

Application of Moral Metaphor in Cross-cultural Communication

Leilei Ma^{1*} and Assoc. Prof. Huiying Yang²

¹School of Foreign Study, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an China

Email: 592868205@qq.com

²School of Foreign Study, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an China

Email: 1836310943@qq.com

Corresponding Author:

Leilei Ma

Chang'an District, Xi'an, China

Zip code: 710129

E-mail: 592868205@qq.com

Telephone Number: +8618292671338

Abstract:

The thesis mainly adopts documentary method to collect a number of relevant documents and study the subject, application of ethic metaphor in cross-cultural communication systematically, including similarities and taboos of ethic metaphor as well as how to avoid the taboos in the cross-cultural communication, just limited in the examples in the thesis, based on cognitive linguistics and Lakoff's and Johnson's classic theories about metaphor. Finally, the thesis finds similarities and taboos of ethic metaphor and states some effective strategies to solve the conflicts in the cross-cultural communication.

Key words: moral metaphor; cross-cultural communication; similarity; taboo; strategy

1. Introduction

This part mainly comprises three parts: the first is background of study on moral metaphor; the second is the definition of moral metaphor; the last is the significance of study on moral metaphor in cross-cultural communication.

1.1 Background of Study on Moral Metaphor

In the cross-cultural communication, there still exist some misunderstandings about the moral metaphor, because of lack of understanding of the differences in cultural background, value orientations and social norms, they often take cultural-centrism bias into the exotic culture, and use localized criteria to understand exotic culture, as a result, cross-cultural misreading generates thereupon.

But beyond that, linguists did not move the linguistic category to the cognitive category until the publication of the book *Metaphors We Live By* written by Lakoff. In this book, Lakoff believes that the concept of ideological metaphors precedes the concept of linguistic metaphors, and the metaphor is conceptual, empirical, ubiquitous, what's more, it is the thinking tool of human beings' understanding to the world. That is to say, With the birth of the book *Metaphors We Live By*, the study of metaphors leaps out of word level.

Therefore, well-understanding to the moral metaphors is not only help of our smooth cross-cultural communication, but also understanding to the world.

1.2 Definition of Moral Metaphor

When we refer to the moral metaphor, we should first make clear that what metaphor is? In the book, *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff points out that the nature of metaphor is to understand an abstract thing through a familiar system. It is also a way of thinking, or a cognitive way. Johnson thinks that thinking can be the origin, association can be the basis. Metaphor is the language of poetry, which combines linguistic information function with aesthetics function.

Lakoff asserts that Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

Now what is moral metaphor? Moral metaphor just is to use metaphorical language to explain and understand the abstract morality.

1.3 Significance of Study on Moral Metaphor in Cross-cultural Communication

According to the background and definition moral metaphor, to understand the moral metaphor and to apply it in the cross-cultural communication well, especially like the differences, the tolerance attitudes and flexibility of cultural development in exotic culture, can help businessmen or traders to make fair and honest deals, avoiding some unethical and illegal cases. Besides, to understand the moral metaphor and to apply it in the cross-cultural communication well can avoid unnecessary culture shocks, besides, can make up some cultural vacancies and help them find their feet easily and quickly for many overseas students. What's more, to understand the moral metaphor and to apply it in the cross-cultural communication well, especially in some

political communication can create a kind of relaxing and pleasing phenomenon to release some embarrassment and conflicts.

2 Literature Review

In literature review, the thesis mainly includes three parts: researches on moral metaphor in at abroad, researches on moral metaphor at home as well as the future directions in the subject. The literature review focuses on solving the following questions: What have been done? What methodologies have been used? What could be improved? What are the future directions in this subject? What could the thesis contribute to the field?

2.1 Researches on Metaphor at abroad

Before the publication of the book, *Metaphors We Live By*, linguists and scholars just focused on study on metaphor from linguistic level or word level, advocated that metaphor just was a kind of language phenomenon, in other words, metaphor was the deep meaning of a sentence, and it has nothing with cognition and experience. But with the publication of the book, it seemed to be a landmark in researches on metaphor, which was acknowledged that it was a turn of study on metaphor from linguistics level from cognition level, and even it was a leap out of word level.

In this famous book, Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that the metaphorical language took over almost 70% in our everyday language in English, that metaphorical expressions took roots in thoughts, but not in language. They were general mappings across conceptual domains. Moreover, these general principles that take the form conceptual mappings, apply not just to novel poetic expressions, but too much of everyday language. (A. Ortony. 1979)

Lakoff and Johnson's point of view of conceptual metaphors can be divided into three parts: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. Structural metaphors refer to those cases in which one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. Orientational metaphors serve to organize a whole system concepts with respect to one another. Orientational metaphors also call spatialization metaphor since most of them result from our perception of space. Ontological metaphors view abstract concepts as entities and substances, according to our experience with physical objects, especially our own bodies.

According to Lakoff and Johnson's theory, the concept system of human beings originated from a small number of specific concepts, such as the basic spatial relations, the basic concept of physical ontology, and basic behavior concepts, etc. On the basis of these concrete concepts, people used the role of mapping to construct a complex abstract object and to understand it. According to Lakoff and Johnson's theory, "All those that did not directly derive from the concept of physical experience were metaphors in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Thus, the cognitive role of metaphor made it the important tool of our language and thinking, therefore, with the mapping of metaphor we can not only understand the meaning of metaphor and mapping features, but also create new meaning and characteristics. "Metaphor is a cognitive tool, which is incremental rather than substitutive" (Ek-Umberto, 2006). Metaphor had three functions: description, cognition, and creation.

2.2 Researches on Metaphor at Home

Comparing with western researches on metaphor, our theories are far fewer than them. The history of the researches on metaphor can date back some English newspapers or magazines from 1980. The researchers did some basic works, such as introduction of concepts of metaphor, more work just stayed at comparison of the figures of speech, for application of metaphor in cross-cultural communication was far rarer.

But from 2000, our researches on metaphor made a lot of progresses. Presented papers over numbered the totality of past ten years, showing various interests and varied perceptions. For example, Cheng Qilong (2002) paid attention to the relationship between metaphor and language cognition; Kuang Wentao (2002) and Wen Xu paid attention to the structure of metaphor and the semantic meanings; Wang Wenbing and Yao Jun (2004) paid attention to the cultural comparison of metaphor: Pang Jixian and Ding Zhanping (2002), Lin Shuwu (2002) discussed the role of metaphor in English teaching, but the contents of metaphor were not still compulsory in English teaching.

To sum up, researches on metaphor in western countries have formed systematic theories and have been applied in many fields, besides, scholars have proposed some research methods to do lot of experiments to demonstrate those theories. Compared to researches at abroad, our theories are not very mature, but gradually scholars also have made some progresses. Therefore, the future direction of metaphor will move towards the study on metaphor in cross-cultural communication, especially moral metaphor.

2.3 Research Paradigm of Moral Metaphor

There are main five research paradigms of moral metaphor: the first is Corpus Analysis Paradigm; the second is Stroop Paradigm; the third is IAT Paradigm; the fourth is Semantic Priming Paradigm; the last is Situation Analysis Paradigm.

2.3.1 Corpus Analysis Paradigm

Yin Hongmiao stated that if linguists wanted to get real information, they should do a lot of analysis through a lot of English and Chinese corpus analysis. In the case, corpus method was produced in the application. For moral metaphor, Wu Nianyang and HaoJing adopted semantics analysis paradigm to analyze a lot of corpus from Concise English - Chinese Dictionary, Modern English - Chinese Comprehensive Dictionary, Modern English – Chinese Dictionary and Concise Chinese – English Dictionary, revealing the connotation of moral metaphor.

2.3.2 Stroop Paradigm

Stroop Paradigm was composed by J. R Stroop, an American psychologist. He did an experiment: When subjects used the red ink write the meaningful word Green and the unmeaningful word Student, the results of the experiment was that the naming time of the former is longer than the later. The experiment demonstrated that it was an automatic processing of word meaning. Stroop Effect was the phenomenon of mutual interference of the two different dimensions of a stimulus. The result of unconsciousness can be observed through the paradigm.

Color-word is the classical Stroop Paradigm that is to be used to measure the connection between color and word. In this task, color word or words related to color show the different colors. When the color does not match the word, the color word would response more slowly, vice versa, when they match, the color word would response faster. In the field of research of moral metaphor, if the identification of white moral words is faster than the recognition of white unmoral words, then that white connects with moral words in the semantic connection more closely. On the contrary, the black connects with immoral words more closely.

2.3.3 IAT Paradigm

IAT paradigm, actually, is Implicit Association Test. It is a method to measure the relationship between the concept words and the attribute words, and indirectly measure the implicit attitude of the individual, that is, the implicit social cognition. It uses a computerized classification task to compare the response-time difference between target-attribute compatibility response and target-attribute incompatibility reaction, and observes that whether initiation of implicit connection is generated.

Meier, Sellborn and Wygant used IAT to do an experiment to test the relation between moral and vertical dimensions. It classified the words that appeared above or below on the computer screen, responding according to the cues of category of the moral words. The experimental results showed that when the moral words and clues were paired at the top and the immoral words and clues were paired below, the responses of the subjects were faster than the opposite pairing. This suggested that there was an implicit link between the moral concepts and the vertical position (morality is up, immorality is down.).

2.3.4 Semantic Priming Paradigm

It is a method of studying implicit social cognition, which studies the priming effect by stimulating semantic features. In general, the criterion of semantic priming paradigm is the reaction time. In some moral metaphor studies, the semantic priming paradigm has some changes. The semantic priming can influence the moral judgments implicitly by the metaphor. At this time, analysis criterion is the moral judgment reaction.

2.3.5 Situation Analysis Paradigm

Situation Analysis Paradigm is the attitude change caused by the physical stimulus, which can be used in the field experiment, also be used in laboratory experiments. For moral metaphor study, this method is to use the experience of the body to change the moral judgments, attitudes or behavior of subjects.

3. Study on Moral Metaphor in English and in Chinese

There are similarities and differences of moral metaphor in English and Chinese culture, the following contents will discuss those similarities and differences.

3.1 Study on Moral Metaphor in English

There are strong theories about study on moral metaphor in English regardless of concepts, system as well as structures of metaphor. We can understand the moral metaphors in English through specific examples.

(1) Face

It has three types: autonomy, fellowship and competence. Autonomy face involves the feeling of freedom and an idea of privacy. Fellowship face involves a feeling of connection with others as a friend. Competence face involves the image of good reputation and capability in society (Lim, 1994).

Toomey (2005) discussed three additional types of face: status face, the need for others to acknowledge power and material worth; reliability face, the need for others to recognize loyalty and dependability; and moral face, the concern for others to respect integrity and dignity.

Face concern refers to the direction and energy an individual adjusts and orients face within a social interaction, and “face movement” refers to the options an individual encounters when deciding to maintain, defend, or improve face (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Face happens everywhere in our usual interaction through familiar and socially accepted communication. However, a perceived threat to an individual’s social self- image can evoke a mixture of image related concerns. These concerns may develop into self-face, the protective concern for one’s own social image; other-face, the concern for other person’s social image; and mutual-face, the concern for the social image of the relationship (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

(2) White and Black

Stroop Paradigm has been mentioned in the literature review, it is a kind of automatic processing for moral concepts through matching different colors. According to subjects’ cognition levels for matching between the moral and immoral vocabularies and symbolic meanings of the color white and black, the study finds that the white usually stands for morality, on the contrary, the black usually stands for immorality.

Whatever in western culture or in Chinese culture, the black in most cases, usually symbolizes evil, cattiness, cheating, injustice, and crime, over the left, the white usually embodies kindness, justice, purity, holiness, and honesty.

The following cited instances will exemplify the above metaphorical meanings.

In the Bible, the God was honored as light of the world, the light is connected with the white; in the classical ballet play, Swan Lake, those actors who wear white dresses embody the purity and beauty, nevertheless, those who wear black dresses embody the evil and blackness; besides, in the Strategic Defense Initiative, there are some black warriors who stand for evil and blackness. What’s more, for example, a black eye means bad reputation; black money means illegal money; black ingratitude means without consciousness; black man means a bad person, etc.

Of course, besides the black, the white stands for kindness, beauty, justice and so on. The following examples will demonstrate the idea. White lie, means kind lie that expresses a kind of meaning of comforting people without any cheating meaning. White person does not mean the one who is in white skin but means that he is a good person with justice. The saying that They treated us white means, means that they treated us with justice, without any prejudices and biases. White list means legal name list. Make one’s name white again means that we should rehab their reputations. There are so many instances that cannot be listed one to one.

3.2 Study on Moral Metaphor in Chinese

The theory of study of ethic metaphor in China is weak. There are three characteristics of it: (1) Using the local materials to test the existing conclusions; (2) Studying on the themes of Chinese cultural features, such as face; (3) Searching for cultural specific factors, such as colors, black and white. Generally speaking, regardless of metaphor, it is related to culture.

There are two clear and specific examples in Chinese:

Face

Chinese culture is a kind of shame culture. For Chinese, they pay more attention to *mianzi*, *face* that is the prestige of the community that people get from the social achievements. It is the confidence of society for personal quality. Face in the Chinese society has a strong moral meaning.

For example, in China, there is an old traditional custom that is whatever in a housewarming, in carwarming, people usually like to entertain guests with a sumptuous dinner to show their hospitality and warming, besides, in some degree, they also want to show off their statuses for someone who wins promotion, they just want to show their social statuses so as to bring honor to their family name. In other words, they want to win face in public.

We cannot deny the social influence of such face activity, because it can bring honor and satisfaction as well as interpersonal connections for the subjects in some way, meanwhile, but to some extent, it produces some bad influences, such as prevailing of atmosphere of comparison and luxury, and resource wasting.

White and Black

In Chinese culture, the metaphorical meanings of the white and black are not very absolute to distinguish. The white and black have complex commendatory meaning and derogatory meaning.

In Chinese culture, on the one hand, the white usually embodies the brilliant sun, pure and nothing fancy silks, therefore, it has such meanings as eminence, purity, auspiciousness and beauty (Pan Feng, 2004). On the other hand, there are some taboos in Chinese culture, for instance, the white symbolizes death and inauspiciousness, often appearing in some funeral and burial situations; besides, the white means ignorance and vain, such as idiot, useless. Nevertheless, the black also has two kinds of meanings, for one thing, it usually connects with evil, crime, horror, acridness and so on. In some literary works, some monsters were named with the black, such as, Old Black Mountain Monster, Black King and so on. For another thing, it connects with fortitude and unyielding because of its same color to iron, such as Baogong in Beijing Opera; besides, it also stands for esteem, elegance, solemnity, usually appearing in some high-ranking situations.

Although the metaphorical meanings of the white and black are not absolutely distinguished in Chinese culture, but in most cases, the white stands for more moral meanings.

4. Moral Metaphor in Cross-cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication is based on interlingua communication, now that communication happens, demonstrating that there are similarities in different languages. As a kind of language phenomenon, similarities of moral metaphor can strongly identify it.

4.1 Similarities of Moral Metaphor

Every kind of culture has their own characteristics, nevertheless, we can still find some similarities because human beings evolve and develop commonly.

Because the original objects are fixed, stone is stone with the same formulating process. It is impossible for Chinese to recognize the stone shaped by crustal movement and weathering, but for foreigners to recognize the stone shaped by manufacturing. Metaphor system is formed according to our experience for objects in our real life. Therefore, they must have similarities in metaphor system.

For example, in the third part, the thesis mentioned face and the color white and black culture. For face culture, they have same meanings in reputation and social status, as well as in showing their competence and ability even their wealth. For the white and black culture, the white stands for purity, beauty and justice; the black stands for evil, horror and inauspiciousness.

Therefore, in the cross-cultural communication, regardless of people who belong to which field or level, they can understand each other and communicate happily and easily through the similarities of moral metaphor. To say the least, they will not make plain mistakes.

4.2 Taboos of Moral Metaphor

Of course, although there are similarities in moral metaphor, but there are still some taboos in it because of different philosophical values and traditional literature views in different countries.

In the third part, the thesis mentioned that face and the color white and black culture, the above stated similarities, here, it will list some taboos. In English-speaking countries, the white just stands for justice, purity, beauty and kindness without metaphorical derogatory meanings, but in Chinese culture, it embodies some inauspicious meanings, such as death, funeral ceremony as well as ignorance and vain, etc; the black also stands for commendatory meanings, such as fortitude and unyielding, as well as elegance, esteem and solemnity except for derogatory meanings, such as evil, horror, crime and acridness, etc.

People can avoid some unnecessary mistakes, and put themselves into others' shoes, even can understand and tolerate the opposite under knowing the taboos of moral metaphor so that they can prompt the cross-cultural communication to penetrate further.

4.3 Strategies to Solve the Taboos in Cross-cultural Communication

How to resolve this embarrassment? The thesis thinks that translators should introduce other language and culture through translation because it seems to be a bridge to connect two kinds of languages and culture. Besides, people should eliminate this cultural-centrism and prejudices, and try to achieve cultural equality. Finally, people should look for a consensus on this culture, understand cultural differences, tolerate cultural differences, and develop mandarin flexibility.

In fact, translation has functioned in cross-cultural communication, there are some English metaphors accepted by Chinese now, such as One stone, two birds; Two heads are better than one, etc.

This demonstrates that regardless Chinese or foreigners, people have paid attention to the significance of translation and cultural tolerance, next, people should develop translation better and cultivate later generations' tolerance so that the world culture reveals diversity and multi-patterns.

5. Conclusion

The thesis has outlined four parts of studying on moral metaphor in cross-cultural communication, let's recap them together. First part introduces the background of study on the moral metaphor, definition of the moral metaphor, as well as significance of the ethic metaphor. Second part mainly focuses on researches on the metaphor at abroad and at home as well as research paradigm of moral metaphor. Third part mainly states study on moral metaphors in English and in Chinese, including face and the white and the black three examples. Last part mainly talks about the moral metaphor in cross-cultural Communication, comprising similarities, taboos of the moral metaphor and the strategies to solve the conflicts in Cross-cultural Communication. Through the above four parts statements, the thesis finds that the regardless metaphor study or moral metaphor study, the English-speaking countries' history is longer than China's history, besides, the former has formed certain systematic theory from linguistics to later interdiscipline, such as cognition, psychology and so on, what's more, the former has adopted many study paradigms to study and test their theories so that they provide some research foundations for further study. In addition, the thesis finds that both English culture and Chinese culture have certain similarities because human beings evolve and develop commonly and some original objects are fixed. Of course, they also have their own taboos. In order to solve the conflicts of moral metaphor in cross-cultural communication, translation will play an important role in the communicating process, besides, through translation, different culture can make up their cultural vacancy and make their culture way towards diversity, tolerance and harmony.

References

- [1] Lakoff, G & Johnson. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- [2] Lakoff, G & Johnson. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- [3] Lakoff, G. (1994). Cognitive versus generative linguistics-how commitments influence results. *Language & Communication*, 53-62.
- [4] Lakoff, G & Johnson. (1980). *The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system: Cognitive Science*, 195-208.
- [5] Ortony, Andrew(1993). (ed). *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Ting-Toomey; Kurogi. (1998). Facework competence in intercultural conflict: An updated face-negotiation theory. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 187-225.
- [7] Eck Umbel. (2006). *Semiotics and philosophy of language*. Tianjin: hundred Flower Art Press.

- [8] Cai Longquan. (2005). Reflections on metaphorical expression as a foreign Language communicative competence. *Foreign language and Foreign Language Teaching*, 21-24.
- [9] Cao Qanping. (2004). Cultural study on metaphors of English and Chinese. *Jiangxi Normal University*, 12-15.
- [10] Fan Qi. (2014). ERP study of the mechanism of metaphorical cognitive neuroprocessing in Chinese. *Nanjing Normal University*, 3-7.
- [11] Gao Xia. (2006). Comparative study on metaphor concepts in English and Chinese. *Liaoning University*, 16-55.
- [12] Liu Yanfang. (2006). Misunderstanding between metaphor and cross-cultural communication. *Journal of Harbin College*, 103-105.
- [13] Wu Nianyang. (2006). *Psychological study of metaphor*. Shanghai: Shanghai Baijia Publishing House.
- [14] Wu Nianyang, Hao Jing. (2006). Conceptual metaphor with morality as its Noumenon. *Journal of Shanghai normal University (basic Education Edition)*, 51-55.
- [15] Yin Rong. (2014). Psychological reality of black and white metaphorical representations of moral concepts. *Nanjing Normal University*, 1-47.