

# Revisiting Sex and Love in Language and Culture: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach

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This study aims to explore (i) how the separation of love and sex is conceptualized in speakers of Mandarin Chinese (Taiwan-based) and English (USA-based), and (ii) whether this conceptualization is crucially subject to its linguistic forms. For instance, in Mandarin Chinese, the character “交 (jiāo)”, meaning “befriending” and “interaction”, is commonly used in many sex terms; while in English, the word “get” often appears in sex slang with the metaphorical meaning of “obtaining” and “achieving”.

Previous studies (Judith 2011; Li, Dai & Wei 2010; Wu 2015) have pointed to the connection between “sex” and “love” in both Taiwanese and American cultures from the stances of anthropology and sociology. However, very few addressed this relationship from the perspective of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff 1980) as to how any such cognitive mappings (Kövecses 2002, 2010) take place, and how they contribute to perceptions in different speakers based on different languages. The study first collects the literature works from other fields, such as sociology, history, and anthropology, which display the traits of the connection and dynamics of sex and love in the two culture, and then the study verifies the traits in linguistic aspect. Basing its methodology in the cognitive framework, the research intends to analyze the metaphorical mechanisms underlying the various terms of sex in comparison with earlier studies. Terms of sex in this study are collected from online questionnaire designed directly to the speakers of the two languages and mainstream online social media, respectively, and are verified using Sinica Corpus (Taiwan-based Chinese corpus) and COCA (USA-based English corpus).

During the analysis of the sex terms in the two languages, the study demonstrates that not only the metaphors are commonly used for sex expression, metonymies and euphemisms also frequently appear in the sex terms. For example, “行房 (xíng fáng)” doing room, and “房事 (fáng shì)” room work, are two of the widely used terms when we want to express “sex” in quite formal occasions. In this case, place, metonymy is used, which substitute the behavior itself by where it takes place. However, significantly fewer obscure sex terms have been found in English literary works. As for the metaphorical mappings, this study has identified the following metaphors based on the sex terms collected: for Chinese, (i) SEX IS NATURAL PHENOMENON, (ii) SEX IS LOVE, and (iii) SEX IS WAR; for English, (i) SEX IS OBTAINMENT and (ii) SEX IS FILTH.

The metaphorical mappings, the metonymies and the evidence of the literary works in the two languages have indicated that in Mandarin Chinese, “love” and “intimacy” are the two dominant metaphors in the most commonly used sex terms, whereas few can be discovered in English. Therefore, it is concluded that a high correlation is found between the linguistic forms and the degree of “separation of sex and love” in speakers’ perception.

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