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Linguistics**

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ABSTRACT

Recently, many scholars have attached much importance on the study of metaphor and extensive research has been conducted on it. Among all the studies, the most common one is the study of metaphor in the field of linguistics, which is the cognitive basis of language research. To apply metaphor study in the aspect of cognitive linguistics in real life, having a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive linguistics is necessary and then we can discuss the essence of metaphor through comparison, interaction, meaning and so on. Based on in-depth analysis and demonstration, this thesis analyzes metaphor from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

Keywords: metaphor, cognitive linguistics, language research

Introduction

Metaphor is a cognitive instrument for human beings to conceptualize the physical and social phenomena in the world. Traditionally, it is defined as a figure of speech in which one word is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. As a special linguistic phenomenon that reflects human cognitive process, metaphor, which works as a magic link between concrete experiences and abstract concepts, has aroused increasing interests from different fields of linguistics, sociology, psychology, philosophy.

The Definition and History of Metaphor

The word “metaphor” derives from the Greek word “metaphor”, which means “transference, carrying over” (Zhang Xiuguo, 2006:161). It is a very common figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another as to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. Metaphor is perhaps the most important and most frequently used figure of speech, which points out resemblance, but with no acknowledging word.

The pervasive existence of conventional metaphors indicates that metaphor belongs to one of the essential cognitive instruments that human beings use to make sense of the world, whether in the past or in the future, in quotidian life or in scientific research. It helps to build up the whole complex system of human knowledge from the rudimentary interactive experiences between human beings and their environment. Various terms and definitions have been introduced by contemporary scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Sperber and Wilson (2001), Gluckberg and Keyyar (1990), Nogales (1999), etc. By investigating their different studies and researching methods, we can see that metaphor is closely related to human conceptualization and categorization of things and events. It offers people the way to conceptualize the abstract via the concrete, the complex via the simple, and the unknown via the known.

The entire history of metaphor can be generally divided into three distinct periods. The first period is the rhetoric study of metaphor, represented by Aristotle, Richards, which is from 300 B.C. to the late 1930s. A more detailed review reveals that, beside serving rhetorical purposes, metaphor also carries cognitive and heuristic functions. Metaphor is the application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing (Aristotle, 1992). The second period is the semantic study of metaphor, with R. Fakobson, as its chief advocates, approximately, in recent years. The Longman Dictionary of contemporary also give the definition as “a way of describing something by comparing it to something else that has similar qualities, without using the words 'like or as' in the sentence” (1995). And, the third period is the interdisciplinary study of metaphor, as exemplified in a number of conferences organized in North America in the 1970s and the variety of publications on metaphor in recent years. Thompson indicated that an application of a name or descriptive tremor phase to an objective

or an action to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable (2005:1275).

According to different levels and variety perspectives, metaphor can be classified differently. Peter Newmark classified metaphor into six types: dead, cliché, stock, adapted, recent and original metaphors (Newmark, 2001). Meanwhile, according to the cognitive level, Lakoff & Johnson divided the metaphors into three groups: orientation metaphor, ontological metaphor, and structural metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The Function of Metaphor

Su Dingfang (2005) definite five main categories: rhetorical function, poetic function, linguistic function, cognitive function and social function. In this paper, we will discuss the following three main functions.

Linguistic Function

Metaphor is an important means in the development of language. It aims at increasing exactness and vividness. If there is a lack of a word expressing a concept in everyday language, people will often use the vocabulary that describes the same shape or function as a temporary substitute from the existing vocabulary. For example, we use the word crane to express a machine for hoisting and moving heavy objects by means of cables attached to a movable boom because it has an original meaning of a kind of wading bird with a long neck, long necks and long bill. If the temporary substitution like this is inherited by other language users, it is very likely that this usage becomes a new term of the word and the word becomes polysemous.

Each language has some common ways of forming new words through metaphor. For example, the common metaphorical forms of word building in English include conversions, affixes, and participles. Sometimes we form a new word by convert its syntactical functions or morphological features, for example, to arrow means to move swiftly toward and penetrate like an arrow and to mushroom means to form and spread in the shape of a mushroom, to grow and spread fast. We also use the word like childish and shivering laughter which are formed by affix and participle.

Poetic Function

Metaphor can draw attention to the similarity between two unlike things, so that the reader can get an immediate image of objects. A metaphor can certainly help readers to create a vivid picture in their minds. Metaphor is the product of the poet's thinking as well as the reader's thinking. On the one hand, the poet uses metaphor to reveal his emotions through an implicit description and to visualize their inner feelings and thoughts though a vivid picture in readers' minds. On the other hand, poet creators could attract our attentions and

stimulate our reflections through metaphors by the pattern A is B. Metaphors are always present in poetry in tangible or intangible form to express a fusion of meaning and sense. This is what we call the poetic language, and metaphor is the key factor that causes this language. The generation of metaphor is based on the author's cognition, but more dependent on the reader's feelings as well as sufficient imagination.

Cognitive Function

As the basic manner of cognitive, metaphor plays an important role in our ways of thinking and verbal expressions. Meanwhile, most of the basic concept in human language is metaphorical. Thus, it also provided a new perspective for us to look at the world around us.

Robin George ever says, "no one can express any thought without metaphors." Cognitive linguists believe that figurative language is essentially the same as non-figurative language, because metaphors is everywhere in daily language and sentences completely without a metaphor are probably only a few. Metaphor makes us a useful cognitive tool for conceptualizing abstract categories. (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996:114) Metaphor is the only way to understand human cognitive ability and it is also an indispensable tool to solve difficulties in language understanding and language acquisition. (May, 1993: 301)

An Analysis of Metaphor from the Cognitive Perspective

From a cognitive point of view, the crucial aspects of metaphor is not only the properties inherent in the individual categories, but their role in the structure of an entire "cognitive model". Metaphor, which is used as a cognitive instruments means that it is not just a way of expressing ideas by means of language, but a way of thinking about things (Ungerer & Schmid, 2001:118). Metaphor transferred the structure, the internal relations or the logic of a cognitive model. This transfer has been called a "mapping" from a source to a target by cognitive linguists. In other words, from a cognitive perspective, a metaphor is a mapping of the structure of a source model onto a target model. Lakoff and Turner (1989: 63) argued that every metaphorical mapping includes the following processes:

- A. The vacancy in source domain is mapped onto the one in the target domain;
- B. The relationship in source domain is mapped onto the one in target domain;
- C. The features in source domain are mapped onto the ones in target domain;
- D. Knowledge in source domain is mapped onto that in target domain.

Metaphor is a kind of cognitive mode of human being to the objective world and a reaction of cultural background. As a universal principle in language, it is the product of human perception in a metaphorical way. Metaphorical meaning is the result of the interaction between the tenor and the vehicle, among which the identity of vehicle determines which features can be transferred. In Black's words,

vehicle plays a “filtering” role, emphasizing certain features and suppressing other features. That means only some features transform in the actual process of metaphor comprehension.

Conclusion

From the discussions above we can see that the research on metaphor carries both theoretical and practical significance regarding human cognition and its linguistic realization. And in the study of this cognitive and linguistic issue, much remains to be explored and discovered. For example, what is the best way to identify conceptual metaphors? What kinds of metaphors are more basic than others in human cognition? How does metaphor influence language acquisition and application? It can be expected that scientific answers to these and many other related questions are to be found in the future with the joint efforts made by psychologists, neurobiologists and philosophers as well as linguists.

In a word, metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of mind, allows us to use what we know about our physical and social experience to provide understanding of countless other subjects. It can shape our perceptions and actions without our ever noticing them.

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