the focus in this metonymic relationship is not on the architecture, but rather on the people who live in the BUILDING. Hence, it can be argued that metonymy in the essays written by the advanced group also plays a facilitative role, which is profiled on the PERSON.

It can be generalised from the present data, that instances of metonymy and metaphor, respectively, are qualitatively subsumed under the categories summarised in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Qualitative Characteristics of Metonymy and Metaphor in the Corpus

Group of Participants	Metonymy	Metaphor
Intermediate	A part for the whole The whole for a part The colour of the castle – the building (castle) A symbol for the country	The castle as a day on which the photo of the castle was taken Flowerbed as a symbol of insignia Flagpole as an artefact sitting on the roof
Advanced	A part for the whole The whole for a part The building (castle) for a the dweller The dweller for the building (castle)	The building (castle) as a person with feelings The building (castle) as a Hogwarts image (a metaphoric reference to Harry Potter) The building (castle) as a coveted object The castle as a day on which the photo of the castle was taken The person as a castle

The results of the qualitative data analysis reveal that the advanced group's essays contain more instances of metaphor compared with the intermediate group, 17 and eight, respectively. Metaphor in the essays written by the advanced group appears to involve the lexico-semantic categories BUILDING and PERSON, for instance i) '*Ever since that day the castle has been Sarah favourite place and she visits it as often as she can. Every time she does that, **the castle makes her feel peaceful and happy**'* (Student ADV1)*;* ii) '*Loneliness has never been a problem for Simon, he has been lonely his whole life. The thought of his new life makes him smile and he knows that life will be much better outside **these walls of the castle which has hated him for so long**.'* (Student ADV 7). In these two instances, the castles metaphorically project emotions onto humans, such as positive emotions in the first former quote and negative emotions in the latter.

The afore-mentioned quotes containing metaphors are taken from two descriptive essays written with the use of imagination. However, the presence of metaphor has been identified even in those advanced group's essays, which have been labelled 'Descriptive', for instance,

(6)   *Picture 5. Description. You saved the best for last. This is a majestic building that would make any university in the world jealous. It all ties together neatly with the reflections in the water and the vivid green trees. To me this is a university campus with so much history built into the walls. Even though the picture I described here is beautiful, it has that Hogwarts-like feel to it.* (Student ADV 20)

In (6), metaphor is identified in the description of a castle which '…*would make any university in the world jealous'*. Judging from Excerpt (6), the metaphoricity of the castle is present even in the seemingly plain description. Echoing Caballero (2003), it can be assumed that metaphor is a critical component in architecture, '*where it mediates the various stages involved in architectural design as well as the discussion on finished buildings'* (ibid.). A metaphorical comparison of the castle with that of Hogwarts is suggestive of Harry Potter's imagery. In other words, architecture represented by famous architectural landmarks in Sweden may invoke not only metonymy, which is observed in the descriptive essay writing by both the intermediate and advanced groups, but also stipulate metaphoric account of the architecture in the EFL essays.

3. Conclusions

This article presents an empirical investigation of the use of metonymy and metaphor in the EFL students' descriptive essay writing, focusing upon i) the identification of metonymy and metaphor in the students' essays and upon ii) the comparison of the use of metonymy and metaphor between two groups of EFL students, an intermediate group and an advanced one. The results of the essay analysis have revealed that the essays written by the intermediate group are marked by the presence of metonymy (the total number per group is 13), rather than metaphor (the total number is 8 per group). The predominance of metonymy over metaphor in the intermediate group's essay writing is in concert with previous research findings (MacArthur, 2010; Haghshenas & Hashemian, 2016), which indicate that the usage of metonymy rather than metaphor is associated with the intermediate level of EFL proficiency.

The findings of the present empirical investigation reveal that the advanced level of EFL proficiency is associated with a substantial occurrence of both metaphor (the total number per group is 17) and metonymy (the total number per group is 15). Arguably, the presence of both metonymy and metaphor in the advanced group's essays contributes to an argument that EFL essay writing involves a sense of empowerment and aesthetic richness (Horowitz, 1990) afforded by the creative writing task. Given that the advanced group has produced descriptive essays characterised by the instances of metaphor and metonymy, it can be concluded that the advanced EFL group in this study used both metaphor and metonymy, which constitutes '*a real mark of the competent learner'* (Littlemore, 2012, p. 16). However, using metonymy may be a sign of overgeneralisation and a lack of precision. Obviously, more research is needed to ascertain the link between the use of both metaphor and metonymy and the students' EFL proficiency level.

In contrast to the advanced group, an insignificant number of metaphors has been identified in the intermediate group's essays. This finding could be taken to indicate that the production of metaphors in descriptive essay writing is associated either with difficulties on the part of the students at the intermediate level of EFL proficiency, or insufficient awareness of the use of figurative language as a means of descriptive essay writing. Consequently, this finding provides further support to previous research by Caballero (2003), who posits that the use of metaphors in EFL writing should be addressed in a typical EFL curriculum design in order to facilitate the students' awareness of figurative language in EFL writing.

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