

Metaphor of Hand in Chinese: A Conceptual Metaphor Theory-Based Analysis

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Abstract:

Metaphor is an indispensable aspect of cognitive linguistics and it is found in various fields in our life. The body and bodily experience are potentially important source domains for conceptual metaphors to construct abstract concepts. Thus a large number of metaphors are from our bodies or bodily experience such as hand which is a prominent part of human body. This study aims to classify metaphors of hand in Chinese into structural, orientational and ontological metaphors, to figure out whether the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) of Lakoff and Johnson (1987) is applicable to analyze metaphors of hand in Chinese. Following, the comparison of metaphorical hands between Chinese and English is conducted to see the difference or similarity. This study shows the metaphorical meanings of Chinese 'hand' can be analyzed by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), in which Chinese 'hand' is used as conceptual metaphors similar as English 'hand'. Meanwhile, there are also differences of metaphorical 'hand' existing between two languages. It is hoped that this paper will be beneficial to metaphorical studies of body cognitive linguistics.

Key Words: Metaphor, Hand, Chinese

Introduction

Metaphor is the figurative speech which identifies something that is identical or same to other unrelated things for rhetorical effect, then it highlights the similarity between two things. More than 2000 years, metaphor was generally considered as a fundamental figure of speech, especially in literature, to the present, it becomes a popular topic of linguistic investigations (Fan, 2017). In everyday speech, speakers use metaphor, such as idioms, usually without realizing it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In the early decades, metaphor was recognized as a stylistic device in language expression, however Reddy (1979) claimed that the language used every day is mainly metaphoric. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is the main theory in the field of metaphor analysis. One of the core view of points of CMT is that metaphor is basically a phenomenon of thought rather than language. Based on CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphor is classified into three types: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. Conceptual metaphor has attracted attention in recent years, especially studies on body parts. Body, as one of the most common and closed things to human, is a universal source for metaphors. Therefore, there are plenty of studies conducted on bodily metaphors such as eyes, head, figure, palm (Amm, 2000; Biljana & Nadežda, 2012; Yu, 2000), etc. Besides these studies, hand has also attracted much attention since it is one of the most frequently used and functional body parts in our life (Fan, 2017; Zhou, 2011). However, few of the previous studies discuss the metaphorical meaning of Chinese 'hand'

in terms of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Therefore, this study firstly aims to investigate whether the three categories of metaphors in CMT can be found in Chinese 'hand'. Following that, the comparison between 'hand' metaphors in Chinese and English will show the differences and similarities between two different languages.

Review of Literature

The Relationship between Metaphor, Body and Culture

When we speak metaphor, actually, it is always a connection with metonymy in our minds. The reason is that metonymy frequently occurs between bodily experience and metaphor, then metaphor forms abstract concepts (Yu, 2008: 388). According to the so-called "circular triangle relationship" of Yu (2003a), we conclude that conceptual metaphors are always derived from bodily experience, then it is filtered by culture in certain aspects. At the same time, conceptual metaphor also constructs cultural model to a large extent.

In the study of Yu (2001), it is claimed that human body and physical activity are universal sources to create meaningful metaphorical expressions because all human share the similar bodily experience and functions. The typical metaphorical expressions of "face" in English and "脸 (liǎn) or 面 (miàn)" in Chinese share the same figurative meaning of "appearance, indicator of emotion, relationship, dignity and prestige". This similarity is obviously based on biological facts and function of our "face". To be more specific, in languages, if A stands for the metonymy from the perceptual organ of eyes, B is the metaphor from the physical action of touching. Then A and B partially merge and form perceptual experience C: seeing. Finally, seeing is metaphorically mapped onto mental function of thinking and understanding. This process explains how "lower" bodily experience conceptualizes "higher" mental experience.

Culture model serves as an indispensable role to interpret bodily metaphors in four viewpoints (Yu, 2003a: 393). First, same body parts or experiences may structure the different metaphorical expressions in different cultures, in contrast, different body parts and experiences may express similar metaphorical conceptual meanings. For instance, the conceptual metaphor of "hand" in English and 手(shǒu) in Chinese share similar conceptual meanings. However, when we look at metaphors of "finger" and 指(zhǐ), variations exist between English and Chinese. For example, finger stands for action only in English. Moreover, it is noteworthy that different body parts may stand for the same concepts in different cultures. Finger, in many contexts of English, expresses the same meaning as "hand" in Chinese, for instance, the English idiom of "*a thief's finger is sticky*" and the correspondent idiom in Chinese is "*a thief's hands are sticky*". There is another difference among different languages: the applicability of metaphor to the target domain concepts. The target domain of finger or 指(zhǐ) in Chinese is "what the finger points to", which is only appropriate to be used for certain negative targets in English, however, 指(zhǐ) is applicable in a broader range in Chinese such as "accusation, intention, dependence, appointment and assignment".

Nevertheless, the extent in which conceptual metaphors are manifested linguistically also vary significantly in different languages. "Palm or 手掌(shǒu zhǎng)", both in English and Chinese refer to "control", its linguistic manifestation is very limited with only two idioms in English: *hold/ have.....in the palm of one's hand*. Moreover, more Chinese compounding words containing

掌 mean “control”. The last difference is that body parts may be implicitly or explicitly used in different languages. For example, English speakers use “point out” without showing “index finger”, however in Chinese “指出(zhǐ chū: finger pointing-out)” is more explicit by referring a bodily action of using “finger” (*ibid*: 394).

Metaphor of Hand in Chinese

This section offers specific insights for the metaphorical expressions of hand in Chinese. In the previous studies, along with the researches on body-part, investigations on hands have been conducted and the metaphorical standards for hand-expressions are based on function, shape and position of hands (Hyun & Yeon, 2007). Fan (2017) conducted a comparative study on metaphorical expressions of ‘hand’ between Chinese and English languages then to explore the causes of the universality variations from cognitive and cultural perspectives. The main metaphoric meanings of Chinese ‘hand’ are summarized and presented in Table 1. Besides the main metaphors of Chinese ‘hand’ shown in Table 1, there are some other examples, moreover, they are from the ancient classic Chinese thus rarely used and recognized by the public nowadays so that they are not shown in the table. According to the examples taken from the Chinese lexicon, it is concluded that our hands play a prominent role in the emergence of linguistic meaning. It is inferred that due to the same functions or our hands from the practical daily lives and routine works, the semantic lexicon of “hand” is formed in the similar way in both English and Chinese social contexts.

Plenty similarities between Chinese and English metaphors of hand can be attributed to the common human bodily experience and physiological structure of human body (Fan, 2017: 91). Nevertheless, the existing differences between two languages are caused by their corresponding specific cultures, since the bodily experience can only tell what possible metaphors are and largely dependent upon its cultural contexts. As stated by Quinn (1991) that a cultural model functions as a major role in constituting speakers’ comprehension of the world and constrains the selection of metaphors.

Table 1 Metaphors of Chinese ‘Hand’ (手) (Fan, 2017: 86-89)

Metaphors of Chinese Hand (手)	Examples
Ones Who Performs a Particular Job	选手(player), 能手(dab hand), 拖拉机手(tractor driver), 助手(assistant), 扒手(pickpocket), 旗手(flagman), 副手(assistant), 帮手(helper), 一把手 (boss)
The Motion of Hand	搭手 (help), 转手 (passed from), 插手 (join in something), 还手 (struck somebody back), 手舞足蹈 (jumped for joy), etc.
Handwriting	妙手 (excellent painters), 手迹 (original handwriting)
Skill, Ability	身手 (skill), 得心应手 (in someone’s element), 心灵手巧 (skilled),

	棋逢敌手 (equal in terms of functionality, skills)
Control, Possession	束手就擒 (being arrested without offering any resistance); 手到擒来 (being like off a log), etc.
Sides, Aspects	左右手 (right-hand man); 手下 ((working) under someone); 手头 (the matter at hand), etc.
Unit of length	一手掌大 (as big as a hand).
The Feeling	手感 (hand feeling)
Assistance, Concern, Approval	碍手碍脚 (get in somebody's way), 额手称庆 (clapping and cheering), 握手言欢 (shake hands and make up), etc.
Order, Sequence	二手货 (second-hand), 一手 (first-hand)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) of Lakoff and Johnson (1980)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is a vital sub-discipline of cognitive linguistics that examines the cognitive processes behind language representation and particularly on the conceptual motivation behind figurative meaning (Diane, 2014). This section provides specifications of metaphor following Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who classify it into three categories, namely structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor.

Structural metaphor is understood as a kind of systematic metaphor in a sense that the abstract concept can be expressed in a more of definite and concrete manner. It is elucidated here that the abstract concept such as “love” is described into a more definite manner that it can be equated to the concept of “journey” for the “inner structures are perceived similar” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). To put it simpler, one concept is able to represent another concept and in this case, love is conceptualized and metaphorically structured in terms of journey. The following example 1 shows the structural metaphor of hand. The hands of a clock are parts of the clock but not parts of human bodies. The hand of a clock can be a conceptual mapping from the source domain of the human hand because they have in common position, function, role, and disorder.

(1): *The **hands** of the clock show the time is seven o'clock.*

Oriental metaphor involves spatial orientation, which functions similarly to individuals' physical environment and the words used are either up-down, on-off, in-out, front-back, deep-shallow, central-peripheral which can highly motivate idiomatic expressions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For examples: (2): ***Hands up!** You cannot run away;* (3): *She got the first prize **hands down**.* In the traditional norms concerning the words “up” and “down”, it may be deduced that ‘up’ refers to something positive and vice versa for the word ‘down’; one keeps his or her head down when feeling sad, moody (negative emotion) and head up for being happy (positive emotion). However, ‘hands up’ in the example above denotes negativity and hands down, positivity. In English, there are three orientational metaphors related to hand: surrendering

oneself is ‘up’, being easy is for ‘down’, finding something is on something (Hyun & Yeon, 2007: 204-205).

Ontological metaphor refers to all ideas, emotions or activities that are represented as objects, substances, containers or etc. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Firstly, ontological metaphorical meaning of hand is that it is equivalent to a container in terms of its function and shape. More specifically, the previous academic idea is that by bending our hand we can put inside an entity or something can ‘reside’ in it. Hand in English is the container of attention, cooperation, control and possession (Hyun & Yeon, 2007: 201), as shown in the following Table 2.

Table 2 Ontological Metaphor of Hand (Hyun & Yeon, 2007: 201)

Ontological Metaphor of Hand	Examples
Holding in the hand is attention	Do they have anything to do with the matter in hand ?
Holding in the hand is cooperation	Korea and America hold hands again.
Holding in the hand is control	Put the matter in the hands of the lawyer.
Holding in the hand is possession	How can I go to Seoul empty- handed ?

Methodology

According to the review on the past studies, it is seen there is a need to examine metaphors of Chinese ‘hand’ in the view of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to figure out the applicability of this theory on Chinese body-part metaphorical expressions. The Chinese corpora data used in this study are mainly from *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (seventh edition) (to hereafter to as: Lv & Ding, 2016). According to Hornby (2010), the original periphrasis on “hand” is “the part of the body at the end of the arm, including the fingers and thumb”, whose equivalent expression is “手” (shǒu) in Chinese. The examples in the analysis use simplified Chinese characters which are annotated with *PinYin* (e.g. 手shǒu) for the convenience of reading. Meanwhile, the literal translation is also given to some examples to straightforward demonstrate the construction of Chinese words, then the exact meaning will be shown.

Findings

This part will clarify metaphorical expressions of 手(shǒu: hand) in Chinese in the light of structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. To begin with, structural metaphor of “hand” refers to the hands that are mapped to parts of other things when the source and target ‘hands’ share some common features. There is an examples of 门手 (mén shǒu: door-hand: door handle). The 手 (hand) of human and the handle of a door share similarities: positions of both are in the middle of the main ‘body’; the function is to touch other things; for the role, their motions are visible and they are all of the most important and movable parts of the bodies of human and door.

With regard to direction and position, there are more “orientational metaphors” than structural metaphors of Chinese ‘hand’. When we raise up the hands, we may put up weapons. Thus, in Chinese culture, people raise up hands to show they give up the competition, belief or wish.

拱手相让(see example 1 in Table 3). **拱(手)** refers to the action of raising and cupping one hand in the other before one's chest, which means the person gives something to others without resistance. Another example is **拱手听命** (see example 1 in Table 3) that literally means "listening to order with hand-up", while the authentic meaning is "obey the order without rejection." We feel more comfortable with hands down rather than hands up because the former costs us less energy when we put down our hands. **垂手可得** (see example 2 in Table 4). The surface meaning is "can get something with hands down", the idiomatic meaning is "get something easily". Therefore **垂手**(down-hands) describes the easiness of getting something. These two metaphorical meanings of Chinese 'hand' are consistent with the findings of English 'hand' by Hyun and Yeon (2007). The third metaphorical meaning "finding something is on something" of orientational metaphor is hardly found in Chinese "hand". The hand in Chinese usually does not refer to "contacting with others" in terms of metaphorical expression. Moreover, based on the dataset, there are more orientational metaphors in Chinese hand, which are shown in Table 3 (example 3-7). We can see that 'up' and 'back' can also realize the metaphorical meaning of 'being easy', which describes that doing/getting something is like 'raise hands up' or 'put hands back' (example 3 and 4 in Table 3). In addition, 'start to do something is up or down', as shown in the example 5 in Table 3, **上手** (up-hand) and **下手** (down-hand) all refer to start to do something. In addition, 'up' refers to 'being skillful' and 'being cheerful' in some cases, which are demonstrated by the example 5 and 6 in Table 3.

Table 3 Orientational Metaphors of Hand in Chinese

Orientational metaphors	Examples
1. Surrendering oneself is up	拱手相让 (gǒng shǒu xiāng ràng: cove-hands-particle-give) Meaning: hand over 拱手而降 (gǒng shǒu ǐr xiáng: cove-hands -surrender) Meaning: surrender without resistance 拱手听命 (gǒng shǒu tīng mìng: cove-hands-obey command) Meaning: obey the command without rejection
2. Being easy is down	垂手可得 (chuí shǒu kě dé: down-hands-can-receive/get) Meaning: get something easily
3. Being easy is up	举手之劳 (jǔ shǒu zhī láo: up-hand-action) Meaning: doing something easily 举手投足 : (jǔ shǒu tóu zú: up-hand-walk-foot) Meaning: doing something easily
4. Being easy is backhand	反手可得 (fǎn shǒu kě dé: back-hand-can-get) Meaning: get something easily
5. Start to do something is up and down	上手 (shàng shǒu: up-hand) Meaning: start to do something 下手 (xià shǒu: down-hand) Meaning: start to do something
6. Being skillful is up	上手 (shàng shǒu: up-hand) Meaning: doing something skillful and easily

7. Being cheerful is up	举手相庆 (jǔ shǒu xiāng qìng: raise up-hand-each other- celebrate) Meaning: raise hands up to celebrate; cheerful 举手加额 (jǔ shǒu jiā é: raise up-hand-reach-forehead) Meaning: raise hands up to celebrate; cheerful
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Based on function, shape and position of hand, the ontological metaphor of Chinese ‘hand’ (手) mainly refers to “container” of entities inside the hand. There are three main entities held in hand: possession, control and cooperation, which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Ontological Metaphor of Hand in Chinese

Ontological metaphors	Examples
Possession	空手 (kōng shǒu: empty-hand) Meaning: nothing
Control	一把手 (yī bǎ shǒu: one-quantifier-hand) Meaning: top leader
Cooperation	联手 (lián-shǒu: unite/join-hand) Meaning: Cooperate/cooperation

In terms of ontological metaphor of possession, there is one Chinese example: 他空手而来 (He came with nothing.). 空手(empty-hand) refers to ‘having nothing’, the possession in hand is “nothing”. With reference to the expression of control, Chinese metaphors always contain a deeper meaning of power, for example, 手(hand) in the word of 一把手(top leader) means “control or power”, so that 一把手 refers to the one with highest control of power. Another ontological metaphor is “cooperation or cooperate”. The Chinese example我们联手吧! (wǒ men lián shǒu ba) is translated as “let’s cooperate!”, in which 手(hand) reveals metaphorical meaning of “cooperation/cooperate”. However, there is no metaphorical meaning like “attention” expressed by Chinese ‘hand’.

Lastly, this section summarily compares the structural, orientational and ontological metaphors of “hand” between Chinese and English languages, with a purpose to find out in what way Chinese and English cultures are different or similar in the way to use hand metaphors. First of all, although the structure and functions of ‘hand’ are similar within two languages, ‘hand’ realizes different metaphorical meanings. For instance, English ‘hand’ has the ontological meaning of “container of attention”, however, Chinese ‘hand’ does not have such metaphorical meaning. Then, different body parts may form identical metaphorical expressions. English ‘hand’ shows the meaning of ‘control’, when it turns to the meaning of ‘control’ in Chinese, 掌(zhǎng: palm) is used to achieve the metaphorical meaning. For example, 掌门(zhǎng mén: palm-door: top leader), in which ‘palm’ means ‘control’. The third difference is the applicability of metaphors to the target domain concepts. For the orientational metaphors of hand in English, “being easy is down” when hand is related to describe the difficulty of action, however, the words of ‘up’, ‘down’ and ‘back’ all can be used as “being easy” in Chinese. Another difference is the extent in which conceptual metaphors are manifested linguistically. For the ontological metaphor of hand with meaning of ‘possession’, there is only one Chinese word 空手(empty-

hand), nevertheless, there are more in English, for instance: (1) *The thief can keep any jewelries he laid hands on.* (2) *This shop has a number of gifts on hand for sale.* However, based on all examples given in the analysis and derived from previous studies, it is seen that both Chinese and English metaphors of hand are explicitly used.

Conclusion

Similar body parts (e.g. hand) and metaphorical expressions are found in both Chinese and English languages thus it proves the academic statement that metaphor is not arbitrary but motivated by human bodily experiences, further, it supports the claim that metaphor is a product of cognition or thinking rather than just a literary device. According to the analysis of Chinese 'hand' (手) based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), obviously, Chinese 'hand' realizes metaphorical meanings that are classified into three main types of CMT: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. However, there is short of metaphorical expressions of "attention" and "finding something is on something" for Chinese 'hand', which is different with metaphor of hand in English. Thus it is seen that even same body parts may form distinct interpretations of metaphors among different languages or cultural contexts. For ontological metaphor, there is a larger extent in English in which conceptual metaphors of hand can be manifested. The applicability of metaphors of Chinese 'hand' is stronger than English to be embedded into the target domain concepts. Moreover, the similarity is that both Chinese and English use 'hand' explicitly to construct metaphorical expressions. There is a recommendation for further studies to investigate body-part metaphors from multiple perspectives and across different cultural contexts. Due to the fact that body and bodily experience are vital for human cognition, constructing an in-depth knowledge of body-related metaphors should improve our comprehension of language and communicative activities.

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