

## Experiential Metaphors in Persuasive Texts of ESOL Undergraduates

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### Abstract

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views Experiential Metaphors (EM) as a primary meaning making resource for creating conciseness and objectivity in formal persuasive academic prose. ESOL learners are also required to be satisfactorily proficient in the use of this advanced level linguistic tool. EM also serves as a valued linguistic choice for building a powerful argument and smooth thematic organization. Hence, we conducted the present study to explore what kinds of EMs are used by the ESOL undergraduates in Pakistan, and how frequently they use them. Working on the specially constructed corpus, *NBSFs2021*, from the handwritten essays on the given prompt from 81 students in BS final semester, we found that the sample population tended to show slight development in their repertoire of incongruent paradigmatic choices during their educational career. The study is significant for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners who are training their learners for attaining advanced academic writing proficiency.

### Introduction

Grammatical metaphor (GM) is one of linguistic resources that distinguish learners in their progression to advanced writing proficiency characterized by condensation, abstraction and sophistication in academic writing. With this grammatical form, learners' freedom to exploit semiotic resources of language is diversified, and they can construct a synoptic portrait of reality. This is necessary for learners at their advanced education careers where they are required to reconstrue meanings and reorganize knowledge in technical taxonomies (Ortega, 2015; Ryshina-Pankova, 2015).

Zooming interest in how GM helps learners in social construction of meaning in different genres and registers cannot be overlooked. Ravelli's (1985) findings that GM has central role in the efficacy of written language, especially in reasoning discourses of advanced learners, still remain true. Halliday (2004b) is right in his claim that GM helps learners not only in the creation of reasoned argument, and thus enhances its cohesiveness, but also towards their smooth introduction of hierarchical taxonomies of technical constructs built on ideational abstraction of concrete reality. Learners' knowledge construction in an organized form at advanced level certainly requires them to be proficient in the handling and manipulation of ideational grammatical metaphors (IGMs) with special focus on EMs, for recently there has been speedy introduction of technicality in disciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, Halliday's observation that every linguistic choice is stylistic in its nature is hard to challenge. With learners' movement across school, college and university, the sophisticated, opaque, objective, and technical variant, which Halliday calls the "Attic" style, replaces the naïve, straightforward, subjective and ordinary language variant called the "Doric" style. Consistent expansion in learners' gradual paradigmatic repertoire greatly contributes to their successful movement between the two styles because grammatical variation accompanied by high lexical density is preferred to the lexical variation

coupled with low lexical density. Thus, GM is an essential element in the academic discourse at undergraduate levels and beyond (Hu, 2015).

### **Background of the Study**

Recognizing the significance of the skill for production of an effective academic discourse, particularly in the global language, Saima Batool (2018) complains about Pakistani university learners' incapacity to achieve the desired target in their academic writing. To these scholars, English language syllabus has failed in providing sufficient facilitation to university learners for the development of their writing skill. As a result, the writing ability of many postgraduate scholars has remained lower than the desired target. Students in the Pakistani academia generally lack capabilities to compete with the educational challenges due to inadequate academic training in various study skills (Gul, 2023). The Pakistani apprentice and professional scholars' written academic discourse shows considerable variability in the degrees and functions of abstraction, a feature highly dependent on GM (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). By means of abstract construals, academic writers reconfigure direct experiences of the world into abstract, general, and technical concepts used by specialists and present a more objective interpersonal stance. To academic writers of English, the regulation of these functions of abstraction often entails several challenges (Arancibia & Sadlier, 2018). The reasons for this may include unfamiliarity with expectations in scholarly cultures, and/or possible gaps in the internalized lexico-grammatical and semantic systems of English that underlie the subjects' capacity to reconfigure concrete events and dynamic forms of reasoning as abstract entities (Byrnes, 2014; Schleppegrell, 2004).

### **Problem Statement**

Writing of Pakistani ESL learners is poor (Gul, Khan, & Ahmad, 2024; Gul, Fatima, & Faraz, 2024). Experiential Metaphor is one of the most important characteristics of academic discourse (Manerko, 2019). The learners at advanced level of their educational career are required to show proficiency in the deployment of all categories of this fundamental resource of meaning so that they can pack rich meaning in phrasal expressions. Otherwise, limitations of learners' inappropriate deployment of GM may create a hindrance in their access to condensed, abstract and technical meaning, highly valued in the academia.

### **Research Questions**

1. What type of Experiential Metaphors do the ESOL undergraduates use in their persuasive texts?
2. What is the frequency of different types of Experiential Metaphors found in persuasive texts of ESOL undergraduates?

### **Literature Review**

In the literature on SFL, different scholars and linguists have given their definition of GM. Taverniers (2017) defines GM "as a doubling of semiosis" (Taverniers, 2017, p. 366) because this structure entails the doubling of characteristically recognized default semiosis so that the ideational and interpersonal meta-functions can be realized differently. The structural change demanded by GM makes it necessary that the typical patterning is doubly used. An ideational metaphor comprises two levels of configuration of figures and for this, at least, one of the figures is nominalized to act as a participant in another figure. Similarly, an interpersonal metaphor consists of two layers of grounding; while one is realized by an additional projecting clause, the other is realized by the default devices used in grounding (Taverniers, 2017). Taverniers follows Halliday & Martin (1993) who define the term GM as "a substitution of one grammatical class, or one grammatical structure, by another" (Halliday & Martin, 1993, p. 79).

### **GM and Distinguishing Success in the University**

Liardét (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2018) has explored Chinese University learners' academic writing development by studying their deployment of grammatical metaphor. All her studies use SFL as a theoretical framework and in agreement with Halliday, she considers GM to be an important resource of meaning, for it increases not only technicality, abstraction and lexical density but also compactness and logical cohesion. She has been consistently working on her project of creating a link between SFL theory and practice in the Chinese academia (Cassi L. , 2013) (Cassi L. , Academic Literacy and Grammatical Metaphor: Mapping Development, 2015) (Cassi L. , 2016a) (Cassi L. , 2016b) (Cassi L. , 2018). In the latest study, Liardét and Black (2020) have even proposed a pedagogical model for teaching GM to the struggling learners and they hope that their model can be of immense assistance to educators and researchers.

### Research Methodology

The current study has employed the tools of corpus linguistics and the theoretical framework of SFL. Academic discourse of undergraduate students is easily distinguishable from that of postgraduate learners. Their tasks are different in length and complexity. Argumentative genres not only offer opportunities to undergraduate learners to develop their academic knowledge but also act as necessary socialization practice. Such writing tasks particularly introduce students to the rhetorical tools which they can employ to establish their skill of evidence formation. Among key undergraduate genres, the essay remains the most common in different academic disciplines for building a coherent argument in written form for an explicitly stated position (Hyland, 2009; Shahzad, Janjua, & Asghar, 2019). An argumentative essay written within a time limit of 30 minutes in response to the prompt — *The rich are morally superior to the poor*— by every BS English learner in the final semester at National University of Modern Language, Islamabad was collected for the construction of a single corpus. The corpus was analyzed to examine the instances of IGM — which has two main categories of Experiential and Logical metaphors — deployed by students in their academic writing. These texts exemplify specialized academic writing. Though they may not be representative of academic writing collectively, they provide a focused design, helpful for a better insight into the deployment of preferred linguistic patterns by Pakistani learners in their academic written texts.

### Data Analysis Procedure

Liardét's (2016b) adapted methodology was used for this study. Data analysis was conducted in two stages working in a cycle. Contrary to most corpus investigations into grammatical metaphor that have employed corpus-tagging software, the present study in its first stage has conducted a manual analysis of a purposive sample corpus (i.e., twenty texts from the corpus). This analysis done manually was an attempt to record every instance of GM in the sample for the compilation of a list of forms central for the further analysis. During the analysis of this stage, there appeared instances of inappropriate deployment of GM. However, applying the derivation and agnation tests as recommended by Ravelli (1988), the researcher has included all instances of incongruent language forms for a deeper and clearer understanding of learners' language development (Ravelli, 1988).

The second and final stage involved a concordance analysis based on instances of GM recorded earlier. With the entry of each instance of GM in the corpus software and with the use of the wildcard functionality, the inclusion of all its variants was ensured. This tool serving as a wider net in the search of forms bearing some similarity was of great help in including plurals, incomplete metaphors and the congruent forms of linguistic items used as GM otherwise. During this stage also, further manual analysis was also made. This was done to delete the congruent forms and ensure the presence of only metaphorical instances.

**Table 1:Experiential Metaphors Selected for the Study**

Types of Reconstrual		Congruent → Incongruent examples
Process	→ Thing	Punish → Punishment. Remove → Removal

Quality → Thing	Different → Difference Stable → Stability
Process → Quality of Thing	Oppress → Oppressive. Prosper → Prosperous
Quality of Process → Quality of Thing	Fail repeatedly → Repeated failure. Behave honestly → Honest behaviour

Table 1 adapted from (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014)

### Data Analysis

The researcher selected Experiential Metaphor for this study. Several categories of this are found in literature of SFL. However, for convenience of analysis only four following subtypes (as shown in Table 3.1) were selected.

- i. *Process as Thing*
- ii. *Process as Quality*
- iii. *Quality as Thing*
- iv. *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing*

Four sections of BS English, Final Semester were given the following prompt for writing an argumentative essay.

*The rich are morally superior to the poor.*

Eighty-one essays of different lengths were collected and the text of 29,155 words was written in the form of a corpus named *NBSFs2021*. Twenty essays of this corpus were manually read and after completion of textual analysis of each clause, instances of four types of experiential metaphors were identified and arranged in a list that contained the names of four categories chosen earlier. Later, each item of this central list was entered in the corpus software, and a concordance of each instance was created by the use of the software in which an important tool of saving the concordance as Rich Text document allowed the researcher to save all concordances in word document form. For the creation of concordance of all items, Wordsmith software, Version 8 was used. Moreover, the tool of Wildcard in the software was used to ensure that maximum forms of the entry appear in the concordance. After the creation of concordance of each item of the list, all the concordance lists were manually read and every congruent use of the chosen item was deleted, and the subsequent list thus obtained contained only the items used metaphorically. Reading these concordance lists, the researcher recorded the frequency of each instance against its entry in the first list. On completion of the first list with the frequency of each item, the highest frequency in each category was first shown in the table and later expressed in bar graph. In addition to this, the mean frequency of each category of GM was calculated by the following mathematical formulae.

Mean Frequency = Sum of Five Highest Frequencies ÷ 5

Since not only did the frequency of different instances differ, but also the gap among total number of recorded instances in the manually read essays was significantly wide, the mean frequency of each category was obtained by using the mathematical formula given above. In the formula, the total number of instances chosen for experiential metaphor as well as logical metaphor was five. Another criterion set for calculating mean frequency was that the five instances selected for the purpose contain highest frequencies. Thus, an effort was made to access the approximately accurate reading of mean frequency for every category.

These mean frequencies of the four types of experiential metaphors along with their percentages were shown first in tabular form and later in two types of graphs, bar graph and pie chart.

### Statistics of Experiential Metaphors

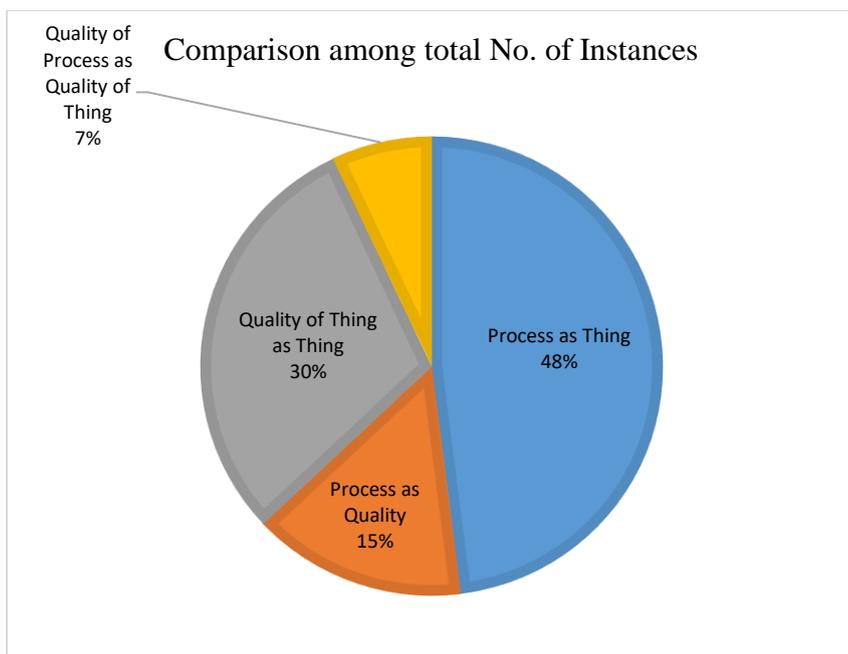
As mentioned earlier, four types of experiential metaphors were selected for this study. The detailed description, followed by discussion, of comparison among their frequencies made at various criteria shows similarities and differences in their use. Data are also displayed in the tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The detail is in coming sections.

**Comparison among Total No. of Instances**

The number of instances for each category that were found in the twenty essays read manually was different. The maximum number of instances came from *Process as Thing* category, and they were ninety-two (92). The category of *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing* had fewest instances, which were only thirteen (13). The second highest category was *Quality as Thing* and its tally was fifty-seven (57). The category of *Process as Quality* stood third and its total instances were twenty-eight (28). Their ratios in descending orders were 48 %, 30 %, 15 % and 7 %.

**Comparison among Total No. of Instances**

Process as Thing		Quality of Thing as Thing		Process as Quality		Quality of Process as Quality of Thing	
Instances	%	Instances	%	Instances	%	Instances	%
92	48%	57	30%	28	15%	13	7%

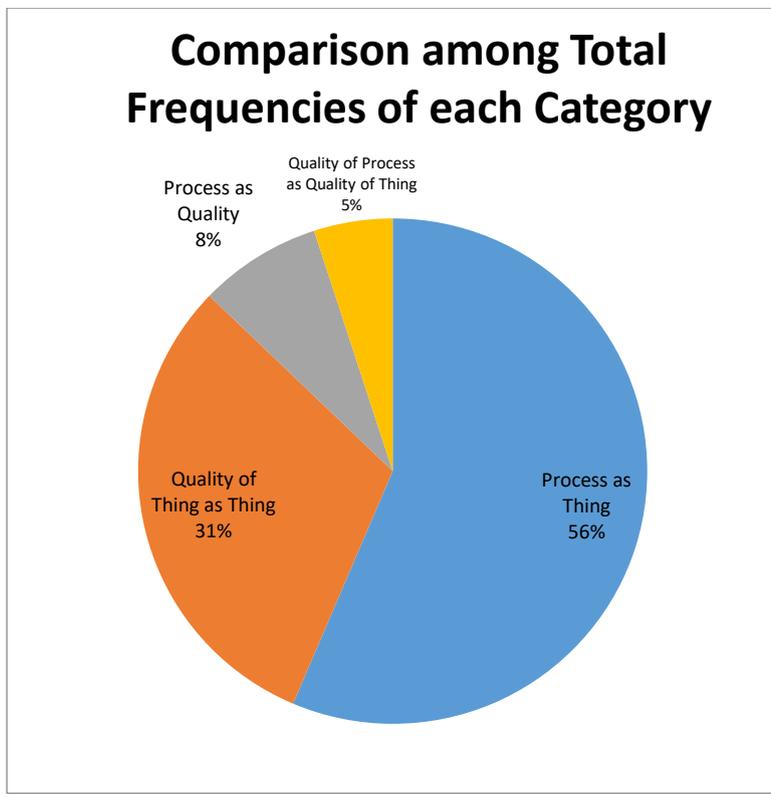


**Comparison among Total Frequencies of Each Category**

Following the same pattern of maximum number of instances in the text and second highest number of instances, the positions of highest and second highest mean frequency were occupied by the category of *Process as Thing* and *Quality as Thing*, respectively. The number of instances in the first category was 92, and the sum of frequencies was 545; the number of instances of second category was 57, and sum of frequencies was 297. The gap in instances was 65 and the sum of frequencies differed by 248. *Process as Quality* had third position with 28 number of instances, and 75 as sum of total frequencies. The fourth category which has least number of instances also had the lowest sum of frequencies which was 49. The ratio in their respective number of instances and their total frequencies according to their positions were: 48 % and 56.4 %, 57 % and 30.8 %, 15 % and 7.8 %, 7 % and 5 %.

**Comparison among Total Frequencies of each Category**

Process as Thing		Quality of Thing as Thing		Process as Quality		Quality of Process as Quality of Thing	
Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
545	56.4%	297	30.8%	75	7.8%	49	5%



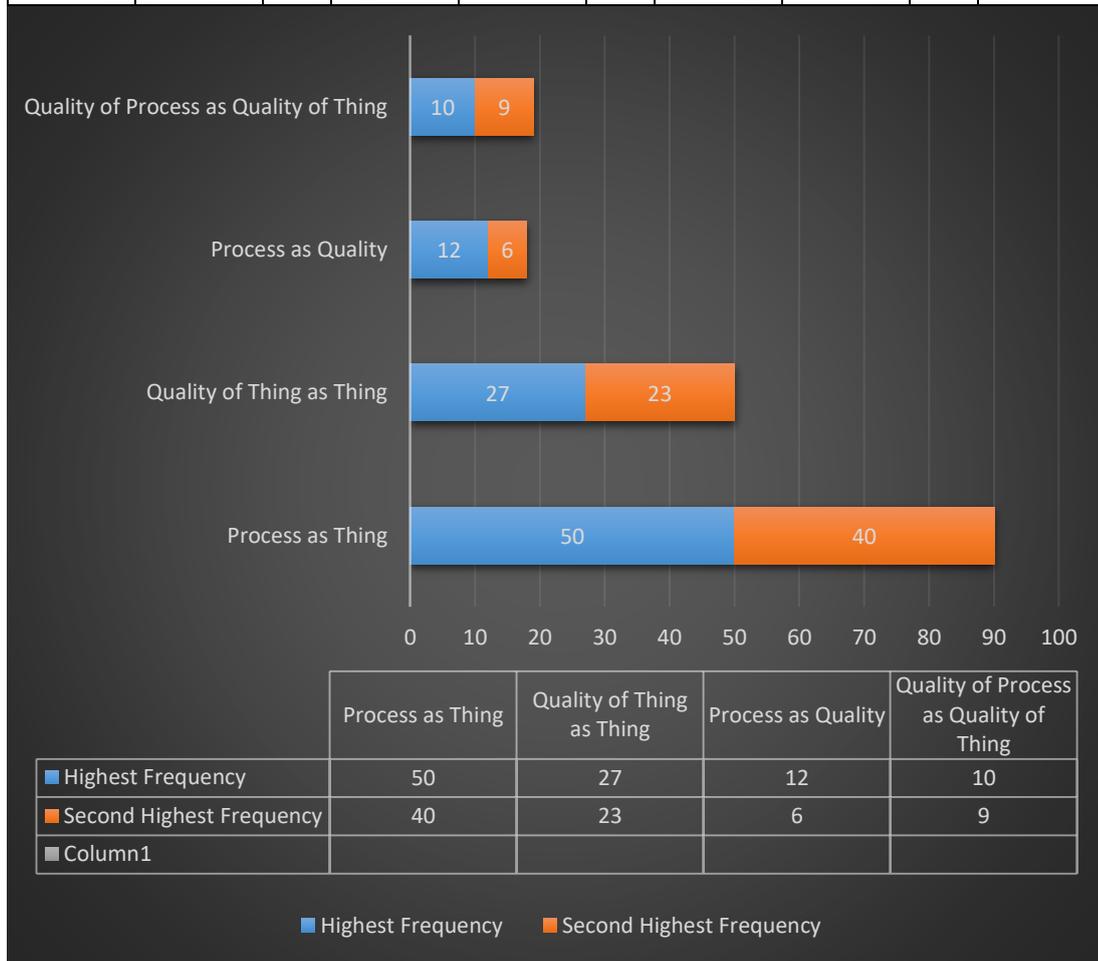
**Comparison among Highest and Second Highest Frequency**

When the highest and the second highest frequency was traced in every category, it was found that in *Process as Thing*, the highest frequency was fifty (50) and the second highest was 40, thus there was a gap of 10 between them. In *Process as Quality*, the highest frequency was merely twelve (12) and the second highest was only half of it. Thus, its highest frequency was only two points above the lowest which was found in *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing*. In *Quality of Thing as Thing*, while the highest frequency was twenty-seven (27), twenty-three points lower than the highest of all the categories, the second highest in this was twenty-three (23). Thus, the pattern shown in total number of instances and the pattern shown in the highest as wells in the second highest frequencies was characterized by consistency and regularity. In every category, the number of total instances and the highest frequency showed no deviation; both were found in the same category. Moreover, the position of every category according to its number of instances also showed no deviation even in the second highest frequency as this was found in the respective category. Even the gap between the highest frequency of two overlapping categories displayed the same pattern as was shown in their number of instances. For example, in the highest and the second highest instances, there was a gap of 65, and the highest frequencies of these two categories differed by 23, thus showing a consistent pattern. This can be interpreted as a sign that not only the maximum number of learners were using this category, but also this category was being used most frequently. Thus, it can be inferred that *Process as Thing* is the

most prevalent category of experiential metaphor used by learners.

**Comparison among Highest and Second Highest Frequencies**

Process as Thing			Quality of Thing as Thing			Process as Quality			Quality of Process as Quality of Thing		
Highest Frequency	Second Highest Frequency	Gap	Highest Frequency	Second Highest Frequency	Gap	Highest Frequency	Second Highest Frequency	Gap	Highest Frequency	Second Highest Frequency	Gap
50	40	10	27	23	4	12	6	6	10	9	1



**Comparison among Five Highest Frequencies of Each Category and their Means**

The sum of five highest frequencies was calculated to reach approximately closest measure of the mean frequency for every category. With the sum of 161, mean of 32.2 and percentage of 47, the category of *Process as Thing* was highest. Second position was occupied by and *Quality as Thing*. Its sum of five highest frequencies was 107, the mean was 21.4 and percentage was 31. The same consistency was observed here, too; the gap between the percentage of total frequencies and that of mean frequency of five highest frequencies was same, they differed by 16 %. With the sum of 37, mean of 7.4 and percentage of 11, the category of *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing* was in third

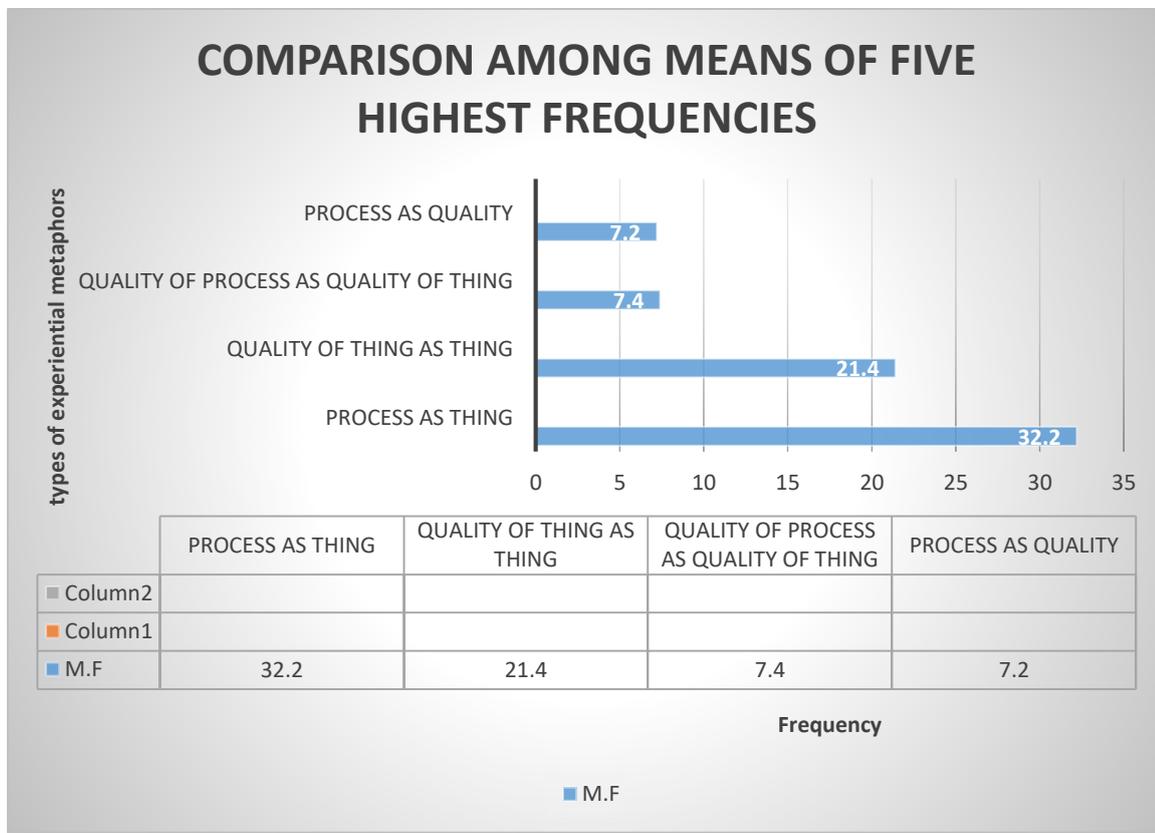
position. Lowest position was occupied by and *Process as Quality*. Its sum of five highest frequencies was 36, the mean was 7.2 and its percentage was also 11. Thus, their showed a contraction. While their difference in their sum of total frequencies was of 3 %, in the mean of five highest frequencies they stood at the same percentage. No significant change in the gap between the second and third position category was observed; the gap between the percentage of total frequencies and that of mean frequency of five highest frequencies was not significantly wide, in first they differed by 23 %, in the second the difference was at almost 20 %.

### Highest Frequencies

Process as Thing	Quality of Thing as Thing	Quality of Process as Quality of Thing	Process as Quality
H. F.	H. F.	H. F.	H. F.
50	27	10	12
40	23	9	6
28	23	8	6
24	18	6	6
19	16	4	6
<b>Total=161</b>	<b>Total=107</b>	<b>Total=37</b>	<b>Total=36</b>

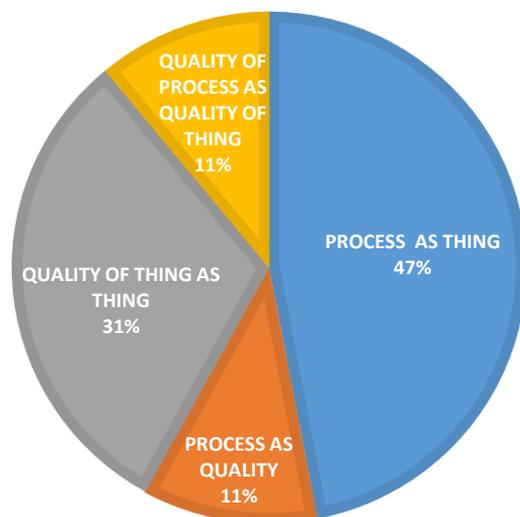
### Comparison among Means of Five Highest Frequencies

Process as Thing			Quality of Thing as Thing			Quality of Process as Quality of Thing			Process as Quality		
Sum	M.F.	%	Sum	M.F.	%	Sum	M.F.	%	Sum	M.F.	%
161	32.2	47%	107	21.4	31%	37	7.4	11%	36	7.2	11%



## COMPARISON AMONG MEANS OF FIVE HIGHEST FREQUENCIES:

- PROCESS AS THING
- PROCESS AS QUALITY
- QUALITY OF THING AS THING
- QUALITY OF PROCESS AS QUALITY OF THING



### Discussion on Statistics of Experiential Metaphors

The description of mean frequency associated with number of instances of each type of experiential metaphor demonstrates learners' highest preference for *Process as Thing*. However, the critical observer can easily notice that not only in the occurrence of highest number of instances but also in the presence of greatest mean frequency of this category, the gerund nouns and the gerundive nominalization have a significant contribution. It is visible that the learners' dependence on this type cannot be interpreted as an important sign of their vast repertoire of this category of experiential metaphor. Another important point that offers contradictory evidentiary support to the learner's highest knowledge of this category is a wide gap between total number of words of the entire corpus and the total tally of the category. In a corpus of about thirty thousand words (actual 29,155), there are found only about six hundred examples (exact 545) of this nominalization which also includes gerunds. Therefore, it is not hard to infer that the learners' paradigmatic repertoire of experiential metaphor has not reached the apparently satisfactory level. The other category of nominalization, *Quality to Thing*, instead of being closer to the first type, falls far behind because the total instances traced in the twenty manually read essays are only about three hundred, a sheer half of the first. This data unambiguously signals towards the learners' insufficient knowledge of this important tool of academic writing. The absence of considerably high number of this important element of advanced proficiency has made the learners' academic writing even at this stage conversational in tone and colloquial in lexical vocabulary. Nevertheless, the presence of all four types of this category shows that there are learners, though not in high number, who can employ this important resource to bring condensation and build a compressed argument in their expository writing. The other two types, first *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing* and second *Process as Quality*, when compared with nominalizations indicate an unexpected pattern. Though the number of instances of the latter are more than the former, the mean frequency shows a reverse pattern and the type with fewer number of

instances touches a clearly higher frequency. This suggests that the learners who employed *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing* are greater in number than those who used *Process as Quality*. However, the fewer number of lexical items used by majority of learners come from *Process as Quality*, rather than from *Quality of Process as Quality of Thing*. This hints that a great majority of learners either have limited knowledge of this helpful device or not have yet expanded their repertoire of paradigmatic choices which the advanced proficiency often entails. Thus, the pattern shown in total number of instances and the pattern shown in highest frequencies were characterized by stark differences. It was only in *Process as Thing* that total number of instances and the highest frequency were found in the same category. This can be interpreted as a sign that not only were the maximum number of learners using this category, but also this category was being used most frequently. Thus, it can be inferred that *Process as Thing* is the most prevalent category of experiential metaphor used by learners. The second highest total number of instances were part of *Process as Quality*, but the second highest frequency was found in *Quality of Thing as Thing*.

## Conclusion

The study on GM is of paramount importance for undergraduate learners and faculty of English language. The learners' ability to create more appropriate grammatical structures can be highly improved by increased awareness for GM as a resource of meaning and ample practice of this grammatical tool. The instruction designs and pedagogical intervention focusing on learners' academic writing cannot ignore the central role of GM.

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