

A Contrastive Study of Temporal-spatial Metaphor between Chinese and Americans*

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Abstract—Psychological time orientation includes past, present and future. Spatial-temporal metaphor tends to be used for understanding the abstract temporal concept. Chinese adopt “Time-moving Metaphor”, in which the future is in the back and the past is in the front. In Americans’ “Ego-moving Metaphor”, front is assigned to the future and back to the past. The paper makes a contrastive study of Static Past-oriented Chinese and Dynamic Future-oriented Americans. The difference is closely related to the ideology, cultural tradition and language system.

Index Terms—psychological time orientation, temporal-spatial metaphor, static past-oriented Chinese, dynamic future-oriented Americans

I. INTRODUCTION

The time frame includes past, present and future. Which segment do Chinese and Americans emphasize? We will come to the psychological time orientation.

The past-oriented society or culture is one that places a strong emphasis on reliving old times and retelling old stories. These cultures have high regard or respect for their parents and elderly persons in the society. (Guo & Hu, 2013)The British, for example, as characteristically close as they are to Americans, place much emphasis on tradition and on the past. Ancestor worship and family tradition played strong roles in Chinese culture. China is a typical example of the past orientation of time.

Unlike the Americans or the British, many Spanish Americans, Filipinos, and Latin Americans place a strong emphasis on present orientations of time. For these present-oriented societies, pleasure is derived from events in the present and the spontaneity and immediacy of events are viewed as most important. As Prosser (1978) has so aptly noted, “Live for today; eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you may die” perhaps expresses the present value orientation of time.

The third orientation and the one with which Anglo-Americans are most familiar, is that of the future orientation of time. In **the future-oriented society**, an emphasis is placed on tomorrow—a tomorrow that is bigger and brighter only if one works and saves today.(Loretta A.Malandro, 1989)

In addition, people under different time orientations may have different view on the pattern of time. In future-oriented societies time is linear, which means that it moves only one direction, from the past to the future. In present and past-oriented societies people regard time as cyclical. According to them, time repeats itself according to some pattern. They may attach more importance to historical, seasonal and daily cycles than people in future-oriented societies do.

II. TEMPORAL-SPATIAL METAPHOR

Spatial-temporal metaphor tends to be used for understanding the abstract temporal concept. Lakoff has contributed to the distinction of temporal metaphor, that is, Ego-moving Metaphor and Time-moving Metaphor. There are two space—time metaphoric systems: ego-moving and time-moving metaphor. The basic distinction is that they have different understanding of front and back in a time line. Thus, with the data from the Chinese and English languages, an analysis has been made on temporal metaphor.

A. Time-moving Metaphor

Time-moving metaphors identify the events temporally ordered with another in the time line. In time-moving metaphors, time can be conceived of as preceding and following one another in which time flows from the future via the ego, the point of reference, to the past (Ahrens and Huang, 2002). In this metaphor, the future is in the back and the

* This paper is the scientific research achievement of the project supported by Youth Foundation of Changchun University of Science and Technology “A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Temporal Concept between Chinese and Americans” (XQNJJ-2013-17).

past is in the front (Gentner, Imai, and Boroditsky, 2002, p. 539). For example, 'The final exam is before Thursday' in which 'before', a space term, indicates 'the final exam' is proceeding 'Thursday'. Therefore, the final exam is in the relative the past and Thursday in the relative future. (Huang & Hsieh, 2007)

Chinese adopt "Time-moving Metaphor". In this metaphor, the future is in the back and the past is in the front, such as "时间如流水"; "后浪推前浪", "前天", "史无前例", "前辈", "前车之鉴", "空前绝后", "后天", "今后", "后辈", "后起之秀", "后继有人" etc.

B. Ego-moving Metaphor

Ego-moving metaphor recognizes the event in the time order with the ego/observer. It attributes motion over a landscape to an entity. The observer comes from the past and moves via the present to into the future, while time as the reference ground remains stationary. Indicated by this metaphor, front is assigned to the future and back to the past (Gentner, Imai, and Boroditsky, 2002, p.539). Americans adopt "Ego-moving Metaphor". In this metaphor, front is assigned to the future and back to the past

eg1 I look forward to your reply.

eg2 A new life lay ahead of him.

eg3 That's all behind us now.

eg4 This town dates back to Roman times.

As a spatial-temporal metaphor, time is represented as motion and sequence. Therefore, the spatial concepts of QIAN/HOU or FRONT/BACK are used in Chinese and English respectively to represent time in two similar schemas. The two languages, however, differ in their conceptual instantiation and usage frequency. Chinese speakers regard temporal sequence as an obvious continuum in which the past is joined to the future at the present. They tend to adopt the static past-oriented schema to observe and express time. In contrast, in English speakers' mind, the time line is divided at the present into the past and future, which represent two separate schemas. They tend to instantiate a dynamic future-oriented schema more frequently. The different tendencies in question are related to differences in ideology, culture and language mechanism.

III. STATIC PAST-ORIENTED CHINA

China is a typical example of static past-oriented societies. As a Chinese proverb goes, "Consider the past and you will know the present." When we confront new situations, we prefer looking to the past for guidance. We consider past events to be relevant to new situations. Chinese cultural values influence this psychological time orientation.

Chinese are oriented to the past. In 2014 Premier Li keqiang delivers a speech in the African Union

非洲历史悠久，文化灿烂，是世界文明的发源地，对人类文化的丰富多样和交流传播有着深远影响。不论是人类共同的“祖母”露西，还是古老的金字塔，不论是简单而韵律明快的鼓点，还是质朴而活力四射的舞蹈，都是非洲亮丽的名片。在当今世界的音乐、雕塑、绘画等艺术形式中，都闪耀着非洲文明的璀璨光芒。

Sino-African relation is very important for China, especially in the United Nations. As we all know, Africa is backward. In above examples, Premier Li said "非洲历史悠久，文化灿烂，是世界文明的发源地，对人类文化的丰富多样和交流传播有着深远影响。" Premier Li looks back at African splendid civilization. Premier Li minimizes dispraise of African countries. He maximized praise of Africa by their splendid national culture and their increasing trade volume. Premier Li wants to show equal status and shorten the distance between China and Africa.

上世纪六七十年代，为了支持南部非洲国家民族解放事业和打破种族隔离制度封锁，中国人民勒紧裤带援建了坦赞铁路。在这条铁路的建设中，有65名中国优秀儿女长眠在非洲大地。

同样，在中国恢复联合国合法席位时，非洲兄弟喜极而泣，欢呼这是发展中国家的伟大胜利。这就是我们同命运、共患难的奋斗历史，是我们永远珍视的宝贵精神财富，是中非关系未来发展的不竭源泉。

Premier Li does some review of the harmonious relationship between China and Africa. Since last century, Chinese have been making a great effort to help Africans. By comparison with the western countries, China and Africa have something in common. Both of them are underdeveloped. Premier Li adopted Sympathy Maxim showing that China and Africa need each other.

A. Values and Past-oriented Schema

To show respect for ancestors. We Chinese pay deep homage to our ancestors. Ancestors can influence our lives and provide special benefits for us. In Chinese, if we address somebody, we will put the surname ahead, such as "王教授, 李博士". Because Chinese pay much attention to the surname of their ancestors. Chinese show respect for their ancestors with such address terms. English speakers on similar occasion will say "Prof Wang, Dr Li", because they put more emphasis on the title.

An English name generally has 2 parts—the first name and the surname (or family name). The first name occurs before the surname. Some English names contain the third part. There is a middle name between the first name and the surname. On the contrary, the surname is put at the beginning of a Chinese name because of Chinese ancestor worship.

The inheritance of the land reflects an ancestral continuity in China. For instance, farmland in China is related to a sense of security. It can be passed through generations; money may be used up, but not the land. Land values often

center around kinship ties. This tie is reinforced by ancestor worship and creates a bond between a man and his land. It is not impossible for a man to sell his land but to break the bonds of filial piety. Because these bonds are so rarely broken, from childhood onward, a man develops a sense of personal identity with his land; it becomes a part of his very personality. (Dodd, Carley H, 1987)

To show respect for elders. Confucianism is a religion that began in China. It has deep influence on Chinese values. Confucius emphasizes filial piety. That is, we should show respect for the elder. Considering the following:

孟懿子问孝。子曰：“无违。”樊迟御，子告之曰：“孟孙问孝于我，我对曰：‘无违’。”樊迟曰：“何谓也？”子曰：“生，事之以礼；死，葬之以礼，祭之以礼。”

子游问孝。子曰：“今之孝者，是谓有养。至于犬马，皆能有养；不敬，何以别乎？”

子夏问孝。子曰：“色难。有事，弟子服其劳；有酒色，先生馔，曾是以为孝乎？”(Liu,1999)

We consider age as a symbol of wisdom. When we find ourselves in a tight corner, we are willing to consult older family members. To most aged people in China, old age is a happy time. The old receive honor, privilege and satisfaction. When they are too old to live alone, they live with a son, daughter or other relatives. The young call them “grandmother” or “grandfather” even if they are not related to them.

There is a degree of respect for age-up to a point in the United States. Some Americans seem to lose respect for their senior family members and senior citizens in general, from retirement age on. The old don't live with their children or relatives. If they have enough money, they buy houses or apartments in places where other old people live. If they are not healthy and strong enough to live alone, they live in special homes for the old. There, strangers take care of them. For many North Americans, old age is not a happy time. North American parents value their children and their needs more than the their own parents or grandparents.

In China, parents attach importance to children .They spend more time in taking care of children, from the daily life to their studies. If a problem occur, they will help children solve it. In order to prevent children from being hurt, they will tell their children what to do and how to do. In general, Chinese children take parental authority for granted. We are accustomed to asking parents for advice. Even if we have got a job, we can still get money from our families. Our parents give disinterested assistance to us. To honor our parents is our virtues. It is our duty to support our parents when they become old.

In contrast, Americans live an independent life usually by age 18 or 21. Americans think that if they depend too much on others, they will lose some of their freedom. They stress individuality and making one's own decisions by the midteens. Disregarding parental authority, they have their own ways. They communicate less with their parents. Chinese regard such action as dishonoring parents.

To take pride in Chinese splendid civilization of 5000 years. As Chinese, we are proud of our splendid civilization of 5000 years. For us, historical background is very important. Our consciousness is steeped in the past. We prefer the past as a guide to know how to live at present.

China Millennium Monument (in Beijing), as China's commemorative landmark for the new century—21st Century, is displaying China's five millennia to the world. If one roams through it, he will be impressed by the proud determination of the contemporary Chinese people to carry forward their civilization. China Millennium Monument symbolizes our culture's persistence for thousands of years. It is our emotional force in the new century.

Panorama of Millennia-Old Chinese Civilization. Panorama of Millennia-Old Chinese Civilization which is the great panorama of the 5000-year-old Chinese civilization in gigantic colored stone relief presents its superb force and beauty to you, with its life-like and individual images seemingly on the verge of stepping out of its long cultural and historical process to greet you. Here, every Chinese may hold a dialogue with his or her ancestors, and the invigorating spirit of the Chinese people may be renewed, with every scene in the mural impacting, edifying and refreshing his or her spirit.

B. Long-term Orientation

Chinese have histories that date back thousands of years, so they find it normal to take a long-range view of events (Larry A.S&Richard E. P&Lisa A.S , 2000). That is, China lives in their ancient pasts or in the far distant future.

For Chinese, “a long time” can be equated with thousands of years or even an endless period. Confucian teaching stress foresight and perseverance, as shown in the Analects of Confucius,

子曰：“人无远虑，必有近忧。”

子曰：“刚，毅，木，讷近仁。”

Chinese are farsighted. We focus on long-term goal rather than short-term present. Our government adopts economic policies for the sake of China's long-term development and Chinese future generations.

IV. DYNAMIC FUTURE-ORIENTED AMERICA

Americans never question the fact that time should be planned and future events fitted into a schedule. They think that people should look forward to the future and not dwell too much on the past. Compared with Chinese, the respect North Americans have for their elderly is indeed pale. Americans are highly future-oriented. If one works hard today, his future will be bright.

Americans are oriented to the future. President Obama's Inaugural Address in 2013 as follows,

We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully – not because we are naïve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more durably lift suspicion and fear. America will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe. (Obama, 2013)

Obama looks forward to the future. After he was elected, he imagines a lot. Obama makes a promise to resolve differences with other nations meanwhile he aims to obtain people's support.

A. *Goal Setting and the Future (Joseph E. McGrath, 1988)*

People set goals, then adopt strategies and behaviors intended to attain those goals. Goals typically are to be met at some point in the future, and behaviors carried out in the present are expected to increase the probability of reaching the goals.

Most Americans believe in close relation between present actions and future outcomes except Black Americans. Historically growing up Black in the US has meant receiving a lot of disconfirming evidence about the conditional probability that present action will alter future outcomes. For Blacks in America, getting good grades by studying hard has often not been reinforced with the prospect of thereafter getting better jobs. Institutional racism serves this connection and reduces the extent to which it is practical for Black Americans to believe in the present action-future outcome contingency that underlies a future time perspective.

B. *Short-term Orientation*

For Americans, a “long time” can be almost anything—ten or twenty years, two or three months, a few weeks or even a couple of days (Hall, 1959). To Americans, “long-term” projects lasting two to three years are very common. Compared to Chinese, Americans have shallow views of the future.

Americans look to the future, their future is not very far ahead of them. The future to them is the foreseeable future, not like Chinese future that may involve centuries. Since most American companies are publicly owned and must report all financial details quarterly for use by banks, security analysts, and the government, American businessmen tend to think in short-term intervals. In contrast, Chinese businessmen tend to plan for twenty, thirty, even fifty years in the future. It is our advantage during international business negotiations.

There are some American employees who feel great loyalty toward their company. Most employees, however, are primarily concerned about their own careers and expect to change jobs and companies if it enhances their opportunities for greater pay, greater recognition, or promotion. Changing jobs is often the only route to advancement. Employees who think they will not be with the company for very long are less concerned about decisions that will not have an impact until some future time when they may no longer be there. Thus, mobility is one more contributor to the short orientation of American business.

American business executives are assigned overseas for short periods, usually two years, which is simply not enough time to learn the language and integrate into the society. Additionally, since they expect to be leaving in two years, they may feel the effort of learning the language would be wasted, another example of how the American short-term orientation adversely affects business performance. (Hall, 1990)

Psychological time orientations have some practical implications. As we know, western producers prefer science fiction works, such as Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). However, Chinese films are centering around historical figures. The reason for the difference is that we are apt to favor film characters who are similar to us, and one important point of similarity may be psychological time orientation. Americans with a future time orientation favor science fiction characters. Chinese with a past time orientation hero-worship some historical figures from whom we can learn a great deal when we deal with new situations.

V. CONCLUSION

Temporal-spatial metaphor plays a crucial role in the process of representation of abstract concept time. The two space-time metaphoric systems are ego-moving and time-moving metaphor. Chinese adopt “Time-moving Metaphor”, in which the future is in the back and the past is in the front. Americans adopt “Ego-moving Metaphor”, in which front is assigned to the future and back to the past.

Chinese are Static Past-oriented. Americans are Dynamic Future-oriented. Chinese have long-term orientation, while Americans have short-term orientation. In daily life, we had better shift time orientations on the basis of actual conditions. A past time orientation plays an important role in building harmony relationship with family. If we spend our holidays, a present orientation will be appropriate. At work, a future orientation is of benefit to productivity.

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