

Strategy of the Conventional Metaphors in English Study and Construction of Analytical Model

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Abstract

In cognitive research of metaphor, comprehending processing of metaphor is always a significant research topic. Research on metaphor comprehending of foreign language learner can not only help us to clearer know the comprehending mechanism of language, but also is beneficial for us to reveal the cognition activities and cultural interaction of learners in second language acquisition process, promote students' foreign language thought and culture their metaphor competence and concept fluency, thus to improve efficiency of foreign language teaching. This paper discussed the metaphor comprehending strategy and model of Chinese English learners in the form of questionnaire test and in the perspective of thinking process and output of learners. This study found that, English learners in China mainly applied sentence context and literal translation method to understand metaphor; second is to use English background knowledge and mother language background knowledge; in addition, learners also use guess, mental imagery and sentence analysis to understand metaphor. Therefore, English learners in China have specificity in metaphor comprehending process, and use analytical model to deduce the significance of English conventional metaphor.

Keywords: metaphor; foreign language learner; comprehending strategy; analytical model

1 Introduction

The nature of metaphor is to understand or experience something by another thing. As the basis of cognition, thinking, experience, language and even behavior, metaphor is the major and basic means for human survival, and the cognitive tool for people to perform cross-domain mapping between difference conceptual domains, playing an important role in the creation and delivery of knowledge [1]. As metaphor research enters cognitive category, metaphor, as one of the language nature and fundamental thinking and cognition means, begins to enter the research field of second language or foreign language learning. Metaphor is the common cognitive means of human, and foreign language learning is also a basic cognitive behavior of human. They have something common in nature; therefore, metaphor can better assist foreign language learning and provide an effective learning strategy for foreign language learners. Based on the above cognition, more and more experts and scholars study further on this field. In the article of An Empirical Study of the Metaphorical Strategy in English Polysemous Word Teaching, Yang Youwen discussed the relationship between metaphor strategy cultivating and polyseme teaching effect of college English through quantitative research on the basis of conceptual metaphor theory, and proved that the acquisition and cultivation of metaphor strategy in college English vocabulary teaching could help improve the memory efficiency of polyseme for English learners. Wang Ping proposed in An Action Research on English Learners' Cognitive Competence of Metaphor [3] that language learner should carefully analyze and correctly the context culture of metaphor, understand the

cultural connotation which metaphor expresses deeply and he rose discussion and put forward correspond teaching advises on metaphor cognition from the view of cognition and provided study skills and theoretical knowledge for English study. In the article On the Function of Metaphorical Competence in the Teaching of Business English [4], Gao Lina and Yao Zhiying discussed the relationship between business English teaching and metaphor competence training, and established the model of activating metaphor consciousness of second language learner and applying metaphor in specific teaching, thus trans students' metaphor competence.

By now, scholars have processed abundant researches on metaphor comprehending and have acquired some research achievements. But through careful review, we found these researches in this aspect were generally rough and of which the research method is simple, the research field was narrow and there were many deficiencies and problems to be solved. This research analyzed the metaphor comprehending strategy of English learner in China, established metaphor analysis model for foreign learner and provided practical significance for foreign language teaching applying questionnaire test, from the view of learner's thought process and thought output under the framework of cognitive linguistics, second language acquisition and bilingual mental lexicon theory.

2 Cognitive Metaphor Theories

2.1 CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

Conceptual metaphor is a kind of concluded metaphor expression which reflects the nature and stores in human brain. Metaphor cognitive is to map the schematic structure

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of source domain on target domain and help us construct and understand target domain on the basis of the structure of source domain. For example, "argument is war" is a conceptual metaphor in which argument is target domain and war is source domain. People use the conception and experience of war to describe argument [5]. There are enemy and friend, attack and defense and win and lose in a war. These conceptual schemata also exist in argument. Thus, the abstract conception of argument can be cognized by people through the specific conception of war.

The cognitive foundation of conceptual metaphor is image schema which is a dynamic representation of space relation and motion. It has internal logic or structure which decides the function when structuring another conception. Image schema comes from people's personal experience in their daily life and it plays a crucial role in cross-domain mapping.

2.2 LINGUISTIC METAPHOR THEORY

Linguistic metaphor is specific word or expression form which generated from conceptual metaphor. It is a superficial linguistic phenomenon which normally not expressed with capital letter. To be informal, linguistic metaphor is what we say and what we write in daily life [6]. There are different forms of linguistic metaphor: (1) predicative metaphor, such as, Love is a red rose; (2) simile, such as, Reality is like a sledgehammer; (3) analogy, such as, White blood cells fight germs like soldiers fight an invading enemy; (4) linguistic metaphor integrating

predictive metaphor and analogy, such as, The New Yorker is the quiche of magazines; (5) metaphor of which the subject and object is clear, such as, Sam was a fly in a bottle; (6) metaphor of which the subject and object is implicit (such as idiom and proverb), the object can map to subject which is not indicated, such as, don't put the cart before the horse.

3 Research of Questionnaire Survey

In this research, a total of 41 non-English major freshmen and 39 English major junior students of Ningbo University took part in the questionnaire survey. During the survey, 3 English major students quitted and 4 handed over blank paper, so we altogether collected 41 valid questionnaires of non-English major students and 32 valid of English major. Among, the average of non-English major freshmen was 19.46 years and English major 21.16 years; 90.24% of the non-English major learners were from science and engineering and 81.25% of English major were from liberal art. Classification and statistics were performed to both groups on the metaphor comprehending strategy according to conception. And, according to the descriptive statistics of metaphor comprehending strategy application of both groups, English major testees got higher average score than non-English major testees in the aspects of context application, literal translation and known English knowledge, the specific content is shown in table 1:

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics of strategy application of both groups

	Level	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Context	English major	16.56	8.18	32
	Non-English major	16.51	10.12	41
	Total	16.53	9.26	73
Literal translation	English major	14.13	5.63	32
	Non-English major	13.95	6.70	41
	Total	14.03	6.22	73
Chinese language knowledge	English major	11.75	4.94	32
	Non-English major	14.37	5.60	41
	Total	13.22	5.44	73
Known English knowledge	English major	12.38	6.24	32
	Non-English major	7.88	3.70	41
	Total	9.85	5.42	73
Casual guess	English major	4.78	3.10	32
	Non-English major	6.51	3.82	41
	Total	5.75	3.60	73
Image in mind	English major	0.75	1.02	32
	Non-English major	1.39	1.48	41
	Total	1.11	1.33	73
Syntactic analysis	English major	0.03	0.18	32
	Non-English major	0.20	0.46	41
	Total	0.12	0.37	73

As the results show, the English learners of all English level tend to comprehend English metaphor on the basis of context and literal meaning of the word. This is because, English education in China focuses on classroom teaching, and even the English major has limited time to practice English every day. The foreign language knowledge mainly comes from the medium such as books and film etc. The environment for them to communicate to local speakers directly, feel foreign culture and understand foreign conceptual system is lacking. So, their

comprehending of regular foreign metaphor tends to resort to context and stays at the basis of analyzing literal meaning.

This research also suggested, English learner of lower level was more likely to comprehend metaphor by image in mind and guess etc. It suggests, lower level learner tends to use other comprehending strategy to make up the deficiency of linguistic competence, that is to improve their language processing skill by applying sub-linguistic strategy or compensatory strategy.

4 Establishment of Analysis Model

As foreign language learner has no equivalent linguistic competence and culture background as the local speaker, they usually have to comprehend metaphor through literal meaning and analysis, comparison and processing of the possible meaning. The results of this research suggested, when comprehending English metaphor, Chinese learner tends to analyze the literal meaning of words in the context and consider their understanding to English culture and

known linguistic knowledge. Their mother language culture is also involved in this process and brings the transformation function. And sometimes, they have to comprehend with syntactic analysis and imagery.

It is obvious that, foreign language learner has specificity in metaphor comprehending, and because of what analytical processing model appears when in demand. This model is always applied by foreign language learner and the specific constituent is shown in figure 3.1:

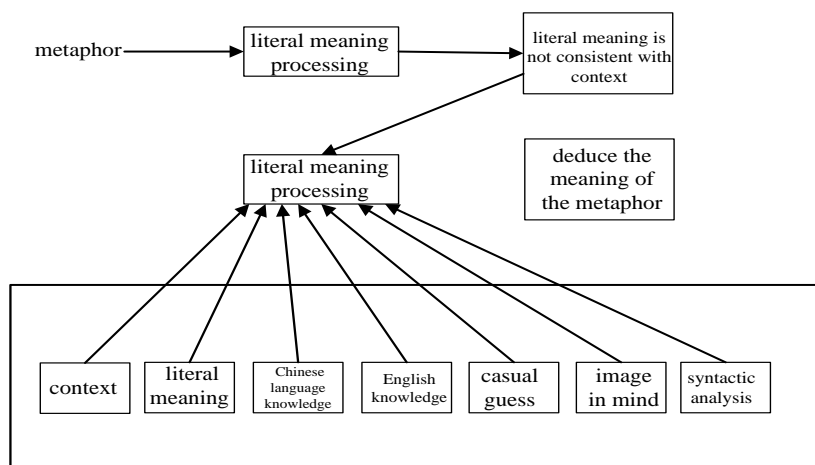


FIGURE 3.1 Metaphor comprehending analytical model of English learner in China

Compared with local English speaker, the metaphor comprehending of Chinese learner involves more and more complicated factor. Normally, they can't comprehend English metaphor directly; they tend to match the literal meaning with the context. The literal meaning is rejected if it is not suitable in the context and the learner turn to searching non-literal meaning or processing of metaphor meaning. During the processing, they deduce the meaning of metaphor applying one or several of the strategy mentioned above. Thus it can be seen, analytical model is more acceptable for Chinese learner of English to comprehend metaphor. That is, not going straightly to the meaning, but starting from literal meaning and reaching the meaning of metaphor by applying several strategies at last.

5 Conclusion

Cognitive linguistics considers metaphor as a universal linguistic phenomenon. Research shows, one out of three words is metaphor in our daily life and people used an average of 4 metaphors per minute when freely talking. Some scholar even made a hypothesis, that if people talk for at least 2h per day, there will be 4.7 million of new metaphor and 21.40 million of dead metaphor in his life if spans for 60 years[7,8]. Though the data is not exactly the same, it suggests metaphor is everywhere in people's everyday words. It is secure to say, the reason why metaphor fills in every corner of daily words is not because people has special linguistic competence but people's thought established on the basis of metaphor and metaphor appears unconsciously during the communication.

In recent years, the research focused on the comprehending model of local English speaker has become a hot spot of metaphor research both at home and abroad. By now, there are 5 models each with its own explanatory power. They are standard pragmatics model, conceptual metaphor model, relevance theory model, metaphor career model and grade-prominent model. On the other hand, specialists have hardly done any research on metaphor comprehending strategy and model of foreign language learner. In fact, lacking foreign linguistic ability and conception system of foreign, it is not possible for learners to comprehend metaphor as the local speaker, especially doing conscious processing to regular metaphor. In addition, the knowledge and conception system of learner's mother language involves and transforms the comprehending. Research of psychological linguistics suggests, application of processing strategy involves in any nonautomatic linguistic processing[9,10]. So, this paper analyzed and discussed what strategy Chinese learners with Chinese as mother language used to comprehend metaphor.

From the view of learner's thinking process and thought generation, this paper discussed the metaphor comprehending strategy and model of English learner in China whose mother language is Chinese. Research showed, Chinese learner mainly apply analytical model to comprehend metaphor which means they don't directly go to metaphorical meaning, but start form the literal meaning and get to the metaphorical meaning finally by applying all kinds of strategies. The strategies include context, literal meaning, English background knowledge, conjecture,

image in mind and syntactic analysis. It suggests, the comprehending of local speaker can not completely state the situation of foreign language learner. The metaphor comprehending of foreign language learner has its specificity and reveals the analytical processing model of strategy application.

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