Grief Metaphors with Low Conventionality and Sadness Intensity Evaluation in German Memorial Texts
– An empirical study from the perspective of cognitive semantics

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The inextricable bonding of emotion and cognition has been confirmed in the cognitive research and in the research of neuroscience and cognitive psychology as well (see Clark & Fiske 1982; Arnold 2011; Davidson et al. 2003; Manstead et al. 2004). As one of the most constructive apparatuses to articulate, to express and to recognize internal emotional state or process, language usages need to be taken into account. Schwarz-Friesel (2013: 69) claims that the verbal parameters for describing emotions incorporate Quality, Duration, and Intensity. And emotional intensity can be expressed by means of utterances respectively from lexical, semantic and syntactic levels (e.g., rhetorical figures, etc.).

Metaphor, as a non-literal linguistic expression, is frequently uttered in memorial texts, while emotions, primarily the grief feelings, would be expressed either with higher or lower intensity. For instance, extremely different levels of sadness intensity will be implied among the german expressions such as "voller Trauer (Eng. full of sadness)", "Trauerwelle (Eng. sadness wave)" and "Tonnen von Trauer (Eng. tons of sadness)" etc.

Bowdle & Gentner (2005) proposed that metaphor will depend both on their degree of conventionality and on their linguistic form. The Conventionality of metaphorical usage refers to the manner in which a metaphor is comprehended. According to the level of conventionality Skirl & Schwarz-Friesel (2013) classified then metaphors into five categories: dead metaphors, lexicalized metaphors, cliched metaphors, creative metaphors, and innovative metaphors.

In terms of discourse constructions, metaphor of higher degree of conventionality has a more solid structure, while metaphor of higher degree of conventionality has no fixed semantic or syntactic structure, and in extreme cases neither the tenor nor the vehicle of rhetorical figure appears in the novel metaphors. Werkman-Horvat et al. (2022) have then tried to illuminate the comprehension process from the perspective of Two types of metaphorical novelty: high-conforming and low-conforming.

In order to clarify a neuropsychological processing system of comprehension of Chinese metaphors, Wang et al. (2020) constructed the Conventionality-oriented Progressive Hierarchy (CPH) Model. They pointed out that "processing non-literal language constructs with lower conventionality needs more involvement of the right hemisphere of the brain (e.g., right hippocampus, right amygdala, right insula, and right precuneus)". And the higher the degree of metaphorical conventionality, the easier the processing. Liu (2022) used a neuroimaging-based activation likelihood assessment (ALE) method to investigate the mechanism of novelty's influence on metaphor processing and found that conventional metaphors activated only the left hemisphere, while novel metaphors activated both hemispheres.

In order to investigate the correlation between conventionality degree and affective intensity of metaphors, this corpus-based qualitative study established a database of corpora, which are comprised of condolence and memorial texts within in past 10 years (2011-2021) in different types of discourses, such as mass media texts, SNS-posting and individual comments in forum.

The collected and registered corpora are classified into different groups in accordance with various research requirements and purposes.

After comparing the corpora, it was found out that high-conventional metaphor dominates a relatively fixed form. Simultaneously, the emotion intensity with a lower degree emerges from the syntactic structure. In other words, low-conventional metaphors not only highlighted the speaker's stronger emotional attitude, but also tried to stimulate the hearer's emotion and meet their emotional resonance. The conventionality degree of sadness metaphors can be seen as the grief evaluation measurement.

Furthermore, after comparing with high-conventional metaphors, low-conventional metaphors for negative emotions such as "sadness" can demonstrate the speaker's grief for the loved ones who passed away more than high-conventional metaphors. In a word, the research reveals that the conventionality degree of metaphorical language is negatively correlated with the emotion intensity.

In addition, metaphorical expressions of high degree of conventionality can be categorized as emotion-denoted metaphors, i.e., they are intended to refer to a certain emotional category. On the other hand, metaphors of lower degree of conventionality, can be described as emotion-loaded metaphors, which aim to highlight the speaker's personal emotional attitudes and mental processes (see Jin 2019).

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