

## Uncovering Fears, Challenges, and Motives of an Adult Learner with Dyslexia through Metaphors

Zeynep Nesrin Coşkun<sup>a\*</sup>, Kenan Dikilitaş<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> nesrinco@gmail.com, Computer Education and Instructional Technologies, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Bahçeşehir University, Turkey

<sup>b</sup> kenan.dikilitas@uis.no, Department of Education, University of Stavanger, Norway

\* Corresponding author, Kenan Dikilitaş, kenan.dikilitas@uis.no

### APA Citation:

Coşkun, Z. N. & Dikilitaş, K. (2022). Uncovering fears, challenges, and motives of an adult learner with dyslexia through metaphors. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 15(1), 64-90.

Received  
28/09/2020

Received in  
revised form  
21/01/2021

Accepted  
21/08/2021

**Keywords**  
Adult Dyslexia,  
Higher  
Education,  
Metaphors

### Abstract

This case study aims to explore English language vocabulary acquisition experiences and conceptualizations of a single adult English language learner with mild dyslexia by drawing on metaphors and semi-structured interviews. In the study, we aimed to view the learner's perception through different lenses to gain deeper insight into her ulterior motives and desire. In the findings, language vocabulary acquisition experiences and conceptualizations attributed to the language were revealed by metaphors. This highlighted the learning barriers which obstructed the learner's foreign language acquisition; her comprehension of the English language and personal motives to overcome the challenges.

## Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore English language vocabulary acquisition experiences and conceptualizations of a single adult English learner with mild dyslexia by drawing on metaphors and semi-structured interviews. Based on the first phase of this study (Coşkun & Mitrani, 2020), the current study focused on the adult learner with dyslexia to better understand what emotions and impressions were behind her poor vocabulary acquisition. Studies on perceptions and experiences of dyslexia learners by Tanner (2006), Stampoltzis and Polychronopolou (2009), Worthy et al., (2016), Bacon and Bennett (2012), and O'Byrne (2019) revealed the need to conduct this study to fill a research gap.

The reasons for choosing metaphors to tackle this study are because metaphors help us relate to a complex world of dyslexia and help people to verbalize their subconscious mind on their emotions, cognition, and perceptions. Neurocognitive deficits in development dyslexia point out that language learning of learners with dyslexia might be interrupted and complicated by their linguistic deficits (Menghini et al., 2010). Since dyslexia has an effect not only on literacy skills in students first language but also foreign language learning, this interruption might present the same problems they had when learning to read and write in their mother tongue (Sparks et al., 2006; Schneider & Crombie, 2003; Nijakowska, 2008, 2010, 2014; Kormos & Smith, 2012). Meanwhile, learners diagnosed with mild dyslexia may not know that they are dyslexic (International Dyslexia Association, 2012). Some may not experience problems until after middle school (Swarbrick & Marxhall, 2004). Difficulties in dyslexia are involuntary and people with this disorder have a normal desire to learn (National Institute of Health, 2016) but lag behind their peers in obtaining skills and acquire less vocabulary (Simmons & Kameenui, 1990). The importance of the problem derives from the fact that when a disability goes undiagnosed, it causes difficulty in dealing with the learning obstacles (Simmons & Kameenui, 1990). Having difficulty with short and long-term memory, learners with dyslexia, experience problems with vocabulary acquisition when learning English as a foreign language (Simon, 2000).

In this relation, this study aims to identify language vocabulary acquisition experiences and conceptualizations of a single adult EFL learner with dyslexia. Using metaphors as a main data collection tool in the context of her inner world enables an understanding of what lies behind inconsistencies in her poor vocabulary acquisition skill if any, other than dyslexia. To this end, metaphors in this study can be described as a language analyzer that creates insights into the cognitive underpinnings of the learner's conceptualism on the English language.

### Literature Review

Dyslexia, also known as a reading disorder, is characterized by trouble with reading despite normal intelligence (Siegel, 2006). Dyslexia is characterized by having difficulties matching letters to sounds and remembering how to spell words, seeing letters moving around while reading, and having trouble telling left from right. Also, dyslexics often have difficulties with correct or fluent word recognition, or they may have problems with spelling and decoding ability. Some dyslexics must re-read paragraphs repeatedly to understand. For some, holding a pencil to write by hand or even organizing themselves can be problematic. Every person with dyslexia is different. The effects of dyslexia on language learning for dyslexics is that they may need more thinking time to remember the right word as well as memorizing sequences. The nature of dyslexia is defined by affecting the acquisition and development of the written language code (reading and spelling) and causing significant handicap to academic achievement and/or activities of daily life. More often diagnosed in men, (Peterson & Bruce, 2012) found that individuals with special needs comprise almost 12.29% of the total population in Turkey and most remain undiagnosed. The number of people officially diagnosed with dyslexia in Turkey stands at 41,600. To gain a deeper understanding of the learner's emotions, cognition, and perceptions on learning English that could hinder learning, adopting a metaphor tool (Johnson & Stake, 1996) is an ideal means for exploration of a phenomenon within its context (Anthony & Jack, 2009). Metaphor studies support our attempt to understand the needs of the learner (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). Some of the research where metaphors are used as investigative tools is as follows:

Farjami (2012) studied images and metaphors held by foreign language learners regarding the nature of the target language. This provided teaching practitioners with useful insights into how to deal with various language learning problems. The resulting categories revealed a very positive attitude towards learning a foreign language. Jin et al., (2014) studied English learning motivation among primary school pupils via analyzing metaphors. 128 pupils aged between 7 and 9 years-old indicated dynamic awareness of English learning difficulties but believed they would still achieve desired outcomes. Dinçer (2017) investigated the beliefs of 60 EFL learners, about speaking English through metaphor analysis. The findings gave insight into a better understanding of the speaking skill and what makes a good speaker of English for language educators. Göçen and Özdemirel (2020) studied Turkish as a foreign language (TFL) learners' perception of Turkish culture through the metaphors and images in their drawings. An analysis of the resultant data revealed that although TFL learners had a positive attitude towards Turkish culture, they were not able to associate language with culture.

### Methodology

This is a single-case study of qualitative research that focuses on a language learner with dyslexia. Participant selection criteria were based on the uniqueness of the case, representing an adult female language learner in a university context. It provides a clear picture of foreign language learning from a dyslexic sufferer's perspective. The study focuses on the vocabulary acquisition difficulties of a thirty-five-year-old adult learner with dyslexia, who is studying in a language preparatory school of a university. Although the goal of the learner is to complete the program successfully, her vocabulary memorization skills hinder her ability to keep up with the requirements of the reading curriculum. The learner is faced with the problem of not being able to successfully meet the requirements within the time constraints of four academic semesters. This is her second BA. She was unable to complete her first BA, which was in distance education and the medium of education was in Turkish. She wanted to do a second BA to rectify her failure to complete her first BA course. She was not aware of her dyslexia until she participated in the study. She knew that something was wrong, but she suspected it was due to her lack of study skills, her level of intelligence, or

others who were to blame for her inability to make progress. That was until she heard about dyslexia. The learner expressed her belief that she may be dyslexic to her teacher, who subsequently informed the relevant department of the university although his student had not yet been diagnosed. The researcher who was working in the department interviewed the learner, her teacher, and looked at her transcripts. It then became evident that the learner had difficulty with vocabulary.

When a checklist (Appendix A) provided by the Adult Dyslexia Association was carried out with the learner to determine if she has dyslexia, she scored 53, which corresponded to mild dyslexia. The data derived from the interview and evaluation of the dyslexia checklist coupled with the background information in her English learning records revealed that she does suffer from dyslexia and is experiencing problems in vocabulary acquisition, memorization, and retention. The learner was notified about her dyslexia, directed to professionals for more medical support, and asked if she would be interested in participating in a study to determine where her difficulties lie and how best to overcome these in English language learning. Following her decision to participate in the study, it was decided to choose metaphor prompts as the main data collection tool since abstract ideas are often defined metaphorically through non-abstract concepts such as organisms, space, motion, food, and objects, and often in a constellation (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Prompts are used as guiding indications and cues to metaphors for the readers of this study to understand the participant better.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the learner that could hinder her learning of the English language, other than her dyslexia, and to discover her ulterior motive of learning that might result in vivid and original descriptions of English, diverse data collection tools were utilized in the study. A significant amount of data was provided from three semi-structured one-to-one interviews held with the participant at three consecutive times. The interviews lasted five hours, followed by transcription and data analysis preparation. Interview questions were constructed based on indications of her dyslexic world, in-depth analysis of experiences, self-perceptions, and emotions of language learning. The first interview was centered on the learner's experiences; the second was centered on her emotions, and the third interview was centered on her self-perception on language learning. A thirty-minute interview with the learner's teacher was conducted to

enrich the data with different viewpoints. The Learner's teacher was younger than the learner, in his thirties and with an indifferent manner. Due to the limited time of the teacher, the interview was unstructured; open-ended questions were asked which flowed like everyday conversation. There was no specific set of predetermined questions although the researcher had certain topics in mind that he wished to cover. Notes taken during the interviews were prepared for data analysis. These topics were the teacher's vocabulary instruction system, observations of the learner during a lesson, knowledge, and experience with learning disability and learning styles. Another data source was the learner's journal in which she was to write whatever came into her mind whilst learning. The notes confirmed the data obtained from interviews and metaphor prompts and were utilized for triangulation.

A study that appeared in Şenaydın and Dikilitaş (2019) used fourteen metaphors to gain insight into the cognitive aspects of participant's conceptualization of learning English. Their sample was utilized for creating the following categorization: The prompts contained metaphors of (a) Vehicle as motion and space; (b) clothes as storage; (c) tool as function; (d) food as core (e) travel as a move (f) make-up product as shaping (g) music as expression (h) song as a slogan (i) flower as reproduction (j) emotion as concern (k) house as conditions (l) memory as mind (m) sports as capability (n) continent as situation. The prompts included the category name and required the participant to fill in space with a metaphor and a reasoning statement for her specific choice, in the format of: "If languages were animals, Turkish/ English would be... because...".

To obtain participant's real-time reactions, the prompt-reply process was orally operationalized. The goal was to examine the difficulties, learning attitudes, and reasons to gain deeper insight into language conceptualization through the inner world of the dyslexic learner. The collected linguistic metaphors were examined with the metaphor analysis methodology (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). Learner's reasoning deciphered her selection for the related metaphor by defining qualities of the source and target domains. Each metaphor was systematically checked in its contextual meanings against a dictionary definition to understand the learner's conceptualization for English, which is the process of envisioning the idea behind the words (Lakoff &

Johnson, 1980). This resulted in a table as a layout for the data from which a decision could be reached.

In the construction of the layout, the first stage was to establish a structure of each metaphor, which can define qualities for the source and target domains. The second stage was to establish defining qualities for the target and source domain (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). The layout provided a working record of the decisions made and the reasons for them, which is a vital part of metaphor analysis. The data from interviews and the learner's journal confirmed the interpreted data. At the third stage, a content analysis was made to identify metaphor categories by spotting and categorizing the occurrence of patterns such as words, subjects, themes, and concepts within the collected data. The content analysis was based on the research question concerning the aim of the study in a hierarchical approach. First, data acquired from data collection tools were transcribed into a word document. Then, the data was reviewed to gain a global perspective. During the review process, repeated patterns such as individual words, themes, characteristics, and concepts occurred. The next step was labeling and defining concepts as a process of procedure for open coding. At the fourth stage, core conceptual metaphors that presented an answer to the research question were selected among the repeated patterns. These selected conceptual metaphors set the metaphor categories in the table. Notes from the learner's journal were reviewed during the interpretation of data to reinforce the main data. The data analysis based on metaphors provided qualitative results that presented thought patterns that construct and constrained the learner's motives, fears, and challenges are discussed below. The data on how the learner conceptualizes English and analysis of metaphors for the English language used by the learner with dyslexia can be found in the Metaphor Analysis Table 1, 2, 3, and 4.

In establishing the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation was established by using more than one method to collect data on the same material. The data acquired by the metaphors were triangulated through interviews, journal notes of the learner, and with her teacher's interview. This way, credibility, and reliability on the accuracy of the findings were assured. For confirmability, it was aimed to portray participants' responses accurately and to minimize researcher bias in the study. Also, detailed records of the interviews and journal notes of the learner were kept and all relevant data was incorporated. Finally, for dependability,

data collection and the data analysis process were presented in detail to ensure enough information is included for the study to be replicable and obtain similar findings to this study. The limitation of a single case study is that there is a possibility that findings may not be representative of learners with dyslexia. Generalization and applicability of the findings should be tested on a larger number of similar populations, situations, and phenomena. However, the findings compared with triangulation suggest that the metaphor tool and findings acquired from the tool are broadly applicable and transferable to many types of learners and situations. However, it should also be considered that culture may affect the way the participant reflects on her learning experience and the way the researchers interpret the data since, culture influences greatly how we see the world, how we try to understand it, and how we communicate with each other.

## Results and Discussion

### Learner's Challenges: Mind (Genetic-based Memory)

As a student at an English Preparation School of a university, the learner's foreign language learning was interrupted by her linguistic deficits caused by her undiagnosed mild dyslexia. Her hidden dyslexia is evident from the "song" metaphor in Table 1. The "song" metaphor suggests that the learner perceives English as something that can support her to cry out for help to her unseen mental state where lies a hidden disability of dyslexia that sets her apart from others. Her conceptualism also revealed her mental state with the metaphor of "shorts". "Piece of cloth" conceptualism as "shorts" pointed out that she has a short memory, which can contain a limited vocabulary. In relation, her short memory makes her slightly unsuccessful and weak as is implied in her "fried egg with sucuk" (sausage) and limited as referred to in "shorts". Learner's metaphors can be examined under the source domain and defining qualities and researcher's interpretations can be examined under target domain and qualities sections Table 1.



Table 1

*Metaphors for English that Uncover Learner's Mind*

Metaphor category	Identifying characteristic	Source domain and defining characteristic	Target domain and defining characteristic
English as a song	Slogan	No one knows A secret Unseen state Disguised	English as an unseen state English as a statement of being different
English as a piece of cloth	Storage	Shorts Limited length Lesser	English as a deficient entity English as overload for short-term
English as an egg meal	Core	Fried egg with sucuk Fermented and slightly smoked Spicy and salty	English as a Turkish meal for breakfast English as a slightly unsuccessful
English as spice	Concern	Seven spices for masking rotten food	English as a mixture of herbs good for all English as covering deficiencies
English as music	Expression	Classical music. Harder than rest Requires more practice  Energetic music	English is an intellectual purpose for the mind.  English as mental exhaustion. English as patterned repetitions
English as a continent	Situation	Africa Difficult circumstances like: Dry desserts Rain forests Largest waterfall	English as extremely large scope English as a hard and long process

The data acquired from metaphors indicated that although she regards English as an essence that is good for all her problems and a cover for her deficiencies, given the demand of hard work, she thinks it is an extremely hard and long process, an overload for her short-term memory that causes mental exhaustion, which develops into stress. The

data acquired from the metaphors were also in correlation with the data acquired from her interview. Excerpts from interview 1, confirms the data acquired from metaphors for English as an overload for short-term memory:

We have to learn 55 English vocabulary words each week.  
But I cannot recall all the words as my peers do. Simply it is too much for me. Therefore, I get frustrated (Interview 1).

Likewise, learner's portrayal of the English language as an effect of dyslexia was different from non-dyslexia learners in terms of being unending and too much for a short memory with the metaphor for 'shorts' and a statement of being different from the others with the metaphor of 'no one knows'. In relation, her "seven spices" metaphor implied that the learner distinguishes English as something that can support her to hide her deficiencies on the one hand and restore her health and keep her safe from harm on the other. Meanwhile, "classical music" and "Africa" metaphor carry learner's specific cognitive aspect to the surface: Although the learner perceives English positively, she identifies it as something that causes mental exhaustion since foreign language learning is extremely difficult and takes a long time which is something that her patience is not enough to cope with. As a result, she loses her control over fulfilling her responsibilities, which poses a major challenge in learning. The data acquired from metaphors as English forces her sense of responsibility for her obligations is revealed with the metaphors of "energetic music" which has patterned repetitions with intervals in the same form versus "classical music" which causes mental exhaustion. Learner's metaphor as English forcing her sense of responsibility for her obligations confirms the data acquired from metaphors for English as patterned repetitions with intervals. Her explanation for the reason of her choice of energetic music is as follows:

When I get bored, I can't study. When I can't study, I check other activities that have a patterned repetition with regular or irregular intervals in the same form, such as listening to energetic music. Doing these kinds of activities help me get rid of my bad energy and relax me.

Likewise, learner's metaphor as English being mental exhaustion confirms the below data acquired from the interview 4. Also, the

following excerpt from interview 2 and 3, verifies learner's metaphor as English as an extremely hard and long process for her:

To improve my English, I bought a book. But after reading for a while, I was overwhelmed by it. I watched movies in English. But it was the same. Therefore, I preferred to stay away from learning English. (Interview 4).

I have difficulty in learning English. Because I get bored very quickly and be overwhelmed. I have no tolerance for waiting; I think I'm impatient. But English learning requires great effort and a long process. And I don't learn like everybody. In fact, it's not up to me. Even if I want to continue studying, I get bored and throw the book away. My attention span is short. I'm having difficulties. A lot of time passes until I start to study (Interview 2 and 3).

The learner is in a struggle when learning a foreign language. Her dyslexia hinder her memorization skills and suspends her foreign language learning. Then at one point when she becomes overwhelmed by the load of required work to be done, she gives up. This is critically important since she can simply give up learning English for good, as she had done in her previous educational study.

### **Learner's Challenges, Fears, Beliefs and Assumptions**

The learner's second challenge that interrupted her foreign language learning was based on her fears, beliefs, and assumptions. The "Royce Rolls" metaphor hints that the learner assumes English is for people who are better than average; and, not for people with mental limitations. Since she senses herself as slightly unsuccessful with a short memory, she believes that English is not for her. Table 2 demonstrates related metaphors.

Table 2

*Metaphors for English that Uncover Learner's Challenges: Fears, Beliefs, and Assumptions*

Metaphor category	Identifying characteristic	Source domain and defining characteristic	Target domain and defining characteristic
English as a vehicle	Motion and space	Rolls-Royce Known not to be for old people with physical constraints. Praised for fineness and being exceptional.	English as a World-class power system English as not for mental limitations English as for better than average

The learner's fears, beliefs, and assumptions were also disclosed in her interviews. Although she believes English is not for people with mental limitations and people with better than average ability, she regards English as supporting her claim that she is worthy and acceptable. The related data acquired from metaphors as a fear, belief, and assumption as a challenge for the learner, endorses the data acquired from excerpts from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd interviews:

I heard a conversation between my mother and my aunt. My aunt was telling my mother that I was not good enough for an education. This broke my heart. I knew that I was not successful at school. I really want to work hard: Except that, I can't. I wanted to have private lessons besides my school. I took courses for two and a half months. But it didn't work. I couldn't do it. I did not understand the things that were taught. As a result, I felt unsuccessful and failed. Then, anxiety attacks started a year before starting the university. And, with anxiety, also my sudden and uncontrollable crying started (Interview 2 and 3).

The learner comes from a traditional type of family with four members, living together on an average income. Except for her elder brother who is a university lecturer, the other three members, including

herself, are educationally below undergraduate level. In this connection, data acquired from metaphors as English is for better than average people are fear, belief, and assumption that challenges the learner and confirms the data acquired from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd interviews. Following are the excerpts:

... I had no confidence in myself; maybe it was because I did not know any vocabulary. Although I knew the answer, I could not raise my hand. I thought they would laugh at me. My success at school was average and below (Interview 2 and 3).

...When I first started the preparation school, I wanted to learn English so much! I had some concern about learning English. My concerns were mostly about the possibility of falling behind my peers and being focus of attention (Interview 1).

It is well-defined in the interview and metaphors that the learner's obstacles of learning are her fears of not being able to succeed, her beliefs, and her assumptions on the English language that it is not for people with mental limitations. Triggered by her fear of being unsuccessful, her acceptance that English is not for her poor memory, would not support her to continue with the discomfort of learning something new during her learning journey. Besides her dyslexia, her assumptions are also an obstacle to her foreign language learning. Likewise, learner's assumptions on who the English language is for might differ from non-dyslexia learners: non-dyslexia learners might not have an assumption on who the English language is for. Her fear of falling behind and feeling unsuccessful in education might prevent her from learning English.

### **Learner's Motives**

Motivation is a crucial element for the learner since it is a desire to act in service of a goal. Her metaphors for her motivations identify how her challenges, fears, and beliefs that hinder her learning could be overcome. Her "vehicle" metaphor implies English as a source of motivation and pleasure. And as her "flower" metaphor suggests the English language presents her with a new beginning bringing her an opportunity and good luck just like a "daisy" that has two flowers in one.

She feels like when she takes the opportunity with good luck on her side, English would intensify her skills, as the "make-up products" metaphor suggests. Moreover, the learner's "sport" metaphor confirms that she perceives English as something that would present her a long-lasting treatment which is a phenomenon that is not seen in non- dyslexia learners. The learner regards this long-lasting treatment as something that would develop all needed skills to be independent and have a healthy lifestyle to succeed. The metaphors related to her willingness to learn English can be inspected in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Metaphors for English that Uncover Learner's Motives: Willingness*

<b>Metaphor category</b>	<b>Identifying characteristic</b>	<b>Source domain and defining characteristic</b>	<b>Target domain and defining characteristic</b>
English as a vehicle	Motion and space	Rolls-Royce Associated with strong emotion Pleasing Known to have no limits Frees from bounds and restraints Takes one to places where everyone cannot go	English as a World-class power system  English as a source of motivation and pleasure  English as a remover of limitations and restrictions
English as make up products	Shaping	Mascara, lipstick, blush. Used for lengthening and lifting Gives three times fuller-looking	English as an increasing depth and dimension  English as intensifying skills
English as a flower	Reproduction	Daisy New beginnings Brings good luck	English as two in one. English as a new beginning
English as sport	Capability	Swimming Used for working all muscles Building endurance and strength	English as developing skills for being independent  English is adopting a healthy lifestyle for success

The findings captured by metaphors revealed the learner's highly positive perception of learning English which is identified as "providing opportunities," in her personality and study skills, building acceptance and confidence as a part of her planned future that would present her with a new beginning. In this regard, the learner's determination for success was evident in the metaphors she used. Metaphors that reveal English as a new beginning that uncover the learner's motives confirm the data acquired from the 3rd and 4th interviews. The following is an excerpt:

I don't have an equipped profession. I just want to be successful in something. And I want to learn English a lot! Then, I will be happy. And this feeling will affect my success (Interview 3 and 4).

The data acquired from metaphors as English as a skills developer that uncovers the learner's motives confirms the data acquired from the 3rd and 4th interviews. Friends give the learner a powerful support system. Relying on learning English, rather than friends would present a preferable support system to her. Following is the excerpt:

I was determined to be successful. Therefore, I used a support system in my school. My support system was consisted of close friends for cheating. So, I graduated with high grades. (Interview 3 and 4).

The data acquired from metaphors as English is a source of motivation and pleasure that uncovers learner's motives confirms the data from the last interview. The exempt is as following:

I want to learn English so much. Can't I learn this language? I love it, it is colorful; and sounds fun. What should I do to speak? It is very important to me!"

The learner strongly emphasizes being free from her concerns, anxiety, mental problems as well as having satisfied conditions of existence in her future. There is strong evidence that the learner has clear motivational goals of developing her vital standards and ideals such as living an independent life and succeeding in life by being healthy, sharpening, and intensifying her skills. In this connection, there are indications that her challenges caused by her mind coupled with her

assumptions, beliefs, and fears on who English learning is for, can be overcome by her strong motives. The learner gives the most important information on how to overcome her challenges and fears with the metaphors she uses. Her metaphors give details on the structure of a personalized instructional design. The "Royce Rolls" metaphor suggests that the learner perceives English as she needs to replace her behaviors such as fault-finding, placing responsibility with the "a part of a day" metaphor she used for hardworking, sense of duty, sense of responsibility. Similarly, the "a part of a house" metaphor suggests that she identifies learning English as it should be in her circumstances: It should not present any mental distress, confusion, or disturbance. While the "travel" metaphor gives details of how the learner's English instruction should be: A balanced itinerary where one can pace oneself and eliminate stress via flexible conditions, just like "a slow travel with a drophead coupe" which implies English learning should be a flexible journey that should be explored slowly. And her "music" metaphor suggests that when the English language causes exhaustion, she should turn to other activities just as in her "energetic music" metaphor that has patterned repetitions, which involves repetition of data in the same form. Table 4 gives a layout of the metaphors for how the learner's challenges and fears can be overcome.

**Table 4**

*Metaphors for English that Uncover How to Overcome Learner's Challenges and Fears*

<b>Metaphor category</b>	<b>Identifying characteristic</b>	<b>Source domain and defining characteristic</b>	<b>Target domain and defining characteristic</b>
English as part of a day	Fruitful time	Morning Hardworking Fruitful	English as a time period, English as hard work, sense of duty, and responsibility
English as a vehicle	Motion and space	Rolls-Royce Known not to be for old people with: Physical constraints. Complaining and blaming	English as a World-class power system English as not for self-excuses English as for not taking responsibility



Metaphor category	Identifying characteristic	Source domain and defining characteristic	Target domain and defining characteristic
English as part of a house	Conditions	My room A personal space Objects arranged in her own way.	English as a separate space English as learning in own terms with no: Mental distress Confusion Disturbance
English as travel	Move	A slow travel with a drophead coupe Used for taking time to discover Convertible folding roof	English as eliminating stress with self-pace  English as a slowly explored flexible journey
English as music	Expression	Energetic music. Used for making rhythm Helps get rid of bad energy	English as a cause of exhaustion without patterns in the same form

The learner attempts to overcome her challenges by adopting a personal strategy. She compensates for her insufficiency by asking questions until she understands (Interview 3). The data acquired from metaphors as English is a slowly explored flexible journey confirms the data acquired from the 3rd interview as follows:

Sometimes when I don't understand something, I ask questions. I know I can learn by asking questions. I ask questions until something is clear to me. I also learn from other people by either observing them or asking them how they are doing things. (Interview 1).

The evidence for the learner's need to develop and sharpen her skills, and to overcome her challenges and fears was also exhibited within the excerpt from the interview 2, 3, and 4:

I did not study, I repeated my classes. Then I was expelled, but I did not care. I might have been unsuccessful since I avoided working hard and wasted my chances (Interview 2, 3 and 4). I believe learning English supports my personality development in ethical senses (Interview 4).

Metaphors in Table 4. indicate the learner's desire to learn English on her terms which was the reverse of what she had experienced in Preparatory School. She needed to learn English slowly in a fun way without mental distress, confusion, and any kind of disturbance. Her interviews confirm the findings related to her learning terms. The data acquired from metaphors reveal English eliminates stress when is in self-pace and learned in its terms and confirms the data acquired from the interviews and journal notes. It is as following:

It is important for me to enjoy a subject when learning it. I need to relate a subject with fun. I need a method that would not bore me. Something like game-based learning would fit me. Every difficult subject can be explained to me with a sample sentence. When I'm sure that I am not going to understand a subject from the instructions, I try to understand it by asking a question. I ask my questions to the people who can do the exercises. I learn by experimenting. (Interview 3 and 4).  
...Today, I helped my nephew on how to turn a boring subject into a fun one. He does not like to read books. I realized how amused he was even when I was talking about some learning techniques (Journal notes).

The data acquired from metaphors as English as not for fault-finding and not for placing responsibility confirms the data acquired from the interviews. It is as following:

When I first started preparation school, I desired to learn English very much. I had few concerns. My concerns were about possibility of falling behind my peers and being the focus of attention. In preparatory school, they (the teachers) turned something very beautiful into something ugly: There was a system that alienated students from learning English. Classes were not fun. The other students enjoyed their irresponsibility; they weren't stressed about it. They liked the light atmosphere. Only after they realized that they would not be able to pass the class, they became aware of the situation. The teachers instructed 15 minutes in each class then in the rest of the time we had to solve questions the teacher gave. And cheating was not possible (Interview 1).

The data acquired from metaphors uncover how learner's challenges and fears can be overcome confirms the data acquired from the interviews. It is as following:

Teachers' communication skills were bad, and they also could not teach. I remember I was not given permission to go to the toilet even though the teacher was not actively teaching something. When the teacher did not give me permission, I thought the teacher was kidding. The teacher is younger than me, I was 35; he was 27 years old. I believe he has to treat me different than the others. But he did not. So, I thought, how could a person who treats me like this teach me something? I decided that he could not, and I closed myself to his teachings. I believe, teachers should be open to discoveries, research, and should sympathize hard workers. When I realized that the teacher has a rude personality, I stopped learning. But I kept on coming to school since it was my responsibility. A teacher's personality is very important to me: Teachers should have teaching ability, treat their students respectfully; they should be polite, and intelligent. If they are not smart or good enough for themselves, what can I learn from them? (Interview 1).

In triangulation, the analysis of the unstructured interview with the teacher of the learner suggested that the teacher did not have any experience teaching learners with dyslexia. Following is the excerpt from the interview:

I am not sure how to help the student. I don't know if my teaching style matches the student's learning style. Also, there is no system for teaching vocabulary in the language school. I sometimes introduce vocabulary in context of a reading text. Then ask learners to guess the meaning of the word and provide the correct definition orally. I see that the student sometimes gets lost during instruction and as a result, she feels frustrated.

The learner needs specialized circumstances for learning, pointing out that game-based learning would support her learning terms which would not trigger her panic for failure. The finding of the study is in exact compatibility with the study on the motivations of Chinese young EFL learners through metaphor analysis (Jin et al., 2014) on 128 pupils. The

non-dyslexic learners felt happiness and excitement about learning English, influenced by learning through play. Some students indicated dynamic awareness of English learning difficulties but believed they would still achieve desired outcomes. It has been confirmed by the metaphor tool that the learner needs a specialized instructional design that would intensify her weaknesses such as fault-finding, placing responsibility, and hardworking in slow-paced and fun involving activities such as games since games include experimenting with a high tolerance for wrong answers with many encouragements. A design of a game that would support her vocabulary acquisition which involves exploring, asking questions, and data repetition, is highly advisable.

The findings of this study were compatible with the literature. One learning barrier for the learner was teacher-based inefficiency. Classroom teachers play a key part in resolving challenges and helping the achievement of learners of dyslexia. Sicherer's study (2019) which explored the relationship between teacher training and knowledge about dyslexia to teacher efficacy in teaching students with dyslexia, suggested that teachers lack training on and do not have appropriate knowledge about dyslexia. Also, Berne & Blachowicz, (2008) suggested that many teachers are not confident about practices in vocabulary teaching and at times they do not know where to begin to form an instruction on word learning is also a case in the learner's barrier. Meanwhile, the learner's description of the English language is similar to that in Dinçer (2017), which showed that 60 EFL learners mostly perceived speaking English as a skill requiring much effort but also giving pleasure where the learner of dyslexia described English as extremely hard, needs great effort and process, requiring much practice. In Dinçer's study, the learners described a good speaker of English as someone who is universal, disarming, wise, privileged, and hardworking. The learner, similarly, to her non-dyslexia peers, described English as something which has a universal appeal and is engaging.

As pedagogical implications of this study would be useful to teachers and adult learners of dyslexia, it is possible to indicate that low grades are an indication of the existence of a challenge. The challenge could be based upon fears and motivations. Therefore, fears and motivations should be uncovered to overcome challenges. Teachers of learners with dyslexia should consider incorporating pedagogical strategies when dealing with dyslexic learners and keep up the

conversation to overcome challenges. And teachers should be aware that barriers can be exceeded by their passion for success. Meanwhile, learners of dyslexia should consider allocating their prime time for learning and not do time-consuming major activities when trying to learn.

## Conclusion

In the study, learning motivations and barriers of an adult learner with mild dyslexia were uncovered. Learner's barriers were genetic-based and teacher-related. Learner's genetic-based barrier was related to her weak, limited, and insufficient memorization skills caused by dyslexia. She constantly struggles to learn. Her struggles end up with not understanding the material which is defined as a characteristic of dyslexia by Abadzi (2006). Moreover, her genetic barrier developed into a fear of not being able to succeed, disbelief, an emotional sensitivity which led her to become overwhelmed and lose self-control. Besides, her English language learning experience increased the learner's negative emotional reactions; she experienced a fear of rejection, fear of being unsuccessful, and shame of never being as good as others. Coupled with her attempts to remember the information, this emotional sensitivity created concerns of feelings of disapproval. She becomes exhausted in her attempts, and she gives up learning thinking that the English language is for people with advanced ability to learn rules and vocabulary rapidly; who is better than average; not for people with mental limitations and who cannot take responsibility. Her beliefs on learning English points out that there is a strong learning barrier to learning English.

The learner's teacher-based barrier was related to the teacher's inexperience at teaching learners with dyslexia, as was self-expressed by the teacher. Also, there was no instruction for teaching vocabulary. The vocabulary teaching resulted in leaving learners alone with a load of vocabulary that should be acquired in a limited time. A problematic vocabulary teaching with no predefined program, inexperience with dyslexic learners, and inefficiency of using teaching methods resulted in a learning barrier while the learner was in desperate need of learning on her terms. Furthermore, the learner's belief that teachers should have a certain type of personality, pointing out that if not, she would shut herself off from her teacher's teaching, is also a barrier to learning, which could be observed in non-dyslexic learners as well.

The learner's final obstacle was a surprising finding uncovered by the "wafer" metaphor. The metaphor implied that the learner had inserted English learning between two time-consuming major activities, which she did not mention in her interviews. When asked, she confirmed the revealing of the metaphor by stating that she was working and had started a new romantic relationship. Her learning difficulty, anxiety for success coupled with time-consuming activities might have distracted her and left very little space for success. Nevertheless, although dyslexia can make learning difficult, learners of dyslexia can be rather successful (Dyslexia Association, 2012) and such a learning experience might have both empowering and helpful effects for developing resiliency, confidence, and self-awareness (Foss, 2013). Similarly, to Foss's findings, the learner's decisiveness and motivation for learning English seem to be more than non-dyslexia learners. She perceives English as a remover of all her limitations and restrictions and a skilled developer for being independent in life. This suggests that she is ready to try any possibility that could ensure her success: Learning English would bring her career and life into a desirable condition, support her claim that she is worthy and present her equilibrium, which is a perfect basis for learning. A learner with dyslexia can succeed though dyslexia make learning English challenging.

The learner's barriers can be exceeded by her passion for success. When she is on the edge of giving up, she should be directed to engage in other activities that could involve her friends. Her learning tasks could be altered into tasks that have patterns and repetitive characteristics. Playful designs of instructions creation such as game-based learning would ease her tension. A design that is developed over game-based learning would contribute to a gap in vocabulary program for adult learners with dyslexia. This vocabulary program could be built upon the learner's vivid and original description of English language sourced from the underpinnings of her metaphors, which is as follows: "The English language is a new beginning of an extremely difficult but pleasurable learning journey which needs time to explore in one's terms to release a person from a hidden and constraint position that could hinder learning while sharpening and intensifying adequate skills such as building endurance and strength which keeps one safe from harm in life."

---

---

### About the Authors

**Zeynep Nesrin Coşkun:** A PhD student of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies in Bahçeşehir University in Educational Sciences Department in Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul, Turkey

**Kenan Dikilitaş:** A professor at Department of Education at University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Rogaland, Norway

### References

- Abadzi, H. (2006). *Efficient learning for the poor: Insights from the frontier of cognitive neuroscience*. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/e596592012-001>
- Anthony, S., & Jack, S. (2009). Qualitative case study methodology in nursing research: An integrative review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 65(6), 1171-1181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2009.04998.x>
- Bacon, A. M., & Bennett, S. (2012). Dyslexia in higher education: The decision to study art. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 28(1), 19-32.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2012.742748>
- Berne, J. I., & Blachowicz, C. L. (2008). What reading teachers say about vocabulary instruction: Voices from the classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(4), 314-323. <https://doi.org/10.1598/rt.62.4.4>
- Cameron, L., & Low, G. (1999). Metaphor. *Language Teaching*, 32(2), 77-96. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444800013781>
- Coskun, Z. N., & Mitrani, C. (2020). An instructional design for vocabulary acquisition with a hidden disability of dyslexia. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 15(2), 305-318.  
<https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v15i2.4671>
- Dinçer, A. (2017). EFL learners' beliefs about speaking English and being a good speaker: A metaphor analysis. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 5(1), 104-112.  
<https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2017.050113>
- Dyslexia accommodations: How to know what your child needs. (2016, February 12). International Dyslexia Association.  
<https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia>

- Farjami, H. (2012). EFL learners' metaphors and images about foreign language learning. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(1), 93. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.1.5>
- Göçen, G., & Özdemirel, A. Y. (2020). Turkish culture in the metaphors and drawings by learners of Turkish as a foreign language. *Participatory Educational Research*, 7(1), 80-110. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.20.6.7.1>
- Jin, L., Liang, X., Jiang, C., Zhang, J., Yuan, Y., & Xie, Q. (2014). Studying the motivations of Chinese young EFL learners through metaphor analysis. *ELT Journal*, 68(3), 286-298. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccu011>
- Johnson, K. E., & Stake, R. E. (1996). The art of case study research. *The Modern Language Journal*, 80(4), 556. <https://doi.org/10.2307/329758>
- Kormos, J., & Smith, A. M. (2012). *Teaching languages to students with specific learning differences*. Multilingual Matters <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847696212>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Menghini, D., Finzi, A., Benassi, M., Bolzani, R., Facoetti, A., Giovagnoli, S., Ruffino, M., & Vicari, S. (2010). Different underlying neurocognitive deficits in developmental dyslexia: A comparative study. *Neuropsychologia*, 48(4), 863-872. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2009.11.003>
- Nijakowska, J. (2008). An experiment with direct multisensory instruction in teaching word reading and spelling to Polish dyslexic learners of English. In *Language learners with special needs* (pp. 130-157). Multilingual Matters.
- Nijakowska, J. (2010). *Dyslexia in the foreign language classroom*. Multilingual matters. <https://doi:10.21832/9781847692818>
- Nijakowska, J. (2014). Dyslexia in the European EFL teacher training context. In *Essential topics in applied linguistics and multilingualism* (pp. 129-154). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01414-2\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01414-2_8)
- O'Byrne, C., Jagoe, C., & Lawler, M. (2019). Experiences of dyslexia and the transition to university: A case study of five students at different stages of study. *Higher Education Research &*



- Development*, 38(5), 1031-1045.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1602595>
- Peterson, R. L., & Pennington, B. F. (2012). Developmental dyslexia. *The Lancet*, 379(9830), 1997-2007. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(12\)60198-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(12)60198-6)
- Crombie, M., & Schneider, E. (2003). *Dyslexia and Modern Foreign Languages: Gaining Success in an Inclusive Context*. David Fulton Publishers.
- Sicherer, M. (2019). Dyslexia. In *College for Students with Learning Disabilities*, (pp.17-21) Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429030277-3>
- Siegel, L. S. (2006). Perspectives on dyslexia. *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 11(9), 581-587. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/11.9.581>
- Simmons, D. C., & Kameenui, E. J. (1990). The effect of task alternatives on vocabulary knowledge: A comparison of students with and without learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23(5), 291-297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002221949002300508>
- Simon, C. S. (2000). Dyslexia and learning a foreign language: A personal experience. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 50(1), 155-187.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-000-0021-7>
- Sparks, R. L., Patton, J., Ganschow, L., Humbach, N., & Javorsky, J. (2006). Native language predictors of foreign language proficiency and foreign language aptitude. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 56(1), 129-160.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11881-006-0006-2>
- Şenaydin, F., & Dikilitaş, K. (2019). Exploring child bilingual identity in Turkish context: A single case study. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1-17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1639130>
- Stampoltzis, A., & Polychronopoulou, S. (2009). Greek university students with dyslexia: An interview study. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 24(3), 307-321.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250903020195>
- Swarbrick, J., & Marshall, A. (2004). *The everything parent's guide to children with dyslexia: All you need to ensure your child's success*. Simon & Schuster.
- Tanner, K. (2009). Adult dyslexia and the 'conundrum of failure'. *Disability & Society*, 24(6), 785-797.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590903160274>

Worthy, J., DeJulio, S., Svrcek, N., Villarreal, D. A., Derbyshire, C., LeeKeenan, K., Wiebe, M. T., Lammert, C., Rubin, J. C., & Salmerón, C. (2016). Teachers' understandings, perspectives, and experiences of dyslexia. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 65(1), 436-453.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2381336916661529>

## Appendix A Dyslexia Checklist

Do you confuse visually similar words such as cat and cot?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
3	6	9	12

Do you confuse similar words such as different and difficult?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

Do you lose your place or miss out lines when reading?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
2	4	6	8

Do you have trouble telling right from left?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	4	4

Is map reading or finding your way to a strange place confusing?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

Do you reread paragraphs to understand them?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

Do you get confused when given several instructions at once?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

Do you make mistakes when taking down telephone messages?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

Do you find it difficult to find the right word to say?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

How often do you think of creative solutions to problems?

Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the Time
1	2	3	4

How easy do you find it to sound out words such as elephant?

Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
3	6	9	12

When writing do you find it difficult to organize thoughts on paper?

Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
2	4	6	8

Did you learn multiplication tables easily?

Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
2	4	6	8

How easy do you find it to recite the alphabet?

Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
1	2	3	4

How hard do you find it to read aloud?

Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
1	2	3	4

TOTAL SCORE 53

Score 45 to 60 - showing signs consistent with mild dyslexia. Research results: most of those who were in this category showed signs of being at least moderately dyslexic. However, many persons not previously diagnosed as dyslexic (though they could just be unrecognized and undiagnosed) fell into this category.