

# Violin Instructors' Views on the Use of Metaphors in Violin Lessons and the Metaphors They Use

Merih Dogan\*

*Ankara University, Turkey*

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**Abstract:** This research aimed at finding out violin instructors' views regarding the use of metaphors for teaching to play the violin and the metaphors they use in their lessons. It was carried out with 10 university instructors who teach lessons of violin. Data were collected by using a structured interview form consisting of 18 questions. Collected data were analyzed with descriptive analysis method. It was found out that the instructors reported using metaphors during teaching of the violin and they found it helpful to do so. Furthermore, the metaphors they use were listed for the manner of holding the violin and bow, legato, martele, spiccato, pizzicato, flageolet, trillo, position shifting, vibrato, nuance, and the period, tone, measurement structure, speed and the form of a given work. However, no specific metaphors were reported for detache and staccato. Apart from these, one respondent mentioned metaphor for sautille and another used metaphor for articulation. In line with the results, it is recommended to utilize metaphors in teaching how to play the violin, to choose comprehensible ones for their students, to conduct experimental studies examining the effects of metaphors on performance in the context of violin education, and to research into the use of metaphors as part of teaching various other instruments.

**Keywords:** violin education, violin lesson, violin instructor, metaphor.

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## Introduction

A wide array of strategies, methods and techniques are available in education and teaching. Educators prefer various strategies, methods and techniques depending on the nature of the subject or topic of teaching and the target group of learners. In this context, metaphors can be used as part of instructional activities.

The point of metaphor is to use a familiar image as an instrument with which to explore more complex fields of meaning (Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh and Longhini, 1998).

“According to Taylor (1984), a metaphor helps us to reconstruct the object or phenomenon we want to understand through connection to the network of concepts belonging to another field of meaning, to see it from different perspectives, and to shed light onto some situations that overlooked before” (as cited by Cevik Kılıc, 2017, p.1100).

“When used in pedagogical context, metaphors offer a learning approach that actively constructs understanding. In this approach, the student must understand the similarities between previously known knowledge and new knowledge. Then, s/he must be able to define the differences between the newly learned knowledge and its metaphoric manifestation” (Arslan and Bayrakçı, 2006, p.103).

Like in other fields of education, metaphors are used in music education. Metaphors can be used both in the teaching of the technical aspects of music education and in the teaching of musical expression. In the literature, there are researches about the use of metaphors in music education (Schippers, 2006; Woody, 2002). In Kara's (2016) master thesis, it is aimed to identify the analogies used by violin educators in teaching basic behaviours such as basic posture, holding in the initial stage of violin education.

Determining the metaphors used by educators in their lessons shows that different perspectives may exist on the subject. Identifying the metaphor that an educator uses can enable another educator to take advantage of that metaphor. It might also encourage them to invent new metaphors using creative ideas. This would in turn elevate the quality of education.

In this research, it was aimed to reveal violin instructors' opinions about the use of metaphors in violin teaching and the metaphors they use.

### **Method**

This is a descriptive research as it intends to find out violin instructors' views regarding the use of metaphors and to find the metaphors they use. The research group consisted of 10 violin instructors. Research data were collected by using a structured interview form. After the questions were prepared by the researcher, opinions were received from the two area experts. The interview form consisted of 18 questions. Collected data were analysed with descriptive analysis method.

In descriptive analysis, the data can be organized according to the themes posed by the research questions, or can be presented by considering the questions or aspects used in the interview and observation processes (Yıldırım and Simsek, 2003).

### **Findings**

#### ***Instructors' views on usefulness of metaphors***

It was found that all of the participant instructors find metaphors beneficial in violin teaching. This can be exemplified in the direct citation quoted below: "Something s/he would otherwise maybe study for 5 hours, but s/he can work it out in just 1 hour by thinking about that metaphor. Metaphors are really important... I think that being able to use metaphors in this sense positively should become a very sophisticated skill of an educator" (Participant 1).

#### ***Frequencies of Instructors' Using Metaphors in Teaching***

The instructors stated that they used metaphors. But; not all of them have the same frequency of use. While some of the instructors reported using them in all lessons, some others stated that they employ metaphors at a frequency varying on the students or the need.

#### ***Top Uses of Metaphors***

One participant reported frequent use of metaphors in order to explain practicing on a regular basis, three used them for teaching technical aspect and musical expression, and two instructors stated that they frequently use them for musical expression. Four instructors stated that there is no obvious topic that they use most frequently and they stated that it changes according to the needs of the student.

#### ***Understanding of Metaphors by Students***

Seven of the participants stated that their students can understand the metaphors. Participant 8 expressed their opinion as follows: "I think they are able to comprehend if the metaphors are used effectively". Participant 3 stated that metaphors become perceptible when imported from the students' lives.

### ***Metaphors Used by Instructors' Previous Instructors***

A participant renamed Participant 1 said that her/his teacher used to pronounce the metaphor “colour” to refer to nuance and “reel” to refer to legato technique. The respondent cited the teacher’s expression by saying, “As if there was a reel here. Without changing the bow, as if a bow always continues from the reel...”. The participant also reported the use of “a knotted rope” metaphor by another instructor to refer to martele technique.

Participant 3 mentioned her/his teacher’s using “washing dishes” metaphor to refer to scale practice by saying, “We students do not like to practise scale. It feels like constantly working on the same thing. My teacher had a metaphor like, 'I don't like washing dishes at home, but I have to do it every day. Because this is an important thing. It is important to find our food on clean dishes’.” The same participant stated that another teacher likened playing the violin to a treasure chest.

Participant 4 talked about the metaphor her/his teacher used for accent. The participant said, “For example, for accents, my teacher used to say 'when a fly sits on a cow, it contracts that part immediately'. Teacher used to give me an example to teach accent.”

Participant 6 stated that her/his teacher used the metaphor “diamond” for intonation.

Participant 7 stated that her/his teacher used the metaphor “like holding a glass” for bow holding.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Holding the Violin and Bow***

In relation with bow holding, Participant 2 and Participant 6 reported using the metaphor “like holding a water bottle”. Participant 3 mentioned phrases associated with softness and comforting. Participant 3 stated that s/he used metaphors such as “light and easy like a bird’s perching to a branch”, “hands like a cloud”, “hands like a cotton candy” and her/his metaphors vary according to the age group of the student.

Participant 4 described her/his metaphors regarding violin and bow holding by saying, “Just as you put the violin on a bookshelf, let the violin stand on your shoulder. Let it parallel, I say. I definitely use this about holding the violin. I also use it regarding the manner of holding the bow. So, just as this bow lies parallel to the shelf - the violin is a chain of planar parallels - this time I say that the bow is parallel to the bridge in the right hand and that these form a 90 degree plane with each other. I speak of planes”.

Participant 8 used a metaphor for bow holding as follows: “Imagining that we have a bird while holding the bow. Expressing that if we hold our hand too tight, we will damage the bird, and if we hold it too loose, the bird will fly away; and we should balance the holding accordingly”. Participant 9’s view was as following: “I tell them to feel and hold the violin as if it was a part of your body. As for the bow, keep it in a way as if someone will try to take it from you, but without holding tight.”

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Bow Techniques***

For legato technique; Participant 1’s view was found to be as following: “Think of a very thin and transparent hose. Water is passing through it. You can see that water flowing with the soft folds of the hose. There is no break... No breaks even if it has folds. All with smooth shiftings.” Participant 3 used the metaphor of “pouring a glass of water slowly”.

Other metaphors appeared as below: “For example, when a stone is thrown into the sea, the waves of water coming out of each other are a very good example of playing legato, in my opinion. I mean its flow there without any breaks” (Participant 5). “Imagine a still lake. There are water lilies on it. A fly or butterfly jumps off

these water lilies without ringing the water at all” (Participant 6). “I say that as if there was a metres-long bow” (Participant 9).

For *martele* technique; Participant 1 stated that s/he uses “a knotted rope” metaphor as s/he heard from her/his teacher. As for *spiccato* technique; Participant 3 and Participant 9 used the metaphors “kangaroo” and “ball”, respectively. Participant 1 reported “a bird’s picking up food from the ground with its beak” for this technique.

Participant 10 said that bow techniques can be taught by comparing them with dance figures. Metaphor is not specified for *detache* technique and *staccato* technique.

#### ***Instructors' Metaphors for pizzicato***

Participant 3 used the metaphor of “a bird’s picking up food from the ground with its beak”. Participant 4 specified the metaphor “cradle” for *pizzicato*. Another respondent, Participant 7, expressed the metaphor concerning *pizzicato* as follows: “Like playing a game. Like you won't hurt anything while touching.”

#### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Flageolet***

Participant 2 and Participant 6, symbolised this technique with metaphors “bird’s tweet” and “touching gently like caressing hair”, respectively.

#### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Trillo***

Participant 7, that s/he used the metaphor of "like bell ringing" to refer to *trillo*.

#### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Position Shifting***

Participant 3 stated that s/he uses position shifting “as easy as pulling a hair out of butter”. Another respondent, Participant 4, explained her/his metaphor as follows: “I always use the cable car example for position shifting. Just as the cable car passes on a wire, I liken the situation of the hand to it in position shifting.” Another metaphor was reported by Participant 7 as follows: “You got on the slide, you slide slowly. Swipe your hand as gently”. Another participant, Participant 9 reported saying, “you will slide like ice skating” to refer to position shifting. Lastly, Participant 10 stated “like pronouncing the names” metaphor.

#### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Vibrato***

In relation with *vibrato*, Participant 3 explained “ornamenting” metaphor as follows. “When teaching *vibrato*, I explain that this is primarily an ornamentation technique because some students try to use *vibrato* to find the sound, for intonation. But I explain that *vibrato* is like wearing a hairpin on the hair of a girl who is already beautiful. Or something like wearing a necklace. So the girl will be beautiful first - the intonation will be clear first - then we will ornament it. We will put buckles, jewellery on it. In the first place, I teach *vibrato* in this way.”

Participant 6, pointed out using the term “clock pendulum” to teach *vibrato*, and s/he said that phrase clock pendulum is already in definition of *vibrato*. Participant 6 stated that a clock pendulum does not roll, but it keeps moving in the same direction, and so does *vibrato*.

Participant 7 stated that s/he likened the *vibrato* movement to a movement such as "calling someone with the hand, ‘Come here, come here’ ". Participant 10 said that s/he used “waving hand” metaphor for *vibrato*.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for Nuance***

“Colour” was seen to be used by Participant 5, Participant 6, and Participant 9 in reference to nuance. Participant 3 stated that the metaphors used for nuances vary according to each work.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for the Period of the Work***

Participant 1 gave examples of "typewriter" and "a systematically working machine" for the Baroque period. Participant 3 and Participant 4 stated that they used metaphors about the cultural characteristics of the period. Participant 10 stated that s/he used metaphors about the clothing styles of the period.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for the Tone of the Work***

In this regard, Participant 4 put the related metaphor into words as following: “You come home from your school every day. But you can commute between home and school via other paths every time. I tell them that systems in music are like this. In other words, the start and end points are actually the same, but the paths taken are different”.

Participant 5 reported the use of metaphors based on the connotations arising from the work. Participant 8 used the expression “the feeling of playing like singing especially in minor tones”. It was found out that Participant 9 tells the students to think major works like an anthem, minor works as if they were singing an emotional song. Participant 10 stated that s/he used “human characters” metaphors regarding tones.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for the Measurement Structure of the Work***

Participant 1 uttered “military march” to refer to measurement of four crotchets.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for the Speed of the Work***

In the findings, a number of metaphors were voiced regarding speed. Participant 3 said, “I often give examples of speed in association with the rapid move of a child, the slow move of an elderly person, 80-90 year old person. A very slow work sounds like an old uncle walking on the road with a walking stick in his hand. I can say that a presto or allegro is like ‘a little kid running around in a mall.’ Of course, it is possible to associate them with animals for younger pupils. I use expressions like, ‘Let's play like a turtle now, very slowly.’ Or ‘Let's play like a running hound’.”

Participant 5 was noted to say, “The student thinks what s/he is playing - something s/he is playing very slowly - is very fast. S/he thinks vice versa while playing something fast, or s/he plays fast when s/he is technically competent, but at normal pace when s/he is not competent. For example, you are driving at a normal speed steadily on the highway for simple works, but you drive ramp in difficult works. The car won't go ahead there. You are driving on the highway with the same gas level so you have no control over tempo, that kind of things. I give more examples of mechanical vehicles.”

Participant 6 stated using “speed problems (in mathematics)” metaphor in relation to speed. Participant 9 and Participant 10 stated using "walking, running” metaphor.

### ***Instructors' Metaphors for the Form of the Work***

Participant 3 expressed the metaphor regarding form as follows: “The works played especially for beginners are in ABA form. I liken this form to a piece of toast. We take the bread first. Part A, we're playing it. Then

we put what we want between the slices of bread... It is part B. Finally, we recap the bread. It corresponds to part A. I mean, I can liken something in ABA form to a piece of toast or sandwich". Differently, Participant 10 said that s/he symbolise ABA form with the metaphor "home-school-home".

### ***Instructors' Use of Metaphors for Topic Other Than Mentioned in the Interview Questions***

One of the participants referred to articulation. Participant 2 warned the students to produce clear sounds as distinctly as grains of chick-peas or marbles echoing when dropped onto the ground.

The other topic which was not included in the interview questions emerged in relation with sautille technique. Participant 7 stated that intense pressure would be applied while performing sautille and the end of the bow can be thought of as "a smoking chimney".

### **Conclusion**

It can be said that instructors find it beneficial to use metaphors. Despite similarities and differences in frequency, it can be said that all of the instructors interviewed here use metaphors. Three instructors expressed that they use the metaphors most frequently in "both technical and musical expression issues". Two others referred to use of metaphors in connection with "musical expression", and one instructor used them "to explain practicing on a regular basis". Four of the participants notified no specific topic of frequent use of metaphors, adding that they rely on the students' needs.

According to seven instructors, their students can make sense of metaphors. One of the instructors believes that the students can perceive metaphors if the metaphors are used effectively. Finally, one instructor stated that metaphors become perceptible when imported from the students' lives.

The participants provided the following list of metaphors used by their teachers during their student life: "Colour" to refer to nuance, "reel" for legato technique, "a knotted rope" for martele, "a fly's contracting the part of the body of a cow where it sits" to represent accent, "diamond" for intonation, "like holding a glass" to refer to bow holding, "washing dishes" in reference to scale practices, and "treasure chest" for playing the violin.

The participants use the following metaphors concerning holding the bow: "like holding a water bottle", "light and easy like a bird's perching to a branch", "hands like a cloud", "hands like a cotton candy", "like holding a bird", "keeping the bow in a way as if someone will try to take it from you, but without holding tight", and "holding the bow like its lying parallel on a bookshelf". As for reference to the holding the violin, two metaphors appear, which are "holding the violin by feeling like a part of your body" and "holding the violin like its lying parallel on a bookshelf".

When it comes to bow techniques, "legato" is represented with depictions like "continuous flow of water through a hose", "pouring a glass of water slowly", "waves of water coming out of each other upon throwing a stone into the sea", "a fly or butterfly's jumping off water lilies without ringing the water at all", and "a metres-long bow".

Other bow techniques are also shown with metaphors. "Martele" is meant by "a knotted rope"; "spiccato" is taken to resemble a "kangaroo", a "ball", and "a bird's picking up food from the ground with its beak". Apart from these, one instructor stated that bow techniques can be taught by comparing them with dance figures. However, no specific metaphors are revealed here in connection with detache and staccato.

As another item, pizzicato is referred to with metaphors such as "a bird's picking up food from the ground with its beak", "cradle", and "like playing a game, like you won't hurt anything while touching".

Two metaphors as “bird’s tweet” and “touching gently like caressing hair” are specified for flageolet.

One metaphor is used for trillo, which is “like bell ringing”.

As for position shifting, several metaphors are identified such as “cable car”, “slide”, “ice skating”, “as easy as pulling a hair out of butter”, and “like pronouncing the names”.

“Vibrato” is expressed with metaphors including “ornamenting”, “clock pendulum”, “calling someone with the hand, ‘Come here, come here’”, and “waving hand”.

“Colour” was seen to be used for nuance. One instructor stated that the metaphors used for nuances vary according to each work.

Referring to the period of the work, two instructors stated that they used metaphors about the cultural characteristics of the period. One instructor stated that s/he used metaphors about the clothing styles of the period. One instructor stated that s/he used “typewriter” and “a systematically working machine” to refer to the Baroque times.

Regarding tone, metaphors appearing in results include “different paths with the same departure and finishing points”, “the feeling of playing like singing especially in minor tones”, and “major works like an anthem, minor works like singing an emotional song”. One instructor reported the use of metaphors based on the connotations arising from the work. Another respondent uses “human characters” metaphors.

Regarding measurement structure, “military march” metaphor is specified for four crotchets measurement.

The metaphors used for the speed of the work can be stated as follows: “moves of children and the elderly”, “play like a turtle, play like a running hound”, “speed problems (in mathematics)”, “walking, running”, and “driving on different roads”.

Regarding form, “toast or sandwich” and “home-school-home” metaphors are specified for ABA form.

Finally, some items are noted by the participants although no relevant questions are addressed in the interview form. Firstly, clear articulation is prescribed with reference to “distinct sounds as grains of chick-peas or marbles echoing when dropped onto the ground”. Secondly and the lastly, it is stated that for the “sautille” technique, the end of the bow can be thought of as a “smoking chimney”.

In the current research, it is seen that some of the metaphors determined about holding, spiccato, position shifting are similar to some analogies determined for the same subjects in Kara's (2016) research. In Kara's (2016) research, it was determined that violin educators use analogies in their lessons and analogies are beneficial in instrument education. This finding is also in congruence with our conclusion about using metaphors and their benefits in violin lessons.

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings obtained in this study:

- metaphors should be used in teaching how to play the violin,
- metaphors should be selected that are perceptible by students,
- experimental studies should be conducted to examine effects of metaphors on performance in violin training,
- the use of metaphors in the process of teaching different instruments should be studied.

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