

Learning Second Language Metaphor by Utilizing Metaphor Mapping

Due to the development of cognitive linguistic research, the understanding of metaphor has changed from a “decorative and ornamental” linguistic expression to a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system by which people understand one domain of experience in terms of another domain of a different kind (Johnson, 1987). Since it reflects how people conceptualize the world around, it is considered to represent a cultural model of a certain language (Kövecses, 2000, 2005), i.e., languages with different cultural models may have various expressions of the same concept. One noteworthy example is metaphor of *anger*. Cross-linguistic studies of *anger* metaphors—including English (Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987), Chinese (King, 1989; Yu, 1995), Japanese (Matsuki, 1995), Hungarian (Kövecses, 1990, 2000), and Spanish (Soriano, 2003)—show that metaphor is both culture universal and culture specific (Kövecses, 2000).

For second language learners, universality and specificity of languages influence learners’ interlanguage constructions (MacWhinney et.al, 1984). To reduce difficulties of learning L2 caused by language specificity, Kövecses (2001) proposes an idea of using metaphor mappings as explicit instructions to facilitate domain linking processes between L1 and L2 metaphorical concepts. Employing the method of transferring already-existent concept of learners’ first language to the newly-learned, Kövecses (2001) showed that Hungarian learners of English who were taught conceptual metaphors outperformed learners who were asked to memorize metaphors. Promising under second language learning circumstances, however, the idea of using metaphor mappings in language teaching still begs for empirical evidence, especially evidence from other linguistic contexts.

The present study, hence, aims at proving the potential of using metaphor mappings in teaching second language metaphor of English to Chinese learners. Although they belong to different language families with distinguished language structures, English and Chinese are found to have metaphorical expressions in common, as indicated by King (1989), Yu (1995), and Kövecses (2000). Metaphor mappings of *anger*, including ontological and relevant mappings, will be used as instructional tools; models of mappings would be adopted and modified based on Kövecses’ (2005) classification. Participants are Chinese learners of English in a university in Taiwan. Their English proficiency ranges from high intermediate to advanced level. Their performance on using English metaphor in writing will be examined to determine if using metaphor mappings could facilitate acquisition of metaphorical expressions of *anger* in English.

The findings of the study would have promising pedagogical implications. Since being able to use metaphorical expressions in expressing abstract concepts is indispensable for learners when they reach the advanced level, language teachers could use metaphor mappings to concrete learners’ cognitive systems on language learning and develop the depth and breadth of learners’ language uses.

Language data:

The *anger* metaphors of English and Chinese will firstly be classified into five categories based on Kövecses' (2005) classification by word forms, literal and figurative meanings of the forms, and conceptual metaphors (Table 1, 2).

Table 1.

Five Possibilities to Translate the Same Figurative Meaning from One Language into Another (Kövecses, 2005, pp.144, 149)

	Word form	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning	Conceptual metaphor
Possibility 1	Different	Same	Same	Same
Possibility 2	Different	Different	Same	Same
Possibility 3	Different	Different	Same	Different
Possibility 4	Different	Different	Different	Different
Possibility 5	Different	Different	Same [by means of literal meaning]	[no metaphor]

Table 2.

Examples of Five Possibilities to Express Metaphor of Anger in English and Chinese

	English	Chinese	Characteristic
Possibility 1	<i>added fuel to the fire</i>	<i>Huo shang jia you</i> fire on add oil “pouring oil on the fire.”	Universality
Possibility 2	<i>smolder</i>	<i>Nu-huo zhong shao</i> angry-fire middle burn “angry fire burns insides.”	Universality
Possibility 3	someone just <i>exploded</i>	<i>Nu-qi zhongyu baofa</i> anger-gas finally explode “finally the anger explodes.”	Specificity
Possibility 4	?	?	Specificity
Possibility 5	<i>Angry</i> (adj.)	<i>Nu</i> (adj.) angry “angry”	N/A