

LIU DILIN, **Metaphor, culture and worldview**. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002. Pp. xiii, 150.

In this work Liu seeks, ostensibly, to address the question of the importance of sports and business metaphors in American English usage vis-à-vis family and eating metaphors in Chinese, “If renowned scholars on language and culture do not understand the eminence of sports metaphors in American English, how do we expect the general public to?” (x, note 1). What he gives us, though, along with an interesting compilation of data involving such metaphors in AE and in Chinese, is another book of the cultural diversity type that exploits and over-generalizes from popular linguistic items in AE and Chinese (of which no specific variety is specified) and forms conclusions about the two cultures on their basis.

Liu opens Chapter 1 with data from remarks made by Warren Christopher during a diplomatic mission to Russia, “In the business of diplomacy, you often *score runs by hitting singles*. And I think the President and President Yeltsin *hit a series of good solid singles that’ll add up to scoring a great many runs*” (emphasis Liu’s) (1). In his subsequent discussion, he uses these and other data to form conclusions about American culture, *viz.*, “in the process of this constant use of sports metaphor, Americans ... conflate sports with other activities, making life a sport indeed” (6).

In purported contrast to American discourse, data from Qian Qichen, People’s Republic of China Vice Premier of Foreign Affairs, speaking on the Taiwan question is offered, “We [Beijing government] will respect the way of life of our *tongbao* (‘descendants born to the same parents’ [his translation—literally, of the same womb, but synchronically, used in political discourse with extended meaning, ‘children of the motherland’—the word has strong, purely emotional political appeal based on a strong, traditional sense of unity among the peoples of China]) in Taiwan ... (1). In later

remarks, the author emphasizes the importance of family metaphor in Chinese culture (73, *passim*).

The view advanced here is that the metaphors used in business or political discourse reveal “how Americans and Chinese view the world and life differently” (9) and that “such different views lead to different attitudes and practices in politics, business, education, and life in general” (10). This recourse to linguistic relativity is a conventional default in contemporary multiculturalism; the view, however, omits rhetorical situation as a determinant in language choice, and thus fails to account for the linguistic facts involved.

In his synopsis of scholarly commentary on the use of metaphor in rhetoric (1-5), the author omits appropriate reference to the *Poetics*, where Aristotle found metaphor to be a most powerful tool among the means of persuasion. Here we come to the problem with L’s argument. Secretary Christopher was speaking for an audience of Americans in a manner calculated to persuade that audience of the value and success of the President’s diplomatic visit to Russia during a period when relations between the two countries were showing signs of strain and American politicians were being asked to approve more economic aid to Russia. Vice Premiere Qian was speaking to an audience of ethnic Chinese, both from the mainland, and from Taiwan and beyond, where his remarks were sure to be reported. Both speakers made language selections that include lexical items and stylistic variety to appeal to their respective audiences. What these data demonstrate are *rhetorical* choices, made to maximize persuasive effect, from all the possibilities resident in the language.

The author in his analysis conflates world view with the means of persuasion. In Secretary Christopher's case, the informal style of the popular baseball metaphor gives him a folksy, homey appeal, a regular feature of Clinton administration public relations, while at the same time offering sufficient vagueness to render his remarks void of concrete predictive content for which he or his boss could later be held accountable. Vice Premier Qian's remarks, on the other hand, involve an attempt to persuade Taiwanese Chinese based on historical and traditional (emotional) grounds, while avoiding the important questions of how the Chinese government's reunification project may affect the concrete economic, social, and political interests of Taiwanese or expatriate Chinese and of defining the "legitimate" interests of the Taiwanese (1).

And so it goes throughout the book. We read of the "unusual importance of food and eating in Chinese culture" (87). This sort of remark is insupportable. First, there is no evidence for the conclusion that such items are more frequent, more dominant, or preferred. Second, how can it be true? Consider that within the last 10 years Egyptologists have resolved the mystery of the labor force that constructed the great pyramids by examining the evidence of diet and food preparation in the newly discovered workers' settlement. Can a culture be found in the world in which food and eating is not "unusually important"?

And third, L omits consideration of the fundamental, purely linguistic process of metaphorical extension in word creation, probably the primary means of vocabulary expansion in language. These lexemes that he calls metaphors, like any other items in lexis, have conventional meaning among the community of speakers that uses them. Chinese speakers I interviewed in the U.S. and in China recognize in *tongbao* a word

used only in political discourse to refer to ethnic Chinese who live outside China. George Campbell expresses the risk of assigning too much significance to figures of speech, "words which appear tropical to a [language] learner...may, through the imperceptible influence of use, have totally lost that appearance to the natives who consider them purely as proper terms" (*The philosophy of rhetoric*, 1776). And as Hugh Blair points out, "the connection between words and ideas may ... be considered as arbitrary and conventional" (*Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres*, 1783).

In other words, whatever process may have transpired in the lexicalization of such items, synchronically they mean what they mean. We could no more safely ascribe to an English speaker uttering *goodbye* (< *God be with you*) a consciousness of the influence of Christianity, or to a baseball player, announcer, or fan observing that *a hot grounder to the third baseman ate him up* an unusually strong consciousness of the importance of either the elements of the universe (*heat*) or of food and eating. American politics and business use sports metaphor; sports in turn uses military metaphor: He *stayed back* on the ball and it *handcuffed him*; you need to *charge* the ball and *come up firing*. In American football we can say: the quarterback went for the *bomb*, and the game *plan* was *to attack* the defense on the corners. All this proves nothing except that metaphorical extension is a productive process of word formation and that items familiar in the culture are likely suspects to undergo this process.

I can say it very simply. Wholesale cultural generalities of the kind offered in this volume, based on these types of observations, on the one hand obscure the properties of lexis in language and on the other mask the interplay of lexis with the situational, rhetorical contexts that inform the selection of language items in speech situations. This

volume does, however, offer an informative set of data demonstrating a number of popular sports and business metaphors from AE, and family and eating metaphors from Chinese, which are of great interest to students of comparative discourse conventions.

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