

A Comparative Study of the Metaphors in the Coverage of Covid-19 by Mainstream Media in China and the United States

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ABSTRACT. *This paper selects the coverage of Chinese and American mainstream media during the period of COVID-19 as the analysis discourse, and takes conceptual metaphor as the starting point to study the similarities and differences of the language used by the media of the two countries in COVID-19 reports. The item is to explore what kind of thinking people from different country express, and what kind of values they convey. At the same time, with the help of corpus tools, using qualitative and quantitative research methods, digital presentation of the results sorted out from the report makes the research content clear and easy to analyze and compare.*

KEYWORDS: *Mainstream media, Covid-19, Metaphor*

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is the hot spot this year, and relevant reports at home and abroad are emerging in an endless stream. Mainstream media represents the mainstream values and trends of the press, and it is also the most concerned. With the mainstream media as the corpus, the research has certain representativeness. These reports use a large number of metaphors, and “metaphors open up a new way for people to understand the language and experience the world, and make people feel the richness of word meaning expression” (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:1). From these metaphors in media reports of China and the United States, we can explore different cultural values and ideologies, so that we can better understand the cultural differences between China and the United States, better understand current domestic affairs, and understand foreign views and measures on COVID-19.

Lakoff and Johnson believed that metaphor is an important way for human beings to understand the world, and this kind of conceptualized cognitive way is conceptual metaphor. Based on the experience cognition of the source domain and the target domain, people establish the relationship between different concept domains through association, that is, the system mapping across cognitive domains. The essence of metaphor is constructing the understanding and experience of one thing according to another thing. The cognition of metaphorical thinking patterns in different languages is an important task in the study of metaphor. Therefore, the comparative study of metaphor is the mainstream. Most of the studies are synchronic horizontal comparison, most of which are based on the corpus of English and Chinese vocabulary comparison, to explore the similarities and differences of metaphorical thinking in different culture, so as to find different thinking patterns and operation principles. this paper attempts to solve the following problems: (1) what are the metaphors in the coverage of COVID-19 by mainstream media in China and the United States? (2) What values do these metaphors convey? (3) What are the differences in cultural thinking between China and the United States?

2. Theory

It is generally believed that metaphor is only a linguistic feature, but only a matter of words. In fact, it permeates not only the language, but also the thinking of human beings, controlling our daily behaviors (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:4). Lakoff and Johnson believed that metaphor is an important way for human beings to understand the world, and this kind of conceptualized cognitive way is conceptual metaphor. The essence of metaphor is constructing the understanding and experience of one thing according to another thing.

3. Research Method

The corpus of this study is composed of five reports on COVID-19 published by the New York Times in May, with a total of 6196 words. Because Chinese characters occupy two spaces, one more than that of English, seven reports on COVID-19 published by Xinhua media in May, with a total of 9839 words, are selected. Such corpus selection ensures the equivalence of time space and quantity, thus ensuring the comparability of research. In this paper, MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010) is used to identify metaphorical keywords and classify metaphors in specific contexts; NLPIR is used to segment the text, and then Antconc 3.5.8 is used to analyze the frequency of metaphorical words. In order to clearly understand the distribution of various metaphors, this study also uses the concept and method of “resonance of source domain” proposed by Charteris black (2004) to measure the productivity of a certain kind of metaphor in a specific corpus, as the basis for qualitative research. Its calculation method is $\text{Resonance} = \Sigma \text{type} \times \Sigma \text{token}$. Σtype is the key form of metaphor, Σtoken is the number of different forms of a metaphor, Resonance is the product of the sum of types of metaphorical keywords. Taking plant metaphor as an example, suppose that there are three key words in the origin of plant metaphor, those are “fruit, concluded to root, root”. Among them, “fruit” appears three times, “concluded to root” appears two times and “root” appears five times. Then the resonance of the source domain in the corpus is $3 \times (3 + 2 + 5)$ (the sum of the times of different metaphorical words) = 30. This parameter can be used to measure the productivity of metaphor and judge the extent to which metaphor is used in discourse, so as to convey the corresponding value orientation.

4. Discourse Analysis

4.1 Analysis on the Metaphor of Xinhua Report

Through close reading of the text and corpus recognition, four representative metaphors with their key words and resonance are obtained, which are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Various Metaphors in Xinhua Media

metaphor	metaphorical expression	resonance
war	struggle (5), resistance (2), oppose (9), antibody (5), crusade (1), anti epidemic (4), front (1), pestilence (1) rebirth from fire (4), expedition (2)	340
chess	layout (11) overall chess (4) whole chess (2) new chess (10) overall chess view (2) a game of chess (1) dilemma chess (2) changeable chess(1)	264
exam	big test (8), surface score (3), score (2), examinee (2), examination room (6)	105
finance	prime cost (8), cost (1), large account (3), overall account (3), comprehensive account (3)	90

It can be seen from table 1, first of all, the resonance of war metaphor is the highest, and it is most frequently used in the COVID-19 report in May. In example 1, the source domain is “war” and the target domain is prevention and controlling of COVID-19. Now we use “struggle” on viruses. It can be seen that in the subconscious, COVID-19 is regarded as an enemy who violates people's property and life safety. So we must be serious, fight against COVID-19, defeat it, and then we can defend ourselves. Second, the proportion of chess metaphor is not small. China is a country with a long history of chess culture. Before you play chess, you should set up the board first, and before you fall, you should think over, and plan the whole board. In example 2, the source domain is the “chess game”, and the target domain is the coordination of all aspects. “One chess game” shows that the Chinese government has comprehensively considered all aspects of the factors, weighed the advantages and disadvantages, and carried out many measures to prevent and control the COVID-19. Third, the test metaphor vividly shows the attitude of the Chinese government when facing COVID-19. As we all know, examination is an important way to distinguish the excellent students. In the face of examinations, the government should be more cautious. Only when they are well prepared can they be able to do well in the examinations and have better expected results. In example 3, the source domain is the “big test”, and the target domain is to resolve the COVID-19. In the face of COVID-19, how to successfully solve the problem is really worth considering. Only with full confidence, ability and wisdom can the government solve the crisis perfectly and achieve better achievements. Finally, finance metaphor is relatively rare, but it plays an important role in expression. In business, the normal operation or continuous profitability of a project requires early investment and payment. In example 4, the source domain is the “cost”, and the target domain is the human, material and

financial resources paid by the government to fight against COVID-19. Facing COVID-19, the government is willing to give all it has for the benefit of the people. It can be seen that Chinese government is the government for the people.

(1) “What are the characteristics of the immune system that has evolved over millions of years? How it fights the virus. “

(2) “Support from all over the country will be continuously delivered to Wuhan, Hubei Province under the overall planning of the whole country.”

(3) “The sudden outbreak is both a crisis and a big test.”

(4) “People first, life first, and to protect people's life safety and health, we can at all costs.”

4.2 Analysis on the Metaphor of Xinhua Report

Four representative metaphors with their key words and frequencies are extracted from the high frequency words in the corpus, which are shown in table 2.

Table 2 Metaphors in the New York Times

metaphor	metaphorical expression	resonance
humanity	sweep(12), shelter(4), recover(9), survive(5) feeding(15), scare(5)	300
war	Outbreak(9), crisis(8), defense(3), target(3), strategy(3), fight against(2)	196
orientation	shutdown(3), front(2), deep(3), center(1), outside(3), Out(2), inside(1), back(2)	136
line	front lines(8), line(7), dead line(3), catch the line(2), from line to line(3)	115

As can be seen from figure 2, first, human metaphor is the most frequently used in the reports of the New York Times. To endow the virus with human feelings, thinking characteristics and ideology is intended to express their own thoughts and attitudes. In example 1, the source domain is the momentum of people to do great things, and the target domain is the situation that COVID-19 infects human beings in a large area. The word “swept” shows that COVID-19 is ruthless and destructive. From this we can see the severity of the COVID-19 in the United States. Second, war metaphor is the second most widely used in the New York Times. In the face of war, it is generally highly tense and serious. War conveys a kind of panic and destructive power. In example 2, the source domain is war and the target domain is the outbreak of COVID-19. The word “outbreak” indicates the sudden and significant nature of COVID-19. Third, the frequency of using location metaphor is also very common. In real life, orientation not only refers to the change of spatial position, but also refers to other things. In example 3, “out” originally refers to the direction “outside” in the sentence, but in fact it reflects the closure of school, which is simple and concise to comprehend. Fourth, the use of line metaphor increases the sensibility of writing. In example 4, the source domain is the lines in front of location, and the target domain is the exact site directly related to the accident. On the spot, the “front lines” is located at the place where the accident happened, facing the problem directly and bearing the brunt.

(1) “As the virus has swept through the United States, thousands in the country have already died “.

(2) “This month-long campaign will benefit First Book and three other agencies offering support to those affected by the outbreak.”

(3) “It’s common for children to forget lessons when school is out, usually called summer slide”.

(4) “Through The Times’s Neediest Cases Fund, a new relief campaign will support organizations on the front lines of serving those affected by the virus.”

5. A Contrastive Analysis of Metaphors in English and Chinese

Through the comparative analysis of figure 1 and figure 2, it is found that the metaphors used in the COVID-19 reports of China's Xinhuan media and the New York Times in the United States bear different styles.

First of all, the most commonly used metaphor on Xinhuan is war metaphor, while the New York Times uses humanity metaphor the most frequently. The United States pays attention to people's feelings in this crisis, which shows that American individualism is more obvious. Secondly, the chess metaphor on Xinhua news report has Chinese characteristics. Chinese chess culture is broad and profound, and such chess metaphors are unconsciously permeated in Chinese discourse. However, the use of chess metaphor in the New York Times is not obvious. Moreover, as for war metaphor, it also has a certain range of use in the New York Times. It can be seen that human thinking has certain commonalities. The sense of urgency, crisis and struggle brought about by war are shared by people all over the world, not limited by region, time and race.

6. Summary

War metaphor, chess metaphor, exam metaphor and finance metaphor are used in Xinhua report. It conveyed that the Chinese government attaches great importance to the prevention and control of COVID-19, and stands on the overall high level to coordinate the prevention and control of COVID-19. The report in the mainstream media of the New York Times uses human metaphor, war metaphor, orientation metaphor and line metaphor, which shows that Americans pay attention to describing the impact of COVID-19 on individuals and the actual condition of real life during the COVID-19. In terms of metaphors used in mainstream media reports in China and the United States, it is found that influenced by Chinese culture, Chinese tends to use chess metaphor, while in English, it is rarely used. In addition, war metaphors are frequently used in both Chinese and English. It can be seen that although there are different cultures, ways of thinking, regions and races, there are also something similar. Also, in front of COVID-19, China and the United States have different priorities. China's mainstream media conveys a spirit of collectivism, starting from the overall situation, facing difficulties and uniting as one. The mainstream media in the United States conveys personal thoughts and feelings, focusing on the description of the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives.

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