



Research on Metaphorical Approach in Economic Vocabulary Teaching

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Supported by Empirical Research on Metaphorical Approach in College English Vocabulary Teaching (JZC12093), A Teaching Research Project From University of Jinan.

Received 25 February 2014; accepted 30 May 2014
 Published online 26 June 2014

Abstract

This paper based on conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) aims at exploring the classification and organization of *inflation*-related metaphors. We have three findings: firstly, orientational metaphors and structural metaphors are the main groups, compared with ontological metaphors; secondly, these source domains tend to share similarities, though different from each other; thirdly, INFLATION IS ENEMY is the dominant classification. The metaphorical exploring may provide an efficient approach with economic vocabulary teaching and learning.

Key words: Metaphorical approach; Classification and organization; Economic vocabulary teaching

Yang, Y. W. (2014). Research on Metaphorical Approach in Economic Vocabulary Teaching. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(3), 47-52. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/4814> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4814>

INTRODUCTION

Our everyday life, thoughts and even the whole world are actually a large conceptual system which consists of a large number of concepts. In fact, concepts are always playing a very important role in our understanding of either objective world or imaginary world. This is the starting point of conceptual metaphor researching launched by Lakoff & Johnson (Feng, 2004). Lakoff &

Johnson (1980) even hold that thinking will be impossible without the help of concepts. Thus, understanding the essence of concepts will no doubt greatly facilitate our thinking and improve the ability to know the world. Furthermore, Lakoff & Johnson (1993) divided all of the concepts into two major groups: literal (non-metaphorical) group and metaphorical group. Literal group means these basic concepts not comprehended via conceptual metaphor. For example, a sentence like “the balloon went up/down”, is literally instead of metaphorical. On the contrary, metaphorical group like emotions and abstractions is comprehended via conceptual metaphor. For example, in the sentence “you are wasting my time”, the concept “time” can be comprehended via conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY. Further study shows that a metaphorical concept is usually structured by more than one conceptual metaphor. Every conceptual metaphor partially structures a single concept, which allows us to get a handle on one aspect of the concept. Through a systematic revelation to these conceptual metaphors used to structure the same concept, we may get a general picture of the metaphoric system of the single concept; consequently, it may greatly facilitate the economic vocabulary teaching practice.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 Terms Identification

Before beginning the research, it is really important to clarify the differences of the two important terms: metaphor and metaphoric expressions. As mentioned above, metaphor is a matter of thought instead of language and the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Hence wherever in the research metaphor is mentioned, such as LOVE IS JOURNEY, it should be understood as a metaphoric concept and it is always written in the form of capital letters. On the other

hand, metaphoric expressions refer to these linguistic expressions which can be understood via metaphor. It is because of metaphors in a person's conceptual system that linguistic expressions are possible precisely understood. It is almost impossible for us to find "a living metaphor" in reality since it only works on the level of concepts as an abstract principle, while it can be successfully realized through its metaphoric expressions, more examples are as follows: the metaphor LOVE IS JOURNEY governs the following metaphoric expressions: Look how far we have come. We are spinning our wheels. The marriage is on the rocks. Similarly, the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR dominates the following metaphoric expressions: He attacked weak points in my argument. Your claims are indefensible. He shot down all of my arguments.

1.2 Classification of Metaphor

According to the degree of conventionality, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) classified metaphors into two major groups: conventional metaphors and novel metaphors. Conventional metaphors refer to these cases which structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture and are reflected in our everyday language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). A conceptual system contains thousands of conventional metaphorical mappings which form a highly structured subsystem of the conceptual system. The system of conventional metaphor is mostly unconscious, automatic, and used with no noticeable effort, just like our linguistic system and the rest of our conceptual system (Lakoff, 1993). Good cases in point are LOVE IS JOURNEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, as mentioned above, etc. Novel metaphors refer to these imaginative and creative cases outside our conventional conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.139). They are actually the extension of conventional metaphors in a sense. Consequently, novel metaphors are systematic just like conventional and it may become one of the conventional metaphors after being used for a period of time. For example, LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART is absolutely a novel metaphor which is attached enough imagination and creativity. Once it is accepted by the majority of people in a culture and begins to structure their conceptual system, it is one of conventional metaphors in deed.

Furthermore, Lakoff & Johnson (1980), in light of the source domain of metaphor, distinguished them into orientational metaphors, ontological metaphors and structural metaphors. Orientational metaphors map a spatial structure onto a non-spatial concepts based on physical and cultural experience. They have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral, etc. They are not arbitrary, instead, have a basis in our physical and cultural experience. For example, the physical basis in MORE IS UP and LESS IS DOWN is: adding more of a substance or of physical objects to a container or pile, and the level

goes up (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Ontological metaphor conceptualizes those not clearly discrete and bounded events, activities and emotions in terms of entities and substances. "Once we can identify our experiences as entities, or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them and quantify them--and by this means, reason about them" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Structural metaphors are those cases where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.14). For example, TIME IS MONEY is a structural metaphor, in which time is conceptualized in terms of money, a highly structured and clearly delineated concept. Likewise, structural metaphors are grounded in systematic correlation within human experience and culture. The three kinds of metaphors may belong to conventional metaphors (Wen & Ye, 2003).

1.3 Research Corpus

All of these authentic examples mentioned in this research are collected and taken from *Economist*, the leading magazine on business and finance, which belongs to the register of socio-economic discourse. Articles in the magazine are rather specialized while fairly popular and highly argumentative at the same time. The language is a mixture and shares a family resemblance with the language of formal economics, but not like formal economics that are theory laden. For the reason of limited time and space, 226 inflation-related articles are searched and the range of searching is from September, 2003 to September, 2005.

1.4 Research Method

We adopted manual identification method due to the possible missing of machine identification. Three steps are involved in the research: identification and classification of inflation-related metaphors; systematic revelation of inflation-related metaphors; function of these metaphors in the process of teaching and learning inflation. To ensure linguistic expression as a metaphor, the three rules are employed: 1) An identity relation such as similarity stands between two things and they belong to different categories; 2) Two things are regarded as source domain and target domain and their positions are not exchanged in the given context; 3) One or some of features or connotations related to the source domain tend to be projected onto the target domain (Black, 1979).

1.5 Research Question

In reading of economic discourse, some seemingly unrelated words more often than not jump into reader's eyes. Most of those words are metaphorical expressions. A large number of researches focused on these expressions from the rhetorical point of view, however, little research about them have been done from a cognitive approach. It is impossible to exhaust every metaphor used in a certain genre considering the abundant nature of metaphor. In this paper, we limit our scope to these metaphors

entailed in the metaphorical concept, *inflation*. Inflation as a noun can be metaphorically viewed as an entity to reflect the experience of rising prices and it can be structured by some different metaphors. This paper will try to find the classification and organization of these metaphors. Furthermore, we hope that a systematic revelation of inflation-related metaphors will facilitate our comprehension and application of the inflation concept. Consequently, it may, in a sense, inspire the teaching of semi-technical vocabulary for an economic purpose.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

After searching in these 226 passages, 493 linguistic expressions of inflation-related metaphors are found. They are generally governed by three types of metaphors: ontological metaphors (48), orientational metaphors (245) and structural metaphors (200). Ontological metaphors can be further classified into two kinds: ENTITY metaphors (44) and CONTAINER metaphors (4). Structural metaphors may be further elaborated into seven groups: ENEMY metaphors (155), VEHICLE metaphors (15), BEAST metaphors, (13) WAVE metaphors (12), BOMB metaphors (2), COMMODITY metaphors (2) and ICEBERG metaphors (1). At last, orientational metaphors can be classified into two major groups: DYNAMIC and STATIC and the dynamic group can be further classified into UPWARD, DOWNWARD and NON-DIRECTIONAL.

The conceptual metaphor held by Lakoff generally only means conventional metaphor rather than novel metaphors since the former is the only central one to our understanding of experience and the way we act on that understanding. Hence we should limit our scope onto the range of conventional metaphors instead of novel metaphors. Then here is a question: How to distinguish conventional metaphors from novel metaphors, namely, how to identify which ones have the function of structuring our conceptual system and which ones don't have. To my best knowledge and belief, so far either Lakoff or other previous scholars didn't give a clear answer to this question. It is almost impossible for us to draw a clear line between conventional and novel metaphors since, in a sense, they may be seen as a continuum as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, the expressions of conventional and novel definitions drop a hint for us to distinguish them from each other: the degree of conventionality. Undoubtedly, metaphors of relatively high degree of conventionality belong to the conventional group; on the contrary, metaphors of relatively low degree of conventionality belong to the novel group. Then how to define high or low degree of conventionality of a metaphor? In a sense, it may be embodied by the using frequency of a certain metaphor, that is, metaphors attached with relatively more linguistic

expressions may belong to the conventional group, on the contrary, metaphors attached with relatively less linguistic expressions may belong to the novel group. However, the criterion is still unclear enough to cut the continuum away since we don't know where the "cutting point" is, namely, the quantity of metaphoric expressions, which may be used to distinguish the conventional from the novel, is unknown. In fact, the quantity criterion may be specific, that is, different concepts may have different criterion. In this research, according to the findings mentioned above, we may define these metaphors attached with more than ten linguistic expressions into the conventional group, and these metaphors attached with less than ten linguistic expressions into the novel group. Consequently, container metaphors(4), BOMB metaphors(2), COMMODITY metaphors(2) and ICEBERG metaphors(1) may haven't the qualification of conventional group, that is, these cases should not be viewed as the researching objects when we reveal the systematicity of INFLATION-related metaphors. However, it doesn't mean that they have nothing to do with the system of inflation-related metaphors, instead, the system may greatly impact on their future and they may have the possibility to enter into the system.

2.1 Inflation-Related Ontological Metaphors

In these cases, viewing inflation as an entity allows us to refer to (concern about, talk about) it, quantify (measure, gauge, reduce) it, foretell (predict, forecast, expect, overstate, understate) it, perceive (worry about, inflationary pressures, painful memories) it, identify a particular aspect of it (harmful, burden), see it as a cause and act with economically to it (effect, impact) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

However, merely viewing a nonphysical thing considered as an entity does not allow us to comprehend very much about it. Some of entities metaphors may be further elaborated as structural metaphors usually do. Namely, these entity metaphors may inherit some systematic characteristics from structural metaphors such as entailments, highlight and hiding, etc. For example, in the metaphor INFLATION IS BEAST, the source domain BEAST can be viewed as an entity, more important, it can be viewed as a concrete entity which has a clear boundary and structure. Hence its boundary and structure may be mapped onto the target domain INFLATION. Thus, we can understand INFLATION more profoundly through the metaphor INFLATION IS BEAST than the metaphor INFLATION IS ENTITY. So to speak, some entity metaphors like INFLATION IS BEAST can be extended into structural metaphors once the source domain has a clear image enough to be perceived (Lanchun 2005, p.123). Some examples related metaphor INFLATION IS ENTITY are as follows:

1). The core price index for personal consumption expenditure, a closely watched *measure* of inflation, rose at a 2.2% annual rate in the first quarter.

2). The Fed's favorite *gauge* of inflation, the rate of increase of the core personal consumption expenditure deflator, was 1.5% in the year to October, implying a real interest rate of only 0.75%.

3). If so, a rise in the euro will have a smaller *effect* on inflation than if exporters adjusted prices. That said, there will still be some impact.

4). To the extent that China adds to the world's productive capacity and strengthens competition, it should, on balance, help to *reduce* inflation for a period.

5). Movements in currencies also tend to have less *impact* on inflation in America than elsewhere, partly because it imports less.

6). But the government is clearly *concerned about* inflation.

7). As growth has picked up, so has the *talk about* inflation.

2.2 Inflation-Related Structural Metaphors

President Gerald Ford called inflation "public enemy number one" decades years ago. A number of cases found in this research proved it. Consider first these examples:

1). Big swings in asset prices can also lead to a misallocation of resources and so slower economic growth, just as high rates of general price inflation distort economies by blurring relative price signals.

2). A healthy trade surplus is partial protection against a rise in American interest rates, which could send the real tumbling and inflation shooting up again.

3). Inflation is slowly gaining ground in America.

4). The bank's worry is that, untamed, inflation could in time kill recovery.

5). But price pressures are easing in Venezuela and Turkey, which have both suffered from acute inflation in the past.

6). Policymakers have since learned the hard way that rising inflation harms growth.

7). Spooked by fear of inflation, high oil prices and a revolt by Asia's central banks, bonds, the dollar and shares all headed south, in that order.

In each of these cases of inflation is personified, but the metaphor is not merely INFLATION IS A PERSON. It is much more specific, namely, INFLATION IS AN ENEMY. They not only give us a very specific way of thinking about inflation but also a way of acting toward it. We think of inflation as an enemy that can attack us, harm us, shoot us, and make us suffer from pains, rob of our territory and even kill us. The INFLATION IS AN ENEMY therefore gives rise to and justifies the action on the part of our government: declaring war on inflation.

8). For more than two decades, central banks' main task was to fight inflation.

After that, our government may set a fighting target firstly and the target may be various (narrow, strict, explicit flexibility or other kinds of targets).

9). Many observers took this as a sign that the Fed had moved closer to *setting an inflation target*, as many other central banks have done.

10). Given the elusiveness of a perfect price index, central banks should keep using conventional, *narrow inflation targets*, but be prepared to undershoot them temporarily if house or share prices soar.

11). Yet it already is more transparent than the Fed: it does at least have a clearly defined inflation target and holds regular press conferences.

12). Unlike the Fed, many other central banks have long declared *explicit inflation targets* and then set interest rates to try to meet these.

Before the attacking, the commanders of enemy (*core inflation*) should be defined and the characteristics of enemy (rampant, core, stubborn, strengthening) should be described. Then the government may work out a strategy in order to fight with the enemy effectively. However, we found that our commanders have little to do with the powerful enemy. They only try to drive it into a narrow space, rather than destroy it completely.

13). In other words, central banks will *police* inflation and the capital markets will police the central banks.

14). Until a few months ago, the conventional wisdom was that the world was awash with spare capacity, which would *keep inflation in check*.

15). Throughout his stewardship, which began in 1998, the Bank of Mexico has *kept inflation within its target range*.

16). The Federal Reserve has rejected the advice of the BIS for many years, insisting that the main job of a central bank is simply to *control* inflation.

Compared with the invariable strategy, our government seems to own many kinds of manner of attacking the enemy.

17). The central bank has concentrated its efforts on keeping interest rates just high enough to *squash* inflation, and resisting pressure from politicians to loosen up.

18). Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's president wants to *cut* inflation from 700% or so, as he has heard that it makes life hard for the little people.

19). A stronger currency will *squeeze* growth and inflation, just like a tightening of monetary

Here comes the end of the fighting, with intensive hatred, our government always wins the fight in some "cruel expressions".

20). Britain's remarkable economic performance since he came to power is mostly down to his Conservative predecessors, who *beat* inflation, privatized dud industries and made the labour market in Britain work better than those in continental Europe.

21). Inflation, which has been *subdued*, will rise a bit above the OECD average.

INFLATION IS ENEMY governed 155 linguistic expressions in the total 200 structural metaphorical expressions found in the research. No doubt that the metaphor is absolutely a conventional metaphor which has been accepted by most people. In other words,

it governs our thinking and structures our linguistic expressions when we talk about the concept inflation in a large degree. Compared with INFLATION IS ENEMY, the other three structural metaphors only play a subsidiary role in the comprehension of the concept inflation.

2.3 Orientational Metaphors of Inflation

As mentioned above, inflation-related structural metaphors are established on the basis of entity metaphors. Likewise, all of the inflation-related orientational metaphors are on the premise of ontological metaphors since inflation should be first viewed as an entity before it can be dynamic or static in a space. Metaphors of space used in economics can be classified into the following two types: static and dynamic. Furthermore, if dynamic, then these metaphors must have a trend: upward or downward; if they don't reveal the direction of trends, then they are classified as non-directional. Generally speaking, the inflation changes are reflected by two dimensions: the state and the amount, the state tells the present general inflation conditions, and the increased or decreased in amount shows the inflation changes. Hence we may summarize the changes in inflation into three states: the state of increase, the state of decrease and the state of being comparatively stable. Some related examples are as follows:

- 1). Dropping interest rates will buy time for some banks, but it will also *push up* inflation.
- 2). Inflation slowed sharply in America, but *rose* in the euro area.
- 3). And as long as surging prices keep fuelling consumer spending and inflation is *edging up*, the Fed is likely to continue to lift interest rates.
- 4). Inflation also *picked up* in Thailand, reaching 3.6% in the year to April. Prices rose in India by 4.2% in the year to March.
- 5). Inflation is *accelerating* in Argentina.
- 6). Consumer-price inflation in America *eased* to 2.5% in the year to September, from 2.7% in the year to August.
- 7). Consumer-price inflation in Brazil *slackened* to 6.7% in the year to September.
- 8). Inflation in the euro area *slowed to* 2.1% in the year to August.
- 9). Inflation in Britain *fell to* 1.1% in the year to March, the lowest rate since September 2002.
- 10). At that time, the Federal Reserve seemed to take the view that faster productivity growth had allowed the unemployment rate consistent with *stable* inflation to be temporarily reduced.
- 11). This is the rate that neither stimulates the economy nor reins it in, but allows it to expand in line with its underlying productive potential, keeping inflation *constant*.
- 12). While the economy is clearly working off its slack, inflation is still *low* enough to cause little palpitations.
- 13). Romania, too, thinks *high* inflation is behind it.

3. IMPLICATION OF ECONOMIC VOCABULARY TEACHING

Boers (2000) argue that economic discourse in particular is heavily metaphorical. The pervasive nature of metaphor in economic discourse creates enough researching room for economic vocabulary teaching. Charteris-Black (2000) gets the similar conclusion that some metaphorical expressions in economic discourse are higher in frequency than in the general discourse through conducting a comparative analysis, which indicates that economics learners are dealing with more specific types of metaphors in their specialized reading than general learners.

3.1 Change Learners' Concept of Metaphor

Traditional theories generally define metaphor as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of their normal conventional meaning to express a "similar" meaning (Lakoff, 1993). Following the definition, almost all of the learners undoubtedly hold the concept that metaphor is absolutely a matter of language instead of thought. Consequently, they regard these "a little odd expressions" as only an exhibition of writing style or skill rather than a reflection of conceptual system highly depending on metaphor, which in turn, make learners impossible to find out the underlying principle of these metaphorical expressions as well as the links between some interrelated metaphorical expressions.

Lakoff (1993) argued that a major difference between the CMT and the traditional one lies in the argument on old literal-figurative distinction, namely, traditional views insist on the division between literal and figurative languages and see metaphor as a kind of figurative one while CMT does not accept the distinction. Therefore, we may destroy traditional views of metaphor through integrating the literal-figurative distinction. Teachers may tell economic learners that some scholars have found a huge body of metaphors which motivates and structures our everyday conceptual system restricting human being's language. These metaphors include either the so-called literal or figurative. Furthermore, some typical "literal expressions" can be listed to justify the integration.

On the basis of destroying, we can rebuild economic learners' concept on metaphor through acquainting them with the knowledge of conceptual metaphor. The definition, working mechanism, experiential basis and characteristics of conceptual metaphor should be briefly introduced or illustrated to learners. A general look at the theory is sufficient for economic learners since they aim only at the instrumental role of conceptual metaphor instead of profound research on it. After that, some exercises should be provided to learners and further examples should be exhibited to learners, which will give learners a profound comprehension of the new theory.

3.2 Develop Learners' Metaphor Approach in Economic Vocabulary Teaching

On the basis of rebuilding economic learners' concept on metaphor, their metaphor thinking should be further developed in vocabulary teaching. Two well-known cognitive approaches are suggested in developing learners' metaphor thinking: deductive and inductive. Deductive approach goes from metaphors to metaphorical expressions (from the universal to the particulars) and inductive one goes from metaphorical expressions to metaphors (from particulars to the universal). The two approaches complement each other since deductive approach tends to focus on the comprehension of metaphors while inductive one seemingly aims at the comprehension of metaphorical expressions. They are illustrated in detail in this part.

Deductive approach is always involved in the exhibition of metaphor, that is, learners are always exposed to some given metaphors in the approach. We claim that the classification of metaphor may be a good way to systematic revelation of it. In fact, this exposure could be viewed as a deductive approach of developing metaphor thinking. Specifically speaking, our understanding about metaphorical expressions may begin from their related metaphor since the location of metaphor is in our thinking which structures human beings' language. In other words, it is likely that these classified metaphors can be used to motivate the thinking of metaphorical expressions. For example: When the metaphor INFLATION IS ENEMY is given to learners, they are firstly invited to map their concepts about enemy (an enemy may attack us, hurt us, even destroy us, etc.) onto inflation, then, they are encouraged to apply their thinking about the mapping process into the understanding of these related metaphorical expressions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis, based on CMT, attempts to investigate the classification and organization of inflation-related metaphors as well as these linguistic expressions. Some

conclusions drawn from the research are as follows: 1) On the basis of given corpus, some inflation-related metaphors in economic discourse have been identified and further classified into three groups: orientational, structural and ontological metaphors; 2) these source domains tend to share similarities, though different from each other; 3) INFLATION IS ENEMY is the dominant classification. The metaphorical exploring may provide an efficient approach with economic vocabulary teaching and learning.

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