

The Pragmatic Functions of Gender Metaphor

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Abstract: Metaphor in linguistics means that it involves the comparison of two concepts in that one is construed in terms of the other. It's often described in terms of a target domain and a source domain. The target domain is the experience being described by the metaphor and the source domain is the means that we use in order to describe the experience. What gender metaphor is different from metaphor is that the conceptual mapping that is projected from the source to the target domain may create or reflect some kind of discrimination against men or women. This paper, first reviews the relevant research of gender metaphor in the foreign countries and China. Second, it mainly analyses three kinds of metaphor which reflect sexism: animal metaphor, plant metaphor and food metaphor. Then, it explores the pragmatic functions of gender metaphor. By explore this, it can be found that animal metaphor, plant metaphor and food metaphor have the following three functions: the referential function; the politeness function; the inferential function in gender metaphor. By study the pragmatic functions of gender metaphor, it is better to understand the real purpose of what the speaker want to say and gain a better communication effect.

1. Introduction

The definition of metaphor from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is as follows: "a word or phrase used to describe sb/sth else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful." Metaphor in linguistics means that it involves the comparison of two concepts in that one is construed in terms of the other. It's often described in terms of a target domain and a source domain. The target domain is the experience being described by the metaphor and the source domain is the means that we use in order to describe the experience. The cognitive force of metaphor is that it maps the schema in the source domain onto the target domain. In this paper, we mainly probe into gender metaphor which have relation with gender in metaphor. What gender metaphor is different from metaphor is that the conceptual mapping that is projected from the source to the target domain may create or reflect some kind of discrimination against men or women. Metaphor is the old research subject and many scholars paid more attention to it in early days. Gender metaphors can be defined as metaphors that meet the following criteria (Velasco-Sacristán 64-96) :

- 1) They have verbal, non-verbal, or multimodal realisations in discourse (discursive criterion);
- 2) The conceptual mapping(s) that is (are) projected from the source to the target domain may create and/or reflect some kind of discrimination against men or women (cognitive criterion);
- 3) They may give rise to sexist interpretations that are often covertly communicated (pragmatic criterion).

In this paper, we mainly analyse three kinds of metaphor which reflect sexism: animal metaphor, plant metaphor and food metaphor. Animals have unique and distinct characters, which are also used to point to a person who has the similar features. And animal metaphor is used to point ugly the female or praise the male; And plant metaphor is used to point to a female or to depreciate a female's social status or praise a male's strong power; As for food metaphor. We can see the endearment terms of female or male(such as honey) are used in our daily life. Gender is a social concept which involves not only the social expectations towards male and female but also how male and female understand themselves. Though female's equal social status as male is strongly advocated. We can see sexism existed in gender metaphor. Then, The most important part is the pragmatic functions of gender metaphor. Cognitive pragmatics studies relations between cognition

and communication. From Aristotle through to modern semioticians, all theories of communication are generally based on code model. Of course, There is another theory—inferential model. And based on these theory, we study three functions: The referential function in gender metaphor. Such function can refer to females’ beauty, weakness or males’ vigor; The politeness function in gender metaphor express females’ ignorance, superficiality or males’ mania; And the inferential function in gender metaphor infer to females’/males’ appearance feature through metaphorical objects’ appearance features or females’/males’ characteristics by metaphorical objects’ character.

2. The Relevant Research of Gender Metaphor in the Foreign Countries and China

Metaphor begins its history since the ancient time. Aristotle regards metaphor as “fancy language” used by poets, nice, but not necessary. He appears to classify metaphors as lying outside normal language use. He explained the quality and function of metaphor and laid a foundation to the development of metaphor in the rhetorical field. In the 1930s, Richards proposed his theory of “interaction” which was later developed by Max Black. It pointed that the metaphorical meaning is created by interaction between a metaphorical expression and the context in which it is used. In the 1960s, With the development of pragmatics theory, it has provided a pragmatic approach to metaphor interpretation. H.P. Grice’s Cooperative Principle Theory shows the effects in the identification of metaphors. From the point of view of modern linguistics, the western linguists show their real interest in gender metaphor until the sixties in the 20th century when the feminism and sociolinguistics were risen. This period is marked that the development of research of western linguistic sexism begins from scatter to system. The studies of gender metaphor begin at feminist campaign which started from the 1970s in the western countries. They hold the idea that language reflects man’s power and women’s status in society. Their questions are about gender differences in language use and the origin of gender metaphor in English language. Of course, The reason why gender prejudice existed in language is also considered. And the study of gender metaphors has been a major concern in the fields of pragmatics, communication and sociology. And feminist linguists have found that the images presented in metaphor in different context reflect a stereotypical world. These language present images of female in a depreciative way.

The metaphor study in China can be traced back to Pre-Qin dynasty. Mozi regarded metaphor as a figure of speech. Because of the influence of history and culture, No one paid more attention to gender metaphor until 1990s. With the development of cognitive researches on metaphor in the west, many scholars are beginning to absorb the new thoughts and turned their eyes to its properties. It began with Liu Ningsheng’s selective translation of Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* in 1992. After that, Many linguists begin to take a deep research about gender metaphor such as Sun Rujian’s *Gender and Language* in 1997s. Shu Dingfang’s *Studies on Metaphor*(2000). Hu Zhuanglin’s *Metaphor and Cognition*(2004). Nowadays, Many Chinese scholars began to search on the unique characteristics of metaphors in Chinese by applying the western theories. After that, Gender metaphor has become a necessary part not only in metaphor but also in linguistic sexism.

3. The Classification of Gender Metaphor

We classify gender metaphor in three types: animal metaphor, plant metaphor and food metaphor. The relationship between human beings and animal/plant/food can be seen in the following diagram: A(target) is B (source). (Here a dotted arrow is used, because B is just mapped onto A, They have no direct contact with each other)

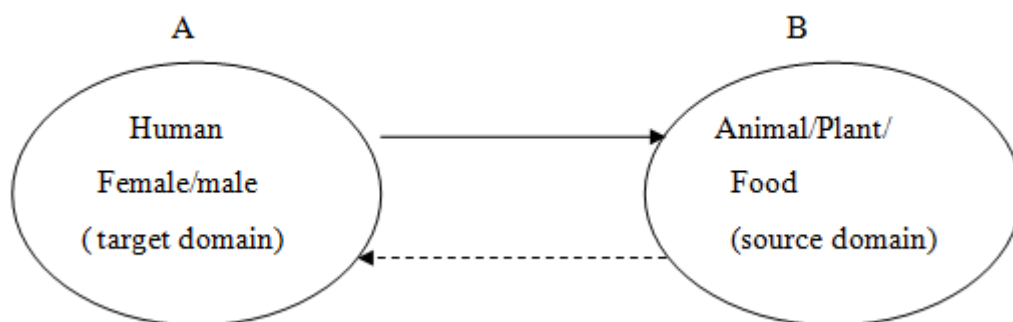


Figure 1: Human domain Mapping into animal, plant and food domain

Create some kind of relations between These creatures have their own human beings and other things appearances and characters that are similar to human beings

Animal metaphor belongs to ontological metaphor which use the entity words to express abstract concept. In another way, Animal is used to pointed to human for there is a certain similarity between animal and human beings. Animal is always human being's partner which was known by human beings. And some of them have unique and distinct features, which is also used to point to a person who has the similar features. Thus, such kind of animal has the connotative meaning which formed animal metaphor. And animal metaphor is used to point to uglify, depreciate the female or praise the male. Let's see some examples:

Eg1. Mary is a bitch.

We can clearly see the relationship between bitch and Mary (human). Some of bitch's features mapping onto the human's character. The animal's behaviors and characters lead an important role in metaphor.

Let's look at Table 1 to know the similar features of bitch and a woman. Animal is used to pointed to human for there is a certain similarity between them. Animal are mapped onto human. We can see A are mapped onto B.(A①→B①, A②→B②, A③→B③, A④→B④)

Table 1 Features of bitch mapping onto the human's character

Bitch	Source domain(bitch)	Target domain(She)
Appearance	The baring of teeth	Aggressive act
Behavior	Like following	Follow somebody
Character	Fight with each other	Merciless competition
Sound	Harsh sound	Say in an unkind way

Bitch refer to a female dog in old times, now it is generally used to abuse female. It means that a woman who behaves in a very mean or unkind way. The American linguist Alleen Pace Nilsen once said:"People is cautious to call a female dog bitch in Contemporary American English for they feel that they nearly abuse that female dog"(Nilsen 67). Even, bitch is very sensitive word so that it is not used to point to a dog now . The great depreciation in this metaphor can be seen.

Eg2. "Snake" in metaphor.

Snake is a long, thin reptile without legs. Snake's religion meaning lead a dominant position in metaphor. Snake occurred in the bible which represents "evil", for it induce Eva eat the apple in the forbidden tree and for that human being are expelled from the Garden of Eden and fall into the hell. The connotative meaning of snake is represent that a woman who seduce people to corruption and evil.

People have a close contact with plant in the world, they find some of plants' characteristics are similar to human or other things' features. Plant words meaning was projected onto the other objects through metaphor. Then one concept can be transferred to another. Plant metaphor means that the appearances and characteristics of plant are endowed with human beings. Many flowers are known as their beautiful appearance and fragrance and trees are known as their powerful strength. Plant is used to point to a females' beauty or praise a male's strong power.

Most of the flowers are very beautiful in the world. So, many female's name come from the implied meaning (beauty) of flowers in English such as "Lily, Rose, Flora, Michelle, Violet, Jasmine, Laura, Daisy" and so on. People hope the girl is the same beautiful as flower. Of course, there are many other metaphorical mapping in plant words. "Daisy" can be used to point a top-ranking person. And "Seed" refers to "Seed player". These words have strong power and they hope a male or female has a brilliant character and strong will. Let's look at another examples:

Eg1. Rose: In ancient Greek mythology, Rose is born in sea by the goddess of love and beauty and daughter of Zeus named Aphrodite (Venus in Roman mythology). The foam in Aphrodite's body become the beautiful flower rose. Thus, Rose become the symbol of love and beauty in ancient Greek even in the whole European country. "Rosebud" pointed to a beautiful girl. Because of the influence of culture, the connotative meaning of rose was created.

Eg2. Lilies: It symbolize the queen of the Olympian gods—Juno or Virgin Mary. It implied to a pure person. Lilies are always white and white is also seen as the symbol of purity. "as white as lily" means the people who is pure just like lilies. "Lilies and roses" refers to a female's beautiful appearance. Lilies beauty pointed to a females' beautiful appearance.

Food metaphor is used to signify a female or a female's endearment terms. A female or male is taken as delicious food with an obvious depreciate meaning. We can see it from the word "dear". A female can call a male "dear" in condition that she is senior to the hearer, or the hearer is her husband or her close friend. However males can call anybody "dear" except the female who is more authoritative than him. It can be analysed from the following concrete examples:

Eg1. Honey: It is a sweet food that is made by bees. Now, it is used as a sign of affection to a male or female. Sweet has the same connotative meaning just like honey. Sweet is a kind of sugar and it is also an endearment terms of human.

Eg2. Cherry: It is a small, round fruit with red skins. It is used to pointed a girl who is virgin and pure.

4. The Pragmatic Functions of Gender Metaphor

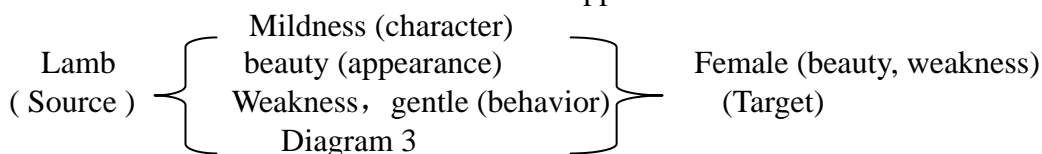
Pragmatics, a new subfield of linguistics, deals with particular utterances in particular situations and is especially concerned with the various ways in which the many social contexts of language performances can influence interpretation. This paper mainly studies pragmatic functions of gender metaphor. We study three functions: The referential function, the politeness function and the inferential function in gender metaphor.

Language has meaning when it is in use, which is based on human cognition to the world. Meaning is determined by reference according to certain context, so there exists a pragmatic relation among reference, meaning and context.

4.1 Referring to Females' Beauty or Weakness

In metaphor, the source domain is projected onto the target domain. What we means is that we use one thing to refer to another. Let's see some examples:

In animal metaphor, these animals (such as Lamb bunny, chick, dove, bird and so on.) give people a lovely, mild feeling. Such of these animals are pointed to human beings. (Diagram 3) Lamb's some characters and behaviors are mapped onto a female's character.



We take "doll" as another example, the original meaning of doll is that a child's toy in the shape of a person. However, with the development of language, this word is degraded as same as mistress in the 16th century. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary, doll has another two connotative meaning: The first one (informal, derogatory) means that a pretty young lady whose appearance is very attractive but her mind is empty. The second one (The slang is disrespect to female) is used to describe a pretty or attractive woman. Obviously, Doll has become the pronoun of

pretty lady who is wrap up by beautiful clothes and brainless just like a marionette. In western countries, The praise words are different because of sex. Males are praised by these words such as great, able, aggressive, ambitious, successful, strong, open-minded and so on. While adorable, gentle, charming, lovely, pretty, considerate, and beautiful are used to describe females.

4.2 Referring to males’ vigor

Eg1. Jack is a lion.

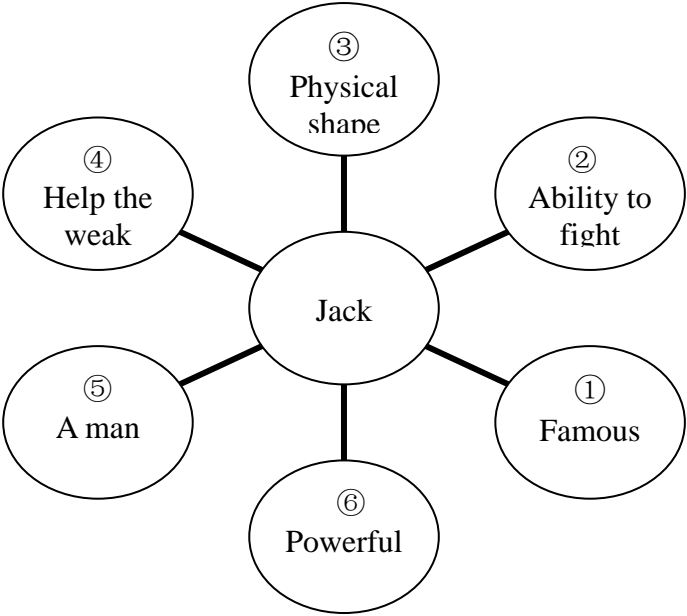


Fig. 2 Features of Jack

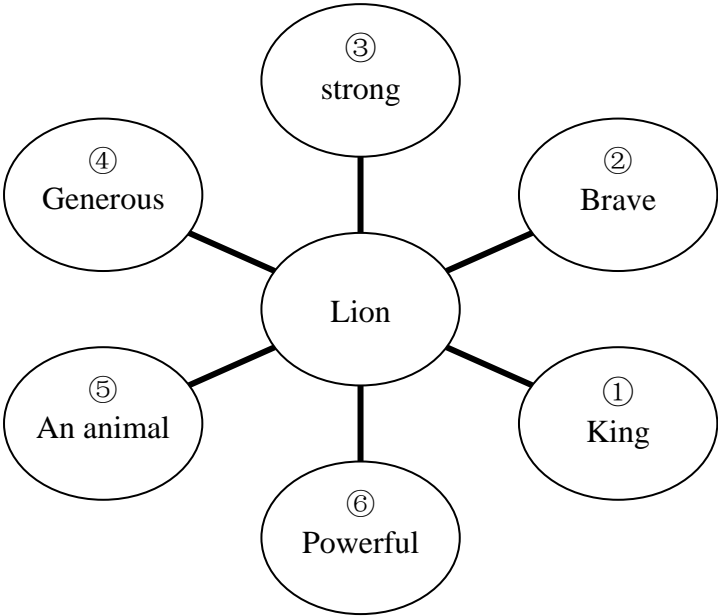


Fig. 3: Features of lion

From Fig. 2 and Fig. 3. We can see: Jack (A) is a lion (B). Animal’s appearance (strong) or characters (brave, generous, powerful) project onto human beings’ features.

Linguistic politeness exists in all languages including in gender metaphor. Politeness considerations regulate every human speaker’s verbal behavior in social interaction.

4.2.1 Expressing Females’ Ignorance or Superficiality in a Polite Way

Brown and Levinson (1978) put forward an important theory on politeness which is known as

the Face Theory (He 83-84). They put forward two kinds of “face”: negative face and positive face. They propose five politeness strategies available to speakers to perform a face-threatening act (FTA) which including Positive politeness and negative politeness and other three strategies. We mainly say the negative politeness in gender metaphor.

We take “nag” as an example. The denotative meaning of “nag” is an old horse, the connotative meaning of “nag” refers to a woman who annoy people or bother persistently with trivial. In fact, we call a female “nag” is a kind of negative politeness, we express females’ ignorance or superficiality not in a rude way but a polite way.

“Vine” is a plant that grows up or over things, especially one that produce grapes ”Clinging vine” means a woman who displays excessive emotional dependence on a man. We call a female “vine” is a kind of negative politeness, we express females’ superficiality.

4.2.2 Expressing Males’ Mania in a Polite Way

Leech’s politeness Principle can be formulated in a general way from two aspects: To minimize, other things being equal, the expression of impolite beliefs and maximize, other things being equal, the expression of polite beliefs(Leech 86). We take “bull” as an example:

“Bull” means a man who is clumsy and rude. Maybe we think that bull has strength. It was considered as a commendatory term. In fact, Its implied meaning has a depreciation meaning, This gender metaphor is just using a polite way to show males’ mania.

4.3 The Inferential Function in Gender Metaphor

4.3.1 Inferring to females’/males’ appearance feature through metaphorical objects’ appearance features

For every conversational implicature, it is possible to make an argument like that given by Grice in the earlier discussion on the process of generating implicature. With the literal meaning or sense of utterance on the one hand, and the cooperative principle and the maxims on the other, it follows that an addressee would make the inference in question to preserve the assumption of cooperation.(Levinson 117)

There exists implied meaning that needs the hearer to explore in gender metaphor. We can see the examples from table 2 to know connotative meaning of animals, flowers and food in detailed.

Table 2 connotative meaning of animals, flowers and food

Origin	Animal(source)	Connotative meaning(target)
Animal’s appearance,	Bat	Ugly woman
	Bird	Beautiful girl
	Elephant	A man who is very strong and tall
	Bunny	Beautiful and lovely girl; hooker
Plant / food appearance	Rose	Beautiful and lovely girl
	Lilies	A girl who has beautiful appearance
	Peach	A woman who has white skin and red face
	Cherry	A girl who is pure

4.3.2 Inferring to females’/ males’ characteristics or behavior by metaphorical objects’ character

Metaphorical thinking transcends other modes of thinking in that it captures the inherent properties of the object of cognition so that a holistic understanding is possible. We must pay more attention to the metaphorical objects’ characteristics, because that is why metaphorical objects’ were mapped onto the tenor. Let’s see table 3 and find features are projected onto human such as sourness; braveness; laziness.

Table 3: connotative meaning of animals, flowers and food

Origin	Animal(source)	Connotative meaning(target)
Animal's/Plant Character	Vixen	Sourness
	Lion	A man who is generous, brave
	Gull	Cheating; a street girl in fleet of army and navy
	Sow	lazy, untidy and fatter woman
	Crone	Old lady
	bud	A young girl who begin her rise to fame
Animal's behavior	Hen	Chatty, gossip monger
	Eagle	A person who are good at noticing
	Nag	A nagging woman
Others (culture, religion, history)	Vampire	A woman who seduce and bring about man to disaster
	Snake	A woman who seduce people to corruption and evil

5. Conclusion

In this paper, Gender metaphor pay more attention to sex, it hold the idea that language reflects men's power and women's social status in society. We mainly explore the classification of gender metaphor. There are three kind of types: animal metaphor, plant metaphor and food metaphor. Gender is a social concept which involves not only the social expectations towards male and female but also how male and female understand themselves. And we can see sexism existed in gender metaphor. Then, The most important part is the pragmatic function of gender metaphor. Pragmatics is the study of the use of context to make inference about meaning. So, We can use some of pragmatic function in gender metaphor to know the different between two sexes. We study three functions: The referential function in gender metaphor. Such function refers to females' beauty, weakness or males' vigor; The politeness function express females' ignorance, superficiality or males' mania; And the inferential function infer to females' appearance feature through tenor's appearance features or males' characteristics or behavior by metaphorical objects' character. We find that sexism is obviously existed in language (especially in metaphor) by study gender metaphor. So, A good understanding of gender metaphor can help people find a better way to deal with sexism in English Language. And, Based on such a large number of examples, It is easier to explore the origin of reason why linguistic sexism existed. And, the sexism in English Language can be eliminated and we can see a better future when male and female are equals. Language is a kind of art, it has many rules an principles. Pragmatics help people to keep a better conversation. And by study the pragmatic functions of gender metaphor, we not only know better about gender metaphor, but also master the real purpose of what the speaker want to say and gain a better communication effect so that the speaker can hold themselves in a correct way and reach a better communication results.

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