

A Comparative Study of Conceptual Metaphor in Chinese and American Commencement Speeches

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Abstract: The main objectives of the study are to further explore the connection between conceptual metaphor and the language expression structures through the comparative analysis of the conceptual metaphor in the commencement speeches of universities between English and Chinese. It also studies the meaning, cultural characteristics, similarities and differences of the two languages so that it can give a proper interpretation of how the cultural factors works on the language structure and semantic expressions. The conceptual metaphor was regards as a system of human conceptualization. Speeches addressed on graduation ceremonies by great people who are admired by the university students play a vital role in their lives. So the comparative study of conceptual metaphor in Chinese and American commencement speeches is necessary.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, the commencement speech, comparative study

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor as a form of language has been attracting attention of international scholars more than two thousand years since Aristotle [1]. The publication of *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980 by Lakoff and Johnson [2] marked the beginning of the contemporary metaphor research from the cognitive perspective. Lakoff advocates probing into metaphor as a sort of cognitive means and thinking mode.

University students who are going to leave school for their new future sometimes are confused about their future. Speeches addressed on their graduation ceremonies by great people they admire play a vital role in their lives, which give the adults more advice and encouragement. The corpus of this thesis was chosen from the internet based on the popular commencement speeches of universities which are famous in China and America. It includes five Chinese and five American commencement speeches were all published in 2016, according to the previous conceptual metaphor studies, ten commencements speeches can guarantee the necessary study statistics.

The Previous Studies of Conceptual Metaphor

The latest cognitive linguistics thinks metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon and a kind of cognitive activity, in which people use the experience of one field to explain or understand the experience of another different field. The metaphor rooted in language, thought and culture, it is full of cultural characteristics. Such as Lakoff's description about the relationship between the conceptual metaphor and thought [3], Turner's cognitive linguistic explanation of the conceptual metaphor meaning formation [4]. There are many works about the conceptual metaphor, such as

Kövecses published the book *Metaphor in culture: Universality and Variation* [5] in 2006 and *Metaphor: A practical Introduction* [6] in 2010. In the second book, Kvasse's pointed out the source domain and the target domain; he also analyzed the working mechanism of the two domains, which offers references for the learners to understand the meaning and usage of the conceptual metaphor.

With the further research, there are also many achievements in China, such as Shu Ding fang's *Studies in Metaphor* [8], this book is regarded as the latest development of metaphor study. Recently Su Lichen published a book named *English and Chinese Conceptual Metaphor and foreign Language Teaching* [9], in which the relationship between the theory and practice was shown, it concludes the similarities and the differences of the semantic structures between English and Chinese, through the comparative analysis of the application examples of the two languages.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the conceptual metaphors as theme, this thesis searches the number of the literature which was published in CNKI from 1997 to 2016; the statics were shown in the following table.

Table-1: The number of paper in CNKI from 1997~2016

Year	1997~2000	2001~2004	2005~2008	2009~2012	2013~2016
Paper	71	228	1149	2378	2649

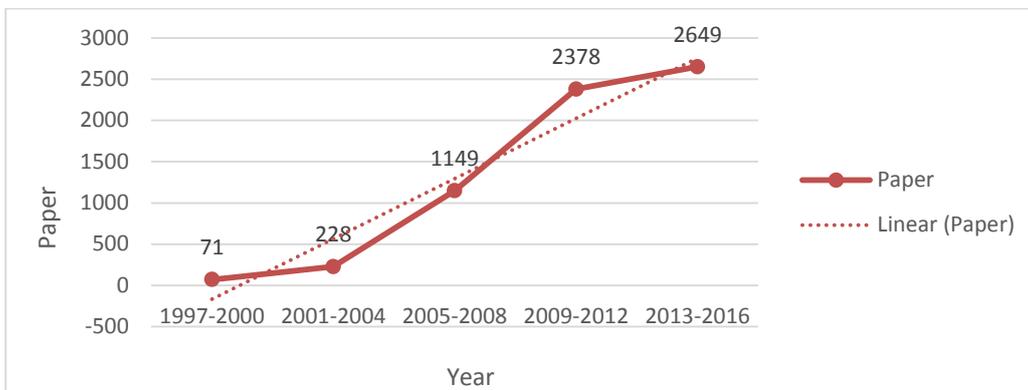


Fig-1: The number of paper in CNKI from 1997~2016

From the table-1 and Fig-1, the study found that the conceptual metaphor study is on the rise as a whole. In this thesis, the writer used the phrases conceptual metaphor and the comparative study between English

and Chinese as the theme of the paper, getting the number of the papers which were published in CNKI as follows.

Table-2: The number of paper in CNKI from 1997~2016

Year	1997~2000	2001~2004	2005~2008	2009~2012	2013~2016
Paper	0	18	107	191	196

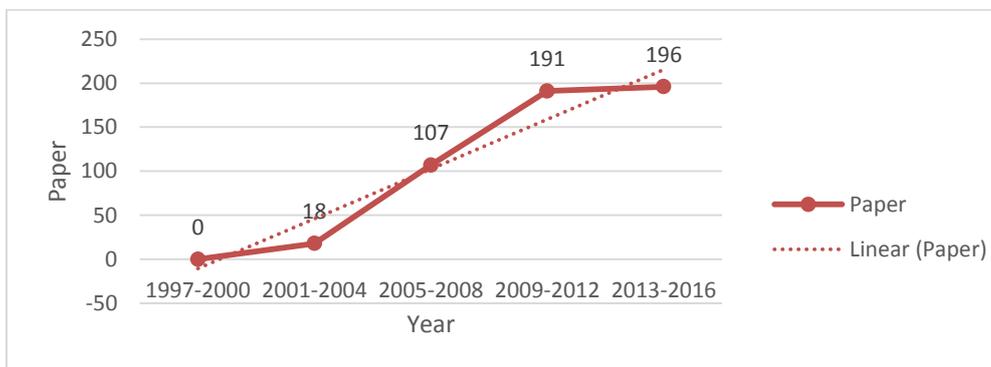


Fig-2: The number of paper in CNKI from 1997~2016

From the table and the line chart above, we can conclude that the comparative studies of the conceptual metaphor between English and Chinese present a rising trend. Based on the conceptual metaphor theory, this thesis used the commencement speeches as the study corpus, to do the further research between English and Chinese.

The Detail Analysis of the Commencement Speech

In 1997, Fauconnier put forward the mapping theory [10], which explained the working mechanism of the conceptual metaphor. The metaphor mainly focuses on the cross-space mapping between the two inputs, which also named the source domain and the target domain by Lakoff [11]. In the mapping theory, the source domain is more physical and concrete than the target domain. The purpose of the metaphor is through

the using of source domain to make readers understand the target domain more vivid and clear. Linguistic Mark Johnson has said that conceptual metaphor is an indispensable component of the human thinking process, and it is closely related to people's life and practice experience [12].

The laborious work of the writer in this research is to identify, categorize and analyze the main types of conceptual metaphor which employed in the commencement speeches in the universities. The conceptual metaphor can be categorized by the source domains. This thesis will analyze the conceptual metaphors based on eight types. The percentage of conceptual metaphor types in corpus can be seen from the table 3.

Table-3: The percentage of conceptual metaphor types in corpus

The times of CM in the Commencement Speeches Metaphor types	Chinese	English	Total number	The percentage of the CM
The journey metaphor	44	69	113	34.88%
The organism metaphor	24	55	79	24.38%
The building metaphor	24	28	52	16.05%
The war metaphor	20	28	48	14.81%
The market metaphor	3	13	16	4.94%
The container metaphor	3	5	8	2.47%
The family metaphor	4	0	4	1.23%
The machine metaphor	0	4	4	1.23%

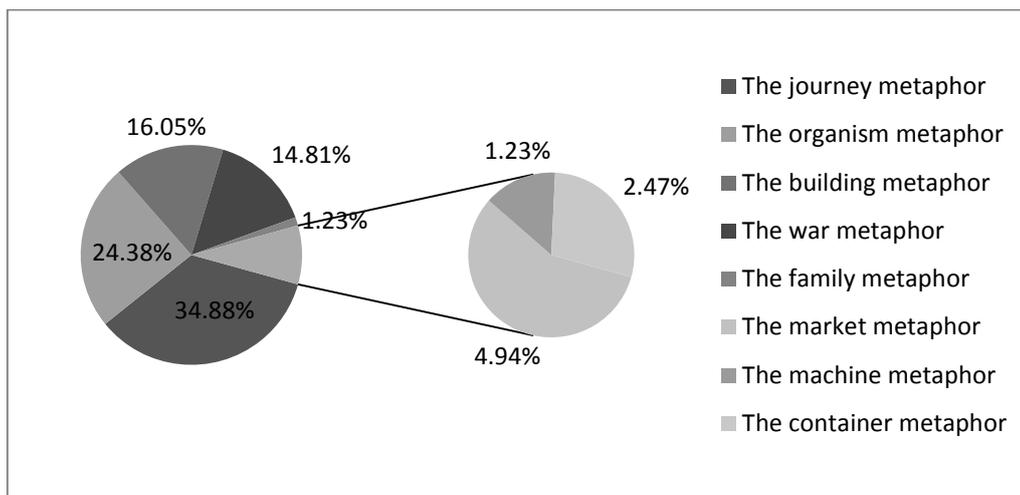


Fig-3: The percentage of conceptual metaphor types in corpus

From the table 3 and the Fig 3, the percentage of conceptual metaphor types in corpus can be seen that the journey metaphor, the building metaphor and the organism metaphor are the domain metaphors in the corpus both in Chinese and English. And the family metaphor only appear in Chinese corpus while the machine metaphor in English. At the following parts, this thesis will analyze the conceptual metaphors in the speeches.

The Journey Metaphor

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson initially proposed the journey metaphor love is a journey. Lakoff and Turner also put forward that LIFE

IS A JOURNEY in 1989. Lakoff said that long term purposeful activities are journeys. The journey metaphors are always being used to describe the development of the event. As we all know there are not only progress in the journey but also some difficulties and barriers. For the graduate students, after they leave school go to the society the future life is a new journey, having new starting point and end. They may come into some obstacles in their career or life, the person who give the commence speech will encourage them to overcome the difficulties and keep going. The mapping process between source domain and target domain can be presented in the table 4.

Table- 4: The mapping process of journey metaphor

The source domain	Correspond to	The target domain
Journey		Long term purposeful activities
Traveler		The students/ meet the person in society
Milestone		Achievements got
Obstacles		The difficulties/ barriers met
Destination		The purpose/ goals achieved/the end
The path		The development of the event

Here are some examples:

- You all have worked so hard and come so far to reach this **milestone**, supported you on this **journey**.(Michelle Obama, City College of New York, 2016)
- Because today you start down the **path** of becoming the generation on which the next generation.(Steven Spielberg, Harvard University, 2016)
- 亲爱的同学们：厦门大学 2016 **毕业站**到了，请携带好自己的随身物品，比如小师妹如果她方便携带的话，**我们下一次再相逢**！（邹振东，厦门大学，2016）
- 也许一般人觉得做到 99%就很了不起，我们武大人还要**继续向前**，向 99.99%甚至 100%**冲刺**！（李晓红，武汉大学，2016）

Sentences above list many different aspects of the journey metaphor, it is the most widely used type in the commencement speeches. All the speech makers both in China and America consider the university graduates will begin a new journey after they leave school. The

new journey may be smooth or have many barriers. Therefore, the speakers will encourage graduate students to go far. In a word, these journey metaphors are of great importance and positive significance in motivating graduates to keep a firm belief in the bright and prosperous future ahead.

The Organism Metaphor

Human cognitive rules, determined the important roles of the organism in the cognition. In term of the human being metaphor, Layoff and Johnson said: "Personification is a special type of ontological metaphor where the object is further specified as being a person so that a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities can be described in terms of human motivations, characteristics and activities." The traditional culture determined the plant metaphor. In China the student is plant and the teacher is cultivator. The development of the student is growth of plant while the contribution of teacher is cultivation. The mapping structure can be shown in the table -5.

Table-5: The mapping process of organism metaphor

Source domain	Correspond to	Target domain
Human being		The future life/ career/ university
The mind/the heart		The idea/ thought
The head		Leader/ remarkable parts of the university
plant		The students
cultivator		The educator/ parents/ teachers
Root/seed		knowledge in university

Here are some examples:

- You can't actually design your life. The hard times and vicissitudes of life will ultimately **visit** everyone. (Ken,Burns, Stanford University ,2016)
- 2.America remains a very **young** nation – **younger**, even, than this university.(Barack Obama, Rutgers university,2016)
- 一直以来的进步和突破，积累起来就是**脱胎换骨**般的变化，这就是坚持的意义。（王小川，清华大学，2016）
- 5.蔡元培校长.....他的这些主张一直为我们所坚守，**滋养**了一代又一代北大入。（林建华，北京大学，2016）

“Among the entities in the world, human beings have a prominent place because only they can initiate and perform willful actions, deliberately exert force on their environment and use instruments to achieve their goals”(Ungerer,2001) [13]. The listed examples above, we can see the organism metaphors mostly are human being metaphors no matter in Chinese or English.

The Building Metaphor

Our experience of physical objects and substances provides a further basis for understanding.

As we all know building need be constructed by people step by step, it just like the abstract things confidence, attitude and goal. They also need building and constructing. The following examples can provide enough evidence for this:

- We'd help to restore the sense that hard work is rewarded and we could **build** an economy that truly works for everybody.(Barack Obama, Rutgers university,2016)
- See, all of you know, for centuries, this city has been **the gateway to** America for so many striving, hope-filled immigrants.(Michelle Obama, City College of New York, 2016)
- 3.光阴如梭，转眼 30 年过去了，复旦母校的教育是我人生最重要的**基石**。（李晓红，武汉大学，2016）
- 4.在破坏性技术刚刚出现时，率先进入这些新兴市场的企业将赢得巨大的回报，并**建立**起明显的先发优势。（王小川，清华大学，2016）

In the examples above, the nation, life, and market are regarded as buildings which need foundation

stones. In fact, the building metaphor and the journey metaphor has many things in common. They both need time and have a goal. People must achieve them step by step in a direction; like the journey needs a guider and the building construction needs a blueprint.

The Family Metaphor

Family metaphor is a commonly used metaphor in Chinese commencement speeches, since in traditional Chinese culture; the Chinese people value their families very much. The family domain is very familiar to our daily life. Just like Lakoff has said the state is a family, the university is also a family, the teachers are parents, the students are children, the classmates are brothers and sisters. Here are some examples concerning this metaphor:

- 1.我想说，复旦永远是你们共同的精神家园。千里万里，无论何时何地，母校始终牵挂着你们，永远是你们最坚强的后盾！（许宁生，复旦大学，2016）
- 2.祝你们的明天更加美好！武大永远是你们的家，请你们常回家看看！（李晓红，武汉大学，2016）
- 3.最后要说的叮嘱，就是常回家看看，其实你懂的，这不过是一句客套话。你们不太可能常回来的，要回来，也是逢五，甚至逢十。（邹振东，厦门大学，2016）

The use of the metaphor the university is a family can enhance the “one-family” ideology in student’s mind. It can encourage the students’ love for their universities. In the examples above, the university is the home of the graduate students, the teacher’s acts as the parents who look after their children and hope that they can come back home now and then. But this type of metaphor is little used in American commencement speeches, which reflects the difference between the two languages.

The Machine Metaphor

America is an industrial country and many kinds of machines come into people’s life, such as computers, TV, mobile phone, etc. The machine makes people’s life more convenient and much easier. So in American commencement speeches, the machine metaphor are used, And it always appeared following words, such as produce, create, generated, etc. Here are some examples:

- So really, it is no accident that this institution has **produced** 10 Nobel Prize winners.(Michelle Obama, City College of New York, 2016)
- They lost it, because they were **ill-equipped** to handle their first encounter with disappointment or falling short.(Michelle Obama, City College of New York, 2016)

- We’ve unleashed the **strongest economic engine** the worldunequal. (Barack Obama, Rutgers University, 2016)

In this part, the author made a detail analysis on the conceptual metaphors in the commencement speeches. It turns out that the journey metaphor, the organism metaphor and the building metaphor are mostly used in the commencement speeches both in China and America. While the family metaphor is commonly used in Chinese commencement speeches and the machine metaphor in American. The differences are based on the cultural differences of the two languages.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Through the detail analysis and the statistic study, the author will summarize the main findings and the implications of the study, also put forward the suggestions for the future study based on the limitations.

Firstly, it has found the pervasiveness of the conceptual metaphor in Chinese and American commencement speeches. Metaphor is pervasive in our everyday life and 70% of our daily language is metaphorical. Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Through the statistic study, the author has found that there are 102 conceptual metaphors in Chinese commencement speeches and 202 conceptual metaphors in American which can testify the University of the Conceptual Metaphor. Secondly, it can find that some conceptual metaphors both appear in these two languages while some metaphors only exist in one. In this thesis, the journey metaphor, organism metaphor and building metaphor are all used in the two data while the family metaphor only occurs in Chinese data and the machine metaphor in American data. The difference of the conceptual metaphor is deeply related to the cultural difference. People in different cultures have different experiences, in order to make other people to understand, they may use different conceptual metaphors to describe unfamiliar things. The finding of the thesis is helpful for the further study of the cultural difference and coherence.

There are some implications of the study, Firstly, the findings are beneficial to culture teaching and learning. Metaphor is determined by country’s cultural system and it also can reflect the country’s cultural system. The comparative study will help language learners understand the similarities and differences of these cultures which makes the cross-cultural communication more available. And it is helpful for the foreign language teaching, teaching more about the target language’s culture is necessary and it also will make language learning smoothly. Secondly, as the conceptual metaphor is based on the bodily experience, It is important to get more and more people understand and use conceptual metaphors flexible in their daily life.

It highly contributes to improve the interpersonal relations.

Due to the author's academic knowledge and personal ability, it is unavoidable to have some limitations in this thesis. Firstly, the corpus in this thesis does not cover a large range of the commencement speeches. Secondly, since the shortage of tools, it is difficult for the author to identify the categories of the conceptual metaphor all accurately; the results may be influenced by the subjective feelings. After analyzing the weaknesses, in the future studies, a larger corpus is needed, and the deeper and more exact research should also be done. Furthermore, the reasons for the differences of the conceptual metaphor in Chinese and English commencement speeches should be analyzed more completely.

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Appendix

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<http://mt.sohu.com/20160627/n456460374.shtml>
- 3.厦门大学毕业演讲，邹振东，2016
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- 4.和时间做朋友，清华大学毕业演讲，王小川，2016
<http://mt.sohu.com/20160704/n457585615.shtml>
- 5.网络时代更需要理性，北京大学毕业演讲，林建华，2016
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- 6.The Commencement Speech of City College of New York, Michelle Obama,2016
<http://www.kekenet.com/Article/201606/451204.shtml>
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<http://www.kekenet.com/Article/201606/446927.shtml>
- 10.There's more at stake today than in any story ever told, MIT, Matt Damon,2016
<http://www.hjenglish.com/yanjiang/p793364/>