

A Corpus-Based Study of Conceptual Metaphor—On Chinese English Learners' Use of “Wind”

Pei Ding

School of English Studies, Shanghai Industry & Commerce Foreign Languages College, Shanghai, China
Email: dingpeih@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Ding, P. (2021). A Corpus-Based Study of Conceptual Metaphor—On Chinese English Learners' Use of “Wind”. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, 448-455.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.910031>

Received: September 22, 2021

Accepted: October 26, 2021

Published: October 29, 2021

Abstract

This article is intended to analyze Chinese English learners' use of “wind” and compare it with the use of “wind” by English speakers. Similarities and differences of conceptual metaphor of the two “winds” are analyzed. The main research method is to use corpus: COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and CLEC (Chinese learners in the Chinese Learner English Corpus). Besides, qualitative method is involved in the analysis and discussion. The research found that there are both similarities and differences in conceptual metaphor of “wind” by English speakers and “wind” by Chinese English learners, due to both positive and negative transfer from “feng” in Chinese to “wind” in English. This research is aimed at giving a better understanding of conceptual metaphor of vocabulary and suggesting some effective strategies in foreign language vocabulary teaching.

Keywords

Wind, Feng, Conceptual Metaphor, Vocabulary Learning, Transfer

1. Introduction

Does our language reflect our cognition, or how we see this world? This question has attracted many linguists, philosophers, anthropologists and psychologists, who have tried to find the answer. Many scholars have conducted deep research on this subject and created different theory systems, one of which is linguistic relativity. The most representative and influential scholars on linguistic relativity are Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, whose thought are called Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. However, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was criticized at that time, especially after the middle of the 20th century, when Chomsky's un-

iversalism became the mainstream in linguistics study field until 1990s (Zhang, 2013).

Over the last three decades, with the rising of cognitive linguistics, scholars have become interested in linguistic relativity again. Among the representatives of the cognitive linguists are Lakoff, Langacker, Talmy and so on. They are trying to understand the construction of language as conceptual content organization, from the perspective of human's cognition mechanism. Among all the theories, conceptual metaphor is one of the hottest topics in studying how we understand the relations between language and mind (Steen, 2011).

According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980) in their publication "Metaphors we live by", "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities."

Human's body is the first entity realized and known by the human beings. Therefore, humans reflect the world through our body (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). For example, in English there is "at foot of the mountain", which is equivalent to shan (mountain) jiao (foot) in Chinese. Therefore, human's thought and cognition are reflected in our language. Though human's language is a relatively independent system, it's influenced and restrained by our brain, eyes and other organs. Therefore, the world is personalized and nature is the stigma of human body (Wang, 2006).

The center of language is vocabulary. There have been a lot of researches on conceptual metaphor of vocabulary, such as human body, time and space, color and so on. However, there are few studies on natural phenomena, among which wind is the most familiar to almost all humans.

"Wind" is experienced by both Western and Eastern people; studies on how wind is cognized by people with different languages help us understand relations between language and mind. Discussions on "wind" and "feng" started early, but mainly from the cultural perspectives (Deignan, 2003; Zolnowska, 2011; Xia, 2014). And the contrastive studies have been mainly conducted qualitatively. In this article, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. In particular, this article made a comparison between "wind" from COCA and "wind" from CLEA, from which we could see the similarities and differences, as well as how Chinese English learners transfer concept of "feng" to concept of "wind". Finally, the article is expected to give some implications for vocabulary learning and teaching.

2. Research Design

In this article, two corpora are used: COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and CLEC (Chinese learners in the Chinese Learner English Corpus).

We made a contrastive analysis about the similarities and differences between “wind” used by Chinese English learners and “wind” by English speakers.

2.1. Research Questions

Question 1: Are there any similarities or differences of conceptual metaphor between “wind” from CLEC and “wind” from COCA? If any, what are the reasons?

Question 2: What are the similarities and differences of conceptual metaphor between “wind” in English and “feng” in Chinese?

Question 3: Do Chinese learners transfer conceptual metaphor of “feng” to “wind”, ignoring the differences? If so, how to minimize negative transfer in vocabulary learning or translation?

2.2. Research Method

1) Comparative study. Comparing is a basic method of studying and understanding objects, and also a basic method in linguistics study. In this research, we made a comparison between “wind” used by Chinese English learners and “wind” used by English local speakers.

2) Quantitative study and qualitative study. Though qualitative analysis can describe and explain the inner law of language, and can explain some linguistics phenomena, it's hardly convincing without quantitative study. In this article, corpus is used and analyzed. Besides, we searched in 8 dictionaries to improve research credibility.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.1. Analysis on Conceptual Metaphor of “Wind” Used by Chinese English Learners

We searched “wind” in CLEC and found 90 results. In these examples, 72 items are used in its literal meaning (e.g. sky is blue and no wind); 1 example is a proper noun, the name of a painting; 17 items are usage of metaphor:

More details of metaphor of wind are listed as follows in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Frequencies of Wind's Conceptual Metaphor in CLEC.

Meaning	Collocates	Frequency
Gone	Gone	7
Speed	Appear, pass	4
Cause	And	2
Danger	Off, against	2
Popular	Have	1
Style	In	1

3.2 Analysis on Conceptual Metaphor of “wind” in English Corpus

We searched “wind” in COCA and randomly selected 93 items. In these 93 ex-

amples, 64 items are used in its literal meaning; 29 items are usage of metaphor: More details of metaphor of wind are listed as follows in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Frequencies of wind's conceptual metaphor from COCA.

Meaning	Collocates	Frequency
Danger	From	7
Trend	In	6
Gone	With	4
News	Come	3
Popular	In	2
Speed	Pass	2
Difficulty	Against	2
Instrument	String	2
Stomach	Throat	1

As we can see from Table 1 and Table 2, there are both similarities and differences between “wind” used by Chinese English learners and “wind” by English local speakers:

1) Similarities. From the charts above, we can see that “winds” both mean gone, speed, danger, and popular. It's worth mentioning that in CLEA, all the items of “wind” with the meaning of nothing are “gone with the wind”. It's noted that “Gone with the wind” is both a famous literal works mentioned in the chapter of American history China's history textbooks and a recommended film by English teachers. It's reasonably speculated that the usage is influenced by the learning context of Chinese English learners.

2) Differences. In CLEA, “wind” also means “cause” and “style”; while in COCA, “wind” also means “trend”, “news”, “difficulty”, “instrument” and “stomach” in addition.

3.3. Analysis on Meanings in Dictionaries

We searched “wind” and “feng” in 4 dictionaries respectively:

Table 3. “Wind” in eight dictionaries.

Type	Dictionary	Explanations:
Chinese-Chinese	The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary	1. 跟地面大致平行的空气流动的现象, 是由于气压分布不均匀而产生的; 2. 借风力吹干的; 3. 像风那样快; 4. 风气, 风俗; 5. 景象; 6. 态度, 姿态; 7. 风声, 消息; 8. 传说的, 没有确实根据的; 9. 中医指一种致病的重要因素或某些疾病。
	Xinhua Chinese Dictionary	1. 空气流动形成的自然现象。多指空气与地球表面大致平行的自然运动; 2. 景色, 景致; 3. 风气, 风尚, 习俗; 4. 消息; 5. 男女之间的情爱; 5. 风度, 作风; 6. 传闻, 没有确实根据的消息; 7. 放荡; 8. 中医。通常与其他病结合后发病。
English-English	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English	Air; breath in; your stomach; talk
	The Pocket Oxford Dictionary	1. air in natural motion. 2. a breath, esp. as needed in exercise or playing a wind instrument. 3. empty talk. 4. gas generated in the bowels etc. 5. wind instruments of an orchestra etc. 6. scent carried by the wind.

Continued

Chinese-English A Modern Chinese-English Dictionary	1. wind: a gust of wind/起~了. 2. practice; custom; tendency: 此~不可长. This tendency is not to be encouraged. 3. scene; view: 风光. 4. style; attitude: 文风. 5. news; information.
A Chinese-English Dictionary for Foreign Learners	1. (空气流动) wind:-小了. The wind is falling. 2. (比喻态度) style; practice; custom: 台~不正 unhealthy style of performance 3. (消息) news: information: 闻~而动 act without delay upon hearing the news
English-Chinese Cobuild English-Chinese Dictionary	1. A wind is a current of air that is moving across the earth's surface; 2. You can refer in a literary way to something that influences events as a wind of some kind; 3. Your wind is your ability to breathe easily. You can lose your wind when you do something physically energetic. 4. Wind is the air that you sometimes swallow with food or drink, or gas that is produced in your intestines, which causes an uncomfortable feeling: a fairly informal use. (引起腹胀的)肠气. 5. The wind section of an orchestra or band is the group of people who produce musical sounds by blowing into their Instruments. (管弦乐队或乐队的)管乐部. 6. If you refer to what someone says as wind, you mean that it is foolish or meaning less; an informal use. 蠢话; 空谈. 7. When someone breaks wind, they release air from their intestines through their anus, a rather formal expression[正式]放屁. 8. The word wind is also used in the following expressions. 亦用于下列词组: If someone who is intending to do something gets the wind, they become very afraid, usually with the result that they decide not to do it after all an informal expression. [俗]变得十分害怕 (而放弃原来的打算)
Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary	1. a current of air moving approximately horizontally, especially one strong enough to be felt 风; 气流; 2. Breath 呼吸. 3. Bowels 肠子.

From **Table 3**, we can see that there are following similarities and differences between “feng” in Chinese and “wind” in English.

1) Similarities.

Humans have the same organs, facing the similar realities, with similar cognition means. Therefore, different peoples have plenty of similar expressions in the languages. Wind is the natural phenomenon that exists objectively in the earth, and people living in two different environments share the experience and cognition towards wind, thus resulting in similar conceptual metaphor of wind (Xia, 2014).

a) Wind is reflected based on its invisibility. Therefore, people use wind to describe invisible objects. Wind means news, unverified words or spreading of news. Wind is a natural phenomenon caused by air flowing. Wind is invisible, untouchable and untraceable. However, people can experience and feel wind using our sensory organs. The invisibility of wind and its fast speed is similar with news, especially the news without precise source. Therefore, both in English and Chinese, wind and feng refer to secret news. For example:

I don't want the public, and especially not the press, to get wind of it at this stage.

如果有什么消息出来,你一定要先给我通风报信。(If any news comes out, you must inform me first.)

b) Wind is caused by air currents. Therefore, flowing is the biggest property of wind. The flow of wind makes it exert speed. Therefore, in daily life, people use wind to express the speed of objects' movement or development. Therefore, in both English and Chinese, wind/feng means speed, change or trends. For example:

He walked away as fast as a gust of wind.

风驰电掣(as fast as wind and lightening)

c) In both English and Chinese, wind could mean both positive and negative power. Wind also means negative energy such as danger or difficult. For example:

野火烧不尽,春风吹又生。(No prairie fire can burn the grass utterly. The spring wind blows it back to life again.)

When the wind is in the West, Then it's at its very best.

风险(risk)

Sail close to the wind

2) Differences

a) Chinese medicine. The most obvious difference is that in Chinese, feng is closely related with diseases.

b) Character or spirit. In Chinese, feng also means a style of a person's behavior. For example: 作风(style of work)

c) Direction. In English, wind means swirling or moving.

d) Difference of categorization. There is another difference. As to the force of wind, the categorization is different. In Chinese, the force of feng is indicated by a character added before feng. While in English, "wind" with different force would be totally different words as seen in **Table 4**.

Table 4. A Comparison between scale of "feng" and "wind".

light	Air	软风 (ruan feng)
Light	breeze	轻风 (qing feng)
Gentle	Breeze	微风 (wei feng)
Moderate	Breeze	和风 (he feng)
Fresh	Breeze	清风 (qing feng)
Strong	Breeze	强风 (qiang feng)
Moderate	Gale	疾风 (ji feng)
fresh	Gale	大风 (da feng)
Strong	Gale	烈风 (lie feng)
Whole	Gale	狂风 (kuang feng)
-	Strom	暴风 (bao feng)
-	Hurricane	飓风 (ju feng)

4. Discussion

From the tables and analysis above, we can see that conceptual metaphor of "wind" used by Chinese English learners is more closed to "feng" in Chinese than "wind" in COCA.

"Cause" and "style" are from the conceptual metaphor of "feng" in Chinese; besides, conceptual metaphor of "wind" by Chinese English learners, "speed",

“danger” and “popular”, are the same with conceptual metaphor of “feng”. However, it’s obvious that “feng” also means “news” in Chinese but wind is not used as news in CLEA.

On one hand, Chinese learners make positive transfer of “feng” in Chinese to “wind” in English consciously or unconsciously; on the other hand, Chinese learners neglect the similarities and differences of conceptual metaphor of “wind” and “feng”. For example, wind is not taught so as news in English classes that Chinese learners didn’t relate “wind” to “news” in their mind or language.

5. Conclusion

This article made a comparison between “wind” used by Chinese English learners and “wind” used by English speakers. Additionally, a comparison between “feng” in Chinese and “wind” in English was conducted. From the two comparisons, it can be seen that Chinese English learners not only make positive but also negative transfer when learning L2 vocabulary.

The contrastive study of wind/feng could have influences in the following aspects: Firstly, the study is meaningful to dictionary editing. Dictionaries are one of the most important learning tools. In this article, the research result of 8 dictionaries indicates that the metaphor meanings are incomplete; in the bilingual dictionaries, the meanings do not correspond to each other. Secondly, the research is of significance to cross-cultural communication. Speakers should have a knowledge of social and cultural background. Thirdly, it is important to translation and interpretation studies. Last but not least, the study is enlightening to vocabulary teaching and learning. From the analysis, we can see that “feng” and “wind” are not completely equivalent in the cognitive level. English-English explanation is necessary to minimize or avoid negative transfer. In both foreign language teaching and teaching Chinese as a foreign language, metaphor ability should be taught to students.

However, there is still plenty of research to do in order to get a more convincing conclusion. For example, as regards to the word “wind” and “feng”, the verb phrases are to be discussed, as well as other synonyms such as breeze, gale, storm, hurricane. Besides, psychological experiments could be designed and conducted to verify the conceptual metaphor transfer of vocabulary.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Deignan, A. (2003). Metaphorical Expressions and Culture: An Indirect Link. *Metaphor and Symbol, No. 18*, 257. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327868MS1804_3
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live by* (p. 4). The University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *The Philosophy in the Flesh*. Basic Books.

- Steen, G. (2011). The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor: Now New and Improved. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 9, 43. <https://doi.org/10.1075/rcl.9.1.03ste>
- Wang, Y. (2006). *Cognitive Linguistics*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Xia, L. (2014). *A Contrastive Study of Conceptual Metaphor of "Wind" in English and "Feng" in Chinese*. Central China Normal University.
- Zhang, H. P. (2013). *A Corpus-Based Study of Conceptual Transfer in Chinese Learners' English*. Northeast Normal University.
- Zolnowska, I. (2011). Weather as the Source Domain for Metaphorical Expressions. *Avant: Journal of Philosophical-Interdisciplinary Vanguard*.