# Cognitive Poetics and Teaching Poetry

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**A B S T R A C T**

Cognitive poetics is a brand-new field which comes into existence since the mid-seventies. The aim of the study is to theoretically explicate the relationship between cognitive poetics and literary genres.

This study highlights the prominent ideas that cognitive poetics assists in teaching any literary genre especially, poetry. These ideas are exploiting metaphor in discussing aesthetically and cognitively any literary genre like poetry.

The selected poem entitled Little Jonny's Confession by the British Liverpool poet Brian Patten is explained and discussed briefly to show the effect of cognitive poetic view on understanding the poem. © 2020 JTUH, College of Education for Human Sciences, Tikrit University

الــشعــــر الأدراكي وتــــــدريس الشعـــــر

أ.د. ناهدة طه مجيد الناصري/ جامعة تكريت – كلية التربية

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الخلاصة

يعد الشعر الإدراكي  مجالاً جديدا يدخل حيز التنفيذ منذ منتصف السبعينيات. تهدف الدراسة الى شرح نظري للعلاقة بين الشعر الإدراكي والأنواع الأدبية

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على النقاط البارزة التي يساعد فيها الشعر الإدراكي في تدريس أي نوعٍ أدبي وخاصة الشعر. من هذه الأفكار استغلال الاستعارة في مناقشة أي نوع أدبي مثل الشعر جمالياً وإدراكياً.

يتم شرح القصيدة المختارة التي تحمل عنوان **اعتراف ليتل جوني** من قبل الشاعر البريطاني براين باتن ومناقشتها بإيجاز لإظهار تأثير الرؤية الشعرية المعرفية على فهم القصيدة.

## Section One: Introduction
### 1.1 The Problem and its Significance

In countries such as Iraq where English is taught as a foreign language, it is very common to see that college students do not comprehend literature in general, and poetry in particular. College students are used to accept the literary lectures of the lecturers as a Bible. They do not interact, think or analyse. To remedy this, they seek ready –made analysis from Wikipedia, e-notes or old notes from their senior colleagues. They paste them on their test papers without comprehension.

The emergence of cognitive poetics is practiced by different scholars with different aims in their minds. One of the aims is to provide the teachers as well as students a way of facilitating all types of literary genres.

### 1.2 The Aim

The present study aims at showing the contribution of the cognitive poetics which facilitates understanding, and analysing poetry.

### 1.3 The Significance of the Study

This study can be useful in demonstrating the strong connection between cognitive poetics and teaching poetry. Furthermore, it helps EFL university instructors to use cognitive poetics in teaching and analysing poetry. Besides, this study may help the students to follow the cognitive poetics in analysing any literary genre.

### 1.4 The Procedures
To conduct the present study, the following procedures are adopted:
1. Cognitive poetics and its relation to teaching poetry is surveyed.
2. Selecting a poem of one the Liverpool poets, Brian Patten as an example of cognitive poetic analysis.
3. A way of analyzing the poem entitled *Little Johnny Confession* as it is a typical poem that concentrates on war and its effect on childhood status,is analysed.

### 1.5 The Limits of the Study

This study is limited to a poem entitled *Little Johnny Confession* which is written by one of the Liverpool poets, namely **Brian Patten.**

### 1.6. Definitions of Basic Terms
**Cognitive poetics**

Cognitive poetics as "an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature employing the tools offered by cognitive science" (Tsur, 2008: 1).

**The Operational Definition**

The researchers adopt Stockwell's (2002:1) definition which says "cognition is to do with mental processes involved in reading", whereas poetics is to do with the "craft of literature".

**Teaching poetry**

Widdowson(1984:146 ) thinks that "poetry is a deviant kind of discourse which exploits the resources of a conventional language in order to develop contradictory quasi – systems of its own, systems compounded of both *langue* and *parole* which derive from a disruption of normal linguistic principles."

Hence, the operational definition is that: the teaching of poetry has to concentrate on the breach of the conventional systems of language discourse.


**Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

"It is defined by kovessesas's (2017) which is adopted in this paper as:

Understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete). This definition captures conceptual metaphors both as a process and a product. The cognitive process of understanding a domain is the process aspect of metaphor, while the resulting conceptual pattern is the product aspect".


**Section Two: Theoretical Background**

**2.1 Cognitive Linguistics**

The fields of cognition, cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics do not emerge out of the blue. Cognition is more comprehensive that includes perception, problem –solving, language and thinking. Pritchard (2007: 8) thinks that cognition is an umbrella term under which all the mental activities that facilitate the acquisition, and these activities of acquisition are storage, retrieval and the use of knowledge. Cognition is originally grounded in Vygotsky's (1925/1971) theory of aesthetical reaction. Bruner (2012:164) states that before 1920s, Vygotsky considers cognitive development as "both a social and a cultural process." He further adds that meaning is extended through experience that encompasses cultural and social experiences.

Tsur (2008:1) thinks that cognitive science is an "umbrella term covering the various disciplines that investigate human information processing." He (cited in Semino and Culpeper 2002 280) conceives that meaning of cognition is changed. First, it discriminates between the rational and emotional aspects of the mental life. It refers to all the activities that are processed in the brain.

Bruner (ibid: 165) thinks that acquiring knowledge needs participation and reason that add flavour and meaning to our knowledge. The role of the teacher, hence, is to give guidance and encouragement to his students. Masuhara (2013:376) argues that researchers or artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology dedicated their time and efforts on reader's knowledge from 1970s

to 1980s as they thought that a computer cannot understand natural language without supplying it with extensive knowledge of the world.

Dancygier (2017:1) thinks that though cognitive linguistics is a new discipline of language study, it grows very fast. It began in the 1980s with the work of the linguists like Ronald Langacker, Charles Fillmore, and Len Talmy, and this leads to a series of progress in many linguistic branches as well as it contributes to the study of cognition and communication. The most important part that cognitive linguistics adds is its assumption that meaning is an inseparable part of linguistics.

Hence, the formal structures of language are studied as: "reflections of general conceptual organization principles, processing mechanisms, and experiential and environmental influences". Cognitive Linguistics refers to the study of language that "began to emerge in the 1970s and has been increasingly active since the 1980s …" (Croft and Cruse 2004:1). It is now connected to language teaching, literature teaching and cognitive poetics.

Evans and Green (2006:3) consider cognitive linguistics as "an approach that has adopted a common set of guiding principles, assumptions and perspectives which have led to a diverse range of complementary, overlapping (and sometimes competing) theories." The reason behind studying language as Evans and Green (ibid: 44) further add that "language offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, the structure and organization of thoughts and ideas. Cognitive linguistics takes inspiration from psychology and philosophy that focus upon human experience and their specific cognitive structure that affects the nature of human experience.

They think that it is very simple that the human talk concentrates on what they perceive and conceive things that form our embodied experience and these form the imprint of the 'embodied experience'.

Ungerer and Schmid (1996: 273) echo this opinion by stating that cognitive linguistics contributes to pedagogical grammar and language teaching by liberating the form from content division .Gavins and Steen (2003:2) state that cognitive linguistics shows an approach to all language and not only literary language by examining the cognitive science regarding the cognitive abilities of our mental processing.

Hollmann (2017:534) believes that cognitive linguistics underlies the viewpoint that language is the existence of the general cognitive abilities, and the engagement to theory- building. He adds that the influence of the concepts taken from cognitive psychology like prototypes, schemas, and figure- ground organization on cognitive linguistics is quite clear.

Taylor (2008:37) has aptly put it in the following way "Any major innovation in linguistic theory is bound, sooner or later to have an impact on the language teaching profession." As cognitive linguistics movement comes into the horizon, it is very natural that all scholars tend to focus on the applications of the movement.

According to Gardner (1985 cited in Jason), cognitive movement was given its first impetus as a distinct approach by the 1948 Hixon Symposium, and

particularly in the address of psychologist Karl Lashley. Lashely challenged behaviourism. Intention is more important and should be taken into account in any interpretation of language and its use.

Specifically, the concept of the human mind is reinstated as a respectable research objective after some forty years of behaviourist banishment of such notions as mind, intentions. Ungerer and Schmid (2006: 328) state that: "since many more people are engaged in teaching English than in linguistic analysis, it is only natural that each new linguistic approach is soon examined for practical applications, especially for foreign language teaching."

Freeman (online, 2009) believes that the literary texts bridge the gap between mind and the world. In other words, it bridges between literary studies and linguistics. She maintains that literary studies and cognitive poetics constrain literary response and poetic structure; they complement each other. She further concludes that both literary critics differ in their concentration from cognitive linguist as the former focus on highlighting the language of the text, and the latter concentrates on highlighting the language of the embodied mind. Hence, cognitive poetics paved the way between the two fields.

## 2.2 Cognitive Linguistics and Language Teaching

In pedagogy it is universally acknowledged that fundamental beliefs in literature, teaching, and education should be re-examined. Freeman (1982:229cited in Wardhaugh and Brown) states that: "Interest in linguistic approaches to literature has grown rapidly"

Holme (2009:218-219) thinks that language is fashioned nowadays by how cognition shapes experience and experience shapes cognition. As our mind carries the imprint of the body and the body is an instrument of mind, our experiences come out from that place of meeting cognition and the world. Not only languages symbolise a common reality in different ways, but different meanings extend the boundary of the same meanings. Holme (ibid) adds that any language class should have the following three essential things:
-   Re- embedding linguistic form in the imagery and movement through which meanings are acquired. Bodily movement, gesture and the imagined projection of the self in the learner's imagination can help students embody new forms of linguistic symbolism;
-   Engaging the learners in the explicit analysis of form and meaning. This may help the learners to identify the constructions that carry the meaning that they purports to convey. The function of education is to develop both the native and non-native speakers' repertoire and recycle the contexts that will promote the use of these words and constructions ;
-   Establishing a forum may foster usage by working outwards-in (i.e. from context to language form), but inwards –out (i.e. from words and their constructions to different modes of use).

Ungerer and Schmid (1996: 273) echo this opinion by stating that cognitive linguistics contributes to pedagogical grammar and language teaching by liberating the form from content division.

Holme (2009:226) states that to enhance usage, the classroom activities that have communicative goals should be encouraged. The teachers have to work 'outwards-in' from context to language form and 'inwards-out' from words and their construction to different modes of use.

He considers language in the schoolroom is not a vocational instrument that should stimulate meanings in drama, scenarios of both contemporary and historic concern. Holme (ibid: 230) concludes that "Language learning is less about releasing the learner on a stream whose mingled significances reduce them to hapless flotsam, and more the assemblage of a semantic resource for their future creative engagement with the contexts that they will encounter."

## 2.3. Cognitive Poetics

Cognitive poetics is the central theme and it is applied on literature taking into consideration the students' interpretation of some poems. Cognitive poetics does not come out of the blue, but it is a new brand of poetics. Cognitive poetics is put under the label cognitive linguistics. Indeed, cognitive poetics is considered today a critical component of all literary education. (ibid: 405).

For Turner (1991: viii) cognitive rhetoric in literary criticism means " the analysis of acts of language including literature , as acts of a human brain in a human body in a human environment which that brain must make intelligible if it is to survive." This cognitive rhetoric is developed later on to be cognitive poetics.

The first one who discovers that all his life he has been speaking about cognitive poetics is Tsur (2008:1). Hence, Harrison and Stockwell (Online: 2015) think that cognitive poetics is coined by Tsur in the 1970s. Tsur (2008:314) conceives cognitive poetics as "a far cry from what goes nowadays under the label 'Cognitive poetics'."

He thinks that cognitive poetics is very important as it "offers cognitive theories that systematically account for the relationship between the structure of literary texts and their perceived effects." He adds that it distinguishes between the effects that are related to the structures and those which are not related .He conceives cognitive poetics "a tailor –made to deal with the aspect of poetry in a principled manner" (ibid: 279).

Samino and Culpeper (2002: ix) think that some practitioners consider cognitive poetics a branch of cognitive linguistics, and others regard cognitive linguistics as one of the cognitive paradigms that feeds into cognitive poetics. The application of cognitive science to literary studies is a new one.

Harrison and Stockwell (Online, 2015) echo the opinion that cognitive poetics draws its principles from cognitive science by stating that there are basic principles that embrace cognitive poetics and makes cognitive poetics a scientific practice. As literature consists of language, the suitable study of cognitive poetics is language. Linguistics as a field is not enough in dealing with literature as a socio-cognitive linguistics is unavailable. The second basic fact is that the principles of cognitive poetics are drawn from cognitive science. Furthermore, readings of literary should be replicable rather than idiosyncratic

or peculiar to a specific individual and lastly, the description should have a general acceptance and recognition.

Stockwell (ibid: 4) adds that cognitive poetics is a means of achieving text and context, uses and circumstances, knowledge and beliefs. In another word, cognitive poetics takes the text seriously.

Cognitive poetics has the privilege of offering a cognitive theory that connects literary texts with their recognised or unrecognized effects. Tsur (2008:1) considers cognitive science an "umbrella term covering the various disciplines that investigate the human information processing: Cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, artificial intelligence, and certain branches of linguistics, and of the philosophy of science." All of the above sciences contribute to the existence of cognitive poetics. Moreover, Freeman (2009) mentions that cognitive poetics is Janus –faced as it looks toward both sides which are the text as well as the mind. This thing constructs both a theory of literature as well as a theory of mind.

Xiao (2017) aptly states that "Cognitive poetics is a kind of poetic interpretation method, which is based on cognitive and psychological theories….Cognitive poetics mainly studies the relationship between literature and cognition." The four domains are cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, artificial intelligence and certain branches of linguistics, and of philosophy of science. Table (1) summarizes the domains of the cognitive science, as it can be the umbrella under which the four domains are put under it.

**Table 1**
**The Four Domains of Cognitive Science Fields (Tsur, 2008: 2)**
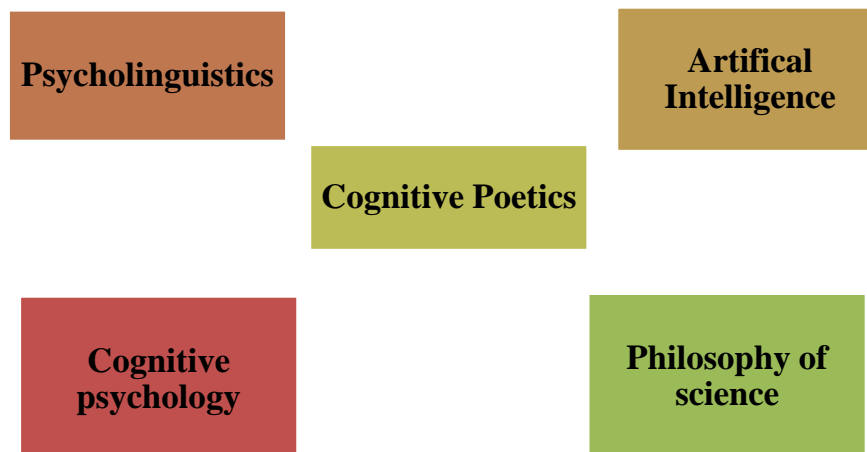


Cognitive poetics is the application of cognitive science to poetics as it uses the cognitive science to illustrate literature rather than the other way round. This needs a combination of several vents like literary criticism, literary history, linguistics and aesthetics so as to study cognitive poetics (Tsur ibid: 2).Freeman (2002:43) mentions that cognitive poetics has "explanatory power .It illuminates the conceptual structures of literary work. It explains how both writer and reader make conceptual projections and mappings that create new meanings.

It focuses on process, not on product." Cognitive poetics is the new appeal to literature that involves the reader in understanding and interpreting any literary piece s/he is asked to appreciate. Steen and Gavins ( 2003 :1 -2) assert that a new art of forms directed to new audiences by new media ,i.e. cognitive poetics which relates the structures of the work with the observed psychological effects on the reader.

Nevertheless Cognitive science has completely helped in the emergence of cognitive poetics. The new approaches in cognitive anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and artificial intelligence contribute to the emergence of new concepts, theories , insights and assist the students of literature towards delving into the mind of the reader in order for describing and explaining the literary texts (ibid. 2)

Steen and Gavins(2003:1) state that the appeal of literature has been challenged by new art forms directed at new groups of audiences through new media, and it has become inevitable to consider the resemblance and difference between these art forms and literature in terms of their psychological and social effects. This is precisely what cognitive poetics promises to bring into view, by relating the structures of the work of art, including the literary text, to their presumed or observed psychological effects on the recipient, including the reader.

Nevertheless, cognitive science has completely helped in the emergence of cognitive poetics. When reading any literary genre, readers tend to prefer some kinds of books to others. This experience goes with that in their lives. Stockwell (2002:75) has related it to the Little Johnny Confession of the characters of the novels or poems with theirs or the experience seems to be authentic and this makes the reader engage in his reading. Accordingly, the search for models that go beyond literary criticism theories in teaching literature in general and poems in particular was inevitable long time ago.

Moving away from the theories of literary criticism, the new orientation is to find theories and models which take into account the readers /students who bring their image schema into play while they are engaged in their reading. The mental map that the readers own can be triggered and activated for the understanding any literary genre and the poems in particular. Here, comes cognitive poetics.

As a result of these different strands, cognitive poetics embraces a broad array of theoretical and methodological approaches. A focus on cognitive poetics is critical as it plays a vital role in interpreting any literary genre. The instructors', as educators, primary focus is literary interpretation as they have the responsibility to assist and teach students the intimate relationship between meaning and world knowledge.

Turning the students of literary genres into cognitive ones is not an easy task as it demands a new way of looking at literary reading. Taking cognitive poetics into account helps those students or readers to conceptualize these genres differently. Freemen (Cited in Semino Culpeper, 2002: XII) emphasizes that cognitive poetics has an "explanatory power" as it illuminates the conceptual

explanation of how meanings are created in the production and reception of texts.

Tsur 2002: 281 (cited in Semino and Caulpeper) mentions three assumptions that underlie cognitive poetics:

1. Poetry can be described in normal cognitive processes. It exploits cognitive as well as linguistic processes used for non-aesthetic purposes for aesthetic purposes.

2. Poetry can be described in some kind of modification or disturbance of these processes. The reading of poetry involves the modification or deformation of cognitive processes and their adaptation for aims that were not originally devised.

3. Poetry can be described as an "organized violence against cognitive processes". In other words, the organization of cognitive processes can be described according to different principles.

Since the publication of the book of Lakoff and Johnson entitled ***Metaphors We live by,*** Metaphor has taken different perspectives. Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003:3) think that: "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action."

This shows that there is a difference between linguistic expressions of metaphor and their underlying conceptual content. Suppose we say 'That officer is a lion' which is seen as a metaphor, and 'That officer is like a lion' is seen as a simile, any EFL student would know that distinction on the bases of surface realisation. But the conceptual metaphor of 'That officer is a lion 'underlies possible surface expressions of the metaphor: 'He is a brute creation', 'He is a beast', or 'He is a man of a mark'.

**Section Three: Procedures**

To achieve the aim of the study, the steps to be followed are:

1. Though there are many ways that analyse the poems, the researchers follow Stockwell's (2002) conceptual metaphor model in analysing the selected poem for being the latest.

2. Material: One of the Liverpool poets, Brian Patten, is selected out of three poets. The three Liverpool poets are Adrian Henri, Roger McGough, and Brian Patten. They are called Liverpool poets because they live in Liverpool, and they are united as they gave readings in the clubs and coffee bars in the 1960s.Performance poetry is one of the most popular directions in contemporary poetry. Liverpool poets are influenced by many the movements, one of which is the Beat poetry of Ginsberg (AL-Saadi, 2012:3).

3. The text of the poem: A poem is selected from one of the Liverpool poets, Brian Patten's ***Little Johnny's Confession***. In this poem, Brian Patten shows the influence of war on people especially children and teenagers.

4. The criteria of analysing the poem: The researchers use the conceptual model. The definition of conceptual metaphor by Kovecsses (2017) is:

**Understanding one domain of experience**
**(that is typically abstract) in terms of**

**another (that is typically concrete). This definition captures conceptual metaphors both as a process and a product. The cognitive process of understanding a domain is the process aspect of metaphor, while the resulting conceptual pattern is the product aspect.**

Hence, Conceptual Metaphor distinguishes between a "source domain" and a "target domain". The former is a concrete domain, whereas the latter is an abstract one.

To sum up, then, cognitive poetics helps readers to highlight the expressions and emotions in a principled manner as any conflicting processes are handled by cognitive poetics squarely. Conceptual metaphor which is one of the types of cognitive poetics may help both the instructors as well as the teachers to understand and pick up the metaphors in poems.

5. The selected poem is entitled *Little Johnny's Confession.* The reason for selecting this poem is that it is a typical reflection of the experience that Patten passed throughout his childhood and youth where the war was the central problem for all the people as it has a drastic change on Iraqi people's lives as they passed through the same experience, and for sure it had an effect on the experience of children and the youth. It goes without saying that the most vulnerable people who are affected strongly by the war. Children and youth are the victims of war who "can be vengeful and carry out violence. Summerfield, Derek (2002) states that they are harmful to themselves and dangerous to others".

**Section Four: Analysis and Discussion of Data, Conclusions, and Recommendations**
**4.1. Analysis and discussion of Data**

Cognitive poetics can be used to teach poetry by explaining metaphors that occur in a poem. Human beings use metaphors in their reading, thinking and even writing. A teacher can use cognitive poetics to help students picking up the metaphors when they study the involved poems. Brian Patten, a British Liverpool poet, whose poems are based on the theme of childhood.

In his masterpiece, **Little Johnny's Confession,** Patten draws us to his childhood world, alive and claustrophobic. The feelings of violence mixed up with psychological disturbance of a child's state of mind as a result of war. This poem is about a rebelling boy, Johnny, who borrows his father's machine-gun and eliminates a number of his "small enemies." The poem begins with an event that sets the cause of all other events of the poem. He borrows his father's machine-gun that led to a series of other events that led to his escape from the house.

Several types of similarities are recognized in this poem: objectively real similarity which is the verb *borrowed*, but the perceived similarity is **stole**. Furthermore, the real similarity is *eliminate*, but the perceived one is *was killed*. The lines below shows the way the poet uses the metaphors to strike the reader with his chosen words.

This morning
 being rather young and foolish
 I **borrowed** a machine gun my father
 had left hidden since the war, went out,
 and **eliminated** a number of small enemies.
 Since then I have not returned home.
 (Patten, 2012)

Later on, the poet shows the readers the disturbed inner feelings of that confused boy as a result of the war. When the police give his description, they use different names like ''Pluto, 'Mighty Mouse', and 'Bifflo, the Bear'. These descriptions shows that the transitional period that the teenager goes through. Though he is about to be a teenager, he is still a child that he looks like the descriptions put downward:
 The following lines list these descriptions of Johnny as such:
 Have you seen him,
 He is seven years old,
 Like **Pluto, Mighty Mouse,**
 And **Bifflo the bear,**
 Have you seen him anywhere? (Patten 2012)

Here, the reader can detect these personalities in Cartoon Films as a sign of childhood life, but it is murdered by the war which eliminates all the happy things in a child. Through these metaphors, the poet uses a lot of unique interpretation of the effect of war on the child that it transmits to the reader the sense of desperation and uselessness in life.

The reader can feel that Johnny wants to escape from the war – life by running out of the house. He wants to escape from reality to another world even if this world is in his mind and in his imagination. But sooner or later, he will be caught by police and the tracker dogs. The dogs can sniff his lollipops as these kinds of candies that are attached to sticks are well-known to be an indication of his being a child.
 The Tracker dogs will sniff me out,
 They have my **lollipops.**

(Brian Patten, 2012)

The aforementioned lines can help in showing as well improving the students' aesthetic ability as well as strengthening the affective education of the students. Furthermore, the connection between the reality of life and the literary work can be bridged by cognitive poetics. During the reading process, the students can create their imaginary world that matches their real life experience so as to facilitate their understanding of the meaning of the poems. Of course, it needs a

scrutinised guidance of the teacher himself/herself to help the students to know or comprehend the whole picture of the poem.

## 4.2 Conclusion

The researchers agree with Stockwell's (2002:6) wordings, in his book **Cognitive Poetics,** which has aptly mentioned that cognitive poetics is a way of thinking about literature , but not a framework in itself. Besides, it is as Gavins and Steen (2003: 11) think that cognitive poetics presents both the teachers and students an approach that presents literature and literary analysis as it is based in general cognitive experience. Furthermore, it enables them to make use of other types of art forms in the near future.

## 4.3 Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following:

1. As cognitive poetics is a new way in teaching poetry, it seems that many ideas can be exploited to develop students' shared experience of the world and glean from the way they express their own ideas. The researchers think now it is time to direct the Iraqi literary scholars to this new movement in Applied Linguistics well as ELT as it enriches and adds insight to the field of language teaching profession.
2. Cognitive poetics offers and enables mapping of the readers' world in accordance with their understanding of the world. As it is seen in Patten's poem Little Johnny Confession.
3. The teacher and the students can have a road map that helps them to pick up the     metaphors. Furthermore, they can explain and analyse the metaphoric words in accordance with real similarity and the perceived one.

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