

Conceptual Metaphor of Poverty in Mandarin and English: A contrastive corpus study

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Abstract

Poverty has been a problem existed in the world for a long time. However, people around the world have different perception toward poverty and thus express this concept in very different ways. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the variation of the ways people perceive and conceptualize poverty in American English and Taiwanese Mandarin. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) was applied to analyze the data retrieved from Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese for Taiwanese Mandarin and Corpus of Contemporary American English for American English respectively.

The research findings show that more than half of conceptual metaphors are shared in Mandarin and English, such as, POVERTY IS ILLNESS, POVERTY IS HUMAN. However, POVERTY IS FLUID only occurred in English and POVERTY IS EVENT only in Mandarin. Although both language share some similar conceptual metaphors, there still existed some differences among them when examined from the dimensions of metaphor variation (Kövecses, 2007). Poverty can be an enemy that people need to fight against in Mandarin and English while it can only be a visitor in English. The results of this study might offer help for people in the process of understanding metaphorical expression in Mandarin and English and provide opportunity for people to get familiar with the cultures of both languages.

Keywords: poverty metaphor, conceptual metaphor, variation in metaphor, corpus, cultural differences

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