

Study on Conceptual Metaphor in Chinese Anti-epidemic Discourse from the Cultural Context Perspective

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Abstract

Metaphor widely exists in daily discourse and shines people's extremely intelligent thinking. With the development of cognitive science, metaphor has become an indispensable cognitive tool. The awards ceremony for fighting against COVID-19 was held in Beijing Great Hall of the people and the speech of general secretary Present Xi at the conference was heartening. The speech contains a large number of metaphorical expressions, carrying the Chinese cultural information that was contained in the process of China's anti-epidemic. Under the guidance of conceptual metaphor theory and combined with cultural context, interpreting the metaphorical expression in the speech will help to understand the great anti-epidemic spirit of the Chinese nation and the profound connotation of Chinese civilization. Research results showed that war metaphors were widely used in the speech, which carried forward the Chinese people's brave and aggressive spirit in the process of fighting against COVID-19. The use of travel metaphors showed the confidence of the Chinese people to move forward bravely. The use of examination metaphors reflected the serious attitude and extraordinary wisdom of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government towards the epidemic.

Keywords

Fight Against COVID-19; Metaphor; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Cultural Context.

1. Introduction

At present, COVID-19 continues to spread worldwide. However, China has effectively controlled the epidemic and the life of the Chinese people has basically returned to normal. In order to award people and organizations that make outstanding contributions in the process of fighting against COVID-19, the awards ceremony for fighting against COVID-19 was held in Beijing Great Hall in September 8, 2020. President Xi delivered an important speech at the conference. Speech contains a large number of metaphorical expressions. Conceptual metaphor theory can provide a perspective to interpret the speech from the cultural context.

Modern cognitive linguistics research shows that metaphor is an important cognitive way for people to understand and express abstract concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conceptual metaphor uses concrete, familiar and easy concepts to understand and express abstract, unfamiliar or difficult concepts. The cross-domain mapping of metaphor is not arbitrary. It is restricted by people's physical experience and cultural experience. There are differences in the way of thinking and cultural connotation of metaphor in different cultural contexts (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Studies on conceptual metaphors have shown that many conceptual metaphors are shared by most languages, reflecting the cross-language generality or universality of conceptual metaphors. At the same time, there are differences in conceptual metaphor between different languages. What are the reasons for the difference? Zoltán Kövecses pointed out two kinds of reasons: different cognitive preferences (or ways) and different experiences (Kövecses, 2015). Here, different experiences refer to the context constituted metaphor, including different social and cultural environments, social and personal history, social and personal

concerns, etc. Zoltán Kövecses believed that culture is a system of meaning output shared by its members. People will choose to solidify metaphor or create novel metaphor under the guidance of cultural context (Kövecses, 2015).

At present, there are many studies about conceptual metaphor no matter in China or in other countries. However, there are few studies that focuses on conceptual metaphor about political discourse of fighting against COVID-19. Therefore, this paper will study the conceptual metaphor of the in the speech of Present Xi in the awards ceremony for COVID-19 fighters from the perspective of cultural context, in order to help people to understand the deep cultural background behind China's anti-epidemic action.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Study of Conceptual Metaphor

From the beginning of cognitive language research, metaphor has been regarded as a kind of linguistic deviation and parasitism. With the development of cognitive science, metaphor has become an indispensable cognitive tool. Zhao Yanfang pointed out that metaphor is not only an indispensable thinking ability for people to understand the world, especially abstract things, but also an advanced stage of people's cognitive ability (Zhao, 2001). In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson systematized their research achievements in metaphor and formed a relatively mature and perfect cognitive theory of metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory. The theory is that human thinking process is mainly characterized by metaphor, so human cognitive system is constructed by metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conceptual metaphor is a whole mapping across conceptual domains. There are a series of ontological or cognitive corresponding relationships between source domain and target domain. Its psychological basis is abstract image schema. People use the blending of two unrelated things to realize the mapping from the source model to the target model. Therefore, the focus of cognitive metaphor research is not on language, but on how people use one concept to explain another conceptual domain, that is, the cognitive function of metaphor (Yang, 2009). Metaphor is a structural mapping from one conceptual domain to another, usually from a known and concrete concept to an unknown and abstract concept. The essential feature of metaphor is based on the similarity between two things. This kind of "similarity" is not only based on the similarity of objective physical characteristics, but more importantly, some characteristics between two things can make people have similar associations in the cognitive field, which is an effect produced by the joint action of various senses.

Traditional metaphor studies only analyze metaphor as a common language phenomenon and believe that metaphor is only a rhetorical phenomenon that modifies discourse. In fact, as Lakoff said, metaphor is a universal phenomenon. It is everywhere. "Metaphor is persistent in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action (Lakoff, 1980)". Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory is a new breakthrough in the field of linguistics. Since then, metaphor has got rid of the shackles of traditional rhetoric and officially embarked on the road of cognitive linguistics and cognitive science.

Language is metaphorical. People can use metaphorical language to achieve the purpose of communication. But the role of metaphor is not only this, but also all aspects of people's daily life are inseparable from metaphor, because human cognition permeates in every link. Shu Dingfang pointed out that metaphor can help us understand the unknown by using the known things, or it can help us re-understand the known things (Shu Dingfang, 1998)". This sentence can be interpreted as that people's understanding of the things around them has changed from unknown to known through metaphor, and from forgetting or simple understanding to deep awakening through metaphor. If human beings lose their understanding of nature and society, then human beings will lose the significance and value of existence.

2.2. Conceptual Metaphor and Cultural Context

After years of development, the study of conceptual metaphor has achieved fruitful results, but there are also some problems and challenges. Kövecses pointed out that the current conceptual metaphor research ignores the role of context in the understanding and construction of metaphorical meaning. He emphasized the importance of context in metaphor understanding and production (Kövecses, 2015).

As an important context of conceptual metaphor, cultural context plays an important role in the recognition and understanding of metaphor. For example, people in different cultural contexts have differences in the understanding and use of moving time metaphor and moving ego metaphor (Li & Cao, 2019). Robert V. Levine and Ara Norenzayan tested the life rhythm of urban residents in 31 countries with three indicators: walking speed, people's waiting time for postal services and the accuracy of public clock compared with international standards (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). The result showed that eight countries from Western Europe and Japan generally have a faster pace of life, while non-industrialized countries rank lower.

In addition, cultural context also affects the output of metaphor. In European and American traditional culture, people believe that four liquids (phlegm, black bile, yellow bile and blood) and their related temperatures regulate the life process of human body and determine people's personality types, which are used to explain some medical problems. According to humoral theory, Westerners generally believe that anger is hot liquid in a pressurized container, which leads to the metaphor of anger is heat (Kövecses, 2000). In contrast, Yu Ning believes that "Nu" and "Qi" in Chinese culture are closely linked. When Qi rises in the body, there is anger, resulting in expressions such as extreme anger (Yu, 1995, 1998). It can be seen that the specific cultural context affects people's creation of metaphorical concepts.

At present, there are many studies about conceptual metaphor no matter in China or in other countries. However, there are few studies that focuses on conceptual metaphor about political discourse of fighting against COVID-19. Therefore, this paper will study the conceptual metaphor of the in the speech of Present Xi in the awards ceremony for COVID-19 fighters from the perspective of cultural context, in order to help people to understand the deep cultural background behind China's anti-epidemic action.

3. The Types of Metaphors in the Speech

Table 1. Types and Percentage of Metaphors in the Speech

Metaphorical Types	Metaphorical Words	The Number of Metaphors	Percentage(%)
War Metaphor	抗击、斗争、战略、牺牲、攻坚、胜利、保卫战等	180	66.91
Architecture Metaphor	构筑, 基础, 构建, 筑牢等	33	12.27
Travel Metaphor	初步, 阻挡, 前进, 道路等	22	8.18
Machine Metaphor	推进, 推动, 运转等	16	5.95
Plant Metaphor	蔓延	5	1.86
Examination Metaphor	大考、答卷、考验	3	1.11
other Metaphors	肆虐、出台、布局等	10	3.17
Total		269	100

By identifying all the metaphorical expressions in the speech of Present Xi in the awards ceremony for COVID-19 fighters, this paper classifies the metaphorical expressions and summarizes the source domains of representative metaphors, namely war, architecture, travel, machine, plant, examination and other metaphors. As shown in the table 1.

It can be seen from the data in the table that the most frequent types of conceptual metaphors in the report are familiar metaphors of war, architecture and travel, as well as machine metaphors, plant metaphors and examination metaphors. The number of metaphorical expressions in other categories is small, accounting for only 3.17%. Next, this paper will focus on the war metaphor, journey metaphor and examination metaphor closely related to the fight against COVID-19.

4. Conceptual Metaphor Analysis in the Speech

4.1. War Metaphor

War is a battle between two opposing sides to achieve their different purposes. War is a series of events launched in a certain time and space. War is dangerous and urgent. The knowledge of war is well known, so “war” is often used to construct the understanding of other abstract events. War metaphor is a cognitive way to understand and express other abstract events with the concept of war field, which can highlight the antagonism, danger and urgency of events. The outbreak of COVID-19 is a major public health emergency, and it is such an event full of antagonism, danger and urgency. War metaphor is widely used in Present Xi’s speech, which constructs a metaphor model of cross domain mapping between “war” and “prevention and cure of COVID-19”.

In Present Xi’s speech, war is the source domain and fight against the COVID-19 is target domain, which constitutes a metaphor that fight against COVID-19 is a war. War metaphors include enemy, confrontation, generals, warriors, strategy, defense and victory and so on. These concepts are reflected in the target domain of fighting against COVID-19, which helps express the idea that fighting against COVID-19 is a war, and the Chinese people take the most comprehensive and strictest measures under the leadership of the Party and government and finally, major strategic achievements in combating the epidemic were made. Relevant sentences are as follows:

(1)

我们坚持人民至上、生命至上，以坚定果敢的勇气和坚忍不拔的决心，同时间赛跑、与病魔较量，迅速打响疫情防控的人民战争、总体战、阻击战，用1个多月的时间初步遏制疫情蔓延势头，用2个月左右的时间将本土每日新增病例控制在个位数以内，用3个月左右的时间取得武汉保卫战、湖北保卫战的决定性成果，进而又接连打了几场局部地区聚集性疫情歼灭战，夺取了全国抗疫斗争重大战略成果。

(2)

面对突如其来的严重疫情，广大医务人员白衣为甲、逆行出征，舍生忘死挽救生命。全国数百万名医务人员奋战在抗疫一线，给病毒肆虐的漫漫黑夜带来了光明，生死救援情景感天动地！54万名湖北省和武汉市医务人员同病毒短兵相接，率先打响了疫情防控遭遇战。346支国家医疗队、4万多名医务人员毅然奔赴前线，很多人在万家团圆的除夕之夜踏上征程。人民军队医务人员牢记我军宗旨，视疫情为命令，召之即来，来之能战，战之能胜。

Countless wars, large and small, have taken place in human history. This sudden epidemic is regarded as a war. Under the leadership of the Party Central Committee, the Chinese people have made great strategic achievements through selfless dedication and mutual help. In the first example, war metaphors highlight the great achievements achieved in the comprehensive efforts against the outbreak of COVID-19 in the concerted efforts of the whole nation. In the

second example, it reflects the spirit of facing death bravely of anti-epidemic medical workers and the courage of medical workers that are not afraid of sacrifice in the face of a serious epidemic and the courage to fight the virus face to face. This spirit of heroism has played a role in demonstrating and encouraging the current era of fighting against COVID-19. In contrast, when some western countries use war metaphors, they divide the enemy and themselves among countries, stigmatize China by epidemic diseases, politicize the epidemic situation, which can understand the hegemonic thought of western countries. It can be seen that war metaphors formed in different cultural contexts are different.

4.2. Travel Metaphor

Travel metaphor conceptualizes abstract event progress into daily travel experience by taking advantage of the traveler's experience of moving towards the destination in daily life. Establishing a corresponding relationship between known travel knowledge and abstract concepts can help people expand their cognitive concept system.

In Present Xi's speech, travel metaphors were used to reflect the arduous journey to fight the COVID-19. The travel was source domain, and the fighting against the epidemic was the target domain. Different types of participants in the fight against the epidemic are travelers. Their common goal is to overcome the epidemic. There will be setbacks and difficulties in the fight against the epidemic. Participants need to move forward together and move towards their destination. Travel is a known concept, which shows the process that people fight against COVID-19 and helps people to understand the great history of the disease. Relevant sentences are as follows:

- (3) 历史和现实都告诉我们，只要国际社会秉持人类命运共同体理念，坚持多边主义、走团结合作之路，世界各国人民就一定能够携手应对新冠疫情，共建美好地球家园。
- (4) 从5000多年文明发展的苦难辉煌中走来的中国人民和中华民族，必将在新时代的伟大征程上一路向前，任何人任何势力都不能阻挡中国人民实现更加美好生活的前进步伐。

In the third example, Chinese people regard fight against COVID-19 as a journey. In the process of fight against COVID-19, China and other countries are travelers and they are heading towards the goal of containment of the epidemic. In the process, China is willing to work with other countries to safeguard public health safety in regions and the whole world. In the fourth example, Present Xi has made overall plans and pointed out the direction for fighting against COVID-19, ensuring that the fight against COVID-19 is moving in the right direction and finally will reach the destination of winning the epidemic. By contrast, because of the lack of correct guidance, western countries are not able to enter the emergency situation of fight against COVID-19 in short time, which leads the spread of the epidemic.

4.3. Examination Metaphor

Everyone will experience all kinds of large or small examinations in his life. Examination metaphors are based on real tests to map events or activities that are not real tests, such as the major public health crisis that people respond to COVID-19. Fighting against COVID-19 is regarded as an examination and the spread of COVID-19 viruses is not restricted by factors such as nationality, skin color and economic development level, which is fair because it is the same as test paper for all people in the examination. There will be high and low scores in the test, and there will be differences in the test ranking. Corresponding to the effect of epidemic prevention and control in different countries and regions in the anti-epidemic test, there will also be good or bad.

Present Xi's speech uses examination metaphor to describe the action against epidemic. Examination is the source domain and anti-epidemic action is the target domain. In the test of

fighting against epidemic, every country, every region and every person are candidates. Various problems will be encountered in the epidemic situation examination, but people prepare for the examination with a positive attitude, think seriously, constantly try to overcome the epidemic situation, and Wuhan's defensive war have made a great achievement. China has made a satisfactory answer to the examination of COVID-19, and has achieved good results. The familiar concept of examination can help readers better understand the difficulty of fighting and winning the epidemic. Relevant sentence is as follows:

(5)

在过去8个多月时间里，我们党团结带领全国各族人民，进行了一场惊心动魄的抗疫大战，经受了一场艰苦卓绝的历史大考，付出巨大努力，交出了一份满意的答卷，取得抗击新冠肺炎疫情斗争重大战略成果，创造了人类同疾病斗争史上又一个英勇壮举！

The fifth example regards COVID-19 as a severe test for China. The state and the individual have encountered various difficulties and adopted many effective Chinese methods. In the examination of fighting the epidemic, the Chinese people gave full play to their respective talents, united and cooperated, wrote correct answers in the epidemic response paper, and achieved excellent results. In the conceptual metaphor of "fighting the epidemic is an examination", as candidates, the Communist Party of China, the Chinese government and the Chinese people earnestly answered the problems encountered in the process of fighting the epidemic, and strived to achieve good results. After epidemic, the Chinese people have more deeply realized that the leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most important guarantee and reliable support.

The examination has the function of selection, and identifies the performance of countries in combating the epidemic. There are also articles on the Internet to comment on the anti-epidemic performance of various countries by taking the examination as a metaphor. Chinese candidates are rigorous and steady, and can quickly enter the state in the epidemic test. Although the test questions are very difficult, they can still complete the answers with high quality, and the whole answer process is serious and meticulous. However, western countries did not submit satisfactory answers in the epidemic test, they were careless. On the answers, there were many scores lost on basic questions such as "shortage of emergency medical materials", and finally they had a terrible performance and a poor result.

5. Conclusion

This paper recognized seven conceptual metaphors in the speech of Present Xi on the awards ceremony for fighting against COVID-19, namely war metaphor, architecture metaphor, travel metaphor, machine metaphor, plant metaphor, examination metaphor and other metaphors. And then this paper analyzed the conceptual metaphor of the in the speech of Present Xi on the awards ceremony for fighting against COVID-19 from the perspective of cultural context from three aspects: war metaphor, travel metaphor and examination metaphor. The war metaphor is that fighting against COVID-19 is a war. The travel metaphor is that the process of fighting the COVID-19 is a travel. The examination metaphor is that fighting against COVID-19 is an examination. These metaphors can share the experience and practice of China's anti-epidemic in an easy way and clarify the Chinese concept and proposition of global anti-epidemic, which show China's responsibility as a responsible country in the international community and then enhance the influence of Chinese culture.

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