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Study of conceptual metaphor in high school English Textbooks: A Case Study of People's Education Edition

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Abstract: Since Lakoff and Johnson proposed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor has gradually been studied as a way of thinking and acting rather than just a rhetorical device. In the past few decades, Conceptual Metaphor Theory has been applied to many fields, especially the field of Foreign Language Teaching. For second language learners, understanding metaphors in a different culture is one of the barriers in the process of second language learning. This paper makes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the metaphors in the high school English textbooks. By enumerating three different metaphors in the textbook, it is not difficult to see that metaphor has caused obstacles to students' foreign language learning. At the same time, statistics on the frequency of metaphors in books can help us intuitively realize the universality of metaphor in language. Therefore, teachers should adjust their teaching strategies in time and have special teaching methods for learning material that contains metaphors.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Textbook study; High school English.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The learning material in senior high schools is more difficult and more flexible for students than the learning content in middle schools. Based on based on the English Curriculum Criteria for Regular High School issued by the Ministry of Education, there are various versions of high school English textbook that is adopted by high schools in China. Among these textbooks, the most commonly used textbook is made by People's Education Edition, which is the focus of this paper.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds the idea that human thought processes are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). As a way of thinking, metaphor is embodied in all aspects of life, but there are differences in metaphor in different languages. Therefore, for second language learners, metaphors in foreign languages may hinder their foreign language learning.

1.2. Research Purpose and Significance

According to Lakoff, metaphor is the way we think and understand outer world. It is no doubt that metaphors are universal and common. But the point is that different languages use various metaphors. Chinese and English, as two languages with great differences, have a huge gap in their conventional metaphors, which causes many obstacles for high school students to learn English systematically. Textbooks, which provide authoritative teaching material, is a guide for teachers to arrange teaching content, so it is very meaningful to study and analyse the text in textbooks.

From the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, the aim of this paper is to analyze the ontological metaphors in the senior high school English textbooks and puts forward some suggestions for teachers' teaching.

2. Literature Review

Since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) put forward Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor has become a new field in cognitive linguistics. Inspired by conceptual metaphor theory, many scholars devoted themselves to the studies of metaphor.

Conceptual metaphors have been studies in various fields, pedagogy, psychology, linguistics and so on. In linguistics, scholars also applied conceptual metaphor to the analysis of many discourses and texts.

Metaphor, as a universal expression in our conceptual system, is likely to hinder students' second language learning. Littlemore (2014) studied the distribution of metaphor used by language learners in their writing. Zhou (2022) conducted a study to explore whether second language metaphorical competence can be taught through instructional intervention. The result showed that instructional interventions with reinforcement of metaphorical practice can help second language learners develop metaphorical competence.

However, there are few studies on metaphor in second language teaching materials. Therefore, this paper selects the English textbook of the People's Education Edition to investigate the metaphor of the text in the textbook.

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1. Introduction of Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in their book Metaphors We Live By, A highly influential academic treatise. Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds the idea that our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A typical example is ARGUMENT IS WAR, which means we always talks about arguments in terms of war. For example: He attacked every weak point of my argument. We use such expressions everyday, but we never realize the fact that it is metaphorical.

Metaphors allow us to understand one abstract domain of

experience in terms of another. In most cases, the abstract domain is Target Domain, and the relatively concrete domain is Source Domain. In the case of ARGUMENT IS WAR, argument is the target domain, and war is the source domain.

3.2. Classification of Metaphors

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, there are three kinds of metaphors, structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and ontological metaphor

The structural metaphor means that one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. For example, TIME IS MONEY.

You are wasting my time.

We have no time now.

I spend most of my time reading books.

Obviously, we understand "time" in terms of "money", because they have many common characteristics. For example, Time is a limited resource, so is money.

The second category of metaphor is orientational metaphors, because most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, central-peripheral. A typical example of orientational metaphors is HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN:

My spirit sank.

I am feeling down recently

Her spirits rose.

Naturally, when we refer to positive emotion, we use spatially upward words. Lakoff suggests that the orientational metaphors are related to physical experience.

The third kind of metaphor is ontological metaphor. Entity metaphor, personification, and container metaphor are considered the branches of ontological metaphor (Lakoff&Johnson, 1980).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Question

4.1.1. How often does each metaphor appear in the high school English textbook of People's Education Edition?

4.1.2. According to this study, what suggestions should be offered to high school English teachers on their teaching methods?

4.2. Research Methods

This paper combines quantitative research method with qualitative research method. First, the metaphor in the selected textbook is analyzed by case study. Secondly, it presents the results of quantitative analysis, that is, the frequency of occurrence of the three metaphors.

5. Analysis of the conceptual metaphors in high school textbooks

5.1. Examples of metaphors in high school textbook

5.1.1. Examples of Structural Metaphor

1)The milu deer certainly seemed happy to be back in China because their numbers started to grow steadily. (Book 2 P70)

It is not obvious that this sentence contains a structural metaphor. Since we can not see number in reality, when we mention numbers and try to describe their trend, we see them as increasing or decreasing entity. That is the reason why the phrase "numbers started to grow steadily" makes sense. But for high school students, they are likely to be confused about it. It is effective to use conceptual metaphor theory to explain this expression, and teachers can help students understand and remember it in this way.

2) There, he set up a business in New York and wrote to say that he would soon repay my father.

The metaphor in this sentence is BUSINESS IS A BUILDING. Business is an abstract concept. In English, we often understand the concept "business" with the structure of "building". we might say that someone's business has collapsed, which is used metaphorically. By comparing business to buildings, we could understand the abstract concept better.

5.1.2. Examples of Orientational Metaphor

1)China is widely known for its ancient civilization which has continued all the way through into modern times, despite the many ups and downs in its history.

In this sentence, the phrase "ups and downs" is used as a slang, which means alternating rise and fall especially in fortune. It is no doubt that this expression is metaphorical, which may hinder students to understand. The direction "ups and downs" is applied to describe the growth and decline of a country. It contains orientational metaphor UP IS GOOD, DOWN IS BAD.

2)These ice princes and princesses are so graceful that it's easy to forget that they are actually highly skilled athletes.

The phrase "highly skilled athletes" includes metaphorical expression. Actually, we can't see if a person's skill is high or low, because skill is an abstract concept. The metaphor is HIGH IS EXCELLENT. For senior high school students, this metaphor is easy to understand. The reason is that there are similar expressions in Chinese. For example, we tend to say "高水平"to express the excellent skills of people.

5.1.3. Examples of Ontological Metaphor

1)Other adults worry that today's youth are spoilt and don't want to face the challenges of adult life. (Book 1 P74)

Challenge is an abstract thing. We could not see it and touch it in real life. Here, the phrase "face the challenges" is a metaphor CHALLENGE IS AN ENTITY. Seeing challenges as entity helps us to visualize the concept of challenge.

2)If a problem seems too difficult for a single nation, the global community can sometimes provide a solution. (Book 2 P4)

In this sentence, it's easy for us to notice the expression "provide a solution". In fact, the concept of solution is quite abstract. Comparing to concrete entity, a solution is untouchable. Consequently, by seeing "solution" as an entity.

5.2. Quantitative Analysis

Table 1. Numbers of different metaphors in the textbooks of People's Education Edition

Types of Metaphor	number
Structural Metaphor	48
Orientational Metaphor	27
Ontological Metaphor	40

According to the examples and table above, it is not difficult to see that, in general, the frequency of metaphor is relatively high. Among the three types of metaphor, the most common metaphor is structural metaphor, and the least

common metaphor is orientational metaphor.

6. Suggestions for Foreign Language Teaching Based on Metaphors in English Textbooks

Based on the conceptual metaphor theory and the results we find above, here are some effective suggestions for English teachers:

6.1. Awareness of Metaphorical Language

Teachers should be mindful of the prevalent use of metaphorical language in the textbooks. Understanding these metaphors helps students grasp the deeper meanings and nuances of the language. Metaphors often introduce new and vivid ways to describe familiar concepts. By highlighting these, teachers can enrich students' vocabulary and enhance their ability to express themselves more eloquently.

6.2. Cultivating Critical Thinking

Analyzing and discussing metaphorical expressions encourages students to think critically about language use and how it shapes our understanding of the world. This fosters a deeper appreciation for the complexity of language.

6.3. Linking Language to Culture

Metaphors are often culturally specific, reflecting the values, beliefs, and experiences of a particular community. By discussing these, teachers can introduce students to the cultural aspects of the language, making the learning process more meaningful and engaging.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper analyzes the distribution and frequency of metaphor in English textbooks and finds that metaphor exists universally in the English textbooks of People's Education Edition.

There are some suggestions for foreign language teachers. Firstly, teachers should know the metaphors in textbook before class, so they can better understand the discourse and design appropriate activities to make students comprehend the discourse deeply. Secondly, teachers can introduce conceptual metaphor theory to students to evaluate the metaphorical awareness of students.

However, the limitation of this study is obvious. Due to the limitations of resources and energy, only English textbooks of People's Education Edition were investigated in this study. Apart from that, the numbers of different metaphors are counted by author, which may cause the findings inaccurate.

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