

A Corpus-based Contrastive Analysis of Emotion Metaphors of Fear in Chinese and English

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Keywords: Emotion Metaphor; Fear Metaphors; Cognitive Linguistics

Abstract: As one of the most important concepts in cognitive linguistics, emotion metaphor refers to a kind of linguistic phenomenon in which abstract emotions are conceptualized by metaphors based on human beings' own experience in the process of perceiving and understanding the world. To study this phenomenon in details, this paper selects one of the basic human emotions of fear as an instance to compare and contrast the differences and similarities in the conceptualizations as well as elaborations of shared conceptual metaphors in English and Chinese. In order to explain this topic clearly, this paper makes full use of corpus method to analyse the different expressions of fear in Chinese and English, and makes a thorough study of multiple types of fear metaphors. In accordance with embodiment of cognitive linguistics, the similar physical activities/responses and life experiences of human beings result in the commonness of the emotion metaphors of fear in English and Chinese, while the differences of external factors such as culture, tradition and environment also lead to the differences between the two languages. Grasping the similarities and differences between English and Chinese emotion metaphors is of great significance to the understanding of the way we perceive the world, and to the expression of our feelings through metaphors.

1. Introduction

Traditional linguists, represented by Aristotle, hold the view that Metaphor is a device of rhetoric used to process or polish languages. However, Lakoff & Johnson^[1] wrote in their book, *Metaphors we live by*, that metaphor is more than a kind of rhetorical phenomenon or embellishment of language; it is a way of thinking that people possess to perceive and engage the world.

Furthermore, they put forward a theory named "conceptual metaphor", which is a phenomenon in which people understand one concept through another. This theory plays a significant role in explaining metaphors of abstract concepts, such as emotions. As one of the most basic and common physical experience, emotions are hard to explain and describe owing to their abstractness and vagueness. Thus, in order to understand, grasp, and express people's basic emotions, metaphors are used to turn abstract concepts into concrete entities. According to Psychology, humans' basic emotions are classified into four types, which are happiness, anger, sadness, and fear^[2].

This paper selects one of the basic human emotions—fear as an example, and makes a detailed analysis and comparison of its conceptual metaphor in English and Chinese from the perspective of cognitive linguistics based on Lakoff & Johnson’s classification of metaphors. As Csillag^[3] pointed out that linguistic context plays an important role in all meaning making, and it helps disambiguate ambiguous metaphorical expressions by stressing culture-specific peculiarities in the use of certain words and concepts within and across languages. According to his argument, this paper will adopt the method of Corpus analysis, based on English Corpora such as Corpus of Contemporary American English, Google Book’s Corpus, British National Corpus and Chinese Corpora such as BCC, CCL, LIVAC, and then probe into the similarities and differences of the metaphorical expressions of this emotion in the two languages and the reasons behind.

2. The Similarities of Metaphors of Fear in English and Chinese

2.1. Fear as an obstacle

From a large number of corpora, it can be seen that fear is something that can hold people back, and is generally associated with the concept of hindrance/obstacle. For example, “Fear holds people back from making progress.” In this sentence, fear is associated with obstacle. And this concept is also existing in Chinese expressions, because it is based on people’s daily experience which is universal. Fear as a common negative emotion, if not dealt with properly, will affect our daily life, such as work and study. Therefore, the metaphorical concept of fear as an obstacle is formed on the basis of this experience.

2.2. Fear as a disease/illness

Language is not only the manifestation of cognition, but also a part of it. The cognitive system derived from daily experience constitutes the psychological basis of language use. In the metaphorical structure, the reason why two seemingly unrelated things are mentioned at the same time is that humans have the similar feelings about them, and then make related associations with them in terms of cognition. In the end, they use the similarities of the two things to explain, evaluate and express real feelings and emotions about objective reality^[4]. There are conceptual metaphors of “FEAR IS A PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISEASE,” In both English and Chinese, which can be seen from these instances:

(1) *He was sick with fright.*

(2) *She was almost driven crazy by the overwhelming fear.*

This similar expression of due to facet that in the primitive society, people lacked basic knowledge about disease and means of protection, so they were helpless and vulnerable in the face of disease, and the fear of disease pervades human’s daily life. Therefore, the concept that FEAR IS A DISEASE has gradually formed through the repeated experience of the disease, and then fixed the emotional concept through words. But at the early age, most attention was paid to physical disease, so did the metaphorical expressions of fear. However, with the development of society, the harm of mental illness has gradually received great public attention, so corresponding metaphors have emerged. As we can see from the above examples, fear causes insanity which is a common mental disease.

2.3. Fear as a natural/supernatural force

Kovecses^[5] pointed out that natural forces can act as a source of emotional fear. People live in an ever-changing world in which some environmental factors, such as waves, strong winds and storms,

can influence people's cognition of the world and the way they perceive the world. There are some similar examples in both Chinese and English selected from the corpus such as “be haunted by fear” or “be weighed on by fear”.

In these expressions, fear is considered as a natural or supernatural force that can weigh on people heavily. The word “Haunt” originally meant to be controlled or influenced (in a bad way) by a supernatural force, so a person in a state of fear is like being engulfed by a force of nature, such as a wave, a fire, or a supernatural force, and then plunged into an infinite panic. Both in English and in Chinese, people tend to project the source of fear onto natural or supernatural force, using frightening natural phenomena or disasters as metaphors for emotions that are hard to express or describe^[6] That is why there are many expressions about fear associated with natural force, such as, “be flooded with fear” in English and “Ru Zhao Lei Ji” (“feeling scared as if being struck by lightning”) in Chinese.

2.4. Fear as a burden

Fear is also associated with burden. According to the Oxford dictionary definition, “Burden” means “a heavy load that is difficult to carry”. When people carry heavy loads, they feel tired, stressed, and sometimes even unhealthy. And people react in the same way when they are faced with fear, feeling exhausted and sleepless, so people use the same expressions to describe their fear in both Chinese and English. This common concept can be showed in the following examples: “Fear weighed heavily on him.” In this expression, fear is described as something that cause burden on people. Thus, through repeated experience, people have formed the metaphorical concept that “FEAR IS A BURDEN.”

2.5. Fear as a container and a fluid in a container

According to the corpora, container metaphor is present in the conceptualization of fear. Specifically speaking, there are two kinds of container metaphors related to fear: one is that fear itself is a container, and the other is that fear is an object (usually fluid) in a container^[7]. They are both specific manifestations of the container metaphor.

The first concept is formed as a result of the interaction between people from birth and the world around them. People often think of their body as a container, and the skin defines them, which separates them from everything else in nature, so that people see themselves as internal and everything else as external. Thus, according to Chen’s theory that “the human body is a container”^[8], and there is the interface, and division between inside and outside. Therefore, emotions can be seen as the objects in the container, such as fear. This concept is showed in many expressions such as “full of fear”. As can be seen from this example, the expressions of fear are generally associated with verbs such as “contain” and “rise,” indicating that emotions are liquids in a container.

The second concept is actually based on the former. We can imagine that the capacity of the human body as a container is limited, so if one’s fear goes beyond this limit, it will break through the container, and it itself form a new container outside the body. This kind of expression is typically used when the emotion is very intense, in fact, so intense that it takes control over the self^[9]. Influenced by this way of thinking, some expressions, such as “living in fear”, are created and used in daily life in both Chinese and English expression.

2.6. Fear as an enemy

Human beings tend to divide the universe into two distinct worlds, nature and human beings,

which are opposite Human is in the position of dominating and transforming nature^[10], advocating fighting and conquering unceasingly, and they always have a strong desire to conquer things in front of them, so in order to understand the concept of fear, they tend to see fear as having certain characteristics of an enemy. Thus, in this concept, fear is seen as an enemy that need to defend or overcome. Based on the concept, many expressions are created, such as “defeat fear,” “conquer fear” in both English and in Chinese.

2.7. Fear as physiological abnormality

Lakoff's research suggests that the concept of emotion has a physical basis, which largely determines how emotions are conceptualized^[11]. Both English and Chinese languages rely on the various parts of the human body to express abstract emotional concepts, such as faces and skin. Specifically, pale faces and goosebumps in skin are usually related to the concept of fear. For example:

(3) *His face was pale and his eyes were wide with fear.*

(4) *As I entered the gloomy alley, my heart beat faster and got goosebumps.*

It can be seen from the above examples that there are many similar physiological reactions when people are in fear both in Chinese and in English. Lakoff pointed out that people often express emotions in terms of specific physiological changes in the human body when they are in a certain emotion or feelings^[12]. Physical changes are used to describe emotions, because specific emotional changes are associated with changes in one of the body's organs^[13].

This kind of metaphor is based on the common physiological structure of human beings. The metaphors of fear in both English and Chinese such as “FEAR IS A COLD LIQUID IN THE CONTAINER” and “FEAR IS THE PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGE OF INTERNAL ORGANS AND EXTERNAL FEARTURES (such as facial features),” are both from the physiological reaction of fear. When people are in fear, their breathing is short and quick, their heart and pulse rate speeds, and their blood circulation is not smooth. As a result, physical reactions such as chills, shivers, hair standing up, pale face, and an accelerated heartbeat usually occur. It is because these physiological reactions are common to all human beings that it is inevitable to form the same conceptual metaphor in both English and Chinese.

3. The Differences of Metaphors of Fear in English and Chinese

3.1. Fear is associated with the soul

There are many Chinese idioms about human souls are associated with the concept of fear, such as “hun fei po san” which literally means that one is so scared that their soul jumps out of their body. The construction of such expression is related to Chinese culture.

The ancestors of the Chinese nation believed in the existence of ghosts, and they thought that people would become ghosts after death, and that when people were extremely frightened, their soul would be out-of-body. Owing to the fear of death, there are also a lot of soul-related fear metaphors in Chinese.

3.2. Fear is associated with human organs

In the discussion of the similarities between English and Chinese metaphors of fear, it is mentioned that the physiological response to fear is similar among people, so it is inevitable that a common conceptual metaphor appears in both English and Chinese. But even if human beings share the same physical structure, owing to different cultures, they still have different cognitive models of

body parts^[14]. Take the kidney and the gall bladder for example:

(5) *Too scared to hold one's urine*

(6) *His gall bladder was nearly broken due to the fear.*

These two sentences are translated from Chinese. According to traditional Chinese medicine, one of the internal organs associated with fear is the kidney. Chinese medicine theory holds the view that the kidney is congenital source of human life. Therefore, if one's "Shenqi" related to one's functional activity of the kidneys is deficient, his/her vitality will not be strong; consequently, it is easy for the person to be frightened and fail to control his/her urinary system. That's why there is an expression called "xia de pi gun niao liu" in Chinese.

Another organ associated with fear is gall bladder (which is called "Dan" in Chinese). Usually, both the liver and the gall bladder are related with anger, but the gall bladder alone represents courage or cowardice^[15]. Therefore, there are many metaphors about "gall bladder" in Chinese, such as "Da Dan (brave), Dan Liang (courage)". This is because, according to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, the gallbladder has the function of influencing the activities of the mind and determining the personality. Specifically speaking, it thinks that gall bladder dominates people's ability to judge things and make decisions, and eliminate the influence of external adverse stimulation on human body spirit, thus maintaining the normal operation of human body spirit and Qi and blood. People with normal physical function of the gallbladder are less likely to be affected by the outside intense mental stimulation, and they can also recover faster. According to this theory, we can understand how gall bladder is associated with courage/cowardice.

The concepts of gallbladder and kidney are deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture and are caused by the cultural heritage and psychological factors of the Chinese. Therefore, they are a particular form of expression in Chinese.

However, owing to different cognition, guts are usually connected with the concept of fear in English. For example, "It takes guts to do things like that."

Gut means "tube through which digested food flows". People think that their feelings or emotions are related to the part of the stomach. When we have a strong reaction to something, there is usually a physiological reaction in the stomach. For example, when we are nervous or scared, our gastrointestinal contracts which may cause some discomfort. Based on this cognition, the concept of the gut as the emotional centre has been formed in ancient Western medical philosophy. And the idea of the bowels as the seat of the spirit can go back to at least 14 century. Then according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "Spirit" means courage, energy, and determination. Therefore, guts came to mean "force of character, courage" from the late 19th century.

3.3. Fear is associated with the colour

The study of chromatic metaphors, as a subfield of metaphorical research, has witnessed significant advancements in recent scholarship. Colours, as perceptual and linguistic constructs shaped by human sensory experiences, serve as universal vehicles for emotional expression across languages^[16]. For instance, blue symbolizes melancholy and sad feelings in English and red represents festivity and happiness in Chinese. Fear, as the basic human emotion, is also related to chromatic metaphors. However, there are some differences in English and Chinese. In English, yellow often stands for timidity and shamelessness. For example, "I'd hate to think my partner had a yellow streak up his back." or "He is too yellow to stand up and fight." However, in Chinese, yellow does not contain such meaning. This difference can be interpreted from a cultural perspective. In the Bible, the clothing worn by Judas who betrayed Jesus was yellow, and it is well known that religion has had a profound influence on English culture, so yellow has gradually had this metaphorical meaning^[17]. By contrast, in ancient China, emperors usually wore yellow dragon

robes, so yellow was more a symbol of luxury and nobility.

3.4. Fear is associated with the ocean

British culture is a marine culture, so there are many metaphorical concepts of fear related to the ocean in English. For instance, “Under such circumstances, perhaps shareholders might get the wind up and throw such directors out”, “When shown a picture of a musk deer, people are sure to be taken aback for a moment.” In these two sentences, the phrase “get the wind up” is related to Seafarers’ fear of bad weather. And the phrase “be taken aback” comes from the nautical term “headwind”, which originally refers to be caught in a sudden gust of wind while sailing^[18]. These two examples are both associated with a dangerous sailing condition, in which people become afraid and worried. Based on this experience and cognition, fear is associated with the ocean.

3.5. Fear is associated with the arrow

Although China has a vast sea area, since ancient times it has been a country dominated by inland agricultural culture, while Britain is an island country surrounded by the sea, dominated by maritime commercial culture. Therefore, English is rich in metaphors about the sea and ships, while in ancient China, bows and arrows were often used in war, so there were many metaphors of fear in Chinese related to them^[18], such as “Jing Gong Zhi Niao”, which literally means birds startled by the mere twang of a bow-string, so it is usually used to describe a badly frightened person. However, there is no such expression in English.

From the above, we can see that due to the common physiological structure and life experience of human beings, a large number of similar metaphorical concepts of fear have been formed, while there are many different metaphorical expressions among different countries because of respective cultural background and geography.

4. Metaphor generation mechanism of Fear emotion and its explanation

From the above analysis, we can see that the choice of vehicle emotion metaphor is not arbitrary, but has certain rules. To a great extent, they are restricted and influenced by human physiological factors and daily life experiences^[19].

On the one hand, there are two main reasons for the similarities of metaphor of fear. One is the common physiological reaction and the behaviour towards fear. When people are in fear, their respiration accelerates, heart and pulse speed up, and their blood circulation is disturbed. As a result, physical reactions such as chills, discoloration of face, and an accelerated heart beat occur. And these physiological reactions are common to all human beings, therefore, it is inevitable to use the same conceptual metaphor in both English and Chinese. That’s why this metaphor “Fear is physiological abnormality” exists in both Chinese and English. In addition, the common human experience of daily life, such as disease, natural/supernatural forces, obstacles, burden and enemies mentioned above, also explains the similar metaphors of fear.

On the other hand, there are three reasons for the differences of metaphor of fear in Chinese and English: geography, culture and history. Firstly, colors and animals are associated with fear both in Chinese and English, but the choice of vehicles is different. When it comes to referring to cowardice, metaphors of rat are usually used in Chinese while metaphors of rabbits and chickens are more common in English. Besides, there are plenty of sea-related expressions of fear in English, but very few in Chinese. The reason is that the formation of those metaphorical concepts are affected by the geography. Secondly, the formation of different metaphors is also related to culture. In the two examples “fear is associated with soul and human organs”, the difference of fear

metaphors in Chinese and English is mainly due to the different medical philosophy. Both traditional Chinese and western medicine are rooted in their unique culture, thus creating unique metaphorical expressions. In addition, this concept “fear is associated with color” is also formed by culture, and more specifically, religion, which is influential in western countries but not so much in China. That’s why the metaphorical concept “yellow implies timid and crafty” only exists in English. Thirdly, historical factors also account for different metaphorical expressions in Chinese and English. In this metaphor “fear is associated with arrow”, some unique expressions of fear in Chinese are mentioned, such as “Jing Gong Zhi Niao”. Due to the change of dynasties and frequent wars in ancient China, there are full of metaphors of fear related to arrow and wars in Chinese.

5. Conclusion

Emotion is rich and abstract, and often described through metaphors. The mapping from abstract non-physical concepts such as emotion, psychology and cultural experience to physical concepts is to a large extent realized by metaphor.

The above analysis shows that the emotion metaphor of fear in English and Chinese is a cognitive phenomenon based on the physiological reaction of human emotional experience, which expresses abstract and complex emotional concepts by means of concrete and tangible objects or phenomena known to human beings. Its commonness mainly comes from the common physiological reaction and physical experience of human beings. As a result, fear is usually associated with physiological reaction, such as sweating, the acceleration of heart beat and so on. Besides, we can see from the section of similarities that most metaphors of fear are structural metaphors. For example, fear is an enemy/burden/natural force. This shows that people in different regions or countries still have the same way of thinking owing to the similar experience. Therefore, it is self-evident that people of different ethnic groups have similar psychological and physiological expressions or reactions and similar ways of understanding unknown things in their perception of fear.

However, there are also differences between English and Chinese in terms of the metaphorical concept of fear. The reason is that people’s perception of emotional similarity has certain national characteristics and specific cultural patterns. When English and Chinese people experience fear in a similar way, their specific cultural patterns are also integrated into the cognitive construction of emotion metaphors, which causes certain differences. In this paper, the metaphors of animals and oceans are related to regions/geography, and the metaphors of colors, bows and souls are related to history and culture. To sum up, when understanding emotion metaphors in different languages, the common life experience of human beings should be considered while their differences owing to respective cultural and historical and geographical background can not be ignored as well.

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