

Cognitive Function of Conceptual Metaphor in Network Catchwords

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Abstract—Conceptual metaphor is not just a rhetorical device of language, but also it is really a universal way of thinking for human beings to recognize and make expression about their world experience. Network catchwords, a newly kind of language form emerging these days with the rapid development of intelligent devices and the universal use of network, are one of the main elements of language. The author here is to make an exploration into the cognitive function of conceptual metaphor in network catchwords in two aspects, organizing conceptual system and derivative terms and organizing cultural connotation and social trends in network catchwords, by a series of network catchword examples. And this essay will provide readers a deep understanding of the newly prevailing network catchwords in a novel perspective of conceptual metaphor.

Keywords—cognitive function; conceptual metaphor; network catchwords

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of the universality of network, computers and smartphones, network language has prevailed among netizens. Thus a multitude of network catchwords has sprung out, which gets its popularity in our life and is closely related to our life. Network catchwords are not only a novel and interesting social language, but also perform in various ways in different sessions of time, and indicate the issues, trends and values of the society.

Metaphor study has a long history of over 2000 years, and, in 1980s, Lakoff and Johnson initiated the study to a cognitive aspect. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor is no longer used for a figure of speech and an ornament of language, but a way of thinking, which exists in our everyday life. Conceptual metaphor can help us have a clear and easy understanding of the abstract things more concretely and conveniently. The theory of conceptual metaphor has a positive guiding role and application value. Therefore, the cognitive function of conceptual metaphor has been widely and deeply applied in such fields as linguistics, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, sociology, artificial intelligence, etc.

What's more, conceptual metaphor is widely employed in network catchwords with the rapid spread of network catchwords. Conceptual metaphor also plays an important role at the factors of constructing abstract concepts to give people a favor to better understand network catchwords. For instance,

the theory of conceptual metaphor will render clear understanding for netizens in network catchwords as “解锁”, “尬聊” and “佛系”. As in this paper, the writer is supposed to, by studying network catchwords, have a perfect command of conceptual metaphor in its cognitive function.

II. WORKING MECHANISM OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

Conceptual metaphor is a mapping of ways of thinking, and includes two domains: the source domain, which is more concrete, always the part we've already known, and the target domain, which is more abstract, the part we do not know or we're not so familiar with. Based on the source domain, we can understand the target domain. According to Lakoff and Johnson, because a large amount of concepts which are significant to us are not abstract and familiar, or ambiguously explained in our experience like the feelings, thinking, time, etc., then we are supposed to understand and express them based on other concepts that we know in clearer terms [1]. “A is B” is a pattern to describe the relationship between the target domain and the source domain. In conceptual metaphor theory, the mapping of partial knowledge of the source domain B is to the target domain A, and this mapping is not reversible. For example, LOVE IS JOURNEY. Here the mapping is from the source domain of JOURNEY to the target domain of LOVE.

The following are some other clear examples, the target domain of LOVE is grouped into three basic metaphors as follows:

LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE: I could feel the electricity between us; there were sparks; the atmosphere was charged, etc.

LOVE IS MADNESS: I am crazy about her; he drives me out of my mind; he constantly raves about her, etc.

LOVE IS WAR: She fought him off, then she fled from his advances; he is besieged by admirers, he has to fend them off them off, etc. [2].

Thus conceptual metaphor can provide us a variety of source domains to one target domain, which will attribute a lot for us to better understand one abstract concept in a wide range of concrete concepts, and make an extension for better understanding and expressing some special language forms, especially the network catchwords.

III. NETWORK CATCHWORDS

Network stems from the America, which is also the first country in the world to start making studies of network catchwords. Since the first worldwide symposium on internet and language was held by the World Language Research and Documentation center of University of Hartford in America in 1997, the study of network together with network language began to come into researchers' views. From 1990s, scholars in China have conducted series of studies [3]. In the 21st century, network catchwords have already become a universally acknowledged linguistic form and a hot issue in the fields of network culture.

However, so far, researchers still have not got an authoritative definition of network catchwords. In this essay, the writer takes a narrow sense of definition provided by several scholars, that is, network catchwords are the network language, used by netizens, and spread inside and even outside the Internet in everyday life; network catchwords can reflect the politics, economy, culture, environment of one country and psychological activities of netizens, in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and appear in certain period of time; thus, network catchwords possess such characteristics as popularity, high-frequency, innovativeness, entertainment, novelty, etc., which are featured by the economical efficiency, vividness and humorousness [4]. Among these characteristics, high-frequency is of the basic element, hence are some widely used network catchword examples:

"996" and "OMG", are the very economical catchwords, composed of only numbers and letters. Originatedly, "996" refers to a work system—working from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., and working for 6 days a week. This kind of work system often appears in high-tech companies such as the Internet. A crop of programmers from Internet companies publicly boycotted the "996" in March 2019. Then "996" was rapidly spread and used to refers to a kind of work and life full of overwork and overburden. "OMG" is short for "Oh, my god.", which initiatively used by Li Jiaqi, a very marvelous Internet celebrity with an unimaginable influence and appeal in people's purchase. Just like Li Jiaqi's mighty popularity, "OMG" brings netizens entertainment and shows people's impulse in catching up with the fashion.

"打 call", a network catchword combined in both Chinese and English, indicates the innovativeness and novelty. "打 call" is a sort of Wota art, which stems from the live assistance culture of Japanese concerts. Then we can use it when you tend to dedicatedly show your love to and be firm enough to support somebody.

Another interesting and humorous example is "硬核", wholly translated from an English word "hardcore", originally refers to a strong sense of power and intense rhythm of rap music style. On network, netizens adopt the catchword "硬核" to describe somebody or something that is "very powerful", "very tough" and "very hard", such as "硬核规定"—tough regulations which are strict and rigid to abide by; "硬核妈妈"—very strong mother of all-sided, who will always be reassuring her child or children in all aspects of life.

It is widely believed that network catchwords are special language forms which are highly accepted and employed not only by netizens, but also by all in and out the internet and social communication. Furthermore, studies on network catchwords are of vital theoretical and realistic importance for social civilization and social developing trends [5]. To sum up, this essay will adopt this narrow sense of definition to make a study of network catchwords.

IV. COGNITIVE FUNCTION OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN NETWORK CATCHWORDS

Metaphor is a way of people's thinking, which can construct different worldviews and psychological cognition. Lakoff firmly holds that metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon, which can reflect the thinking mode of people, with the essence of understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Conceptual metaphor furtherly has a positive guiding role and application value. In *Cognitive Metaphor*, Hu Zhuanglin (2004) points out that the essence of metaphor is substitution, comparison and interaction [6]. Therefore, the cognitive function of conceptual metaphor has been widely and deeply applied in linguistics, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, sociology, artificial intelligence and many other fields. It is also found that conceptual metaphor is widely employed in network catchwords, which attributes a lot to better constructing and understanding network catchwords.

The essay here is mainly to make an analysis on how the cognitive function of conceptual metaphor works in network catchwords, in the aspects of organizing conceptual system and organizing derivative terms, and, organizing cultural connotation and social trends in network catchwords.

A. Organizing Conceptual System and Derivative Terms in Network Catchwords

Conceptual metaphor is a process from a conceptual structure of familiar and concrete source domain to a strange and abstract target domain. Then we are able to access to the targets conveniently without taking much about the real nature of the targets. In the process of mapping, we will first find out the similarity or structure that constitutes the concept equivalence between the two domains, and then broaden the mapping and get inferences to get a more clear handle of the connotation of the network catchwords [7].

The writer now is going to explore it from some popular network catchwords:

"雷 (thunder)" is a kind of meteorology, which is also explained as the loud noise that you hear after a flash of lightning both in English and Chinese. It first appeared in a Japanese animation, referring to people's feeling after seeing something surprising or hearing some shocking news. From the cognitive perspective, the concept of "雷 (thunder)" is employed to describe something causing shocks, threatening the others or giving people the strong terrible feelings.

Following this conceptual system, network catchwords, such as "雷人", "雷剧" and "雷语" are constructed by netizens to describe some person or some series of TV play or some words addressed by persons are shocking, terrible or sick to see,

and to hear. Based on the cognition, some derivative network catchwords are reconstructed with another noun in a pattern -- “雷 X”, to express that series of objects, characterized with unrealistic and shocking elements, will make people in shocks and sickness [8].

Consequently, some other derivative expressions constructed by netizens, such as “请自带避雷针”, which means that people can defend themselves from those shocking people or things by taking lightning rod with them. “雷倒” means that people was so shocked by something shocking to fall onto the earth. “雷得外焦里嫩” means if you cannot escape from those “雷 X”, you are subjected to being burned outside but tender inside. And “雷死人不偿命” means those “雷 X” are so terribly shocking that they can even shock people to death but with no compensation [8].

“佛(the Buddha)”, is the title given to Gautama Siddhartha, the religious teacher and founder of Buddhism. The metaphorical meaning of “佛” is also kindhearted person. From the perspective of conceptual metaphor, “佛” is always related to Buddhism, and the norm—“everything follows fate.” refers to making the right choice according to the existing conditions and circumstances, with an idea of having no desire, no sorrow, no joy, and the pursuit of inner peace in life and seeing through everything in the world and living a peaceful and detached life. “系” means related and connected, in fact, its meaning has been integrated into the relationship between two things of the similar features. So “佛系 X” refers to somebody or something with the characteristics of “佛”, that is, an attitude to living a peaceful life of one’s own style, looking down on and putting down purposefully everything.

The network catchword “佛系男子” which dated from a Japanese magazine in 2014, appeared as “佛系青年” in 2017, and then spread rapidly among netizens. With the rapid and wide use by netizens in a short period of time, the network catchword ascends into a series of derivative terms as “佛系 X”, “佛系生活”, “佛系人生”, “佛系乘客”, “佛系父母”, “佛系恋爱”, “佛系考生”, “佛系员工”, “佛系购物”, “佛系少女”, “佛系作者”, “佛系追星” etc.. From the perspective of conceptual metaphor, the series of network catchwords have similar cognitive basis with the element of putting everything down and taking nothing seriously [9].

“锁(lock)” is noun or a verb, which refers to the device which is used to keep a door, a drawer or a machine shut and prevent other people from opening it, or make a lock closed to keep it from being used. With the development of computer science, lock is adopted to mean removing the restriction of mobile communication equipment on operation network by means of software or hardware.

“解锁(unlock)” a verb phrase, primarily refers to prevent computer data from being changed or looked at by sb without permission. The netizens then use the catchword to indicate that people get the skills in one form or another to begin something that they never know before, in an appropriate way. Thus, netizens connect it with something, like “解锁新技能”, “解锁新歌”, “解锁新书” and “解锁游戏”, etc..

“草(weed)” is a wild plant growing where it is not wanted, especially among crops or garden plants, with its essence that it has strong vitality and can grow and spread everywhere and in any environment. And weed is so vigorous that it’s not conducive to plant growth, so people are inclined to pull them up as soon as they grow. In China, there is a poet “离离原上草,一岁一枯荣,野火烧不尽,春风吹又生”, which pays tribute to the weeds’ vitality.

In the society of information explosion, netizens create the catchword “种草 (planting weeds)”, which means to share and recommend a good product to stimulate others’ desire to buy it, or generate their own desire to experience or own something based on external information. In short, it means the process of recommending one thing to another and making another like it and plant their desire to buy it. Then comes a series of catchwords to respond to such act, that is, “拔草 (pulling weeds up)”, “长草(growing weeds)” and “草族(weed family)” etc.[10].

B. Organizing Cultural Connotation and Social Trends in Network Catchwords

Network catchwords are not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a psychological expression of netizens and a reflection of social culture in the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory. In the rapid developing information age, network catchwords are not only the embodiment of social culture and social trend development, but also a new language carrier of netizens’ cultural spirit, ideology, interests and emotion, and network virtual life. Its formation interweaves with the stigma of the age, cultural imprint and constant changes of social values. And its mappings are from concrete objects, social events or behaviors to abstract concept or social trends, which bring us cultural connotation and cognition of social culture from the network catchwords.

The following is about some network catchwords that bring us the cultural connotation and the psychological cognition about social trends:

“恐龙(dinosaur)” originally is an animal that lived millions of years ago but is now extinct, usually with big size and ugly appearance. It metaphorically refers to a person who is always out of fashion, and cannot adapt to the changing conditions of modern society. Then when it comes to the popular network catchwords, it refers to the female working on computer and network, is ugly and old-fashioned in a disapproving way. The metaphorical cognition of this network catchword implies the aesthetic concept of netizens. First of all, “恐龙” is ugly, and somehow “恐龙” will eventually die out because she is unable to adapt to the environment. Secondly, the public believes that in the field of computer and Internet, female workers are usually not good-looking, rigid, fashionable and gregarious, even that they will be taken out of the society with the development of the times [4].

“躲猫猫 (hide-and-seek)” is a kind of children’s games, in which one child with a cover on his eyes tries to find other children who hide themselves before the game starts. But it was taken in the New Chinese English Dictionary in January 2010. This catchword is originated an incident in Yunnan in

2009. The incident, reported by the local public security authorities, caused the death of a young man named Li Qiaoming in the detention center while playing hide and seek with his inmates. Such expressions derived from “躲猫猫”, like “冲凉死”, “喝开水死”, “睡觉死”, “摔倒死”, “激动死”, “头痛死”, “晕倒死”, etc. , all metaphorically mean that the official explanation is far-fetched and ridiculous, which cannot make the public believe and accept, even that the truth is still complicated and confusing. These catchwords directly reflect thoughts of the public to the questionable government credibility.

“范跑跑 (Fan Paopao)” is a teacher, named Fan Zhongmei, who rushed out of the classroom, leaving all his students behind in an earthquake. Hereafter, he posted an article on the forum to explain that he had no choice but to escape, for everyone’s life is valuable and he would take his responsibility for his daughter and his family. He was named “范跑跑” by netizens, which rapidly spread and triggered a discussion about “teacher’s morality”. Then on internet comes “郭美美 (Guo Meimei)”, who is a conspicuous female who shows off her wealth on the Internet. These intensify the righteousness, morality and even outlook on life, which implies the values of the public.

“亲 (dear)” is another good example to show us humans’ delicate creation to form network catchwords and the phenomenon of network culture, which will indicate netizens and even the public’s attitude to the social trends. “亲 (dear)”, now is widely used not only on network, but also universally in our daily life. “亲 (dear)” primarily means “dear” or “darling”, used mostly among lovers or intimate friends. Then it was created by netizens when using “TaoBao” to communicate online to buy things, the metaphorical meaning is functioned as “my dear friend”, the most appropriate address to talk to a person who you really know nothing about, even gender and age, or a person who is only your new friend or a nodding acquaintance. Furthermore, this network catchword can strongly improve the intimacy and reduce the embarrassment between the communicators. This indicates a kind of social culture and social communicative trend, which can help us to better communicate with others who we are not familiar with both in online and offline life [4].

V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In the field of cognitive linguistics, the mapping of conceptual metaphor is completed on the very basis of similarities, and both the domains share common features. The theory of conceptual metaphor permeates almost every field,

among which the network catchwords are a typical form of language, structured and spread through the mapping.

The rapid transmission of information on the Internet carries the psychological trend, ideological orientation and values of the large majority of netizens. Network catchwords not only bring pleasure to netizens, but also lead to the vane of social and cultural development and value orientation. Network catchwords are not only the carrier of language and culture in a society, but also the elements of social language and culture, which take possess of the metaphorical cognitive characteristics of social culture.

And those network catchwords that are originated from social events can also show people’s attitudinal, cultural and social opinion and trends. Therefore, they can be well employed in guiding a positive and pessimistic ascent of social trends. Hence it is an interesting field for language learners to make some more research

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