CSCanada
Studies in Literature and Language
Vol. 11, No. 3, 2015, pp. 52-56
DOI:10.3968/7513

ISSN 1923-1555[Print]
ISSN 1923-1563[Online]
www.cscanada.net
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The Explanatory Power of Conceptual Integration Theory for English Proverbs

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Supported by Scientific Research Foundation of Binzhou University (NO. BZXYRW1014).

Received 7 June 2015; accepted 2 August 2015
Published online 26 September 2015

Abstract
English proverbs are the crystallization of westerners' wisdom and the accumulation of western culture. They have been essential windows for us to know western cultures. With the development of cognitive linguistics, Gilles Fauconnier put forward conceptual integration theory based on mental space theory. The new theory has a whole system of operating mechanism. This is a tentative study that focuses on analyzing the meaning construction and cognitive mechanism of understanding English proverbs through conceptual integration theory. It attempts to prove the mighty explanatory power of conceptual integration theory for English proverbs and also make contributions to English proverbs study.

Key words: Conceptual integration theory; English proverb; Explanatory power

Yang. Y. X. (2015). The Explanatory Power of Conceptual Integration Theory for English Proverbs. *Studies in Literature and Language, 11*(3), 52-56. Available from: http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/7513
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7513

INTRODUCTION
English proverbs, one of the most important parts in English and western culture, are created by the masses and are the outcome of daily experience. Their contents are concerned with the nature of economy, philosophy, sentiment, class and epoch, etc.. So, they have long been justifiably entitled a highly condensed encyclopedia of a nation and its culture. English proverbs are so essential in language and culture that they have attracted many scholars' attention both at home and abroad. Influenced by traditional linguistics and structural linguistics, researches on English proverbs were mainly carried on from the perspective of syntactic features, figure of speech, culture, contrastive study and translation. Some foreign scholars have done researches from the point of cognitive linguistics, such as Honeck (1984, 1997), Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Coulson (1995).

Conceptual Integration Theory, one of the latest linguistic theories in the western cognitive linguistic field, is a further development of Fauconnier's Mental Space Theory. It was brought forward by Fauconnier and Turner in the 1990s. "It plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, in the arts and sciences, in the technological development, and in religious thinking" (Fauconnier, 2003, p.2). This paper is attempting to prove whether conceptual integration theory has explanatory power for English proverbs and to reveal the process of understanding English proverbs.

1. CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION THEORY
Conceptual integration theory is based on the studies of Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Mental Space Theory by Fauconnier (1985, 1994). Conceptual integration occurs during on-line dynamic construction of meaning. It operates according to a set of principles. Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002) illustrate the principles of the network model of conceptual integration through many examples, such as the Buddhist monk, the debate with Kant, the skiing waiter, etc.. A basic network model of conceptual integration contains four mental spaces: two input spaces, one generic space and one blended space (blend). There is a cross-space mapping between these two spaces. The

cross-space mapping connects counterparts in two input spaces and creates a more abstract and schematic structure which is common to both input spaces. This is called generic space. The blended space arises by selective projection from the input spaces. It develops emergent structure in various ways and operates according to its own logic. The following figure is the network model of conceptual integration.

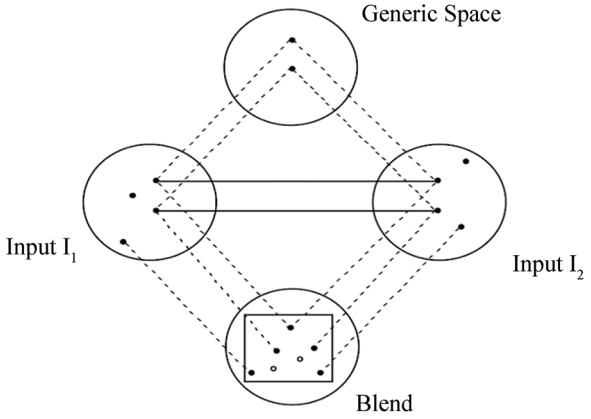

Figure 1
Basic Diagram of Conceptual Integration

Conceptual integration is a theoretical framework for exploring human information integration. It involves a set of operations for combining dynamic cognitive models in a network of mental spaces. Generally speaking, there are four types of conceptual integration networks: simplex network, mirror network, single-scope network and double-scope network.

Simplex network is a basic and simple network. In this network, human cultural and biological history has provided an effective frame that can be applied to certain kinds of elements as values. The blend integrates the frame and the values in the simplest way. The frame is in one input space and some of its elements are in the other input space. The cross-space mapping is a frame-to-values connection. The frame in one input is compatible with the elements of the other. So, there is no clash between the input spaces.

Compared with simplex networks, mirror networks are a little more complex. "A mirror network is an integration network in which all spaces—inputs, generic, and blend—share an organizing frame" (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, p.122). All the spaces share an organizing frame, but the blended space has a richer frame than other spaces. An organizing frame provides a set of organizing relations among the elements in the space it organizes. So, there are no clashes between the input spaces at the level of organizing frame and there are clashes at the sublevel of organizing frame.

Single-scope network is an extension of the mirror network. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002, p.126), "A single-scope network has two input spaces with different organizing frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend. Its defining property is that the organizing frame of the blend is an extension of the organizing frame of one of the inputs but not the other". That is, there are two separate organizing frames contained in the input spaces, but only one is projected to the blend as its organizing frame.

Double-scope network is the most complicated one of four networks. Different from single-scope network, double-scope network shares topology networks assign organizing frames of two input spaces to the blend. "A double-scope network has inputs with different (and often clashing) organizing frames as well as an organizing frame for the blend that includes parts of each of those frames and has emergent structure of its own" (Fauconnier & Turner, 200, p.131). In double-scope networks, both organizing frames provide elements to the blend, and the two input spaces usually have different or even clashing organizing frames. Therefore, there will be clashes between the organizing frames. However, instead of preventing the construction of blending network, such clashes can challenge people's imagination and the blends become highly creative. With great imagination, human can run the blend in a creative way.

2. THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION THEORY FOR ENGLISH PROVERBS

Proverbs are omnipresent and have many sources, ranging from dictionaries, textbooks, literature works to web pages, newspapers and even some advertisements. The proverbs used in this paper are mainly from two books on proverbs, one by Wang and Cai (2001) and the other one by Chen (2007). And other proverbs are gathered from Chapter Four: The Great Chain of Being in *More than Cool Reason* by Lakoff and Turner (1989).

2.1 Simplex Network and English Proverbs

Simplex network is a basic and simple conceptual integration network. In this network, there are two inputs, a generic space and a blended one. The frame is in one input space and some of its elements are in the other input space. The cross-space mapping is a frame-to-values connection. The blend integrates the frame and the values in the simplest way. There is no clash between the input spaces.

Now consider this following English proverb: Failure is the mother of success. In this proverb, there are only two elements: failure and success. Their relationship is mother and child. In input space 1, there is a frame of human kinship: mother and child. And in input space 2, there are two elements: failure and success. After reading or hearing this proverb, the receiver creates a blend in which the mother-and-child frame is integrated with the elements failure and success. The cross-space mapping

between the input spaces is a frame-to-values connection. There is no clash between the input spaces.

It is very obvious that the relationship mother-and-child is that of human beings. Failure and success are abstract concepts rather than human beings. So they in fact have been endowed with some features of human beings, or they are compared to human beings. As for human beings, mother conceives and gives birth to a child. For these two elements, failure can also conceive and give birth to success. The same relationship makes the cross-space mapping between input 1 and input 2 possible.

2.2 Mirror Network and English Proverbs

Mirror network is a little more complex than simplex network. In a mirror network, there are four spaces and all the spaces share one organizing frame. This type of network is a relatively standard one of conceptual integration networks. The organizing frame provides a set of organizing relations among the elements in the space. The cross-space mappings between the two inputs can easily be put into correspondence since all mental spaces share the same organizing frame. Moreover, there are no clashes between the input spaces at the level of organizing frame and there may be clashes at the sublevel of organizing frame.

Now consider the following English proverb: Big thunder, little rain. In this proverb, it concerns a particular natural phenomenon with two sub-events: thunder and rain. There are at least two causally related natural events in a thunderstorm: the thunder and the rainstorm. Usually, thunder precedes the rain and suggests the coming of rain. The magnitude of the thunder indicates the magnitude of the rainstorm. But it is an unusual case: After a lot of thunder, there is little rain. The literal meaning of the proverb is that the force of rain is much less than people would expect according to the force of the thunder. This is also the content of input 1. Proverbs concern general issues about the nature of human beings and situations they encounter. In input 2, it is behavior of human beings. As for behavior of human beings, there are two casually related actions in one human behavior. The first one precedes the second one and typically the magnitude of the first indicates the magnitude of the second. But in this case, the force of the second is much less than people could expect according to the force of the first. So both input spaces have the same organizing frame: two things, sequence, general rule and unexpected result.

It is not hard to find that all the spaces share a rich event frame, which involves "two things, sequence, indication and unexpected result" as demonstrated in the generic space. Since the two input spaces have the same organizing frame "there is an unexpected result according to the indication", they share much of the content and the elements of the two inputs can be easily put into correspondence. In blended space, some elements from input 1 are fused with the elements from input 2. That is, the element of "thunder and rain" from mental space of thunderstorm and "two actions" from mental space of human's behavior. Thus, the first step of conceptual integration COMPOSITION is finished. From the basic knowledge, it can be known that the magnitude of thunder usually indicates the magnitude of rain according to the natural rules. Here is the unexpected result. And it is combined with the new condition of human's actions. The second stage of conceptual integration COMPLETION is accomplished. Then the background knowledge mixes with the new elements in the blended space and the emergent structure is formed that "there is unexpected result after the normal indication of two things in cause-effect relation". This is the last step ELABORATION of conceptual integration.

2.3 Single-Scope Network and English Proverbs

Single-scope network is an extension of the mirror network. It has two input spaces with different organizing frames, one of which is projected to organize the blend. In a single-scope network, there are two separate organizing frames in the input spaces, but only one is projected to the blend as its organizing frame. Hence, the projection to the blend in a single-scope is highly asymmetric. Since the input spaces have different frames, there are conceptual clashes in single-scope networks. The analysis of the following English proverb may demonstrate the features of this type of conceptual integration network.

Now consider the following English proverb: Lawyers, like painters, can easily change white into black. Usually a lawyer is rare to be associated with a painter, but in this proverb lawyers are considered to be like painters. It seems that there is no difference between being a lawyer and being a painter. How these two distinct images are connected and how to understand this proverb will be analyzed in virtue of the conceptual integration theory, by which a series of cognitive processes are unfolded in the single-scope network.

There are four mental spaces: two input spaces, one generic space and one blended space. The organizing frame in input 1 is a frame of "painter", in which such elements as painter, paper, palette, easel, watercolor, brush, painting skill and painting, changing color are contained. And input 2 includes a frame of "lawyer", in which elements like lawyer, case, client, proof, eloquence, arguing, changing adjudge and legal costs are involved. The generic space is "agent, material, skill, action and result", which provide a basis for the cross-space mapping between the two input spaces and the subsequent selective projection from the input spaces into the blended space. That is, the element "painter" is corresponding to "lawyer", "watercolor" to "proof", "painting skill" to "arguing skill", "painting" to "arguing" and "changing color" to "changing adjudge". But some elements such as palette,

easel in input 1 and client, legal costs in input 2 do not have corresponding counterparts and are excluded from the subsequent projection. Hence, the new relations are established. The first step COMPOSITION of conceptual integration is completed. The two elements "painter" and "lawyer" activate the background knowledge and provide some associations between these two images, which play an important role in the second step COMPLETION of conceptual integration. Usually a lawyer is considered to abide by constitution and laws, defend for his clients based on facts or proof with his own business ethnics. The lawyer, as a spokesman for his client, must stick to the position which can not be changed as he wishes. However, in western countries there are some lawyers who can change the judgment as he wishes. That is, whether the client can win or not depends on the lawyer based on the same facts or proof. So, some lawyers are skillful enough to change win into lose in a lawsuit. There are many proverbs about this such as "A lawyer and a wagon wheel must be well greased." "A lawsuit is a fruit tree planted in a lawyer's garden." "A lawyer's opinion is worth nothing unless paid for." In this point, a lawyer is compared to a painter, who can change the color at will. The new relations of the first step and the basic knowledge from the second one are projected into the blended space to bring the second step COMPLETION to end. The third step ELABORATION in the blended space, in which "lawyer" is regarded to be equal to "painter". The meaning of this proverb is that a lawyer changes his argument from case to case.

2.4 Double-Scope Network and English Proverbs

According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), a double-scope network has inputs with different (and often clashing) organizing frames as well as an organizing frame for the blend that includes parts of each of those frames and has emergent structure of its own. In such networks, both organizing frames provide elements to the blend, and the great differences offer the possibility of rich clashes. The clashes can make the blends become highly creative. With great imagination, the blend can be operated in a creative way.

Now consider the following English proverb: A bad workman always blames his tools. This proverb is about a bad workman and his tools. As a bad workman, he must be incapable and his workmanship must be inferior. So he can not complete his work well and achieve his goal successfully. In this case, he should accept his own incapability and learn how to improve his workmanship to complete his work. However, he tries to pass the buck and blame his tools for the failure rather than his own incapability.

Here, in this network, two input spaces are set up. One input space is about "a bad workman" (input 2), by which the frame of "a bad-workman" is set up. In this input space, such elements as workman, incapability, tools, work and failure are included. In the other input space, there is a frame about "blame" (input 1). In this frame, such elements as something (usually bad) happens, one person, criticize/find fault with, other person or something responsible for it is involved. Elements in generic space which are shared by the input spaces are reason, agent and patient. This makes the cross-space mapping between the input spaces possible. This relationship between the input spaces is set up, so the first step COMPOSITION of conceptual integration is completed. At the same time, frames of input spaces activate the basic knowledge about these things. The corresponding counterparts and some of the elements are excluded in the subsequent projections. The projection of partial structures and some elements from the input spaces as well as the basic knowledge brings the second step COMPLETION of conceptual integration to end. At the last step ELABORATION of conceptual integration, some elements are fused in the blended space, and some are not. At last, the partial projection from the input spaces forms a new structure in the blended space: after failure, the incapable workman with criticizing his tools, which he believes is responsible for his failure, rather than his own incapability. This is the third step of conceptual integration. The whole process of understanding this proverb can be shown in the following figure.

CONCLUSION

English proverb is one of the most important parts of western culture and has attracted many scholars' attention both at home and abroad. As the core of Conceptual integration theory, conceptual integration networks have four kinds of sub-networks: simplex networks, mirror networks, single-scope networks and double-scope networks. This paper gives a relatively detailed description of each network and interprets English proverbs from the perspective of conceptual integration theory. The mighty explanatory power of conceptual integration theory is shown in the process of understanding English proverbs.

The data are collected from books about English proverbs. Theoretical analysis and qualitative study are adopted as research methodology. In case study, some selected English proverbs are interpreted in the frame of conceptual integration theory. Although the four-space model, cross-space mapping, partial selection and emergent structure are involved in all conceptual integration, they do have different features in different networks. The detailed descriptions of the process of understanding English proverbs reveal how people interpret English proverbs in the frame of conceptual integration theory and show the mighty explanatory power of conceptual integration theory for the English proverbs.

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