

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

Linnei Li
Bill Geddes

The study of proverbs has a long history and embraces vast quantities of scholarly work across many disciplines and inter-disciplinary approaches are prevalent in recent decades. Both proverbs and metaphors are complex subject matters and scholars have approached them from disciplines as wide apart as philosophy, psychology, linguistics, neurology, artificial intelligence and literature. Still we have yet to uncover many of the complexities of proverbs and metaphors. The present study aims to look at proverbs in relations to metaphors within the framework of categorization and classification.

While categorization and classification processes underpinning linguistic expressions have a universal base because of common thought processes in human beings, it is expected that proverbs and metaphors would reflect these processes. In this article we suggest that what appears different might, in fact, share something in common with other cultures, and what appears superficially similar might, in fact, be very different in the understandings of people in different cultural communities. The similarities are a consequence of common generative and thinking processes, as well as common psychological and cognitive experiences in all human beings. Equally, communities

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

might well express very similar ideas in very different ways. The differences are a consequence of the particular emphases and focuses in categorization which have emerged through time in different communities. As a result, both metaphors and proverbs can:

- a) have different forms but have similar meaning, e.g., To shed crocodile tears (in English) = mao ku laoshu or The cat crying over the mouse (in Chinese), indicating the universality of the perception of 'hypocrisy'. It is in the sphere of universal emotions, human conditions that we can find many other examples of this kind;
- b) have similar forms but different meaning, e.g., proverbs relating to colors and animals, indicating that the association of ideas/feelings, where colors are concerned, is very much culture-bound, and attitudes towards animals and pets are deeply ingrained in different cultures.

We propose to compare a selection of proverbs from different cultures to determine how cultural considerations would shape the form of proverbs and how common categorization and classification principles underpinning linguistic expressions would have a significant impact on the form of some proverbs. This is an attempt to combine the study of the Formal aspects of proverbs and metaphors with the Cultural aspects.

Definition of the Proverb

What are proverbs? Everyone knows some in his/her own language, and every culture has a collection of these pithy wise sayings. Some

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

common examples in English include “Where there is a will, there is a way”, “The early bird catches the worm”, and “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”. Some proverbs, such as “A stitch in time saves nine” may be somewhat obscure now when mending clothes is no long a common activity in our disposable society. Some may be quite contradictory or paradoxical, classical examples being “Look before you leap” and “He who hesitates is lost”. Furthermore, some proverbs are slight variations on the same theme, for example, on the topic of collaborative work, is it true that “Two heads are better than one”, or “Too many cooks spoil the broth”, or, as in some cases, “It takes two to tango”?

Proverbs are a kind of instant wisdom, ready advice given out to the community to deal with all situations and to help ourselves justify our every action. As Bert O. States (2001) observes, “the world of received wisdom” may turn out to be “a world of contradictions”. Normally, proverbs are metaphorical, containing both a literal and a figurative level of meaning, and as such they can be considered as “models of verbal economy” and “an extreme perspective on experience”, but often their “figurative aspect becomes transparent from over use.”ⁱ

The definition of the proverb is by no means a resolved matter. Its formal definition depends on the disciplinary base one uses. As Norrick (1985) points out, in the everyday, folkloristic definition, “proverbs are consistently described as self-contained, pithy, traditional expressions with didactic content and fixed, poetic form”, but he also gives a linguistically based definition which he calls *feature matrix definition*, where he compares and contrasts proverb with related genres such as

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

cliche, Wellerism, curse, proverbial phrase, riddle, joke, tale, song, slogan and aphorism. According to the feature matrix formula the proverb has the distinguishing features of “potential free conversational turn, conversational, traditional, spoken, fixed form, didactic and general”, and the optional features of “figurative, prosodic and humorous”.ⁱⁱ

Based on the same principles of distinguishing features, Norrick gives an ethnographic definition of proverb, which is also relevant for current consideration, as “a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning.” He further points out, “This definition not only distinguishes the proverb from all other genres, it also characterizes the proverb according to its ethnographic features in Anglo-American culture.”

Honeck (1997), an experimental psychologist, presents seven views of the proverb, the personal, formal, religious, literary, practical, cultural and cognition. He thinks that proverbs represent a form of folk psychology, and even proverbs from very different cultures can be quickly understood in terms of the universal elements. The focus of his study is on the theory and practice of proverb comprehension, an attempt to integrate neuro-psychology into figurative language comprehension.ⁱⁱⁱ

In interdisciplinary terms, as summarized by Hernadi and Steen (1999):

Proverbs are brief, memorable, and intuitively convincing formulations of socially sanctioned advice. All or virtually all cultures possess a repertoire of

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

such formulations and use them mainly as rhetorically effective means of transmitting accumulated experience.

In addition, Hernadi and Steen highlight some special features of proverbs: 1) frequent use of figurative language, 2) intuitively persuasive without the benefit of lengthy arguments, 3) phonemic and semantic memorability, 4) amenable to cross-domain blending, and 5) user-friendly because of the ease and facility in storing and retrieving the cross-domain associations evoked by them. Proverbs “inhabit the mind and circulate in societies”. With regard to the function of proverbs, Hernadi and Steen maintain:

By lending communal approval to individual dispositions toward recurrent human situations, proverbs help both to make human decisions more predictable and to allay any sense of guilt, shame, or regret that decision makers who face a bewildering plurality of options can experience in view of unintended adverse consequences.^{iv}

This study takes into account all the above definitions. Some proverbial phrases are included as examples where proverbs are not readily available.

The Nature of Metaphor

To understand the structure of proverbs, one must first understand the structure of metaphors. Metaphors are only secondarily a feature of language. Primarily, they are integral to the processes of categorization and classification which determine how human beings understand their worlds. As such, they underpin language and are reflected in the linguistic structures of communities. Linguistic phenomena such as

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

metaphor and other expressions of analogy and similitude are formalized representations of more fundamental categorical and classificatory conceptualizations. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 6) suggest, 'Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system', or, as Lynne Cameron (1999, 11)^v puts it,

the conceptual system is not only involved in the processing of metaphor, but ... thought is itself structured metaphorically, and ... the systematicity of metaphor on the surface of language merely reflects underlying conceptual structure in which something is understood, stored and processed in terms of something else.

The process of ordering reality is a process of categorization which proceeds through establishing degrees of identity between phenomena using structural scalar continua such as similarity, complementarity, displacement, containment, accompaniment (many of these continua are central to linguistic theory - e.g. see Hjelmslev^{vi} (1969)) and descriptive scalar continua such as length, height, breadth, color, hardness. The characteristics of such identificational scales are, in their scalar detail, community specific. So, for instance, color discrimination, based on the same set of physiological experiences across communities, nonetheless exhibits community specific variations. As Ian Davis (1998, 433)^{vii} describes of Heider's (1972)^{viii} research,

She found that even though the Dani [of Highlands Papua New Guinea] had only two basic colour terms - mill 'dark' and mola 'light' - they remembered focal exemplars (the best examples) of eight English colour terms better than non-focal exemplars. Further, they learned names for the focal exemplars more effectively than for the non-focal exemplars. Heider interpreted her results as reflecting the universal perceptual distinctiveness of the focal exemplars, perhaps derived from universal perceptual physiology (De Valois & Jacobs, 1968^{ix}).... Although the Dani remembered focal colours better than non-focal colours - consistent with universalism - their performance was much

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

worse than the American comparison group, which could reflect the Dani's limited repertoire of basic colour terms.

Identificational scales are, themselves, divided into regions each of which encompasses a range of the scalar possibilities. For example, the identificational scale of 'hardness' might be divided into regions such as 'soft', 'firm', 'hard'. These recognized regions, and the breadth of scale included in each, are community specific. So, as Davis (1998, 434) observes of Setswana recognized color regions,

speakers of languages with less than 11 basic color terms should have 'perceptual categories' corresponding to the missing universal categories. In a sense, there are nascent linguistic categories ready to form at physiologically determined 'faults' in color space. Thus, for instance, if speakers of a language with no separate terms for GREEN or BLUE (such as Setswana, which we include here) were asked to sort colors in the GREEN - BLUE region into two groups based on their perceptual similarity, they should tend to sort them into one group focused around GREEN and one group focused around BLUE, just as speakers of languages such as English or Russian that do have separate GREEN and BLUE terms would do. +

Of course, while Davis speaks of perceptual 'categories' and universal 'categories' in relation to color discrimination, the terminology employed here is one of scales and scalar values ^x. Particular values from identificational scales are attached to elements of categories and, in their sum, these markers distinguish category elements from each other. The markers (or values) therefore, should not, themselves, be considered categorical constructs.

Identificational scales reflect the experiences and understandings of the community which perceives them and utilizes them in defining

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

categories and their contents. As individuals, and ultimately communities, elaborate the scales they use, the identificational markers attached to elements of categories must be adjusted to the newly refined scale in terms of which they are understood. At the individual level, this implies a process of re-evaluation: that is, a refinement of the definition of categories and their elements. At the community level, in the interests of conservation and stability, attempts at elaborating descriptive scales will be resisted or will be confined to those who need increased refinement of the scales for specific purposes.

Integrated Proverbs

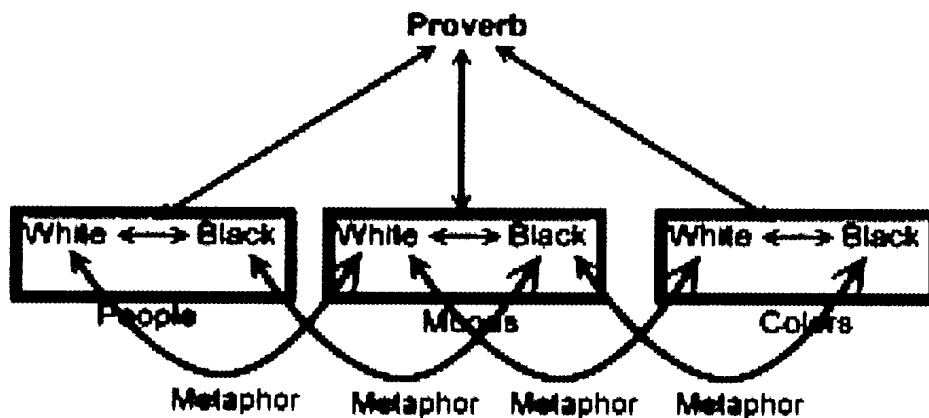
Once, speaking with a person about the problems of an apartheid South Africa, he observed that, in the eyes of South African officials 'Two blacks do not make a white'. In his observation he had invoked a proverb, which, in common with many proverbs, can, in Western^{xi} communities, be interpreted in a number of quite different ways. The term 'black' can stand as a metaphor for vice (black deeds etc), oppression (black moods) persons (black people: of Negro or similar origin), negation (as in $(-1 + -1) \neq +1$) and so on. Similarly, the term white can be interpreted as an oppositional referent in each of those areas. That is, the proverb evokes and contrasts particular *presumed relationships* between color referents and referents in the categories of virtue, mood, ethnicity and even number. The comparison it conjures up is one of *relationship between items within* categories rather than a comparison of *characteristics of descriptive elements between* categories.

Whereas the proverb above invites the hearer to presume a similar

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

relationship between the implied referents as in the stated ones (white and black as polar extremes (or 'opposites') in both color and people), metaphors, as in 'the lady was spaghetti thin', evoke a comparison between descriptive markers of elements in different categories – two kinds of thinness: thinness in human beings and thinness in forms of pasta. The proverb evokes a comparison between two kinds of relationships of items within categories: the relationship between the colors black and white and the relationship between vice and virtue; between depression and happiness; between negative and positive; between Africans and Western Europeans. That is, the proverb acts as an integrative metaphor, conjoining metaphors which evoke a comparison between characteristics of elements of different categories and focusing on the relationships evoked by the comparison of the elements of the metaphors.

Illustration 1: Proverb as integrating metaphor



In this article we suggest that, while both metaphor and proverb are language expressions, they are, more fundamentally, expressions of the most basic categorizational processes of the human mind. To use a metaphor, explaining proverbs and metaphors at the level of language without taking the categorizational processes which generate the

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

linguistic forms into account is like examining the movement of a piston head in a combustion engine without taking the connection between it, the piston rod and the crank shaft into account.

Selection of Proverbs (E=English, C=Chinese, J=Japanese)

Sources of many English proverbs come from the Bible, Shakespearian, Greek and Roman Classics, including Aesop's Fables. On the other hand, most Chinese proverbs come from the Chinese classics often articulating Confucian thinking and philosophy.^{xii} As can be expected, many of the Japanese proverbs have their origin in Chinese sayings and stories, e.g. 五十步笑百步 wushi bu xiao bai bu (Fifty steps laughing at hundred steps) in Chinese becomes ごじっぽひゃっぽ gojippo hyappo (Fifty steps hundred steps) in Japanese.^{xiii} The proverb means that "it is much easier to see other people's weaknesses than your own", which is similar to the English proverb "The pot calling the kettle black". This Chinese proverb refers to the story of two groups of army deserters: those who had walked away for only fifty steps were laughing at those who had gone a hundred steps, although both groups of deserters were equally guilty of cowardice. However, there are also many everyday proverbs, which have a uniquely Japanese flavor, e.g., 花より団子 hana yori dango (Flowers are not as good as dumplings, meaning: when receiving gifts food items are preferable to flowers; in other words, people prefer something that pleases their stomachs rather than something that pleases their eyes.)

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

Proverbs Universal

The following twenty-four example proverbs indicate that there is a sizeable number of proverbs across different cultures which can be termed Proverb Universals, for they display and demonstrate some universal quality in human perception, human emotions and the human condition of our existence. This category of proverbs transcends national and cultural boundaries. This category of proverbs would concur with Honeck's(1997) observation mentioned earlier that proverbs represent a form of folk psychology, and even proverbs from very different cultures can be quickly understood in terms of the universal elements

- 1) E: To cry crocodile tears
- 2) C: 猫哭老鼠 mao ku lao shu
(The cat crying over the mouse)

Proverbs 1) and 2) can be described as sharing a similar linguistic form and pictorial image, that of an animal shedding tears over its prey, and are almost identical in meaning, that of false sympathy or hypocrisy.

- 3) E: Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder
- 4) C: 情人眼里出西施 qingren yanli chu Xishi
(In the eye of the lover a legendary beauty Xishi emerges)
- 5) J: ほれてしまえばあばたもえくぼ horete shimaeba abata mo ekubo
(Pockmarks become dimples in the eye of the lover).

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

Proverbs 3), 4) and 5) are all saying the same thing: that the concept of beauty is a subjective quality and its perception is closely related to the emotions and the bias/partiality of the beholder.

6) E: A bird in hand is worth two in the bush

7) J: 明日の百より今日の五十 ashita no hyaku yori kyou no gojyuu

(Rather today's fifty than tomorrow's hundred)

Proverbs 6) and 7) illustrates the wisdom of holding on to something certain rather than hoping and waiting for some better alternative which may never come.

8) E: To kill two birds with one stone

9) C: 一箭双雕 yi jian shaung diao

(Shooting down two birds with one arrow)

Proverbs 8) and 9) are what we human beings aim for in the name of efficiency, when carrying out a task, or what we hope for in the name of good fortune.

10) E: Fortune's wheel is ever turning

11) C: 世界轮流转 shijie lunliu zhuan

(The world turns round and round)

12) J: 浮世は回る水車 ukiyo wa mawaru suisha

(The world is a turning water wheel)

Proverbs 10), 11) and 12) reflect the human condition of change and unpredictability of human existence. We are being reminded not to be

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

too smug in times of good fortune, and not to despair when we encounter misfortune.

- 13) E: The pot calling the kettle black
- 14) C: 五十步笑百步 wushi bu xiao bai bu
(Fifty steps laughing at hundred steps)
- 15) J: ごじっぼうひゃっぼう gojippou hyppou
(Fifty steps hundred steps)

As explained earlier, proverbs 13), 14) and 15) all refer to the rather universal human failing of our inability to see our own weaknesses as clearly as we can see those of others.

- 16) E: Birds of a feather flock together
- 17) C: 物以类聚 wu yi lei ju
(Things of the same kind are drawn together)
- 18) J: 牛は牛連れ、馬は馬連れ ushi wa ushi-zure, uma wa uma-zure
(Oxen go with oxen, horses with horses)

Proverbs 16), 17) and 18) confirm our observation that things of the same kind and people of similar temperament are often drawn together.

- 19) E: The proof of the pudding is in the eating
- 20) C: 路遥知马力, 日久知人心 lu yao zhi ma li, ri jiu zhi ren xin
(Distance proves the horse, time proves the person)
- 21) J: 馬には乗ってみよ、人に添うてみよ uma ni wa notte miyo,
hito ni wa soute miyo

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

(To know a horse, try to ride it; to know a person, try to associate with him)

Proverbs 19), 20) and 21) show the relationship between time and knowledge, the longer the time, the more complete is our knowledge of the object, be it human or animal.

22) E: Eagles do not breed doves

23) C: 狗口不出象牙 gou kou bu chu xiangya

(Ivory does not come from a dog's mouth)

24) J: 瓜の蔓に茄子はならぬ uri no turu ni nasubi wa naranu

(A squash vine will not produce an eggplant)

The last three proverbs all emphasize the inherent nature of things, and it is impossible to blend things that are inherently opposites.

Culture-Bound Proverbs

Another category of proverbs demonstrates the force that culture exerts over the form of proverbs. Many proverbs have their origin in historical legends and fables, illustrating folk wisdom, beliefs, attitudes and values. They are peculiar to the culture from which they are born, and are often incomprehensible to people outside the culture. Many pithy four-character expressions in Chinese fall into this category of proverbs, for example:

塞翁失马 sai weng shi ma

(The old man at the frontier lost a horse

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

=A misfortune can be a blessing in disguise)

愚公移山 yu gong yi shan

(The foolish old man moving the mountain

=Perseverance leads to achievement)

画蛇添足 hua she tian zu

(Painting a snake and adding legs to it

=A superfluous action is harmful rather than helpful)

Similarly, the meaning of many proverbs in English may be puzzling to speakers of other languages that fall outside the European tradition, e.g., the proverb “A rolling stone gathers no moss.” While every British or American child might have been brought up on this proverb, the meaning often eludes people from other cultural background. The puzzle for them is the underlying assumption that moss gathering is an intrinsically desirable activity for a stone! The connection between the source and the target may not be readily understood.

There are also proverbs, and metaphors, that are very much culture bound, e.g., the association of ideas, attitudes, images and emotions with things such as colors and animals. For example: “red-eyed” 眼红 (yan hong) suggests someone is jealous or envious of another person in Chinese, but a person is “green with envy” or “green-eyed” in English. “Blue” movies in English become “yellow” movies 黄色电影 (huangse dianying) in Chinese. Red in English can mean “important”, “danger”, “shame” or “embarrassment”. The meaning of a “red-letter day” or a

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

“red carpet” is not necessarily self-evident to non-English speakers. In Chinese red is usually a good or auspicious sign, for example, 红光满面 hong guang man mian (red aura over one’s face, in good health and spirits), 红双喜 hong shuang xi (red double happiness, an auspicious symbol), 又红又专 you hong you zhuan (to be both a revolutionary and an expert).

Black, on the other hand, is associated with things sinister, wicked or illegal, e.g., 黑社会 hei shehui (the under world), 黑名单 hei mingdan (black list, black listed), 黑市 hei shi (black market), 黑心 hei xin (black heart, evil mind), 黑幕 hei mu (sinister background, shady deal, literally black curtain), 黑货 hei huo (black goods, illegal goods), 黑点 hei dian (black mark, a defect) and 黑帮 hei bang (black gang, gangsters).

White enjoys a mixed image: while it is a good thing to be 清白 qing bai (literally “clear and white”, meaning “not guilty of any wrong-doing”), or be able to 白手兴家 bai shou xing jia (to build up one’s family fortune from nothing), the image of white in the following expressions is negative: 白眼 bai yan (to give or receive a contemptuous look) 白色恐怖 bai se hong bu (White Terror, terrorism from reactionary forces), 白字 bai zi (to write the wrong character, thereby betraying one’s ignorance or inferior education background)..

It seems in European culture animals are often treated with good-natured tolerance, if not overtly warm affection. Hence, dogs and puppies may enjoy a good deal of affection in English, e.g., “a lucky dog” or “a man’s best friend”, in Chinese, however, to be called a

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

“puppy” is not a compliment, let alone being called a “dog”, e.g., 骗人小狗 *pian ren xiao gou* (a cheating little dog, literally little dog cheating people). In fact, most animals do not fare well in Chinese proverbs and metaphors: the rat is timid (胆小如鼠 *dan xiao ru shu*, as timid as a rat); the cat is hypocritical (猫哭老鼠 *mao ku lao shu*, cat crying over mouse); the pig is stupid (蠢得像猪 *chun de xiang zhu*, as stupid as a pig; 猪脑子 *zhu naozi*, a pig’s brain); the cow is uncultured (对牛弹琴 *dui niu tan qin* playing the lute or koto to the cow) and stubborn (牛脾气 *niu piqi*, a cow’s temper or temperament, meaning a stubborn temperament); the fox is cunning (老狐狸 *lao hu li*, an old fox, referring to someone who is sly and devious); the tiger is powerful, but also a ferocious bully (为虎作恶 *wei hu zuo e*, using one’s power to do bad deeds); the snake is a scoundrel (蛇鼠一窝 *she shu yi wo*, like snakes and rats all in the same den, meaning colluding together); the frog is parochial (井底之蛙 *jing di zhi wa*, the frog under the well, who has never been out of its confining elements); the wolf is treacherous (狼狈为奸 *lang bei wei jian*, the wolf and the *bei* ‘a legendary animal with short front legs riding on the back of the wolf to move about’ doing treacherous deeds together); the sheep is gullible and easily lead astray (歧路亡羊 *qi lu wang yang*, like a lost sheep at the cross road); the dog is a nuisance (狐群狗党 *hu qun gou dang*, a pack of foxes and a gang of dogs); the tortoise is a cuckold (乌龟 *wu gui*, term given to a cuckold); and the horse can be a black sheep (害群之马 *hai qun zhi ma*, a horse which harms the herd).

The only animal that consistently enjoys a good image is the mythical dragon, as shown in the following expressions: 龙马精神 *long ma jing shen* (as healthy and energetic as a dragon and a horse, usually used as

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

greeting in the New Year), 龙凤呈祥 long feng cheng xiang (like the dragon and the phoenix showing an auspicious sign, usually used at wedding times), and 龙飞凤舞 long fei feng wu (flying like a dragon and dancing like a phoenix, describing lively, energetic and graceful movements reflected in Chinese calligraphy). However, until recent years, the image of the dragon in Western culture has always been negative. It is noteworthy that the image of the oriental dragon is changing that of its Western counterpart!^{xiv}

Some proverbs may appear similar in form across cultures, but their intended meanings and allusions may be quite different. For example, the English proverb “Shutting the gate after the horse has bolted” means that it is useless to bolt the gate now, but the Chinese proverb “亡羊补牢 wang yang bu lao” (Repair the stable after losing the sheep) gives the message that it is not too late to repair the stable after the sheep has escaped. This probably illustrates a very different psychological orientation towards the loss of something. While the English proverb laments the futility of “crying over spilt milk”, the Chinese one is urging the person to take action to prevent another occurrence. The didactic element in Chinese proverbs tend to be more direct and obtrusive, and the above example illustrates this tendency.

Processes of categorization and scalar marking (definition)

The never-ending modification and refinement of reality within cosmological communities^{xv} is a process of continual refinement of categorization. This is accomplished through establishing sub-categories of elements included in higher level categories and comparing

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

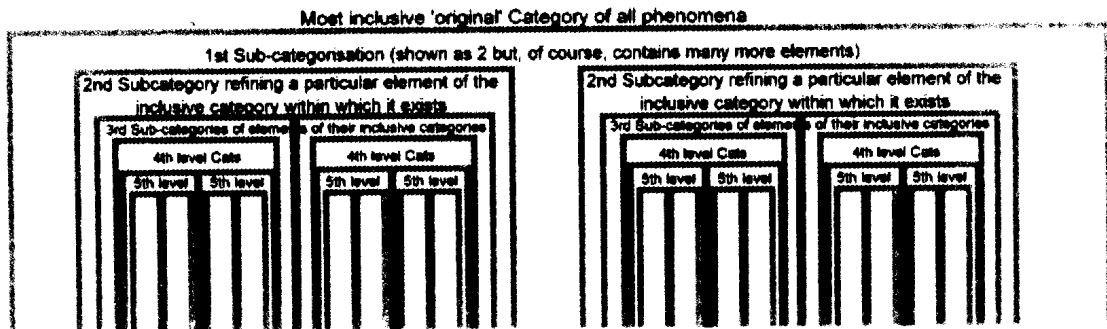
and contrasting the scalar values of identificational elements of both those categories and sub-categories and of items contained in them. The process must, logically, result in sets of inclusive categories containing pyramids of sub-categories which increasingly diverge from each other as categorization and classification is refined. As illustrated below, each element in the 'original' category of all phenomena is, in fact, a summation of all the sub-categories contained within it. Those sub-categories, however, are increasingly defined as separate from the sub-categories of other '1st order' elements (i.e., the elements of the original category). The process of progressive sub-categorization produces categorizational sets which are understood by those who order reality in terms of them as separate domains, each with its own rationale ^{xvi}. As Mary Douglas *et al* (1979^{xvii}) have suggested in relation to understanding food taboos, 'food taboos are rooted in a cosmological conception rather than nutrition and taste'. In many communities the mixing of items belonging to different categorizational sets is seen as dangerous and those who confuse categories are considered aberrant.

So, as the process of sub-categorization proceeds, the thinker is left with the problem of how to 'connect' elements which exist within different categorizational sets. The answer is, of course, metaphor. To quote Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 3) ^{xviii} '... the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor'. This has been understood for centuries in Chinese cosmological thought. As Martin Ekstroem (2002, 253) ^{xix} puts it, 'the theory of "correlative cosmology" — to use the conventional sinological term — ... sought to reveal the hidden system of "categorical correspondences" (*lei*) according to which the seemingly disparate

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

phenomena of the world were organized.'

Illustration 2: The development of Categorizational sets and included sub-category hierarchies



'Thought' is the process of evoking sets of established relationships between already categorized phenomena, with the 'simplest' thought being that which traces clearly established connections between phenomena within the same pyramidal hierarchy. Metaphors (of whatever variety) provide a means of connecting elements of otherwise unconnected or poorly connected categories (bringing together phenomena which belong in separate pyramidal hierarchies) without, in doing so, breaking the categorizational rules established to maintain the integrity of the categorizational system. In other words, metaphors are the 'bridges' (another metaphor) between pyramids of categories. As Raymond Gozzi ^{xx} puts it, 'A metaphor is commonly thought of as a bridge - a linguistic bridge linking two separate conceptual domains.' (1997, 348)

The process of metaphorization is similar to that involved in categorization, that is, it is a process of establishing degrees of identity between phenomena in otherwise unconnected or poorly connected categories using scalar continua such as similarity, complementarity, displacement, containment, accompaniment and all the commonly

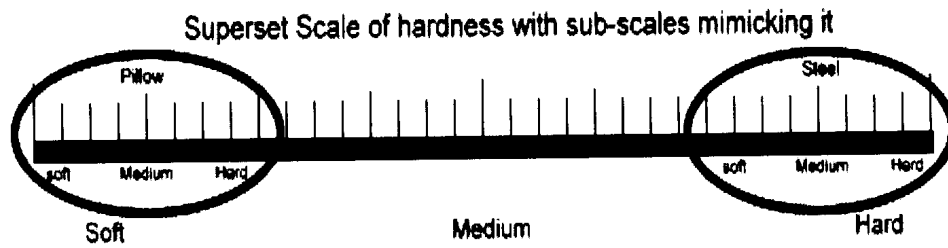
Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

recognized comparative descriptive scales — length, height, breadth, color, hardness etc. The scales which exist within each category are specific to the category. But each scale is a subset of the possibilities of a universal scale. For example, degrees of hardness for pillows is very different from degrees of hardness for steel, yet both sets of possibilities can readily be envisaged as degrees of hardness in a superset scale of hardness. The process of metaphorization is one which allows for pseudo comparison between placement on the subset scales of the two categories - a soft pillow of steel.

The characteristics of a metaphor are summed up in the relativities of the descriptive sub-scales of the connected categories. Particular expressions of the metaphor will, therefore, evoke sets of relationships between phenomena (and between the pyramidal hierarchies of categories within which they occur) which can be mapped along the continua of comparison which underlie all classification and categorization. Since the descriptive sub-scales invoked are specific to each of the linked categories, but each sub-scale is divided into regions based upon the regional divisions of the superset scale from which it is derived, it is possible to invoke a region of the sub-scales as though the regions being related are comparable - e.g. hard pillow and hard steel.

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

Illustration 3: Scales and internal Sub-scales



Mapped on the super-scale from which the sub-scales are derived, one will arrive at very different superset values for scalar values which are recognized as *relatively* similar when comparing the sub-scales. For instance, one can speak of a 'soft' pillow and of 'soft' steel. On the super-scale from which the sub-scales are derived, the scalar value of soft steel is very different from the scalar value of soft pillow. Invoking 'pillow' and 'steel' allows comparisons of degree of hardness which are entirely relative to the subscales of the categories being bridged.

The human subject constructs not only hierarchies of categories, but also hierarchies of linking metaphors ('integrative metaphors' of which proverbs are an example). This allows for potentially complex comparisons of relative sub-scale values as the number of bridged categories and their elements increases in an integrative metaphor.

Since the categories and their contents are historically determined and vary between communities, the metaphors which connect them must also be, similarly, culturally specific. Apparently similar metaphors will evoke very different perceived connections and dissonances in different communities.

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

Human thought involves the maintenance of 'balance'. That is, there is an 'equalizing tendency' at work which, in the case of identificational scales, produces constant elaboration since, whenever a new possible value is recognized within a scale, all scalar positions are adjusted to ensure equality between them. Consider the two scales below. The first is an unbalanced or unequalized scale, the second is a balanced or equalized scale. Human beings have a natural tendency toward equalizing the unbalanced scale - moving the scale lines until they are equal and/or elaborating the scale until all the recognized possibilities can be included in an equalized version of the scale.

Illustration 4: The equalization of scale values



for greater specificity. And all sub-scales and their generalizations (soft, In metaphor construction, this natural inclination toward balance and equilibrium results in selection of comparative elements of the metaphor from similar hierarchical positions within category pyramids. Where the metaphor uses elements which are 'out of balance', one of the features of the metaphor is a challenge to the hearer to restore balance or to account for the imbalance.

As demonstrated in the illustration below, each linking metaphor shares the characteristics of both the bridged categories and the more specific attributes of the selected items within each of the categories. For example: If category 1 is 'Food' and item 3 is 'spaghetti'; and category 2 is 'creeping things' and item 5 is 'worms'; then Linking metaphor 1 will have the characteristics of creeping things, with a focus

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

on worm like creatures and of food with particular focus on either pasta and the item spaghetti within that sub-category (which might, itself, be seen as a sub-category of types of spaghetti), or on spaghetti if no sub-category is perceived by the subject. The comparison implied in metaphor evokes the descriptive markers of each element in the comparison and this, in turn, evokes the sub-scales of the superset scales which are employed in defining each element, allowing for pseudo comparison of very different superset values.

The integrating metaphor will evoke all the possibilities of the linked categories and focused items in the linking metaphors which it bridges. The more complete the categorical system held by those who evoke or respond to the metaphor the greater the subtlety and possibilities perceived in the metaphor. The allusions perceived in a metaphor by a child will be fewer than those perceived by a mature adult. A mature adult might well have a category 'worms' in which is contained a range of different creatures with wormlike characteristics, whereas a child might only perceive 'worms as an item in the category 'creeping things'

When a person hears a metaphor which goes through several hierarchically connected sub-categories within one linked category but does not do the same in the other category, the person will feel that the metaphor needs adjusting or 'correcting' so that the number of sub-categories involved in both primary bridged categories will be as close as possible. This is why it is possible to hear metaphors as inappropriate or in need of refinement. For instance, in linking metaphor 1 a person who has refined their categorization of pasta and has a refined set of categories for worms might feel that a connection

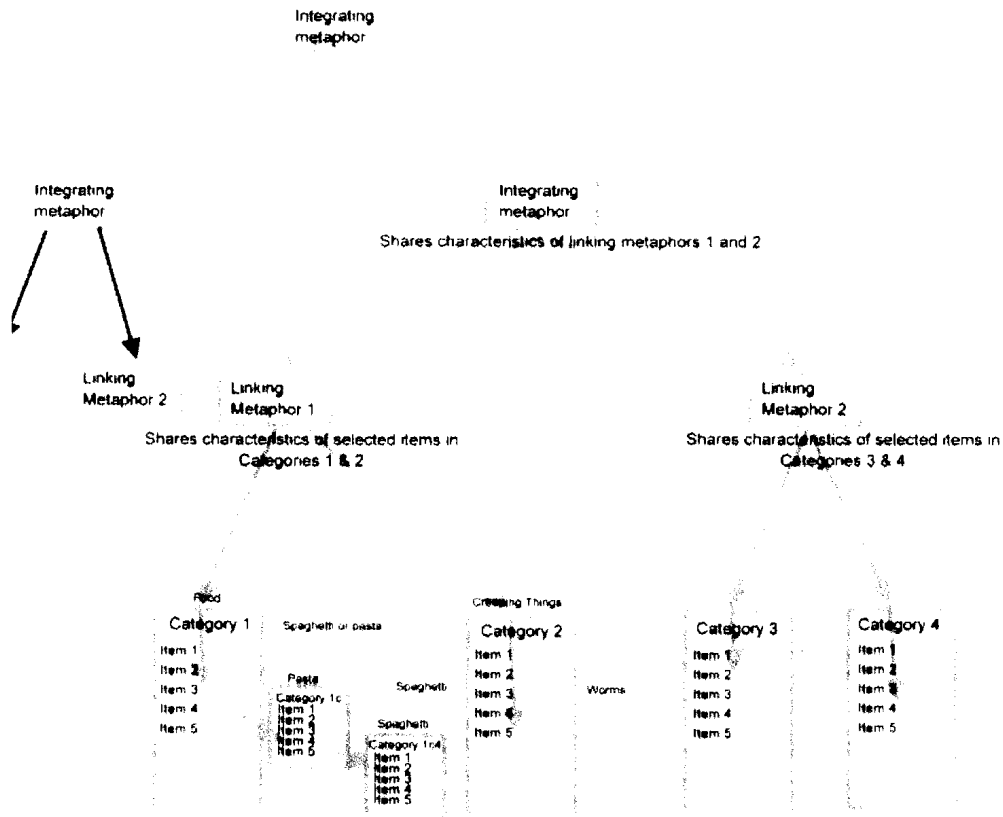
Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Intercultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

of 'spaghetti' with 'worms' is a little crude and might want to exclude some kinds of pasta and/or some kinds of worms from the metaphor. This would be done by specifying the particular type of spaghetti and the particular type of worm to which the metaphor applies: 'tubular spaghetti is like Gippsland earth worms'. Alternatively, if the person has an elaborated category of pasta but not an elaborated category of worms, the use of a metaphor linking spaghetti with worms is likely to make the hearer aware of the need for a categorical elaboration of worms. That is, the metaphor is carrying an implied message about the need for category elaboration in the interests of equalization or balance.

Not only can we have linking metaphors which connect unconnected hierarchies of categories, we can also have hierarchies of integrative metaphors, as illustrated below, which connect linking metaphors. It is postulated that proverbs and similar constructs (cf Honeck ^{xxi} 1997, Ch. 2 for discussion) are best understood as 'frozen' integrative metaphors.

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

Illustration 5: Metaphorical linking of categories and their elements



Categorization and classification are based on assigning particular scalar values to phenomena (e.g. it's off white, warm, firm, long, round, thin and flexible). All descriptive values are, by definition, scalar, that is, they are particular values from scales of possibilities — degrees of whiteness; degrees of hotness; degrees of hardness; degrees of length; degrees of roundness etc.. Items contained within categories are classified (that is, defined) by particular scalar values which, in combination, distinguish them from other category items. And, the sub-scales employed within categories are specific to the categories within which they are employed.

Language is not nearly so precise as the scalar values assigned to items inside categories. This is why, when someone asks — how thin? The

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

speaker is able to make comparisons based on relative thinness. That is, the scale employed in marking (or defining) an item in terms of thickness is detailed, but the language employed economizes on detail by assigning generalizations of thickness unless asked medium, hard; thin, middling, fat) are relative to the category within which they are employed (a thin piece of spaghetti and a thin person do not have similar dimensions).

Metaphors commonly play on similarities and differences in the scalar values assigned to bridged phenomena. Metaphors focus on perceived classificatory commonalities and contrasts of phenomena which belong in different categorical hierarchies. So, a metaphor might play on the assigned 'thinness' of two phenomena, in which the thinness is relative to the categories in which each of the phenomena are found — this is often employed in humor. 'She wobbled around like a thin piece of semi-cooked spaghetti'. So, a cross cultural study of metaphor and higher level integrative forms such as proverb, should focus on the nature of the perceived internal characteristics of definitional sub-scales; on the nature of the bridging processes (e.g. do they assume similarity and so focus on contrast, or assume difference and so focus on commonalities?); and on the nature of those persistent or 'frozen' forms which are inherently conservative, reasserting long-established comparative relationships and characteristics. That is, the study of metaphor is a study of a particular comparative process common to all processes of categorization and classification. Since all people, everywhere, categorize their worlds, the study of metaphor at this level of abstraction can, indeed, be universal. One must, however, always

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

presume that the focuses employed in comparing scalar values; the ways in which scales are elaborated; and the ways in which sub-scales are distinguished and compared will be culturally specific

ⁱ States Bert O., Tropic Through Proverbia, *American Scholar*, Volume 70, issue 3: 105-109, 2001.

ⁱⁱ Norrick, Neal R., 1985, *How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*, Mouton Publishers, Berlin, New York, and Amsterdam, 65-79.

ⁱⁱⁱ Honeck Richard P., 1997 *A Proverb in Mind: The cognitive science of Proverbial wit and wisdom*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey

^{iv} Hernadi, Paul and Steen, Francis 1999, *Style*, Spring 1999, Volume 33, issue 1, p.1.

^v Cameron L., 1999, Operationalising 'metaphor' for applied linguistic research, in Cameron and Low (1999) pp. 3 - 28
Cameron L. and Low G. (eds) 1999, *Researching and applying metaphor*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge

^{vi} Hjelmslev, Louis translated by Francis J. Whitfield, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961, 1969 (Rev. Ed.)

^{vii} Ian R. L. Davies, A Study of Colour Grouping in Three Languages: A Test of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, *British Journal of Psychology*, August 1998 V89 N3 P433

^{viii} Heider, E. R. (1972). Universals in color naming and memory. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 93(1), 10-20

^{ix} De Valois, R. L. & Jacobs, G. H. (1968). Primate color vision. *Science*, 162, 533-540

^x Color can be unravelled as a set of scales including hue, saturation, contrast, lightness, and red, green and blue color shifts. The 'colors' recognized by a community are, somewhat arbitrarily, terms identified with particular combinations of values from these scales.

Proverbs as Integrative Metaphors: Common Classificatory Principles for Inter-cultural Comparison of Proverbs and Metaphors

^{xi} We will use the generic term 'Western' to refer to communities which have their hegemonic roots in Western European history.

^{xii} In the selection of Chinese proverbs, the following books have been consulted: Chen Wenbo *English and Chinese Idioms, a Comparative Study*, Beijing: Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Press, September 1985;

Deng Yanchang and Liu Runqing, *Language & Culture* Beijing: Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Press, 1989;

Huang Xinghe (edit), *Zhongri Chengyu Cidian* (Dictionary of Chinese-Japanese Proverbs), Beijing: Duiwai Maoyi Jiaoyu Press, 1989.

^{xiii} In selecting Japanese proverbs the following books have been consulted: Deng Qinglin (edit), *Shiyong Ri-Han Chengyu Cidian* (A Practical Dictionary of Japanese-Chinese Proverbs), Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Press, 1992.

Yamamoto Tadanao (edit), *Nichi-Ei Hikaku: Kotowaza Jiten* (A Comparative Dictionary of Japanese-English Proverbs), Osaka: Sougensha 2000, 2nd edition.

Hiejima Ichiro, *A Short Dictionary of Feelings and Emotions in English and Japanese*, Tokyodo 1994.

Yamaguchi Momo-o (edit), *Nihon Kotowaza Seigo Jiten*, Tokyo: Kenkyusha 1999.

^{xiv} Refer to previous article, Li & Geddes, "Of Motifs, Metaphors and Meaning: Comparison of Dragon Motifs from China and the West", *Aichi Bunkyo Daigaku Ronsou*, Volume 3, 2000, 79-119.

^{xv} for an explanation of the emergence of Western understandings of 'reality' see Geddes B., 1995, Economy, environment, ideology and marginalisation, in Perry J and Hughes J (eds), 1995, *Anthropology: Voices from the Margins*, Deakin University Press, Geelong, pp. 61 - 128

^{xvi} In Western categorization the primary categorizations are usually referred to as 'environments' — the economic, political, natural, metaphysical, social etc., see Geddes (1995) for further discussion.

Linnei Li and Bill Geddes

^{xvii} Douglas Mary; Bolo Paule; Fischler Claude, 1979, *Les Structures du Culinaire*, *Communications* 31 145-170

^{xviii} Lakoff George and Johnson Mark, 1980, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago University Press, Chicago

^{xix} Martin Svensson Ekstroem, Illusion, Lie, and Metaphor: The Paradox of Divergence in Early Chinese Poetics, *Poetics Today*, Volume 23, 2002

^{xx} Raymond Gozzi Jr., *Metaphors by the Seashore, Etc.: A Review of General Semantics*, Fall 1997 V54 N3 P348, 5

^{xxi} Honeck Richard P., 1997 *A Proverb in Mind: The cognitive science of Proverbial wit and wisdom*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey