

Similarity, Metaphor and Creativity

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Abstract

In the traditional study of metaphor, conventional or creative, everyday or literary, scholars are simply interested in the existent metaphorical expressions, those they can directly find in oral or written texts. Even when they are talking about creative metaphors or creativity in metaphorical thinking, they usually base their discussion on instances they collected from various sources. In our study, we are more concerned with the potential similarity-based relations which, when combined with proper conditions, are likely to become real metaphorical expressions. As the core of metaphor and also our discussion, similarity plays a leading role. Nobody can deny the existence of similarity in metaphor, though there are disputes that arise from the different properties of similarity, i.e., piecemeal similarity or structural similarity. Similarity does not simply exist in metaphor, it is pervasive in our perception of the world. Any two things, as long as they are perceived to be related to each other, must be based on certain kind of similarity. Explicit or easily detected similarities are easier to be turned into metaphors and be widely accepted as conventional ones, while implicit or vaguely represented similarities are usually beyond the reach of the mental faculties of most people, so more difficult to become metaphors. Similarities which are in line with conventional cognitive structures are more advantageous than those that go against these conventions. But it is those similarities that are implicit, vaguely perceived, context-specific, opposite to conventional cognition, that demonstrate the true value of creativity and novelty.

Keywords: metaphor, similarity, creativity, convention

1. The Pervasiveness of Similarity between Things

“Similarity is generally viewed as cognitively fundamental” (Hodgetts et al., 2009, p. 62), because metaphor, the most important research area in cognitive linguistics, has long been

believed to be based on similarity, and quite a lot of major psychological or cognitive processes, such as categorization, reasoning, induction, mapping, blending, priming effects, also have much to do with similarity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Turner, 1989; Indurkha, 1992; Goatly, 1997; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

Before we dwell on a cognitive exploration of similarity, it is necessary to contemplate it in light of more general relations in the world, the mind, and the relationship between world and mind. The reason why we get away for a while from the central research area of cognitive linguistics is that we want to show that similarity is the fundamental way things are related, and the way we human being are able to know the world.

According to Goodman (1972), similarity exists between any two entities, because, theoretically speaking, any two things share an infinite number of properties as long as one tries to find all of them out. For example, although a *cat* and a *chair* seem quite dissimilar, we can still find they share such properties as “weighs less than three tones”, “weights less than 4 tonnes”, etc. (Hodgetts et al., 2009, p. 62) However, if we specify in what aspects we are considering the similarities between certain two entities, there would be possibly only few similarities or no similarities at all. Here is a question involving *possibility* and *reality*. In terms of possibility, any two things may contain countless similar properties; in terms of reality, in which specific contextual factors exist and serve as constraints for selecting possible similar properties, similarity between two things might be totally absent. Reality seems to be composed of distinct things with distinct properties so that things can be easily distinguished from one another. We can not understand one thing without considering its relation to other things which contain quite different properties. The same is true for understanding ourselves, the self, a special kind of thing. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), a 20th-century Russian philosopher and linguist, we are always in need of others in order to evaluate our own existence and construct a self-image, and we know nothing about ourselves if we do not look through the screen of the other’s soul. So, we get to know one thing, one person, even oneself in light of knowing other things or other people. This is what happens in reality with things and people set apart with their distinct properties, but in the meanwhile we can not deny the fact that beneath any two things or people there are always some common properties that await being uncovered. Differences are more easily perceived and necessary for individual categorization, while similarities are the glue that sticks diverse categorizations together to form another category at a superordinate level.

Goodman (1972)’s view of similarity is of a psychological nature, that is, he does not care about “the physical properties of the objects per se but the relationship between the *mental representations* of objects” (Hodgetts et al., 2009, p. 62). This is quite important for the understanding of similarity, because similarity can be said to be nonexistent if people do not process objects in the form of mental representations; the outside world can only be perceived and understood when our mental faculty is in full swing. Although Wenbin Wang (2006) classifies similarity in metaphor into two types, i.e., physical similarity and mental similarity, the former being limited in number and easily perceived

while the latter suggesting limitless possibilities, it is doubtful how physical similarity can exist if there is no mental mechanism involved. The physical similarity suggests our brain can process it with less effort, while the mental similarity requires some mental effort, and in some cases even with the greatest mental effort some potential similarities can not be uncovered. Just think about *paper* and *computer*, which do not seem to have physical similarity. But if we think a bit more we would find that both *paper* and *computer* are concrete things, and can be used for recording information, keeping messages for ever, erasing the information that has already been put in, etc. For another example, are there any similar properties between *love* and *stone*, with one abstract, emotional, and the other concrete, visual? The absence of physical similarity only indicates that we cannot or cannot easily figure out their common features as reflected in our mental representation. But they do have something in common. For instance, some particular kind of *love* can hardly be forgotten or erased from memory, thus bearing a feature of stiffness or hardness, which is similar to the property of *stone*.

Although scholars have long paid much attention to the study of similarity, their research is to a large extent “restricted in scope by the fact that they define similarity over very specific—and very simple—kinds of representation: points in space or feature sets” (Hahn et al., 2003, p. 2). In theorizing about similarity, two classical approaches are quite prominent: *the contrast model*, proposed by Tversky (1977), which renders similarity as being composed of common and distinctive features of the things under comparison, and *the spatial account*, proposed by Shepard (1957), which takes distance in a psychological space as a parameter for representing similarity. The contrast model is mainly concerned with physical and prominent similarities, disregarding less prominent and potential similarities, thus having limited explanatory power. The spatial model gets into the psychological sphere, tackling the mental connection strength between entities. This is the right way to measuring and understanding similarity in depth, but unfortunately the spatial model neglects dealing with complex entity relations and still rely on piecemeal similarities. It is only when the role of structure in similarity begins to catch people’s attention (Gentner & Markman, 1997; Goldstone, 1994; Hahn et al., 2003; Markman, 1997) that the scope of researching similarity has been enlarged to the greatest extent.

There are two major structural similarity models: the Structural Alignment model (Gentner & Markman, 1997) and the Transformational (or Representational Distortion) model (Markman & Gentner, 1993). The importance of the Structural Alignment model does not simply lie in the fact that it deals with the corresponding elements of items in comparison, but, what is more important is that even when there is no piecemeal similarity two entities may still reflect a match at a structural level. This is of great theoretical significance, for even when similarities in specific elements between two entities can not be found, it is still possible to secure a structural match at a higher-than-element level. The Transformational model holds that “the similarity between representations is determined by transformational distance... (which) refers to the complexity required to ‘distort’ the representation of one object into the representation of another... The simpler

this transformation is, the more similar the objects are deemed to be” (Hodgetts et al., 2009, p. 64). This implies that if the transformation is complex enough, there would always be a possibility of getting two entities connected with certain similar features.

We may now put forth a strong hypothesis: with similarity as a psychological concept, any two things in the world may contain certain common properties, which can be easily perceived or hard perceived or even never uncovered. To admit this limitless possibility can do much good to the cultivation of a creative mind, to turn something (seemingly) impossible into possible.

2. Similarity at the Core of Metaphor

Similarity in metaphorical structuring is indispensable; if there is no any similarity between source domain and target domain, any metaphor would be unable to take shape (W. B. Wang, 2006, p. 125). But Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 113) suspect that no possible similarities are shared by the concepts that are oriented UP. And there is no any similarity between UP and HAPPINESS, HEALTH, CONTROL, and the like, or between IDEAS and FOOD. This claim should not be misunderstood as denying the use of similarity in metaphorical thinking. What they actually mean is that no obvious physical similarities between the two domains can be found and the weak homonymy view does not hold water by stating that “the various concepts expressed by a single word can in many cases be related by similarity” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 111-112), and such similarities are believed to be given. In the weak homonymy’s view, some concepts expressed by a single word may not rely on similarity for acquiring brand-new meaning. That is to say, the different meanings in homonymy may develop independently from each other, having nothing to do with each other. It is true that some homonymies belong to this case, such as *bank* (referring to an institution where people or businesses can keep their money, or a sloping land beside a body of water), which has two separate meanings and are not related to each other. As long as we can not find out why the two distinct meanings are expressed by a single word, we may simply take this homonymy as a coincidence if we do not want to think more about it. However, a simple comparison of the two meanings would readily reveal that they do share some properties, and one of them is of crucial importance for the meaning construction: both the money bank and the waterside bank can be vividly described as a stronghold which either keeps water or flood away, or keeps the unlawful people outside. If this stronghold feature was an inherent one on which the two meanings of bank were established, it is proved that the bank homonymy is also based on similarity, thus becoming a motivated homonymy instead of a coincidence. But if the stronghold feature is just a coincidence, and we have found it out, this would be a proof that we, as language users, can consciously and actively set up a link between two things.

Different from the *bank* instance, in some metaphors similarities can hardly be detected until the whole expression has been fully understood. For example (W. B. Wang, 2006, p. 126):

- (1) As he spoke, his face brightened as with a light turned on.
- (2) Pain and pleasure, like light and darkness, succeed each other.

There are countless ways for the face to become “bright” as a result of being affected by an outside illuminator, and the light is just one of them. But before the comparison is made between the brightness of face and the brightness of light in (1), the viewer can hardly notice this similarity. It seems that it is the addresser who intentionally and creatively brings the two images together. The same is true for (2), in which the pair of pain and pleasure is compared to the pair of light and darkness. This instance is more difficult to understand than (1), because this is not a simple comparison between two entities but two relations, i.e., “succeed each other”. Entities are relatively easy to notice, including most of the properties attached to them, for the fact that they can be directly perceived with our sense organs, while relations are abstract and implicit, and can only be secured with some or much mental effort, a result of higher and more complicated mental activities. (Liu, 2001) Many scholars have noticed this distinction and applied it to the classification of metaphor. Indurkha (1992, pp. 1-2) holds that there are three kinds of basic metaphors: conventional metaphor, similarity-based metaphor and similarity-creating metaphor. Considering conventional metaphor is also based on similarity, Dingfang Shu (2000, p. 15) simplifies the classification and proposes a dichotomy: similarity-based metaphor and similarity-creating metaphor.

The issue of metaphor creativity is always related to the creation of similarity. Black (1979) proposes that there may not be pre-existing similarities between the source domain and the target domain; it is the language user who, by making the best use of his mental faculty and initiative, creates certain similarities. This view has been supported by Forceville (1996) and Xiufeng Zhao (2011) in the study of multimodal texts. Is this case like setting up a bridge which did not exist before between two opposite banks? Our answer is no. Because for a new bridge, it is something constructed by people out of nothing; people just bring construction materials to the site and turn what was originally on the blueprint into reality. But for similarities in metaphor, they are always there awaiting people’s discovery; you can not create them, and you can only discover them, showing them directly or highlighting them.

Here is a terminology problem. “Create” seems to be a misleading term, because, according to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (New Edition, 2004), it means “to make something exist that did not exist before”. In line with this explanation, “similarity-creating metaphor” would suggest “making similarity exist that did not exist before”. Is it possible for us to create a metaphor where there is no similarity at all? If there is no similarity, how can two entities be connected and how can a metaphor be understood? When Wenbin Wang (2006, p. 126) explains Indurkha’s metaphor-creating metaphor, he tactfully avoids the misunderstanding that might be caused by the use of “create” by saying that metaphor-creating metaphor means: “at first sight a metaphor does

not contain similarity between the source and target domains; it is only when the metaphor is understood that similarity can be discovered". "At first sight" does not deny the existence of similarity; it just implies that if we are not careful enough we can hardly find out the similarity that was already there. Hiraga (1998) is one who is "not careful enough" to be unable to discover the potential similarity underlining metaphor, because he thinks that "the resemblance between source and target is created rather than given, i.e. even a priori dissimilar domains can be connected through metaphoric mappings" (Panther, 2014, p. 5). If Hiraga is to be believed to be right in this regard, his notion of similarity must be narrowed down to refer to physical entities and perceptible properties, but this cramped defining of similarity would undermine the basis of metaphor (that is, metaphor must be based on similarity), and cause further theoretical problems about metaphor. The best way of dealing with the instances used by Hiraga (1998) is the introduction of structural similarity which deals with similarity at a higher or more abstract level. (Markman & Gentner, 1993; Panther, 2014) But whatever similarity is defined, the absence of it would make it impossible to set up a link between a certain source domain and a certain target domain.

3. The Extent of Creating Metaphor

Since the 1970s, metaphor has been studied rather extensively in the field of cognitive linguistics and other related fields. But among these researches, scholars are mainly interested in the metaphor instances that can be found in oral or written texts, or they create metaphor instances that are in accordance with or at least close to people's general intuition. So the type of conventional metaphors plays a rather significant role in conceptual metaphor theorizing and the demonstration of the overwhelming power of metaphorical thinking. Scholars do take more and more interest in the study of novel or creative metaphors (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 53, in which *theories* are taken to be *patriarchs*¹), but two features of their study indicate a departure from our aim of research: the first feature is that mainly existing metaphor instances are used, and the second one is that these instances are all based on well-established conventional metaphorical patterns. This can be demonstrated even in the currently popular study of multimodal metaphors. According to Sweetser's (1977, p. 69) study of some Superbowl advertisements, as a multimodal text and mixture of various blends of frames, advertising design and understanding require both the viewers' and the advertisers' viewpoints, and these viewpoints must depend on pre-existing conventional metaphorical patterns. Just because the "ad viewers already have multiple highly conventional metaphoric blends at their disposal", some partially represented metaphors can be fully understood. And on the part of the skilled advertisers, who are "like good poets, can depend on pre-existing blend structures to build their intended blends", if no conventional metaphoric structures are used as a basis or background, no advertisement would make sense. However, in what follows, we would move gradually from existing, conventional metaphors or metaphoric

structures to non-existing but plausible instances in order to point out the endless possibility of metaphor creation.

3.1 From conventional to non-conventional metaphors

Just as what we have demonstrated, similarity, whether physical or psychological, is an indispensable factor that ensures the semantic connection between two entities. It is no wonder for physically or cognitively prominent similar properties in two entities to get in a metaphorical relation, as in the conceptual metaphor of TIME IS MONEY, in which the value property is quite easily captured in both domains, or in the specific metaphor of THE SKY IS CRYING, in which the falling of rain drops matches in image and motion direction, though in a highly exaggerated manner, that of the tear. But for some similarities which are hardly perceptible or do not exist in the physical form (but they do exist in the structural form), the addresser's motives and creativity must be called forth to activate and highlight the relation that once lay dormant or loosely connected. According to Jun Wang (2011, p. 50), "(t)he nature of the metaphorical process is simply the use of source-domain-specific words to highlight those elements in the target domain, which were originally less conspicuous or prominent". Before the use of words to highlight the target domain, the addresser must be able to detect the similar properties or structures, however weak or just faintly perceivable, in two entities in line with the addresser's motives and evaluation of the whole situation or context. The weaker the connection, the more creative the establishment of the metaphorical relation.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) classical approach to metaphor makes sense of the world from a similarity-based perspective, "without taking any interest into the generative mechanism...behind a good creative metaphor" (Gerdes, 2008, p. 120). This is what most of modern cognitive linguistics have been doing. Sweetser (1992, p. 707), however, adopts an experientialist's view, holding that "(t)he immense power of everyday cognitive structure, language, and thought is that they shape and frame all of our experience, pervasively. The immense power of artistic usages is that they can draw on these everyday structures to make us notice them and perceive them differently". Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) study the metaphors which were already there, well-established as a result of human being's cognitive activities, so their metaphors or conceptual metaphors are quite limited in number or can be exhausted in theory if people want to. However, Sweetser (1992) cares about the general cognitive faculty of human being and the vastness of human being's knowledge and practice about the world, and take all these as the grounding for human being's endless creativity. Against this background, we can confidently predict that we can set up metaphorical relations between any two entities.

Take LOVE for an example first.

LOVE as an abstract concept has been studied rather extensively in cognitive linguistics, and a lot of conventional conceptual metaphors have already been specified and acknowledged (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 85), such as:

LOVE is JOURNEY

A PHYSICAL FORCE

A PATIENT

MADNESS

MAGIC

WAR

....

It is nothing difficult to find out the similarities between the source and target domains in the above-mentioned conceptual metaphors, and these metaphors can often be found across cultures. This is a sign that shows that people experience love in more or less the same way. Although conventional metaphors are always based on specific or individual metaphors in specific contexts, it is not that every specific metaphor can turn into a general or conceptual one and then become widely accepted. The ultimate cause lies in the nature of context. Context, for the specific purpose of our consideration, can be divided into two types: *dynamic context* and *static context*. Dynamic context has no fixed state of existence; it is always changing. Every dynamic context is unique, just as what the philosophical proverb goes that nobody can step in the same river twice. There are countless number of dynamic contexts for the sake of ever-changing time, innumerable contextual components and componential relations. Static context, however, is a result of the mental abstraction of the ever-changing dynamic contexts. Though every dynamic context is unique, when different dynamic contexts share certain properties and such a thing happens again and again, people's cognitive mechanism tends to summarize and categorize these diverse contexts, and arrives at a relatively more general and stable context so as to fit more situations. As this process of categorization may not often happen, subject to the intent of the people involved, the lack of conspicuous common properties, the specialty of the situation, etc., most contexts would maintain their original state without being further generalized. For the case of metaphor, most metaphors would never have a chance to get generalized and become a certain conceptual metaphor. The metaphors accompanied by dynamic contexts are pervasive in our life, and we can create such metaphors at our own will without caring about whether other people share the same experience. Along this line, in imagined contexts, LOVE can be compared to anything from which similarity can be detected:

LOVE is STONE

COMPUTER

WIND

PAPER

COLOUR

RESEARCH

DREAM

METAPHOR

RAAM

...

We can imagine various specific situations in which we express the sense of love. If a person can hardly manage a certain love affair and want to forget it completely, he may “throw it away into a quite distant place and never want to get it back”. By thinking or saying so, he is comparing LOVE to a STONE (or other similar things that are useless and can be thrown away). If a person thinks that falling in love with somebody hoards quite a lot of sweet memories and in the meanwhile can cover, override or erase the bad memories, he is treating LOVE as a COMPUTER. LOVE can be compared to WIND, if one takes love as being soft, invisible, and it can sweep the heart bringing the feel of freshness and relaxation. LOVE is a piece of PAPER, whose original state is blank but gradually gathers more and more information imprinted on it. And one may draw a very beautiful picture on it, or may simply scrawl it, leaving a total mess. LOVE can be blue, yellow, red, purple, with each representing a distinct emotion or temperament. LOVE deserves much careful examination, evaluation, reasoning and judgments as what scholars do in RESEARCH. LOVE can be an illusion or DREAM for some miserable people; it seems to be in a certain place but is always beyond their reach. When LOVE and METAPHOR are related to each other, we can readily get the inspiration that in order to understand one’s beloved one, his/her feelings and emotions, his/her spouse’s role must be taken into account, because, according to the Russian philosopher and linguist Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogue theory (Bakhtin, 1981), in order to evaluate one’s own state of existence and construct a reasonable self-image, one must take others as a reference, that is, self can only be understood through others. This way of thinking is in accordance with Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980, p. 5) defining of metaphor, which says “(t)he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. At the end of randomly listing instances, we put LOVE and RaAM, a very specific event, together in order to reveal any similar properties or structural similarity. RaAM refers to Researching and Applying Metaphor, an international academic association that holds conferences every second year. The latest one, RaAM/12, was held in Hong Kong Polytechnic University on June 27-30, and the author took part in this event. How can LOVE, a general and abstract concept, be understood in terms of RaAM, a very specific event? First of all, it must be made clear that those who do not know or have never experienced this event have no way of setting up any meaningful relation between LOVE and RaAM. Secondly, RaAM can be perceived or understood in many different ways; it is an event in general, a specific event that took place in Hong Kong, an assembly of scholars interested in metaphor, a reunion of scholarly friends, a forum for exchanging academic views, etc. Every piece of thoughts about RaAM could contain some properties that are similar to those existent in LOVE, or the structure of a certain piece of thoughts is similar to that of LOVE. The experience of RaAM for an individual is new, and this new experience could shed some

light on the understanding of LOVE. LOVE is something that calls for continuous reflection and interpretation. Though there is a universally acknowledged definition of LOVE (in the dictionary or in the collective memory of people), for each individual LOVE can never be fully interpreted due to the ever-changing situation and personal experience. So it is no wonder that we can find out certain matches of similarity between LOVE and RaAM.

The list of metaphor about LOVE can go on and on, endlessly. While we are demonstrating the endlessness of creating LOVE metaphors, we should be aware that most such metaphors would probably never be able to be widely accepted as conceptual metaphors. The reason is that the similar properties contained in the source domains are only faintly perceivable and/or highly dependent on the interpreter's personal experience, intent, state of mood, and/or specific contexts. These personal and even unique things can hardly be shared by other people and accordingly would have no way to become stable metaphorical thinking patterns. According to Kövecses (2010, 2015, 2017), metaphors created as a result of highly personal experiences are at the *individual level*, which is concerned with online processing in natural discourse contexts, and metaphors as described in the CMT literature are "typically given at the *supraindividual level*. Such descriptions lack the specificity and richness of metaphorical conceptualization" (Kövecses, 2017, p. 329). It is at the individual level that entities and events are first conceptualized or categorized, while at the supraindividual level both the conceptualizer and the knowledge employed by the conceptualizer are of highly generalized, abstract, and decontextualized nature. The introduction of individual or contextual factors paves the way for exploring deeper the issue of metaphorical creativity, set apart in a certain sense from the traditional study of metaphors which focuses on given and well-established instances.

3.2 The other side of the conventional metaphor

In CMT, people have already accepted the universal conceptualized patterns of HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN. As conceptual metaphors, they can be instantiated with concrete examples in countless ways in English as well as in many other languages. But this is not the only way people's experiences are conceptualized as metaphors; the opposite is also likely to be true in some particular contexts. For example:

(3) 拿起就是幸福，放下就是快乐。² [Taking up is happiness, while setting down gladness.]

In (3), both *taking up* and *setting down* do not refer to general behaviors; they are related to some very important things with particular properties in one's life. In other words, you can not take up anything and feel happy, or set down anything and feel glad. You are happy if you can take up things that are of crucial importance for you; you are also glad, when you can not stand the pressure or burden by taking up the important things, you may choose to set them down, or give them up. This choice of yielding would make you feel relieved and glad. So *down* in this case has a rather restricted sense. It is first

constrained by the collocational element *set*, and then further constrained by the potential idiosyncratic entities or tasks. All these make the situation unique and applicable to the GLAD IS DOWN metaphor.

A similar example is the word cluster *down-to-earth*, which is taken as a positive term, meaning “practical and sensible” according to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/down-to-earth>). This is also a highly specific usage, the meaning of *down* being stiffly fixed to *earth*, making a contextualized metaphor. In both *setting down* and *down-to-earth*, similarities between source domain and target domain are confined to specific contexts. The directional *down* action in *setting down* brings about a relief from heavy load of goods, thus posing some cross-domain matches:

Matches	
Source domain	Target domain
set down	give up
heavy load of goods	important things or tasks
relaxed, comfortable, glad	relaxed, comfortable, glad

In *down-to-earth*, we can also find out matches or similarities between the source and target domains:

Matches	
Source domain	Target domain
down to	come back to
the entity of earth	the entity of task
real, solid ground	realistic, practical task

The interpretation of *down*, according to the embodied philosophy of cognitive linguistics, is based on how people experience the descending action and the associations that arise along with such an action. It is true that most *down*-related actions or experience are concerned with negative feelings, and such feelings are so widespread that they later on become unanimously accepted and highly generalized, getting further and further away from specific contexts. However, as people’s experience and reflections are so diversified that there always be some areas or situations where people manage their affairs in quite different or opposite ways.

It is not just DOWN can be GLAD, HAPPY or GOOD, UP can also be associated with unpleasant experiences or emotions. In English vocabulary, although most *up*-related derivations and compounds are associated with positive affections or neutral ones, negative senses also exist, such as *uphill*, *upstart*, *upset*, etc. Among these words, the root words, *hill*, *set* and *start*, all have a neutral sense. This suggests that the ultimate negative sense of the compounds does not come from the components *per se*, including the component *up* (for *up* either has a neutral sense or a figuratively positive sense. The only plausible explanation rests on the blending effect (Fauconnier, 1997; Fauconnier & Turner,

1998) of *up* plus the latter root. Besides, to go up a hill may not always imply hard-work or struggle, because for professional mountain climbers or climbers who climb just for fun, “up a hill” has little or nothing to do with anything negative. But for some people, in some particular situations or stages of hill-climbing, “up a hill” does involve hard-work or hardship. So it is only on some particular occasions that *uphill* takes on some negative sense, and this limited situation of application, in contrast with most situations in which UP is interpreted as something positive, makes it impossible for UP to be widely accepted and used in negative senses. The same is true for *upstart*, which does not simply mean “to start up”, but “to jump up (as to one’s feet) suddenly”, and then figuratively refers to “someone who behaves as if they were more important than they really are and who shows a lack of respect towards people who are more experienced or older” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). So the negative sense of *upstart* is not a result of a general situation of “start up”, but a very occasional, special occurrence. This limited use of UP prevents it from being universal. At last, in the case of *upset*, according to the online *Word Origins Dictionary*, or *youdict* (优词) (<http://www.youdict.com/etym/s/upset>), *upset* was a substitute for the obsolete *overset*, once in reference to the stomach, figuratively meaning “to throw into mental discomposure”. Once again, the negative sense of *upset* is derived from a very special situation.

The role of contexts in metaphorical thinking is further or more specifically demonstrated with the introduction of viewpoint in metaphor analysis. According to Dancygier and Sweetser (2014), metaphorical blending involves and shapes viewpoint, because both the source and target domains contain viewpoint structure, which determines to a certain extent what metaphorical senses are expressed. For example, a traveler’s viewpoint is taken when we take the expression of Dean End as an obstruction to ones’ intentions, which suggests “a negatively evaluated frame”. However, “(f)rom a local inhabitant’s viewpoint, a dead end street may in fact be a positive phenomenon: low traffic, less noise”. (Sweetser, 2017, p. 66) The difference between a traveler’s viewpoint and a local inhabitant’s viewpoint is that the former is conceptualized as a universal pattern of reasoning, while the latter “is not what is mapped onto the Relationship”. But according to what we have analyzed above, even the local viewpoint has the potential to be conceptualized as metaphor, though in a restricted context. If we deny this, the power of creativity will be suffocated.

4. Concluding Remarks

Compared with metonymy, a figure of speech or thinking mode that is distinct from metaphor but situated in a position of the same continuum, metaphor is relatively of more creative nature. Because metaphor is generally characterized by setting up a new and provisional relation between two conceptual domains, and it is the addresser who discovers the originally potential cross-domain relation, while in metonymy the cross-domain relation “has already been established” (Zhang & Cheng, 2008, p. 104), and

what the addresser needs to do is just to express it in words. According to Haser (2005, p. 46), the key to distinguish metaphor from metonymy lies in the inter-relationship between the source domain and the target domain. While the source meaning and the target meaning in metaphor are relatively separated, with the target meaning containing nothing constructive in relation to the source meaning, in metonymy the source meaning and the target meaning are unable to be separated. In other words, in metonymy the source meaning must serve as a pre-condition for the interpretation of the target concept. This would to a large extent reduce the effect of creativity of the metonymic expression. And this is also the reason why metaphor is more tightly linked to the literary works of romance or surrealism as is found in poetry and surrealist painting, say, that of Salvador Dali, and metonymy very much favored by relatively objective or realistic genres such as prose and novel (Jakobson, 1987; Lodge, 1979). So metaphor is a rather suitable tool for creative thinking.

The study of creativity in metaphor can follow two major routes: the study of existing metaphor instances and the study of non-existing ones. The former is a traditional approach that is characteristic of most original researches, while the latter, which has been rather inadequately tackled, deserves equal, if not more, attention. Because the essence of creativity, it seems to us, lies more or mainly in “to create something out of nothing” rather than in “to study something that are already there”. In the study of metaphor, if we emphasize that similarities between the source and target domains can be created without implying any pre-existing common properties, we would most likely rely on contingency to construct metaphor, and people’s power of creativity would be discouraged to some extent. However, if pre-existing common properties are believed to be over there in any two entities, people would be very much motivated to work hard on them, trying hard to uncover them, and in the meanwhile be fully conscious of the contexts and the intent of the current task. This is quite beneficial to creativity.

The condensation or fixation of meaning must be based on repeated use of a large number of people through a long stretch of time. Although all conceptual metaphors are based on specific uses of metaphorical expressions in specific contexts, some are shared by all or most people, and used repeatedly across a long span of time; some others, however, are used only among a small number of people or in restricted areas or situations. While most people tend to follow routine or conventional practices that facilitate smooth communication, there are always some others who can pick up vaguely-represented, or unconventional cues that reveal similarity-based conceptual link between certain entities or events. Since contexts can never be definitely enumerated, the possibilities of creating novel and non/anti-conventional metaphorical expressions would always be open-ended. All things in the world are interrelated by sharing something in common. It is our creative mind, together with our intent, the assessment of the context, the knowledge stored in our long-term memory, that helps us get two entities or events connected. Since similarities between entities and events are pervasive and of inherent nature, in theory one is able to set up representational links between any two of them. But

this does not mean that one is free to create any kind of representational relations. It is a highly subjective matter to detect the similarities between entities, and one of the signs of creativity is the ability to discover the new connections based on similarities (Lu, 2009, p. 46). So, the so-called creativity does not simply mean that one can turn out something that has never been noticed or produced, but it means that when in the right timing, in right contexts, for the right purposes and maximal effect, he can make it happen.

Notes

- 1 The novel metaphor example given by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 53) is: *Classical theories are patriarchs who father many children, most of whom fight incessantly*. But it is not clear whether this example comes from a certain source text (no sources of the examples used in the book are specified), or just an artificial or imagined example that is in line with common sense. Even in the second case, this example also observes a certain potential principle that makes the meaning transparent to most or all the people.
- 2 This line is the title of a Chinese book, written by Dongfang Juehui (东方觉慧), and published by The Eastern Publishing Co., Ltd. in 2011.
- 3 In fact, it is impossible to create something out of *nothing*. By *nothing*, it is meant here that it is something that has not yet been noticed or just has the potential to become fully represented when a certain need kicks in.

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