A Study on Chinese TALK Metaphor from Corpus-based Approach

Ruifeng Luo
School of English Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China; Foreign Language Department, Sichuan Vocational and Technical College, Suining, Sichuan, China

Abstract—Metaphor is a vitally important concept in Cognitive Linguistics and refers to the mapping from source domain to the target domain. It is the mapping from the concrete entity to the abstract one, through which we can understand the process of men’s mental cognition to handle abstract things through specific ones and has been researching by many linguistic scholars by means of traditional methods such as introspection. The Corpus method is a newly utilized and empirical method to conduct linguistic research and contains the language materials of real and the actual use of language, and corpus is the carrier of basic language knowledge resources based on the computer. The real corpus must be processed (analysis and processing), in order to become useful resources. This paper takes advantage of CCL Corpus (Center for Chinese Linguistics Corpus) which is the biggest Chinese Corpus in China constructed by Beijing University to investigate TALK metaphor and conduct the empirical research to make metaphor research more objective and convincing.

Index Terms—metaphor, corpus, TALK, CCI.

I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is sometimes and traditionally used as a general term for figurative or non-literal language. It is difficult to determine whether a word or phrase should be understood metaphorically or not. In Cognitive Linguistic view, metaphor is a creative process in which an existing linguistic form is used to express a meaning similar, but not identical, to its conventional meaning (Kovesces 2002). Individual metaphors are built on an inferable analogy between the original and the novel meanings, or the ‘source’ and ‘target’ meanings in Lakoff and Johnson (1980)’s terms. Importantly, however, metaphor is not a deviant special case of language use, nor is literal use the default setting for language; Metaphorical language use is often specifically considered exceptional only because of the seductively erroneous assumption that language is a tool which enables the speaker to encode meaning and the hearer to decode it (Wilson & Sperber 2012). Linguistic communication is, however, not simply an encoding-decoding process, nor is it even a process of reverse-engineering in which the hearer puts the speaker’s original meaning back together again (Mufwene 2002; Brighton, Smith, & Kirby 2005). Rather it is best characterised by the complementary processes of ostension and inference (Sperber & Wilson 1995). Metaphors are defined by the analogical connections which can be drawn between the source and target meaning, and are interpreted in the same way: the hearer infers the parts of the source meaning relevant in the communicative context and constructs an ad-hoc interpretation based on the relevant semantic fragments.

Corpus contains a large scale computer-aided analysis of very extensive collections of transcribed utterances or written texts. Corpus data has led to methodological and theoretical innovation in linguistics in general. Clear and detailed explanations lay out the key issues of method and theory in contemporary corpus linguistics. A structured and coherent narrative links the historical development of the field to current topics in ‘mainstream’ linguistics. Practical activities and questions for discussion at the end of each chapter encourage students to test their understanding of what they have read and an extensive glossary provides easy access to definitions of all technical terms used in the text (McEnery & Hardie 2012). Currently, the research of Metaphor of Cognitive Linguistics is more convincing with the benefit from the empirical support provided by Corpus data.

Language is the most important communication tool for human beings. As a medium for human communication, language has an impact on politics, economy and society, science and technology, and culture. The cultural phenomenon of language is developing constantly, and its present spatial distribution is also the result of the development of the past. People use language to preserve and transmit the fruits of human civilization. Language is one of the most important characteristics of a nation. Talking is the oral manifestation of human communication, and we do a lot of talking every day to communicate with others. TALK is the most direct way for people to express themselves and transmit information. Thanks to talking, the relationship between people begins to become tight.

II. METHODS

As TALK can express people's thoughts and feelings, it has its own abstract features. However, in the use of language, people give it physical features by means of metaphor. In the contemporary view of metaphor, metaphor is not only a rhetorical phenomenon but a way of perceiving the world by human beings, in which human beings utilize the
experiences of one domain to explain or understand concepts of other domains. Metaphor is pervasive in human life. The TALK itself is just a voice form (spoken language) or text symbols (written) and the semantic carrier, which is abstract. But when people take TALK as object, they often use the metaphor way to use the attribute of other things to understand it. The “talking”, is abstract and difficult to understand. In order to enable people to understand this communication tool, this paper will study how the TALK’S source domains are mapped onto its target domain with the help of the data attracted from CCL Corpus. The key word TALK related Chinese words such as hua 话, yan 言, shuohuaxiang 说话像, shuohuara 说话如 are examined on CCL Corpus to get the sentences containing above words. If the numbers of the sentences are many that 2000 sentences are selected. And, the sentences of TALK which are met are selected from which the percentage is drawn to show the distribution of metaphor in the chosen sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical Items</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Total Numbers</th>
<th>Numbers of Metaphor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hua 话</td>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yan 言</td>
<td>Talk</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shuohuaxiang 说话像</td>
<td>“Talk” is like</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shuohuara 说话如</td>
<td>“Talk” is like</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>86.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table1 shows that life is the target domain and English TALK has two Chinese translations, namely, hua 话 (shuohua 说话) and yan 言 (shuohua 说话). We use the Chinese lexical items hua 话 (shuohua 说话) “Talk”, yan 言 “Talk”, shuohuaxiang 说话像 “Talk is like”, shuohuara 说话如 “Talk is like” retrieve them in CCL respectively to see how many metaphors there are in their respective total numbers and what are their source domains.

In hua 话 (shuohua 说话) “Talk”, the total surveyed numbers of sentences containing hua 话 (shuohua 说话) “Talk” are 2000, and the numbers of metaphor are 67. The percentage of metaphors is 3.35%. The hua 话 (shuohua 说话) “Talk” relevant metaphors are paohuyijiahua 抛出一句话 “throw a word”, hualoudongbaichu 话漏洞百出 “The loopholes appeared in the words one after another.”, huaasuanliuliu 话酸溜溜 “The word is sour.”, zhonghua 重话 “heavy words”, huaxiazi 话匣子 “talking box”, huaasuanliuliu 话酸溜溜 “The loopholes appeared in the words one after another.” metaphor are 31.

In yan 言 “Talk”, the total surveyed numbers of sentences containing yan 言 “Talk” are 2000, and the numbers of metaphor are 31. The percentage of metaphors is 1.55%. yan 言 “Talk” relevant metaphors are chiyuanpianyu 只言片语 “isolated words”, yangfangzhongliu 言方行圆 “contradictions between words and deeds”, yanbihuowen 言之无文 “words without literary” metaphor are 13.

In shuohuaxiang 说话像 “Talk is like”, the total surveyed numbers of sentences containing shuohuaxiang 说话像 “Talk is like” are 45, and the numbers of metaphor is 18. The percentage of metaphors is 40%. The shuohuaxiang 说话像 “Talk is like” relevant metaphors are shuohuaxiangdayami 说话像打哑谜一样 “Talk is like guessing”, shuohuaxiangfaguanzhongtou 说话像放贯穿头 “Talk is like piercing”, shuohuaxiangzhibianqianzi 说话像剪线头一样 “Talk is like piercing” metaphor are 15.

In shuohuara 说话如 “Talk is like”, the total surveyed numbers of sentences containing shuohuara 说话如 “Talk is like” are 15, and the numbers of metaphor is 13. The percentage of metaphors is 86.66%. shuohuara 说话如 “Talk is
like” relevant metaphors are shuohuarutongerxi“Talk is like a trifling matter.”, shuohuarutongshengzhi“Talk is like a decree.”, shuohuarutongdadianhuayiyangxi“Talk is like clear calling.”, shuohuarutongfangpi“Talk is like fart.”, etc.

From the table1, we can see that the numbers of metaphor of shuohuaru“Talk is like” and shuohuaxiang“Talk is like” are highest accounting for 86.66% and 40% respectively. The numbers of metaphor of hua“Talk” and yan“Talk” are lowest accounting for 3.35% and 1.55% respectively.

III. RESULTS AND EXPLANATIONS

According to the examples from CCL, we can conclude that TALK metaphors fall into different source domain: Material domain, State Domain, Sensory Domain.

A. Material Domain

Chinese always metaphorizes “words” as a container which can hold things, such as, hualiyouhua“have one’s tongue in one’s cheek”, huaxiaozi“talking box”, etc.

There are internal and external sides in the container. So there is the expression of “the word outside” and “the word inside” in Chinese, and words as a container can not only store things, but also can be opened and closed. As the material, words have two types: soft words and hard words.

1. He misunderstood that I had my tongue in my cheek and his eyes became grey blue. I looked at his young face, wrinkles and white hair had become a camouflage.

2. The words he said to the orphan was full of affection.

3. The prose has refined words and is poetic.

4. Now that we have talked things out, it is all right. Let’s hurry up to the next agenda of the meeting.

5. After a few drinks, the guy opened the talkingbox.

6. He knows his wife is soft, so he always says soft words.
He knew his wife was soft, and he said soft words to her.

(7) 新中国建立初期我中国怎敢谈那类强硬话呢?

How can China dare to say such hard words in the founding of People’s Republic of China?

B. State Domain

We humans live in the physical world, and know things from the understanding of the specific matter, which provides the material basis for our physical experience to understand and express thoughts and feelings and psychological abstract fuzzy activities, events, and other intangible concepts. In general, we tend to organize our non-physical experiences with physical experiences. The expression and understanding of words are abstract, and people always use the metaphorical cognitive approach to make the TALKmetaphor a concrete and tangible entity.

Words has the feature of Weight. Because the object has a weight, “words”, after being metaphorized into entity, has the weight difference. The weight difference depends on the importance of “words” in the minds of people. In general, important words” shows the feature of weigh and vice versa.

Words has the feature of shape. As an object, it has an external shape. When we make the words metaphor into an entity, we also give the words a certain shape.

(8) 她举止优雅，说话轻言细语，一副江南女子的模样。

She is elegant talks gently and is a typical Jiangnan woman.

(9) 你可以觉得自己是人微言轻的无名之辈，也可以心灵充实。

Though you think you are in humble position and your word does not carry weight, you can also enrich your heart.

After hearing Sun Zhongshan’s sincere words, the children were inspired, and seemed to grow a lot.

The teacher’s words carries weight and the students only obediently obey.

The teacher said a light words to the students who failed in the examinations.
(13) 中国队也要用实力来赢球，不要给别人话柄。

Chinese team should use its strength to win the game, don’t give others handle.

(14) 一位老大爷慢悠悠地接过话茬儿。

An old man leisurely talked with others.

(15) 见他收不住话头，妻子忙给他使眼色，并斟满酒向着客人唱起了欢乐的歌。

He could not stop his words and the wife was busy giving him a wink and filled wine to the guests to sing the song.

(16) 我的意见完全是被杨某的甜言蜜语所欺骗。

My opinion is completely fooled by Yang’s sweet words.

(17) 医院明白了张朝安为什么要提出带张春华回乡，更加苦言相劝。

The hospital understood why Zhang Chao’an wanted to take Zhang Chunhua home, and persaded him honestly.

(18) 别老说那些酸溜溜的话。

Don’t say those sour words again and again.

(19) 看到一张张亲切的脸，听到那一声声温暖的话语，我便激动不已。

Seeing the kind faces and hearing the sound of warm words, I felt excited.

(20) 电话那头甩来一位女士生硬冰冷的话，便挂断了。

Seeing the kind faces and hearing the sound of warm words, I felt excited.
Upon hearing a lady’ stiff and cold words from the phone, I found the phone hung up.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper makes a tentative analysis of the metaphorical meaning of “words” by means of corpus and cognitive linguistics to show that TALK is abstract but by means of metaphor, we can use the concrete entities to describe it and make it tangible and easy to understand. The Corpus data offers valid and real language materials to explain the amount of metaphor TALK in real world. We can see that the understanding of the concept TALK depends on the other related concepts such as material, food, taste, etc. These materials are closely related to our daily lives and provides vivid picture to let the men know how concrete our TALK metaphor is because we know these experiences well. So metaphor is grounded in our daily experiences. All the understanding of TALK must be connected with these concepts by means of metaphor. It is difficult to talk about the concept of TALK without these elements in source domains. The reason why life is so rich in metaphorical expression is that metaphor mapping is a process of feature focus and feature suppression. Every focus of the metaphor of talk can only highlight the characteristics of a certain aspect, and all aspects of TALK need to be understood.

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Ruifeng Luo was born in Sichuan, China in 1982. He is studying for doctorate of Linguistics in School of English Studies of Shanghai International Studies University, China. He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages, Sichuan Vocational and Technical College, SuiNing, China. His research interests include Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics.