

# The Application of Metaphor in Senior High School English Teaching

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**ABSTRACT.** *Metaphor is a universal linguistic rhetorical phenomenon whose essence is cognition. This kind of cognition can be reflected in the cultural level of vocabulary and idioms. It is rooted in language thinking and culture. abstract. concepts can be concretized through metaphor. Conceptual metaphor is a very effective auxiliary means for students to learn English words. If students can correctly understand the conceptual metaphor implied by vocabulary in specific context, they can fully acquire the connotation expressed by sentences, so that language can be understood and analyzed more effectively. In high school English classroom, teachers should use more teaching methods of conceptual metaphor to explain words, phrases and sentences so as to improve students' language perception ability.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Metaphor, Cognition, Language thinking, Conceptual metaphor, High school English classroom*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 A General Statement

Since Lakoff and Johnson formally put forward conceptual metaphor theory in 1980, metaphor research has undergone earth-shaking changes. Cognitive psychology, linguistics, rhetoric, anthropology, philosophy, political science, archaeology and many other disciplines have not only made new contributions to the establishment of metaphorical theory from different angles, but also made a fruitful attempt on the practical application of metaphorical theory. Especially in the field of linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory has been greatly developed, and a large number of effective metaphorical researchers have emerged. Foreign representative scholars are mainly: Lakoff & Johnson, Gibbs, Turner, kovecses, Grady, Steen, et al. Domestic representative scholars are mainly: Lin Shuwu, Hu Zhuanglin, Wang Yin, Shu Dingfang, Wen Xu, et al. However, compared with the rapid development of its theory, the practical application of conceptual metaphor is very weak, which Mr. Lin Shuwu pointed out as early as the first National Symposium on Cognitive Linguistics. Up to now, foreign work on the practical application of conceptual metaphor is that Cameron & Low (1999) edited a collection of theses *Researching and Applying Metaphor*. While only a few theses in China are concerned with the

application of conceptual metaphor theory, for example, the works of Pang Jixian and Ding Zhanping, Cai Longquan, Shu Dingfang and others. It will be a qualitative leap to incorporate the latest achievements of conceptual metaphor theory into English teaching practice.

### ***1.2 The Need for the Study***

Vocabulary is the carrier and concrete embodiment of language, the basic element of language and the most active part of language. British famous linguist Wilkins said, "We can not accept that grammar is more important than vocabulary. The fact is that without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." The sentence shows the importance of vocabulary. Vocabulary teaching is an important part of English learning and plays an important role in English teaching. Metaphor is an important cognitive tool and a construction way of language and thinking. Therefore, it is a key factor in learning English well to cultivate students' metaphorical thinking ability. In order to make vocabulary teaching more in line with human cognitive laws and help students learn English vocabulary more effectively, metaphor theory should be applied to English vocabulary teaching in senior high school.

### ***1.3 The Overall Structure of the Thesis***

This thesis is composed of five parts. The first chapter is mainly the introduction, which includes the general statement, the need for the study, and the structure of the thesis. The second one is a literature review, focusing on definitions of key terms, such as metaphor, structural metaphors, orientational metaphors, vocabulary and so on, a review of metaphor research, and conceptual metaphor theory. Chapter three mainly talks about the value of teaching metaphor, including humanistic value, cognitive value, and practical value. The fourth chapter is the application of conceptual metaphor in high school English vocabulary teaching, mainly discussing the introduction of metaphor in high school English textbook and the combination of conceptual metaphor and English vocabulary learning which includes using conceptual metaphor theory to emphasize the basic meaning of vocabulary, using conceptual metaphor theory to deepen the understanding of polysemous vocabulary and using conceptual metaphor theory to analyze English-Chinese lexical culture. Chapter five makes a conclusion, which includes the important role of conceptual metaphor in high school English vocabulary teaching, and how to better apply metaphor to vocabulary teaching.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Definitions of Key Terms***

#### ***2.1.1 Metaphor***

Metaphor refers to a comparison between unlike things without the use of “like” or “as”. This comparison is done between two things that are basically different but have something in common in some significant ways.

Metaphor is composed of tenor, vehicle or ground. A is B. For example, life is journey.

Lakoff & Johnson defined a metaphor as the understanding itself of one concept in terms of another in *Metaphors We Live By*(1980).

### **2.1.2 Structural Metaphors**

Construct another vague and abstract concept according to a concept with clear structure and boundaries. Therefore, it is a kind of metaphor that is the most easily observed and recognized.

### **2.1.3 Orientational Metaphors**

Taking space as the source domain, the spatial structure is projected to the non-spatial concept, and the non-spatial concept is given a spatial position.

### **2.1.4 Ontological Metaphors**

They can help us to think of abstract events, activities, emotions, ideas and so on as tangible entities and substances.

### **2.1.5 Vocabulary**

As to definitions of vocabulary, the main types are as follows:

All the words that a person knows or uses.

All the words in a particular language.

The words that people use when they are talking about a particular subject.

A list of words with their meanings, especially in a book for learning a foreign language.

## **2.2 A Review of Metaphor Research**

Metaphor is a common phenomenon and people use a lot of metaphors every moment. British rhetorician Richards once said that “A metaphor may appear in almost every three sentences in our daily conversation.” With the development of cognitive linguistics, scholars in the field have a strong interest in metaphor research, and domestic linguists have made systematic comments on metaphor. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of metaphors, it is necessary to systematically sort out the historical development of metaphor.

### **2.2.1 Traditional Metaphor**

The study of metaphor can trace back to 300 BC and has a history of more than 2000 years. However, the first person in history to be interested in metaphor is Aristotle. He repeatedly mentioned metaphors in his works. Aristotle's interpretation of metaphor is to regard metaphor as a rhetorical device. His belief is that there is little difference between metaphor and simile, and the difference lies in the expression used. Aristotle's understanding of metaphor is called "contrastive theory". During the first century B.C., Roman rhetorician Quintilianus put forward another theory on metaphor, namely "substitution theory". His opinion is that metaphor is actually a rhetorical phenomenon where one word is replaced by another. In the traditional metaphor view, metaphor is an unconventional language expression but a rhetorical device. As far as Aristotle's contrastive theory and Quintilianus' substitution theory are concerned, there are similarities between them. In fact, Quintilianus' view of "replacing one word by another" is based on Aristotle's view of "talking about one thing by another". However, we can see that both views of traditional metaphor research focus on the single word and seldom involve the study of sentences. To some extent, it is inappropriate to regard metaphor as a figurative language.

### **2.2.2 Modern Metaphor**

During the 1930s, Richards first mentioned metaphor interaction theory in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, which was developed and perfected later. The main point of metaphor interaction theory is that metaphor is a creative process of a new meaning and the result of the interaction between two subject words. This theory breaks through the lexical level and examines metaphor as a semantic phenomenon at the sentence level. In addition, the concept of cognition is also introduced into the study of metaphor. Metaphor activity is actually the interaction between thoughts of tenor and vehicle. Because the theory of interaction is studied by many scholars, and it also draws lessons from Piaget's constructivism of interaction, it has strong explanatory power. However, both "contrastive theory" and "interaction theory" are based on the similarity between things. Metaphor is only a rhetorical way to recognize another thing with similar characteristics by some characteristics of one thing. The two theories are only the descriptive interpretation of metaphor but never explore the nature of metaphor.

### **2.2.3 Contemporary Metaphor**

By the late 1970s, European and American scholars had reached the climax of metaphor research. Lakoff was the most successful at this stage, when he and Johnson wrote *Metaphors We Live By*. The fundamental difference between Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor research and traditional metaphor research is that the former regards metaphor as thinking activity, not just language phenomenon. Lakoff and Johnson think that it is unnecessary to distinguish metaphorical language from non-metaphorical language. Metaphor exists in people's daily life, and there are few words without metaphorical characteristics. That is, whether a sentence is a metaphorical language is no longer that important. Metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cognitive phenomenon. People use the experience of one

field to explain another, which is a way of intellectual activity. Lakoff and Johnson focus on conceptual metaphor. They think that conceptual metaphor can be divided into three categories: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor. Metaphor is the basis for people to form concepts and ratiocination.

### **2.3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

The conceptual metaphor theory was first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in the book *Metaphors We Live By*. They believe that metaphor exists in our daily life, not only in language, but also in our thoughts and behaviors. Under the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, the understanding of metaphor involves two cognitive domains: source domain and target domain. Conceptual metaphor is to understand the experience of another cognitive domain by the experience of one cognitive domain. Some of the characteristics of the source domain are reflected in the target domain, and the latter gets partly understood due to the former. Therefore, "the essence of metaphor is to use one kind of things to understand and experience another kind of things". Conceptual metaphor theory also puts forward the difference between conceptual metaphor and metaphorical expression. The former is the mapping between two cognitive domains, and the latter is the concrete expression of conceptual metaphor.

Conceptual metaphor and rhetorical metaphor are both related and different. The connection is that conceptual metaphor is based on the cognitive analysis of rhetorical metaphor, and the analytical result of rhetorical metaphor (cognitive function) is used in the study of general language so as to produce so-called "conceptual metaphor". The difference is that the former is internal and the latter is external. Therefore, in order to understand conceptual metaphor, we should grasp several points: First, conceptual metaphor can also be called "metaphorical concept". It is internal, that is, only in the process of conceptualization it can be seen. Second, conceptual metaphor itself is not a direct speech expression, although it restricts the way of speech expression at a deep level. Third, conceptual metaphor is summed up from the general daily expression. Fourth, according to Lakoff's research, metaphorical concept must have the generating ability of language, namely, the systematization of metaphorical concept. Concepts without the ability in Lakoff's metaphorical framework can not be called "metaphorical concept" or "conceptual metaphor".

#### **2.3.1 The Systematization of Conceptual Metaphor**

The systematization of conceptual metaphor can be viewed in two aspects. First, several metaphorical concepts are combined to form a more complete understanding of something. People's cognitive concept of things is not messy, but has a characteristic of systematization. Conceptual metaphor also possesses a characteristic of systematization. Generally speaking, conceptual metaphor always grasps a certain aspect of the object to describe, and then hits the mark to help people understand a certain aspect of something. However, one aspect of something

does not represent the whole. Therefore, people understand it from other aspects inevitably. In this way, according to people's different social experience and practice, and people's different cultural customs, several metaphorical concepts are combined to form a more complete understanding of something. Second, the combination of vehicle and related words in speech expression influenced and restricted by metaphorical concepts forms an organic system. As a cognitive object, the vehicle in metaphor concept is characterized by multi-level and multi-side. Conceptual metaphor may consist of one or more characteristics of tenor and vehicle, and once this metaphorical concept is formed, other potential characteristics of vehicle may appear with the deepening of people's understanding. Therefore, metaphorical cognition not only is a language matter, but also stipulates our way of thinking and behavior.

### ***2.3.2 Rationale for Conceptual Metaphor***

Conceptual metaphor is the mapping from source domain to target domain. In general, source domain is some concrete and familiar concepts, while the target domain is more abstract and less familiar. Our conceptual system stores a large number of concrete and abstract concepts. So there is a question here: is it possible that any concrete concept can be mapped to abstract concepts as a source domain? The traditional metaphor theory holds that metaphor occurs because of the similarity between tenor and vehicle, and this similarity exists objectively, so people choose a similar concept to understand another concept. This traditional interpretation has two difficult problems. First, there are similarities between any two things. Even if the two things are very different, we can still find out the similarities between them. So, why do we only choose this concept instead of another one to express the abstract concept? Second, objective similarities can explain many metaphorical phenomena, but there are also many metaphorical phenomena that can not be explained. Cognitive linguistics has made a new explanation in illustrating the choice of the source domain in metaphor: for one thing, it is based on our relevant experience; for another, it is the similarity of the perceptual structure, namely, the similarity of the two concepts of the speaker's subjective perception.

## **3. The Value of Teaching Metaphor**

Teaching metaphor has important humanistic value, cognitive value and practical value. We should not ignore or even reject metaphor, but should cherish the metaphor existing in teaching theory and practice. It is the existence of these metaphors that makes us explore teaching with infinite complexity from different perspectives. Teaching is complex, and our understanding of teaching is never exhaustive. It can be expected that the further renewal of our teaching concept will resort to creating new teaching metaphors.

### ***3.1 Humanistic Value of Teaching Metaphor***

Teaching metaphor has the characteristics of visualization, emotion, creativity and openness. Teaching metaphors often use concrete, vivid and perceptible things to analogy abstract things. Visualization of teaching metaphor makes teaching metaphor avoid the vapidness of concepts. The emotion of teaching metaphor means that it can reflect the similarities of different things and make people feel familiar. Because it is a familiar object that is observed, there is a sense of ease in the mind. The creativity of teaching metaphor refers to the vivid expression of new ideas acquired by analogy between teaching and other things. It often takes wisdom to discover or create similarities that are not perceived by ordinary people. In itself, it is the embodiment of wisdom. The openness of teaching metaphor means that teaching metaphor is not fixed. Throughout the ages, teaching metaphors are constantly changing, and people constantly renew their teaching concepts through new analogies. In addition, the openness of teaching metaphor also refers to the unique interpretation of teaching metaphor made by the creators. Even with the same teaching metaphor, different people often have different interpretations. Individual understanding and independent personality should be paid attention to in teaching metaphor. In the teaching theory, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign, there are many metaphors. These metaphors are educators' discovery of teaching wisdom and an important carrier of the teaching ideas. Whenever we read these metaphors, we are overwhelmed by the acumen and wisdom, and then produce rich associations and spiritual experiences. This is an important embodiment of the humanistic value of teaching metaphor.

### ***3.2 Cognitive Value of Teaching Metaphor***

Teaching metaphor has both perceptual and rational aspects. Teaching metaphor can not only express ideas vividly, but also avoid the rigidity and dullness of teaching concepts. Meanwhile, it is not as passionate as teaching slogans, which lacks rationality. In the classical works of pedagogy, there are many metaphors. Plato's cave metaphor, Comenius' seed metaphor and Dewey's growth metaphor can all be regarded as the cornerstone of metaphorical pedagogy thought. Even contemporary teaching theories based on science can not leave metaphor. It can be said that metaphor is still the foundation of these theories, and without metaphor, these theories will not be carried out. However, people often pay attention to the concepts, logic and ideas in these works, and seldom explore the metaphorical visualization and the thought fulcrum behind it. Metaphor in teaching theory is not only widely taken from the field of life, but also from other disciplines. Combing and summarizing the metaphors in teaching theory can make people understand the quality of teaching theory from another perspective.

### ***3.3 Practical Value of Teaching Metaphor***

In teaching practice, there widely exist metaphors about education, teaching and teachers. On the one hand, these metaphors are influenced by educationalists' metaphorical thoughts. On the other hand, they are rooted in practice and have their

own logic. They reflect educators' views on the problems of education and teaching in a vivid and concise way. It plays an important role in understanding the educators' teaching thought and practice to study these metaphors and reveal the thought and logic behind them. Generally speaking, many teachers' understanding of teaching ideas is vague, so it is difficult to develop teaching metaphor which embodies their own teaching thought and practice. Therefore, educational experts can help teachers to construct their own teaching metaphors by developing certain strategies and methods so as to realize the reflection on their own teaching ideas and practices. Educational experts guide teachers to reflect on their own life experience and teaching experience, write reflective diaries, set up the process and content of teachers' development of teaching metaphors, and choose metaphors suitable for themselves from the classification system of teaching metaphors which provides strategies and methods for teachers to construct and form their own teaching metaphors.

#### **4. The Application of Conceptual Metaphor in High School English Vocabulary Teaching**

##### ***4.1 Metaphor in High School Textbook***

In Grammar and usage of unit 1, Module 11, Advance with English, the concept and application of metaphor are explained in detail.

Metaphor is defined as follows:

A metaphor (or a closed comparison) states that one thing is something else. It is a comparison of two things that are not usually thought to be alike but have something in common. A metaphor may compare the figurative meaning of a noun to the literal meaning of another noun, but it does NOT use *as* or *like* to make any comparisons.

Here are some examples:

1) As a Business Person, You Cannot Be a Mouse. You Have to Be a Tiger.

Here, business person is the literal term, while mouse and tiger are used figuratively. To understand the use of metaphor in this sentence, you need to know about the qualities of the two animals.

2) For Lawyers, a Courtroom is a Battlefield.

In this sentence, a courtroom is compared to a battlefield, reflecting that lawyers must fight to win cases here.

3) Going to Work Every Day Became a Chore for Him, and he Could Hardly Wait to Find a New and Exciting Job.

In this example, work is being compared to a chore, which is housework. From the sentence it is easy to see that work and chores are considered similar in that both



are thought to be boring and tiring.

Here are two exercises about metaphors:

1) Read the Poem and Underline the Metaphors in It.

If you want to be a ...

If you want to be a spy like James Bond 007, you need to be as cool as a cucumber and as sly as a fox and you need cast-iron nerves. If you want to be a model, you need to be as tall as a tree and eat like a bird. If you want to be an actor and a martial arts expert like Jackie Chan, you cannot be a weed. If you want to be successful like Bill Gates, you need to have a mind like a computer and be as sharp as a spear in business. If you want to be a magician like David Copperfield, you need to make people see that black is white and white is black. If you want to succeed in life, you need to be as hungry as a lion.

2) Match the Metaphors with the Correct Meanings.

|                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| be a weed                         | things appear different |
| black is white and white is black | weak and not brave      |
| cast-iron nerves                  | a very strong will      |

#### ***4.2 The Combination of Conceptual Metaphor and English Vocabulary Learning***

Understanding vocabulary through conceptual metaphor theory can enhance students' metaphorical ability and make students master the deep meaning of vocabulary. Teachers can guide students to use conceptual metaphors to understand the richness of vocabulary usage, and to use some familiar and concrete concepts to map some unfamiliar and abstract concepts.

##### ***4.2.1 Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Emphasize the Basic Meaning of Vocabulary***

Language becomes novel under metaphorical context and presents a trend of diversified development. In high school English vocabulary teaching, vocabulary has both basic meaning and extended meaning, and extended meaning should be based on basic meaning. Therefore, when teachers use conceptual metaphor theory to carry out vocabulary teaching, they need to emphasize the basic meaning of vocabulary and guide students to further study the deep meaning of vocabulary, namely, metaphorical meaning. In order to help students understand the basic meaning and extended meaning of English vocabulary, teachers should guide students master the internal relationship between the two, improve the comprehensive ability of using English vocabulary. For example, when learning "arm", students are told the basic meaning of this word refers to either of the two long parts that stick out from the top of the body and connect the shoulders to the hands, and they can quickly master its basic meaning under the guidance of teachers. However, there are many extended meanings of this word, and teachers can display

other words or phrases related to “arm” with the help of multimedia teaching methods, like “the arm of the river” which means a long narrow piece of water or land that is joined to a larger area, “the research arm of the company” which means a section of a large organization that deals with one particular activity, “arm sb with sth” which means “to provide weapons for sb in order to fight a battle or a war”. Thus it can be seen that when learning English words or phrases related to “arm”, we should pay attention to the basic meaning of “arm” and make appropriate modifications so that students can better understand and master the usage of the word. Therefore, when applying conceptual metaphor theory in high school English vocabulary teaching, we should pay attention to emphasizing the basic meaning of vocabulary.

#### ***4.2.2 Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Deepen the Understanding of Polysemous Vocabulary***

Metaphor is the main basis of a word with multiple meanings, and human life experience is the basic meaning of polysemous words. The extended meaning of vocabulary is the abstract concept and mapping produced on the basis of its basic meaning. That is to say, the internal relation of polysemous words is based on conceptual metaphor. There is an internal relationship between the meanings of polysemous words, and the content which conceptual metaphor maps is the connection between different things. For example, steal one's thunder, bite one's tongue, save one's skin, pull one's leg, they are the evolution of thunder, tongue, skin, leg and other lexical concepts in life. Polysemy has always been an important and difficult point in English vocabulary teaching in senior high school. The traditional teaching of polysemous words is mainly based on the method of “spoon-feeding “. Students memorize the different meanings of words and ignore the internal relationship of polysemous words. If teachers can use conceptual metaphor theory to guide students to master the relationship and rules between the meanings of polysemous words and take students' imagination as the basis of polysemous words teaching, students can achieve twice the result with half the effort. Therefore, when using conceptual metaphor theory in English vocabulary teaching in senior high school, teachers can apply the theory to the teaching of polysemous words to improve the effect of vocabulary teaching.

#### **5. .2.3 Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to Analyze English-Chinese Lexical Culture**

Conceptual metaphor theory is a very common way of human cognitive thinking. Even in the face of different cultures, people have common characteristics in cognition. For example, in our culture, cow represents “hard work”, and people often say “俯首甘为孺子牛” which means “to serve the people willingly; in western culture, people also have praise and admiration for cow, like “a sacred cow”. In addition, metaphor is also a form of reflection of culture and conceptual metaphor reflects different cultural characteristics in different languages. Because of the differences in values, conceptual systems, cognitive thinking and other aspects,

people from different cultural backgrounds have great differences in understanding things. For example, in Chinese culture, fish represent wealth and auspiciousness. However, fish is a derogatory term in western culture, for example, a cool fish which means “shameless”. Dogs often represent lowliness in Chinese culture, while dogs mean loveliness and loyalty in western culture. It can be seen that Chinese and Western cultures have great differences in cognitive thinking. Therefore, teachers should use conceptual metaphor theory in English vocabulary teaching in senior high school, and apply this theory to the comparative analysis of English and Chinese vocabulary culture, which is helpful to increase students' understanding of Chinese and Western vocabulary culture.

## 6. Conclusion

Applying conceptual metaphor theory to high school English vocabulary teaching can help students learn basic vocabulary, polysemous vocabulary, new vocabulary and vocabulary difficult to understand. In this way, students can not only better understand the deep thinking mode under the surface structure of language, but also effectively increase the depth and breadth of vocabulary learning, enhance the interest and enthusiasm of vocabulary learning, and then promote the comprehensive development of English language ability. In view of the important role of conceptual metaphor theory in English teaching, English teachers in senior high school should further strengthen the research and application of this theory. On the basis of mastering the basic content and application value of the theory, teachers should apply the theory science to vocabulary teaching according to the students' true learning situation so as to ensure that the teaching advantages of the theory can be brought into full play in vocabulary culture teaching and basic meaning teaching, and then achieve the expected goal of vocabulary teaching. In the process of using conceptual metaphor theory to carry out vocabulary teaching, English teachers in senior high school should emphasize the basic meaning of vocabulary through conceptual metaphor theory, deepen students' understanding and memory of polysemous words, and compare English and Chinese vocabulary culture so as to improve students' English vocabulary learning level, promote students' long-term development.

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