

Analysis of Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in China-related Front Covers of *The Economist*

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Abstract

Most of previous studies on metaphor and metonymy at home and abroad are limited to the verbal mode, ignoring non-verbal mode. A few studies on multimodality mainly focus on the basic role of metonymy, lacking adequate attention to the representation of multimodal metaphor and metonymy, and the role in constructing specific images from the perspective of social pragmatic function. This paper takes the cover cartoons of *the Economist* as data to analyze the recognition and representation of multimodal metaphors and metonymy. Then, from the perspective of social pragmatics, we quantitatively analyze the symbolic signs of the source domain of the covers in the past decade, and reveal their roles in constructing the image of China. This research is to understand the linguistic approach of “how to reconstruct China’s image” and “how to construct” by international media, which can provide implication for Chinese dissemination and diplomatic strategy in the digital age.

Keywords: multimodal metaphor, multimodal metonymy, national image

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up, China’s international communication has been facing an unprecedented challenge. However, it is news media that matters to some extent in international communication. Compared with pure texts, the rich and novel images in magazine front covers have been endowed with more perceptual privileges in human communication, and cooperate with verbal mode to convey information and express emotions. Therefore, critical discourse analysis of the political news of international multimodal discourse is to understand what image the international media reconstruct and how to construct in the linguistics approach, which will be significant for national image transmission.

In recent years, studies on multimodal metaphor and metonymy are one of the hotspots of research, but such studies mostly focused on the function of metonymy, not on the image construction mechanism. In addition, such studies fail to conduct quantitative analysis based on rich multimodal materials. This paper aims to use multimodal discourse analysis method to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of China-related cover comics. Qualitative analysis includes four steps: description, identification, interpretation and discussion, which is used to analyze the representation mechanism of multimodal metaphor and metonymy. From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, the quantitative analysis, by counting the symbols in the source domain adopted by the China-related cover cartoons in the past decade, summarizes the characteristics of the symbols of the source domain, and reveals China image reconstructed by the international media.

2. Literature Review

Lakoff and Johnson put forward the metaphorical cognitive view in the *Metaphor We Live By*, that is, the conceptual system of thought and action is metaphorical in nature (Lakoff, G., & M. Johnson, 1980). Existing studies basically follow the definition of multimodal metaphor in this book, that is, the source domain and the target domain are presented separately or mainly by different modes.

Forceville has mentioned that pictures speak louder than numerous verbal words. In this study, multimodal metaphors are all derived from the cover of the economist, in which imaginary dynamic scenes are created to reflect current affairs (Forceville, C., 2006). As a result, the theme of a cartoon is usually not expressed by one element, but the whole elements used to depict one particular scenario (Zhao Xiufeng & Dai Xinyang, 2016). Given the dynamic narrative, the multimodal quotation can be represented as “A-ING IS B-ING” format.

Jakobson pushes the conventional research of metonymy into the field of semantics, thinking that metonymic operation is based on the contiguity of domains (Jakobson, M., 1987).

Lakoff and Johnson first described metonymy as cognitive process, in which people can conceptualize one thing in terms of another (Lakoff, G., & M. Johnson., 1980). Lakoff held that the metonymic operation is mainly considered as a reference. Moreover, source and target domain are mentioned in metonymy. The difference between metaphor and metonymy is drawn by Lakoff and Johnson. Metaphor relates to cross-domain mapping, while metaphor connects with mapping within a single conceptual. It is the conceptual contiguity relation that establishes the connection between the source and the target domain. Besides, Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff, G., & M. Johnson, 1980) said that the basic metonymic concepts are even more common than metaphoric concepts in fact, because it usually concludes direct associations.

Lakoff & Turner proposed that the difficult point is the definition of “domain” is rather vague and still needs to be further identified. Consequently, the concept of “domain” should be avoided in the process of distinction of between multimodal metaphor and metonymy. Panther redefined metaphor and metonymy in the perspective of semiotic, which is more applicable and suitable in pictorial-verbal contexts (Panther, K. U., 2006). Zhan Hui and Zhan Weiwei has employed Panther’s model to pictorial metaphor and metonymy study with the modification of the “linguistic vehicle” (Zhang Huihui & Zhan Weiwei, 2011). In view of two modes, this research modifies Panther’s models of metaphoric and metonymic relation demonstrated in the following two cases.

3. Data and Research Method

The Economist is one of the most influential international magazines in the world. Its cover is a combination of text and image modes. The topics are often related to international events or celebrities, and usually reflect the specific political ideologies of the Western media. Therefore, the cover of *the Economist* can be regarded as good corpus for analyzing multimodal metaphor and metonymy.

The collection criteria of corpus are determined from two aspects: content and cognition. In terms of content, the cover should be related to China, such as politics, economy, culture, diplomacy, environment, etc. In terms of cognitive mechanism, covers should have obvious visual conflicts, and observers can recognize at least one cross-domain mapping. This study collected the covers of *the Economist* from January 2012 to January 2020, and selected 28 covers that met the requirements. This study intends to conduct a detailed case analysis of two cartoons, and systematically analyze the representation mechanism of multimodal implicit metonymy through four steps: description, identification, interpretation and discussion.

4. Representation of Multimodal Metaphors and Metonymy

4.1 Example 1



In this cartoon, we can see that a giant panda has climbed to the highest point of a mountain with its mouth widely open, roaring toward the sky. Behind it is an extremely huge red moon in the sky. This whole scene may take place at night. The title of this cartoon is *Red moon is rising. Will China dominate science?* In the social context, China’s landing of a spacecraft on the far side of the Moon on January 3rd, a first for any country, was a mark of its greatness in science. It can be inferred that the metaphorical scene constructed virtually in the cartoon

is the scene of “Chinese science and technology” through the suggestive effect of text mode. Second, the words “dominate” and “rising” together indicate that China is rising. Finally, the cultural connotation of “red moon” is the key to the success or failure of interpretation. Most cultures believe that “red moon” is the “blood moon”, which indicates disaster, evil and anger. Therefore, this is a structural metaphor where the features of the source domain are mapped to the target domain. The multimodal metaphor representation mechanism is the pictorial & verbal in the source domain and verbal mode in the target domain. After analyzing the cross-domain mapping, the working mechanism of this multimodal metaphor is illustrated in the following figure.

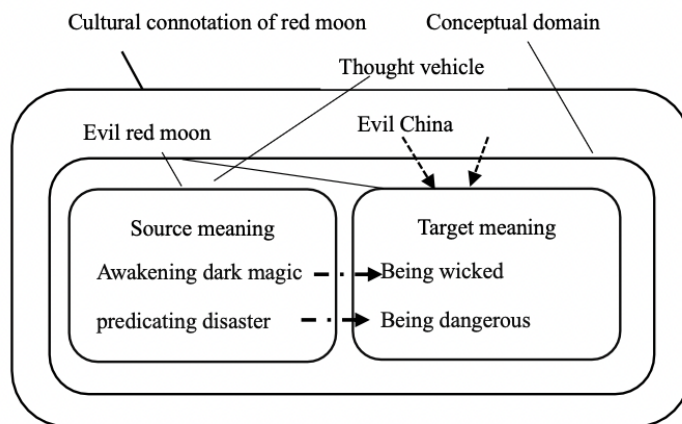


Figure 1. Working mechanism of RED MOON IS CHINA

In addition, the cultural statute metonymy “PANDA FOR CHINA” activates China identity, and the construction of the image of CHINA by the PANDA will be realized through the multi-modal metaphor of “PANDA IS CHINA”. That is, by means of an implicit metonymy chain first metonymy then metaphor. Because the image of the panda in the picture is not exactly the same as the traditional and cute panda in Chinese traditional culture, the panda in the picture has been fabricated by the Western media as a greedy and ambitious world hegemon. There are three features that map to the features of China’s image. First of all, the giant panda in the cartoon reflects China’s boom in technology. Second, it slopes upwards at a 45-degree Angle, reflecting the rapid rise of Chinese technology. Third, the panda holds its head high, its mouth wide open, its teeth sharp and its ambition frightening, which echoes the word “dominant” in the title. Therefore, PANDA IS CHINA can be defined as a structural metaphor. The mechanism of multimodal metaphor representation is pictorial mode in the source domain, verbal & pictorial in the target domain. In the cartoon, the author deliberately used the cultural connotation of the red moon and the dominant image of the panda to promote “China threat” theory. After analyzing the cross-domain mapping, the working mechanism of this multimodal metaphor is illustrated in the following figure.

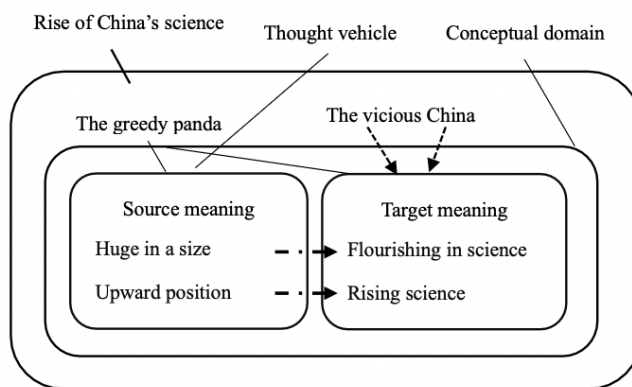


Figure 2. Working Mechanism of PANDA IS CHINA

4.2 Example 2



The front cover was published on the cover of January 4, 2020. The top half is the five-star red flag, the bottom half is the American flag, the middle is a globe. The title of this cartoon is “Poles apart. China, America and the planet’s biggest break-up.” But according to common sense, both China and the United States are in the Northern hemisphere, so the word “polarized” obviously does not refer to the two countries being at opposite ends of the geographical divide, but to something else.

In this cover, the Chinese flag and American flag respectively stands for China and America by metonymic operations at the first sight. The target can be activated by the combination of pictorial mode and verbal mode in this cartoon. The pictorial mode is the spatial separation from the planet, like the up-down pattern. The verbal mode, namely, the title “Poles apart”, means China and America are apart in the planet. With some background information, confrontation between China and America is referred in terms of the combination of the pictorial and verbal modes “Pole apart”. Therefore, POLES APART IS CONFRONTATION can be identified as orientational metaphor, as well as the multimodal metaphor. In the table below, the characteristics of the source domain are mapped onto the target domain.

The source domain “POLES APART” represents in both verbal mode and pictorial mode, while the target domain “NATIONAL CONFRONTATION” is unmanifested. Thus the POLES APART IS NATIONAL CONFRONTATION can be identified as a multimodal metaphor. The representation mechanism of this multimodal metaphor is pictorial & verbal mode in the source domain, while unmanifested mode in the target domain. After the cross-domain mapping analysis, the working mechanism of this multimodal metaphor will be illustrated in the table below.

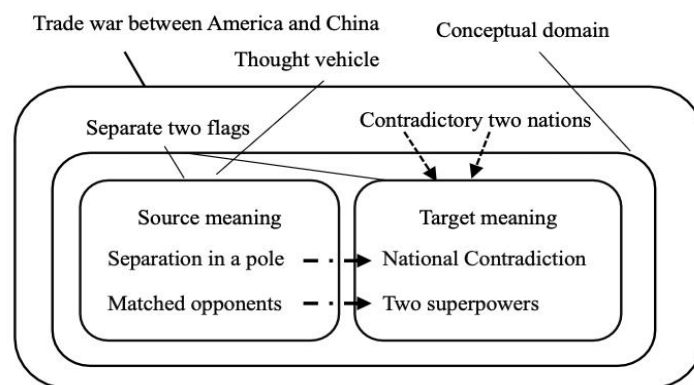


Figure 3. Working mechanism of POLES APART IS CONFRONTATION

We have explored the background knowledge, the representation mechanism and the working mechanism of the multimodal metaphor about this front cover, so it is relatively clear for us to understand the source and the target of the multimodal metaphor. The Chinese flag and the American flag are respectively located in the up and down in this cover, which gives viewers the clue: As two superpowers, China and America are matched in comprehensive national strength, such as economy and science. What's more, as shown in this cartoon, China is up while America is down. According to Lakoff & Johnson's classification of the orientational metaphor, the up-down pattern of this cartoon has two meanings: on the one hand, the up-down diagram is used to map onto the nation domain, emphasizing the antagonism and confrontation between the upper and relatively lower countries, namely, between China and the United States. On the other hand, the diagram is applied to map onto the social hierarchy domain. Orientational metaphors reflect certain ideology (Feng Dezheng & Xing Chunyan, 2011). The metaphoric formula "UP IS STRONG" and "DOWN IS WEAK" can be applied onto the two countries. By means of metonymic operation, the western media deliberately contribute the "CHINA IS UP" to Chinese suppression of the United States, leading the United States in a weak position, thus creating a provocative and aggressive image of China in Sino-US relations.

Notably, if viewers only focus on the confrontation between China and the United States, but fail to realize that the up-down diagram of the orientational metaphor can map the social hierarchy and the predicate function of metonymy, they may not recognize the ideological nature behind the cartoon.

5. Image Construction in the Front Covers of *The Economist*

5.1 The Process of Image Construction

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the front covers of *The Economist* from January 2012 to January 2020, focusing on the construction process of China's image. It is found that cartoon creators tend to use as the source domain conventional symbols related to China that are relatively easy to be recognized by viewers and play an important role in the recognition of multimodal metonymy, such as the five-star red flag, national leaders, dragons, pandas, etc. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of source domain symbols of the covers. It is necessary to mention that 97.2% symbols are represented by metonymic operations, which relates to the relation of ELEMENT FOR ENTITY. These metonymic operations are based on social convention, which plays a significant role in the identification of the multimodal metonymy. However, the visual features of these symbols are mostly different from the conventionalized symbols according to Chinese culture. Some cultural symbols, such as pandas and dragons, are depicted in the front covers of *The Economist* in an exaggerated way, like frightening facial expressions or extremely big body. This deliberate false depiction not only reveals the prejudice and stereotype on China from western media, but also leads viewers of *The Economist* to arouse sense of xenophobia, namely, dislike and hatred.

Table 1. Symbols of China in front covers of *The Economist*

Source domain	Pictorial mode	Frequency	Percentage
National Flag	the Five-Starred Red Flag	8	21.62%
State leader	President	5	13.51%
Color	Red	5	13.51%
	Combination of red and yellow		
Panda	Angry or untruthful	4	10.81%
	Lovely and cute		
Dragon	Huge in size and fierce	4	10.81%
Chinese company	Company logos or names	2	5.40%
Chinese clothes	Dragon robe	2	5.40%
	Chinese tunic suit		
Blood moon	Red moon	1	2.70%
Chinese Territory	Map of China	1	2.70%
Places of interests	The Great Wall	1	2.70%

	Landscape in Guilin	1	2.70%
Facial makeup	Beijing opera mask	1	2.70%
Landmark	Oriental Pearl Tower of Shanghai	1	2.70%
Chinese currency	Renminbi	1	2.70%
In total		37	100%

5.2 The Effects of Image Construction

After the analysis of the 28 covers, we can conclude that China's economic, scientific, political and diplomatic situations have aroused wide attention in the West. China's international images constructed by producers of *The Economist* tend to be negative by making full use of the multimodal metaphoric and metonymic operations. The table above demonstrates China's images constructed by the western media in the front covers of *The Economist* in the past eight years.

Table 2. China's images constructed by news media

Number	Target Domain	China Image	Frequency	Percentage
1	China's economy	Strong and powerful Dangerous	7	28%
	China's science and technology			
	China's international influence			
2	China's political system	Dictatorial	5	20%
		Authoritarian Autarchic		
3	Sino-American relations	Aggressive Combative	4	16%
4	China's economy	Vulnerable Doubtful	4	16%
	China's economic reform			
	Chinese market			
5	China's economy	Ambitious; Greedy	3	12%
6	Chinese market	Dishonest	2	8%
	China's ecological environment	Hypocritical Illegal and unfair		
In total			25	100%

The results reveal different ideology behind the international media, which are characterized by obvious prejudice, stereotype and dislike. With the random slander, readers or viewers should be clearly aware of the distortion and slander of China Image by the international media, and critically understand the ways of construction by news media.

Furthermore, compared with mono-modal discourses, especially direct verbal words, we should realize that multimodal discourse has more destructive power, that is, it is powerful for multi-modality in the construction of the national identity and image. Multimodal metonymy makes good use of its cognitive activation or highlighting, putting abstract statements or comments into fictitious story scenarios (Zhao Xiufeng & Feng Dezheng, 2017). For the same cognitive phenomenon, the decoding way of text is linear interpretation from left to right word by word and sentence by sentence.

6. Conclusions

This paper has given a careful analysis of multimodal metaphor and metonymy on the front covers of *The Economist*, including the identification, working mechanism, representation mechanism and image construction

from the perspective of critical discourse analysis. The findings have been summarized as follows.

First, perceptual resemblances, especially visual similarities, are significant in the identification of multimodal metaphors. That is to say, the source and target domains share resemblance in terms of their shapes, sizes, colors and qualities. Second, social context and cultural connotation also play an important role. Third, multimodal metonymy plays a fundamental role in the construction of multimodal metaphor. We found that most multimodal metaphors are on the type of PART FOR WHOLE, including ELEMENT FOR ENTITY and FEATURE FOR ENTITY. In this way, multimodal metonymies always activate or highlight multimodal metaphors of cartoons. Fourth, images can be constructed by multimodal metaphors and metonymies. On the one hand, negative symbols are used to depict negative national images of China by conventionalized cultural symbols, such as the fierce dragon and greedy panda. On the other hand, the orientational metaphor also reveals the communicative intention of the west media. Finally, the representation modes of the source and target domains mainly include four types: pictorial mode in the source, while verbal & pictorial modes in the target; pictorial mode in the source, while unmanifested mode in the target; verbal & pictorial modes in the source, while unmanifested mode in the target; verbal & pictorial modes both in the two domains.

The limitation of this study lies in the inadequate data. The number of front covers is less than 30. In addition, there is the risk of subjectivity in this thesis when it comes to the interpretation of the multimodal metaphors. This study verifies the explanatory power of multimodal metaphor and metonymy theory and is significant to the cultivation of multiliteracies in cross-cultural communication.

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