Abstract

This exercise is a case study of the contemporary theory of metaphor as applied in the Chinese context. It attempts to demonstrate that the cultural construct of love, as manifested in the lyrics of Mandarin popular music, is largely a matter of metaphor. Through an examination of conceptual metaphors and their cognitive motivations latent in a large corpus of song lyrics, it will be shown that romantic love is anything but a literal reality, and that the modes of discourse and reasoning involved are, by and large, shaped by metaphors in our cognition.

In the tradition of Lakoff & Johnson, metaphorical instantiations in lyric texts are identified and divided by virtue of their nature into three categories, which are then analysed along the dual lines of form and content. Roughly speaking, the myriad forms which romantic love assumes are primarily delineated by ontological metaphors (where a non-entity becomes an entity), mainly the dominant CONTAINER metaphor as well as the ENTITY metaphor. Within the context of the former, orientational metaphors (mainly up-down metaphors) are found to dictate the directional aspect of love. On the other hand, the inner process and texture of love are carved out under the structural metaphor, which links two conceptual domains through a process of mapping. These include the EVENT metaphor, JOURNEY metaphor, TRANSACTION metaphor, LEARNING metaphor and BODY metaphor.

The kaleidoscopic variations of the LOVE metaphor testify to its multifaceted nature. However, general patterns do exist across metaphorical categories, primarily with respect to the aspects of spatiality, temporality and quality as constructed in the conceptual domain of love. Cognitively speaking, space is a very basic source domain in the metaphorization of love. As will be shown, the ways with which we describe love are frequently engaged in spatial terms, thus conforming to Lakoff's Spatialization of Form Hypothesis. The temporal nature of love is conceptualised not as a continuum, but as a characteristically discrete one. One important manifestation of this is the use of grammatical state classifiers in lyric texts, which exemplifies the fact that LOVE is
perceived as independent and time-limited occurrences on the temporal landscape. Lastly, a general negative quality seems to be associated with love in Chinese lyric texts. Under the working of several metaphors, the experience of love seems to be conceived of as a complex state of tension between the sexes, in which its participants are, paradoxically, both active and passive subjects with respect to the state of love.

As a discourse analysis in popular culture, this paper demonstrates that a large part of what we commonly accept as "love" is not naturally emerging in our culture but metaphorically and cognitively construed. On the other hand, as a textual study of Chinese data, this study can be seen as part of a contribution to the contemporary theory of metaphor from the standpoint of Chinese, with the aim toward placing the theory into a wider cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspective.