



Cognitive Analysis of Chinese-English Metaphors of Animal and Human Body Part Words

Meiying Song

Northwestern Ploytechnical University, Xi'an 710072, China

Tel: 86-29-8806-9065 E-mail: maxun666@163.com

The research is financed by the "Research of English Teaching for the Non-English Specialty Postgraduates in Colleges" of the 6th Youth Science & Technology Innovation Fund of Northwestern Ploytechnical University (No.W016218). (Sponsoring information)

Abstract

Metaphorical cognition arises from the mapping of two conceptual domains onto each other. According to the "Anthropocentrism", people tend to know the world first by learning about their bodies including Apparatuses. Based on that, people begin to know the material world, and the human body part metaphorization emerges as the times requires. Because mankind possesses same body structure, perceptive organs, same perceptive and cognitive abilities, so people have many similarities in their cognition. At the same time, both the metaphor thinking and the conceptive system are from human living experiences. As a kind of thinking mode and behavior mode, the metaphor doesn't exist along, and it can not break away from the social and cultural environment, and it must be combined closely with certain language situation and culture. As a result of cultural influence, metaphor shows its unique nationality. Taking English-Chinese animal and human body part words as the example, the cultural cognitive difference of Chinese and English metaphors is analyzed in the article.

Keywords: Metaphor, Anthropocentrism, Cognition, Mapping, Body part metaphorization

1. Theoretical base

Metaphor is regarded as a kind of linguistic phenomenon in traditional linguistics which thought it is the rhetoric in the linguistic form and the decorated measure of language. But the modern cognitive linguistics thought that the metaphor is only the linguistic decorated measure and a kind of thinking mode. As the base of human cognition, thinking, experience, language and behavior, the metaphor is the basic mode to know the world and survive in the world for human beings. In daily life, people always use their familiar, material and concrete concepts to know, think about, experience and treat immaterial concepts which are difficult to be defined for references to form a cognitive form among associated and different concepts (Zhao, 2001). According to Lakoff's understanding, human language is a symbol system with the character of metaphor, and the metaphor in the language is just a kind of surface phenomenon, and the metaphor concepts concealed in human concept system deeply work really (Shu, 2000). The structured mapping between the concept domain and the cognitive domain forms the metaphor mapping from the source domain to the target domain (Lu, 2005, P.470-485). The understanding of metaphor is to map the initiative domain or the source domain to the target domain and achieve the target of recognizing the characters of the target domain. For example, "Argument is War", this metaphor concept, denotes human cognitions and understands about the argument, and the mode that people treat the argument is formed by mapping the concept of war to the concept of argument. The cognition of metaphor was first recorded in the Pre-Qin Days in China, i.e. "Jin Qu Zhu Shen, Yuan Qu Zhu Wu (XiCi of Zhou Yi)". The philosopher in ancient Greece, Protagoras (485 B.C. – 410 B.C.) said that "human being is the scale of everything". Chinese ancestors also had the "experienced cognition" in their thinking, and they always took the experiences they acquired as the standard to measure the world (Wang, 2005). According to the "Anthropocentrism", "all things start from human themselves to arrive for exterior things such as space, time and character (Shen, 1994, P.17-24)". The words which denote human body parts are easily to be mapped to other semantic domains by the metaphor (Chen, 2005), and the human metaphor emerges as the time requires. The human metaphorization includes three kinds of type, i.e. the structured mapping from the body-part domain to the non-body domain, the mapping from the non-body domain to the body-part domain, and the mapping between two organs in the human-part domain. The mapping relationship between the source domain to the target domain is relative, i.e. they can be mapped each other not only from the source domain to the target domain, but from the target domain to the source domain (Lu, 2005, P.470-485). For example, the word of "neck" generates the word of "bottleneck" based on the metaphor cognition with similar position and form, and generated the words, "bottleneck for road traffic" and "bottleneck for production development" based on the metaphor cognition with similar function or attribute (Li, 2001, P.118). Taking the mapping from the non-body domain to the body-part domain or the mapping from the animal domain to the human body-part

domain as the example, the differences of cognitive culture in metaphors of Chinese and English animal and human body-part metaphor words will be analyzed in the article.

2. Analysis of cultural cognition of metaphors of English and Chinese animal and human body-part words

Out of the human world, there is a colorful animal world which is closely linked with our life. The neighbor relationship between human and animals makes people to be very familiar with the habits of animals, and gradually, people begin to associate some characters on some animals with someone's characters in human lives, and map them on the cognitions and expressions to other things, and the human glossary is one of important objects of the mapping of animal words. For example, "Zhang Mei Shu Mu (roe's eyebrows and rat's eyes)", "Lang Xin Gou Fei (being brutal and cold-blooded)", "Cong Yan (Insect's eyes)" and "Mao Yan (cat's eyes)" in Chinese all belong to this category, and some English human words such as "horse faced", "dragonhead" and "cat's eye" also belong to this category. Based on human basic experiences (Li, 2001, P.126), as a kind of human thinking mode and behavior mode, the metaphor is not isolated, and it can not form spontaneously without the social and cultural environment, and it must be associated with certain language environment and culture. Just as Lakoff predicted, "Metaphorical mappings vary in universality, some seem to be universal, others are widespread, and some seem to be culture specific." The commonness and nationality in human thinking make the metaphor to possess the universality and cultural specific characters.

2.1 Similarities of metaphors of Chinese and English animal and human body-part words

Because the human beings have same body structure and perceptive organs and same perception and cognitive ability, so they can acquire similar concept structure when they face same material world, which make different nations and cultures possess obvious commonness for the cognition of the metaphor. For the understanding process to the material world, Chinese culture and English culture possess similar cognitions to some animals, which are represented in the similarities about the structure and meaning of human body-part metaphor in English and Chinese such as "horse back (Ma Bei)", "horse-faced (Ma Lian)", "horse hair (Ma Zong)", "cat's eye (Mao Yan)", "sheep skin (Yang Pi)", "ox-eyed (Niu Yan)" and "chicken-shit (Ji Mao) (In English, "Shit" is selected and "Mao" is selected in Chinese, but their meanings are same)", and from above examples, the similarity about the metaphor thinking are obviously same in English and Chinese cultures.

2.2 Cultural characters of metaphors of Chinese and English animal and human body-part words

However, "the expressions to one true event will be different because of observers' different angles, focuses and detailed degrees, and these differences will form different images in the brains and reflect different cognitions to the things (Zhao, 2001, P.109)". At the same time, the metaphors rooting in different cultural soils are one part of the culture, and they can reflect the content, faith, attitude and behavior of the culture to the largest degree, and they have specific cultural brand, so the nationality of metaphor forms. Because of the influences of different cultures and thinking modes, Chinese-English human body-part metaphors must have certain cultural differences which are mainly embodied in following aspects.

(1) The literal meanings are same, but the metaphor meanings are different. Because of different associations inspired by different cultures, in two kinds of languages, there are some expressions with same literal meanings but different metaphor meanings such as "Ji Xin (heart-form things)" and "chicken-hearted (scary)", "Gou Tui Zi (henchman)" and "dog-leg", "quack medicine" and "dog skin", "cock" and "dragonhead", "Zhu Tou" and "pig-headed". Above Chinese-English animal and human body-part words have same literal meanings but they have obviously different metaphors. In Chinese, "Dan Xiao (cowardice)" is always associated with "rat", so people always say "Dan Xiao Ru Shu (chicken-hearted as timid as a hare)", but the rat is replaced by chicken in English. "Gou (dog)" is always the symbol of "beggarliness" in Chinese, and all human body-part words about the god have derogatory sense, such as "Gou Yan Kan Ren Di", "Gou Xue Pen Tou", "Lang Xin Gou Fei", "Gou Tou Jun Shi", "Gou Dan Bao Tian" and "Gou Zui Li Tu Bu Chu Xiang Ya". But in English countries, dog is man's best friend, so many human body-part words about dog are neutral terms such as "dog-eared", "dogsbody", "dogface" and "dog fall". In Chinese, "Long (dragon)" is the symbol of "luck", and it is the special product that the tradition of Chinese culture roots in Chinese land, and the body of the emperor was called by "the dragon body", and the "Long Ma Jing Shen (the spirit of a dragon horse)" means vigorous spirit. But western people think that the dragon is the symbol of evil, the fierce and cruel monster, and in western pictures, dragon has a pair of added wings than in Chinese pictures, so it is not hard to understand that a few human body-part words about dragon are independent of the animal, "dragon", such as "dragonhead", "dragon-blood" and "dragon's teeth". "Zhu (pig)" is the pronoun of "stupidity" in Chinese, but the word means "greedy" and "obstinate", so human body-part words have different cultural metaphors.

(2) Except for structured metaphors of human and animal body-part words, the cultural metaphors of these words are not same in English and Chinese languages. Almost all these words in Chinese have certain cultural metaphor meanings, but there are few words with cultural metaphors in English, taking "fish" as an example, British is a island country around seas, English living depends on seas, and many English metaphors are related with ocean culture such as "give up the ship", "all at sea", "go with the stream", and "in the same ship", however, the human body-part words about

“fish” are very rare such as “fish-eye lens”, “fish finger”, “fish-skin disease” and “fish joint”, and in these words, there are no one to contain cultural metaphors. Though China is agricultural country with land, but there are many human body-part metaphors about “fish”, such as “Yu Chun (fish’s lip)”, “Yu Gan You (fish liver oil)”, “Yu Mu Hun Zhu (passing away the sham as the genuine)”, “Yu Rou Bai Xing (being cruel to common people)” and “Yu Du Bai (the color of the sky at dawn)”.

(3) The quantities of animal kind evolved in English and Chinese human and animal body-part words are different. In Chinese, all animal words can be mapped to the human body and generate human-body metaphor words, such as “Ying Bi Yao Yan (eagle’s nose and snipe’s eye, describing bad people’s appearance)”, “She Zu (snake’s feet, describing useless things)”, “He fa Tong Yan, describing strong old man’s body”, “Jian Zui Hou Sai (describing small face and ugly appearance)”, “Hu Bei Xiong Yao (describing human strong body)”, “Ji Kou Niu Hou (the man who would rather rule the roost in the small place, not be dominated by others in the big place)”, and “Shu Mu Cun Guang (being shortsighted)”. But in English, there are few animal and human animal words and the evolved animal kinds are rare.

In a word, the culture is very important to form the concept metaphor. The experiences to form the concept metaphor are complex social and cultural structure (Wang, 2003). The metaphors root in not only human experiences but cultures. Under the influence of culture, the metaphor can exactly reflect the specific culture.

3. Conclusions

Human cognitive rule from far to near, from entity to non-entity, from simple to complex, and from concrete to abstract decide human and their organs’ important basic function in the cognition process. The metaphorization of mapping between human glossary and inhuman glossary each other is the important measure to know the world for human beings. Because the human beings have same body structure and perceptive organs and same perception and cognitive ability, so they can acquire similar concept structure when they face same material world, and there are many similarities in English and Chinese human body-part words. Though metaphor and culture have commonness, but because of the differences in living environment, cultural background, custom, habit, psychology and observation angles, the English and Chinese cognitive cultures including animal and human metaphor words are obviously different, and these differences can help us to further know two kinds of cultures and make for trans-cultural communication between English and Chinese.

References

- Cheng, Li & Cheng, Jianhua. (2000). *English & Chinese Cultural Comparison Dictionary*. Changsha: Hu’nan Education Press.
- Chen, Jiaxu. (2005). Comparisons of English & Chinese Body-part Metaphorization Cognitions. *Journal of Liaocheng University (Social Sciences Edition)*. No.1.
- Dictionary Compilation Office of Linguistics Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. (1998). *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Dictionary Compilation Office of Shanghai Translation Publishing House. (2002). *New English-Chinese Dictionary of Century Edition*. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House.
- Dictionary Compilation Office of Wuhan University English Department. (2003). *English-Chinese Phrase Dictionary*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Li, Guonan. (2001). *Figure of Speech and Glossary*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. P.118, 126.
- Lu, Weizhong. (2005). Cognitive Characters of Human Body-part Metaphorization. *Selective Theses of Cognitive Linguistic Theory*. P.470-485.
- Shen, Jiaxuan. (1994). Comprehensive Review of “Grammaticalization” Researches. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*. No.4. P.17-24.
- Shu, Dingfang. (2005). Cognitive Research of Language. *Selective Theses of Cognitive Linguistic Theory*. P.470-485.
- Shu, Dingfang. (2000). *Research of Metaphor Theory*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Ungerer F. & H. Schmid. (1996). An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics. *London: Addition Wesley Longman Limited*.
- Wang, Shouyuan. (2003). Metaphors and the Teaching of Target Language Culture. *Foreign Language Education*. No.1.
- Wang, Yin. (2005). The Embodiment View of Language from the Perspective of Embodied Philosophy and Cognitive Linguistics. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*. No.1.
- Zhao, Yanfang. (2001). *Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. P.109.