

Music as Source Domain: A Cross-Linguistic Exploration of Conceptual Metaphors

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Abstract : The metaphors people use in everyday discourse do not arise randomly; rather, they develop from our physical experiences in our social and cultural environments. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) explains that through metaphor, we apply our embodied understanding of the physical world to non-material concepts to understand and express abstract concepts. Our most productive source domains derive from our embodied understanding and allow us to develop primary metaphors, and from primary metaphors, an elaborate, creative world of culturally constructed complex metaphors. Cognitive Linguistics researchers draw upon individual embodied experience for primary metaphors. Socioculturally embodied experience through music has long furnished linguistic expressions in diverse languages, as conceptual metaphors or everyday expressions. Can a socially embodied experience function in the same way as an individually embodied experience in the creation of conceptual metaphors? The authors argue that since music is inherently social and embodied, musical experiences function as a richly motivated source domain. The focus of this study is socially embodied musical experience which is then reflected and expressed through metaphors. This cross-linguistic study explores music as a source domain for metaphors of social alignment in English, French, and Chinese. The authors explored two public discourse sites, Facebook and Linguée, in order to collect linguistic metaphors from three different languages. By conducting this cross-linguistic study, cross-cultural similarities and differences in metaphors for which music is the source domain can be examined. Different musical elements, such as melody, speed, rhythm and harmony, are analyzed for their possible metaphoric meanings of social alignment. Our findings suggest that the general metaphor cooperation is music is a productive metaphor with some subcases, and that correlated social behaviors can be metaphorically expressed with certain elements in music. For example, since performance is a subset of the category behavior, there is a natural mapping from performance in music to behavior in social settings: social alignment is musical performance. Musical performance entails a collective social expectation that exerts control over individual behavior. When individual behavior does not align with the collective social expectation, music-related expressions are often used to express how the individual is violating social norms. Moreover, when individuals do align their behavior with social norms, similar musical expressions are used. Cooperation is a crucial social value in all cultures, indeed it is a key element of survival, and music provides a coherent, consistent, and rich source domain—one based upon a universal and definitive cultural practice.

Keywords : Chinese, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, cross-linguistic, culturally embodied experience, English, French, metaphor, music

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