

The Cognitive Metaphor of the Merchant of Venice

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Abstract

As one of the representative of Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice is a ironical comedy appeared in many textbooks. The theme of the drama is to advocate love and friendship, at the same time it reflect the conflict between the early bourgeois class and the usurer. In order to build up more vivid characters in the comedy, the author uses many metaphors. Through the interpretation of the cognitive metaphors, the reader can construct the deep meaning in the works.

Keywords

Cognitive Metaphor; The Merchant of Venice; Metaphorical background; Metaphorical patterns.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, with the rapid development of cognitive science and cognitive linguistics, there has been an obvious "cognitive turn" in the field of literary research. More and more scholars begin to use the theory of cognitive linguistics to study and analyze literary texts. Cognitive linguists focus on the cognitive structure and process of language analysis or language form selection, especially on the basic relationship between literature reading and general cognition, starting from the cognitive effect of language selection and language model. They regard the method of clear and detailed language analysis as traditional literature, which is the same as the cognitive structure and process hidden under the production and acceptance of language. The systematic theoretical thinking of the treatment is combined to provide a more systematic and detailed description for literary discourse and its interpretation. Among many theories of cognitive linguistics, the most commonly used one is the theory of cognitive metaphor. According to the theory of cognitive metaphor, metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a common cognitive means and way of thinking. Metaphor is ubiquitous in daily life, not only in language, but also in people's thinking and action. The daily conceptual system we rely on for thinking and action is also metaphorical in nature.

The article was based on the theory of cognitive metaphor, try to build up the conceptual meaning and thematic meaning of the drama, and lead the reader to understand the deep meaning of the cognitive metaphor.

2. THE METAPHORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or expression normally used one kind of object, action etc is extended to another. The frequent use of metaphor arouse much attention from both the researchers and the readers, which makes the characters in the drama more vividly and the article more colorful, and also deepen the implications. There are so many rhetorical devices in The Merchant of Venice that the readers much analyze them more carefully in order

to grasp the whole meaning expressed in the drama. Most domestic experts pay much attention to the translation of them rather than the deep study of the rhetorical meaning existing in the drama.

3. METAPHORICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

There are many metaphors in the drama. For example, in Act I Scene I, Antonio compares himself as a sad part in a play.

I hold the world but as the world Gratiano,
A stage, where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one. (1.1 77-79)

From this stanza, we can see Antonio's pessimistic view towards the world, maybe one reason is the worry towards the ships on the sea, or maybe because his best friend is going to get married. It is clearly seen that the hero in the drama is not a very active person. Comparingly, Gratiano plays the opposite role, we can see this point from the following stanza,

Let me play the fool,
With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come,
And let my liver rather heat with wine,
Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
Why should a man whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire, cut in alabaster?
Sleep when he wakes? and creep into the jaundice
By being peevish? I tell thee what Antonio,
I love thee, and it is my love that speaks: (1.1 80-88)

Here we can see Gratiano is the true friend of Antonio, when he feels the sad atmosphere in Antonio's body, he tries his best to wake him up, make him happy. And also told him what kind of persons is a true friend. It is not the persons who always like to keep quiet, but the persons who like to show other people the true feelings. The metaphor "clown" is just the opposite towards the "sad one". Everyday different people are acting different roles on the different stages, people don't know which character is more suitable for him or her. They don't know if they have played a good part, but they are always trying their best. This metaphor can be a conceptual metaphor.

Conceptual metaphor is different from the metaphor we says always, and it is very summarized. Its main characteristics is its systematicness, summarization, and productivity. For example, Argument is war. This conceptual metaphor, which is summarized form many daily conversations. From this metaphor, we can get many similar metaphors. For example, Your claims are indefensible, and He attacked every weak point in my argument, His criticism was right on the target. These expressions are metaphorical forms in daily conversation. They are from "Argument is war". So we can say conceptual metaphor is a more summarized working concept.

Gratiano is a very talkative person, just like Bassanio says about him
Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man
in all Venice, his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in
two bushels of chaff: you shall seek all day ere you find them,
and when you have them they are not worth the search. (1.1 115-118)

Though what Gratiano says is very reasonable, in other persons' eyes what he says is not quite valuable because he says too much. Here, the author uses a simile, "his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you shall seek all day ere you find them", which is just like a sentence in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, It doesn't taste good. It's a pity to throw it away. It's a metaphor that there's not much need for things to go on, so I'm reluctant to let go. Also describes dilemma, indecision, helpless. Talkative person sometimes is very welcome by many people. However, every coins have two sides. If you talk a very simple reason too much, and every person can understand that, at that time you are a annoying one.

In Act I Scene I, Bassanio says,
 In my school days, when I had lost one shaft
 I shot his fellow of the selfsame flight
 The selfsame way, with more advised watch
 To find the other forth, and by adventuring both,
 I oft found both, I urge this childhood proof,
 Because what follows is pure innocence.
 I owe you much, and like a wilful youth,
 That which I owe is lost: but if you please
 To shoot another arrow that self way
 Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
 As I will watch the aim, or to find both,
 Or bring your latter hazard back again,
 And thankfully rest debtor for the first. (1.1 140-152)

From the metaphor we can see clearly Bassanio's attitude towards the money he borrowed from Antonio. Bassanio had borrowed money from Antonio one time, in his way, it is just like lost one shaft when shot first time. Because Bassanio has strong dignity, so he is embarrassed to say that his money has been squandered. When he want to borrow the money for the second time, he says it is like "shoot another arrow that selfway which you shoot the first", which means he will do the same something quite like the first time .And he is sure that he will return the money at least the money he borrowed the second time. The author compare borrowing money from other people with shooting, because shooting in the western country is a very ordianry activity. Borrowing money from other people and shooting has a lot of similarities. Doing businesses is a risky thing. Sometimes you can earn money, however, sometimes you will lose a lot of money. In that way it is quite natural for Antonio to understand the thing of not returning money. And people can also see the close relationship between Bassanio and Antonio. Antonio says "You know me well, and herein spend but time to wind about my love with circumstances, And out of doubt you do me now more wrong in making question of my uttermost than if you had made waste of all I have". Some scholars say they two have homosexuality. No judgement is made here. But we can see the feelings between the two people is quite deep, which can transcend everything.

In Act I Scene, Antonio wants to borrow money from Shylock, Shylock told a story about earning interests when borrow money,

When Laban and himself were compromis'd
 That all the earnings which were streak'd and pied
 Should fall as Jacob's hire, the ewes being rank,
 In end of Autumn turned to the rams,
 And when the work of generation was

Between these woolly breeders in the act,
 The skilful shepherd pill'd me certain wands,
 And in the doing of the deed of kind,
 He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,
 Who then conceiving, did in eaning time
 Fall parti-colour'd lambs, and those were Jacob's.
 This was a way to thrive, and he was blest:
 And thrift is blessing if men steal it not (1.3 76-88)

For modern people, it is quite natural to get interests when we lend money to other people. Nevertheless Antonio doesn't get any interests when he lend money to other people. So we consider Shylock as a man who is greedy for money. In fact it is quite unequal for him to be treated as a Jew. At that time, Jews were looked down upon very deeply. It is known that his daughter gave up being a Jew, and elope with Lorenzo. This thing hurt Shylock a lot. There is contradiction between the economic power that the Jews have in fact mastered and the political power that he has not enjoyed before. When he climbed up the road of capitalism, he could not help but feel painfully that the national identity of "Jew" was too heavy a burden for him. What is all this for? I am a Jew. Shylock set foot in the court of Venice with such a gesture of discriminated and persecuted Jews. So when he wanted the pound of meat determinately, it become quite understandable. Although Shylock's idea of getting a higher position in political field failed, and he dissipate his fortune because of having indirect attempts to seek the life of Antonio. The cleverness of Jews can also be seen. Because Jews don't want to be assimilated, so they are usually scattered around the country, which become a good condition to be a businessman. So we know there are many rich businessman who are Jews. Maybe more space should be given to the Jews.

At last, Shylock confront Antonio in the court, Shylock says
 What would thou have a serpent sting thee twice? Antonio answers
 I pray you think you question with the Jew:
 You may as well go stand upon the beach,
 And bid the main flood bate his usual height,
 You may as well use question with the wolf,
 Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb:
 You may as well forbid the mountain pines
 To wag their high tips, and to make no noise
 When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven:
 You may as well do any thing most hard,
 And seek to soften that, than which what's harder:
 His Jewish heart. Therefore I do beseech you
 Make no more offers, use no farther means,
 But with all brief and plain conveniency
 Let me have judgement, and the Jew his will. (4.1 71-85)

In this dialogue, Shylock compare Antonio as the serpent. In this metaphor, the source field is serpent, and the target field is Antonio. As is known to all, serpents are very dangerous animal in the wild field. Most people can't live if bitten by the serpents, and from this metaphor we know how much Shylock hates Antonio. Following this metaphor, there are also some metaphors which are quite similar with the previous one. For example, Antonio thinks arguing

with Shylock is like ordering the flood lower the sea water height. It is impossible to happen. Similar metaphors include questioning the wolf why he has made the ewe bleat for the lamb. Here people can see Shylock has the stone heart.

4. CONCLUSION

From the study of metaphor in the language of *The Merchant of Venice*, we can find that metaphor is actually a method system of cognitive world. This paper analyzes the emotions or themes they want to express through the metaphorical patterns in the speech of several characters in *The Merchant of Venice*. Through the analysis and exploration of the metaphorical cognitive model, we can see the rich emotions and prominent personality of the characters.

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