

Analysis of Metaphors in *The Old Man and the Sea* from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract

There has been growing interest in investigating metaphors in literary works recently. However, most studies in the field of metaphor have only focused on its rhetorical function. However, little research has been carried out from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. This study adopts a cognitive linguistics approach to explore how conceptual metaphors function in literary works based on some analyses of the well-known novel *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. The results show that conceptual metaphors do play a very important role which helps people comprehend literary works much better. In the point of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is a kind of mapping tool and plays an important role in understanding some abstract concepts with specific things. Therefore, conceptual metaphors could definitely reveal the thinking mode of mankind to a great degree. And this study confirms the complex association between conceptual metaphors and *The Old Man and the Sea*. On the one hand, the findings in this study seek to understand and explain the role of metaphors in novel writing. On the other hand, it also presents a new way of appreciating literary works.

Keywords

Metaphor; Cognitive Linguistics; *The Old Man and the Sea*.

1. Introduction

The history of metaphor research could date back to 300 B.C. and the word “metaphor” is derived from the Greek word “metaphora”. In the historical investigation of metaphor, there are many representative theories, such as substitution theory, comparison theory, interaction theory and conceptual metaphor theory.

In ancient Greece, many scholars paid much attention to the study of metaphor from the perspective of rhetorical devices. People in the ancient Greek period have realized that metaphors exist widely in the language use of their daily life and Richards once pointed out it is possible to find a metaphor in every three sentences [1]. Additionally, Aristotle has also ever mentioned the role of metaphor many times in his works including *The Book of Songs and Rhetoric* and he also gives the definition of metaphor which means the metaphor is a sort of rhetorical tool for refinement in *Poetics* [2]. However, they just analyze the significance of metaphor due to the limitations of the times as well as cognitive ability. Aristotle holds that the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor [2].

The study of metaphor from the perspective of cognitive linguistics has become a hot topic in recent years because of the rapid-developing cognitive linguistics. Based on the conceptual metaphor theory, the correlation between metaphor and our thoughts is established. So the effect of metaphor in the cognitive field can never be underestimated.

In modern times, with the development of cognitive linguistics, an increasing number of linguists gradually start to study metaphor in a brand new view, turning their focus point from rhetoric to cognitive linguistics. Hence, the relevant theories and hypotheses of metaphor in the

perspective of cognitive linguistics have got developed and perfected to a great extent. Especially in the 1980s, the work *Metaphors We Live By* which could be regarded as a milestone in the development of metaphor research written by Lakoff and Johnson pushed the study of metaphor forward by a big step [3]. In the view of Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is not only a kind of figure of speech, but a thinking mode or cognitive tool. In other words, metaphor is the basis of human conceptual system and was elevated to the level of cognition. They hold the use of metaphor is to build a mapping relation in the process when understanding some abstract concepts with specific or familiar things [3]. Additionally, the classic theory namely conceptual metaphor theory was put forward in the book and it could be applied in various fields, especially literary works analysis. There are three types of this theory, including ontological metaphor, structural metaphor and orientational metaphor.

Metaphor frequently exists in our language usage. However, metaphor is just understood as a rhetorical device by many people for a long period. Scholars begin to pay attention to its cognitive functions after modern linguistics, especially cognitive linguistics rises, and the conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Lakoff & Johnson is the core of cognitive metaphor. The term "conceptual metaphor" is used by Lakoff & Johnson in their masterpiece *Metaphors We Live By* to refer to a cross-domain mapping from source domain to target domain [3]. And its three main characteristics are universality, cognition and systematicness [4]. And Zhao Yanfang believes that "metaphor is an important cognitive model and the root of new linguistic meaning" [5]. Actually, metaphor is used for understanding what is strange or unfamiliar to listeners or readers. So, it could be applied in various aspects such as comprehending language interaction and analyzing literary works with a brand new perspective. Since then, many scholars have tried to take advantage of cognitive linguistics to reinterpret metaphors existing in language use including poems, novels, lectures and so on. That is also to say, people own a kind of competence that knowing something new by what they have known or experienced in this way namely metaphor.

This thesis will illustrate the conceptual metaphor theory and provide a new angle and method to appreciate and analyze the phenomenon of metaphor in literary works, taking the classical novel *The Old Man and the Sea* as an example.

Metaphor is the object of multi-disciplinary research, from philosophy, psychology, and language to artificial intelligence. The study of metaphor has a long record. So far, a large number of researchers have carefully studied metaphor from different angles. In addition, *The Old Man and the Sea*, as Hemingway's world-famous masterpiece, has its unique literary art and language style. Many scholars have studied this novel from various aspects, and metaphor analysis from the perspective of cognitive linguistics is a very novel and innovative starting point. In this study, some analyses with specific research were used to address the following research questions:

- (1) How does metaphor function in literary works?
- (2) How does metaphor function in literary works? How to interpret metaphor from the perspective of cognitive linguistics in *The Old Man and the Sea*?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Definition of Conceptual Metaphor

"Conceptual Metaphor", this concept firstly appeared in *Metaphors We Live By*. And it is the main theoretical foundation of this thesis, which includes ontological metaphor, structural metaphor and orientational metaphor. In brief, the definition of conceptual metaphor is a systematic mapping from a concrete conceptual domain to an abstract conceptual domain. Fauconnier has ever stated in his work, people are establishing mapping relations between mental spaces and the material world when people are thinking and talking [6]. And conceptual

metaphor theory has become the essential method and angle to analyze the language phenomenon in the past several years.

2.2. The Classification of Conceptual Metaphor

2.2.1. Ontological Metaphor

In the world, not everything exists in the form of an entity. Ontological metaphor means that people could comprehend what is abstract to them mainly including the cognitive experience with some specific entities. Hence, the cognitive objects can be understood by quantification and classification recognition. In Lakoff and Johnson's work *Metaphors We Live By*, there is a typical example of ontological metaphor, that is, "THE MIND IS A MACHINE". In this sentence, the mind, as the target domain can be regarded as an entity. It is the premise of some sentences which can be understood.

In addition, a kind of ontological metaphor is used very often in literary works namely the container metaphor. It containerizes its own non-container ontology such as emotions, horizons, events, behaviors, states, and moods so that it has boundaries, and its contents can be accessed and quantified. For instance, "STATE IS CONTAINER" (state is a container). If a certain state is regarded as a container, then it is inside the container when it is in this state, and it is outside the container when it is not in this state.

2.2.2. Structural Metaphor

Structural Metaphor is a kind of phenomenon of various usage of a word [7]. Structural metaphor is how one concept is metaphorically constructed by another concept. It is to explain what they cannot explain clearly directly. Among the three types of conceptual metaphors, structural metaphor is the most commonly used. Structural metaphor enables us to construct another concept with a highly structured and clearly defined concept. "LIFE IS A JOURNEY", as a typical example, illustrates the characteristics of structural metaphor well. Life is an incomprehensible concept, however, the journey is not so far from people's cognitive range. In other words, they could take advantage of what they suffered in their journeys to promote their understanding of the concept of life. There could be some understanding of the example sentence "LIFE IS A JOURNEY".

2.2.3. Orientational Metaphor

The orientational metaphor also plays an important role in language use. It is a metaphor constructed by reference to spatial orientation, such as up and down, front and back, and far and near. The wonderful use of positional metaphor in language use, especially in literary creation, can often bring excellent artistic effects. For example, Lakoff and Johnson summarized the metaphors of UP and DOWN in detail in their books. Generally speaking, UP is related to something positive, and vice versa [3].

3. The Analysis of Conceptual Metaphor in *The Old Man and the Sea*

3.1. Ontological Metaphors in *The Old Man and the Sea*

In this novel, the sea definitely is the most important image containing the information that the author wants to convey and it also plays the role of concatenating the full text. When it comes to the word "life", maybe a lot of people will feel confused and think it is a little abstract. However, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the author analogizes the sea to the concept of life. The sea can be regarded as the concretization and materialization of life. The reason for this analogy is that there are many similarities between the two concepts. For example, Sometimes the sea is peaceful but sometimes surgy, just like the ups and downs, setbacks and achievements in people's life. So, this is an ontological metaphor in this work. By

describing what happened on the sea, the readers could not only get a better understanding of the protagonist, that is, the old fisherman, but think about their own life experiences.

Furthermore, the little boy could also be seen as the kindness as he is willing to trust the old fisherman no matter how unlucky the old man is and encourages him greatly. There must be such people in daily life, who always give people in trouble the hope and strength to confront fearlessly difficulties. So the little boy is a positive image that the author wants to create, which is a metaphor for light and kindness. In this metaphor, the abstract concept of kindness can be explained by the entity namely the boy in the mapping relationship between the two things.

Additionally, the sea in the novel is also a typical container metaphor, one of the ontological metaphors. It can be regarded as a huge container, which contains fishermen, sharks, marlins, seabirds and so on. And based on the container, the readers are guided to understand what the author wants to express, that is, people's lives in a changing sea, which will inevitably witness dawn and darkness, stormy waves and calm, like ups and downs in life. Therefore, readers can understand the theme more vividly from the entity image constructed by the author.

3.2. Structural Metaphors in *The Old Man and the Sea*

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the author uses a lot of structural metaphors to enrich the story, enhance readability and show language art. Firstly, Santiago was exhausted after catching a marlin, but unfortunately he was attacked by sharks. During this period, he dreamed of lions many times. The lion is a conceptual metaphor. Because there are many similarities between the old man and the image lion. More specifically speaking, according to the conceptual metaphor theory, there exists a mapping relationship. In other words, the old man can be regarded as the source domain which is not clear for readers to know the character. And the lion, as the target domain, could help to understand the personality characteristics of the old man. As we all know, the lion is a kind of beast with great strength and courage, which is exactly reflected in the fishing process in the work. More specifically speaking, the fisherman dares to face the difficulties and challenges in his life even though he did not get a satisfactory harvest for a long time and never gave up easily in the process of fishing. So this is like a lion's quality in hunting. Readers will know what person the old man is through their cognition of lions, for example:

(1) "Up the road, in his shack, the old man was sleeping again. He was still sleeping on his face and the boy was sitting by him watching him. The old man was dreaming about the lions." [8].

Second, the shark is also an important structural metaphor. In real life, there must be all kinds of evil forces and obstacles and setbacks in life. It is not easy to give a clear expression of what the evil force is like directly. And the shark shares some features with it. It is fierce and wants to take away the fruits of the old man's labor after the old man catches marlin, which brings great trouble to the old man. Depicting such an image as a shark, the author skillfully and vividly expresses the dark side of life, and also paves the way for the metaphor of the struggle between the old man and the shark in the following contents.

Third, the marlin is equally important, it is the object of fishing for the old man. He took the marlin back to the shore through untold hardships. For him, this is not only the harvest of this trip to sea, but also the realization of the life value of a fisherman.

Besides, there are many other structural metaphors used flexibly by Hemingway. Take, for instance, the following examples.

(2) "bullet shape", "shovel-nosed" and "shovel-pointed heads" [8].

The first one is used to describe the shape of tunas and the last two show the ferocity and danger of sharks. From these examples, it is much easier for readers to learn the specific shape or characteristics of the sharks.

And in the process of struggling with sharks, we could discover a metaphor—LIFE IS A BATTLE. The following table is about the correspondence of this typical metaphor.

Table 1. Mappings between Life and Battle

Life is a battle	Source domain	Target domain
Cross-domain mappings	Battle	Life
	A soldier	The old man
	The battlefield	The sea
	Enemy	Shark

Therefore, from the cross-domain mappings, the picture of struggling between sharks and the fisherman can be presented much more vividly to readers.

Actually, this whole novel is a structural metaphor for Hemingway's life situation and choice. Specifically, Santiago, also an experienced old fisherman, failed to catch a fish for 84 days in a row. This is highly consistent with the author Hemingway's life experience. Before Hemingway wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*, there had been no works published for ten years, and his literary career was at a low point, and he was questioned and ridiculed. In this very similar background, both of them chose to move forward bravely. Hemingway expresses his loneliness, confusion and hope. Meanwhile, he also makes his life choice by using the image of a fisherman.

3.3. Orientational Metaphors in *The Old Man and the Sea*

Besides ontological metaphor and structural metaphor, the orientational metaphor also plays an indispensable role in literary works. It is worth noting that the usage of locative metaphors is not easily perceived by readers most of the time. The author of this dissertation will explain three major orientational metaphors in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Firstly, in the novel, the protagonist makes a living by fishing on the sea. And in the first few chapters of the novel, the old man said that he would go further than before when he went to sea this time for a big fish.

(1) "The old man knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean" [8].

In the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the concepts "far" and "close" here mean not only the geographical distance to the sea in his voyage, but refer to reality and dreams. Because dreams are usually far away, and if you want to realize them, you must dare to go far away. The dream of the old man is to catch a big fish, so he is determined to sail to a distant place.

Secondly, there is also a pair of typical orientation metaphors in the novel, that is, "above the sea surface" and "below the sea surface". In other words, "above the sea surface" means "up" while "below the sea surface" means "down". In the process of struggling between the old man and the shark, the old man and the shark represent different forces respectively. On the one hand, sharks want to compete for the big marlin from the old man, on the other hand, the old man tries his best to protect his prey and fights with sharks at sea. Below the sea surface, it is surging secretly, while above the sea surface, only an old man's lonely boat sails on the vast sea surface. That is also to say, "up" including the old man, the sky, the sun and birds are the symbols of hope and bravery, instead, the "down" includes surging current and brutal sharks' darkness and insidiousness. So by describing the mapping of orientation between novel and reality, the author gives the picture more profound meanings, and absolutely helps readers understand these two opposing forces.

At last, the "edge" and "center" also run throughout the full novel, which helps to shape the three-dimensional and comprehensive image of the old man.

(2) "The village water supply was two streets down the road" [8].

On the one hand, the novel mentions some things about the old man when he was young. At that time, the old man was strong and respected, but now he is old and frail, he is ignored and edged by everyone as he cannot catch many fishes. Only the little boy has been firmly supporting him. This tandem contrast highlights the inner loneliness of the elderly. On the other hand, the location of the old man's cottage also implies this. Where the old fisherman's life is far away the street means the old is not are out of other people in the town.

4. Conclusion

This paper used qualitative methods to analyze the metaphors filling in the work *The Old Man and the Sea*, and mainly listed some examples from the perspective of three classifications of conceptual metaphor namely ontological metaphor, structural metaphor and orientational metaphor. Analyzing the metaphors could help readers to get a better understanding of the theme in literary works accordingly. In other words, this also provided a brand-new way to interpret literary images. And there are some implications for learners, we could try to use some methods from the perspective of cognitive linguistics to analyze texts and train thinking ability.

By consulting previous research results and combining Hemingway's literary masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea*, the author of this thesis makes a brief analysis of the application of conceptual metaphor in literary works and its artistic effect from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. The main findings are as follows. First, conceptual metaphors absolutely play essential roles in a large number of literary works as they could not only help the author to add to the diversity of novel language, but enrich the readability for readers. And that is exactly why they are so popular as well as well-sold all over the world. Additionally, the novel, as a reflection of real life, implies that there exist a large number of metaphors in our daily life. Second, from the point of conceptual metaphor, the usage of metaphor is not only a kind of rhetorical device, but a thinking mode that could help people to understand some somewhat abstract concepts.

Although this thesis has done a lot of literature investigation and example analysis on the use of metaphor in literary works from the cognitive perspective, there are still many limitations. First, The document literature on metaphor from the cognitive perspective is voluminous and hard to understand. So in the process of writing, it cannot be achieved to integrate all theories and research. Second, due to a lack of time and energy, the relevant examples in this thesis are still not enough as expected, and the persuasiveness needs to be improved. Thirdly, because the research perspective is limited to cognitive linguistics, the deep exploration of metaphor is still lacking.

Therefore, on the one hand, the author hopes that there will be more and more research on metaphor from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, extensively analyzing all kinds of language materials which are not limited to literary works, to further improve the research on cognitive metaphor. On the other hand, follow-up researchers can try to make up for the deficiency of this thesis by making supplementary research from the perspectives of other linguistic branches.

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