

## What Can Metaphors Tell Us About Culture?\*

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Recent studies on metaphor have proved it to be an important language device that reflects the cognitive source of human thinking. These experientialists claimed that metaphors in our languages mirror our ordinary conceptual system and treat metaphors as conventionalized cognitive structure. Adopting the experientialists' view of interpreting metaphor cognitively as a mapping relation from a source domain to a target domain (Lakoff 1990), the present study explores how metaphors reflect different cultural information by investigating conceptual metaphors about *MARRIAGE* and *THOUGHT AS FOOD* in current Chinese.

Using corpus data, we find that some of the familiar metaphors with which Chinese conceptualize marriage reflect cognitively the current Chinese view of marriage—*MARRIAGE IS AN ONGOING JOURNEY*, *MARRIAGE IS BUSINESS*, *MARRIAGE IS GAMBLING*, and *MARRIAGE IS BONDING*. Among the four, the conceptualization of *MARRIAGE AS BUSINESS* at 59.3% outweigh the others.

As for the metaphor *THOUGHT AS FOOD*, four proposition-schemas are identified to be at work in our conceptualization: *THE CONTENT OF THOUGHT IS THE INGREDIENT OF FOOD*, *THE QUALITY OF THOUGHT IS THE FLAVOR OF FOOD*, *THE FORMATION OF THOUGHT IS THE PREPARATION OF FOOD*, *THE COMPREHENSION OF THOUGHT IS THE DIGESTION OF FOOD*. Such conceptual mappings match syntactic manifestations in terms of grammatical categories, which may bear theoretical significance for the study of metaphor.

Key words: metaphor, mapping principle, conceptualization, culture

### 1. Introduction

Metaphors reflect processes of thinking and therefore serve as a good resource for the investigation of mapping in thought and language. Over the past twenty years, cognitive scientists have discovered things about the nature and importance of metaphor

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with significant implications for metaphor research. Such findings are startling in the sense that they require us to rethink some of our basic notions of meaning, concepts, and reason. Metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but more fundamentally, a conceptual and experiential process that structures our world. With such belief we have gained deep insights in that our conceptual system and all forms of symbolic interaction are grounded in our bodily experience and yet imaginatively structured. This new perspective on metaphor has had a great impact on linguistics, because studies of metaphor have now become much more a matter of seeking empirical generalizations to explain the phenomena based on various kinds of converging evidence concerning conceptual and inferential structure.

We are now beginning to learn how metaphors are constrained and motivated by structures of our embodied experience and how these metaphors, in turn, constrain our reasoning. We have a growing body of empirical research on the way in which metaphor source domains typically come from basic-level experiences that are shared by human beings because of their shared bodily and cognitive makeup and because of the common features of the environments within which people interact. Metaphors tend to be grounded in common patterns of our bodily experience that have their own corporeal or spatial logic, which are the bases for most of our abstract conceptualization and inference.

By investigating marriage metaphors and food metaphors in current Chinese, we wish to address the following research questions: In the two conceptual metaphors, what are the prominent features in the source domain that are mapped to its target domain? What can mapping between the domains reveal about the conceptualization process? How does this metaphorical conceptualization reflect the Chinese cultural model of thinking? Finally, what kind of theoretical and pragmatic implications can be derived from our investigation of metaphor? It is hoped that the present paper may provide empirical evidence for mapping in thought and language, which in turn, may shed light on the study of cultural models.

## **2. Literature review and methodology**

Metaphor has been shown to be an integral component of the way we conceptualize experience and embody it in language. Philosophers as early as Aristotle and traditional rhetoricians have regarded metaphorical expressions as ornamental in language and playing an insignificant role in thought. This view on metaphors, has been, however questioned and challenged by cognitive linguists and philosophers since the 1980s. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide one of the earliest treatments of metaphor as conventionalized cognitive structure. The authors believe

that metaphors are not peripheral, but instead, essential to human thinking and reasoning. Human cognitive processing is largely metaphorical in that people tend to group things together as such.

As a result, cognitive scientists have since discovered things about the nature and importance of metaphor that are startling because of their radical implications for metaphor research and because they require us to rethink some of our most fundamental received notions of meaning, concepts, and reason. This new body of work on metaphor has profound implications for linguistics.

## 2.1 Background

The startling advances in metaphor research mainly refer to the following: 1) The level of methodological sophistication of empirical studies of metaphor has increased markedly, which has made possible rigorous, detailed analyses of how metaphors actually structure our conceptualization and reasoning; and 2) we have learned that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but more fundamentally, a conceptual and experiential process that structures our world. We have gained deep insights into the ways in which our conceptual system and all forms of symbolic interaction are grounded in our bodily experience, and yet are imaginatively structured.

While we must acknowledge the importance and philosophical insight of earlier work on metaphor, recent methodological developments are particularly noteworthy. The principal advances nowadays are the use of empirical evidence and the depth of analysis, made possible by recent developments in the cognitive sciences. The study of metaphor has now become much more a matter of seeking empirical generalizations to explain the phenomena based on various kinds of converging evidence concerning conceptual and inferential structure.

Furthermore, we are now beginning to learn how metaphors are constrained and motivated by structures of our embodied experience and how these metaphors, in turn, constrain our reasoning. We have a growing body of empirical research on the way in which metaphor source domains typically come from basic-level experiences that are shared by human beings because of their shared bodily and cognitive makeup and because of the common features of the environments with which people interact.

Thus metaphor is perhaps the most important of all the means by which language develops, changes, grows, and adapts itself to our changing needs. When metaphors are successful, they “die” from being overused—that is, they become so much a part of our regular language that we cease thinking of them as metaphors at all. Following this line of reasoning, we consider metaphor to be pervasive and essential in language and thought (e.g., Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1993). It is not just a way of naming, but also a way

of thinking. It is a figure of thought as well as a figure of speech (Lakoff 1987). It is “a process by which we understand and structure one domain of experience in terms of another domain of a different kind” (Johnson 1987).

## 2.2 Methodology

Studies on metaphors concentrate primarily on two topics: 1) language used as metaphor and 2) language as object of metaphor. The former deems metaphor as a restricted communicative code used concurrently with language. For instance, an investigation of the language of food would examine the characteristics of language used metaphorically and ascertain the degree of expressiveness of such use. The study of language as object of metaphor attempts to provide answers to questions such as: a) What do metaphors reveal about language? b) How do speakers view it? and c) How are metaphors for language related to directions in linguistics?

In general, studies of the metaphorical use of language have looked at metaphor from two basic angles: as transfer from one cognitive (donor) domain to another (recipient) domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), or as grounding of such mappings via image schemata. Both constitute the basis for any act of conceptualization. In order to bring out cultural differences as a possible impact on the use of metaphors, we select marriage metaphors and food metaphors. We hypothesize that marriage metaphors may highlight a change in cultural values, while food metaphors may single out the unique status of food in the Chinese culture.

In addition, we have adopted two different treatments of the two subjects of this study. In the case of marriage metaphors, we set as constant the target domain, so as to find out what the source domain can be onto which marriage is frequently mapped. On the other hand, we have delimited both the source and the target domains for food metaphors. Choosing the conceptual metaphor of *THOUGHT AS FOOD* is primarily based on the assumption that language and thought are in fact closely interrelated.

## 2.3 Data

The cognitive approach to the study of metaphor differs methodologically from most of the earlier work on metaphor. The latter relied chiefly on our intuitions about the cognitive content of metaphors, and its argument was based typically on only one or two allegedly representative examples that were supposed to underwrite sweeping claims about all metaphors. For the most part, these kinds of arguments are no longer regarded as rigorous or convincing. If one wants to make a claim about how a certain kind of metaphor works, for example, it is necessary to analyze several examples of such metaphors, providing generalizations in the form of detailed conceptual mappings

that apply to each one. One must then trace out the ways in which these mappings constrain the conceptual inferences we make. In other words, a strong argument depends on the empirical evidence that can be brought to bear in support of one's generalizations about metaphor or about any other form of imaginative activity. The standards for what counts as evidence and arguments have changed for the better.

A characteristic of the current discourse is the study of metaphor from everyday speech. The point of departure for this study is the metaphor involving marriage and food. The metaphor is ubiquitous and so offers rich resources (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). It is possible to talk about marriage or food using any of the various options that a language provides. For example, in the case of marriage, one may speak of one's spouse in Chinese as "the person with whom one holds hands" (牽手); of being married as "tying hearts together" (永結同心); of divorce as "swallows flying apart" (勞燕分飛). People do at times opt for non-metaphorical alternatives, but they do not sustain such non-metaphorical language for long, probably because neutral language is incapable of describing the marital experience in the desired way. The range of available metaphorical language, by contrast, allows the speaker to make a variety of points about that experience.

To analyze the metaphorical expressions underlying discourse is in this way reconstruction of the cultural understandings of the concept (e.g., marriage, thought) that must be assumed to underlie discourse about it in order to make such discourse comprehensible.

One prominent goal of discourse analysis is to uncover the conceptual structures denoted by a discourse. The data of this study come, other than those based on the native speakers' intuition, mainly from Chinese linguistic corpora based on natural discourse. The corpus data is based on the so-called balanced corpus provided by the *Chinese Knowledge Information Processing Group* (CKIP) of Academia Sinica; this is a Chinese corpus of 3.5 million words with tagged parts-of-speech. Corpus data also consist of Taita (National Taiwan University) spoken data collected from face-to-face conversations, lectures, and radio interviews. In addition to these two sources, we also rely to a great extent on information contained in and English dictionaries.

In an analysis of marriage and food metaphors, we need to identify from the corpus expressions reflecting such mapping relationships from source to target domains. For the marriage metaphors, marriage is set as the target domain, and we try to identify its possible source domains. For the food metaphor, food is taken as the source domain. We looked into various aspects related to FOOD, and examine how they can be mapped onto the target domain of THOUGHT, a domain defined in a very broad sense, which includes not only human thoughts or ideas, but also human knowledge in the form of spoken and written language.

### 3. Notions significant to the present study

For the study as proposed, certain notions are crucial; these are presented forthwith.

#### 3.1 Mapping relation

According to Lakovian theory, metaphorical concepts are essentially understood by means of a mapping relation between a source domain and a target domain. Structure from the former is imposed upon the latter. Concepts from the latter are metaphorically structured in that they are understood in terms of structure from the former. A metaphor is therefore understood as a domain mapping which can instantiate metaphorical concepts. The mapping is between whole domains, not just individual concepts. This is evidenced by many expressions involving a variety of metaphorical concepts each united under the same source and target domains (e.g., *valuable time*, *living on borrowed time*.) Armed with the conviction that the human conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature, researchers on metaphors have proposed a number of conceptual metaphors that are basic to human understanding, thinking, and reasoning (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Among them are metaphors such as *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*, *TIME MOVES*, *MORE IS UP*, which structure our conceptualizations about life, time, and quantity. Many of these studies, however, draw their conclusions only from English data. Whether these same metaphors conceptualize many Chinese expressions remains unknown. Taking metaphors as grounded in our physical or social/cultural experiences (Lakoff 1990), metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in a culture will, therefore, be coherent with the most fundamental values of that culture. Since some physical experiences are common to all humans and some other experiences differ from culture to culture, we may reasonably hypothesize that some metaphors are universal while others are culturally specific. One of the concerns of this study is to distinguish types of metaphor that are universal to humanity from those that are specific to Chinese society and culture.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide one of the earliest treatments of metaphor as conventionalized cognitive structure. Their theory principally involves a mapping relation from a source semantic domain to a target semantic domain, where the source domain concepts are taken to be “literal” and target domain concepts are “figurative”. Also advocated in Lakoff & Johnson (1980) is a view of semantics in which human conceptual structure is organized into domains of experiential knowledge (e.g., *PHYSICAL OBJECTS*, *LIVING THINGS*, *SPACE*). A domain is an experiential gestalt; that is, a “multidimensional structured whole arising naturally from experience”

(Lakoff & Johnson 1980:85), which is closely related to Fillmore's notion of "frame" in frame semantics (Fillmore 1985), and Langacker's notion of "experiential domain" (Langacker 1987). A concept is characterized relative to one or more experiential domains, each highlighting and contributing some structure to a particular dimension of the coherent whole (domain). Any domain is a dimension of experiential knowledge highlighting specific aspects of the concepts in that domain.

### **3.2 Invariance hypothesis**

Lakoff (1990) proposes the Invariance Hypothesis to characterize the regularities in both our conceptual and linguistic systems. This hypothesis claims that the portion of the source domain that is mapped preserves cognitive typology. And since the source domains of some metaphorical concepts such as the understanding of time, states, events, actions, etc., are structured by image-schemas, it is suggested that reasoning involving these concepts is fundamentally image-based.

The Invariance Hypothesis is advanced based on the assumption that "metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology of the source domain" (Lakoff 1990). This means that in conceptualization, the inference process in the source domain is similar to that in the target domain, which is accomplished through the cognitive schema—be it an image or a proposition type.

Lakoff not only proposes the Invariance Hypothesis to explain systematicity in linguistic correspondences, he also highlights the cognitive nature of metaphor. From a cognitive point of view, the Invariance Hypothesis is used to explain that "the use of metaphor is to govern reasoning and behavior based on that reasoning" (Lakoff 1990). Lakoff further suggests in the same article that we can take this process of reasoning as a basis for the "possibility for understanding novel extensions in terms of the conventional correspondences".

### **3.3 Proposition-schema**

Superficially varied, metaphors available in a language about a certain concept fall into a few classes known as proposition-schemas. To be exact, they are linguistic expressions organized by schemas for propositions. This notion of schema is originally taken from Hutchins (1980). We, however, adopt the name "proposition-schema" in recognition of the fact that mental schemas may organize information other than propositional material. In Hutchins' terms, a proposition-schema is a "template" from which any number of propositions can be constructed. The centrality of the schemas identified in terms of their contribution to a cultural understanding is evidenced by the recurrence of propositions cast in metaphors of the phenomena discussed, in addition to

other propositions in which these same concepts are non-metaphorically represented throughout the discourse.

A convergent support for the proposition-schemas identified on the basis of the metaphors encountered comes from the evidence for how these schemas articulate with one another in a particular culture. In order to uncover the logic of such reasoning, it is necessary to decode the metaphors involved in which such reasoning is frequently couched to reveal the common schemas underlying these metaphors. The more complex schema is created by conjoining two or more such propositions in a causal relation. The sequence of causally related proposition-schemas displayed represents a widely shared understanding of how a particular concept works in that culture.

### 3.4 Conduit metaphor

In addition to the notion of proposition-schema, we resort also to what is known as the “conduit metaphor” in order to learn how conceptualization may take place. The conduit metaphor is a hypothesized cognitive association between communication and the process of sending and receiving packages. It has played a central role in the development of linguistic theory of conceptual metaphor. Following up on Reddy’s article (1993), and using their own conventions for presenting metaphorical mappings (i.e., systematic correspondences between different conceptual domains, such as linguistic communication and the transfer of containers), Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed the following breakdown of the conduit metaphor into a set of conventional correspondence pairs:

- a. *IDEAS/MEANINGS ARE OBJECTS*
- b. *LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS*
- c. *COMMUNICATION IS SENDING*

In Lakoff and Johnson’s formulation, “the speaker puts ideas (objects) into words (containers) and sends them (along a conduit) to a hearer who takes the idea/objects out of the word/containers” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:10). These words are the essence of Reddy’s proposal.<sup>1</sup> This view is also expressed by Gibbs (1994:151): Communication

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<sup>1</sup> Such a formulation has, of course, been revised by other linguists; e.g., Grady in Koenig (1998). Grady argues that a close examination of data associated with conduit metaphor reveals that there are important aspects of the evidence unaccounted for by an existing analysis as such. We, however, shall simply use Lakoff & Johnson’s classic definition as presented in their ground-breaking 1980 work *Metaphors We Live By*, in which they lay out many of the theoretical principles now current in the field.



consists of finding the right word/container for your idea/object, sending this filled container along a conduit or through space to the listener, who must then take the idea/object out of the word/container. The conduit metaphor is in fact a metaphorically based model, representing another aspect of the broader cultural model commonly employed by language users in our understanding of human communication.

#### 4. The marriage metaphors

According to our corpus data, linguistic expressions reflecting cognitive metaphors of marriage in Chinese can be characterized by the following proposition-schemas: MARRIAGE IS AN ONGOING JOURNEY, MARRIAGE IS BUSINESS, MARRIAGE IS GAMBLING, and MARRIAGE IS BONDING.

##### 4.1 Conceptualization of marriage

Out of a total of 176 tokens of the word *hunyun* ‘marriage’ occurring in the corpus, 84.6% (149 instances) are used in one of its core meanings, while 15.4% (27 instances) are conceptualized in a metaphorical way: Marriage is viewed as 1) an on-going journey, 2) gambling, 3) a bonding, or 4) business. Consider the following examples:

- (1) *zou shang hunyin zhe tiao lu* (走上婚姻這條路)  
walk ASP marriage this CL road  
‘to take the road of marriage’
- (2) *Hunyun shi yi zhong duzhu, you shu you ying*  
marriage COP one CL bet have lose have win  
(婚姻是一種賭注，有輸有贏)  
“Marriage is a gamble; you may either lose or win.”
- (3) *bei hunyin de jiasuo tao zhu* (被婚姻的枷鎖套住)  
BEI marriage DE bondage tie tight  
‘be trapped in marital bondage’
- (4) *touzi zai hunyin zhong* (投資在婚姻中)  
invest PREP marriage inside  
‘to invest in a marriage’

Getting married is like standing at a crossroad with a hard decision to make. Or marriage can be a gamble, with winners and losers. Or marriage can represent the bonding of a couple, whether in joyful bliss or in insufferable pain. Devoting or committing oneself to marriage involves time and money—an investment. The distribution of marriage metaphors we have identified are given in Table 1:

Table 1: Metaphors of marriage in Chinese

Metaphors of Marriage	Number	%
MARRIAGE AS AN ONGOING JOURNEY	9	33.3
MARRIAGE AS GAMBLING	1	3.7
MARRIAGE AS A BONDING	2	3.7
MARRIAGE AS BUSINESS	16	59.3
Total	27	100

#### 4.2 Marriage as business

This conceptualization of marriage is of particular interest, since, with 59.3% of the total, it occurs more often than all the other three types combined. Marriage may be conceptualized as a business to be managed (as in example (5)). Husband and wife are considered partners working for the benefit of their enterprise. The management may be good or bad, and so the marriage may succeed or fail, as in the expressions *hunyin chenggong/shibai* ‘to have a successful/unsuccessful marriage’. The outcome of their efforts is thought of as a manufactured product, the quality of which reflects the couple’s marital quality (as in (6) below).

(5) *Hunyin shi keyi jingying de* (婚姻是可以經營的)  
 marriage COP can manage NOM  
 “Marriage can be managed.”

(6) *hunyin pinzhi* (婚姻品質)  
 marriage quality  
 ‘the quality of marriage’

Under such conceptualizing circumstances, unmarried people are goods to be bought and sold for prices set in “the marriage market”. Single men are more easily put up on the market than single women, as indicated in (7):

(7) *Nanren zai hunyin shichang shang bi nüren zhan youshi*  
 men PREP marriage market up COMP women possess advantage  
 (男人在婚姻市場上比女人佔優勢)  
 “In terms of marriage, (single) men have better market value than women.”

## 5. The conceptualization of thought as food

The conceptualization of a metaphor is the mapping from a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain (Lakoff 1990). Four such aspects of the FOOD domain can be identified: They are *ingredient of food*, *flavor of food*, *preparation of food*, and *digestion of food*. They are mapped conceptually into the following aspects of the THOUGHT domain: *content*, *quality*, *production*, and *comprehension* of thought. The conceptualization is made possible via proposition schemas.

### 5.1 THE CONTENT OF THOUGHT IS THE INGREDIENT OF FOOD

Mostly younger speakers will use the following Chinese expressions:

- (8) *Zhe chang yanjiang hen you liao* (這場演講很有料)  
 this CL speech very have ingredient  
 “This speech is very informative.”
- (9) *Ta shi yi wei hen you liao de xuezhe*  
 he is a CL very have ingredient DE scholar  
 (他是一位很有料的學者)  
 “He is a very learned scholar.”

In these two sentences, the term *you liao* (有料 ‘have ingredient’) refers to the content of the speech and the knowledge of a scholar respectively, while *liao* (料 ‘ingredient’) basically has to do with a food’s ingredients.<sup>2</sup> An ingredient here is conceptualized as the content of thought/language/knowledge via a metaphorical use of the word, which basically refers to a food ingredient.

### 5.2 THE QUALITY OF THOUGHT IS THE FLAVOR OF FOOD

In English, there are metaphorical expressions such as *a sweet thought* or *bitter words*, which use the *flavor* of FOOD to describe the quality of THOUGHT or language. There are analogous expressions in Chinese:

- (10) *tian yan mi yu* (甜言蜜語)  
 sweet word honey language  
 ‘sweet words’

<sup>2</sup> For example, *haoliao* (好料 ‘good stuff’) in Southern Min means that the food has been prepared with good ingredients.

- (11) *jian suan kebo* (尖酸刻薄)  
 sharp sour mean  
 ‘pungent’

Example (10) shows that the FOOD flavors *tian* (甜 ‘sweet’) and *mi* (蜜 ‘honey’) are used metaphorically to modify the following nouns *yan* (言 ‘word’) and *yu* (語 ‘language’). Via the conduit metaphor, both *yan* ‘word’ and *yu* ‘language’ are conceptualized as objects, capable of loading (or expressing) THOUGHT. The original meaning of *tian yan mi yu* (甜言蜜語) in Chinese is, in fact, ‘sweet words’, but the phrase is now conventionalized with the metaphorical meaning of flattering language. Therefore, the flavor of FOOD is metaphorically transferred to the *quality* of THOUGHT. The same can be said of the phrase *jian suan kebo* (尖酸刻薄) in (11), in which the *suan* (酸 ‘sour’) flavor is conceptualized as a pungent way of talking.

Various flavors from the FOOD domain are metaphorically extended and used to qualify THOUGHT.<sup>3</sup> The proposition-schema of THE *QUALITY OF THOUGHT IS THE FLAVOR OF FOOD* enables us to comprehend the linguistic expressions in question.

### 5.3 THE FORMATION OF THOUGHT IS THE PREPARATION OF FOOD

To understand (12) and (13), we need a proposition-schema which dictates that the production or formation of THOUGHT is conceptualized as the preparation of FOOD:

- (12) *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan de yuanyuhuiyi yi zai yunniang*  
 Academia Sinica DE assembly-meeting already Asp ferment  
*yige xin de yian*  
 a new DE proposal  
 (中央研究院的院務會議已在醞釀一個新的議案。)  
 “The assembly meeting of Academia Sinica has tried to come up with a new proposal.”
- (13) *Ouzhou yi wancheng le zhezhong moshi, women que lian*  
 Europe already finish Asp this mode, we even  
*guannian yunniang dou hai meiyou*  
 concept ferment yet not have  
 (歐洲已完成了這種模式，我們卻連觀念醞釀都還沒有。)

<sup>3</sup> For details of the linguistic reflections of this proposition-schema in Chinese, see Su (2000).

“Whereas Europe has already completed such mode, yet we don’t even have the slightest concept”

The two expressions of ‘fermenting’ (*yunniang* 醞釀) above refer to the formation of a proposal or that of a concept, and the process of forming new concepts or an idea is viewed as analogous to the process of food preparation, specifically that of wine fermentation, as the word *yunniang* (醞釀) is originally used. Such notional transfer is made possible via metaphorical conceptualization, based on the proposition-schema of THE FORMATION OF THOUGHT IS THE PREPARATION OF FOOD.

#### 5.4 THE COMPREHENSION OF THOUGHT IS THE DIGESTION OF FOOD

In Chinese, verbs abound that metaphorically express this proposition-schema,<sup>4</sup> as shown by the following:

- (14) *Yi fanchu de fangshi xiaohua jiu you zhishi*  
 with ruminat[i]on DE way digest old have knowledge  
 (以反芻的方式消化舊有知識)  
 ‘to digest what one already knows by ruminat[i]on’

*Fanchu* (反芻 ‘ruminat[i]on’) literally refers to a special way of digesting food peculiar to cows. It is now used metaphorically to mean the re-digestion of knowledge, whereas knowledge is taken as a type of THOUGHT in its broad sense. Note that the word *fanchu* (反芻 ‘ruminat[i]on’) implies digesting again what has already been absorbed or taken in, which is a concept built upon THE COMPREHENSION OF THOUGHT IS THE DIGESTION OF FOOD. The verbs expressing this type of mapping relationship range from chewing and biting to tasting and swallowing food.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting that this proposition-schema and that of *THE QUALITY OF THOUGHT IS THE FLAVOR OF FOOD* are the most productive in Chinese.<sup>6</sup> Combined they constitute 92% of the examples identified. The majority of the data encountered in the linguistic metaphor *THOUGHT IS FOOD* is conceptualized through these two proposition-schemas.

<sup>4</sup> In this study, *digestion* refers to the process of assimilating and decomposing food into a form that can be absorbed by the body.

<sup>5</sup> For a listing of verbs and examples embodying the proposition-schema, see Su (2000).

<sup>6</sup> According to the data collected, these two proposition-schemas have the same productivity. Each of them constitutes about 46% of all instances identified.

## 6. Some theoretical considerations

In the course of our study, we came to realize that there are interesting correlations between the proposition-schemas identified and syntax. In this section we shall investigate such syntactic phenomena and the nature of mapping.

### 6.1 Mapping and its syntactic manifestation

The syntactic features of the four proposition-schemas for the conceptualization of *THOUGHT AS FOOD* deserve some discussion. The mapping from the ingredients of food to the content of thought is made possible by the part of speech known as noun. The linguistic expressions in the food domain used metaphorically to express the quality of thought belong to the linguistic category commonly known as adjective. And it is by way of verbs that the last two proposition-schemas are expressed. This is reflected in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Mapping and parts of speech

Metaphor Mapping Parts of Speech	Source domain FOOD	Mapping Features	Target domain THOUGHT
<b>Noun</b>	Ingredient (Nouns)	<b>Material</b>	Content
<b>Adjectives</b>	Flavor (Adjectives)	<b>Taste</b>	Quality
<b>Verbs</b>	Preparation (Verbs)	<b>Creation</b>	Formation
<b>Verbs</b>	Digestion (Verbs)	<b>Processing</b>	Comprehension

A closer examination of the last two proposition-schemas via the category of grammatical verb reveals that two types of verb are associated with the proposition-schemas in question. In conceptualizing the formation of thought as the preparation of food, we see that the verbs describing culinary actions fall into the category of accomplishment verbs (Vendler 1967), designating events (Givón 1993). On the other hand, in conceptualizing the comprehension of thought as the digestion of food, we rely on another set of event verbs categorized as achievement verbs (Vendler

1967).<sup>7</sup>

## 6.2 Aspects of the source domain that get mapped

It should be fairly clear by now that the Chinese conceptual metaphor *THOUGHT IS FOOD* entails the mapping of various aspects from the source domain of FOOD to the target domain of THOUGHT. It may simply be coincidental that each proposition-schema subsumed by such conceptualization falls into one distinct category in terms of the grammatical part of speech, but it may also be theoretically significant.<sup>8</sup>

Ahrens (1999) claims that mapping from the source to the target domain generally implies mapping of the following, which are some key elements in the source domain:

1. What does it have regarding its composition?
2. What is/are the important feature(s) it possesses?
3. What can it do or what can be done to it?

Take *ARGUMENT IS BUILDING* as an example. Ahrens (1999) explains that, an argument should be established on a *ground basis* like the foundation of a building, and its important feature should be *well-built* and *solid*. Since we can either construct a building or knock it down, we can have a “well-established” argument or have a “knocked-down” argument.

From a slightly different point of view, the three questions above, in fact, point to three aspects in the source domain: the essence, the quality, and the function, which are normally represented via the linguistic categories of noun, adjective, and verb.

The same can be said of the *MARRIAGE AS BUSINESS* metaphor. Its various linguistic manifestations fall into the four following categories representing crucial aspects of business, i.e., partnership, product quality, investment, and marketing:

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<sup>7</sup> This verb classification scheme was proposed by Vendler (1967) in order to account for the observation that as far as the notion of time is concerned, verbs can be subdivided into four types in order to account for the more subtle presuppositions associated with verbs. Accomplishment verbs and achievement verbs share the feature of telicity, but differ in that the former is punctual whereas the latter is durative.

<sup>8</sup> We understand that it is quite difficult to identify parts of speech solely in terms of semantic considerations. There is no necessary isomorphism between grammatical categories and semantic notions. However, the tendency is suggested here based on our data.

Table 2: Conceptualization of MARRIAGE AS BUSINESS

Conceptualization of <i>MARRIAGE AS BUSINESS</i>	Number	%
Partnership	11	68.8
Quality	1	6.5
Investing	2	12.5
Marketing	2	12.5
Total	16	100

In other words, we take advantage of the Conduit metaphor by which marriage is conceptualized as a commodity. As a commodity, we can talk about its quality, its value, and its purpose for being. We can even manage it with partners so that it can be viewed as a joint venture. The following represents the mapping relationship in this regard:

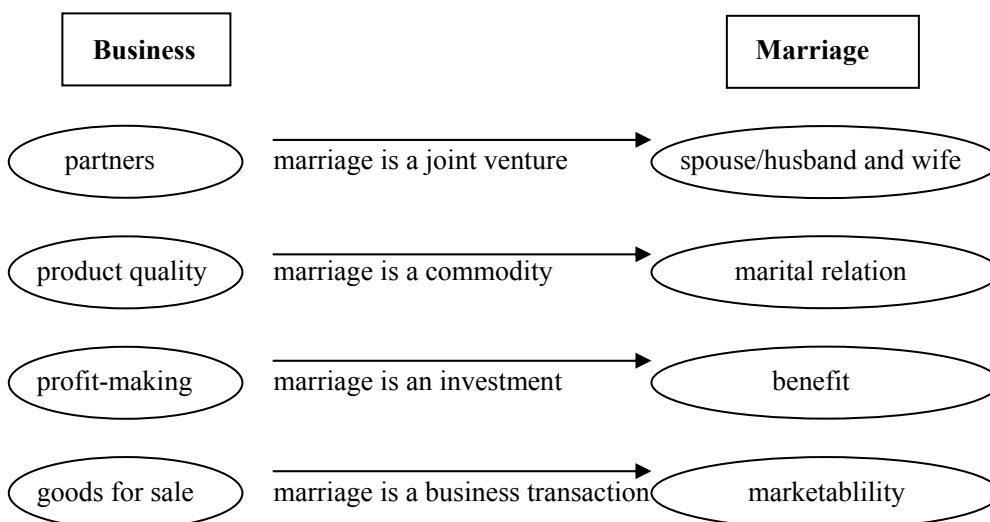


Figure 2: Mapping relations between business and marriage

These features unmistakably correspond to the crucial essence-quality-function trio: partnership being the essence of marriage, commodity involving quality, investment and sale standing for its functions, i.e., what one can do regarding such a view of marriage. This ties in with what we have discovered for the *THOUGHT AS FOOD* metaphors: its functions. The ingredient is the essence of food; taste matters the most regarding food quality; and production and digestion are related to the functions of food.



The question of why these three aspects are expressed respectively via three different syntactic categories becomes, then, a theoretically important one. Nouns by nature are assigned to name the essence, adjectives the quality, and verbs the function. This finding of ours indirectly supports Ahrens' (1999) claim about mapping principles and knowledge representations.

## 7. Conceptualization via metaphors

Not all examples encountered in our data can be completely explained by the proposition-schemas identified. Mapping is in fact a complicated cognitive effort in which multi-level conceptualization is a must in order to explain the data involved. In this section, we shall first show how concepts are blended together, with an attempt at peeking into the nature of human conceptualization.

### 7.1 Towards a cultural model

Business operations entail staffing, managing, manufacturing, controlling production and quality, marketing, accounting, financing, and so on. In the conceptual metaphor of *MARRIAGE IS BUSINESS*, the feature of *relationship* is most prominent in invoking conceptual mappings between source and target domains. The two parties in a marriage may compete like enemies in business, or cooperate as partners for their joint benefit. The quality of their “business” depends on the relationship they maintain.

As such, marriage, maintained via the bond between the two parties involved, may be enduring (or non-enduring). That is, it may succeed or it may fail. So, the frequent metaphors of success and failure exploit an entailment of the marriage metaphor. They add another layer of meaning to the metaphor in order to characterize the successful marriage as one that “works” and the failed marriage, by contrast, as one that no longer does so. Another popular metaphor, this one building on that of marriage as an effortful activity, characterizes marital success in terms of some difficult task brought to completion—a marriage, like a problem, “works out,” or an unsuccessful one that perhaps doesn't. Two of the varied metaphors of risk used to talk about marriage characterize it as a matter of chance, like gambling (“There are so many odds against the marriage”) and thus *MARRIAGE AS GAMBLING*. The journey metaphor, which so aptly combines the concepts of endurance, difficulties encountered along the way, and the effort of overcoming those obstacles to make progress, can also bear the additional entailment of risk to survival, as the danger inherent in an arduous journey. Like that for effort, the schemas involving success (or failure) and risk derive not directly from our understanding of marriage, but from our folk physics of difficult activities, of which

marriage is one. Not only do we recognize that in spite of such effort, they may or may not be successfully completed: the difficulties may be insurmountable, so that undertaking to overcome them carries the risk of failure. The folk physics of difficult activities, then, like the folk social psychology of voluntary relationships, is a cultural model within a cultural model. We can understand why marriage should be cast in metaphors of effort, success or failure, and risk only if we know about difficulty.

In fact, evidence shows that proposition-schemas articulate with one another in a particular cultural model of marriage. In this reasoning, propositions about marital status, uncertainty (gambling), mutual benefit (investment), etc., serve as building blocks for composite proposition-schemas. The more complex schema is created by conjoining two or more such propositions in a causal relation.

For instance, since the success of a marriage is unknowable at its outset, it may be difficult, and thus, not enduring. Such a chain of reasoning, expressed via proposition-schemas, may be used to construct a schematic structure about marriage in a particular culture. Chains of propositions violating this structure would therefore make no sense to people of that culture. The sequence of causally related proposition-schemas displayed represents a widely shared understanding of how marriage works in that culture. Not only are the separate proposition-schemas for each causal link in this chain available for reasoning about marriage, but the sequence of linked proposition-schemas also is itself a stable composite schema, available in its entirety.

The same holds true for the food metaphors. Example (15) represents an interesting case in the sense that it posts a potential challenge to our analysis:

- (15) *Wo man duzi de hua, yishi ye shuo bu wan*  
I full belly DE words, a moment either speak not finish  
(我滿肚子的話，一時也說不完)  
“I have tons of words that cannot be expressed in a moment.”

We have located for the *THOUGHT AS FOOD* metaphors four proposition-schemas that may predict the mapping between the two domains involved, but none predicts correctly examples like (15). In (15), *duzi* (肚子) “belly”, the body organ containing food, is metaphorically referred to as the container for words. One’s belly is viewed as the container of food because it is generally regarded as the location where food is stored and digested. The literal meaning of the sentence is simply that there is a full load of words inside the belly. Of course, words here will have to be first conceptualized as something that can be contained through the conduit metaphor *WORDS ARE OBJECTS*, and of course, thought is expressed via words or language.

In order to understand a metaphor such as (15), one needs in addition the

image-schema *THE CONTAINER OF FOOD IS THE CONTAINER OF THOUGHT*. With this, what is contained in the belly, the content of container in the FOOD domain, can be mapped to yield the words, understood as the content of the container in the THOUGHT domain. In fact, we need to appeal to the following proposition-schema *QUANTITY OF THOUGHT IS MEASURED BY THE CONTAINER OF FOOD* so that the other examples of this category can be understood:

- (16) *Sou* *pian* *ku* *chang*, *que* *zhao* *bu* *chu* *fanbo* *de* *liyou*  
 thoroughly dry bowel but find NEG out rebut DE reason  
 (搜遍枯腸，卻找不出反駁的理由)  
 ‘to run out of words for rebuttal’
- (17) *man* *fu* *jinglun*  
 full abdomen knowledge  
 (滿腹經綸)  
 ‘very knowledgeable’

In these examples, the human organs of *duzi* (肚子 ‘belly’), *chang* (腸 ‘bowel’), and *fu* (腹 ‘abdomen’) are either the actual container of FOOD, like ‘bowel’, or the place where the digestive system is located, like ‘belly’ or ‘abdomen’. These physical parts are taken as the containers of FOOD. Through mapping, these containers of FOOD are metaphorically understood as the container of THOUGHT, so as to measure its quantity. It may be a case of **too many** words, like (15), or **too much** knowledge, as in (17), using *fu* (腹 ‘abdomen’) to hold one’s knowledge. It may be, on the other hand, a case of **too little**, or even **none**, as in (16). Thus the quantity of THOUGHT can be measured by the container of FOOD through the proposition-schema *THE QUANTITY OF THOUGHT IS MEASURED BY THE CONTAINER OF FOOD*.

## 7.2 A sketch of human conceptualization

Thus, the comprehension of a simple linguistic expression such as *man duzi de hua* ‘tons of words’ in fact entails mapping of a hierarchical nature:

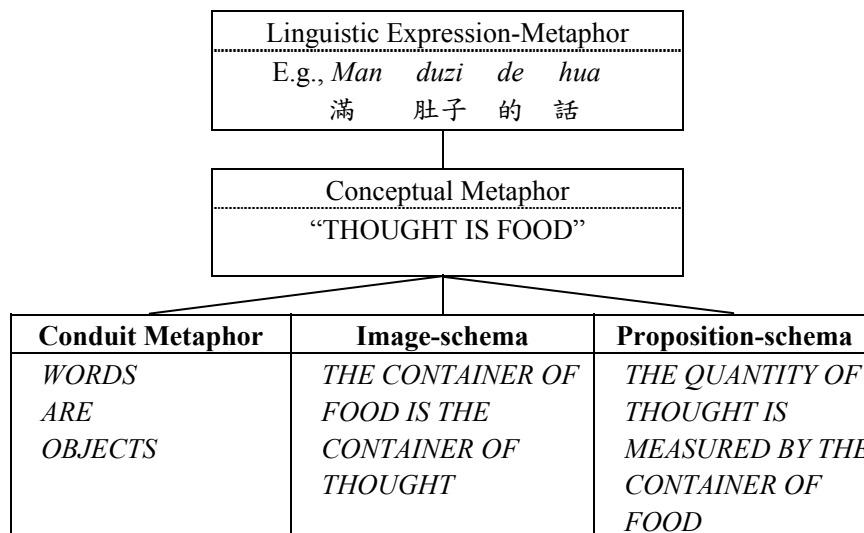


Figure 3: A theoretical sketch of conceptualization

Example (18) also illustrates the complexity of metaphorical interpretation:

(18) *jia you tian cu* (加 油 添 醋)  
 add oil add vinegar  
 ‘to add unnecessary details’

In order to understand the meaning of (18), a proposition-schema other than the conceptualization of THOUGHT AS FOOD is necessary. *You* (油 ‘oil’) and *cu* (醋 ‘vinegar’) are two kinds of food seasonings added to bring out flavor. Such additions are often unnecessary, just like the excessive elaboration of simple facts. *You* (油 ‘oil’) and *cu* (醋 ‘vinegar’) being peripheral to food, so is superfluous decoration to language. In fact, linguistic expressions like (18) make sense to us because of the following:

1. *THOUGHT IS FOOD*
2. *ELABORATION OF THOUGHT IS THE SEASONING OF FOOD*
3. Conduit Metaphors
  - a) *IDEAS ARE OBJECTS*
  - b) *WORDS ARE CONTAINER OF IDEAS* (a kind of thought)

Examples like *jinjin youwei* (津津有味 ‘tasteful, interesting’) and *suoran wuwei*

(索然無味 ‘insipid, boring’) shows further that the attractiveness of THOUGHT is conceived as the taste of FOOD, resembling the proposition-schema THE QUALITY OF THOUGHT IS THE FLAVOR OF FOOD. Such examples may serve as a bridge to understanding how something like *jia you tian cu* (加油添醋 ‘to add unnecessary details’) works.

From a cognitive point of view, understanding a metaphor may entail great complexity. Still the human mind is capable of processing hierarchically organized knowledge, making it possible for us to understand the intricate meaning expressed by a seemingly simple metaphor.

## 8. Conclusion

An important feature of discourse that makes our analysis possible is the reasoning people do in the course of their explanation of a particular concept. This reasoning provides evidence of how the proposition-schemas are indicative of the cultural view toward that concept in a particular language.

Examples from folk studies of proverbs about marriage speak clearly for this view. That marriage in Chinese society was pre-arranged and not a matter of free choice is indicated in the saying *Yinyuan tian zhuding* (“Marriages are pre-arranged”). Divorces were thus unacceptable, and a Chinese woman considered marriage—within this frame of thought—a crucial life decision. The old saying *Nan pa xuan cuo hang, nü pa jia cuo lang* (“A man’s disaster is to choose the wrong career; a woman’s misery is to marry the wrong husband”) illustrates the different meaning that marriage holds for a man or a woman.

However, when East met West, the contact transmitted a different cultural perspective, and traditional values have been challenged and adjusted. The idea that a marriage can be managed, like a business, is emerging among contemporary Chinese. However, *MARRIAGE AS BUSSINESS* is not a brand new idea for Chinese—marriage in ancient China was not only a way to personal wealth, but even an instrument in national security. People nevertheless gain new perspectives on marriage via metaphors in their ordinary language.

Taking culture into consideration, we soon understand why food metaphors are productive and diversified in the Chinese language. Food and especially the culinary arts play a major role in Chinese culture, and such cultural values are reflected linguistically. Food, chosen as a source domain, makes possible many metaphorical expressions, to express abstract notions in the target domains of language, speech, idea, and thought. Furthermore, among the four proposition-schemes we have identified for the *THOUGHT AS FOOD* metaphors, the most productive ones are those related to the

process of food preparation and consumption. Cultural values inspire language, and language in turn speaks for culture through human conceptualization.

Contrary to what we may profess, we think increasingly by means of metaphors, as seen in the food and marriage metaphors presented here. We discovered, however, that some features of the source domain are more prominent and more often mapped in Chinese. Different languages, though appealing to the same conceptual metaphor, vary in their degree of dependency toward the linguistic strategies applied. In this study, we have shown how variation as such may be expressed via the types and the tokens of the relevant proposition-schemas. Metaphor research may help us build up the language-specific cultural model as well as reflect cultural differences based on the models identified.

Language being a major component of culture, metaphor is no doubt one of the most important linguistic devices that reflect cognitive vision and epitomize cultural context. The cross-language study of metaphor, therefore, may shed light on cross-cultural similarities and dissimilarities in ways of thinking and speaking. A well understood metaphor in one culture may have entirely different meanings in another part of the world. The dragon is a symbol of evil in the western world, yet a traditional image of royalty in the oriental world.

In fact, to view culture as cognition as an approach to the study of systems of folk classification (Keesing 1974) was first voiced by Goodenough (1957:167): "Culture is ... the form of things that people have in mind, their models of perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them." This definition unfolds an ambitious theoretical program, one that is concerned with the organization of knowledge. It contemplates the various kinds of structures necessary in order to account for what people know. It recognizes the vital role of particular conceptual structures such as propositions (Kay 1973), events (Frake 1977), etc. Linguistic interaction is a shared journey through a mental landscape (Sweetser 1992), a statement especially true with the study of metaphor. With pursuits of such a nature, cognitive linguistics converges with other fields in a newly fashioned multidisciplinary effort called cognitive science, which takes the issue of the representation of knowledge as a central concern. Our study only shows a beginning effort in Chinese in delineating the role of culture in the organization of knowledge. A considerable amount of work is needed before we achieve a detailed understanding of the processes related to metaphors. Linguistic studies of metaphor open a new window to the mysterious world of mapping in thought and language.

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## 從譬喻看文化：語言之認知研究

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人類思考及推理的本質可經由檢視語言中譬喻的用法得知。將譬喻視為人類思考及認知之重要語言機制，乃 Lakoff 與 Johnson (1980) 的主要論點之一。他們認為了解譬喻必須了解本體 (source) 與客體 (target) 間的映照關係。

本研究針對中文語料中「思想為食物」(THOUGHT AS FOOD) 的譬喻使用，企圖了解中文裡以食物為本體，思想（含抽象之概念及具體之語言文字）的譬喻使用。研究顯示，此譬喻在中文大抵經由四個不同的命題結構 (proposition-schema) 所建構而成。

在不同的語言中，相同的譬喻可經由不同的命題結構來建構。即令二個語言以相同的命題結構建構某一譬喻，其仰賴各命題結構的程度及使用的頻率也不盡相同。研究隱喻的映照模式因此可以反映出文化之本質。映照所藉以完成之命題結構可用來作為不同文化模式的依據，進而反映出不同文化之間的差異性。

關鍵詞：譬喻，映照模式，概念化，文化