

Conceptual Metaphor of COVID-19 in New York Times

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Abstract

Conceptual metaphor is an important theory of cognitive metaphor. Its nature is recognized as a rhetoric within the scope of traditional metaphor research. It is a deliberate deviation of literal meaning and an optional discourse modifier. Cognitive metaphor holds that metaphor mechanism is the projection from the source domain to the target domain. In this process, the establishment of similarity is fundamental, and the similarity relationship can be divided into physical similarity and psychological similarity. Things can enter both ends of metaphor by virtue of these two similarity relationships to produce rich and complex conceptual metaphor, which makes metaphor everywhere in our life. As one of the important ways of information dissemination, news discourse has a strong ideological tendency and political motivation, which has a subtle impact on the psychology of readers. Therefore, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, this paper uses conceptual metaphor theory to analyze the characteristics, types and cognitive mechanisms of conceptual metaphors in COVID-19 coverage in The New York Times. It provides ideas for discourse analysis of epidemic situation in the future.

Keywords

Conceptual Metaphor; COVID-19; New York Times.

1. Introduction

In early 2020, COVID-19 broke out and quickly spread around the world, creating a world-class public safety crisis. Since then, every country has developed a response strategy, waging an invisible war against the epidemic. Meanwhile, coverage of COVID-19 has become a hot topic in newspapers around the world. As one of the important ways of information transmission, news report is usually endowed with a strong ideological tendency and political motivation, which exerts a subtle psychological influence on readers. As one of the mainstream media in the United States, the New York Times occupies a leading position in the international opinion circle and has a huge influence on the construction and dissemination of crisis events. There are a lot of metaphors used in its coverage of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Therefore, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, this paper studies conceptual metaphors in COVID-19 reporting, analyzes the types, features, functions and values of metaphors, and aims to reveal the linguistic features and verbal communication significance of the extensive use of metaphors in COVID-19 reporting.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Status of Conceptual Metaphor

Metaphor has always been a hot topic in the field of linguistics and rhetoric. The study of metaphor in the West has a long history, which can be traced back to Aristotle's famous works *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* more than 2000 years ago. Aristotle made a systematic exposition of metaphor and put forward the definition, type, nature and function of metaphor. He believes that as long as the wording contains metaphor, it can be popular, but metaphor cannot be too

far fetched, otherwise it is difficult to see the relationship. However, we should not lose its superficiality, otherwise it will not impress the audience. In the 1980s, people studied metaphor from the perspective of cognitive psychology and pointed out that metaphor is not only a means of language rhetoric, but also a cognitive phenomenon, which is closely related to human thinking mode and thinking development process. Metaphors We Live By, CO authored by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, is an important work on metaphor, which introduces the study of metaphor from the category of rhetoric into the field of cognitive science. Lakoff and Johnson point out that metaphor is a way to understand and experience another thing with one thing, and it is a basic cognitive way of human beings. Metaphor is ubiquitous in daily life, not only in language. And in thought and action. Metaphor can provide us with a new perspective on things and give new meaning to daily activities.

According to the definition of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is the mapping of the structure from one conceptual domain (or cognitive domain) to another, that is, the mapping from "source domain" to "target domain". In other words, the conceptual domain on which a category depends is explained by another conceptual domain. Therefore, people can master the similarity between the old and new concepts through the "familiarity" of metaphor. Metaphor is a visualized language, which can make the sentence meaning clear, powerful and colorful, stimulate emotion and arouse Association, and make the language economical and concise. Various characteristics of metaphor have made it widely used in many levels of human cognition and social activities. In short, metaphor has become a common phenomenon in language use. As the British rhetorician Richards once said, "there may be a metaphor in almost every three sentences in our daily conversation."

Lakoff and Johnson in book of the Metaphor We Live By. This paper makes a comprehensive and detailed study on metaphor in the fields of human behavior, mode of thinking, conceptual category, language symbols and so on. This paper puts forward the proposition of conceptual metaphor, and divides conceptual metaphor into structural metaphor, orientation metaphor and ontological metaphor. Since then, more and more scholars have begun to study conceptual metaphor. Some focus on theoretical research, while others tend to apply conceptual metaphor to various fields, such as politics, economy, literature or other discourse. Few scholars have studied how to construct conceptual metaphors in disease news reports. In early 2020, the outbreak of New Coronavirus pneumonia and spread rapidly all over the world caused a world-class public security crisis. Since then, the COVID-19 epidemic has also become a hot topic in newspapers, and the metaphor covered by it has also become the focus of many scholars.

3. Types and Characteristics of Metaphors in the Report of Covid-19 Epidemic Situation

3.1. War Metaphor

According to Collins COBUILD Advanced English Chinese dictionary, war is a period of fighting or conflict between countries or between countries. War can be seen as an armed battle between political groups and organizations. Its purpose is to achieve some kind of political, economic and territorial integrity through the use of violence and abuse. For all species on earth, war exists everywhere except humans. Throughout history, people have always fought or waged war to get what they want. Due to the cognitive characteristics of war, many non-material activities can be conceptualized and discussed on the basis of war. From covid-19, we can see that war metaphors are widely used in news of new crown pneumonia, which is used to arouse people's fighting spirit, but also show the savagery and cruelty of new crown pneumonia.

The similarity between war and covid-19 shows that war is the source domain and COVID-19 is the target domain. Therefore, the key concept is that the battle with COVID-19 is a war. The

modern Chinese Dictionary (2012) defines "war" as "armed struggle between nations, countries, classes or political groups." As a social phenomenon, politics solves the struggle by violence and is the highest expression of contradictions and conflicts. Many wars have broken out in the process of human history. The Chinese nation can be described as a country rising from the smoke of arduous war. People are very familiar with the concept of war in their subconscious mind and can quickly express the war scene in their thinking. For example, in the war, the fierce contradiction between the enemy and ourselves, the cruelty of the war, the chaos of the war scene, and the loss of people in the war. This is people's impression of conventional war. There is a real enemy in the whole battle. The two sides have their own generals. They will formulate strategies according to the military situation, launch attacks, connect their weapons, use tactics to counterattack, there will also be deadlock, there may be a truce, and the outcome is nothing more than victory or surrender. War brings pain to people, both spiritual and physical. "COVID-19" is a highly contagious and sudden disease with heavy casualties. Therefore, there are a lot of war metaphors in relevant news reports.

(1) To tame public outrage, Beijing is determined to create a "good public opinion environment". It has sent hundreds of state-sponsored journalists to Wuhan and elsewhere to chum out heart-tugging stories about the front-line doctors and nurses and the selfless support from the Chinese public. China's propaganda spinners have some tough competition.

(2) Chinese medical workers at the forefront of the fight against the coronavirus epidemic are often becoming its victims, partly because of government missteps and logistical hurdles

(3) Chinese President and Communist Party leader, Xi Jinping, has praised hospital workers in Hubei as heroes, and mobilized the country in a "people's war" against the coronavirus. But hospital workers in Wuhan said they often felt frustrated and alone. Some have scrambled to buy protective gear with their own money, begged from friends, or relied on donations from other parts of China and abroad. Others have avoided eating and drinking for long stretches because going to the toilet meant discarding safety gowns that they would not be able to replace.

In example (1), the newspaper satirized that the Chinese government had sent a large number of reporters to report the epidemic. The verb phrase "chum out" means to produce mechanically and abundantly. Coupled with the adjective "state sponsorship", it means that the Chinese media's coverage of the epidemic has been controlled by the government and has a certain political purpose.

The New York Times focuses on doctors, ordinary people and vulnerable groups, portraying them as innocent victims. As we all know, many medical staff have stood in the front line of the fight against the epidemic and made generous contributions. Because of covid-19 outbreak, the protection of materials is not enough in a short time. The New York Times has repeatedly reported on the experience of medical personnel, but in the report, it did not sympathize with any group, but tried to politicize it. As shown in example (2), part of the reason is that the government has not taken action. In example (3), the New York Times quoted China's so-called "people's war". However, in their view, "war" lacks "people", and the Chinese government is just talking about empty slogans. In other words, the United States believes that the "people" represented by medical personnel have sacrificed their personal interests. Their psychological and physical needs have not been met, which means a deviation from the "people-oriented" declaration. However, these statements are the result of some observations. In the early covid-19 outbreak, it is undeniable that some unpleasant situations have been encountered in the process of fighting the epidemic, such as shortage of medical supplies and shortage of beds. Medical staff were also under great pressure during the epidemic. However, the New York Times tried to exaggerate this defect and use it to attack China's political system. The ultimate goal of portraying China as a "defeated soldier" may be to provoke confrontation between the people and the government.

In short, the war framework built by New York Times has distorted the reality of China's fight against epidemic: a war is spreading between New Coronavirus and mankind. People suffered greatly from the invasion of the virus. As for China's "battlefield", this struggle was hindered by the government, and the Chinese people suffered administrative inaction. Through conceptual metaphor, the New York Times has made China's anti epidemic efforts lose legitimacy, especially stigmatizing the Chinese government as an incompetent leader.

3.2. Container Metaphor

Container has the concepts of inside and outside, depth and center periphery, which is the most basic primitive experience of human beings. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and other linguists (LAN 2003; (Li 2004), events, actions, activities, States, time and relationships in the field of vision can be regarded as containers, that is, specific container image schemas are projected onto these abstract concepts. Through the analysis, the author finds that country, time, statement and activity are often regarded as containers to help readers understand news reports.

(4) Governments and companies around the globe are already scrambling to contain the illness, which has shown up in a smattering of cases beyond China.

(5) Outside China, airports have begun screening some passengers for symptoms, including in the U.S.

Country or city is not a specific thing, like books, cups or computers, we can touch. It is an abstract thing that exists only in the human mind. A country or city is conceptualized as a container in order to understand it in the news. In the above example, the country is metaphorically a container, so we can "enter" and "exit" the country. The above example conveys information that COVID-19 is spreading from Wuhan China to other countries in the world. In the US report, COVID-19's origin was specially emphasized, and China's efforts to combat epidemic diseases were satirized. However, in the early stage of the epidemic, the United States only blindly commented on other countries, ignoring the spread of the epidemic to its own country, and the epidemic gradually got out of control.

(6) The incubation period—the time between acquiring the virus and when symptoms begin—is estimated at anywhere between two and 14 days.

During the past decades, China has become much more of a world leader—including taking a stronger position on the global health stage—and has much more at stake in 2020 than in 2003.

(7) The reason for linking time and containers is that they have empirical similarities. Time is invisible and has no boundary, but if we regard it as a container and define its boundary with the metaphor of container, we will have the boundary of time. In the above example, "2003", "the past decade" and "day" are abstract time concepts, but they are conceptualized as a container. In other words, people regard time as a container with boundaries. The above analogy shows that the incubation period of coronavirus is 14 days. The US government has repeatedly stressed the length of the incubation period, possibly in order to shift the responsibility to China, with ulterior motives, which has been proved by the subsequent international situation.

3.3. Human Metaphor

Human metaphor is a general category that describes non-human things as human things. Because human body and human behavior are our most familiar experiences, human beings are often used as a medium to observe unfamiliar fields, worlds, emotions and so on. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that human metaphor enables us to use human actions, characteristics, emotions and activities to understand a large number of non-human entities. Human metaphor is of great significance to human thinking and cognition to a certain extent.

(8) Those countries are canaries in the coalmine that the virus is quite active—a sign that containment is reaching the end of its applicability.

(9) How pandemics have changed the world?

(10) That has enabled scientists anywhere to study the genetic fingerprint of the virus for clues about where and how it might have emerged.

(11) How many people will it kill?

(12) That raised the possibility that the pathogen is lurking more widely in the city.

In the above example, covid-19 is mapped as the source domain to people who behave like people and have human characteristics. The media used the keywords of "active", "killing", "changing" and "emerging" to describe COVID-19's flexibility, cunning and cruelty. It can be seen from these keywords that the U.S. report focuses on the detailed description of the virus, because it is considered difficult to defeat, leading readers to doubt that the failure to effectively control the pandemic virus is not the fault of the government, but too cunning, in order to divert public attention and reduce public condemnation of the government's inaction.

(13) The decisions to quarantine returning Americans illustrate the agility of the U.S. government's response.

(14) China may be racine into the future, but its bungled response to the coronavirns outbreak is a reminder of how suddenly it can stumble.

(15) Beijing's unwillingness to cooperate with international partners to prevent the emergence of a global pandemic turned China into the weak link in global health preparedness for the influenza-type pandemics that often originate there.

In the process of covid-19, the strength of the people alone is not enough. Countries have also played their due role. Human attributes include human characteristics, thoughts, motives, goals, emotions and so on. They are human qualities. But in the above example, the state is endowed with human characteristics, which is the use of anthropomorphic rhetoric. The state is also regarded as a person who takes action against COVID-19. For most people, the state is usually an abstract concept, but here, the state is a person who can deal with, race, cooperation and management. These behaviors make the country vivid and make people feel the existence of the country. The US government has been criticizing China's practice and trying to discredit China, but it failed to control the epidemic at home and lost the best time for prevention and control from the beginning.

3.4. Journey Metaphor

Journey metaphor is a common and familiar type of metaphor. Human life is always inseparable from food, clothing, shelter and transportation, and people often run on the road. The conceptual metaphor is "epidemic prevention and control is a journey", and the relationship between the journey and epidemic prevention and control is placed at both ends of the continuum. The mapping between the two domains is partially constructed, and the event of epidemic prevention and control is mapped based on the characteristics and relations of the journey domain.

According to Collins COBUILD Advanced English Chinese dictionary, travel refers to the process of traveling from one place to another, by land, air or sea. It contains a starting point and an ending point. Travelers may encounter some up and down slopes, intersections and landmarks during their journey. According to our physical experience, the mapping correspondence is established.

(16) Masks are a critical roadblock to spreading the virus in public places.

(17) The mild infections seem not to transmit to others, he said, so they are dead-ends for the virus.

During the journey, travelers often encounter obstacles and crossroads. In the fight against COVID-19, there are many difficulties that are taking a toll and even slowing down the response. They are all seen as obstacles in the journey. The use of keywords such as "roadblock" and

"desperate situation" by the media indicates that China has encountered some difficulties in dealing with COVID-19, and that development in other areas may be delayed by COVID-19. It shows the Chinese government's passive attitude towards controlling the spread of the disease, as well as accusations of mismanagement.

4. Functional Interpretation of Metaphor in COVID-19 Epidemic Report

Through the above combing and analysis of the COVID-19 epidemic report, it can be seen that the types of conceptual metaphors are rich, the realization forms of the origin domain are diverse, and the mapping between the origin domain and the target domain is systematic. People's thinking is based on metaphor, which is ubiquitous. The study of metaphorical discourse is a favorable evidence to spy on how people's thinking works. When people perceive and create the similarity of things, they integrate the subject's experience and cognition of the thing. The similarities and aspects established are the result of the constructor's perception. Therefore, metaphorical discourse inevitably contains the subject's cognitive judgment, values and evaluation appreciation. But at the same time, metaphor is regarded as a way of thinking from the perspective of cognition, but the realization of metaphor eventually returns to the form of discourse. Metaphor is developed on the basis of rhetoric. Metaphor is no longer just a decorative coat of language, but still undertakes the language function of rhetorical discourse. It is not reconstructed from the literal metaphorical discourse, making the expression more concise and vivid. It provides a new perspective for people to recognize and experience things and a way to understand the world. Therefore, we will analyze its function and value from the metaphorical discourse of COVID-19 epidemic report.

4.1. Cognitive Function

As a cognitive way, metaphor has the function of helping people understand things systematically. Shu dingfang believes that "the central concept metaphor is the root metaphor, and the metaphor derived from the central concept is the derived metaphor (2000:54)." Root metaphor contains derived metaphor and forms a harmonious system. With the help of analogy ability, it forms the mapping between the source domain and the target domain system, which helps people understand the target domain from the perspective of system. The use of metaphor in the news report of COVID-19 epidemic can help the audience organize the conceptual system and be more conducive to the cognition of the reporting object. For example, taking the metaphor of "epidemic prevention and control is a war" as an example, a series of derived metaphors are derived on this basis to help people understand the complexity and difficulty of "epidemic prevention and control" with the systematic characteristics of "war".

4.2. Language Function

Metaphor is an important way of language change and development. The use of metaphor is the embodiment of language function. "Refinement is the most obvious feature of metaphor. A series of meanings can be contained in a short word, which can arouse the listener's association with the whole relevant event and context (Shu dingfang, 2000:113)." In the initial stage of language production, due to the limitation of thinking development ability, "words and things are not clear correspondence, but fuzzy reference. The motivation of metaphor can be said to be a forced fuzzy metaphor (Shu dingfang, 2000:91)". Through social practice and the long-term experience between man and the world, we can obtain richer life experience, grasp social conventions and long-term memory. People's thinking ability in concept, judgment and reasoning has been greatly developed. The generation of metaphor is more because the metaphor builder consciously perceives and maps the similarities between the target domain and the source domain on the basis of clarifying the characteristics of the things in the target domain and the source domain, and even subjectively creates similarities between things

without physical similarity and different properties to express the cognitive subject's unique cognitive feelings about the target domain. The metaphor constructed under the subjective initiative is the intentional highlighting of the similarities of something. The cognition and judgment of things are integrated into one word, which makes the language expression of conceptual metaphor show the characteristics of refinement. The metaphor interpreter interprets the richer connotation of the metaphorical expression to the things in the target domain based on the existing life experience and the context.

The use of conceptual metaphor in COVID-19 epidemic report not only enhances the simplicity of language in news report, but also improves the image of language. In terms of image, Li Kui Liu believes that "direct image and indirect image are the differences in the degree of image of language. Language has only indirect characteristics. Direct language image needs to express the object vividly and clearly through any language way, while conceptual metaphor is an indirect image through the joint action of two or more levels (1999:3-5)". The image of language is connected with the experience of the mental world. The experience remains in memory and is re created through language. Conceptual metaphor is to lend the image imagination of this object to the other object, which makes the other object appear richer, vivid and clear.

4.3. Communication Function

The conceptual metaphor in the news report of COVID-19 epidemic not only enhances the simplicity and vividness of expression in language, but also serves as a cognitive tool to understand the world. Metaphorical expression is also the carrier of discourse information, while language is social. News reports face the majority of social groups and have considerable social value. Through a large number of conceptual metaphors, they can guide the audience, stimulate group emotion, cause group resonance and have a profound impact.

Philosopher Schaff once said that "language is the world knowledge accumulated in society and taught to all members of society through education. It is influenced by thought and creates a unique way for people to observe the world (2014:68)". In the face of fierce, complex causes, wide spread, serious harm and complex and changeable public health emergencies, the news report of the New York Times skillfully uses metaphorical discourse strategy and innovates the communication mode of news language. While transmitting epidemic information to the group, it also plays a role in guiding social public opinion. In addition to the emotion and ideology of news editors, news reports are also integrated into the national social ideology. They are expressed through news discourse and expressed in a large number of unconventional literal metaphors, which can more vividly and concisely convey the social ideology and mainstream values, stimulate the emotions of the audience and cause the resonance of the group.

"Through cross-domain mapping, metaphor can change people's perspective of understanding and change the way of thinking about problems, so as to rebuild the purpose of persuasion about the world with words and deeds, and with the help of metaphor (Zhang Lixin, 2014:26)". When people use the experience of one thing to understand the experience of another thing, they can guide the next behavior in practice through the value judgment and evaluation of the known things, and obtain the judgment of the target domain through the evaluation of the first source domain.

5. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the history of cognitive research in metaphor is ancient. In the Aristotelian era, the sages have already paid attention to the phenomenon of metaphor and the cognitive meaning in the language, but the cognitive function of what Aristotle describes as metaphor mainly exists in the ontological things. The systematic study of metaphor as the basic way of thinking and language is after cognitive linguistics. In the perspective of cognitive

linguistics, metaphor is the result of human creativity and imagination, which can be seen everywhere in human thinking and action. Based on experience, people understand the abstract and obscure understood objects with the familiar and understandable origin concept, through the way to project some characteristics, so as to establish the connection between conceptual systems, making most abstract thinking possible. Due to the "COVID-19 outbreak" suddenly, unprecedented, menacing, the whole society is facing very severe prevention and control challenges, medical institutions bear a very difficult treatment, as a real life reflects a lot of various types of metaphor, it should help people achieve cross-domain cognition, with words and deeds, to comfort public sentiment, persuade citizens, government intention, the help epidemic prevention and control, smoothly played the news media mouthpiece rather than deliberately guide, transfer public attention, hide the facts, as a political means to influence the audience.

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