

Study on the Phenomenon of Metonymy in Cantonese From the Cognitive Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Different from those in Mandarin Chinese, some references in Cantonese adopt metonymy. From the perspective of cognition, this paper takes the conceptual metonymy as the analytical framework to analyze the typical metonymic references in Cantonese, so as to illustrate the penetration of metonymy thinking in various languages used by people.

Keywords: Cantonese references, referential metonymy, metonymic thinking

I. INTRODUCTION

Cantonese, also known as Guangdong language, commonly known as "Baihua" (vernacular), is a tonal language in the Chinese dialects of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Cantonese is the mother tongue of the Han nationality in South China, especially the Guangfu clan in Guangdong, the important carrier of Cantonese culture and one of the basic cultural symbols of Cantonese. Some Cantonese references are different from those in Mandarin Chinese, as there are metonymies in them. The author found that up to now, some studies have regarded Cantonese references as taboo words, euphemisms. There are few studies on the use of referential metonymy in Cantonese. Therefore, from the perspective of cognition, this paper takes conceptual metonymy as the framework to analyze the typical referential metonymy in Cantonese. The goal is to explain the permeation of metonymy thought in various languages in people's life, and helps people to know more about Cantonese and its culture.

II. REFERENTIAL METONYMY

Lakoff and Johnson argue that people's use of one thing to refer to another related thing is called metonymy. Metonymy is a cognitive operation that provides access to the target language in the same cognitive domain. This cognitive process allows one to

conceptualize another event in relation to other events. The concept of metonymy is mainly derived from people's experience. Metonymy is effective in the same cognitive domain, in which the conceptual reflection is mainly used for reference, and the relation between reference and metonymy is a kind of "representation". From the perspective of pragmatic function, Panther and Thornburg divided metonymy into three categories: first, referential metonymy; second, predicate metonymy; third, extrinsic metonymy. Among them, referential metonymy uses one concept to refer to another related concept. This paper mainly discusses Cantonese references which belong to referential metonymy.

III. TYPICAL REFERENTIAL METONYMY IN CANTONESE

The author found that some Cantonese references in daily life are different from those of Mandarin Chinese. Usually, some words of Mandarin Chinese are replaced, but the referents of people and things remain the same. That is, the function of reference does not change, nor affect people's normal communication, and even make the communication smoother and more pleasant for avoiding the association of negative meaning. The following is some typical Cantonese references ("Table I").

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TABLE I. CANTONESE REFERENCES

Mandarin Chinese	Cantonese
伯母 (refers to auntie; "伯" pronounces "ba", meaning uncle in Cantonese; "母" pronounces "mou", meaning "mother" in Cantonese; the Cantonese pronunciation of 伯母 is similar to the pronunciation of "百无" in Mandarin Chinese which means "having nothing")	伯"友" ("友" pronounces "you", meaning "friend"; the pronunciation of 伯"友" is similar to that of "百有" in Mandarin Chinese which means "having everything")
苦瓜 (refers to bitter gourd; "苦" pronounces "ku", meaning "bitter"; "瓜" pronounces "gua", meaning "melon")	凉"瓜" ("凉" pronounces "liang", meaning "cool")
丝瓜 (refers to luffa; "丝" means "reticular fiber" and pronounces "si", similar to the pronunciation of "输" (pronounces "syu", which means "lose")	"胜"瓜 ("胜" pronounces "sheng", meaning "win")
雨伞 (refers to umbrella; "雨" means rain; "伞" means "umbrella" and pronounces "san", similar to the pronunciation of "散" which means dissociation)	雨"遮" ("遮" pronounces "zhe", meaning "cover")
猪血 (refers to coagulated pig blood used as a food item; "猪" means pig and pronounces "zhu"; "血" means "blood" and pronounces "xie")	猪"红" ("红" pronounces "hong", meaning "red")
竹杠面 (refers to Bamboo-pressed noodles; "竹" means bamboo and pronounces "zhu"; "杠" pronounces "gang", similar to the pronunciation of "降" which pronounces "gong" in Cantonese, meaning "down"; "面" refers to noodles and pronounces "mian")	竹"升"面 ("升" pronounces "sheng", meaning "up")

In the pronunciation of Cantonese, the above several references in Mandarin Chinese can make experienced Cantonese people think of bad meanings or feel unlucky. Therefore, according to life experience, Cantonese people replaced them with other words, thus producing referential metonymy. For example, the pronunciation of "伯母" is similar to that of "百无", and is thus likely to make people associate with the meaning of "having nothing". So "伯母" is replaced with "伯友", whose pronunciation is close to "百有", meaning "having everything". And taking "苦瓜" for another example, the "苦" in which is not a good taste nor a nice experience according to people's experience, as one can see from "苦日子" (pronounces "ku ri zi", meaning "bitter days") and "痛苦" (pronounces "tong ku", meaning "pain"). According to the effect of this melon — relieving inflammation or internal heat, people call "苦瓜" "凉瓜", in which the character "凉" means relieving inflammation or internal heat just as in Guangdong "herbal tea". In this way, the association with "bitterness" is successfully avoided. The "丝" (pronounces "si" in Cantonese) in "丝瓜" pronounces like "输" (pronounces "syu" in Cantonese, meaning "lose"), which is replaced with "胜" (pronounces "sheng") of the opposite meaning. That's why we get "胜瓜" here. The "伞" in "雨伞" pronounces the same as "

散", and the "打伞" (pronounces "da san", meaning "holding up an umbrella" in Mandarin Chinese reminds Cantonese people of "打散" (pronounces "da san" too, yet meaning "breaking up"), which triggers a tinge of sadness as in "曲散人终" (pronounces "qu san ren zhong", meaning "the play came to an end and the audience dispersed, which indicates the end of a happy occasion") Therefore, Cantonese people adopt umbrella's function of covering to replace the character "伞", and it becomes "雨遮". The act of "打伞" (pronounces "da san", meaning "holding up an umbrella") is therefore turned into "担遮" (pronounces "dan zhe", meaning the same). The character "血" in "猪血" can naturally evoke people's expression of "bloodshed", and is thus replaced with "红", which indicated "prosperousness". "竹杠面" are noodles made with bamboo bars. The "杠" in it has a pronunciation similar to that of "降" in Cantonese, which has a negative implied meaning. So people call it "竹升面", indicating that eating it can bring a good luck for moving toward a better situation.

From the above cases it can be seen that Cantonese people use metonymy to refer to things according to their life experience and cognition. Metonymy, on the

other hand, uses the transference and substitution of words.

IV. METONYMIC THINKING BEHIND REFERENTIAL METONYMY

Metonymy is a cognitive operation and a manifestation of human thinking. The turn from metonymy to metonymic thinking is a reflection and sublimation of thinking. According to Kovecses and Radden (1999), human experience, perceptual choice, cultural preference and communicative principle are the main cognitive factors that restrict metonymy. He Aijing (2011) believes that metonymic thinking is a kind of thinking activity for seeking compensation, or

an substitutive thinking, which is the essential attribute of metonymic thinking. The so-called "substitutability" means that the external mark of the metonymy using is the replacement and substitution of words, that is, it is dominated by a mode of "X replace Y" in thinking. Under the operation of metonymic thinking, in "伯母", "苦瓜", "丝瓜", "雨伞", "猪血" and "竹杠面", etc. there are such replacement and substitution as "母"- "友", "苦"- "凉", "丝"- "胜", "伞"- "遮", "血"- "红", "杠"- "升", etc.

Here, the author attempts to analyze the four cognitive factors contributing to these referential metonymies, see "Fig. 1".

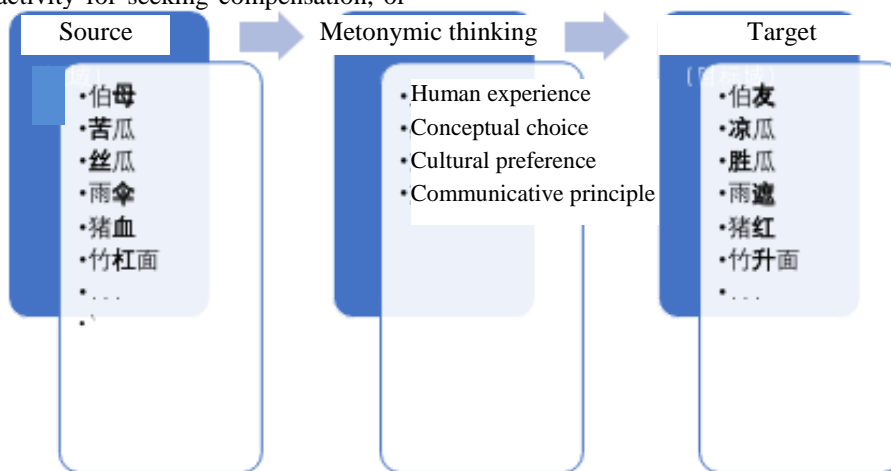


Fig. 1. Mechanism of referential metonymy in Cantonese.

A. Human experience

Human experience refers to the relationship between human beings and animals, subjectivity and objectivity, concreteness and abstraction, interaction and non-interaction, function and non-function, and experience and mind (Wei Zaijiang, 2019). Experience is the direct experience of life itself, and life includes not only simple physical activities, but also complex thinking and consciousness activities. People gradually form categories and concepts in their life experiences and perceptions. Referential metonymies occur in the Cantonese "伯友", "凉瓜", "胜瓜", "雨遮", "猪红" and "竹升面", etc. under the effect of cognition and thinking. These referential metonymies not only reflect people's expectation and yearning for a better life, but also convey people's positive attitude towards life.

B. Conceptual choice

Conceptual choice refers to the relationship between the immediate and the non-immediate, the occurring and the non-occurring, the more and the less, the controlling party and the controlled party, gestalt and non-gestalt, the bounded and the unbounded and the

special and the generic (Wei Zaijiang, 2019). He Aijing (2011) pointed out that metonymy has a great occasionality, and the reference of concepts is selective and restricted by the specific context. The choice of perception plays a very important role in people's life communication and cognition, and it is the subjective reflection that people make to the objective person and thing experience. The "伯友", "凉瓜", "胜瓜", "雨遮", "猪红" and "竹升面", etc. in Cantonese are just different subjective reflection made by Cantonese people after their experiences in daily life. These references reflect people's positive attitude towards life through metonymy.

C. Cultural preference

Cultural preference focuses on the positioning of cultural identity and is determined according to environment, region, nationality, cultural background and other factors. The Cantonese belief in feng shui has its historical origins. Guangdong is adjacent to the birthplace of the Gan-style school of feng shui — Ganzhou of Jiangxi province, and is thus deeply influenced by the theory of feng shui established by

Yang Yunsong. A large number of ancient Hakka ancestors migrated to Guangdong from Jiangxi, bringing a strong traditional atmosphere of feng shui. People in Guangzhou are inclined to be engaged in business. The great risk in this trade makes people's believe in feng shui and gods even stronger. In addition, the strong sense of clan, and prevalence of ancestral temple culture further contributes to the rootedness of feng shui. Influenced by this cultural preference, the Cantonese people change "伯母", "苦瓜", "丝瓜", "雨伞", "猪血" and "竹杠面" into "伯友", "凉瓜", "胜瓜", "雨遮", "猪红" and "竹升面" respectively to avoid words with negative meaning bringing misfortune and even disaster. The metonymy in Cantonese reflects this cultural preference of Cantonese people.

D. Communicative principle

Sperber and Wilson proposed that association theory includes two principles based on association: first, communicative principle of relevance (every act of ostensive communication conveys the assumption that the act itself is of optimal relevance); second, principle of cognitive relevance (human cognition tends to maximize relevance). The complete generalization of communication is that "ostensive-inferential communication" includes the behavior of the speaker indicating his own intention to speak and the reasoning of the listener (Hu Zhuanglin, 2006). According to the relevance theory, the context needed to understand a discourse is no longer regarded as a predetermined derivation premise. Instead, it is assumed that the new information to be processed is relevant, and then the appropriate context is selected to confirm this hypothesis. In relevance theory, the contextual hypothesis is the cognitive hypothesis. In Guangdong area, when the speaker talk about "伯友", "凉瓜", "胜瓜", "雨遮", "猪红" and "竹升面" and other references, the listener will make a contextual hypothesis based on the very logic information, encyclopedic information and word information in the cognitive context of Cantonese culture to find the best relevance between the speaker and the contextual hypothesis (avoiding words with bad connotations that bring misfortune or even disaster). In this way, the implied meanings of these referents are inferred through reasoning, and the contextual effect is finally achieved which leads to communicative success.

V. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of cognition, this paper analyzes some typical referential metonymies in Cantonese from four cognitive factors: human experience, conceptual choice, cultural preference and communicative principle which restrict metonymy. It shows that metonymy is used for better contextual effect and successful communication, explains that metonymic thinking permeates the various languages

used in people's life and also helps people to know more about Cantonese and its culture.

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