

Conceptual Metaphors of “风 (Wind)” and “雨 (Rain)” in English and Chinese Idioms: A Corpus-Based Comparative Study

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Abstract—This study, framed within the paradigm of cognitive linguistics, systematically examines and analyzes the metaphorical expressions of “风 (wind)”, “雨 (rain)”, and “风雨 (wind and rain)” in English and Chinese idioms. The Chinese language data for this study primarily originates from *Modern Chinese dictionary* and the BCC corpus, while the English language data is predominantly sourced from the COCA corpus. Through a comprehensive comparative analysis, the following conclusions are drawn: regarding the metaphorical expressions of the “风 (wind)”, both English and Chinese languages predominantly exhibit similarities, demonstrating a characteristic of “differences within similarities”; in contrast, the metaphorical expressions of the “雨 (rain)” is not as rich as that of the “风 (wind)”, and the majority of metaphorical expressions manifest differences between English and Chinese, reflecting a “similarity within differences” pattern. The metaphorical expressions of the “风雨 (wind and rain)” show uniqueness in Chinese and an absence in English. This study suggests that the target domain of meteorological metaphorical terms can be broadly categorized into three aspects: (1) the natural target domain, (2) the social target domain, and (3) the psychological target domain. In English and Chinese languages, the similarities of meteorological metaphorical terms is mainly observed in the natural domain, whereas differences are primarily evident in the psychological domain, with fewer differences in the social domain.

Keywords—conceptual metaphor, meteorological metaphors, wind idioms, rain idioms

I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is omnipresent, permeating various aspects of people’s daily lives. It is considered one of the fundamental ways by which individuals perceive the world. According to the theory of cognitive linguistics, metaphor theory is essentially conceptual, which means that our conceptual system originates from everyday experiences, with many concepts, especially abstract ones, being constructed through metaphorical means [1]. In this context, metaphor refers to the use of a concept in one cognitive domain to express other concepts in another cognitive domain [2].

Metaphor has a long history, spanning over two thousand years. Traditional metaphor studies consider it as a rhetorical phenomenon. However, modern metaphor researches tend to view metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon [3]. In interpreting the metaphors, traditional semantics interprets metaphors as the substitution or transformation of word meanings [2]. For instance, Aristotle in “Poetics” proposed four types of metaphor: genus for species, species for genus, species for species, and analogy. However, these are all confined to the substitution or transformation of word meanings. Later,

pragmatics suggested that the understanding of metaphor should be based on logic and context. Nevertheless, it still remains limited by examining metaphor from the perspective of language use [2]. In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson [4] co-authored the classic book, *Metaphors we Live by*, which first raised the study of metaphor to the cognitive level. By analyzing and studying a large number of metaphors, they pointed out that metaphor is a process of expressing and understanding abstract, intangible and complex target concepts (such as psychological feelings, social relations, morality, etc.) through concrete, tangible and simple source domains (such as temperature, space, action, etc.), so as to promote abstract thinking.

Weather or meteorology, exemplified by “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)”, is one of the common and pervasive existences. The image of weather often appears in many literary works and life conditions, reflecting the culture and history of a country or nation. Therefore, the metaphorical concepts of weather or meteorology can open a window to the social culture and civilization of a country or nation.

This study tries to answer the following questions, taking the metaphors of “风 (wind)”, “雨 (rain)” and “风雨 (wind and rain)” in English and Chinese idioms as the research object:

(1) What are the similarities and differences of “风(wind)”, “雨 (rain)”, and “风雨 (wind and rain)” in the idioms of English and Chinese?

(2) What are the main aspects of the similarities and differences of meteorological metaphors?

(3) Why is “风雨 (wind and rain)” as a compound word unique to Chinese?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, a large number of researches focus on spatial metaphor, temperature metaphor, clean metaphor, and tactile metaphor [2], while the researches on weather and meteorological metaphor are relatively limited.

Huang and Xie [5] conducted an in-depth analysis of the conceptual metaphor of “风 (wind)” in both English and Chinese from the perspective of experiential cognition. He concluded that the metaphor of “风 (wind)” presents a cognitive law of “reality-cognition-language”, and concluded that the projection scope of “风 (wind)” has extended to the field of human behavior and social evaluation. Li and Feng [6] made a comparative analysis of the commonality and individuality of the metaphorical projection of “风

(wind)” in English and Chinese. They analyzed the reasons behind the phenomenon, and believed that the differences were mainly caused by the different cognitive psychological and cultural backgrounds of China and the West. Wang [7] studied the conceptual metaphor of “雨 (rain)” in English and Chinese and believed that the differences are caused by geographical environment and value orientation. Chen [8] analyzed the target domains mapped by “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)” at different stages from the formation and development processes in nature, and found that the similar and interconnected experiences of Chinese and British people are the basis of metaphorical similarity, while different social and cultural experiences are the root cause of differences.

At present, no one has classified and summarized the different types of the target domains of meteorological metaphors and analyzed the metaphorical concepts of “风雨 (wind and rain)” as a compound word.

III. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

After sorting out and analyzing, this study believes that in the field of meteorological metaphor, the target domain can be further divided into natural target domain, social target domain and psychological target domain according to the metaphorical projection domain. Natural target domain is formed by one metaphorical projections from the original domain and closely associated with its natural attributes. Social target domain refers to the concept formed by two metaphorical projections from the original domain (or one metaphorical projection from natural target domain) or directly formed by social culture, geographical environment and others, thereby containing social concepts. Psychological target domain refers to the concepts formed in human psychological activities after a metaphorical projection from social target domain, or directly influenced by social culture, geographical environment and other factors.

A. The Metaphorical Concepts of “风 (wind)” in Chinese and English idioms

1) Natural target domain

Wind in nature is fast, unpredictable, ubiquitous, invisible and colorless. Besides, wind can be used as a spread medium of pollen, disease and other substances. Since these are the basic natural attributes of wind, most people from different countries and cultural backgrounds will have the same experience and feelings, the metaphorical concepts in Chinese and English are basically the same. For example, since the wind is fast, it can be used as a metaphor for “rapid movement”. Since the wind is unpredictable, it can be used as a metaphor for “the change of things”. Since the wind is everywhere, it can be used as a metaphor for “situation or atmosphere”. Since wind is invisible and colorless, it can be used as a metaphor for “futility or nothing”. Since the wind can act as a medium for material transmission, it can be used as a metaphor for “secret or information”.

2) Social target domain

Since the social and cultural backgrounds of different countries and regions are both identical and different, the social target domains projected from the same original domain are both common and different. At the same time, through the further projection of natural target domain, part

of social target domain can also be generated. For example, as mentioned above, the unpredictable wind can be used as a metaphor for the change of things. Wind usually brings danger to people when a hurricane comes [5], so wind can also be used as a metaphor for “danger”. At the same time, the change of movement often trigger domino effect. For example, wind is one of the reasons for the formation of rain, so wind can also be used as a metaphor for “reason”. In addition, as mentioned above, because the wind is everywhere, it can be used as a metaphor for the situation or atmosphere. When people go against the wind or the trend, they will be blocked from doing things. Based on this experience, the wind can also be used as a metaphor for “difficulty or setback”. Moreover, wind can be used as a metaphor for futility or nothing. If the theory is not based on evidence, it will become groundless, so wind can also be used as a metaphor for “groundlessness”. These metaphorical projections are not different due to different cultural backgrounds, because Chinese people and British people have the same cultural experience. Therefore, the scope of metaphorical projection in the social target domain of “风 (wind)” overlaps.

At the same time, the influence of cultural traditions, literary allusions, social psychology, geographical environment and other factors should not be ignored. The same original domain will project different social target domain. For example, in the *Romance of The Three Kingdoms* (《三国演义》), a masterpiece of Chinese classical literature, Zhuge Liang made use of the east wind to burn the Red Cliff and defeated Cao Army, and since then the allusion that “everything is ready except the east wind (万事俱备只欠东风)” has been passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, the wind in Chinese, especially the east wind, can be used as a metaphor for “favorable condition”. As a country of rites and ceremonies, China has attached great importance to individual speech and behavior since ancient times, and the rite system in the Western Zhou Dynasty was perfected, and even Confucius put forward the “gentleman’s moral style (君子之德风)” when the system of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty collapsed. The statement means that the morality of the gentleman is like the wind and Confucius hopes to standardize the world with Zhou etiquette (周礼). Therefore, in the context of Chinese culture, wind can be used as a metaphor for “good manner”, and there are idioms such as “风度翩翩”. In addition, wind can be used as a metaphor for “talent”. Many poems of Mao Zedong, the first president of China, allude to this concepts, including “风流人物” and “风华正茂”. In Chinese, wind can also be used as a metaphor for “love”, such as the idiom “风花雪月”, because the image of wind often appears in classical Chinese love poems.

However, Britain is surrounded by the sea, and its economy depends on maritime trade, which often requires merchants to pay the price of their lives for ocean sailing. The lives of all people on a ship all depend on the sea wind condition. If a strong storm is encountered, they all risk their lives. Therefore, the wind can be used as a metaphor for “manipulation”, such as the idiom “wind sb. around one’s fingers”. When the wind subsides, everyone can take a relief and relax, so the wind can be used as a metaphor for “relax or stop”, such as the idiom “wind down”. In addition, English

literature is deeply influenced by epic legends and ancient Greek and Roman myths, so there are many characters with the spirit of adventure in English literature, such as Beowulf and Robinson, etc. These literary images reflect the cultural characteristics of British people who are keen on adventure [9]. The culture of English-speaking countries is unique in that they love adventure and advocate freedom, so wind is used as a metaphor for “energy”, such as the idiom “get one’s second wind”.

3) *Psychological target domain*

The social and natural environment is a major factor affecting the formation and development of language. For the same thing, people in different geographical environments, natural conditions, and climatic characteristics will have different experiences [6]. Taking wind as a metaphor for “mood” is a common cultural experience in both China and Britain, but the specific metaphorical content is quite different. For example, the spring breeze in China is the east wind from the Pacific Ocean, so the east wind symbolizes “warmth and joy”. However, Chinese people’s emotional experience of the “west wind” is bleak and desolate, such as the idiom “西风残照”. The “east wind” blowing from the Pacific Ocean heralds spring, so the Chinese people use it as a metaphor for “positive things”, while the corresponding “west wind” is synonymous with “decay and backwardness”. In Britain, the image of “east wind” and “west wind” is the opposite. The west wind from the Atlantic heralds the coming of spring. Therefore, in western culture, the “west wind” symbolizes “warmth and hope”. For example, Shelley used “west wind” as a metaphor of revolutionary power in his poem “Ode to the West Wind”, which is full of eagerness for the prospect of revolution. Samuel Butler described the east wind as “biting east winds”.

In addition, as mentioned above, the British often need to set sail. If the wind speed and direction are satisfactory, it will make the crew and helmsman more confident in the voyage. If the weather is not good and the wind is not satisfactory, the crew is in danger of being caught in a storm and become worried. Therefore, in English, the wind can be used as a metaphor for “confidence”, such as the English idiom “knock the wind out of one’s sail”, which means “to make someone lose confidence”. However, due to the lack of the same historical experience in China, the wind does not have the same metaphorical concept in the Chinese context.

B. The Metaphorical Concepts of “雨 (rain)” in Chinese and English idioms

1) *Natural target domain*

Rain in nature is characterized by density. It rains in the shape of a point or line, giving people a strong impact force. Therefore, both English and Chinese use the rain as a metaphor for “large quantity”. For example, in Chinese, there are “枪林弹雨” and “硝烟弹雨”; In English, there are expressions a rain of arrows, a rain of stones, a rain of bullets, and a rain of congratulations.

2) *Social target domain*

As mentioned above, rain will bring people a strong impact. In many cases, people do not want rain because rain often makes projects and activities difficult to carry out. This experience is shared by both countries. Therefore, in both

English and Chinese, the rain has a metaphorical meaning of “difficulty or setback”. For example, in Chinese, there are idioms such as “雨过天晴” and “未雨绸缪”. In English, British people also have the expression “come rain and shine”, which means “for better or for worse”.

The formation of metaphor is also deeply influenced by the climate differences between China and Britain. The British have come to regard rain as an everyday occurrence because of the unpredictable weather and continuous rain. In Britain, rain is used as a metaphor for “normal things”, for example, idiom “as right as rain”, which means to function normally. China is a country with a shortage of water. In this environment, rain becomes extremely valuable, so in Chinese, rain is a metaphor for “precious and rare things”, such as the idiom “久旱逢甘露”. Not only that, rain can also be a metaphor for “precious and rare people”, such as old friends who have been separated for many years. In Chinese, there are idioms “旧雨重逢” and “旧雨今雨”.

For the British, although rain has become a part of everyday life, people still see rain as a nuisance. Thus, the rain is used to describe “trouble”. For example, the English idiom “it never rains but it pours”. At the same time, rain may disrupt people’s plans or arrangements, so the rain can also be a metaphor for “wet blanket”, for example, rain on one’s parade.

The rain can bring the dry earth back to life and play a magical role in transforming the decay. Therefore, it can be used as a metaphor for “education” in Chinese, such as “春风化雨” and “如坐春风”. Since ancient times, China has counted on agriculture but is relatively dry and short of water. For the people, rain is “as precious as oil”. Therefore, people regard timely rain as the grace and gift of nature. Extended to social life, rain is used to describe the benevolent governance of a monarch, who makes the people live and work in peace and happiness. Therefore, the Chinese rain can be metaphorically referred to as “benevolent governance” [10]. For example, the Chinese idioms “雨露均沾”, “祥风时雨”, and so on. Like the wind, rain can also be a metaphor for “love”. This metaphorical concept originates in the Warring States Period of Song Yu’s “Gao Tang Fu (《高唐赋》)”. Since then, people began to use “巫山云雨” and “雨沾云惹” to compare the love between men and women.

3) *Psychological target domain*

Like wind, rain can also change people’s mood, so rain can be a metaphor for “mood” in both English and Chinese contexts. However, compared with that of wind, the metaphorical meaning of rain shows more similarities than differences. For example, in the metaphor of joy and other positive emotions, there are Chinese idiom “杏花烟雨” and English idiom “February rain fills the barn”. In the metaphor of sadness and other negative emotions, there are Chinese idiom “凄风苦雨” and English expression “tears of heaven, weeping sky”.

C. The Metaphorical Concepts of “风雨 (wind and rain)” in Chinese and English Idioms

It is worth noting that “风雨 (wind and rain)” as a compound word exists only in Chinese, and there is no idiom that contains both “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)” at the same

time in English.

In Chinese, there are both similarities and differences between the combined use of “风雨 (wind and rain)” and the single use of “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)”. When used alone, both “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)” can be used as metaphors for “difficulty or setback”, while “风雨 (wind and rain)” can also be used as a metaphor for “difficulty or setback”, such as the idioms “风雨无阻” and “风雨同舟”. Moreover, when “风雨 (wind and rain)” is used as a compound word, it is more inclined to adopt metaphorical concepts of “风 (wind)”. For example, the idiom “满城风雨” adopts the concept of “风 (wind)” as a metaphor for “information”, and “风雨飘摇” adopts the concept of “风(wind)” as a metaphor for “situation or atmosphere”. Even in some cases, the compound word, “风雨 (wind and rain)” will enrich the metaphorical concepts of “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)”. For example, in the idiom “风雨不透”, it refers to “small things”; in the idiom “风雨交加”, it refers to “strong force”.

This study believes that this phenomenon can be explained through the following aspects.

First of all, although both English and Chinese use compound structures as the most common word formation method, there are differences in the way they form compound words. According to Pan's [11] *Introduction to the Comparison of Chinese and English Languages*, “风(wind)” and “雨 (rain)” belong to the joint relation in Chinese, that is, the two words have the same part of speech, both nouns and equal to each other. Therefore, the Chinese compound word “风雨 (wind and rain)” is a joint relation of nominal compound words. However, in English, the association relation is not equated with the classification of nominal compounds, such as subject-predicate relation and verb-object relation. Therefore, there is no special compound word in English that is similar to “wind-rain” or “rain-wind”.

Second, Chinese tends to repetition, while English pays more attention to substitution. Chinese often combines morphemes with similar meanings to form words, such as “欢喜”, “问询”, and “寂静”. Therefore, when “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)” symbolize the same thing, the compound word “风雨 (wind and rain)” reflects the preference for repetition in Chinese. English, on the other hand, emphasizes clarity and brevity. Therefore, English does not use two words with the same or similar meaning at the same time, when it is possible to express the full meaning in one word.

Third, partial compound word (偏义复词) is a unique phenomenon in ancient Chinese, that is, a compound word is composed of two morphemes with related or opposite meanings, but the meaning of the whole compound word only takes the meaning of one of the morphemes, and the other morpheme only plays the role of word formation. For example, Du [12] gives the example of “润之以风雨”, and the thing moistened can only be wind. Therefore, in Chinese, under certain circumstances, the metaphorical concept of “风雨 (wind and rain)” will be mainly manifested as the metaphorical concept of “风 (wind)”. In English, however, it is rarely the case that the meaning of a single morpheme replaces the meaning of the whole word.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through in-depth research, the conclusion can be drawn that concerning the number of conceptual metaphors, there are 18 kinds of idioms about “风 (wind)” in both English and Chinese, of which 10 are shared, 4 exist only in Chinese, and the other 4 are unique to English. There are 12 kinds of metaphors about “雨 (rain)”, of which 5 are shared, 4 are unique to Chinese and 3 are unique to English. However, the metaphorical concept of “风雨 (wind and rain)” only exists in Chinese, covering a total of 5 kinds of concepts, of which 1 kind overlaps with the metaphorical concepts of “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)”, 2 kinds focus on the metaphorical concepts of “风(wind)”, and 2 kinds enrich the metaphorical concepts of “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)”.

In terms of similarities and differences, most metaphors in English and Chinese in the natural target domain show similarities. This may be because natural attributes are inherent in things, even though people in different cultural contexts tend to have similar emotional experiences about the natural attributes of things. In the social target domain, if the metaphorical concepts are further projected by the natural target domain, most of them also show similarities; however, if the social target domain is influenced by cultural tradition, literary allusions, social psychology and other factors, it often shows differences. In the psychological target domain, although in a few cases it may be manifested as similarities, it is more manifested as differences. Because, the original domain may be affected by different geographical environments and life experiences, thus bringing different feelings and experiences to people's psychological experiences.

This study analyzes and compares the causes of the similarities and differences of conceptual metaphors in English and Chinese and classifies them into three categories: natural target domain, social target domain and psychological target domain. Moreover, the study reveals the similarities and differences of conceptual metaphors of “风 (wind)” and “雨 (rain)” in both languages. This paper analyzes the uniqueness of “风雨 (wind and rain)” as a compound word in Chinese and its absence in English, and tries to explain the causes of this phenomenon from the perspective of word formation. Finally, this study finds that the similarities of meteorological metaphors is mostly reflected in the natural target domain, and a small part is reflected in the social target domain. Most of the differences are reflected in the psychological target domain, and a small part is reflected in the social target domain. The main cause of metaphorical similarities is that the natural (inherent) attributes of the original domain make people of different countries have the same or similar cultural experience. The main reasons for the differences of metaphor are the geographical environment, social culture and others of different countries and regions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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