



A Study of Metaphor and its Application in Language Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

Metaphor is more a vehicle of cognizing the world than purely a rhetorical device. This paper first gives a brief review of traditional metaphor and modern metaphor in the West and then devotes a large space to elaborate on reasons for emergence of metaphor, characteristics of metaphor, working mechanism of metaphor, and then proposes suggestions on its application in language learning and teaching.

Keywords: Metaphor, Working mechanism, Language learning and teaching

1. Introduction

A study of metaphor is an infant branch of linguistic study and has held tremendous allure to scholars ever since the ancient times. Naturally a great diversity of views have come into being, mainly falling into two schools, namely traditional metaphor and modern metaphor, which interpret metaphor in the line of rhetorics and cognition respectively.

Traditional metaphor or a study of metaphor in the line of rhetorics can be traced back to scholars from Aristotle to Richards. In his famous works *Poetics*, Aristotle gives his definition of metaphor: "Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy" (Lan, 2005). Richards (1936) in his book "The Philosophy of Rhetoric proposes Interaction Theory" asserts that the essence of metaphor lies in an Interaction between a metaphorical expression and the context in which it is used. The Interaction Theory arises from a correct observation in that as for a conventional metaphor which links a source domain and a target domain, speaking about the source domain alone may bring to mind the target domain.

The echoing voice of pro-traditional-metaphor scholars holds that metaphor is merely a rhetoric phenomenon, a transference from one word to another, and a device to enhance forcefulness and ornate ness of expressions, thus only those talented linguistic masters or writers can well manipulate and it is hardly out of the question for us average people to well use.

Studies of metaphor have taken on an absolutely new look ever since 1980s, evidenced by *Metaphors We Live by* collaborated by Lakoff and Johnson(1980), which has rocked to the core studies of metaphor in linguistic field, attributing to their interpretation of metaphor system in the line of cognition named modern metaphor and proposes that metaphor is a matter of thought and action rather than a device of poetic imagination and the rhetoric flourish. Kovecses (1986) presents a demonstration that emotions such as anger, pride and love are conceptualized structure in everyday language. All these studies illustrate the cognitive idea of metaphor, i.e. metaphor mediates human understanding and world view(Lan, 2005).

This paper, in retrospection of literature review of metaphor studies in the West, devotes a large space to give an elaborate account of image schema and working mechanism of metaphor and particularly application of working

mechanism of metaphor and image schema to translation of metaphors in both Chinese and English. Finally I arrive at the conclusion that if we language learners can well grasp working mechanism of metaphor, translation of metaphors can take good care of themselves. In the conclusion part, I propose some suggestions on teaching translation of metaphors.

2. Working Mechanism of Metaphor

In the mechanism, there are five elements, namely, metaphor producer, metaphor receiver, source domain, target domain and context.

2.1 Metaphor producer and receiver

They are the participants or subject in communication who possesses cognitive ability and well know the context the metaphor is in, background information, cultural factors and cognitive models, which altogether structure the ground on which a metaphor can stand. The subject play an indispensable role in the working process, for their cognitive abilities, wide stretch of imagination and reasoning power make their metaphorical mindset possible, therefore they can come up with more novel metaphors to enrich metaphorical expressions. Besides, their cognitive can well equip them with good judgment to recognize the metaphorical meaning of words, sentences or whatever.

As we all know, one or some features of the target domain can, more often than not, not be straightly projected onto the source domain, in which process will definitely requires involvement of the subject, for without whose involvement similarity between two things that are not of the same kind, nor bear any relationship to each other can not be created when put together. Their roles become still greater when talking of metaphor can create similarities, for similarities between source domain and target domain, are created by human beings in the process of exploring the world and those similarities will remain unknown to us without such metaphorical expressions, therefore emphasis on subjective initiatives can never be undermined in deciphering a metaphor which goes well with what cognitive linguistics holds.

2.2 Interaction between source domain (A) and target domain (B)

Mapping process: It can be imagined as a process of projecting features of the target domain onto the source domain, in which process context plays an essential part, for it can on the one hand provide relevant background knowledge and on the other hand can help to eliminate irrelevant features. Mapping results, Features of source domain will in return interact with that of the target domain, which determines formation of the focus information. Cognitive subject, under influence of interaction between A and B, will naturally activate relevant information and process it; meanwhile checking processing irrelevant information to ensure processing efficiency. By dint of subject's activating mechanism and checking mechanism, one or more features of A and B after mapping and interaction, will find their equivalent feature in each other, thus metaphorical meaning is acquired.

When an metaphor is formed, it may have several metaphorical meanings because of multiple equivalent features in the source domain and target domain. For example, in the sentence, he is a mule only stubbornness can be projected onto him, though a mule has several traits and other traits like long ears, feeding on grass, are eliminated due to cognitive power of the subject. Metaphorical meaning will for certain change if we replace mule with fish, because another mapping process is established. In the new process, two traits of the fish slipperiness and a big capacity are projected onto him in spite of its other traits.

Still another example:

- 1) Ta yi jie hun shi nian, ru jin que hong xing chu qiang.
- 2) Hang zhou jing guan zhi yi: Hong xing chu qiang

We can read between the lines different implicatures from the above two sentences. The first sentence is obviously a metaphor which means she has extramarital affairs with another man. while the second sentence means what it is literally written. In conclusion, establishment of an image depends heavily on interaction between source domain and target domain, either of which changes will definitely lead to change of the other.

2.3 Context

Self-evidently, context is of great importance to recognizing and decoding metaphors. Moreover, there exists too a interaction between context and subject, for which reason comes from many scholars the proposition that metaphors should be approached from perspectives of pragmatics, for no linguistic elements can stand being isolated from the context. Here are the examples to illustrate importance of context of a metaphor. Bartsch once gave the following the example:

Mary has a teapot and she loves it so much that whoever touches it she will immediately warn him to watch out. One day, when she finished using the bike borrowed from her friend, Mary just put it in the corner without care, which was caught by her friend and he shouted at her "this bike is my teapot." We can see clearly from the above example that Mary's care and love to her teapot are undiminishingly projected to that of her friend towards his bike. Outsiders will

become completely at a loss when overhearing the sentence that my bike is my teapot. In saying he is a fish, what exactly do we intend to convey when saying he is a fish. We intend to get across his unreliability or his great capacity for liquor; completely subject to the context it is used. When he is drinking it can be interpreted as his great capacity to hold liquor, otherwise, as his unreliability. Context can directly affect degree of the metaphorical meaning.

In conclusion, working mechanism of a metaphor is a cognitive mechanism which is based on interaction between the five elements producer and receiver, source domain, target domain and context.

3. Characteristics of Metaphor

For all its characteristics, I just want to single out among them three to dwell on. They are namely universality, systematic character and power of enriching semantic meaning.

3.1 Universality

Metaphor is not simply confined to linguistics, but also has entered into and become spotlight of fields of philosophy cognitive science, artificial intelligence, psychology, sociology and education. Metaphor has attracted tremendous attention from philosophers, which is evidenced by Kant's elaboration on conceptual metaphor from the angle of cognition and pointing out that our language is full of conceptualized expressions indirectly deriving from metaphorization. In 1960, German philosopher Blumenberg also pointed out with emphasis that most of the reasoning of human beings is metaphorical because of abstract and scientific account can be possible.

Metaphor proliferates too in natural science. For instance, in physics, we come to know what electricity is in terms of understanding the intangible water we are familiar with, hence expressions of flow of electricity, pressure of electricity, obstacle of electricity, to name just a few.

Metaphor, used in our daily thinking and acting is an omnipresent principle of human languages and makes abstraction possible, therefore it is a must to think in metaphor. Lackoff and Johnson's investigation showed even higher frequency of use of metaphor--70% of expressions in language derive from metaphorical concepts. Ortony (1929) held: all languages are of metaphorical quality.

3.2 systematic character of metaphor

Different conceptual metaphors do not work independently, as Lackoff and Johnson (1980) put it, metaphorical entailments can characterize a coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts. For instance, in English there are three metaphors related to time, namely,

Time is money

How do you spend your time these days?

That flat tire cost me an hour.

Time is a limited resource

You don't use your time profitably.

You are running out of time.

Time is a valuable commodity.

I don't have the time to give you.

Thank you for your time.

(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)

Knowledge of what money, limited resources and valuable commodity are in mind, these metaphors can facilitate our understanding of the abstract concept time. The three metaphors well agree with each other and mingle into a harmonious whole, for money is in modern society a limited resource while a limited resource is a commodity. In other words time is money entails time is a limited resource, while the latter entails time is a valuable commodity.

3.3 Power of enriching semantic meaning

Metaphor, in linguistic system, is to endow with a word new meaning and extension of meaning, and a bridge of the known and the unknown. Metaphor makes one semantic domain map onto another. (Lakoff & Turner, 1989) Cognitive semantics holds acquisition of new lexical meaning is by no means groundless and is grounded on the cognitive structuring which makes different meanings of one word relate to each other in a reasonable way. We can use a polysemy loud to illustrate Sweetser's stand. The word loud has following meanings (a) having great intensity of sound (b) producing great intensity of sound ; resounding (c)vehement or insistent :loud denunciations.(d)Tastelessly bright ; garish, flashy: a loud red automobile (e) obsessive in appearance or manner : Joe is a loud, vulgar person.(Macmillan contemporary dictionary)

The first two items are of minor difference and of its literal meaning, while the third item is somewhat different from its literal meaning yet still bears close relationship to sound. Item four and five bear no direct relationship to sound, but still stem from high-pitchingness and ear-catchingness of sound. In a word, metaphorization is the effective mechanism to make such connotation possible.

4. Metaphor in language learning and teaching

We have no time to exhaust all aspects of metaphor in language learning, and here we just single out one aspect of metaphor in language learning---using conceptual metaphor in extending lexicon.

The first area of using or applying conceptual metaphor is obviously vocabulary learning in general. Conceptual metaphors provide us with the possibility of seeing one thing in terms of another. This feature enables us to link the senses of a lexical item in one domain to its related metaphorical senses in another domain, thus extending the senses of the same word forms. For example the word *shaky* in the building domain can be used in the theory domain with the linking conceptual metaphor *theories are buildings*. Another example, the word *remote* in the distance domain can be used in the relationship domain with the linking conceptual metaphor *relationship is distance* and most importantly, a large number of words can be learned systematically in this way. In pedagogical practice, teaching of extending the meanings of lexical items can be conducted in the following way. To begin with, the teacher can give such an example: *Jim and Lily are lovers while Jim abandoned Lily and fell love with another girl, so Lily felt wounded by Jim's betrayal and she had never been stabbed in the back like that before. She was badly hurt.* In teaching sentences of such kind, the teacher can guide the students to find the two domains. For instance, the teacher can guide the students to find the two domains by asking questions like *can wounded be used on other occasions and what is the normal use of hurt*. Gradually the students would be guided to the physical domain of using the words *wounded* and *hurt*. The expected conceptual metaphor to be established is *negative emotions are physical pains*. Therefore, a mapping relation like the following can be established.

Negative emotions are physical pains. In this activity, students are guided to search for the different senses of the same word forms, to link one domain to another, and eventually to find the potential conceptual metaphors linking these two topic domains. In this way, students can easily memorize the meanings of a word.

It is well known to us that metaphor is the carrier of culture and reflects ways of cognizing the world, thus importance of culture teaching becomes greater.

Firstly teachers of the foreign language should conduct a systematic research on culture. Metaphor, among research of cultural field is an important part, through study of which complicated and various cultural phenomenon can be organized systematically and should also deepen understanding of culture and thinking pattern peculiar to the foreign language. The so called culture here refers to not only the concrete aspect including history, geography and social system, but also the abstract facet, say, life style, values, outlook of the world, belief, cultural heritage, philosophy, etc.

Secondly, learners of foreign language should make conscious efforts, adopt a positive attitude and systematic study method to learn culture and through channels of various kinds say movies, literary works so as to be fully immersed in the culture. Contents of teaching materials must be reformed in that more space should be offered to culture and it is much better if culture course can be included in the curriculum. Teaching method must be reformed in that activity of students should be dominated in class and the teacher's role is to select proper cultural materials and compare and contrast differences of culture in foreign language and mother tongue.

Thirdly, teachers of foreign language should well know new discoveries in study of metaphors and elaborate on theoretical basis behind linguistic phenomenon of various kinds and organize the bits and pieces of language phenomenon into a whole by dint of metaphor theories.

The last but not the least, I sincerely suggest field of foreign language teaching can pool wisdom to compile a dictionary devoted to studies of relationships of among cognitive linguistic theories, metaphor study, culture and thinking patterns.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, metaphor is an avenue of cognizing the world and has penetrated every nook and corner of our daily life, thus having immense impact on our thinking patterns. This paper gives a relatively detailed account of working mechanism of metaphor and image schema and proposes five techniques of translating metaphors before arriving at the conclusion that if working mechanism of metaphor and image schema can be well grasped, translation of metaphors can take good care of itself. Since metaphor is intimately related to people's ways of deciphering the world, therefore a study on relationships between thinking patterns and metaphors may throw light on translation of metaphors. The author would like to give some suggestions on teaching of metaphor translation. It is well known to us that metaphor is the carrier of culture and reflects ways of cognizing the world, thus importance of culture teaching becomes greater.

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