

A Comparative Study of English and Chinese Animal “Rooster” Metaphor From the Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract

It is universally accepted that cognitive linguistics is a relatively new school of linguistics, and one of the most innovative and intriguing approaches to the study of language and thought. During the past two decades, this cognitive science entered into a new era, especially after Lakoff & Johnson came up with the conceptual metaphor. It argues that our understanding of the world is experiential rather than literal or direct corresponding to and external reality. Besides, our reasoning involves metaphorical inferences; our categories of entities are mostly metaphorical and imaginative. Metaphor is ubiquitous in our thought, action, human language as well as a significant cognitive instrument by which human beings perceive, categorize and conceptualize the world. Among them, animal metaphor is an important category for their rich images and intimate relationship with human beings. Thus the attributes of animals are inevitably mapped onto those human beings.

Many studies have been made about animal metaphor either from cognitive angle or cultural perspective. But animal metaphor is only taken as a whole subject to carry out different studies. Yet this paper will merely discuss metaphors on “rooster” in English and Chinese from cognitive perspective, which aims to contrast and discover the cognitive similarity and differentiation about rooster through a detailed analysis of metaphorical expressions in both languages, and at the same time this paper hopes to make a certain contribution in realizing high-quality cross-cultural communication.

Key words: Rooster; Metaphor; Comparative study; Cognitive perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, human beings and animals share too much in common like living environment, the food structure from plants or other animals’ meat and so forth. And actually, human beings are animals in essence, which have been in close contact with many animals. “Rooster” is pretty familiar to human beings. Human beings must have a better understanding about their features. Therefore, many expressions on rooster are embodied in human language inevitably, which are reflected in the way of metaphors. Naturally, there exist many similarity and difference between English and Chinese. This paper will mainly explore their particular features; analyze their differences and similarities from the cognitive perspective.

1. THEORETICAL EXPLANATION ON METAPHOR

1.1 Major Theories on Metaphor Study in West

Contemporary cognitive linguistics assumed that metaphor is deeply rooted in human cognitive structure. And metaphor exists both in linguistic level and the level of human thought.

According to Aristotle, metaphor is a kind of decoration and ornament in language (Song, 2009). Simultaneously, he pointed out metaphor is the application

to one thing of a name belonging to another thing. And he described in detail: “metaphor is the transference of a name from the object to which it has a natural application; this transference can take place from genus to species or species to genus or species to species or by analogy”. His interpretation of metaphor as the mechanism of renaming and transference that is later developed into “Comparison Theory”, which exerted great impact on the traditional study of metaphor.

In the 1st century, Quintillion proposed his theory of substitution on metaphor. According to the Substitution Theory, metaphor is a kind of rhetorical phenomenon that another word substitutes for a literal term and the meaning of the metaphor could be discovered by replacing the literal term. Metaphor was also regarded as decorative or rhetorical device (Black, 1962).

Richards (1936) and Max Black (1962) came up with the Interaction Theory of metaphor. This viewpoint was first put forward by I. A. Richards in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936). He holds that essence of metaphor lies in an interaction between a metaphorical expression and the context in which it is used. Max Black put that “a metaphor is where a metaphorical expressions is used in place of some equivalent literal expression, and the comparative theory is a special case of substitution.”

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) who worked out a new paradigm in metaphor study in their far-reaching book *Metaphor We Live By*, which has brought extensive influence in this field. They hold that metaphor should not be regarded as a figure of speech but as a figure of thought. They point that systematic analysis of language use can indicate the presence of an underlying metaphoric conceptual process which can explain whole collection of expressions. They propose the term metaphorical concepts and state that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.3). They realize that human beings’ conceptual system, in terms of which they think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. People talk about things the way they conceive of them, which is fashioned through and grounded in experience and culture (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

For Lakoff & Johnson, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.5). It is a matter of thought rather than language. A basic assumption is that metaphors establish correspondence between concepts from disparate domains of knowledge. Therefore, from a cognitive perspective, understanding of the world is based on bodily experience. As abstract reasoning has to be grounded in bodily, concrete experience metaphor is a very common device in structuring abstract entities.

1.2 Major Scholars’ Exploration on Metaphor in China

In 1990s, many Chinese researchers enthusiastically began to explore the properties of metaphor from some

new perspectives based on the western well-established theories. Zhao Yanfang’s review *Metaphors We Live By* (1995) deepens people’s understanding of metaphor. In recent years, increasing numbers of Chinese researchers have devoted to the subject of metaphor and made many substantial achievements. In the classic article *On the Nature of Metaphor and Semantic Features* (1998), Shu Dingfang claims human language is metaphorical symbol system on the whole. In the frequently quoted article, *Language, Cognition, and Metaphor* (1997), Hu Zhuanglin pointed out the two items which metaphor referred to is not temporary, accidental category, but reflects in people’s preexisting concepts. They all believe metaphor is in essence cognitive phenomenon.

Different theories and opinions on the interpretation have been discussed. They all have limitations. Besides, the Substitution Theory and the Interaction Theory are not practical in that the working mechanisms of metaphor haven’t been given. Therefore, the conceptual metaphor put forward by Lakoff & Johnson is proper for discussing the subject of this thesis.

1.3 A General View of Conceptual Metaphor

According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphors are systemic mappings across conceptual domains; metaphor is described as the mapping of one domain onto another. The source domain is the domain that is mapped, and the target domain is the recipient of the mapping. The experience from the source domain is mapped onto the relatively abstract target domain. The effect of a conceptual metaphor is that the mapping transfers aspects of the source domain to the target domain. In terms of the Invariance Principle proposed by Lakoff (1989), metaphorical mapping preserve the cognitive image schema of the source domain. In this process, the image-schematic structure of the source domain is projected onto the target domain. But not all the properties are mapped onto the target domain. Some of the structural relations, domain- specific properties, and the knowledge of the source domain are mapped onto the target domain. This transfer occurs on the basis of perceived similarity between some of the elements of the two domains.

Lakoff and Johnson classify metaphor into three categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. Structural metaphors mean people comprehend construction of one concept in terms of another concept. What orientational metaphors concern are spatial orientations such as up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, central-peripheral, on the basis of physical and culture experiences. The radical reason is that spatial orientations arise from the fact that we have physical bodies and that our bodies function in the correlative environment, on the social occasions. Ontological metaphors are based on human’s experience with physical objects. Their formation enables humans to view nonphysical entities such as events, activities, emotions,

ideas, and the like, as physical entities and substances. That is to say, the abstract concept is understood and talked about in terms of physical construction.

2. THE FORMATION OF ANIMAL METAPHORICAL MEANING

2.1 General Survey on Animal Metaphor

What is animal metaphor? How can those animal vocabularies produce metaphorical meaning? There haven't a universally recognized conclusion yet for animal metaphor is no more than a very small part of studying scope about metaphor. People may comprehend it as the metaphorical expressions with animal images in languages, in which people of a certain culture share and grasp its connotation.

2.2 Forming Mechanism of Animal Metaphor

Zhao Yanfang (2001) points out, metaphor is the product of human cognitive development, also is the need to conceptualize our world. "The human brain doesn't possess limitless capacity to store information and knowledge. Human beings are endowed with higher creativity, which lies in the fact that people can recognize and name things by means of the known or existing language forms. This special ability derives from the development of cognitive capacity rather than learning."

Generally speaking, the source domain in a metaphorical structure is the tangible or specific thing or familiar with human beings. It comes from the interaction between human beings and the whole world. It constitutes the basis for the existence of metaphorical cognition. However the target domain is abstract or intangible thing. More often than not, they are pretty unfamiliar with the human beings. As different domains establish the connections, we tend to use the specifics to refer to the abstracts, the known to the unknown, and the familiar to the strange, to realize the metaphorical process. The existence and development of human beings keep very close contact with animals. Animals might become friends, pet or fighting objects in the natural coexistence process. Then animals play a vital role in human's life gradually. Man has profound knowledge about the animal characteristics, habits, behaviors and so forth through long productive life. Hence, during the process of linguistic development, people certainly associate their feelings and emotions, natural phenomena or social events with animal images, which promote the projection between these two conceptual domains.

Liao Guangrong (2000) specifically points out three factors that animal expressions can produce metaphorical meanings. Firstly, animals and human beings are similar in their physical appearance, characters, and behaviors to some degree; secondly, human being's cultural tradition and cultural psychology are closely associated

with animals, such as mythology, religion, history, literature, art and geography; thirdly, people have strong power of imagination and observation which is based on the reality related to animals. In this sense, animal expressions gradually get their established connotations in all languages.

3. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANIMAL METAPHOR ON ROOSTER IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

Comparative study between English and Chinese shows corresponding degree or differences in many aspects. Di Feng (2006) classified the relation of images between English and Chinese animal metaphors into three groups: same animal images, different animal images and image blanks. As for the 'rooster' image contrastive study of animal metaphors in English and Chinese, we can employ this classification to probe into the connotation of them similarly.

3.1 Rooster With Similar Metaphorical Meanings in English and Chinese

There are some animal metaphorical expressions which are similar or even identical in form and meaning between English and Chinese. They exist by coincidence or cultural exchange through translation. They also reflect some common developing features of human-being civilization in the cognition and thought. Some examples are as follows.

"母鸡" refers to woman or wife in Chinese. For example, 鸡鸣馑耕 means woman is thrifty in running the household. 鸡鸣之助 means the help of wife. 母鸡司晨家不兴 means it's unlucky for a wife to be in charge of the whole family.

English words "cock" or "rooster" refers to 公鸡, "hen" stands for 母鸡, whereas "chicken" indicates 小鸡. Similarly, "hen" means wife or woman in English, especially, inquisitive or talkative woman. "Cock" refers to husband. The sentence "It is a sad house where the hen crows louder than the cock" produces the same effect with the Chinese expressions 母鸡司晨家不兴. In addition, the fact that "hen" refers to woman can be illustrated in the following expressions. 'A wet hen' means annoying woman; 'a hen house' means the house which women live in; 'hen-pecked' means a man is afraid of his wife.

In Chinese, 鸡 takes the meaning of triviality or unimportance. For instance, 鸡毛蒜皮, 鸡零狗碎 means small or trivial matter. 鸡虫得失何须算 means the loss matters a little. 鸡鸣狗盗 means the skill which is so insignificant that is not worthy of mention. Undoubtedly, this sort of meaning has the counterpart in English. "Chicken" also means trivial or inconsiderable thing. Some obvious examples like "chickenshit" in English mean invaluable matter; "chicken feed" means meaningless things or a small amount of capital. "For him,

that's the chicken feed, barely enough to cover the travel and hotel expenses" is a case in this point.

鸡 is often used to refer to "prostitute" in today's society since 鸡 and 妓 are homophonic. 鸡奸 is taken as the sexual behavior between men. The expression "chicken hawk" in English means the man who are inclined to pick out little or young man as sexual partners.

Feng Zhenjun(2006) pointed out, except for the meaning of 公鸡, "cock" in English has the meaning of head, primary or dominant person. For example, "the cock of the school" means the leader of the whole school. 鸡尊王 in Chinese shares the similar meaning to "cock", even though is usually employed in the occasion when adults might compromise with kids who deliberately provocative.

3.2 Metaphorical Blank About Rooster in English and Chinese

People have necessarily differentiated association and evaluating attitude on animal metaphors since there are differences of culture, language development history, people's thinking mode, animal absence, living style, etc. between English and Chinese, which is also reflected in the metaphors of rooster. Therefore, undoubtedly there exists some metaphorical vacancy about rooster image English by a contrast to Chinese, or vice versa. Metaphor vacancy is closely related to this phenomenon that the same kind of animal has colorful metaphorical meanings in one culture but appears to blank in another culture. Some metaphorical meanings about rooster only belong to English or Chinese to a certain degree.

3.2.1 Rooster With Metaphorical Meaning for English Unique

Owing to distinct cultural background, Chinese and English naturally gave different associations or richer cultural connotations on the same animal.

The English word "chicken" indicates the coward and young woman. For example, "You are a chicken" means you are easily frightened or afraid to do something; "Mary is no chicken, she is at least thirty" means Mary is not young any more.

"Cock" can also signify those people who are puffed up with pride and energy. The sentence "Peter is a cock; no one is more active and dynamic than he is in the class" shared this meaning. What's more, "cock" in English slang can be used as a friendly form of address between men or nonsense. "Hi, cock, how you are doing these days?"; "He never talks cock" respectively refers to the way of addressing and nonsense.

"Hen" in English takes slightly different meaning from Chinese. For instance, 'sell one's hens on a rainy day' means sell something at loss; "like a hen with one chicken" means fuss up and down over little matter; "as scarce as hen's teeth" is the exaggeration of rareness.

3.2.2 Rooster With Metaphorical Meaning for Chinese Unique

To most of Chinese, 鸡 is regarded as an auspicious animal and symbolizes good thing or good luck for it

has the same sound of 吉. Chinese people always have the custom to take the chicken to entertain their guests on the important occasions, while there is no identical metaphorical meaning in English.

More examples should be mentioned in this paper. 鸡毛信 in Chinese refers to official documents or letters which need passing on urgently. 鸡犬相闻 means densely populated place. 鸡犬桑麻 is connected to the peaceful and stable countryside life. 鸡肋 originally means chicken's rib, but is later taken as something tasteless, wasteful to discard. 铁公鸡 symbols the mean person. 宁为鸡口无为牛后; 宁当鸡头, 不当凤尾 both demonstrate that people would rather take over in the small situation than being at other's disposal in more complicated situation. In the idiom 一人得道, 鸡犬升天, 鸡犬 has the metaphorical meaning of people who attach themselves to relatives or friends with influential power and authority to get the upper hand. Another popular saying 嫁鸡随鸡, 嫁狗随狗 shows that married women should be loyal to their husbands all the life no matter what the situation they are in.

These metaphorical meanings about 鸡 are unique to Chinese. People almost could find out the corresponding expressions or connotations in English,

3.3 Metaphorical Conflict About Rooster in English and Chinese

Rooster images in English and Chinese have similar metaphorical meanings according to above-mentioned discussion. Yet metaphorical conflict about rooster image is manifested in English and Chinese due to the long process of race's development and different cultural mode. (Xiang & Wang, 2009) Namely, metaphorical meaning of expressions about rooster in Chinese could be given counterparts in English, but English adopted the other different animal words. Some examples can account for this.

In English, "like a drowned rat" is applied to depict a state of being completely wet. The image of a drowned rat can be witnessed in many rainy places in that the weather is changeable in Britain. However, in Chinese, we have an expression including a different animal image which is 落汤鸡. It is mainly because chicken is a kind of domestic fowl which is very familiar for the Chinese people in the traditional agricultural society. Similarly, 鸡皮疙瘩 in Chinese is used to describe uneasy or uncomfortable feeling produced by shock or chill, whereas the English counterpart is "goose flesh". Apart from that, one well-known saying in English "Kill the goose that lays the golden eggs" means to destroy future basis and benefits for the aim of obtaining quick interests. In Chinese, we use another animal image in a phrase 杀鸡取卵. The expression in English "To break a butterfly on a wheel" means it's unnecessary and unworthy for people to waste their great power over trivial things, while Chinese expression 杀鸡用牛刀 catch the same meaning. Idioms like "like a hen on a hot girdle" (像热锅上的蚂蚁), "as

timid as a rabbit, chicken-hearted" (胆小如鼠) are also typical examples of this sort.

Through these examples, "rat", "goose", "butterfly", "ant" and "rabbit" images in English and 鸡 images in Chinese shares the same specific connotations in a certain area. Metaphorical conflict about rooster in English and Chinese are unmistakably explained.

CONCLUSION

As a thinking mode, metaphor has become indispensable media by which human beings understand the world and survive. The cognitive process of people refers to the process which people employs familiar concept to signify another unfamiliar concept, that is, realize the mapping from one domain to another domain, and then continuously heighten the cognitive level of people. Metaphorical expressions about rooster in English and Chinese are the essence of collective wisdom through long-time life. This article analyzed metaphorical consistency, metaphorical blank and metaphorical conflict about rooster in English and Chinese, which might assist us to have deeper understanding about the integral role of metaphor in language expression and the improvement of thinking. Besides, it will bring many benefits on language learners in studying the language of different sort and prompt the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication.

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