A Relevance-Theoretic Study of Poetic Metaphor

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Poetic metaphors are one kind of conceptual metaphors. The previous studies showed that much attention has been paid to the conceptual metaphors in poems, but less in novels. As a result, the properties of conceptual metaphors are much limited by the root metaphors and poems. Moreover, the concept of the poetic metaphors is indefinite and regarded as the conceptual metaphors in poems, which neglects the varieties of the poetic metaphors and weakens their functions. Therefore, this study explores how the readers apply the poetic metaphors to reach the optimal relevance in the process of reading short stories under the framework of the Relevance Theory (RT), aiming to construct an interpreting model of novels from the cognitive-pragmatic perspective and implement the model in literary analysis.

Keywords: poetic metaphor, novel, relevance theory

Introduction

That the text can be called literature lies in the fact that it can bring the endless imagination and enlighten the readers. When a reader opens a book, he or she begins to interpret the text, which means the process of reading becomes the communication between the text and the readers. According to the definition of the conceptual metaphor put forward by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphor reflects people's mind and action. In other words, the text can reflect its own concepts on the one hand; the readers obtain the meanings of the text based on the concepts reflected in the text on the other hand. Nevertheless, the conceptual metaphors are much studied from the perspective of the consciousness of characters or author from the perspective of text style. Besides, texts are endowed with the concepts so that the text and the readers become two independent subjects. Different from daily conversation, the text reading is limited to the characteristics of the genre. Due to the collected resources, Relevance Theory provides a good way to interpret discourse and Sperber and Wilson (1995) analyzed metaphors within the theory. Even though Sperber and Wilson emphasized there is no need to build the framework of how to understand metaphors, the study shows that for a comprehensive interpretation metaphors in discourse, it is essential to construct a model of analysis.

In this study, it not only defines the metaphors in literature, but concludes the properties of such properties and provides the suggested understanding model for such conceptual metaphors within the Relevance Theory. This section mainly deals with the general description, the significance, and the structure of the present study.

Redefinition of the Poetic Metaphor and Model Construction

In the previous chapter of literature review, it is found that the concept of the poetic metaphor is illusive in

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the study of metaphors. However, the poetic metaphor plays a necessary role in the understanding of literary discourse. Hence, first of all, the definition of the poetic metaphor needs to be clarified. A working definition of the poetic metaphor is suggested after the mainstream of the categories of metaphors and pointing out the flaws in these categories.

The concept metaphor is omniscient, but it is necessary to tell the poetic metaphor and the non-poetic metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Poetic metaphor belongs to the concept metaphor. However, the characters of literature text are endowed with the unique features to the poetic metaphor. According to the former study results, conceptual metaphor in literature text is three-dimension. A wide range of the concept metaphors are involved in poem studies. A large amount of concept metaphors are used in Emily Dickson's poems, including the case "life is a journey". For understanding these concept metaphors, it involves the poet, the poems, and the readers. Since the poems are concise and simple, the projection relationship between source domain and the target domain is direct. In novels, such projections become less direct, since the novels lack the understanding contexts for concept metaphor, in which most words are direct and easy to understand. Compared with the non-poetic metaphor, the poetic metaphor involves four-dimension, i.e., the author, the text, the readers, and between the text. In other words, the poetic property of the poetic metaphor can be stimulated in the whole text rather than limited in the range of sentences or stanzas.

Moreover, the non-poetic metaphor exists in words, sentences, paragraphs, and even the discourse of a literary text. The poetic metaphor only exists in paragraphs and texts. It is necessary to demonstrate that here the paragraphs and texts all refers to the paragraphs and text that the readers achieved after reading, instead of the original one in the literary discourse. From the goal of literature, it is to communicate the experience and feelings with readers. As a result of it, the poetic metaphor must be endowed with the much over-burden meaning than that it appears. Therefore, the poetic metaphor is a type of conceptual metaphor rooted in literary discourse whose interpretation depends on a holistic view of a larger unit such as a paragraph or a text. In addition, the source domain and the target domain of the poetic metaphor exist within the same discourse. The poetic metaphor is formulated through the reading process, during which the reader actively involves his/herself in the interpretation. The source domain and the target domain are constructed out of the readers' exploration of the literary discourse. The two domains interact with each other.

Properties of Poetic Metaphor

According to the content mentioned above, the properties of poetic metaphors have not been provided in literary discourses. The basic property of PMs (Poetic Metaphors) is creative, which is reflected in different forms in literature discourses. In the following parts, it concludes three properties of poetic metaphors.

Dynamicity in Staticity

"Dynamicity" means the receivers of the poetic metaphor proactively mobilize their knowledge and experience to understand the target texts. "Staticity" means all the endless imaginations based on the PM are limited by the literal meanings, which is only one part of these symbols.

In terms of "dynamicity", the interaction theory explores the relationship between metaphors and the cognitive ability of human beings. Moreover, under some circumstances, the similarity of the so-called "active and creative assumptions" can reflect much more creativity than those existing similarities. SHU Ding-fang (2000, p. 162) held the same opinion as Black's. Black's view targets at the two different conceptual scopes

reflected in the metaphor understanding. These creative metaphors with imagistic and affective effects can produce a huge cluster of weak assumptions, which can highlight the dynamic degree of the metaphors. The more dynamic the poetic metaphor is, the higher the weak assumptions are (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; 2008; Pilkington, 2000). These weak assumptions can be regarded as the results of communication of the two conceptual scopes. Moreover, the context provides the production and living environment for these assumptions. The understanding of metaphors must be acquired through common knowledge, belief, and various assumptions between interlocutors. During their communications, these decisive elements should be on-line accessed. In spite of human beings' knowledge or the understanding process, it embodies the dynamicity of the poetic metaphor.

The concept of metaphor was first delivered in *Poetics* by Aristotle. The event of the metaphor has been closely connected with poetics and rhetoric. In both two fields, metaphor plays its role of nouns. For the former, it concerns expression, such as order and statement; for the latter, it involves the different parts of speeches, such as letters, words, and sentences. In the traditional rhetoric, the function of metaphors involves the deviation and replacement of words meaning (Ricoeur, 1997, pp. 10-19). The essence of noun is the core of the literal meaning and the dynamic motivation of metaphors. As the fall of traditional rhetoric and the event of neo-rhetoric, metaphor researchers find that metaphor is not the replacement of words meaning, but the change of the semantic content of words. Such changes of semantic content originate in two basic activities—the enrichment of semantic lexis and hiding. In view of Ricœur, metaphors do not only contribute to the transformation of nouns, the abnormal nomination, and the intentional misunderstanding of nomination, but the endlessly updated activity of semantic meanings. No matter from the perspective of classical rhetoric field or from the neo-rhetoric field, the semantic deviation is regarded as the main way of understanding metaphors. Nevertheless, such meaning deviation fails to explain how the creative metaphor is transformed into the dead metaphor (SHU, 2000). Even so, meaning deviation demonstrates the dynamicity of the poetic metaphor.

In the pragmatic field, such "dynamicity" in "staticity" provides a new evidence for the study of context. Grice discussed the questions with reference to metaphor and claimed that metaphors violate the quality maxim of conversational theory. Therefore, the listeners have to consider the implied meaning of speeches. Searle (1978) pointed out eight principles to highlight the understanding of metaphors from multi-perspectives. In Searle's system, sentence meaning is regarded as the literal sense and the metaphor meaning is the speech sense or the non-literal meaning. It is through the context and inference that the speech sense expresses the metaphor meaning (HU, 2004, p. 124). In light of pragmatics, Fraser (1993) held that metaphor is the non-literal use of language, among of which the statement with intention must be achieved through inference. Moreover, Fraser realized it is questionable about the relevance of metaphor to the non-literal use of language. According to Fraser's idea, if it is correct that metaphor is the non-literal use of language with intention, the sentence containing the metaphor will be irrelevant to its truth-condition. Compared with the common meaning expand, the non-literal metaphor cannot be neglected. Such idea is expounded in the *loose talk* of Sperber and Wilson.

In a word, through the traditional rhetoric and neo-rhetoric, poetics, and pragmatics, the PM is dynamic and static. Its dynamicity is reflected in its innovation, creativity, and cognition. The meanings of metaphors are changeable. The staticity highlights its literal use and its meanings limited by the context. Both aspects are opposite but unified. The staticity lays a solid foundation for its dynamacity and the dynamicity adds much more activity to its staticity.

Complementation

"Complementation" includes not only the representative function but also the evocative function of metaphor. In other words, metaphors are certain statements, which can arouse the readers' affection and emotion. In daily communication, metaphors always play the role of semantic enrichment resulting from the lack of lexis. Pilkington (2000, pp. 119-121) provided an account of the aesthetic value with respect to metaphors within the context of relevance theory. However, in general, author tends to state, rather than demonstrate, the superior creativity they attribute to literary metaphors. This study suggests that representation and elaboration are the two paralleled properties of the PM. The representation of PM is to enrich meanings for the existed assumptions and the elaboration refers to arouse emotions from the representation.

In accordance with Recanatti's categories mentioned above, metaphor use belongs to the sub-branch of literal expression. To express the same meaning, why people would rather choose to use metaphor than the literal meaning? To this question, Searle gave an unclear answer that metaphor can realize the indirect goal of speeches. Furthermore, people can express the unpleasant events in a polite manner. However, such answer fails to expound the motivation of metaphor use. The property cannot be disparate from its motivation. In literary discourse, authors who apply the PM aim to stimulate much affection and emotion from readers, while making one statement. Gibbs and Colston (2012) claimed that "readers appeared to view metaphoric language as being intentionally employed by authors in an attempt to create literary texts" (p. 261). Moreover, such usage is apt to be realized by readers when they read literary discourses. Freeman (1995) showed to construct the power of metaphor in Dickinson's poems. Freeman demonstrated how the poet creates her own metaphors to express meanings. Nevertheless, there is a great difference between the poetic language and the language of other genres of literature, especially the language of novels.

The motivation of poetic metaphors can be divided into three types. The first type abides by the inexpressibility hypothesis. According to the inexpressibility hypothesis, metaphor can express the meanings that the literal meaning fails to demonstrate. "We might try to translate the metaphorical sentence into literal language, but we still end up with language that is essentially metaphorical" (Gibbs, 1995, p. 124). However, the experiment proves that there is no clear cut between the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning during reader understanding metaphors in literature. The difference between the metaphorical language and the literal language needs to be studied empirically. In this study, it is claimed that metaphorical meaning and literal meaning are paralleled. In some situations, authors want to convey more meanings in a limited space with the literal meaning failing to satisfy such demand, so the metaphorical meaning will thus incur. The poetic metaphor is multi-faceted in essence, which can express so many meanings from different perspectives.

The second type of motivation is to enrich the emotive expression, which can truly transmit the affection that the metaphor attempts to demonstrate (HU, 2004, p. 5). Moreover, Meier and Robinson (2005) contended that many metaphors reveal the relationship between the affect and perceptual experiences. Both of them study such relations from three levels, including brightness, vertical position, and distance. From the perspective of conceptual metaphor, it is omniscient in our daily life, which reflects one's thought and action. In literature, authors in the same way apply conceptual metaphors to the communication with readers. Authors try their best to arouse and enlighten the affection and emotion among readers and communicate their intentions with readers. Pinning on this point, literature is based on the poetic metaphors.

The main function of literary text is to enlighten the experience of readers. Another main function of literary text is to arouse affection and emotion among readers. If the reader fails to realize the experience that the author attempts to transmit, there is no communicative process between the author and the reader. LI Rong-qi (2005, p. 27) maintained that the expressive function of literary language transforms the referential property of language into the implied one. Such language either completely refutes the literal meaning of words or depends on these fixed meanings. More importantly, authors employ various linguistic devices to make the fixed meanings of words beyond their temporal meanings. As a result, such transformation reaches an artistic image that surpasses the realistic image and the image created by the authors. In addition, Susanne (1983, p. 28) stated that some subject experience is blur thought or concept, which can be identified in common situation. In case that they are endowed with names, these names are just the outside condition to be beneficial for the production of such experience. Pertaining to the Controversion Theory, the statement of metaphor is false, but it is still meaningful and insightful.

The third category is to strengthen the force of literal meaning. It is clear that the metaphorical meanings are more powerful in literature. The PM can induce much more creative and innovative assumptions in a limited scope than those literal meanings. Take the classical example *My Love is a Red Red Rose* to demonstrate this motivation. When Burns wrote down this sentence, he must have hoped to express his intense love. However, in literature, many authors do not know what they want to demonstrate their thoughts and emotions when they write down their letters (Pilkington, 2000, p. 89). At that time, what they can do is to attribute and describe what they are thinking about and experiencing. Contrary to the concrete statements, such concise expression form can make meanings more attractive and concrete in the aspect of expressing abstract objects.

In terms of adding "complementation" to the existing meanings, further field-experiments should be made. In this part, it just provides a theoretical hypothesis for the induced emotion by PM. Stockwell (2002, p. 151) highlighted that literature reading is a process of experiencing emotion and even provides an excited and joyful sense. When readers are appreciating literature, their cognitive ability and emotion are interactive. The cognitive ability is contributed to the stimulation of the emotion as much possible; the emotion is beneficial for improving reader's cognitive ability. It is worthwhile to mention that the complementation of the PM is different from the literary discourse itself. In other words, the emotion inspired by the PM is dramatic and featured with suspended space.

Innovation and Creativity

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the PM is based on experience. In this part, "Innovation" means that the reading background is related to the existing experience, knowledge, and emotion, all of which can be regarded as the known information. The so-called "Creativity" refers to the new meaning of the PM, which is processed on-line. Therefore, appreciating literary discourse is an on-line process of interpreting the existing assumptions and establishing the new assumptions. During the process, the existing assumptions provide basis of understanding for the new assumptions and the new assumptions again provide the basis of understanding for the following assumptions. The cycling process between the existing assumptions and the new assumptions will be continued until the end of appreciation. Such property of PM not only reflects its creativity, but also assumes its discourse understandability, which is the distinct property from other metaphor categories.

According to the identification of the PM, "innovation" of it is different from the meaning of the dead metaphor. The latter is regarded as the fixed meaning and its understanding can be achieved beyond the limit of context. Contrary to the dead metaphor, the PM is closely related to the context and as the continuous enrichment of knowledge, the meanings of the PM becomes much rich. It is well known that the concept of conceptual metaphor is concerned with action and thought. Reading is a psychological activity and the discourse is dramatically different from the ordinary utterances. The usual conceptual metaphors in literary discourse involve two dimensions, which mean the understanding process of conceptual metaphors comes from the target domain to the source domain. However, in the study scope of blending theory, the creative meaning of the conceptual metaphor is born from the emergent space. The result shows that the interactions between the target domain and the source domain fail to interpret the conceptual metaphors in literature. For the PM, the production of meanings is multi-dimensional.

"Creativity" of the PM means that the PM is constantly generated and it develops such property to the maximum through literary reading. The meanings processed are novel. The innovation of the PM can be specified into the following two aspects, i.e., the forms and contents. For the innovative forms, it focuses on the expression of thoughts just as the conceptual metaphors in non-literary discourse. However, the difference lies in the expressive scope of the PM. When the title of one literary discourse occurs in readers' mind, the innovative PM starts to play its role. For example, the famous novel, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austin best illustrates the priority of the PM. The main content of the novel is closely connected with the title. As the development of the content, the title is constantly projected into the contents and keeps changing. Besides, the contents of each chapter are projected into each other. Each projection can be regarded as the innovation of the PMs in the novel. Therefore, the understanding patterns of the PM are unique and endlessly innovative for the contents of the PM lie in its assumptions. The endless production of assumptions demonstrates the innovative content of the PM, which does not belong to the conceptual metaphors in non-literary discourse.

A Suggested Model of Poetic Metaphors in RT

Pilkington (2000) has provided abundant evidence to prove that relevance theory is an effective tool to analyze the poetic effects but failed to put forward a working model for the poetic metaphor under the relevance theory. The strong and weak implicatures in RT are similar to the poetic effects of PM. The former is a set of assumptions of listeners; the latter is a set of assumptions of receivers. Moreover, the two kinds of assumptions own the same characteristics, i.e., inference.

Nevertheless, there are still some differences between the implicatures of RT and the poetic effects of PM. As is mentioned in the last section, the strong implicatures can be easily achieved by listeners and the weak implicatures will spend much more efforts on the hearer's part. Moreover, there is almost no time gap between the understanding processes of the two implicatures. According to the properties of PM listed in section 2, the poetic effects of the PM can be concluded as the representation and the enlightened-emotion. Specifically, language takes the priority of communication, so the literal meanings of PM can be easily grasped, which abides by the motivation of using metaphors. In addition, the enlightened-emotion will attract much more effort for receivers to feel. It is clear that the two implicatures are continuum and the statement and the enlightened-emotion are indispensible. However, it truly exists that the four elements are connected and forms a net during the understanding of PM. As result of it, to distinct the assumptions in the original relevance theory, it provides the first-order assumption, which is the product of reading features.

Even though the PM belongs to the scope of conceptual metaphor, the conceptual metaphor processes definite root domain and target domain. However, the PM does not exist in the fixed root domain and target domain. The source domain of the PM can originates from the themes of the literary text, while the target domains are the plots of the literary discourse. Therefore, the projections of PM reflect a mapping between the themes and the plots. Stern (2000) suggested that the conceptual metaphors are featured with the same properties of indexicals and demonstrators. "The character, or meaning, of a metaphor is the linguistic function from context to context expression; the content of a metaphor is the propositional content determined by the character" (Mey & Brown, 2009, p. 287). Stern's statements demonstrated that there are differences between metaphors and indexicals & demonstratives. From the perspective of reference, the anaphors in texts and the projection of PM share a lot of similarities. For anaphors, one word can be used to refer to the other, which is the same as the projection of PM. In a text, if such reference does not exist, the text will lack coherence. However, there are some basic differences between anaphors and the projections of PM.

The anaphors refer to the words, usually the noun and pronoun. For example, *my neighbor had a dog. That dog kept me awake.* In this case, "that" is the anaphor, without which the dog in the latter sentence will lose relation with that of the former sentence. According to the definition of PM listed above, PM have to exist in the paragraphs and texts. Meanings are achieved through the projection from one concept to another. Moreover, in terms of the identification, the two objects select different path. Anaphors are obvious and easy to be identified. Compared with the anaphor, PMs are hidden behind the words and the meanings consist of a set of assumptions.

According to the narrative characteristics, there is the understanding gap between reading time and literary text. Therefore, in literary text, the mutual manifest in RT is different from that of usual utterances.

According to the analysis mentioned above, for completely and profoundly interpreting the PM in literary, the RT demands a fake assumptions that will disappear in the whole cognitive context. The second-order assumptions are the production of readers under the incomplete cognitive context, which enjoy the same property of poetic effects. It is born at the beginning of the literary discourse and is dead at the appearance of the whole cognitive context.

Combining with the properties of PM and the knowledge of RT, the understanding model of PM is listed as followed:
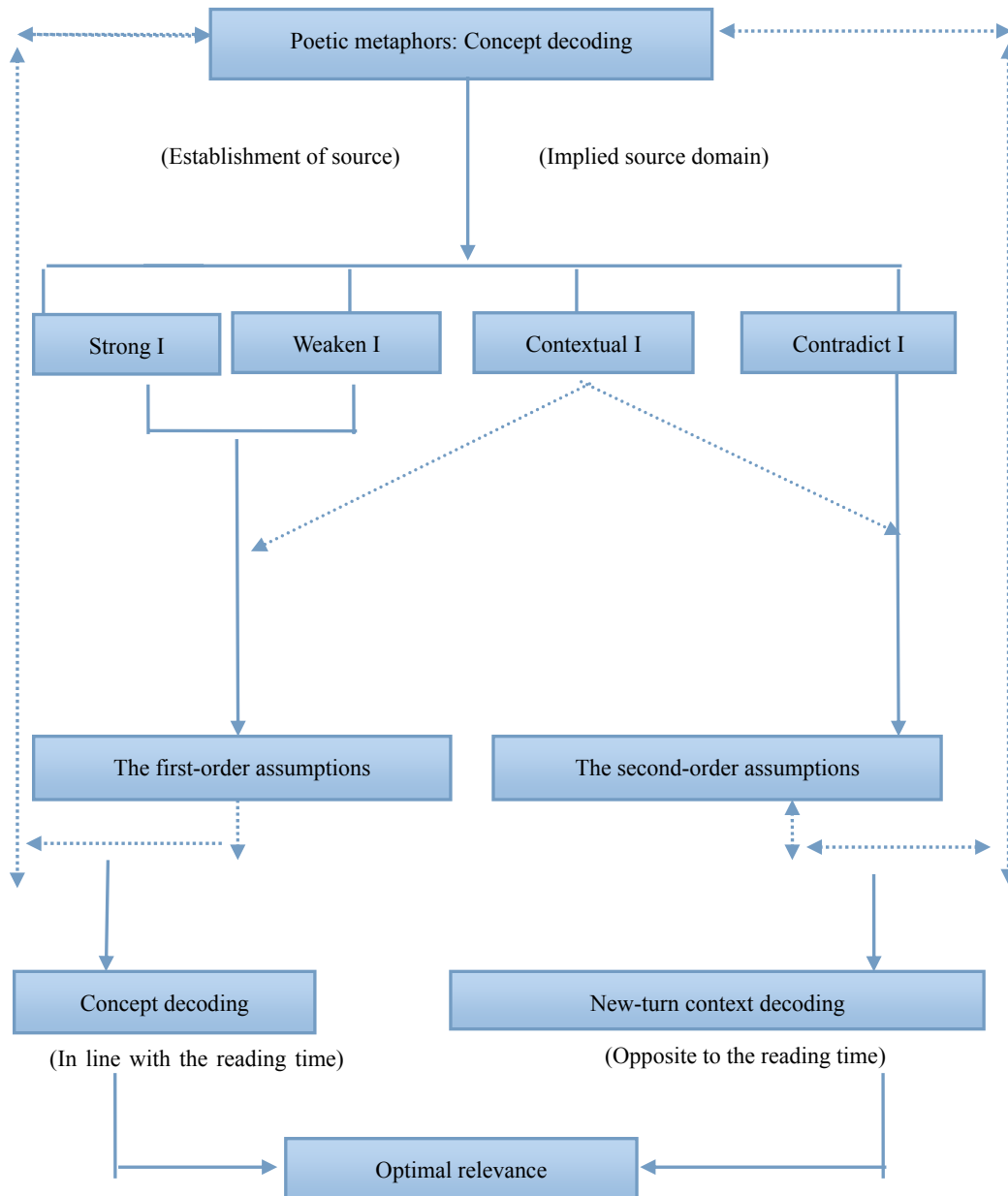
Figure 1. The model of poetic metaphors in relevance theory.

The interpreting process of PM is just as the Figure 1 mentioned above. The whole model combines the relevance theory with the conceptual metaphor theory together, consisting of five levels. Within the relevance theory, it highlights the on-line loose talk and the conceptual assumptions generated during the on-line loose talk. In turn, the conceptual metaphor theory emphasizes the concepts contained in words. Therefore, the combination of both theories can unite the conceptual metaphors in literary discourses together. In the first level, it refers to the concept decoding of the poetic metaphor. In the literary discourse, it is regarded as the process, within which the source domain is established, which is based on the inference of readers. In the second level, it is composed of four categories, i.e., the strong implicaures, the weak implicatures, the contextual implicatures, and the contradict implicatures. For the first two implicatures, they can be tracked back

to the strengthened assumptions and the weakened implicatures. No matter the strong implicatures and the weak implicatures, or the contradict implicatures can be regarded as the new contextual assumptions.

As is shown in the model, the reader begins the process of interpreting poetic metaphor once he is absorbed into the literary discourse. He would go through a series of projections. The main types are listed in the model as projection 1 and projection 2. For projection 1, it results from the readers' inference according to the time line of the discourse. Consequently, the first-order assumptions are generated. In terms of projection 2, it originates from the time gap during the reading process, in which there is implied source domain and implied target domain. As a result, the second-order assumptions incur. The reader reinterprets the literary discourse based on the second-order assumption with the information supplied by the work itself until he regains the first-order assumptions. Hence, the whole process of reading is a constant repetition of projection 1 and projection 2 till the reader seeks the optimal relevance.

Conclusion

The present research has studied the properties of poetic metaphors and constructed the understanding model of poetic metaphor by adopting the cognitive pragmatic approach. Due to the fact that the source domains of poetic metaphors are scattered in the literature, three stories in the story collection are selected to be analyzed in details within the relevance-theoretical framework. Although great efforts have been made in the current study, it still needs much improvement in some aspects. There are still some problems and limitations due to the author's ability, the limited time, and the available materials. For the future research, it is expected to apply the model in other literary genres, such as poetry, drama, and prose. Furthermore, the suggested model will be much more convincing when the psychological approach is involved.

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