

1. Introduction

Metaphors are traditionally viewed as merely an embellishment for languages or a trope typical of poetic fancy and rhetorical embroidery. However, this language device should no longer be considered only within the realm of language since metaphors are pervasive in our daily life, and how we think or act is basically metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In other words, metaphors reflect the cognitive source of human thinking, and our daily language use is largely connected with metaphors.

Among all types of metaphors and metonyms, animal metaphors which contain the animal species are broadly used to specify human beings or objects. Due to the prevalence of animals around us, animal metaphors are ubiquitous in world languages. As Talebinejad and Dastjerdi (2005) observe, many aspects of animal metaphors are culture-specific. For example, shark is a “dishonest person,” a “swindler” in English, but a “man with no or very little beard growing on him” in Persian. In Mandarin Chinese (hereafter Mandarin), for example, when someone is referred to as being stupid or brainless, s/he might be called *xiang4zhu1yi2yang4ben4* 像豬一樣笨 “like-pig-same-stupid; as stupid as a pig.” Pigs, on the other hand, connote happy animals in English, as in “(somebody is) as happy as a pig in shit” or “(somebody is) in pig/hog heaven,” both of which are used to describe an extremely happy and carefree person.

Although the use of animal metaphors is influenced by culture, there is fairly general agreement that most animal metaphors are pejorative when used to specify human beings. Hsieh’s (2006) study has found that most animal expressions are used to abuse people, some of which may even imply sexist bias. Indeed, as Fontecha and Catalán (2003) acutely point out, most animal metaphors are derogatory in semantic nature, which can be understood from the perspective of hierarchy since they imply a vertical hierarchical organization of beings. By applying animal metaphors, one can derogate others (human beings, i.e., higher order forms of being) by characterizing them as animals (non-human beings, i.e., lower order forms of being).

In addition, since in pragmatics metaphors can be elaborated as exploitations or floutings of the maxim of Quality, animal metaphors can be thought of as a type of conversational implicature (Grice 1975). Any conversational implicature generated in a speaker’s utterances is simply an inference type and not a fact, and therefore can be cancelled or denied in certain contexts. With this characteristic of “defeasibility,” politicians are inclined to use animal metaphors to verbally attack their political rivals. Kuo (2003) analyzes the use of animal metaphors in five televised political debates of the

1998 Taipei mayoral election. She has found that metaphors of this class are overwhelmingly employed by two of the three candidates to denigrate their debating opponents. For instance, the GOOD MAYOR IS HEN metaphor is employed by one candidate to compare the incumbent mayor to a rooster, which cannot lay eggs, thereby implicitly criticizing the incumbent mayor's municipal management. Kuo also notices that the largest number of negative metaphors is found in the final debate, pointing out the fact that with the coming of the election day, the antagonism among the three candidates seems to increase gradually.¹

Although a great deal of research has been done on animal metaphors, what seems to be lacking is a systematic, cross-linguistic comparison. Therefore, the present study is conducted with the aim of comparing animal metaphors used in Mandarin and English. In the following, Section 2 describes the theoretical framework of this study and the data used for analysis. Section 3 analyzes how animal metaphors are used in Mandarin and English, respectively, and explores how the use of animal metaphors reflects cultural heritage and gender bias in these two languages. Finally, Section 4 summarizes and concludes our findings.

2. Research Framework

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that metaphors are fundamental to the structuring of our thought and language, and that we often use the concepts from one semantic area to think and talk about other areas. Conceptual metaphor theory has been remarkably influential in cognitive science, and has cross-cultural implications. In this study, we are interested in animal metaphors in which there is a mapping from the domain of animals unto that of human beings. The theoretical framework of the present study is the Great Chain Metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Turner (1989). The basic Great Chain includes different forms of being. Each form, based on its attributes and behavior, is allocated a place in a hierarchy. Humans are the highest order forms of being, and animals the lower order ones, then plants, complex objects, and natural physical things. In the Great Chain Metaphor, “things” are closely related to each other in the world, and humans are understood metaphorically as animals and inanimate things. Applying this model to our analysis of animal metaphors, thus, helps

¹Although animal metaphors are frequently employed as negative-other presentation in Kuo's (2003) study, she also indicates that a few instances of animal metaphors are used as positive self-presentation, such as the MAYOR IS WATER BUFFALO metaphor, which is used as the source domain to embody the mayor's diligence and efforts. It also functions as a linguistic device for the mayor to exculpate his rude and abrasive rhetorical style, since the water buffalo is the most valued animal by farmers in traditional Chinese agricultural society.