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<td>Author(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>人間文化研究科年報 第25号 pp.71-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Date</td>
<td>2010-03-31</td>
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<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10935/1550">http://hdl.handle.net/10935/1550</a></td>
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<td>Textversion</td>
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<td>Source</td>
<td>Nara Women's University Digital Information Repository</td>
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This document is downloaded at: 2018-12-05T18:24:57Z
Cultural scripting of body parts for emotional expressions
On ‘anger’ in English, Chinese and Japanese

毛 峻 凌*

1. Introduction

Different languages present a variety of ways of talking about emotional experiences. There is abundant linguistic data showing expression of emotion in terms of their imagined “locus” in the physical body. The question inevitably arises as to “How the body is referred to in description of anger” and “What role do people’s embodied experiences have in their understanding of anger”? That is, “what kinds of activities or states are associated with the body parts when they are used to talk about anger?” If body is a vehicle through which emotions can be felt, experienced, expressed, and communicated, which components of the body are culturally scripted for “anger” in English, Chinese and Japanese? On the one hand, the linguistic evidence in this paper, from Chinese and Japanese perspectives, attests to the universal form of physiological embodiment for anger proposed by Kövecses (1986:12): THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR THE EMOTION. On the other hand, it points to the cultural diversity in the bodily conceptualization and interpretation of anger in the three languages. Namely, the role of metaphor can be described via a cultural script. Let’s begin with the general principle proposed by Kövecses.

2. The scripting of physiological effects of the conceptualization of anger

Kövecses (1986:12) exemplifies a general metonymic principle: THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR THE EMOTION, which is given an almost exclusively physiological bearing. It means that there really exists connection between anger and physiological effects, hence the description of these effects is indirectly the description of the emotion (the metonymic process). There are the following effects of anger: increased body heat, increased body pressure, a red face, agitation and interference with accurate perception. Do Chinese and Japanese also share this physiological function? Consider the following linguistic descriptions of physiological responses of anger in these three languages:

(1) BODY HEAT
a. English:
   Don’t get hot under the collar.
   Billy’s a hot head.

b. Chinese:
   他气得脸上火辣辣的。

＊比較文化学専攻
“He got so angry that my face was peppery hot.”

c. Japanese:
Watashi no atama ga katto atsuku natta.
“My head got hot.”
Atama-o hiyashita hoo ga ii.
“You should cool down.”

It is interesting to point out that in Chinese, though it contains a rich and varied set of metonymies which describe the physiological and behavioral effects of anger, it does not have a large number of expressions that show the metonymic association of body heat, only one example can be found in the common daily use. The reason is that the Chinese version for the central metaphor ANGER IS HEAT is ANGER IS HOT GAS IN THE CONTAINER. According to our commonsense knowledge of gas, heat is already a necessary condition for the gas, a gas metaphor can be an anger metaphor without heat being highlighted, thus body heat association is rarely expressed.

(2) INTERNAL PRESSURE

a. English:
Don’t get a hernia.
When I found out, I almost burst a blood vessel.

b. Chinese
别把肺给气炸了。
“Don’t break your lung with gas (rage).”
别气破了肚皮。
“Don’t break your belly skin with gas.

c. Japanese:
Ikari no kimochi-o osae-kireini.
“To be unable to suppress the feeling of anger.”
Sonni ni ikiri tattcha ketsuatsu ga agaru yo.
“Don’t get so angry, your blood pressure will go up.”

Pressure seems to be an important element in the Chinese and Japanese anger metonymies, just as in English, which suggests that these are physiological reactions belonging more to biology than to culture.

(3) REDNESS IN FACE AND NECK AREA

a. English
She was scarlet with rage.
He was flushed with anger.

b. Chinese
They argued until everyone became red in the face and ears.

She was so angry that her face turned red, pale, blue, and purple.

c. Japanese

Kare wa makka ni natte okotta.

“He turned red with anger.”

Kare wa ikari de akaku natta.

“He got red with anger.”

English, Chinese and Japanese all have a lot of phrases concerned with an increase in skin temperature which serves as metonymies for anger, as shown in (3). It shows that the lexicalized responses of body heat and redness serve as a basis for the heat component in the English and Japanese anger metaphor, while the lexicalized response of internal pressure and redness provide the experiential basis for the pressure component in all the English, Chinese and Japanese anger metaphor.

(4) AGITATION

a. English

She was shaking with anger.

I was hopping mad.

b. Chinese

他气得咬牙切齿。

“He was gnashing his teeth with anger.”

他气得捶胸顿足。

“He hit his breast and stamped his feet in anger.”

他气得全身发抖。

“His whole body was shaking all over with rage.”

c. Japanese

Karada ga ikari de furueru.

“To shake with anger.”

Koe ga ikari de furueru no o osaekirenai.

“To be unable to control the voice shaken by anger.”

As we saw in (4), the effects of these various kinds of aggressive behavior are unpleasant, but they are all bases of metonymic expressions of anger in these three languages. In (4b), we can see that bodily movements can be different to varying degrees, from gnashing of teeth and stamping feet to shaking all over.
(5) INTERFERENCE WITH ACCURATE PERCEPTION

a. English
   She was blind with rage.
   I was beginning to see red.

b. Chinese
   他气得两眼发黑。
   “He was so angry that he was beginning to see black.”
   他气糊涂了。
   “He is confused because of anger.”

c. Japanese
   Ikari de zengo no misakai ga tsukanai.
   “To be unable to tell which side is front or back because of anger.”

English and Chinese elaborate the metonymic association of visual perception contrast. As shown in (5a) and (5b), the English example selects “see red” but the Chinese one selects “see black”. That is because one’s lessened accurate perception will lead to weakened visual perception, and with Chinese metaphorical sentence SEE NOTHING IS SEEING DARKNESS we can see that the only thing the angry one can get is darkness. Differently, English views anger as fire or hot fluid. As we know, fluid is categorized with cold and only with the help of fire can we get the heated water. Suppose you engulf yourself in a flame, you then will be surrounded by the red world.

Thus, as linguistic evidence suggests, people respond physiologically. They seem to share certain physiological process including body heat, internal pressure, and redness in the face and neck area. The metonymic understandings of anger are in part based on shared ideas about the human body and certain physiological processes that are associated with anger.

3. The scripting of culturally specific embodiment

In the foregoing, we have analyzed the physiological effects of anger which are likely to be the bases for its conceptualization in English, Chinese and Japanese. All this provides evidence for the linguistic manifestation of embodied cognition. The question that inevitably arises is that: If anger is only understood in part via a conceptual metonymy grounded in a physiological embodiment or it is also shaped by a culture-specific metonymic understanding of the body parts? Consider the following sentences:

(6) a. 他气得发指眦裂。
   “He is so angry that his hair bristles up and eyes bursts.”
b. 他气得吹胡子瞪眼。
   “He was so angry that he was blowing his moustache and opening his eyes wide.”
c. 他气得横眉竖目。

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“He was angry with horizontal brows and vertical eyes.”

d. 他气得怒发冲冠。

“He is so angry that his angry hair is pushing up his hat.”

Example (6) reveals that in Beijing Opera, many various aggressive behavioral reactions are used to show that the speaker has got angry. It leads us to get a glimpse of the existence of culturally specific elements of Chinese, and reference to culturally specific knowledge related to the expression of emotion in Beijing Opera. And it’s interesting to point out that though all of the expressions of (6) involving terms of external body parts, only (6d) makes explicit use of angry word ‘怒’ in Chinese, attaching it to the body parts that reveal the feeling of anger. In (6c), both “horizontal” brows and “vertical” eyes are used to denote anger. (6a-b) show us that bodily movements can link to various degrees, from “hair bristles up” to “blows moustache”.

Superficially, the above Chinese examples resemble a number of English and Japanese expressions which describe one’s anger by referring to some behavioral reactions common to the folk models as in (4a) and (4c), but there exists a difference between English and Chinese. Chinese attempts to reflect an indigenous way of describing agitation in utilizing the bodily movements as shown in (4b). Moreover, the agitation expressions in Chinese appear to be motivated by a different image, which emphasizes the basis in the physical and cultural experience, as in (6a-d).

Most strikingly, in the common folk opinion held by Chinese, anger causes the following interferences with bodily functions, as shown in (7):

(7) a. 他气得头疼。

“He is so angry that his head aches.”

他气瘦了。

“He became emaciated as a result of anger.”

c. 他气死了。

“He died from anger.”

It is apparent that as (7a-c) show, one’s health may be damaged and he may die from anger if he can’t control his anger. These sentences show that in Chinese medicine, gas is an important element and negative emotion anger is exactly the cause for the impediment of circulation of gas which may result in the illness.

The effect of anger can be expressed in an artistically exaggerated manner. This kind of exaggerated manner is also significant in Chinese, as shown in (8):

(8) a. 他咆哮如雷。

“He was so angry that he roars like thunder.”

b. 他气得暴跳如雷。
“He jumps violently like thunder.”

These results indicate that one’s aggressive behavior can be ascribed to the natural phenomena which is characteristically violent and uncontrollable as thunder. The Chinese data suggest strongly that cultural specific understanding can be revealed to account for the interpretation of the emotional state of a person.

So as the above examples show, cultural models do enter and influence the selection of linguistic expressions for a particular physical experience. This is well illustrated by the examples in (7) and (8). From the point of view of the Chinese language, English and Japanese are lacking in descriptions of somatic features and exaggerated manner. The same conceptual metonymies may vary cross-culturally in terms of their elaboration and the importance given to them (Kövecses, 2002). Our cultural interpretation of an event shapes how our bodies experience emotions, too.

4. The scripting of internal body parts in the conceptualization of anger

The above examples suggest that the English, Chinese and Japanese people can refer to emotion by describing their externally observable bodily events and processes primarily. It seems that there are only a few exceptions, like ‘explosion of lung’ with gas (2b), which involves an internal part. That is to say, following the metonymic principle THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR THE EMOTION, the conventionalized expressions involving external body parts are originally metonymic in nature. Then, what about the role of the internal body parts in the conceptualization of anger? Kövecses (1987:13) detects THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR THE EMOTIONS, and we can see that the angry person’s body is mapped onto the physical container. Illustrations of the different parts of the body with respect to the metaphorical expressions of anger are as follows:

(9) a. English
He was breathing fire.
Simmer down.

b. Chinese
他的话撩动了她的肝火。
“What he said stirred up fire in her liver.”

他脾气很大。
“He’s got big gas in his spleen.”

他窝了一肚子火。
“She held in a belly of fire.” (i.e., He was simmering with rage.)

他心头火起。
“Fire started to flare up in his heart.” (i.e., He flared up with anger)

c. Japanese
Ikari ga mune no naka ni moe sakaru.
“Fire is burning inside the breast.”
Ikari ga hara no soko o guragura, saseru.
“Anger boils in the bottom of the belly.”

Interesting enough, English doesn’t mention a particular location of fire while anger is described as “the gas in the spleen” or “the liver fire” in Chinese and fire can also be found in heart and belly. In Japanese, anger is thought to be located in the breast and belly. This is because for English and Japanese, ANGER IS FIRE and ANGER IS HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER (Lakoff and Kövecses, 1987; Mastuki, 1995), whereas the Chinese versions are ANGER IS FIRE and ANGER IS HOT GAS IN A CONTAINER. Lexical evidence suggests that the three languages make a distinction between “external body parts” and “inner body parts”, namely, in sharp contrast to the expressions with external body-part terms, those expressions containing terms of internal body parts are fundamentally metaphorical. They evoke internal bodily images that are imaginary in character (Wierzbicka, 1999). As listed in the above metonymies associated with physiological embodiment, the external body parts are connected with visible bodily changes and events primarily, but viewed as a whole, we can’t find the same connection between the bodily movement and the internal body parts. In contrast, we can’t really tell how “simmering with fire” feels or how the fire in the liver is stirred up.

From the previous discussion, it is interesting to note that the expressions involving external body parts are primarily metonymic, whereas those involving internal body parts are fundamentally metaphorical.

5. Further discussion: Chinese 心 heart’ versus Japanese hara ‘belly’

In Japan, Matsuki (1995) tells us that there seems to exist a culturally distinct set of concepts that is built around the concept of hara. There is a further point which needs to be clarified, that is, “Does Chinese culture produce the equivalent concept that is present in Japanese?” The answer is positive. The corresponding concept in Chinese is 心 ‘heart’. Let’s first look at the definition of the word 心 ‘heart’ in a popular Chinese-English dictionary (外研社, 2006: 1021), that is, (a) “the heart”; and (b) “heart, mind, feeling”. Further more, according to the theory of internal organs in Chinese medicine, Chinese 心 ‘heart’ not only acts as the seat or container of thoughts and feelings, but also, by metonymy CONTAINER FOR CONTAINED, it also refers to one’s thoughts and feelings, as the evidence below will demonstrate:

(10) a. 他很有心机，他心思我可猜不透。
   “He has a mind of his own, I really can’t read his mind.

b. 他终于心想事成，心愿了结。
   “He eventually accomplished his wish/desire in his heart.”

c. 他心里全白费了，不由得心灰意冷。
   “He bothered his heart for nothing and become heart-gray and spirit-cold.”
   (i.e., downhearted.)

d. 眼前令人心醉的风光让他心旷神怡。
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“The enchanting scenery in front of him makes him heart-vast and spirit-joyful.”
(i.e., being charmed or enchanted, relaxed and joyful.)

Examples (10a) and (10b) are both about mental activities that can be conceptualized as taking place in one’s heart. As we can see in (10a), one is very calculating then it is hard to figure out the thought/mind in his heart. (10b) indicates that the desire one wants to fulfill is the mental state originates in the heart. Examples (10c-d) evoke the image of the feeling of disappointment and happiness. Both two examples contain words from such semantic domains as color (e.g., gray heart), bodily sensation (e.g., cold spirit), dimension (e.g., heart vast) and emotion (e.g., spirit joyful). These examples show us that the Chinese ‘heart’ is not only the center of emotional activity, but also includes what is described as “mind” in English.

In Japanese, Matsuki (1995: 143) suggests that when *hara* is used to refer to the contents of the container, it is the word for something real but hidden. When it is used for the container itself, it is the container for some invisible, hidden truth. Consider the following examples:

(11) a. Hara o watte hanasu.
   “Cut one’s belly and talk.” (i.e., reveal one’s intentions; have a heart-to heart talk)
   b. Hara ni osameru.
   “Keep something in one’s stomach. (i.e., keep something to one’s self.)
   c. Hara no mushi ga osamaranai.
   “Belly worms cannot be pacified.” (i.e., cannot control one’s feelings)

Example (11a) shows us clearly that the Japanese may think in their *hara* and they each may keep their common thought in their *hara*, to reveal their intentions is to cut down their *hara* and bring the thought out of it. Example (11b) refers to mental behaviour which has to do with a person’s real intention or true motives. Example (11c) implies that *hara* also plays a role in describing a stressful feeling of impatience. These examples show clearly that one may ‘think’ in one’s *hara*. As Mcveigh (1996: 39) demonstrates, when Japanese people use *hara* (i.e., ‘bellies’) for thinking, they “go beyond mere rational intellectual thought and focus on the deeper, essential aspects of a problem.” So, we can say ‘*hara*’ in Japanese can denotes mind and real feeling as ‘*heart*’ in Chinese.

Through analysis of linguistic evidence, it has become clear that the Chinese ‘*heart*’, as well as the Japanese *hara*, is the combination of “heart” and “mind” in the western sense. On the one hand, both ‘*heart*’ and *hara* can be linked to the place where emotions and thoughts are stored, processed, and manipulated; on the other hand, they both include what is described as “mind” in English. Conversely, western cultures maintain that the mind is the place for thoughts and ideas whereas the heart is the seat of emotions and feelings (see, e.g., Lakoff& Johnson,1999).

Another use of Chinese ‘*heart*’ and Japanese *hara* is that they are often employed in the phrases that characterize people, as shown below:
(12) a. Chinese:

“He is really bad-hearted.” (i.e., he is scheming)
“He is a man who has broad heart.” (i.e., he is a man of vision with high ambitions)
“He has so many things weighing on his heart that he always in despair.” (i.e., he is narrow-minded and oversensitive.)

b. Japanese:

“He has a black belly.”
“A man whose hara is set down.” (i.e. a man with plenty guts.)
“A broad-minded person.”

Examples in (12) reflect that Chinese and Japanese hara can be viewed as the center of fundamental and important personal characteristics. heart is proceeded by an adjective to refer to the personality traits. The evil person’s heart is bad in Chinese, however, the Japanese one will have a black belly. Also, one who has a big heart is more likely to be ambitious and thoughtful enough. People with a big, broad heart, or people who has a hara which is ‘set’ to be spiritually strong and can be judged positively. On the other hand, people who can’t take the load off his heart is thus incapable of withstanding the difficulties of life, so they are naturally considered negatively. Note, however, one may have a broad heart in Chinese and one may have a big hara in Japanese, thus, internal body parts are enculturated and also embedded in the cultural enviroment.

6. Conclusion

The paper lists many physiological effects associated with anger in English, Chinese and Japanese that provide the bases for systematic metonymies. Also, this paper has presented a study of metaphorical expressions of internal organs which associate with anger in Chinese and Japanese.

As the early stage of my study, detailed culture-specific case study of linguistic representations of the abstract concept anger, this paper is bound to suffer from its limitation, both in the quantity and scope of the data examined and in their quantitative verifications. But the message is clear: the role of culture must be recognized, cultural models set up specific perspectives from which certain aspects of bodily experience or certain parts of the body are viewed as especially salient and meaningful in the understanding of anger expressions.

In summary, anger metaphor emerges from the interaction between body and culture: it is grounded in bodily experience, but shaped by cultural understanding. We must take language and culture seriously if
we ever want to gain a real and full understanding of the human anger.

Notes

References
Abstract

This paper illustrates how the body is referred to in description of anger and examines the role that people’s embodied experiences have in their understanding of anger in English, Chinese and Japanese. The first objective of this paper is to compare the models of the “folk image of anger” with its systematic metonymies of Chinese and Japanese to see if Köecses’s metonymic principle is also applicable in these two languages. The second objective of the paper is to understand the meaning of descriptions of anger that refer to the body to see if they are influenced by cultural models. This paper also examine the nature of Chinese—f ‘heart’ and Japanese hara ‘belly’. Japanese hara, as well as Chinese—f, can be regarded as the organ that stores feelings and emotions, is the combination of ‘heart’ and ‘mind’ in English. All these evidence should support the claim that although ‘anger’ is fundamentally grounded in embodiment, culture also plays a crucial role in selecting the specific embodiment.

Key words: physiological effects, cultural script, internal organs, heart and belly