Review of *Metaphors We Live by*

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Abstract. *Metaphors We Live by* published by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, is considered a classic masterpiece of cognitive linguistics and exerts a profound influence on both linguistics and cognitive science. To solve the problems encountered by logical positivism in the study of metaphor, Lakoff argues that metaphor is ubiquitous in language and is grounded in our bodily experiences to be studied experientially. He notes that language is metaphorical, those abstract concepts are understood through metaphor, and that metaphor is a mapping of conceptual structures from one domain to another as is said by Liu in 2001. This paper attempts to comment on it. It is hoped that the comment will not only open up a new avenue of research in cognitive linguistics but also provide a more profound perspective for other fields of study.

Key words: *Metaphors We Live by*, metaphor, review, contribution.

Introduction

In 1980, The book *Metaphors We Live* by was published by the leading American linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which plays a significant role in the field of linguistics and cognitive science. This book is highly illuminating in three aspects. Firstly, three kinds of metaphors are proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, namely conceptual metaphor, orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors, which are explained one by one in detail with numerous examples. Secondly, Lakoff and Johnson explore the nature of metaphors that they are derived from people's physical and cultural experience, thus implying that human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined; Thirdly, Lakoff and Johnson argue that human metaphorical cognition is the basis for the development of language, and that language, in turn, reacts upon human thought and cognition.

With the publication of this book, people's perception of metaphor is turned from traditional objectivism to cognitivism in the study of metaphor. After that, linguists begin a series of systematic studies on metaphor. Metaphor is generally considered as a kind of rhetorical device rather than a language. As a linguistic phenomenon, rhetorical metaphor is not used because of the lack of language but rather to modify it. In the view of cognitive linguists, metaphor is not only a literary device occurring in the field of literature, nor is it just a rhetorical device, but also a way of thinking. The *Metaphors We Live* by has been published for decades and is always regarded as a classic masterpiece. This book, which centered on the human act of cognition, has shed much light on the study of linguistic and cognitive science studies, giving us a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and the real world. In this paper, the author will begin with a chapter-by-chapter review of the book and then give some commentaries. At last, a conclusion is drawn about the significance and academic contribution of this book.

Content Review

The book *Metaphors We Live by* has a total of 30 chapters and can be divided into six parts. The first part includes the first three chapters, which mainly introduce the theoretical knowledge and characteristics of metaphorical concepts. The concept consists of two aspects: one is the essence of metaphorical concepts, the second is the

characteristics of the metaphorical concept. In the first chapter, Lakoff and Johnson use the concept of "ARGUMENT IS WAR" to point out the essence of metaphor and the metaphorical concept we live by, showing that people can understand and experience the current thing through another thing. In our general understanding, "WAR" and "ARGUMENT" are two different concepts. Since there are similarities between the two, "ARGUMENT" is partially constructed and understood in terms of the concept of "WAR," indicating that the concept is constructed in a metaphorical way. Language reflects people's thinking, and the use of metaphor is also an important embodiment of the human thinking process. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 42-43). In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the characteristics of metaphorical concepts are clarified. Chapter 2 points out the systematic nature of the metaphorical concept. In language, metaphorical expression and metaphorical conceptual system are all closely related and have the same properties. Because of the systematicity of the metaphorical concept, the language we use to talk has the nature of systematicity, too. The systematic nature of metaphor, according to Chapter 3, makes it unavoidable that when we comprehend one aspect of a concept, we hide other aspects of that concept (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 67-69). Thus, when we state that a concept is partially structured by a metaphor, we mean that it may be extended in certain ways but not others.

The second part spans Chapter 4 through Chapter 14. According to Lakoff and Johnson, in this part, they mainly discuss their belief that metaphor is pervasive in daily human life. In chapter 4, Chapter 6 and Chapter 13 of their work, three types of metaphor are introduced respectively: orientational metaphor, ontological metaphor and structural metaphor. On the other hand, Orientational metaphor does not construct through another concept but involves the spatial relationships between a whole system of concepts and another. Such metaphors often give a concept of spatial orientation (such as UP-DOWN, IN-OUT, ON-OFF, and FRONT-BACK). Our experience with physical objects provides the ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, thoughts, and other things as entities and substances are referred to as ontological metaphors. Ontological metaphor can be used to serve various purposes and is the most basic device we use to comprehend our experience. The metaphorical construction of one complex concept to be presented in terms of another is referred to as a structural metaphor. Structural metaphor is grounded in our experience, which allows us to go beyond orientation. The concept "ARGUMENT IS WAR" put forward by Lakoff and Johnson is a typical example of a structural metaphor. Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between metaphor and cultural coherence. Two authors conclude in this chapter that culture's most fundamental values are coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture. For example, "MORE IS BETTER" is coherent with "MORE IS UP, GOOD IS UP," but not with "LESS IS BETTER." Similarly, "THE FUTURE IS BETTER" is coherent with "THE FUTURE IS UP, GOOD IS UP," but not with "THE FUTURE WILL BE WORSE'. We can say these values are strongly ingrained in our societies and cultures. Our values appear to form a coherent system with the metaphor we live by, rather than existing independently. Chapter 7 discusses the most apparent ontological metaphors, in which the physical object is further stated as being a person. As a kind of rhetoric device, personification is regarded as general category in which a wide range of metaphors are included. Each metaphor selects different aspects of humans, but they are all derived from ontological metaphors. In Chapter 8, Lakoff and Johnson make a distinction between the two different concepts of metaphor and metonymy. According to the book, metaphor is used to conceptualize something that is difficult to understand into something that is relatively

easy to understand. Its primary function is to facilitate understanding. At the same time, metonymy is to use one entity to refer to another entity related to it. In Chapter 11, two authors discuss the partial nature of metaphorical structuring. Take "THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS" as an example. In the concept of BUILDING, the foundation and the outer shell are used to structure the concept instead of the others. Thus, we can say the metaphor "THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS" has a "used" part and an "unused" part (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 11-14). Chapter 12 indicates that most of the concepts in our life is metaphorically structured and can only be understood through people's cognition of other things. People's constant spatial experience, that is, our interaction with the physical environment, shapes our spatial concept. The resulting concept is the most fundamental concept by which we live. In Chapter 14, Lakoff and Johnson discuss that direct manipulation is the prototype of causation, which derives directly from our experience. The core of prototypical causation extends to a broader conceptual meaning due to metaphor, which has many exceptional cases. The prototypical core of causality, or direct manipulation, is not an unanalyzable semantic primitive but rather a gestalt consisting of properties that naturally occur together in our daily experience of performing direct manipulations (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 72-78).The third part is composed of chapters 15 to 17, mainly explaining the coherence of metaphor. Some concepts relating to the coherent structuring of experience are discussed in Chapter 15, such as experiential gestalts, the dimension of experience, metaphorical structuring and subcategorization. Chapter 16 shows the fact that metaphors are coherent inherently, which can be seen from two aspects: coherence within a single metaphor and coherence between two aspects of a single concept. The book uses the example of "AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY" to illustrate the systematicity and coherence of metaphor. From the metaphors "AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY " and "A JOURNEY DEFINES A PATH," "AN ARGUMENT DEFINES A PATH " can be derived. And also, combining "AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY" and "THE PATH OF A JOURNEY IS A SURFACE," we can get a new metaphor that "THE PATH OF AN ARGUMENT IS A SURFACE." These examples show the inherent systematic nature of metaphor and the coherence of the examples under this metaphorical system. The second part shows the same implication between the journey metaphor and container metaphor. In the journey metaphor, people compare the form of argument to the route during the journey, and the content is equivalent to what they see and hear. Therefore, metaphor plays a vital role in connecting all instances within a single metaphor and in connecting two different metaphorical constructions of a single concept. Chapter 17 illustrates the complex coherence across metaphor. Any seemingly random metaphor expression is a part of the whole metaphor system, which serves the complex purpose of characterizing the concept and allows us to construct highly abstract and refined concepts.

The fourth part includes Chapter 18 and Chapter 19, which mainly explain some of the consequences for theories of conceptual structure and introduce the understanding of metaphor-related definitions. Linguists and logicians use two different strategies to handle metaphorical concepts, namely abstraction and homonymy. Chapter 18 puts forward the inadequacies of abstraction and homonymy in contrast to conceptual structure theory. Chapter 19 has argued that an account of how people understand their experiences requires a view of definition very different from the standard account. Concepts are not simply defined in terms of inherent properties; rather, they are defined primarily in terms of interactional properties (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 46-47). Metaphors are systematic devices that help to further define a concept and expand its range of applicability. The fifth part includes Chapter 20 and Chapter 21, which mainly

introduce how metaphors give meaning to forms and give new meaning to our experience. Chapter 20 points out that we can observe the linguistic form from a spatial perspective, so as to directly apply some spatial metaphors into the sentence form. The language form itself will be endowed with more content by virtue of spatialization. It is the first time that researchers have included the concept of spatial metaphors in their analysis. In Chapter21, Lakoff and Johnson discuss that conventional metaphors only structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture. Metaphors are imaginative and creative when we turn to metaphors outside of our conventional conceptual systems. These metaphors can give us a fresh understanding of our own experiences, which can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe. In addition, Lakoff and Johnson indicate in Chapter 22 that the similarities that we perceive are a result of conventional metaphors that are part of our conceptual system. Metaphor has a special metaphorical meaning, and the experience of human life can only be shown through metaphor. Thus, the only kind of similarity associated with metaphor is the experiential, not objective, similarity.

In the sixth part, Lakoff and Johnson present the idea that cognitive structure, languages and culture are interactive. Due to the fact that metaphorical languages are connected to the cognition of people, metaphors are conceptual in nature; metaphors not only exist commonly but also are systemic. Metaphors exist systemically in culture. Therefore, metaphors are systemic. It is clear from these characteristics that cognitive structure, languages, and culture are interactive. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson deeply explain the limitations of objectivist metaphors and some shortcomings of subjectivist metaphors (Wang, 2003: 213).

Comments on the Book

Metaphors We Live by is the first work to study metaphors from the perspective of linguistic cognition. The book has carried out an in-depth analysis of metaphor, explored the nature and characteristics of metaphor, and systematically explained the operating mechanism and existence basis of metaphor. It opens up new ideas for metaphor and makes the study of metaphor realize a cognitive turn.

As a classic of cognitive linguistics, this book has been praised by many scholars and has achieved many breakthroughs in the study of cognitive metaphors. Firstly, in contrast to the traditional view of metaphor as a rhetorical pattern, this book first points out that metaphors can also be viewed as powerful cognitive tools for our conceptualization of the world. Metaphor is the basis of people's thinking, experience, language and even behavior and is a primary and fundamental way of human existence. Secondly, the book challenges the semantic theories of western philosophy and linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson make it clear that people's experience and cognitive ability are of great importance in the interpretation of semantic. Two authors also put forward an empirical view of semantics, which holds that there is no so-called meaning and no objective truth independent of human cognition (Zhao, 1995: 67-72). Thirdly, it expounds that the cognitive structure of human metaphor is the basis for the production and development of language and culture, and language, in turn, has an impact on ideology and culture. Metaphors not only make our thoughts more vivid and interesting but actually structure our perceptions and understanding (Xu, 2019: 254-256). It reconnects many readers to the fact that metaphor not only profoundly shapes our current outlook on life but also establishes expectations that will determine our future lives.

Of course, there is no perfect theory. The cognitive metaphor created by Lakoff and Johnson is no exception. On the one hand, there is a lack of cross-linguistic and cross-

cultural cognitive studies of metaphor in this book, sit is hard to know whether languages in other cultures have the same cognitive and conceptual patterns as English. In fact, Lakoff and Johnson only conduct a cognitive analysis of metaphors in English and do not provide a large number of examples to prove that metaphors are universal. So the research scope is needed to be expanded to other cross-language metaphor research. On the other hand, Lakoff and Johnson study metaphor on the basis of experience, equating the empirical world with the real world. The empirical world is finite, while the real world is infinite. Taking such an empirical epistemology as the starting point, they try to construct a general cognitive model on the basis of cognitive semantics. The limitations are self-evident. First of all, semantic categories cannot accurately represent cognitive domains (Liu, 25-29). There's a huge difference between the way we think and the way we express ourselves. Therefore, the implementation of activities in the cognitive domain must be sought and explained beyond language (Steen, 2000: 261-277). Second, it is not just language that is involved in cognition. In most cases, we will subconsciously rely on many cognitive resources. Therefore, placing abstract ideas in our empirical existence requires more involvement of non-verbal content.

Overall, compared with its theoretical achievements, these flaws do not overshadow its brilliance. The publication of this book has greatly promoted the development of metaphor and played a vital role in the study of metaphor. As a masterpiece in cognitive linguistics, *Metaphors we Live by* are worthy of our profound research and exploration.

Conclusion

The *Metaphors We Live by* has now become a tool for a comprehensive understanding of people's language and society from a metaphorical perspective. In this book, Lakoff and Johnson provide a thorough exploration of the metaphorical system in our everyday speech. This book enriches the horizon and depth of research, both in the field of linguistics and in other fields such as philosophy and psychology. It pioneers the study of metaphor, and takes a new perspective overall world. Although the study of metaphor in the book has some defects, it is still a classic work of cognitive linguistics, which deserves readers' in-depth exploration.

Acknowledgment

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