

ABSTRACT

Background: A linguistic analysis of the emotional expressions of anger, happiness and romantic love in Standardised Chinese, as spoken in Taiwan was undertaken. It was hypothesised that: I. Comparable conceptual metaphors and cognitive models to those identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) and Kövecses (1986, 1989, 1990), also exist in Chinese; II. Multiple prototypical cognitive models for the conceptualisation of each emotion are demonstrable; III. Conceptual metaphors and their cognitive models have universal features which are related to physiological bases of emotional expression. Moreover, culturally specific features are the product of an interaction between human biology and social factors; IV. Moderating social factors influence the complexity of the emotion's structure; V. Social and cultural dynamics, from a diachronic point of view, are shared by various societies at different points in time; VI. Demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level, will not have any significant impact upon the use of metaphor and metonymy. Furthermore, place of residency and second language should not contaminate the data, given that the experimental subjects moved to their respective countries in adulthood; VII. There will be evidence to support a weak form of the Whorfian Hypothesis, where existing concepts guide or motivate the emergence of new concepts. **Method:** Subjects from Chinese speaking communities in Taiwan and the United States of America were interviewed using a survey method; each was required to report in writing their recent or most memorable angry and happy experiences, and a personal definition of romantic love in Chinese. Each narration was coded according to metonymy, metaphor and related concepts, as described by Lakoff and Johnson (*ibid*), Lakoff and Kövecses (*ibid*) and Kövecses (*ibid*). Frequencies for each metonymy and metaphor were compared, and the length of each narration was measured using linguistic units (Johnson, 1970) for each emotion. **Results:** Major metonymies and metaphors categorised for each emotion were found to be similar to those used in English. These similarities were largely orientational and to a lesser extent ontological in nature; while the majority of differences were found amongst the structural metaphors. Major metaphors for anger and happiness had an orientational and ontological reference, while romantic love was structural. The cognitive models which underlie each emotion included more than one prototype: They either described various aspects or stages of the emotion in question, or diachronically speaking, old conceptualisations that were in the process of being superseded by newer ones. The impetus for the preferences for certain models was determined by the state of social development for each respective speech community. **Conclusion:** In order to explore the emotion concepts across cultures it is judicious to examine each of the conceptual metaphors and cognitive models that relate to the emotional language in question. Thus, not all concepts of emotion are structured similarly, and, by inference, emotions in turn are much more than mere biological processes. Their conceptualisation constitutes specific cultural and social knowledge, from a Whorfian perspective. Therefore, similarities found in cross-cultural data are determined by a shared biology and synchronous exposure to evolving cultural and social environments.