

# A Study of Culture Metaphor and Conceptual Metaphor in the Film “Zootopia”

**Yilana**

*School of Foreign Languages, Inner Mongolia Normal University, Hohhot, China*

**Abstract:** *Metaphor is a figure of speech. In order to achieve rhetorical effect, it directly uses one thing to describe another thing. It may provide (or blur) clarity or identify hidden similarities between two things. “Zootopia”, an animated film produced by Disney, has swept around the world since its release. From this story, the children enjoyed the lovely cartoon image and the power of justice. Teenagers felt the efforts for the pursuits. However in adult perspective, there are metaphors everywhere in the city of wild animals. The application of metaphors in this film will bring strong astonishment and inspiration.*

**Keywords:** *Zootopia, Cultural Metaphor, Conceptual Metaphor*

## 1. Introduction

Zootopia is a beautiful metropolis where various animals live and thrive. Judy is a tiny rabbit. She overcomes all the unseeable social barriers of stereotypes and prejudices about her size. Also, she is vulnerable she want to become a top-notch police officer. When she moves to Zootopia to work as a police officer in the Zootopia Police Department, she is given a task to find a missing otter, which directs her to investigate an odd case of predators becoming savages in Zootopia. There were many social issues in the Zootopia considering race, prejudice, and gender. In this paper, the author want to analyze the metaphors appeared in the film.

Linguists have discussed a lot about metaphor. The study of metaphor can be traced back to Aristotle's classics Poetics and Rhetoric. He said, "If you use a word to describe something to refer to something else, that word becomes a metaphor." It is a powerful tool for people to understand the world. From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, Gannon Martin(2001)[i]proposed the concept of metaphor to develop the metaphor theory into understand culture creatively. From Oxford dictionary, Metaphor is a figure of speech that, for rhetorical effect, directly refers to one thing by mentioning another. It may provide (or obscure) clarity or identify hidden similarities between two ideas. The application of metaphor was regarded as a way of thinking and cognitive means. Therefore, the research of metaphor has entered the stage of practice. This paper will study the Conceptual Metaphor and Cultural Metaphor of the film Zootopia. In this paper, the author will study the cultural metaphor of living pattern, racial relationship and American Politics. As well as study the conceptual metaphor of Zootopia.

## 2. Cultural Metaphor in the Zootopia

The social members who are in a particular culture acknowledged that Cultural Metaphor refers to the cultural phenomena, activities and traditional customs that are emotionally or cognitively. It is able to express or symbolize a shared and underlying value. Zootopia is a true portrayal of American social status and cultural phenomena. The film has the metaphor of dominant position due to its virtual nature. The description of Zootopia has the meaning of comprehensive cultural concept of modern society. The film was widely accepted by its implications. The ingenious metaphors used in this film played an important role in culture diffusion. Metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, which is an internal psychological phenomenon reflecting the deepest cultural elements. Metaphors are regarded as linguistic phenomenon by many experts and scholars. Therefore, it can also be said that metaphor is actually a cultural phenomenon. Metaphor is generated through the imagination and association of cognitive things, and it is actually the examination and creation of the similarity of different things. All cognitive objects are in a certain social and cultural background. So metaphorical cognition undoubtedly carries cultural information.

The cultural consistency of metaphor shows its complex relationship with culture. Metaphor

constitutes culture. The emergence of metaphor is a cyclic process of specific experiences, which belongs to culture, so does human cognition. Without human contact with the cultural world, there would be no cognitive existence. Culture limits experiences and ideas. That is, culture influences people's behavior and cognition, at least part of the information in culture is expressed through metaphors stored in our memory. On the other hand, the cultural cognitive imprint of metaphor is reflected in the cultural world. Cultural information is transmitted by metaphor. People can get a lot of cultural contents through Metaphor. Such as world view, life view, personal value, cultural value and so on. Zootopia, this film was full of metaphor that manifest the American culture and social reality. The film embodies the problems prevalent in American society. Such as, racial problem, politic problem, government problems, living problems etc. Under such problems and conflicts, people are searching for solutions and looking forward to a wonderful tomorrow. The author will discuss three aspects in culture metaphor .which are living pattern, American politics, and racial relationship.

### ***2.1. Metaphor of living pattern***

With the development of society, more and more young people want to live in their ideal big city and pursue their dreams. Judy is the portrait of today's young people. As we know, Judy is hot blood and brave. She is not afraid of any setbacks. No matter how hard it is, she fought for the difficulties and never give up. Finally, she realized her dream, became the real police officer which was the first rabbit in this city. This is one of the ways in which Judy's experience like most people's lives.

When Judy took a train to go to Zootopia, have you ever noticed the door of that train? Because of different animal's different body size, the train was designed to three sized door to fit in animal's different body. Have you ever noticed that Judy saw the completely different city scenery behind her? Zootopia has twelve unique ecosystems within its city limits. It was a place that many kinds of animals exist together. Such as there are rainforest district built for those tropical animals, Sahara Square built for those animals suitable for desert environments, Tundra town built for those animals lived in glacier district etc. Additionally, have you noticed the pipes for mice to passable? And those pillars prepared for giraffes to take the stuff easily. As we know, America is a melting pot which is a concept that a number of ethnic groups, cultures and religions in a society will fuse together to produce new cultural and social forms. The idea was common in the USA. The founding of the USA was not the end of migration; instead, it was the beginning of it. New settlers kept coming into the new country. In the 19th century, large numbers of immigrants came from Europe. Migration from other continents like Asia and Latin America belongs to a later and the present time. America is a nation that formed by many different ethnic groups. Zootopia is a district of melting pot. In this area, weather predators or preys live in harmony on the surface at least. Everything continues in its order. And has its regularity. All things provided that animals are living together. It can represent this nation with multi-cultural living mode. That was a metaphor of living pattern. In other ways, Zootopia likes modern city. There were tall skyscrapers, wonderful entertainment facilities, convenient transportation, a wide variety of products arranged at the shop shelves. Those pictures denote modern people's mode of living.

### ***2.2. Metaphor of Racial Relationship***

Since Martin Luther King had a speech "I Have a Dream", sixty years have passed. Although racial discrimination in the United States is abolished in the law. It is still manifested in all aspects of American society. On another perspective, the different areas where the animals live have sense of segregation in Zootopia. As we know, Zootopia was divided into twelve districts. Whole city looks harmony on the surface. The construction of districts was fully considering the characteristics of the animals. Animals can meet their needs basically. However, after the careful observation, people will find that the district of rainforest is always dark and humid. Sahara square is always hot and dry. Tundra town is piercingly cold. Although all Animals were lived in one city —Zootopia, many kinds of animals just moved in their own districts. There were very little communication with other species. Just like the American black people and white people coexist in one nation. Actually, there is very little communication and movement between each other. There is no doubt that the most desirable area is city center where the sun is shining, everything is in order, life is comfortable, the transportation is convenient. Everyone admire life in the downtown. However, it was very hard to get this harmonious environment. In the next place, there exist ingrained prejudice between different species of animals. It was reflected vividly in this film.

The contradiction between predators and preys was very serious. When Nick was a child, he determined to join the Junior Ranger Scouts, he prepared a lot to fit in the group. He wanted to be part of a pack. However, the other members of group did not trust Nick and bulled him. Only because he was

the predator in the troop, the only fox. He was wore muzzle by preys. From that Nick became cynical and bitter. He became unscrupulous merchant. He sold fake blanket to other animals. When Nick wanted to buy an ice cream from elephant sweet shop, the elephant refused to sell ice cream. The reason is that they reserve the right to refuse service to anyone. The provisions of this clearly let us understand that racial discrimination had become a kind of social recognition by the government and society. When the case of missing animal gets worse, the remarks” There was aggressive hunting instinct in predator’s DNA.” broke that world. It brought great panic to preys. Even preys would deliberately avoid predators on the bus. This action reminds people of the racial segregation in 1950s.

### **2.3. Metaphor of American Politics**

In some way, the problems of American politics also appeared metaphorically in Zootopia. The government efficiency is one of the common issues. It was also approved in the film. When Judy and Nick went to DMV to find out the plate number. They met a civil servant, sloth whose name is flash. It was an Irony. As we know, flash is the fastest phenomena. On the contrary, sloth is the slowest one. The civil servant sloth who speaks slowly, moves slowly. From that humorous plot, people can remind that low efficiency of government immediately. When people saw that plot, they should instantly think of the American government official’s daily routine. Although the government superior officials emphasize the importance of the efficiency. The truth is that kind of problems exist in everywhere in America. It was shown in very humorous way in this film as well.

American Presidential election is a complex system. As we know, there are two major parties in America. One is the Democratic Party, the other is the Republican Party. And the president is elected from two parties. So there is intense competition for the Presidential Election. The Candidates has debating in front of the media. In Zootopia, there is a shoot-out between lion mayor and deputy sheep mayor. They come from different groups and both of them fight for the power. They have a speech in front of the media. It really likes the American Presidential Election. And the deputy sheep mayor looks kind and friendly to everyone on the surface. However, she was the crime culprit of that big case. For the sake of her power and interests, she operated the criminal and mastered the savage attack. She framed predators to attack the preys. She completely ignored the citizen safety, even caused the discrimination and estrangement between the citizens. Her action have influenced the amity between preys and predator and plagued whole Zootopia. Besides, the lion mayor was majestic and strong. He undertook the management work of the whole city. Everything in the city seems in order on the surface. Actually, it exactly proves the unfairness and dominant position of the citizen exist in this world. In order to get the support of voters, the politicians try all means to make it works. Additionally, the lion mayor who set up private prison to imprison predators those who getting savaged. Even after he was captured, he still claimed that he is for the sake of the citizen security. Actually he was afraid of his own political status would be influenced because of mistakes. So in Zootopia, politics is still a dark corner of the society. In order to power, the politicians are still resorting to every conceivable means. Their purpose and the starting point are never think of the cities and citizens, they just want to meet their desire for power. In human society and Zootopia, the struggle and means between politicians are not based on the security and development of citizens. Sometimes for the power the politicians are at the expense of the security and development of citizens.

## **3. Conceptual metaphor in the Zootopia**

Cognitive linguistics Lakoff and Johnson believed that there are a lot of such conceptual metaphors in human communication. They conclude conceptual metaphor was composed of Structural Metaphor, Orientational Metaphor as well as Ontological Metaphor. (Lakoff,G&Johson1980)[2]. Hu Zhuanglin (2000) describes conceptual metaphor theory as "one process can be metaphorized into another process".[3]In the following part, the author will analyze these three aspects of the film Zootopia.

### **3.1. Structural Metaphor**

"Structural metaphor" can construct another concept in the structure of one concept. So that the two concepts are superimposed. The words describing one concept are used to describe the other. In this movie, When Nick was going to sell his Popsicles, Judy stopped him. Because Nick was the only witness of a case. Judy wanted to ask something related to this case. At that time, Nick said “Time is money.” Famous quotes “time is money” is a most classical example of structural metaphor. The concept of time is organized and understood through the concept of money. The words used to talk about “money” also

can be used for “time”. Time is regarded as something as precious as money. Moreover, there is a classical lines in this film “We are really fighting the clock and every minute counts.” It embodies the notion of Structural Metaphor completely. Actually, time is abstract. Once it regarded as money, people can understand it easily. Because money is concrete. In cognitive structure, money is limited valuable recourse. It is precious and it can be easy to describe. People know the importance of money. Using money to describe time, it illustrates the limitation and preciousness of time vividly.

The lines which appeared in this film fully reflects the structural metaphor influences many aspects of our lives. It is understood that the whole story is journey. When the story begins, Judy took a train to started her Zootopia travel. In the expression “Story is a journey”, we understand this story through the experience and knowledge of travel. People see the story as a traveler along the road. Think of the big and small goals in life as a destination. Think of the difficult setbacks in the pursuit of goals as the hills and gullies that need to be surmounted. In this movie, Judy encountered various difficulties in the direction of her dream. At the beginning, Judy was a rabbit—a meek prey. Because of inherent deficiencies, there were many setbacks on her way to becoming a police officer. She was powerless on her military training. When Judy became a police officer, her colleagues were look down upon her. And the worst experience to Judy is she has hurt her friend accidentally. Luckily, they are reconciled with each other again. “The story is a journey” set a purpose of the story and continuity. And It promotes the development of the story and arouses the curiosity of the audience. “Story is a journey”, which means to understand and experience the current thing (story) through a thing (travel). It is a metaphor in linguistic. For most people, metaphor is often regarded as a figure of speech which is full of imagination. However, according to the Conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor is not only a matter of language, but also an important means of human thinking. It has directly participated in human thinking and behavior. The conceptual systems itself on which we live is based on metaphors which construct our perceptions. These concepts construct human perceptions, constitute the existence in this world and establish relationships with each other. The two examples all are structural metaphor appeared in this film. Structural metaphors can be found everywhere in life. Through structural metaphor, we can understand some concepts or content more vividly and easily.

### ***3.2. Orientational Metaphor***

According to famous linguistics Lakoff and Johnson[2], Orientational metaphor which organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. Since most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central peripheral. The implied meaning of the space relation and the space property projected onto non-orientation matter and the concept is treated as orientational metaphors. In other words, Orientation metaphor refers to a series of metaphorical concepts formed by reference to orientation. Spatial orientation comes from the interaction between people and nature. It is the most basic concept on which people live. According to famous linguistics, positive emotions such as joy, happiness are usually upwards. However, those negative emotions such as depression, pains point downward. It is understood that emotions are abstract. In order to have more direct understanding, people use such spatial orientation. The film used orientational metaphor cleverly in its details. Judy caused troubles in some way. When Judy went back her home, she started to sell carrots. She was drooping her ears all the day. Her parents know Judy was unhappy. Because “happy is up, sad is down.” That is one of the examples of orientational metaphor applied in this movie. When someone is happy, his head was erect and his back was straight. On the contrary, when someone is in depression, he was down in the dumps. Human and animal can express their emotions through their postures. Emotion is an abstract concept. It can be visualized and concreted. Those orientational words play the important role towards communication and life. Success and failure can also be seen through orientational words. When Judy made success, she walked straight even though she was a little bunny. Besides, “Try everything” is the Original motion picture soundtrack of Zootopia. There is a lyric “Birds don’t just fly, they fall down and get up.” “Down” and “up” express the attitudes and emotions. Fall down means they suffered a lot. Get up means bestir themselves. Orientational Metaphor provides a direct understanding towards people. Life never did run smooth. Orientational metaphor in this movie describes the ups and downs of life. It also represents the joy and sorrow of experience.

### ***3.3. Ontological metaphor***

Ontological metaphor refers to something concrete is projected onto something abstract. So that see the abstract one more clearly. Generally speaking, ontological metaphors enable people to see more sharply delineated structure where there is very little or none. People tend to transform the invisible into

the perception. The transformation called ontological metaphor. For example, people can perceive of personification as a form of ontological metaphor. In personification, human qualities are given to nonhuman entities. Personification is very common in literature, but it also abounds in everyday discourse. The characters in this film, all the animals were personalized. They can speak and think. If the abstract things can be described as familiar or touchable things. People can understand it easily. There are several scenes appeared in the Zootopia. When Judy was a child, she and her friends played a performance on their village. The content of this performance was about vicious predators and meek prey. Thousands of years ago, a world where prey were scared of predators. As time goes on, predators and preys live in harmony. When Judy and her friend play the part of predator and prey, they used box. There were two boxes. One was written vicious predators, another was written meek preys. When Judy said "Now predator and prey live in harmony." The boxes were removed then disappeared suddenly. This is an example of ontological metaphors appeared in this story. As a matter of fact, it was a delicate description of conflict. The disappearance of box represented that the world was not as harmony as Judy said. This can be explained that there must exist a hidden conflict between predators and preys. If there had not been conflict between predators and preys, the story would not happen later. The ending of the movie has been different. At night, when Judy and Nick investigated the case to fought for the truth, a savaged Jaguar chased after Judy and Nick. Because Judy was not have evidence of criminal. She was rebuked by her higher authorities. Nick helped Judy get an opportunity. After that both of them took a cable. Nick expose his unexpected experience. Then they comforted and encouraged each other. An idea jumped into Nick's mind abruptly. The traffic cameras would have caught the trace. At that moment, we can see the sun was rising and the light was coming. That means the turning point of this case was appearing. The sun represented the hope. Everything was getting better. No matter how long the night is, the day will come eventually. Ontological Metaphor was used elaborately in this film. Additionally, DNA was represented animal's instinct. Exactly, here DNA refers to predators who survived through their aggressive hunting instincts. There was a biological component. Audience has a deep and clearly understanding about inherent conflict after watching this movie. That was the use of ontological metaphor appeared in this movie.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper studied the cultural metaphor and conceptual metaphor of the movie Zootopia. The metaphor of American social and cultural phenomenon in Zootopia is plentiful and complex. Firstly, this paper helps to understand the concept of metaphor. Metaphors are exist in our daily life. However, people usually don't realize it. This paper helps people to identify conceptual metaphor and culture metaphor directly. Let people know, metaphor is not only a rhetorical device, but also is a cultural reflection and a way of thinking. Secondly, this paper shows the current situation of American society. Although America is a developed country. There exist a lot of problems. After reading this paper, let people have a understanding of American politics, racial relationship and living mode etc. The knowledge of Culture background is an indispensable point for English learners. In addition, it reminds people to think more. Thinking ability is the core of learning ability. Watching movie is not only to enjoy but also to broaden the horizon. The film makes people think more after watching the movie. The images and profound connotation let people have a more comprehensive understanding of the American culture. The film is worth to deliberating. Audience can not only see the piercing social reality, but also see people's wishes for social justice and world peace. Besides, the film has a strong political color. It raises people's awareness of metaphor and culture. Let people have a understanding of culture background and American society. Everyone hopes that human beings can coexist peacefully and create a harmonious space together.

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