

Conceptual Metaphor of Network Catchwords from a Cognitive Perspective

-- Take "Lying Flat" as an Example

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Abstract

Internet catchwords, as a special expression form of network language, contain a great deal of metaphorical expressions. The emergence of the Internet catchphrase "lying flat" in 2021 is the result of conceptual metaphor. Taking "lying flat", one of the top ten Internet catchwords in China in 2021, as an example, this paper discusses the conceptual metaphor mechanism in the process of its emergence and popularity, further reveals the cognitive attributes of Internet catchwords and enriches the research process of Internet catchwords.

Keywords

Cognitive Linguistics; Conceptual Metaphor; Lying Flat; Network Catchwords.

1. Introduction

According to the 48th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, as of June 2021, the number of Internet users in China reached 1.011 billion, the Internet penetration rate reached 71.6%, the number of mobile Internet users in China reached 1.007 billion, and the proportion of Internet users using mobile Internet was 99.6%, which was basically the same as that in December 2020. The Internet has entered all aspects of people's life, network catchwords have also emerged and developed, and have greatly enriched people's language and life. China's top ten network catchwords in 2021 are: the Age of Awakening; YYDS; Double Subtraction; Break the Defense; Metaverse; Juejuezi; Lying Flat; It is not that hurtful but extremely embarrassing; I didn't get it, I was just in awe; We are ready to build a powerful China. Internet catchwords not only show the creativity of Internet users in language use, but also reflect the concerns of Internet users. It is the crystallization of the wisdom of internet users. It is humorous and distinctive. Its recognition and use are very high. It is one of the representative characteristics of current online life. At the same time, it has also become a hot topic concerned by all sectors of society.

In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson first proposed: "metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also people's cognitive style." Therefore, using the conceptual metaphor theory in the field of cognitive linguistics to explore the values and social phenomena of a social group reflected behind the network catchwords has adaptability and explanatory power. "Lying flat", as one of the top ten network catchwords in China in 2021, will be discussed how the conceptual metaphor operation mechanism in "lying flat" comes into being and develops in this paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on Network Catchwords

2.1.1. Definition

As for the studies on the definition of network catchwords, different scholars have different opinions toward it from different points of view. Here are some typically representative definitions as follow:

The first view is defined from the use subject and spatial attribute. Jiang (2010) believes that network catchwords are the popular language on the Internet and the customary expression of netizens.

The second view is defined from the spatial attribute, time attribute and the field of generation and propagation. Professor Chen (2008) believes that network catchwords are "hot words that are produced almost synchronously on the network, quickly popular inside and outside the network, and have extremely strong vitality in a short time, but not for a long time, with the occurrence of real social news events. They are also called network thunder words and network hot words."

The third view is defined from the subject and form of communication Gao (2011) believes that network catchwords are all kinds of symbols, words, phrases and sentences created by Internet users, widely popular and used on the Internet, and can move from virtual to reality.

To sum up, it can safely conclude that network catchwords refer to popular network language and conventional expressions which are applied on Internet among Internet users. More specifically, it refers to words and expressions on Internet especially in online chatting room, BBS, Baidu Post Bar, and Web-log. Sometimes, it comes along on the Internet with some social events. Usually, it gains popularity quickly inside and outside the Internet and used by groups of Internet users during their communication on line.

2.1.2. Features

Network catchwords, as a unique language type, are difference from the language people usually use in actual daily communication or in literature works. Likely, they have their own unique features. Four main features are usually seen, namely, Innovativeness, Entertainment, Popularity and Periodicity.

1) Innovativeness

Network language is different from spoken language and written language, thus it is less limited to the language rules. At the same time, young Internet users have a great motivation or inclination to innovate or create novel expressions. In reality they have created large numbers of novel expressions to convey information by creating new words or phrases and giving new meaning to original words or phrases without changing their forms. Therefore, network catchwords show their innovativeness feature in both their form and meaning.

2) Entertainment

According to the 48th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, as of June 2021, China's Internet users aged 30-39 accounted for 20.3%, the highest among all age groups; Internet users aged 40-49 and 20-29 accounted for 18.7% and 17.4% respectively, ranking second and third among all age groups. As can be seen from the report, China's Internet users are mainly composed of young generations. Modern urban life is busy, and the actual communication between people is gradually decreasing due to the pressure of daily life nowadays. The high rhythm and pressure of modern society cause people try to find ways to relax themselves physically and mentally. In their regular work life, usually it is difficult for them to travel abroad or relax for a long time. Therefore, most people are surfing on Internet

during their leisure time, releasing their psychological pressure. Internet users use expressions of network catchwords to pursue humorous and facetious purposes.

3) Popularity

The professional terms in network language are more popular among computer, network professionals or lovers, but do not spread to the public. In addition, due to the limitation of regional culture, dialect catchwords can only be popular in the local area, and only a small part can spread outward (Chen, 2001). Internet catchwords are different. Due to the geographical and borderless nature of the Internet and its own language charm, after the popularity of Internet catchwords in cyberspace, due to the role of interpersonal communication and mass communication, it can spread beyond the online world, enter the real life space of the public, be widely used by everyone, and even spread all over the world. For example, an article in the Economist on July 3, 2021 talked about the phenomenon of "lying flat" of Chinese young people. The title is Youth Culture: Giving up, Lying Down. So "lying flat", as an Internet catchphrase in China, was introduced to foreign people and media.

2.2. Studies on Conceptual Metaphors

In this part, different views on conceptual metaphor, namely traditional and modern view, will be summarized, together with some related researches on conceptual metaphor.

2.2.1. Traditional View and Related Researches

Metaphor was initially thought as a rhetoric device from a traditional point at home and abroad, which includes simile, explicit metaphor and the loan metaphor. The first appearance of metaphor in the western culture comes from Aristotle's Poetics and Rhetoric (Butcher, 2000). He regarded metaphor as just a language phenomenon. The interactive theory of metaphor was put forward by Richards in his book Philosophy of Rhetoric (Richards, 1965). Being the first person to propose the idea of interaction, Richard provided a detailed description on how the interaction process is carried out by metaphor. Therefore, metaphor has been regarded as a cognitive thinking mode since then (Hu, 2004).

2.2.2. Modern View and Related Researches

The publication of the book *Metaphors We Live by* by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff, 1980) has changed the metaphor research from traditional limitation of rhetorical device to a modern view, and pushed the study into a brand new field in cognitive linguistics in a real sense. In their book *Metaphors We Live by* written in 1980, they regarded metaphor as a cross-domain mapping underlying the conceptual theory system and that metaphorical expressions are not in the language but also in thought. So they proposed Conceptual Metaphor theory. According to this theory, metaphor is a systematic way of thinking, acting and expressing ideas. In daily life, people often refer to familiar, tangible and specific concepts to understand the invisible and abstract concepts in thinking, and form a cognitive way of correlation between different concepts. Lakoff clearly pointed out that "metaphor is the mapping between two conceptual domains" (Lakoff, 1993:232). Metaphor systematically and correspondingly maps one conceptual domain to another through human cognition and reasoning, which is the mapping from source domain to target domain. People can understand why metaphor exists immediately. For example "We are driving in the fast lane on the freeway of love." this metaphorical expression uses the conceptual metaphor "love is travel". In this conceptual metaphor, we map the knowledge of travel to the understanding of love relationship. Lovers correspond to travelers, love relationship corresponds to transportation, and shared experience corresponds to travel. Therefore, when we drive in the fast lane, we walk a long way in a short time (with many shared experiences), which may stimulate a new life or bring potential dangers (the relationship may break down and the relationship between the two sides

may be hurt). It can be seen that there is such a cross domain mapping in the cognitive mechanism when generating and understanding metaphorical expressions.

2.3. Summary

Cognitive linguistics holds the idea that people's cognition and perception of the world is based on the process of their daily life experience and thinking pattern. This process is not arbitrary but orderly and rational. Therefore, it is not imagined or fabricated by people to create a network language, but the process of creating new concepts that are similar in some respects through their own experience and knowledge of some known concepts (Yan, 1995). According to Lakoff and Johnson, the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Conceptual metaphor is realized by the mapping from the source domain to the target domain, so there must be some degree of similarity between the source domain and the target domain. This similarity may be phonetic, semantic or pragmatic. Only with some similarities of the two domains, one can use a well-known concept to explore unknown or abstract concepts. The metaphorical phenomena in network catchword are constructed by these similarities of source domain and target domain, which have existed in people's subconscious thinking.

3. The Analysis of the Conceptual Metaphor of "Lying Flat"

With the help of the fermentation and dissemination of online media, the word "lying flat" quickly became popular with expression packs and popular quotations as the carrier, and was warmly sought after by the people. People shouted "lying flat 'leek' is not easy to cut", "whatever floats your boat, I'm lying flat", and "lying flat" if you don't agree with each other ". Many people even claimed to be "lying flat master ". As a result, "lying flat" has become another "life philosophy" that triggered the youth network Carnival after the "inner scroll", and has also become one of the most eye-catching labels of youth subculture. The following will explain the generation process of conceptual metaphor in the word "lying flat".

3.1. Background of "Lying Flat"

On December 4, 2020, the editorial department of biting words published the top ten buzzwords of 2020, and the word "involution" was listed on the list. "Involution" is originally a sociological term, which means that things cannot maintain a certain state and cannot achieve self-upgrading, and stay in the phenomenon of internal complexity and refinement for a long time (Zhu, 2020). In the second half of 2020, college students began to use "involution" to refer to irrational internal competition, and "inner volume" became more and more popular. Now the irrational competition in all walks of life can be called "involution". In 2020, COVID-19 was raging, and social and economic life was in chaos. After the epidemic was effectively controlled, although the social order returned to normal, affected by the epidemic, many small and medium-sized enterprises were seriously injured, and increased the work intensity in order to recover the losses, resulting in more fierce competition within the industry. This series of problems has led to great challenges and competition for college graduates in job hunting, postgraduate entrance examination and further study abroad this year. These social factors in turn lead to the white heat of internal competition in enterprises, universities and so on. "Involution" is the true reflection of this phenomenon. In recent years, new words and phrases produced by the social phenomenon of high work pressure, poor working environment and slow income growth have often appeared in newspapers. For example, "996", one of the top ten Internet terms in 2019, is a reflection of this phenomenon. With the passage of time, the pressure of "involution" continues to accumulate, aggravating the anxiety and helplessness of young people. Therefore, in 2021, more and more young people have turned from voluntary or forced to join the "involution" of society into rejection or even confrontation. Language is the

true reflection of people's social life. Under this background, lying flat, which is opposite to the semantics of "involution", was born.

3.2. Development of "Lying Flat"

In 2010, "lying flat bar" appeared in Baidu Post Bar, just using the original meaning of relaxing the body. From the appearance of "lying flat and being ridiculed" of celebrity fan clubs in 2018, lying flat has the meaning of "no response" and "no resistance". At the end of May 2021 and the first half of 2021, an article "lying flat is justice" unexpectedly became popular on the Internet. The author described how he could maintain his life through low consumption without a stable job for two years, and put forward the views that "lying flat is my wise movement" and "only lying flat is the yardstick of all things", which were called "lying flat master" by netizens, And has been sought after by many young people. So far, "lying flat" literally refers to the state of lying flat, which has been extended to a state of mind that people in modern society are difficult to resist in the face of great practical pressure, so they no longer yearn for success and actively reduce their desire. In other words, "lying flat" has changed from a concrete behavioral state to an abstract psychological state or behavioral attitude. The change of the meaning of "lying flat" is rooted in the role of metaphorical thinking. Professor Wang said that "if a word has polysemy, it is often caused by the change of word meaning, and the change of word meaning is mostly due to the role of metaphor" (Wang, 2007). Lying flat, as a network catchword, covers many social phenomena, and metaphorical expression is the concentrated reflection of these phenomena (Zheng, 2021). Symbolizing abstract concepts and recognizing unfamiliar things with familiar things are important features of metaphor

3.3. Cognitive Mechanism of "Lying Flat" Metaphor

Metaphor systematically and correspondingly maps one conceptual domain to another through human cognition and reasoning, which is the mapping from source domain to target domain (Lakoff, 1993). Therefore, we must analyze the metaphorical cognitive mechanism of "lying flat" from two aspects: cognitive subject and mapping.

3.3.1. The Cognitive Subject of "Lying Flat" Metaphor

The word "lying flat" has a wide range of cognitive subjects, mainly the contemporary youth groups active on the Internet platform. Their communication style often presents a one to many form, which is mainly determined by the multi interactive communication environment of cyberspace. To some extent, the audience of a blog or post may be tens of thousands of Internet users, and any user existing in this cyberspace may become the audience. It is this communication environment that determines that they can produce cognitive consensus in interaction. Wang Yin pointed out that "the use and understanding of metaphor will naturally involve the interactive relationship between the two sides. If the two sides reach a consensus on a metaphor, they may establish a conventional relationship and make it an effective communication tool between the two sides (Wang, 2006)."

3.3.2. Metaphorical Mapping of "Lying Flat"

The important mechanism of metaphor realization is the mapping from source domain to target domain. Generally, the source domain is familiar, tangible, concrete and common, while the target domain is unfamiliar, invisible, abstract and rare (Wang, 2007). The cognitive subject maps the structural characteristics of the source domain to the target domain, so that the concept of the target domain can be recognized and understood. This process mainly depends on metaphorical thinking. So, is the concept that can be mapped to the target domain arbitrary? The answer is, of course, No. Human beings have acquired thousands of knowledge concepts through social life experience. Which concepts can be mapped to the target domain mainly depends on whether there is "similarity" or "identity" between the two concept domains. Xu Shenghuan pointed out that "Identity is the generalization made by the subject of two (or more)

objects with different appearances according to their own understanding of the common characteristics of a certain aspect (Xu, 2014)." Identity limits the arbitrariness of the concept choice of the origin domain, so that the cognitive subject can establish an appropriate connection between the two concept domains, so that metaphor can be understood correctly. Through the above combing of the popularity of the word "lying flat", we can find some conceptual features related to "lying flat". For example: (1) low energy consumption (lying flat can reduce physical consumption and maintain the lowest living cost.) (2) Inaction (if you lie flat, you don't need to buy a house, buy a car, get married and have a baby.) (3) Soft resistance (as long as lying flat, interests cannot be reaped) no matter what kind of conceptual characteristics, it is the similarity between psychological feelings and physical reality that evokes the "lying flat" state in people's mind, which is the identity contained in the "lying flat" metaphor. The most easily associated with this identity may be the expression package of "Ge You(a famous Chinese actor) lying". Cognitive linguistics calls this psychological representation "intention schema". Wang Yin pointed out that intention schema is the key to understanding metaphor, because when a concept is mapped to another concept, especially from concrete to abstract domain, intention schema provides the main basis for us to understand abstract concepts (Wang, 2007). The realization of "lying flat" metaphor is the result of the mapping from the specific behavior domain to the abstract psychological domain. The intention schema provides the basis for the formation and understanding of this process.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that conceptual metaphor is a basic and important cognitive means of human beings, which is of great significance for the understanding and understanding of new abstract concepts. A large number of new words appear on the network platform every year. The emergence of these new words reflects the universality of conceptual metaphor. "Lying flat", as one of the popular words on the Internet in 2021, has representative metaphorical characteristics. But at the same time, in real life, there are very few young people who really choose to "lie flat", most of them are just ridicule and banter in words, which also reflects the unique narrative style of network language. Young people say to "lying flat", but when they stand, they struggle for themselves and the future of their country all the time. Therefore, the emergence of any language phenomenon is closely related to people's social living environment. Exploring the formation mechanism behind language is not only to help us understand this language phenomenon, but also to help us understand a social phenomenon.

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