

Spatial Metaphors of Time in English and Chinese from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract: Metaphor is a type of speech in linguistics and also a way of thinking. The entire system of concepts for people is based on metaphor. Based on the analysis and comparison above, we can find some similarities and differences in how the metaphor of time is expressed in English and Chinese. The commonality stems from the similar cognitive ability and the sharing of the same "time as space" metaphor, and the differences are due to various socio-cultural backgrounds.

Key words: Time; space; metaphor; cognitive ability; socio-cultural backgrounds

1. Introduction

Traditional metaphor theory only sees metaphor as a figure of speech in language and a way to embellish language. With the development of cognitive science, modern metaphor theory has emerged, and one representative work is "Metaphors We Live By" by Lakoff and Johnson. The theory has achieved the "cognitive turn" in metaphor research. It is believed that metaphor is not only a figure of speech in literature but also a way of thinking that is widely used in daily life; therefore, Lakoff and Johnson believe that "metaphor is everywhere, and the entire conceptual system of human beings is built on the foundation of metaphor". Johnson, 1980.

When people learn about something, they use familiar concepts to describe or talk about new things and ideas; this is called metaphorical cognition. It is a type of cognition in which one area of knowledge is applied to interpret or learn about another area. Metaphor is generally a type of mapping from a more familiar source domain to a less familiar or unknown target domain in terms of its way of operation. Cognitive linguistics believes that our sense of time is not only about time; rather, it is also related to how we perceive movement in space.

Space and time have been subjects of study and research in philosophy, physics, psychology, etc., for a long time. With the appearance of cognitive linguistics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, space and time have also attracted the attention of many cognitive linguists and have become one of the popular research topics in cognitive linguistics (Zhang Keding, 2008). Space can be perceived by the human visual system; time is not visible and intangible to people, so it must be understood and expressed in terms of other concrete concepts.

Spatial orientation can help us understand time better, and people often grasp the concept of time through spatial metaphors. In terms of experience, any observable motion event in the world always has space, time, and motion (or change in the state of things), and the three are in experiential correlation; this is also why they are often interrelated (Lakoff, 1999; Moore, 2006, 2011, 2014, 2016). This paper aims to compare the spatial metaphors of time in English and Chinese from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, and through such comparison, explore the similarities and differences between them as well as the reasons for these differences.

2. The Motion Characteristics of Time

Cognitive linguists Gluckberg, Keysar and McGlone believe that "a universal feature of human language, and even of human thought, is the systematic use of spatial concepts and vocabulary to refer to time concepts" (Gluckberg, Keysar & McGlone, 1992). Different cultures around the world may have different ideas of time; some believe that time is a straight line, some consider time to be a circle, and others believe that time is a spiral. However, in fact, all of the above are spatial (Zhang Jianli & Ding Zhanping, 2003). The main model used by both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking people to

think about time is one-dimensional linear time; that is, time is an object that moves in a straight line and continuously flows from the future through the present to the past, or from the past through the present to the future. The two kinds of models are as follows:

- (1) Time is on the horizontal axis (front/back direction).
- (2) Time is on the vertical axis (up/down orientation).

3. The Horizontal Level (Time Moving Along the Horizontal Axis): A Contrastive Study of Spatial Metaphors for Time in English and Chinese

Lakoff has put forward two forms of the spatial metaphor for time in English: "TIME PASSING IS MOTION", namely "Time Moving" and "Ego Moving" (Lakoff, G. & M. Johnson, 1980). The other two are also available in Chinese.

3.1 "Time Moving"

The metaphor of "Time Moving" is as follows: the observer is stationary with respect to time, and time itself is an object that moves from the future to the past in the direction of the observer. In the direction of motion, time has a head and a tail; that is to say, the future is ahead of the observer, the stationary observer is at the present, and the past is behind the observer. People map the reasoning pattern of spatial object motion onto the concept of time and create spatial metaphors for time. Many such examples exist in both English and Chinese:

Expressing the Future.

- (1) the coming year (the future, days to come, next year, life to come)
- (2) to look forward to (to look ahead in life)

Based on the above examples, we can see that the future is now considered an object that "has not yet arrived but is moving towards the stationary observer".

Expressing the Present

- (3) at present, at this time (the present, now)

From the above examples, we can see that the present time is considered to be in the same state as the observer; that is, it is at the same level as the observer.

Expressing the Past

- (4) In the past, in the years gone by (last year, the past).

(5) to recall, to review, to remember; that is, to look back at something or to be in a state of recollection.

- (6) Time flies; this year has gone by in an instant.

From the above examples, we can see that the past is understood as an object that has "left the stationary observer and is moving away slowly from the stationary observer".

In short, it can be seen that both English and Chinese, in all their expressions of "the future", "the present" and "the past", are in line with the metaphorical idea of "the future is ahead and the past is behind", and this is built upon the "Time Moving" metaphor.

3.2 "Ego Moving"

"Ego Moving" is the idea that time is a fixed point and a finite, measurable space, and the self (the observer) is moving from the past through these fixed positions towards the future. Self moves through time; it has gone through the past, lives in the present, and will enter the future, so the future is ahead and the past is behind. The metaphor of "ego movement" is that the observer is in the present. Time is the same for all people. If Time 1 follows Time 2, then with respect to Time 1, Time 2 is in the future. Time can be expanded and recorded. Extended time is a space, and it can be regarded as a finite region (Chen Yu & Wu Lan, 2008). That is,

Expressing the Past

(7) to remember, to recall, to recollect; that is, to look back or reflect on.

(8) Mary finished her homework in a week. (The Republic of China has had a very extraordinary fifty-five years.)

(9) journey, course, past events.

Based on the above examples, it can be seen that the past is regarded as the way the observer has already walked or the traces he has left behind.

Expressing the Present

(10) The project will be carried out over a period of 18 months. (Humanity has entered the new century.)

(11) Even now, thirty years have passed, but I can still recall that time vividly. (To this day, although it has been thirty years, I can still clearly remember that time.)

Based on the above examples, it can be seen that the observer has moved out of the past and reached the present.

Expressing the Future.

(12) Future Development Direction.

(13) From this time forward I' ll work harder. (From now on I will work hard.)

Based on the above examples, we can see that the future is regarded as the journey, road or scene ahead of the moving observer; that is to say, the future refers to the observer's own future.

As shown in the examples above, both English-speaking and Chinese-speaking people have adopted the "Ego Moving" metaphor and followed the metaphorical idea of "the future is ahead and the past is behind" in their expressions of time. The two versions of "TIME PASSING IS MOTION" at the horizontal level (time along the horizontal axis), namely "Time Moving" and "Ego Moving", can be used in both English and Chinese. It can be seen that although the cultures and languages of English and Chinese are very different, they both use the metaphor of "time as space", and this metaphor has cross-cultural and cross-linguistic universality. However, due to the different cultural values and beliefs, history, living environments, customs, and other reasons, there are also considerable differences in the metaphorical cognition of time in the two languages. The cosmological view of the "separation of man and nature" is prevalent in English culture; Westerners value rationality, are good at logical thinking, and advocate for the separation of subject and object. Based on the above reasons, English-speaking people are more likely to use the "ego moving" metaphor and have started to believe that "the future is bright and the past is gone".

(14) I will wait for your letter. (I will wait to be informed by you.)

(15) A new road lay ahead of him. (A new road is in front of him.)

(16) the time that has passed is behind us

As shown in Examples (14)-(16), events that are about to happen in the future are all expressed with words that suggest a "front" orientation, and events that have already taken place are expressed with words that indicate a "back" orientation; this is consistent with the metaphor that "the future is ahead and the past is behind". Chinese people are accustomed to thinking in a "time-moving" way, on the other hand. Time is a stream of water, and its back wave advances the front wave; time moves forward for us, so what is ahead is the past and what has been achieved, and what is coming next is the future and what has yet to be realised (Zhou Rong & Huang Xiting, 1999).

When using the front/back orientation in the spatial domain to express the temporal domain, Chinese people have formed the metaphor of "the past is in front and the future is behind". Therefore, in Chinese, there are expressions such as "the day before yesterday", "the year before last", "unprecedented", "predecessor", "a lesson from the past", "unparalleled", "the day after tomorrow", "future", "younger generation", "an up-and-coming young person", and "there will be successors to carry on the cause". All of them are metaphors that use the front/back position of space to indicate time. Such expressions are difficult for English speakers to understand and accept, as they do not use the "Ego Moving" time metaphor, but they are in line with the metaphorical behaviour of the Chinese people who revere ancestors, respect elders, value experience, esteem age and give weight to seniority. However, Chinese also has linguistic expressions that represent the metaphorical idea of "the future is

ahead and the past is behind", such as "future prospects" and "looking back".

The two metaphors are in opposition to each other, so there is a conflict among the values of the past and the future. In the same society, there are different value systems that fall under the mainstream culture and subcultures, and the conflict between these two systems shows that different cultures give different weights to value systems (Lakoff, G. & M.). Johnson, 1980. Past-oriented values are part of the main culture in China and have a much stronger influence than future-oriented values.

4. Vertical Level (Time Moving Along the Vertical Axis): A Contrastive Study of Spatial Metaphors for Time in English and Chinese

There are many uses of "up/down" (shang/xia) in Chinese, such as: morning/first half of the day/ancient times/previous generation/last year/first ten days of a month/first half of the night/last week; second half of life/last ten days of a month/afternoon/second half of the day/second half of the night/not to be repeated, and so on. Lan Chun believes that when using time to express "morning" or "afternoon", the emergence of this metaphor may be related to the movement of the sun; the sun rises above the horizon in the morning and reaches its highest point at noon, so "morning" (shangwu, literally "up-noon") refers to the earlier period or an early time, and after noon, the sun gradually sets and goes below the horizon in the evening; thus, "afternoon" (xiawu, literally "down-noon") was formed (Lan Chun, 1999). Liu Yunhong (2011) found in her study that the metaphorical meanings of "inside/within/interior" (li, zhong, nei) are generally related to time, scope, state, etc.

In Chinese culture, time is sometimes considered to be moving from top to bottom. The pattern of motion is associated with such metaphors as the "long river of history" and "time flowing like water", and equating time with a river is a relatively fixed image in traditional Chinese culture. Confucius's well-known words, "It will go on like this forever, day after day", are a typical example of this. Phrases such as "Since the Tang and Song dynasties" and "Since the Song and Yuan dynasties" make people feel that a certain period of time is like water falling from a height. Because of the Earth's gravity, water will always flow downwards; it takes some time for the water to reach the lower part, so it will pass through the upper part first and then the lower part. People have projected their understanding of the attributes of flowing water onto the idea of time and thus created this particular metaphor for time.

Spatial Metaphors of Time also exist in Western culture. We can see this metaphorical idea in English family trees; the older generation is the "ascendants" at the top, and the younger generation is the "descendants" at the bottom. There are also linguistic forms in English that use "up" to refer to an earlier time and "down" to refer to a later time, such as:

(17) We will advance the meeting by a week. (We will move the meeting up by one week.)

(18) a story that has come down from medieval times. (A story that has come down from medieval times.)

However, Western culture is a culture based on Christianity. God is the Creator of the universe, heaven and earth, and all that exists. God is in heaven; people associate "up" with the almighty God and are convinced that God will guide them, even though they do not know when or how God will do so. Because God is in heaven, far above, "up" refers to the unknown. Therefore, in English, a metaphorical idea of "the future is up and the past is down" (UNKNOWN IS UP; KNOWN IS DOWN) has been created (Chen Xiaoping, 2007). For instance,

(19) Up to the end of last year (Until the end of last year)

(20) Business has not been good this year. (Business has not done well this year.)

What is worth noting is that in the conceptual metaphor "time is space", there is another difference between English and Chinese in the metaphorical expressions of age: "long" and "short" can be used in both English and Chinese to refer to people's lifespans, such as "short-lived" (short-lived). However, in Chinese, people also use the spatial terms "high" and "low" to refer to age, such as "high longevity" (gaoshou) and "low age trend" (dilinghua); "high" and "low" are not used in English to refer to age. This particular metaphor is in line with the traditional Chinese cultural concept of filial piety. The older generation is always at the top, and the younger generation is always at the bottom; older people have relatively high status and younger people have low status. The Chinese people have incorporated this traditional idea into their metaphors for age and thus created expressions that differ from those in English.

5. Conclusion

According to the theory of modern metaphor, most of the time people learn about and talk about abstract ideas is through space-related concepts. People who speak different languages often need to use particular spatial references to understand and express the abstract idea of time. Based on the comparison, this paper finds that there are some similarities and some differences in the metaphors for the concept of time in English and Chinese. The above reasons can be traced back to the common cognitive features of Chinese and English speakers and their shared metaphor of "time as space". The spatial metaphor of time is universal in culture and language, and the differences are due to different sociocultural backgrounds. Based on the above analysis, there are some common traits and differences in the two cultures. It will help solve the problem of cross-linguistic communication, advance the study and application of English, and promote interaction among different countries and cultures.

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