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COGNITIVE SEMANTICS OF THE NAMES OF CHINESE DISHES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This article brings to light cognitive mechanisms involved into the process of forming the names of Chinese dishes and draws parallels with English. Varieties of conceptual metaphors, metonymies, and metaphonymies are specified, which are characteristic of the linguistic units under study.

Key words: cognitive mechanisms; cognitive metaphor, metonymy, and metaphonymy; names of Chinese dishes.

У статті розглядаються когнітивні механізми, задіяні у процесі формування назв китайських страв; наводяться паралелі з англійською мовою. Виявлено притаманні цим одиницям різновиди концептуальних метафор, метонімій та метафтонімій.

Ключові слова: когнітивні механізми; когнітивна метафора, метонімія та метафтонімія; назви китайських страв.

В статье рассматриваются когнитивные механизмы, задействованные в процессе формирования названий блюд китайской кухни; проводятся параллели с английским языком. Выявлены характерные для этих единиц разновидности концептуальных метафор, метонимий и метафтонимий.

Ключевые слова: когнитивные механизмы; когнитивная метафора, метонимия, метафтонимия; названия блюд китайской кухни.

China is a country with a long history of ritual and etiquette, eating being an important part of it. Chinese dining practices date back several millennia and are manifest in ceremonial meals. A festive dinner will consist of four to eight cold dishes, eight hot dishes served one at a time, two to four whole-size showpiece dishes, such as a whole fish, a whole suckling pig or a whole chicken, in addition to soups, steamed rice and pastries. The dinner usually finishes up with fruits. To an overseas visitor, it might seem overabundant, but it is just a display of hospitality: there is no need to eat more than a single mouthful of a dish at a Chinese dinner. Traditionally, the most elaborate dishes are placed in the middle of the dinner table to be shared by all. This age-old custom is another proof to the importance of food in Chinese culture: it is cooked dishes, rather than flowers, that serve as centerpieces on a Chinese dinner-table. Also, food is frequently the main topic of table-talk. Variety in the color and texture of dishes serves aesthetic ends, while the ritual of sharing food from the same plate is conducive to bond-binding.

Not only is Chinese dining culture different from that of the western world, there are also many dishes which have no equivalents in other cultures. And even if there are such counterparts, their names often remain opaque to a visitor from abroad, while to a native Chinese they are rich in sense and full of vivid imagery.

This paper attempts to bring to light cognitive mechanisms (in the first place, cognitive metaphor and metonymy) which underpin the names of popular Chinese dishes, which are the object-matter of our research. The paper has a comparative edge, too, since it compares these mechanisms with those at work in the English equivalents of Chinese dishes. Thus the research is timely and relevant since it belongs to the areas of cognitive linguistics and comparativistics.

The two main theoretical tools used in the research are cognitive (conceptual) metaphor and metonymy, which are hardly new to the present-day linguistic research, and hence only short definitions are given below.

Metaphor (from Gr. *metapherein* 'carry over') is based on perceived similarity. For example, referring to the bottom part of a mountain as *the foot of the mountain*, the speakers of English explicate that they perceive a similarity between the structure of the human body and of a mountain. But the similarity is completely in the eyes of the beholder: only if he is willing to see the similarity, it is there. That is why metaphor is considered to be a powerful instrument of the mind. In the cognitive linguistic view, the term «cognitive (or conceptual) metaphor» refers to understanding one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another [3, p. 1; 4, p. 3]. The concept identified with the help of metaphor is called the «target concept», or «conceptual referent», and the concept brought in for comparison is called the «source concept», or «conceptual correlate» [4, p. 203]. The source domain / concept and the target domain / concept are said to be linked in a cross-mapping defined as the projection of one set of conceptual entities onto another set of conceptual entities [ibid, p. 245].

In metonymy (from Gr. *meta* 'change' and *onoma* 'name'), the link between two or more entities is based on a relationship of contiguity, i. e. between the whole of something and its part. More generally, contiguity is the state of being in some sort of contact such as that between a part and a whole, a container and the contents, a place and its inhabitants, etc. [1, p. 32]. For example, in English we may say *He drank the whole bottle*. Here we mean of course the contents in the bottle and not the bottle itself. Because the bottle and its contents are literally in contact with each other, the link between them is considered to be metonymic by nature. However, the concept of contiguity does not apply only to real physical or spatial contact, but also to more abstract associations such as time or cause. Redefined in cognitive linguistic terms, metonymy involves a transfer within a single domain, where an element of the domain (a concept) stands for another element of the same domain (another concept). It allows people to give mental access to an element through another element related to it where the relationship either is conventional in the conceptual system or can be easily figured out in a given context [6, p. 107].

Metaphors and metonymies often interact in linguistic expressions, and they are important conceptual tools to understand meanings. We are going to focus on conceptual metaphors and metonymies underpinning the names of

Chinese dishes. We consider the role of conceptual metaphor first, after that move on to conceptual metonymy, and subsequently turn to the analysis of their interaction in a single linguistic expression.

The name of the dish 蚂蚁上树(ants climb the tree) is based on conceptual metaphor. The name goes back to a story written by a famous Chinese author, Guan Hanqing. The main character of the story is a poor widow who had to take care of her sick mother-in-law in dire circumstances. She managed to persuade the butcher to give her a small piece of pork on credit. She chopped the meat into tiny bits and stewed it with vermicelli. Since the cooking method is very simple and the main ingredients are cheap, the dish has kept through centuries preserving its picturesque name. As minced pork looks like ants, and vermicelli may resemble tree roots, the conceptual metaphors MINCED MEAT is ANTS and VERMICELLI are TREE ROOTS underpin the name of the dish. The metaphoric mapping is based on the similarity of the look of the corresponding substances. There is no correspondence to this imagistic name of the dish in English, though the ingredients of the dish can be found in its cuisine.

It is easy to see that the meaning of a complex nomination of a dish 翡翠白玉汤 (green and white jade soup) is metaphoric, too. In spite of the fact that the ingredients of the dish are affordable (the soup is made of spinach and tofu), it has a really luxurious name (jade is a semi-precious stone). The metaphoric mapping is based on the similarity of the colors of the mineral and the dish. As the color of spinach is green, just like the color of green jade, and the color of tofu is white, just like the color of white jade, the conceptual metaphors SPINACH is GREEN JADE and TOFU is WHITE JADE underpin the name of the dish. Tofu is not characteristic of Western cuisine and the imagery of the dish might seem exotic, too.

The name of the dish 泡椒凤爪 (phoenix feet with pickled peppers) is another example of conceptual metaphor. In Chinese, *Phoenix feet* is a popular alternative name for *chicken feet*. Though the phoenix symbolism is familiar to Western cultures, such transfer of meaning is not. The conceptual shift involves a mapping between the concepts PHOENIX and CHICKEN since both belong to the family of birds. Hence their feet are bound to look the same. As in the case with 龙虎斗 (dragon-tiger fight), the source concept here is that of a mythological creature.

水晶肉 (meat «crystal») involves a conceptual shift of a metaphoric nature, too. This dish is in fact meat jelly, or aspic, which is similar to crystal in its consistency. The conceptual shift involves a mapping between CRYSTAL and MEAT JELLY. Thus, the conceptual metaphor MEAT JELLY is CRYSTAL underpins the meaning of the nomination of the dish. Crystal in Chinese cuisine is the analogue of the aspic in British cuisine.

The complex nomination 西湖牛肉羹 (West Lake beef soup) originated in the Hangzhou area, with its breathtaking sight – the West Lake. This soup got its name from the famous lake, as it might resemble the lake with mist clouding over its surface at dawn. The conceptual shift involves a mapping between the source concept of an individual place name WEST LAKE and the target concept of a dish SOUP. This metaphoric mapping is based on the similarity of the look of the lake and the soup. Yet the conceptual shift underpinning the name of the dish can be explained in a different – metonymic – way: THE NAME OF THE AREA for THE FOOD THAT ORIGINATED IN THAT AREA. The choice between the metaphoric or metonymic reading of the imagery of the name of the dish depends on the conceptualizer.

The name of the dish 叫化鸡 (Beggars' Chicken), which can be found on the menu of many smart restaurants in China, is obviously based on conceptual metonymy. The conceptual shift involves a transfer from BEGGAR to THE WAY BEGGARS COOK CHICKEN, i. e. on the open fire, or more generally ACTOR for A CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS ACTION.

The name of the dish 烧二冬 (two winters braised) involves a metonymic conceptual shift WINTER for SEASON WHEN CERTAIN PLANTS GROW. The main ingredients of this dish are mushroom and bamboo shoots, and both of them grow in winter in the northern part of China. It is obvious to a speaker of English that winter cannot be braised, thus in the phrase *two winters braised* the word *winters* has an imagery which is specific to the Chinese language: WINTER for MUSHROOM AND BAMBOO SHOOTS.

The dish 龙虎斗 (dragon-tiger fight) appeared at an early stage of the Qing Dynasty (in the XVIIIth century) and has survived till nowadays, though the cooking methods and seasoning have changed. A governmental official of a high rank was interested in culinary; he experimented with dishes and invented names for his culinary creations. On his seventieth anniversary, he created something special – a dish made of snake and cat meat. As a snake can be said to resemble a dragon, and cats and tigers belong to the same family, the conceptual metaphors SNAKE is DRAGON and CAT is TIGER underpin the name of this dish. The mappings are based on the similarity of the look of the animals. There is another conceptual shift at work in the name of this dish, which is conceptual metonymy. It is the shift between DRAGON (a whole) and DRAGON MEAT (a part), TIGER (a whole) and TIGER MEAT (a part). Since flesh is a part of a living being, both categories belong to the same frame / domain. Thus we arrive at the interpretation of DRAGON MEAT for DRAGON and TIGER MEAT for TIGER. The combination in the name of this dish of cognitive metaphor, where the source concept is that of a mythological entity, and metonymy results in metaphonymy [2]. There is no correspondence to this imagistic name of the dish in English, and the ingredients of the dish are not popular in its cuisine, either.

Having analyzed a selection made of the names of Chinese dishes, we have arrived at the following conclusions. Cognitive metaphor and metonymy are fundamental to the process of formation of the names of Chinese dishes. Metaphoric cross-mapping can be based on the similarity of the general look, color, shape, and consistency of the dish; the source concepts can be general or individual by nature, of creatures (real or mythological) or things. The specificity of Chinese imagery reveals itself best in conceptual metonymies, some of which are based on precedent stories, legends and myths, and metaphonymies.

The research into the conceptual mechanisms underpinning the processes of Chinese dish name formation seems especially promising in the direction of expanding their list by involving the processes of specification and generalization, as well as taking into account the specificity of the form of the corresponding linguistic units.

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