

# A Cognitive Analysis of Emotional Metaphors in English

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**Abstract:** A metaphor is a rhetorical device in language. It can reveal the cognitive way of thinking. Emotion is an experience in that people perceive the world. The study of emotional metaphors can help us explore our perception and understanding of the world. This paper focuses on the cognitive analysis of emotional metaphors in English.

**Keywords:** Emotional metaphor; Cognition; Rhetoric

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Metaphor is not only an essential linguistic phenomenon but also a way of thinking in cognitive linguistics, which can help us have a better understanding of the world. Richards (1946), a British rhetorician, once said that there is a parable in almost every three sentences.<sup>[1]</sup> The study of metaphor can be traced back more than two thousand years ago, extending a long history. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “Metaphor is pervasive in our everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action.”<sup>[2]</sup> With the further study of metaphor, people have gained a better understanding of it: Metaphor is not only the meaning of rhetoric, but also the way of thinking that can play a role in the whole person’s cognition. It enables us to use concepts and experience in specific and tight areas to understand the complex and abstract things of new fields. Therefore, metaphor is a tool to help us understand the world around us. It also provides us with a unique perspective to understand things.

## 1. Concept of metaphor

Metaphor is not only the process of language rhetoric stimulating imagination but also a critical way of thinking. The study of metaphor can be traced back to the period of Aristotle. He regards metaphor as the transfer of one entity to another, and observes the similarity through dissimilarity, which belongs to the field of rhetoric.<sup>[2]</sup> With the rise of cognitive linguistics, metaphor, especially conceptual metaphor, has become the focus of research in the cognitive paradigm. Metaphor is not only a rhetorical phenomenon, and more is about a human mental phenomenon. A metaphor is a fundamental mental way for the human to explain and comprehend another area of expertise by using a familiar field of experience. It is a cognitive tool for people to conceptualize abstract scope. “Metaphor is a universal phenomenon, which is filled in all daily life, and seventy percent of everyday language is made up of metaphors.”<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2. Emotional metaphors

The so-called emotion refers to the psychological response of human stimulation toward the outside world, which involves sensory, physiological, behavioral, empirical, cognitive and conceptual aspects. Most emotions come from cognitive interpretation. People repeat cognitive process and gradually deepen it, then people have a certain sense of things and make a certain reaction, which constitutes the emotion. Emotions can be expressed in terms of facial expressions, eyes, gestures, and body movements, as well as by implicit language abstraction. Emotion is one of the main way of expressing human experience and is an important part of human experience. The theoretical basis of cognitive linguistics shows that emotional metaphor is not only a language, but also a reflection of the way of thinking. Many of the conceptual systems that guide our behavior are constructed in a metaphorical way. Metaphor, as a universal linguistic phenomenon, is embodied in various languages. The concept of emotion is often expressed in metaphor and has a distinctive national cognitive difference. There are a lot of metaphorical expressions in both English and Chinese which have certain similarities and differences. Human cognitive system and emotion influence each other in the same, the study of the concept of emotion is also the study of human cognitive system.

The study of emotional metaphors began with Lakoff and Johnson. Afterwards Kovecses, Matsuki, etc. made abundant

analysis of cross-language emotional concept. According to cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson, “most metaphor of happiness is connected with spatial orientation. Generally, upright position of human body is used to express happiness, while that forms the emotional metaphor of ‘Happy Is Up’”.[2] Cognitive psychologist Ortony (1988) presented that most emotion came from cognitive interpretation. Lakoff and Kovecses (1987) presented the concept of heat which is the most common basis of explaining anger, namely “Anger Is Heat.” Andrew Goat studied English metaphor on the basis of Lakoff and Johnson’s theories. He found that there were a lot of root analogies and a great many of English expressing emotion or mood in relation to words of weather.

Many linguists have made plenty of studies of English emotional metaphors. According to their researches, abstract emotion of human in the whole scope, is expressed through metaphor which is based on the body experience. Body experience refers to the body instinct of acquiring knowledge through interaction between human body and external environment. “It plays an important role in our conceptual cognition to the world”.[3] Cognitive experience helps people materialize psychology and physical reactivity of human, and is shared by people all over the world, when expressing emotion. Huang Shuanfun asserted that “human emotion was expressed through metaphor which was based on the body perception”.[4] In a word, emotional metaphor is important in our everyday life. It forms our ways of thinking and embodies cultural models of the world.

### **3. Cognitive analysis of emotional metaphors**

#### **3.1 Orientational metaphors**

An orientational metaphors is a cognitive process that based on the concept of space as the source domain mapping to other target domain and access the abstract meaning. It is not using a concept to construct the other concept, but to understand a metaphor which structured by the concept of non-spatial orientation through spatial concepts such as “up and down,” “inside and outside,” “before and after.” It maps the spatial relations and characteristics to other non-spatial relations and features. Human beings exist in space and are surrounded by things with spatial characteristics. It is easy to understand the concept of abstraction by spatial concepts and the concept of orientation is the earliest concept in human beings.

Spatial orientation originates from human cognition of basic spatial concepts. Refer to these orientations, human beings establish a series of metaphorical concepts. A lot of emotional metaphors are constructed by orientational metaphors. The typical characteristic of orientational metaphors is a system formed with cross-references. Opposite examples such as “up” and “down,” “front” and “rear,” “center” and “edge.” Such as, (a) My spirits sank. (b) He is at the peak of his career. “Sank” and “peak” confirm the conceptual metaphors of “up” and “down.” Body language studies have shown that “people body posture have some kind of internal relationship with human emotions”.[5] A vertical posture is associated with a positive emotion, while a low posture is often associated with frustration, pain, sadness and other emotions. Whether in Chinese or English, people are accustomed to use “on” or “high” represent “happy” or “good,” with “down” or “low” to represent “sad” or “bad.” This metaphorical concept can be used to describe some abstract concepts, also can refer to people’s emotions and other conditions, which widespread in human language.

#### **3.2 Metaphor with color**

Color is an important field in the process of people’s perceiving the world. Although the number of color words in the human language is similar, they follow a general structure order, “black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and gray”.[6] There are a lot of emotional metaphors in English which express people’s rich emotions. They are divided into natural color metaphors and facial color metaphors. People’s emotions can be reflected through the color words, such as: (a) He was flushed with anger. (b) His face was red with anger. (c) He was quite blue over his death. Emotional expression is the expression of emotional changes through facial expressions, moods and body postures and other ways. Under normal circumstances, person’s face turns red with excitement and shyness, and becomes pale or white in fear. In English, red, green, blue, yellow, black and other color words express emotions.

#### **3.3 Body metaphors**

Emotional changes have a close relation with people’s body parts, which are the human’s physiological response to the external environment. Lakoff (1990) put forward his view from the physiological perspective of “the physiological effects of emotion express emotion.”[2]

It includes four factors (take anger metaphor as an example): (a) Body heat—“He always get hot under the collar about people’s driving habits;” (b) Internal pressure—“She almost had a hemorrhage;” (c) Redness in face and neck—“I was flushed with anger;” (4) Agitation—“I was quivering with rage.”[7]

Physiological effects show that emotional metaphors are based on the physiological mechanisms of humans. No matter what cultural background, anger or pleasure have some similar physiological responses, but the way of expression varied by language, people with different cultural backgrounds may have different feelings. Such as, the same words like “anger is fire” in English and Chinese.

### **3.4 Metaphors of natural phenomena**

Nature is the object that human can directly feel. Our language itself is the metaphorical system of “taken from body nearly and from materials far”. Language establishes the most original relative net between human flesh and the cosmic inventory. In the evolution of language and culture, metaphor eternally take control of this basic truth: the unity of mankind and nature. There are many metaphors expressing emotion in the English and Chinese languages, such as fire, gas, season, and so on.

Just as the commonality and individuality of human culture, happiness, anger, sadness, joy, fear are the common expressions of emotion in different cultural backgrounds. Their common manifestation is the human emotional expression stems from our daily life experience. Emotional metaphors result from physical and psychological effects of the body. But at the same time, they are affected by human physiological, psychological and cultural factors to show a certain degree of difference which reflect in the language structure. This also makes the language has a distinct cultural characteristics. At the same time, metaphor, as a cognitive phenomenon, is significant for foreign language teaching and intercultural communication.

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