

Cognitive Approach to Metaphor From Metonymy in Classical Chinese Poetry

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Abstract—Metaphor and metonymy, which are treated as two basic cognitive and conceptual mechanisms in cognitive linguistics, are highly interactive to each other. Metaphor from metonymy, as a complicated linguistic device and cognitive mechanism, has long been ignored although it helps create abundant implications and aesthetic value in poetry. This paper explores functions of metaphor from metonymy in meaning construction in classical Chinese poetry in order to offer a new perspective for the research of classical Chinese poetry and provide implications for appreciation, translation and teaching of classical Chinese poetry.

Index Terms—metonymy, metaphor, metaphor from metonymy, classical Chinese poetry

I. INTRODUCTION

The conventional view of metaphor and metonymy is that they are figurative devices. The cognitive turn of linguistics launched by Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live by* (1980) offers a new perspective on metaphor and metonymy. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) hold that metaphor and metonymy are conceptual:

Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand for another. But metonymy is not merely a referential device; it also serves the function of providing understanding (p. 36).

Metaphor and metonymy, treated as independent linguistic devices and cognitive mechanisms, are pervasive in classical Chinese poetry. The pervasiveness of both metaphor and metonymy, to a great degree, contributes to the creation of rich connotations and aesthetic sense of poetic expressions. Although metaphor and metonymy are usually treated as two distinct linguistic devices and cognitive mechanisms, they are highly interactive and closely related to each other. Metaphor and metonymy often “meet” at conceptual and linguistic crossroads (Barcelona, 2003, p.1). The interaction between metaphor and metonymy reinforces the artistic attraction of classical Chinese poetry. In spite of the capacity of interaction between metaphor and metonymy to create aesthetically impressive and structurally important effects in classical Chinese poetry, probably because the interactions between metaphor and metonymy are more complicated conceptualizing processes and figurative devices, they have received so little attention in literary research, especially in comparison with the attention that has been lavished on metaphor. But actually, we should pay more attention to the interplay between metaphor and metonymy. Besides, the study on the meaning construction of poetry will be not complete and comprehensive with the absence of the analysis on the interactions between metaphor and metonymy. The present paper takes a closer look at one kind of the interplay between metaphor and metonymy, i.e. metaphor from metonymy, in order to examine its role in the creation of meaning in classical Chinese poetry. This cognitive approach to the interplay between metaphor and metonymy is aimed to develop a more comprehensive cognitive-based descriptive framework for the role of metaphor and metonymy in literary works.

II. METONYMY-METAPHOR CONTINUUM

Are metaphor and metonymy related but ultimately distinct phenomena? Does there exist a metaphor-metonymy continuum? These have been topics of a heated debate over recent years, which is termed as the “demarcation Question” by Riemer (2002, pp. 380–388).

The domain-based notion argues that metaphor is different from metonymy in the sense that metaphor is related to cross-domain mapping while metonymy involves within-domain mapping. In other words, the essence of metaphor resides in a domain-external cognitive mapping from a source domain to a target domain while the nature of metonymy lies in a domain-internal cognitive mapping from a source domain to a target domain. But this domain-based demarcation between metonymy and metaphor has been in doubt since for some metaphors, there is no clear-cut distinction between source domain and target domain. For instance, in the metaphor *She is a butterfly*, “she” and “butterfly” belong to the same superordinate domain LIVING CREATURES.

Another way to differentiate metonymy from metaphor is based on the contrast between similarity and contiguity. According to this view, metaphor is grounded on a similar relationship between source domain and target domain while metonymy is understood as a contiguous relationship between source domain and target domain. Although this contiguity-versus-similarity criterion seems to be less problematic than the domain-based approach, it has to be treated with care because in practice no single criterion can unquestionably distinguish all metaphorical cases from metonymic ones.

The observation that metaphor and metonymy are not mutually exclusive has motivated some scholars to investigate the existence of metonymy-metaphor continuum by seeking intermediate points along it. Radden (2000) argues that some metaphors are embedded in metonymy and a closer look at conceptual metaphors may unveil more metonymy-grounded metaphors. In other words, there is no clear-cut dividing line between metaphor and metonymy. Like natural categories, metonymy and metaphor display degrees of membership and have fuzzy boundaries (Radden, 2002, p. 431). Radden (2000) holds that the classical notions of metonymy and metaphor are to be seen as prototypical categories at the end points of a continuum of mapping processes and the range in the middle of the metonymy-metaphor continuum is made up of metonymy-based metaphors, which also account for the transition of metonymy to metaphor by providing an experiential motivation of a metaphor (p. 105).

Goossens (2002), working from a contemporary British database, analyzes how metonymy and metaphor interact in figurative expressions for linguistic action from three donor domains: body parts, sound and violent action, and summarizes four patterns: “metaphor from metonymy”, “metonymy within metaphor”, “metaphor within metonymy” and “demetonymization in a metaphorical context”. The order of the list displays the frequency in which they occur. In other words, metaphor from metonymy is of the highest frequency among these four types of interplay between metaphor and metonymy. Goossens (2002) creates a new cover term “metaphytonymy” to enhance our awareness of the observation that metaphor and metonymy can be closely interconnected (p. 349).

Kövecses and Radden (1998) reckon that some conceptual metaphors stem from conceptual metonymies (p. 61). For example, the conceptual metaphor ANGER IS HEAT derives from a generalization from body heat to heat. The metonymic source (body heat), as the source domain, acts as the foundation of metaphor through the process of generalization. Basically all the metaphors which Lakoff claims are grounded in our experience can be traced back to a metonymic basis (Radden, 2005, p. 25).

III. METONYMIC BASIS OF METAPHOR

Actually, metaphor from metonymy is the development on the basis of metonymy. Radden (2000) sorts out four types of metonymic basis that may give rise to metaphor: common experiential basis, conversational implicature, taxonomic structure of categories, and cultural models.

A. *Common Experiential Basis*

Firstly, the common experiential basis includes three types of metonymic relationships that may lead to metaphor: correlation, complementarity and comparison. People perceive the surroundings, based on correlation. The notion of correlation suggests that the change of one variable will be accompanied by the change of the other variables. Positive correlations, instead of negative correlations, tend to imply a cause-effect relation. According to Radden (2000), positive correlation is the only type of correlation that pertains to metaphor. For example, the proverb “What’s good for General Motors is good for America” indicates a positive correlation: a change for the better for General Motors may lead to the change for better for America. Conceptual contiguity is essential to correlate two variables. The correlation of quantity and verticality is a perfect illustration of conceptual contiguity since both variables stem from the same experiential basis. We are also inclined to interpret the positive correlation between UP and MORE as in the metaphor “MORE IS UP” in a causal sense, i.e. something is more because its level is higher, or the level is higher because its quantity is more. It is the notion of correlation that best presents the transition from metonymy to metaphor (Radden, 2000).

Complementarity refers to a special category of part-part relationship in which two counterparts are tightly related to each other and form a unity although they are in semantic opposition. Complementarity is a strong conceptual connection between two completing parts. We tend to establish a connection between mental phenomenon and physical phenomenon or use body language to express our thoughts. It is likely that our common complementary experience of BODY PLUS MIND generates the conceptual metaphor THE MIND IS THE BODY. The two counterparts of a complementary relationship are inseparable. The mention of one side automatically activates the thinking of the other side.

The notion of comparison also involves the interdependent relationship between two entities. For example, acts of comparison may give rise to the conceptual metaphor: COMPARISON OF A AND B IS DISTANCE BETWEEN A AND B. In terms of metaphor, similar objects are understood as being close to each other while different objects are conceived as being distant from each other.

B. *Conversational Implicature*

Conversational implicature is another metonymic source of metaphor. Grammaticalization provides a good case of

the evolution of metaphor from the pragmatics of a situation. A specific example is the spatial expression *be going to* used as a future marker in terms of the conceptual metaphor *TIME IS SPACE*. To be more specific, it can be described as *THE FUTURE IS FORWARD MOTION*. Grammaticalized categories develop in a gradual way as shown by the evolution of the implicature of *be going to*, which is used to refer to spatial movement, intention, without spatial movement, intention, prediction, and then prediction without intention. The sequence of the list indicates the metonymically based continuum along which the implicature of *be going to* has developed.

A certain sense of an expression and its conversational implicature belong to the same domain. In other words, they are conceptually contiguous and establish a metonymic link. Metonymic links, which are particularly inclined to generate conversational implicatures and lead to emerging metaphor, include the following implicated elements: (1) implicated result and causation, (2) implicated possession, and (3) implicated purpose and activity. Firstly, for the illustration of the motivating force of implicated result and causation, the metaphor *KNOWING IS SEEING* is a good example since most of what we know derives from what we see and in most cases, if we see something, we usually think it is true. Secondly, the conceptual metaphor *HOLDING IS POSSESSING* as in *to hold power* has emerged by implicature and pragmatic strengthening through the metonymy *HOLDING FOR POSSESSION*. Thirdly, the conceptual metaphor *PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS* as in *We've reached an agreement* is grounded on two implicated metonymies: *PLACE FOR (PLACE AND) ACTIVITY* and *DESTINATION FOR (DESTINATION AND) PURPOSE* because in our daily life, in order to achieve most of our purposes, we need to move to a certain destination.

C. Taxonomic Structure of Categories

A third type of metonymy-based metaphor is related to taxonomic hierarchies of categories. The link between a category and its members is widely used in metonymy. A category may represent a salient member and a salient member may stand for the category as a whole. This metonymic link can give rise to metaphor. For example, the conceptual metaphor, *HARM IS PHYSICAL INJURY*, is based on the metonymic link between the category *PHYSICAL INJURY* and a salient member *PSYCHIC HARM*. Often people experience physical injury and psychic harm simultaneously. Physical injury often leads to psychic harm.

D. Cultural Models

A fourth type of metonymy-based metaphor involves cultural models. According to Quinn & Holland (1987), cultural models are "presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared ... by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behaviour in it" (p. 4). Cultural models are significant to our understanding of the world because they establish a link between different phenomena in the world in a coherent and explicable way, and thus create new relationships which may give rise to metaphor and metonymy. Cultural models may be the motivating force for metonymy-based metaphors in three fields: (1) physical forces, (2) communication and language, (3) emotions and their physiological reactions.

Physical force is metonymically seen as a substance contained in, or put into a container, i.e. *SUBSTANCE FOR FORCE*. The metaphoric illustration of physical force is that *FORCE IS A SUBSTANCE CONTAINED IN AFFECTING CAUSES* and *FORCE IS A SUBSTANCE DIRECTED AT AN AFFECTED PARTY*. Thus the metonymic interpretation of force is the foundation for the metaphoric conceptualization of force.

The conduit metaphor, a perfect example for the cultural model of communication and language, is based on two hypotheses: (1) language is the container of thoughts and feelings; (2) communication is the transfer of thoughts and feelings. Thus the conduit metaphor involves both the relationship between form and content, and that of communication as transfer. Complementarity can account for the relationship between form and content since they are tightly related to each other and form a unity. Thus the form of a word is usually used to metonymically stand for the conceptual content it transmits. The combination of the metonymy *FORM FOR CONTENT* with the pervasive metonymy *CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS* leads to the metonymy *CONTAINER FOR CONTENT*, the metonymic counterpart of the conceptual metaphor *CONTENT IN CONTAINER*. The notion that form and content are inseparable makes us also believe that speakers exchange their thoughts by delivering content to the hearer. Thus communication is the transfer of contents through a channel.

Generally, emotions are conceived of metaphorically. Physiological reactions may be the metonymic source of these emotions, i.e., a certain emotion may cause a physiological response. In our daily life, we may infer a person's emotional state from his or her physiological response. For example, we can infer that a person is frightened from his or her physiological reaction such as trembling. The conceptual metaphor *ANGER IS THE HEAT OF A FLUID IN A CONTAINER* is based on the observation that one of the physiological reactions of anger is the increased body heat.

IV. ANALYSIS OF METAPHOR FROM METONYMY IN CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY

Metaphor from metonymy refers to a metaphor with a metonymic origin, which portrays a sequential operation of the two mechanisms. In other words, metaphor from metonymy indicates that the experiential basis for metaphor is a metonymy. We find a large number of instances of metaphor from metonymy in classical Chinese poetry.

In example (1), with a metonymic source, the metaphor 軒冕 (xuānmǐǎn, cab and cap) refers to high official rank and privileged treatment. 軒 (xuān, cab) refers to the carriage for the exclusive use of officials whose rank is higher than

scholar bureaucrat in ancient China. 冕 (miǎn, cap) means cap for the exclusive use of high officials in ancient China. Both 轩 (xuān, cab) and 冕 (miǎn, cap) symbolize high status and dignity. 轩 (xuān, cab) involves the metonymic relationship POSSESSED FOR POSSESSOR and 冕 (miǎn, cap) is based on the metonymic link PIECE OF CLOTHING FOR PERSON. The combination of 轩 (xuān, cab) and 冕 (miǎn, cap) work as a metaphor to refer to high official rank and privileged treatment. This metaphor has a metonymic source motivated by common experiential basis, correlation. In this case, metaphor from metonymy produces a refined poetic image, which is more elegant compared to the plain and straightforward expression of high official rank and privileged treatment, 高官厚禄 (gāoguān hòulù).

(1) 红颜弃轩冕, 白首卧松云。(李白 《赠孟浩然》)

Hóngyán qì xuānmiǎn, báishǒu wò sōngyún. (Li Bai Zèng Mèng Hàorán)

Red-cheek'd, from cap to cab you kept apart;

White-haired, you lie beneath the pine and cloud.

To Meng Haoran (Xu, 2014, p. 97)

As in example (2), the metaphorical expression 倾国 (qīngguó, ruin the country), which originated from Song of Li Yannian (李延年歌) in the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-8 AD), was used to portray a beautiful lady whose overwhelming beauty can ruin a city, even a country. In front of Han Wudi, Li Yannian complimented his younger sister on her great beauty by saying that her glance may claim the life of a city and one more glance may even put a country into danger. Here in The Beautiful Lady Yang (III), the beautiful lady is Yang Guifei who was said to have led to the demise of the state in Chinese history. This metaphor has a metonymic origin with 倾国 (qīngguó, ruin the country) being the effect and the beauty being the cause of the perdition of a state. The metonymic basis of this metaphorical expression is conversational implicature. To be more specific, it involves implicated cause and effect. Although 倾国 (qīngguó, ruin the country) and the beauty share similar meaning, the use of 倾国 (qīngguó, ruin the country) instead of the direct expression, the beauty, activates vivid image and enhances the aesthetic value of the poem.

(2) 名花倾国两相欢, 长得君王带笑看。(李白 《清平调 其三》)

Míng huā qīngguó liǎng xiāng huān, zhǎng de jūnwáng dàixiào kàn. (Li Bai Qīng píngdiào qí sān)

The lady fair admires and is admired by the flower,

The sovereign would gaze upon her with a smile.

The Beautiful Lady Yang (III) (Xu, 2014, p. 117)

Li Bai's narrative poem, Ballads of a Merchant's Wife (I), is the monologue of a merchant's wife to depict her life experience and express her emotions. The description of specific events in different life stages of the merchant's wife unfolds a lively picture in the reader's mind's eye. As in example (3), 尘 (chén, dust) and 灰 (huī, ash) is a metaphor to indicate that love between husband and wife will never change until death. This metaphorical expression, 尘 (chén, dust) and 灰 (huī, ash) also has a metonymic basis as both of them refer to death as human beings will turn into dust and ash after death. Dust and ash standing for death belongs to the metonymic category, SALIENT MEMBER FOR CATEGORY. Death is an abstract concept. This poetic image of death initiated by dust and ash in this poem is more specific and impressive. The vow that their affection toward each other will last until they turn into dust and ash is definitely more appealing than the single word, death.

(3) 十五始展眉, 愿同尘与灰。(李白 《长干行 其一》)

Shíwǔ shǐ zhǎnméi, yuàn tóng chén yǔ huī. (Li Bai Chánggānxíng qí yī)

I was fifteen when I composed my brows;

To mix my dust with yours were my dear vows.

Ballads of a Merchant's Wife (I) (Xu, 2014, p. 23)

In example (4), the phrase 烟尘 (yānchén, smoke and dust) is a metaphorical expression to symbolize war. 烟 (yān, smoke) and 尘 (chén, dust) are specific entities and war is an abstract concept. In ancient China, soldiers on the front line used beacon-fire to give border alarm. So the fire and smoke are typical things in the category of war. This metaphorical expression has a metonymic basis motivated by taxonomic hierarchies of categories, SALIENT MEMBER FOR CATEGORY. The indirect reference to war through the metaphorical expression 烟尘 (yānchén, smoke and dust) is able to enhance the implicit beauty of the poem.

(4) 汉家烟尘在东北 (高适 《燕歌行》)

Hànjiā yānchén zài dōngběi. (Gao Shi Yān'gēxíng)

The northeastern border of China was dark with smoke and dust.

A Song from Yan

In the following three examples, metaphors from metonymy, 断肠 (duàncháng, broken bowel), 肠断 (chángduàn, broken bowel), 摧心肝 (cuī xīn'gān, break heart and liver), highlight the grief caused by the wife's thinking of her husband in (5) and (7), and Ban Jieyu's complaint of being in disfavor in (6). These metaphorical devices have a metonymic basis, i.e. human embodiment that extreme emotions, such as overwhelming sorrow, grief, disappointment, happiness, may give rise to physiological reactions, such as the damage to the heart, liver or intestine. We may infer a person's emotional state from his or her physiological response since there is a connection between mental feelings and

physiological responses. So the injury to the important human organs, such as heart, liver and intestine, is used to symbolize a person's profound grief. These metaphorical expressions, based on a metonymic source, can create the image of being heartbroken and strike a chord with readers. Compared with the literal expressions, these metaphorical devices, with a metonymic basis, resonate with poetic quality.

(5) 不信妾断肠，归来看取明镜前！（李白《长相思 其二》）

Bùxìn qiè duàncháng, guīlái kànqǔ míngjìng qián! (Li Bai Chángxiāngsī qí èr)

If you do not believe my heart is broken, alas!

Come back and look into my bright mirror of brass!

Lovesickness (II) (Xu, 2014, p. 43)

(6) 肠断弦亦绝，悲心夜忡忡。（李白《怨歌行》）

Chángduàn xián yì jué, bēixīn yè chōngchōng. (Li Bai Yuàngēxíng)

The broken strings cannot play any more music;

The broken heart cannot bear any more sorrows.

Ballad of Sorrows

(7) 长相思，摧心肝。（李白《长相思 其一》）

Cháng xiāngsī, cuī xīngān. (Li Bai Chángxiāngsī qí yī)

We are so far apart,

The yearning breaks my heart.

Lovesickness (I) (Xu, 2014, p. 41)

From the above analysis and illustration, we can see that metaphor from metonymy makes an effective contribution to the integration of imageability and vividness in classical Chinese poetry. Examples such as 轩冕 (xuānmiǎn, cab and cap) for high official rank and privileged treatment, 倾国 (qīngguó, ruin the country) for great beauty, 尘 (chén, dust) and 灰 (huī, ash) for death, 烟尘 (yānchén, smoke and dust) for war, 断肠 (duàncháng, broken bowel), 肠断 (chángduàn, broken bowel), 摧心肝 (cuī xīngān, break heart and liver) for profound grief, are able to convey abundant connotations by establishing a link between ordinary things and their associative meanings. Thus, metaphor from metonymy, and the other types of the interaction between metonymy and metaphor need more attention from researchers in the cognitive approach to poetry. The interaction between metonymy and metaphor in classical Chinese poetry guarantees both economy of poetic language and transmission of rich implications. The formation of metaphor from metonymy can be mostly attributed to the embodied human experience. As a complicated cognitive mechanism, metaphor from metonymy is not entirely shaped by the universal bodily experience. Instead, metaphor from metonymy in classical Chinese poems has also been governed by cultural models. In other words, metaphor from metonymy is rooted in both physiological and cultural embodiment. As a result, culture-specific diversity enables metaphor from metonymy in poems to avoid redundancy and deliver very rich and vivid information, and throw a spotlight on the information thereby focused.

V. CONCLUSION

Classical Chinese poetry, the gem of classical Chinese culture, is also the vehicle of history, culture and cognition. The great value of classical Chinese poetry consists in an ideal combination of thoughts and art. Classical Chinese poetry has always been one of the major concerns of literary research in China. Previous researches on classical Chinese poetry are concerned with topics such as rhetorical devices, themes, poetic style, imagery etc. But little has dealt with the combination of metaphor and metonymy in classical Chinese poetry. Given its capacity to achieve aesthetically impressive and important effects in poems, it will be meaningful and productive to explore metaphor from metonymy in classical Chinese poetry. The cognitive analysis of metaphor from metonymy in classical Chinese poetry in this research may offer implications for appreciation, translation and teaching of classical Chinese poetry in the world. Proper handling of metaphor from metonymy in classical Chinese poetry can guarantee and improve the quality of the translated text, and help deliver accurate meaning and rich cultural connotations. Readers of the target language, thus, gain the opportunity to appreciate the charm of metaphor from metonymy in ancient Chinese poetry and learn the profound and extensive traditional Chinese culture.

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