Text Organizing Mechanism of Metaphors in Discourse

Xian TANG¹,a,*
¹School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan Textile University, Wuhan, Hubei Province, China
*txianne@163.com

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Abstract. This paper intends to discuss the discourse function of metaphors, and tries to explore the text organizing mechanism of metaphors in discourse. First, it reviews the past and current researches of metaphors, and finds that metaphors can work not only at the vocabulary and grammar level, but also at the discourse level. Based on the analysis of some examples, it finds that the metaphorical mapping correspondence can work in the discourse development and coherence. The systematic features and coherent features of a metaphor can also help in the discourse coherence. Metaphors can play a great role in text organizing and discourse coherence.

Introduction
Metaphors in language are as the numerous stars in the universe and there are metaphors everywhere in our daily language usage. Since the ancient Greek times, there is a history of over 2000 years of metaphorical studies, and scholars have made a lot of researches on metaphors and created different views and theories. From about 300 B. C. to the early 20th century, the two major theories are Aristotle’s comparison theory and Quintilianus’ substitution theory. From the early 20th century to the 1970s, Richards and Blake’s interaction theory improved the comparison and substitution theory, and changed the metaphorical study from the vocabulary level into the sentence level.

After the 1970s, as the development of western philosophy, semiotics theory and cognition theory, philosophers, semiologists, psychologists all began their researches on metaphors. These studies explored the essence, the form features, the comprehension, the function and the work mechanism of metaphors. All these studies are all about the vocabulary and sentence level of metaphors.

However, there are not many studies about the discourse level of metaphorical studies. Lackoff and Johnson made some discussion about the coherence function of metaphors in the 1980s [1]. Weinrich pointed out that metaphors are not simply words, but are always a discourse, no matter how small the discourse is. In China, some scholars also discussed the coherence function of metaphors. In 2006, Shaozeng Ren analyzed the texts of All the King’s Men to demonstrate the coherence function of conceptual metaphors in the narrative discourse. Still in 2006, Zaijiang Wei analyzed the discourse function of cognitive metaphors [2]. In 2007, Meizhen Liao discussed the working mechanism of metaphors in organizing a discourse. In 2012, Wei Zhang discussed the function of metaphorical mapping in discourse cohesion. All these studies reveal that metaphors are not only a cognitive phenomenon, but can also work in discourse coherence.

This paper intends to discuss how metaphors make the discourse coherent by analyzing some examples. It tries to analyze the language usage both from perspectives of the cognitive metaphorical theory and the functional linguistics. It tries to put the metaphor study at the discourse level, and provide some implications of discourse study.

Metaphors in Discourse
In cognitive linguistics, metaphors are not only a rhetoric device, but a useful tool people use to cognize the world. Metaphors are the structural mapping from one domain to another domain, that is, the mapping from the source domain to the target domain. People usually try to map the abstract or unfamiliar domain to the familiar domain in order to get better comprehension. The metaphorical
studies are the research target of many disciplines besides the traditional rhetoric studies, such as cognitive linguistics, philosophy, psychology, literature criticism, semiotics, etc.

There two major methods of the existing metaphorical researches: one is the philosophical method, which explores the relationship between metaphors and thinking; the other is the linguistic method, which explores metaphors and language. As we all know, in history, metaphors belong to the domain of rhetoric. In the 20th century, there is a change in philosophy studies to language. One study focus of 20th century philosophy is the relationship between language and the world and another focus is meaning of language. Linguists intend to explore the inner mechanism of language, and philosophers comprehend the world by understanding the language.

Some researchers have already explored the cohesive function of metaphors. Early in the 1980s, Lakoff and Johnson discussed the coherent feature of metaphors in their famous work *Metaphors We Live By*. In 1991, Hoey in his book *Patterns of Lexis in Text* also discussed the function of a metaphor for text organization [3]. David Lee pointed out that metaphors work at all levels of language and that they are related to not only vocabulary meaning, but also the discourse [4].

In China, Dingfang Shu noticed the influence of discourse in metaphorical studies. He said, the recent metaphorical studies are no longer limited to the vocabulary level, and metaphors work in a broader language environment [5]. The researches on metaphors should be carried out from a broader theory perspective, by combining the approaches and methods from other disciplines. In 2006, Zaijiang Wei pointed out metaphors are also a discourse phenomenon and that metaphors not only exist at the level of vocabulary and grammar, but also at the level of discourse. Metaphors are an important device for text organization, and they can build a discourse, and realize the function of cohesion and coherence.

**Metaphors in Text Organization**

Because mapping universally exists in metaphors and metaphors are systematic and coherent, metaphors are useful and influential in text organization.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphors are a kind of mapping from the source domain to the target domain. The source domain is usually familiar and concrete, whereas the target domain is usually very abstract. Metaphors are based on people’s experience. There three kinds of metaphorical mapping correspondence:

The first one is the ontological correspondences. Mapping is a fixed ontology set correspondence between the entity’s source domain and the target domain. For example, LOVE IS A JOURNEY. The mapping of this metaphor includes:

- The lovers are the travelers in a journey.
- Love is the vehicle.
- Difficulties in love are the barriers in a journey.

The second one is the inference pattern correspondences. When something is stimulated, the mapping can project the inference in the source domain into the inference mode of the target domain. For example, in the metaphor “LOVE IS A JOURNEY”, when facing the difficulties, the travelers have such choices:

- Travelers may overcome the difficulties and get rid of the barriers.
- Travelers may remain at the same place, and give up the destination.
- Travelers may abandon the vehicle.

Accordingly, when the journey scenario is projected to the target domain, the lovers may have the following choices:

- Lovers may overcome the difficulties and get rid of the barriers.
- Lovers may suspend their relationship and give up their common life goals.
- Lovers may give up their love.

The third one is the open potential correspondences between inference modes. The ontology and inference mode of the source domain are open, so is the target domain.
The metaphors are systematic both at the level of language and concept. One conceptual metaphor can derive many systematic metaphorical expressions. Because of people’s multi-dimensional experience, the mapping of a metaphor usually shows systematic correspondences. The metaphorical mapping can create coherence by the mapping correspondences. For example, there is a poem:

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The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over silent haunches
and then moves on.
(by Car Sandburg, *Fog*)
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In this short poem, there is a conceptual metaphor “FOG IS A CAT” which makes the whole poem a coherent discourse. The source domain is the cat, and the target domain is the fog. The typical movement features of a cat expressed by the words “feet, sits, looking, haunches” are projected to the target domain “fog”, and this systematic mapping make the whole poem a cohesive and coherent discourse.

Metaphors and their metaphorical expressions can create a coherence system by metaphorical entailment. For example, from “TIME IS MONEY”, we can get “Time is a kind of limited recourses” and “Time is very precious”. Because there is metaphorical entailment in the source domain, for instance, “AN ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY”, the source domain “journey” entailing road, the target domain “argument” also entails road. In this way, the metaphor itself and its metaphorical expressions create a coherent system.

Metaphors are as a bond that connects all the elements together in discourse coherence. A metaphor is a semantic field which influences the development of discourse information. There are metaphors everywhere in our life, and texts are full of metaphors. Authors often use metaphors to explain an unfamiliar thing to the readers. They use a metaphor from the beginning until the end, and form a core metaphor which can derive many different metaphorical expressions. Some metaphorical expressions repeat in the discourse, and some entail the other. Take the following paragraph for example.

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Life is a river. Each day is the water drops in the river. Days move forward, and vanish gradually. Some water drops become cloud and fog, and are blew away by the wind. Some water drops become beautiful spindrift that makes us happy. (by Gaofeng Tian, *Days in Life are like Flowing Water*)
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In this paragraph, there is a metaphor “LIFE IS A RIVER” which is the core metaphor. Life is made up of days, and the river is made up of water drops. What happens in life is similar to that of a river. The ontological correspondences and the inference pattern correspondences of metaphorical mapping made the whole passage a coherent discourse. Metaphors really make a great difference in text organization and discourse coherence.

Summary

This paper discussed the coherence function of cognitive metaphors in discourse. The understanding of a metaphor is based on our daily experience, and discourse is an important tool for us to comprehend the world. Metaphors can play a great role in discourse development and make it coherent through its mapping mechanisms and its systematic features. This paper provides some implications to the study between cognitive metaphors and discourse. Future research work can explore the coherent mechanisms of metaphors in a broader range of discourse and can also be carried out from broader theory perspectives.

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References