

The Enlightenment of Metaphors in Titles on English Writing Teaching*

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Based on non-English majors' textbooks, this paper discusses the functions of metaphors in titles of texts and places a major emphasis on enlightenment of metaphors in titles on English writing teaching. And through analyzing metaphors in titles, it is suggested that in daily writing teaching, teachers should bear the cultivation of students' metaphorical thinking from analyzing titles in mind; teachers also design some writing tasks with metaphors in titles and select textbooks with metaphor-rich texts.

Keywords: title, metaphor, English writing teaching

Introduction

Traditionally, metaphor is conceived as a figure of speech, purely a matter of language. Until the 1930s, Richards and Blake shifted the focus of metaphor study to cognitive field. And then Lakoff and Johnson published *Metaphor We Live By* in 1980, which has opened up a new way for metaphor research and pushed the study to a higher level. Recently, with continued interest and a large number of studies, the domestic and foreign scholars have combined metaphor research with SLA (Second Language Acquisition), who attempt to find out an easy access to SLA through studying metaphor. Ungerer and Schmid claim that the cognitive function of metaphor lies in its uniqueness in helping learners acquire knowledge and they think that metaphor is just like a bridge, through which knowledge will be vivid and concrete (as cited in YANG, 2010, p. 156). Perie and Oshlag proposed four approaches to applying metaphor in FLT (Foreign Languages Teaching) in 1993. When elaborating on the focus and tendency of metaphor study, the domestic scholar LIN (2002) emphasized several important aspects: metaphor and reading, metaphor and vocabulary teaching, metaphor and teenagers' language study, and metaphor study and FLT. WANG and LI (2004) put forward a three-in-one view: linguistic ability, communicative competence, and metaphorical ability. WEN and YE (2007) discussed the importance of conceptual metaphor in FLT. YAN (2001) pointed out that the tendency of applied linguistics may be centered on metaphorical ability and relevant pedagogies. Such studies are countless, which have one thing in common that they have shown that scholars' attention has been diverted from cognitive area to FLT field and metaphor will be a great aid to FLT.

Actually, the lately metaphor study has touched on almost every corner in FLT. We may take writing

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teaching as an example, and through searching Wan Fang and other websites, we finally found a very large number of papers about the application of metaphor in writing teaching. Despite so many studies, there have been no studies on metaphor in textbooks that has an easy access to students. We randomly drew the first two copies of the following three textbooks, widely used in non-English majors: *New Horizon*, *College English* and *College Experience*, and found metaphor pervasive almost in every part of passages. Broadly speaking, metaphor here we discuss includes simile, synecdoche, analogy, personification, metonymy and some other figures of speech studied in traditional Rhetoric. As a matter of fact, only by analyzing the titles can we find there are metaphors in 55% titles. Titles are compared to eyes and windows by some writers. What can we see through these windows or with the eyes? We will seek answers in this paper and concentrate our attention on the enlightenment of metaphors in titles on writing teaching.

Analysis of Metaphors in Titles

Classifications of Metaphors in Titles

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claimed “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p. 3). They demonstrated that “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). And Lakoff and Johnson classified metaphors into three groups: orientational metaphors, ontological metaphors and structural metaphors, which lays a solid foundation for metaphor study in cognitive area. Orientational metaphors refer to the metaphorical concept that organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another and mostly have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, and central-peripheral. These metaphors arise from our physical and cultural experience and are used to elaborate some abstract concepts on feelings, physical conditions and status and so on. For example, more is up, and less is down; happy is up, and sad is down... Ontological metaphors serve us various purposes, in which people treat our experiences as entities or substances and we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, quantify them, and reason about them. And structural metaphors refer to the cognitive process where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. There are two domains in structural metaphors, and the concrete and known or familiar concepts to us in source domain are usually employed to describe abstract and unknown or unfamiliar things in target domains.

With a rough calculation of metaphors in titles, there are 72 titles with metaphors in all, among which ontological and structural metaphors are lion's share. We may take several titles as examples. The title of Passage C of Unit 7 (Book 2 *New Horizon*) is “How Well Do You Handle Daily Stress”, where stress—the invisible and abstract concept, is regarded as a visible object that can be taken up and put down. And the title of Passage B of Unit 1 (Book 1 *New Horizon*) is “Keys to Successful Online Learning”, where metaphor is mainly created by the word “keys”. Learning, a cognitive process of acquiring skill or knowledge from reading, practicing and attending lectures, is compared to a house or room which is locked tightly. If learners can find a right key, they can enter the room and acquire knowledge. Apparently, keys refer to learning methods and strategies. And another example is related to the title of Passage 1 of Unit 4 (Book 2 *College Experience*), which is a typical structural metaphor. People tend to understand things in light of their own experiences, so here source domain is concerning life and target domain is about dream: They interact with each other laterally, and develop vertically.

As Figure 1 goes:

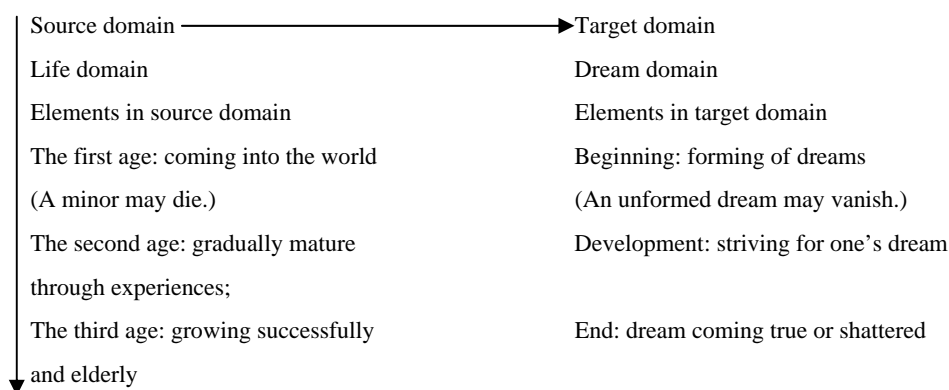


Figure 1. Mapping mode.

Functions of Metaphors in Titles

Creating rhetorical effect. Low (1998) and SHU (2000) listed six functions of metaphors. We think no matter how many functions metaphor has, the function of creating rhetorical effect is the most important and fundamental. Therefore, the primary function of metaphors in titles is to create rhetorical effect. Mooij pointed out, though the standard vocabulary in language is used widely and professionally, it cannot incorporate all things and scenes outside into our mind (as cited in CAO & MA, 2008, p. 104). To describe ever-changing world, new problems, new phenomena and new things, we need to create limitless expressions with number-limited vocabularies. Kurz (1988) said that we frequently express new ideas with the help of old expressions, and from this point of view, the process of understanding language is metaphorical (p. 16). Thus, metaphor can name new things through rhetorical function, which brings into its full play in titles.

Titles are succinct generalizations of body parts in passages, so they are usually characterized by the use of condensed language, but originality and vividness are deadily required so as to create certain effects. The application of metaphors can meet the need, and except originality, it can bring about unexpected effects. For example, the title of Passage B of Unit 9 (Book 1 *College English*) is "Fresh Air Will Kill You", where "fresh air" is compared to a lethal object that can threaten human being's lives. The use of metaphor makes "fresh air" unusual and makes the title original and full of suspense. With the help of metaphor, readers are sure to be curious about the content and eager to know why fresh air will kill people. And then readers will look through the passage and get the main idea. When they get the main idea, the humorous and ironical effects will come out simultaneously. And another example is connected with the title of Passage A of Unit 5 (Book 2 *College English*). From the title "The Villain in the Atmosphere", we can see that a certain kind of gas is compared to villain. And after reading, we know the gas refers to carbon dioxide. With metaphors in title, the language effect has been enhanced and readers are inspired a lot.

Making predictions. Another function of metaphors in titles occurs in textual level: On the one hand, metaphors in title can indicate the key metaphor and glossary chain in body parts; on the other hand, they interact with metaphors in body parts and echo with them. The second aspect is quite complicated and not our focus. We place our emphasis on the first one: Predictive function of metaphors in titles and their influence on metaphors in body parts.

Since metaphors in titles cannot be isolated from ones in body parts, the corresponding mapping must be found in the passage. It is not necessarily that there is only one metaphor domain in the passage, and there may be dozens of metaphor domains and mappings, but metaphors in titles usually dominate and link other domains, which contributes greatly to coherence and directs the message on the textual level.

A case in point is the title of Passage A of Unit 1 (Book 1 *New Horizon*)—"The Battle Against AIDS", which contains a metaphor domain related to "war". In this metaphor, source domain (war) is about our experience or events familiar to us, while target domain (AIDS prevention) is professional, invisible and hard to understand for ordinary people. In light of operation mechanism of metaphor, some features in source domain have been mapped into target domain, so we have little difficulty finding the following sentences (see Examples 1-4) in the passage.

Example (1) Since then, AIDS has killed more than 204,000 Americans.

(2) One organization, the South Carolina AIDS Education Network, formed in 1985 to combat the growing number of AIDS cases.

(3) While no one way of winning the war against AIDS exists, the net work shares these lessons learned in its battle against AIDS.

(4) Like no other plague before, the AIDS epidemic threatens to wipe out an entire generation and leave another without parents.

From the above, we can see metaphors in titles develop actively, interact with other metaphors and then promote the textual development.

Metaphors in Titles and English Writing Teaching

The Current Situation of College Students' English Writing Learning

Then what is the relationship between metaphors and students' English writing learning? On the one hand, English writing has perplexed teachers and students for a long time and many a teacher have strived to win breakthrough; on the other hand, as is discussed above, metaphor research has been shifted to FLT field, which surely has a deep influence on every corner of FLT and there is no exception with writing teaching.

Since so, what is the current situation of our college students' writing learning? The domestic scholar LIU and DAI (2004) pointed out that Chinese college students' English learning has been fossilized to some degree. WANG and ZHANG (2008) proved that fossilization of college students' writing ability was the worst among four abilities. ZENG (2007) and GAO, ZHU, and CHEN (2007) did some empirical research and arrived at the same conclusion. As is shown, there is no disagreement that Chinese college students' writing ability has been fossilized. And the main problems students come across in writing are grammatical mistakes, loose structures and repeated words and so on; what is more, there is less creative language filled with figures of speech. SHEN (1996) did a research on eight Chinese students and demonstrated that Chinese students rarely use metaphor, which is root of the problem.

Enlightenment of Metaphors in Titles on English Writing Teaching

Developing students' metaphorical thinking from title learning. To solve the problem, it is crucial to stimulate students to think in the pattern of target language and use metaphorical expressions in writing. Besides powerful rhetorical function, metaphor can help us construct thinking and conceptual system with its cognitive

power, create new expressions with finite vocabulary, extend our conceptual system and transform our minds through new expression and things. These characteristics of metaphor are largely related to writing, because writing is a process of refinement for thinking and follows thinking closely. Therefore, metaphorical thinking is a key to improving students' fossilization of writing ability when they write in target language.

In teaching, it is suggested that both learners and teachers pay more attention to metaphors in texts, especially metaphors in titles, and teachers should remember at all times to cultivate students' metaphorical thinking. For example, There are two metaphors in the title of Passage A of Unit 8 (Book 1 *New Horizon*)—"Birth of Bright Ideas". And we focus on the metaphor produced by the noun "birth": The source domain is about life, while the target domain is concerning thoughts. Its mapping pattern is similar to that of "Death of a Dream", and we lay more emphasis on the glossary chain triggered by word "birth". After reading, we may find the following glossary chain (see Figure 2):

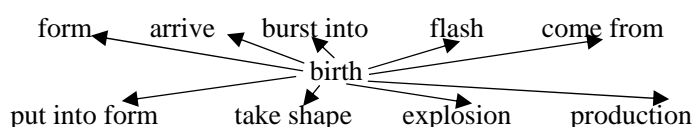


Figure 2. Glossary chain of "birth".

Then teachers may direct students' attention to other metaphors in the text. Through the exercise, on the view of macroscopic, students can understand the relationship between titles and body parts better; at a micro level, students are gradually conscious of the interaction between metaphors in titles and those in body parts, and study the key metaphors and the glossary chain created by them. This is greatly beneficial to students in cultivating metaphorical thinking and accumulating vocabulary.

Designing writing tasks with metaphors in titles. Chinese students seldom use metaphor, which is attributed to students' mentality of playing safe by SHEN (1996). YAN (2001) said, "This is widely related to Chinese test-oriented teaching" (p. 63). The accuracy of expressions is preferred to the ideas and aesthetic feeling transmitted by words in evaluating compositions in all English tests, so students recite some model essays in order to get high scores and then apply some sentences in their own writings. Consequently, students' compositions, similar in structures to each other and lacking in originality, are full of platitude, which hinders students from improving fossilization and changing thinking way. Therefore, teachers need to correct students' improper learning methods and help students out of mistaken ideas.

We suppose that designing writing tasks with metaphors in titles is a basic and effective strategy. And through the above analysis, we can see if there is a metaphor in titles, it will usually facilitate a glossary chain and dominate key metaphor domain in body parts. With its dominance and coordination of other metaphors, the writing is surely coherent and precise to the topic, so teachers need to make efforts to design writing tasks with metaphors in title. For example, if we write a composition about campus love, we may design two titles at the same time: "My View on Campus Love" and "Is Campus Love a Beautiful Flower or a Poisonous Apple?". The first title has nothing remarkable, while there are two metaphors in the second one that can stimulate students to vast imaginary space. Without outline, students need to figure out the hidden meaning of the title if they are given the first one, and they have to think about what is needed to express, so students do not have clear heads and their compositions are usually not to the topic. Also without outline, the second title may open up a new ground. The

second title includes two metaphors: Campus love is a beautiful flower; campus love is a poisonous apple. Because of cultural gap, people have different understandings of love. But with common sense, it seems that students have no difficulty understanding the two metaphors. As we know, a blooming flower may experience three phases: in bud, blooming and withering. And then these characteristics are mapped into target domain, which makes campus love also experience three stages: knowing each other, falling in love and getting married or breaking apart. The second metaphor compares campus love to a poisonous apple, which refers to the negative effect of campus love. Through the two metaphors, the aim of test designers is clear that students are required to discuss advantages and disadvantages of campus love. With the help of metaphors, students are stimulated properly before writing and the main idea may come into shape. In addition, after the mapping is constructed between source domain and target domain, related words and expressions also arise in students' minds, e.g., in bud, in blossom, wither, edible, etc.

Selecting textbooks with metaphor-rich texts. In addition to the above, the third enlightenment is that we should choose textbooks with metaphor-rich texts. Because the cognitive frame of mother language has been rooted in students' mind when they study foreign language, it is not easy to replace it with the frame of target language, which leads to the fact that students think in mother tongue and write in target language, and students cannot describe their thoughts vividly. Thus, teachers should start from textbooks with an easy access to students, explaining cognitive frame of target language gradually to students so as to make students conscious of the differences between the two frames. In view of that, textbooks with metaphor-rich texts seem to be especially important in producing a favorable and metaphor-be-everywhere learning environment.

With a rough statistics, titles with metaphor account for 63% in *New Horizon*, 45% in *College English* and 50% in *College Experience*. Metaphors in titles are helpful for us to select textbooks because they have a great influence on metaphors in body parts. If there is a metaphor in titles, it may facilitate a key metaphor domain or a chain of metaphors in the body parts, so the passage is possibly a metaphor-rich text. When selecting textbooks, we do not have sufficient time to read every passage, so we can refer to titles which can predict whether the passage is metaphor-rich or not.

Conclusions

Metaphor is really pervasive in our life. We examined students' textbooks which turned out to be filled with metaphors. And we just studied titles and found a great number of metaphors. Metaphors in titles have powerful rhetorical and predictive functions. Through analysis of the titles, we see that the enlightenment of metaphor on English writing has largely exceeded our expectations. Teachers should cultivate students' metaphorical thinking from analyzing metaphors in titles and design some writing tasks with metaphors in titles, which is especially beneficial to changing their cognitive frame and way of thinking in target language. In addition, teachers may select textbooks with metaphor-rich texts according to window role of metaphor. In view of the number and kind of textbooks selected, the study needs to be done further. And we will pay more attention to research coverage and continue to exploit the functions of metaphors in titles, especially the relationship between metaphors in titles and metaphors in body parts so as to contribute much to English teaching.

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