Sign Languages and Linguistics Convergence Research
Vol. 1. No. 2 (2024) pp.353~370

Conceptual Metaphor and Double Mapping in Chinese Sign Language

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Jo, Charmhun & Park, Yubin. 2024. Conceptual Metaphor and Double Mapping in Chinese Sign Language. ***Sign Languages and Linguistics Convergence Research,*** *1*(2), 353-370. Conceptual metaphor is a linguistic mechanism that uses concrete experiences to understand and express abstract concepts. It is considered a universal linguistic phenomenon, observed not only in spoken languages but also in sign languages. However, the situation differs for conceptual metaphors derived from sign languages due to the strong association between metaphor and iconicity (Wilcox, 2000; Taub, 2001). In other words, sign languages are characterized by rich iconicity, meaning that when certain signs are extended metaphorically, they undergo double mappings involving both metaphorical and iconically related transfers. This study investigates the applicability of the double mapping model to Chinese Sign Language (CSL), which has received relatively little attention. To determine whether the double mapping model, which integrates metaphorical and iconic dimensions, is applicable within the linguistic context of CSL, this study examines the metaphorical mapping mechanism of the abstract verbFORGETin CSL as a case study. The results indicate that the sign forFORGETin CSL exhibits a layered structure of metaphorical and iconic elements, demonstrating the validity of the double mapping model for CSL. This dual-layered mapping not only enhances the expressiveness of the sign but also highlights the cognitive interplay between concrete experience and abstract concept. The findings of this study underscore the importance of considering both metaphorical and iconic dimensions when analyzing conceptual metaphors in sign languages. They confirm that the double mapping model provides a robust framework for exploring the intricate connection between metaphor and iconicity.

Key Words: Chinese Sign Language, Conceptual Metaphor, Double Mapping, Iconicity, Abstract Verb

1. Introduction

Conceptual metaphor is a linguistic device that employs concrete experiences to comprehend and convey abstract ideas. It serves as a bridge between the tangible and the intangible, enabling individuals to articulate complex ideas/concepts through familiar imagery. This is considered as a universal linguistic phenomenon that is widely observed across languages and cultures (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2005).

For instance, the metaphor TIME IS MONEY illustrates how we often perceive time as a valuable resource akin to currency. This conceptualization influences many aspects of our daily lives, from how we manage our schedules to the decisions we make in both personal and professional realms. In a world where efficiency and productivity are highly prized, every minute can feel like a financial transaction, where time *spent* on one activity means less time available for another. This metaphor not only shapes our behavior but also permeates our language. Phrases such as “saving time”, “wasting time” underscore this deep-seated belief that time is a commodity subject to economic principles. We often hear the admonition, “Don't waste your time”, reflecting the idea that time, once lost, cannot be regained-a nonrenewable resource that demands careful stewardship.

In terms of source-target mapping, TIME IS MONEY as a conceptual metaphor maps our understanding of the more concrete domain of money onto the abstract domain of time. This metaphor allows us to reason about time using the familiar framework of economic transactions, value, and resource management. MONEY as a source domain is a finite resource that can be earned, spent, saved, invested, or wasted. TIME as a target domain is also perceived as a limited resource that can be used or squandered, through the metaphoric transfer processing. Hence, the TIME IS MONEY metaphor provides a framework for understanding and discussing time in economic terms, influencing both individual behavior and broader societal attitudes towards time management.

However, when it comes to sign languages, the situation is somewhat different, particularly with respect to the processing of mappings between the

source and target domains in the two conceptual domains involved. The difference is primarily evident, attributed to the strong correlation between metaphor and iconicity in the context of conceptual metaphors derived from sign languages (Wilcox 2000; Taub 2001). Essentially, sign languages are replete with iconicity, and when signs are employed metaphorically, they undergo double mappings involving both metaphorical and iconically-related transfers.

The concept of iconicity, which refers to the resemblance between the form of a linguistic item and its meaning, is a prevalent principle in both sign and spoken languages. By incorporating metaphor, iconicity enables the representation of abstract ideas through visual means. While sign languages possess a greater number of iconic elements due to their capacity to convey visual, spatial, and motor images, spoken languages are limited to presenting auditory images only (Klima and Bellugi 1979). Due to the iconicity in sign languages, some signs extend their meanings metaphorically and undergo double mappings, which are both iconic and metaphorical, as Taub (2001) pointed out. In the metaphorical mapping, more concrete concepts (source) are mapped onto more abstract concepts (target). Additionally, the source-domain concepts are iconically articulated by the handshapes, locations, and movements in signs, which constitutes the iconic mapping.

In this light, , this study aims to investigate the applicability of the double mapping model for Chinese Sign Language (CSL), which has received relatively little attention thus far. The study examines the metaphorical mapping mechanism of the abstract verb FORGET in CSL as a case study, to determine if the double mapping model, which connects metaphorical and iconic dimensions, is applicable within the linguistic context of CSL. The history of CSL research is briefly covered in Section 2, and an overview of conceptual metaphor theory is provided in Section 3. In Section 4, the relevance of iconicity to metaphor in sign language for showing a double mapping model is discussed, and the CSL abstract verb FORGET is analyzed as a case study in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 concludes with a summary of the research findings and their significance.

2. Chinese Sign Language

Chinese Sign Language (CSL) is a visual-manual language that is used by deaf individuals in China. Historical documents from China indicate that the origins of CSL can be traced back at least 100 years, and it has evolved over time through the use of symbols and facial expressions that were originally used within families and shared among neighbors (Yang, 2008). Like many other sign languages, CSL has also incorporated manually coded signs that are used for educational purposes (Yang and Fisher, 2002; Yang, 2008). CSL signers typically write and are educated in Chinese, and the influence of spoken and written Chinese on CSL is significant, similar to the influence of English on American Sign Language (ASL) (Yang and Fisher, 2002).

The development of CSL was influenced by Western education models. As stated by Callaway (2000), prior to 1887, there was no deaf education in China, and no opportunity for deaf individuals to gather and foster the growth of a sign language. However, in 1887, a former teacher from the Rochester School for the Deaf established the first school for the deaf in Shandong, China, which provided deaf individuals with the opportunity to congregate, leading to the development of sign language in China. This school utilized an oral approach, but it was the starting point for the growth of sign language in the country. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, schools for the deaf in China employed manual alphabets, such as the *Lyon* manual alphabet and manual *Zhuyinzimu,* an early Chinese pronunciation alphabet that used simple Chinese characters or parts of Chinese characters, as well as CSL, to teach Chinese characters (Callaway 2000).

Yang (2011) states that CSL is utilized both in mainland China and among some deaf individuals in Hong Kong, Macao, and parts of Taiwan. Chinese Sign Language features a multitude of regional variations. The primary distinction between all regional sign languages lies in the vocabulary level, which is developed by local deaf people who employ distinct signs to convey the same meaning. Generally, there are two principal types of regional Chinese sign language: Northern dialect sign language, primarily referring to Beijing, and Southern dialect sign language, mainly targeting Shanghai. According to Fischer

and Gong's (2010) research, deaf individuals in the northern region exhibit a greater reliance on Chinese mouth shapes and loaned gestures rooted in Chinese phonetics, while also demonstrating a stronger influence from Chinese word order. On the other hand, those in the southern region are known to utilize more visual gestures and facial expressions in their signing, which differs from the signing style of northern CSL.

Despite the extensive and varied linguistic landscape of CSL, there has been relatively little English-language literature published about it. However, Yau's (1990) study is recognized for shedding light on how CSL's lexical signs are produced. Yau (1990) conducted a thorough analysis of the word formation processes in CSL. According to the study, there are two primary methods for expanding the lexicon: (1) combining two or more basic signs to form a compound sign, which is known as compounding, and (2) using a lexical pantomimic sequence to denote a new notion or object in the language, which likely involves classifier constructions.

The work of Yang and Fisher (2002) on negation in CSL is noteworthy. Their study includes observations and analyses of negation expression in CSL based on interviews with 15 Chinese deaf adults. The results demonstrate that while some aspects of negation in CSL, such as negative signs, resemble those found in other sign languages, CSL has distinctive features. For instance, a negative handshape, which is phonetically equivalent to the fingerspelled letter *i* in ASL, can be expressed through a horizontal handwave and a side-to-side headshake, but these two cannot be used simultaneously. Moreover, the negative words and sentences' structures reveal that CSL has a unique grammatical system that challenges some of our assumptions about sign language negation.

In addition, Hen (2013) examined emotional metaphors in CSL. The study analyzed ten different types of emotional metaphors in CSL. By investigating their phonological parameters, such as sign shape, location, and movement, it was found that CSL shares many conceptual metaphors with Chinese. However, due to the absence of auditory experience, individuals with hearing impairments are unable to use voice as a means of forming emotional metaphors. Furthermore, the metonymic expressions of emotional metaphors in CSL can be categorized into two types of "behavioral" and "physiological", which exhibit a

double mapping. This is linked to the iconicity and cognitive economy of sign language expressions. The overall research suggests that the similarities between the emotional metaphors of Chinese and CSL are greater than the differences. This is because individuals with hearing impairments can gain experiences from alternative sensory channels and are influenced by the same culture as hearing people.

The number of linguistic studies on the concept of double mapping in CSL metaphors is limited in English-language literature. This dearth of research leaves a considerable part of the global community uninformed about its distinctive characteristics and the cultural context in which it flourishes. By conducting this research, I will fill this gap. More extensive research and documentation in English would not only improve comprehension and appreciation of CSL but also encourage cross-cultural exchange and strengthen the global deaf community.

3. Conceptual metaphor theory

Metaphor has traditionally been viewed as a linguistic device rather than a conceptual issue, as in the work of Aristotle. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) challenged this perspective by positing that metaphor is not only a matter of language use, but also a reflection of human conceptual mechanism. Their theory has been widely accepted for over three decades (even if it is not without its limitations, as Engstrøm (1999) acknowledges). Turner (1987), for instance, strongly supports their view by arguing that metaphor is not restricted to words, but is instead a fundamental aspect of cognition that influences all human thoughts and actions, encompassing both everyday and poetic language.

Metaphorical understanding and experience, as posited by Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, involve comprehending one kind of thing in terms of another, thereby allowing for the understanding of one domain of experience in terms of another. The cognitive approach to metaphor is characterized by three fundamental claims: the ubiquity, systematicity, and conceptual nature of metaphor. First, the synchronic and diachronic prevalence of metaphors across every language refutes the notion that they only exist in a

specific language at a specific time. Second, metaphoric concepts are structured systematically, implying the systematic use of metaphoric phenomenon. Lastly, the conceptual nature of metaphors underscores their thorough conceptual basis, rather than being solely a problem of language.

The need to elaborate on the structure of metaphor in light of Lakoffian theory is essential. According to this theory, metaphor is based on cross-modal mapping from the source to the target modality. Generally, three characteristics are noted in the structure of conceptual metaphor: unidirectionality, partial structuring, and invariance. The unidirectional feature of conceptual metaphor suggests that the cross-domain transfer is semantically unidirectional, with the source domain always being more concrete than the target domain. However, this feature seems to be overgeneralized in some cases, as exceptions exist (see Wu 2007).

In the "partial structuring" aspect, it is stated that when the source mode is applied to the target mode in a metaphor, only some of the properties of the source are transferred to the target, and not all of them. For instance, in the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, not all of the properties of journey are mapped onto the target of life, but only some of them are. Additionally, the characteristic of "invariance" indicates that conceptual mappings maintain a consistent structure during the process (Lakoff 1990). As Lakoff (1990: 39) explains, "Given that all metaphorical mappings are partial, the portion of the source domain structure that is mapped preserves cognitive typology (though, of course, not all the cognitive typology of the source domain need to be mapped)".

In summary, cognitive linguistics posits that our comprehension is based on the entirety of our experiences and not on individual concepts. Moreover, a metaphorical association is a linking relationship at the level of ideas, and this linkage occurs between two autonomous domain of the source and target domains (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Furthermore, these mappings are typically one-sided and from a more concrete domain to a more abstract domain, and are not random but are rooted in the body and physical experiences in the cultural world (Yu 2003). Lastly, as Lakoff and Turner (1989) pointed out, one of the main tenets of the theory of conceptual metaphor is that poetic metaphors are not fundamentally different from the metaphors in everyday language, in that they both utilize the same cognitive mechanism, but with variations in extension,

elaboration, and combination.

In this context, the use of conceptual metaphor is widely recognized as a pervasive linguistic phenomenon that occurs not only in spoken languages but also in sign languages. However, there are differences in the way that metaphors derived from sign languages are treated, due to the strong connection between metaphor and iconicity (Wilcox 2000). In sign languages, certain metaphorical signs tend to undergo a process known as double mapping, which involves both metaphorical and iconically-related mappings (Taub 2001). This research examines the potential utility of the double mapping model within the context of CSL, an area that has not been extensively explored thus far, by drawing on the mapping principles of conceptual metaphor theory.

4. Iconicity and double mapping

In a nutshell, iconicity refers to the resemblance between a sign or form and its referent or object. It is well-documented that sign languages possess a greater number of iconic elements than spoken languages, as the visual, spatial, and motor images that are present in sign languages are more conducive to presenting such images than the auditory images that are present in spoken languages (Klima and Bellugi 1979).

The study of conceptual metaphors, which involve using one domain of experience to describe or reason about another domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1992), has revealed the prevalence of metaphors linked with iconicity in sign languages (Wilbur 2005). While such metaphors are possible but rare in spoken languages, the pervasive iconicity of sign languages makes this phenomenon more common. In fact, metaphor without iconicity is a rarity in American Sign Language (ASL) and other sign languages (Wilbur 1990). Due to the iconicity in sign languages, certain signs can extend their meanings metaphorically and undergo double mappings, which are both iconic and metaphorical in nature (Taub 2001). To put it simply, double mapping refers to the simultaneous use of iconicity and metaphor in a single sign, thereby enriching its meaning by utilizing both visual resemblance and abstract analogy. This dual-layering of meaning can produce signs

that are both illustrative and conceptually rich.

As an illustration, communication is frequently expressed metaphorically as sending an object in many languages, utilizing a metaphor COMMUNICATION IS SENDING (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), in which successful communication is characterized as successfully transmitting an object to other people. In ASL, a substantial number of lexical signs, such as INFORM, COMMUNICATE, OVER-OUR-HEAD rely on this metaphor. Examining British Sign Language (BSL), Brennan (1990) has also identified a substantial number of signs that utilize this metaphor. It is clear that these signs involve two conceptual transfers, as Taub (2001) indicated. The first transfer is between the source and target domains, while the second transfer is between the source-domain image and phonetic form.

More specifically, the mechanism of double mapping from metaphors connected with iconicity in sign languages is particularly evident in the example of I-INFORM-YOU from ASL (Taub 2001). In American Sign Language (ASL), the I-INFORM-YOU construction serves as a prime illustration of a directional verb, in which the movement and orientation of the verb indicate the subject and object of the action. As depicted in Figure 1, the sign commences with both hands oriented towards the first-person subject, utilizing the ASL Flat-O handshapes. The dominant hand, featuring the Flat-O handshape, makes contact with the forehead. Subsequently, both hands move away from the first-person subject, extending outward towards the person being informed, typically following a slight diagonal or direct line based on the relative positioning. Ultimately, the Flat-O handshapes on both hands transform into open palms as both hands approach the recipient.



[Figure 1] I-INFORM-YOU in ASL (Taub 2001)

When examining this sign metaphorically, it can be seen as a way of conveying an idea or concept (specifically, the target domain) to another person through sending an object (the source domain). Simultaneously, the source domains are represented iconically through the handshapes, locations, movements, and orientations of the sign I-INFORM-YOU. More specifically, in the context of metaphorical mapping, a concept (or an idea) is represented as an object situated within the speaker's head, while the act of conveying that concept to a listener is likened to transferring the object. Regarding iconic mapping, the Flat-O handshapes symbolize holding an object, and the action of the dominant hand with a Flat-O shape touching the forehead represents the object located in the head. The forward motion of both hands with open palms signifies the transmission of an object to another person. The complete representation of the double mapping (i.e., the iconic and metaphoric mapping) is illustrated in Figure 2, as outlined in Taub's (2001) research.

[Table 1] Double mapping mechanism of I-INFORM-YOU in ASL (Taub 2001)

TABLE 6.5. Double Mapping for I-INFORM-YOU

ICONIC MAPPING	METAPHORICAL MAPPING	
ARTICULATORS	SOURCE	TARGET
[Null]	Objects	Ideas
Forehead	Head	Mind; locus of thought
Flat-O handshape	Holding an object	Considering an idea
Flat-O touches forehead	Object located in head	Idea understood by originator
Flat-O moves toward locus of addressee and opens	Tossing an object to someone	Communicating idea to someone
Signer's locus	Sender	Originator of idea
Addressee's locus	Receiver	Person intended to learn idea

5. A case study: Analysis of CSL abstract verb FORGET

This research endeavors to explore the feasibility and universality of the double mapping model in the context of Chinese Sign Language (CSL), which has not garnered substantial attention hitherto. The investigation specifically focuses on elucidating the metaphorical mapping mechanism of the abstract verb FORGET in CSL, which the author has selected as a case study, in order to ascertain the viability of the double mapping model, a framework that interconnects metaphorical and iconic dimensions, within the linguistic domain of CSL.



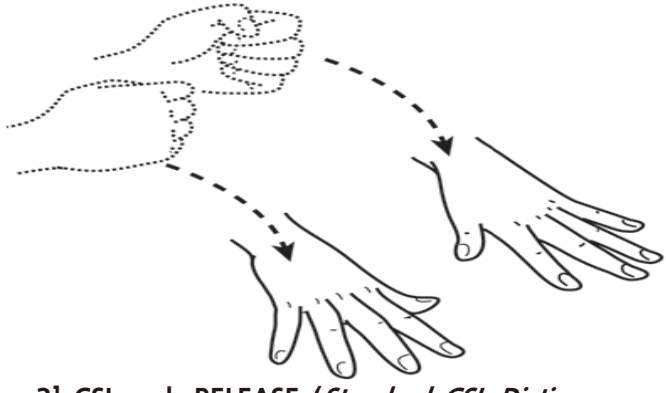
[Figure 2] CSL abstract verb FORGET (*Standard CSL Dictionary*, p. 886)

In the Chinese Sign Language sign FORGET, the dominant handshape begins at the forehead. While moving all the fingers beside the head, it changes the fingers gathered into all open-extended fingers facing backwards beside the head. This is depicted in Figure 2. If this description were to be construed as a classification of an object, it would depict a spherical object (with all fingers gathered, resembling the ASL Flat-O handshape) materializing from the head and circumnavigating it. The mapping between articulators and the source domain of concrete concepts is depicted in Table 2 below in an iconic manner.

[Table 2] Iconic mapping for CSL abstract verb FORGET

ARTICULATOR	SOURCE
[Null]	An object
Forehead	Head
All fingers gathered	Holding an object
All fingers gathered touch forehead	Object located in head
All fingers gathered move beside head	Relocate an object out of head
All fingers gathered change to all open-extended fingers beside head	Release an object out of head

In this context, it is necessary to examine the CSL verb RELEASE (放 *fang*) in comparison to the CSL verb FORGET. The verb 放 *fang* in CSL can be translated into English as "to put", "to place", "to release", or "to let go", depending on the context in which it is used. In the CSL sign RELEASE, both hands assume open palms, with all fingers extended and oriented downwards. The image chosen to represent putting down or throwing something away in people's behavior is that of opening and extending all the fingers from a fist while facing the palms downwards. This image is considered iconic, as it provides a clear and direct representation of the action. The iconic mapping is depicted in Table 3.



[Figure 3] CSL verb RELEASE (*Standard CSL Dictionary*, p. 271)

[Table 3] Iconic mapping for CSL verb RELEASE

ARTICULATOR	SOURCE
Fist handshapes on both hands	Holding anobject
Open palms with all fingers extended and oriented downwards	Putting down or throwing an object away

Unlike the CSL verb RELEASE, which generally depicts a physical action, the CSL verb FORGET represents a more abstract concept. Specifically, it means "to be unable to recall or think of something". When one considers signs, such as I-INFORM-YOU in ASL, as previously mentioned, which manifest classifier descriptions of objects moving towards or away from the head and pertain to the exchange of ideas, there is compelling evidence for a metaphorical mapping between the domains of sending objects and conveying ideas. The FORGET sign in CSL likewise entails a metaphorical mapping between the source and target domains, as well as an iconic mapping between the articulators and the source domain, as indicated in Table 2. Specifically, this sign represents a metaphorical mapping between the domains of releasing objects as the source and failing to recall ideas or thoughts as the target.

Therefore, the overall mapping correspondences generated by CSL sign FORGET can be depicted in Table 4, which illustrates a double mapping distribution. This table demonstrates how each articulatory element of FORGET corresponds to an element of the source domain through iconic mapping, and then to an element of the target domain through metaphoric mapping. The signer's location corresponds to the communicator's location. The fingers that are gathered together correspond to holding an object, which indicates the thought or information to be conveyed or remembered, while the forehead corresponds to the head entailing the object, which signifies the location of that thought. The movement of the gathered fingers in space corresponds to the process of moving the object out of the head, which suggests the difficulty in recalling the thought. When all the fingers are open and extended alongside the head, it corresponds to releasing the object out of head, which represents the ultimate failure of recalling the thought for communication purposes.

[Table 4] Double mapping for CSL abstract verb FORGET

Iconic mapping		Metaphorical mapping
ARTICULATOR	SOURCE	TARGET
[Null]	An object	A thought
Forehead	Head	Locus of thought
All fingers gathered	Holding an object	Considering a thought
All fingers gathered touch forehead	Object located in head	Thought generated by originator
All fingers gathered move beside head	Relocate an object out of head	Difficulty in recalling thought
All fingers gathered change to all open-extended fingers beside head	Release an object out of head	Failure of recalling thought

According to Taub (2001), it is not necessary for signs that share a metaphorical source-target mapping to also share an iconic source-articulator mapping. For instance, the ASL sign I-INFORM-YOU (refer to Figure 1 and Table 1) demonstrates this concept. In this sign, the Flat-O handshapes commence at the signer's forehead and move towards the recipient's location, while simultaneously spreading the fingers open. This sign does not have a physical articulator that corresponds to the object in the source domain and the idea in the target domain. Instead, the Flat-O classifier's handshapes are used to show the manipulation of a (flat) object iconically, with the object itself being implied rather than explicitly stated. Thus, in both the ASL sign I-INFORM-YOU and the CSL sign FORGET, the moved object displays the concept of an idea or thought, independent of its representation.

6. Conclusion

This paper assessed the usefulness and universality of the double mapping model in relation to the metaphorical structure of CSL. The double mapping model links the metaphorical and iconic elements of language. To determine its suitability within the context of CSL, this study analyzed the metaphorical representation of the abstract verb FORGET as a case study. The findings reveal that the sign for FORGET in CSL comprises a complex arrangement of metaphorical and iconic components, suggesting that the double mapping model is applicable to CSL.

According to the study's results, it can be observed that the combination of metaphor and iconicity in sign languages distinguishes them from spoken languages and enhances the cognitive and communicative experiences of their users. This distinct characteristic emphasizes the significance of taking into account the characteristics specific to the modality of language in linguistic research and underscores the remarkable versatility of human communication. Furthermore, the double-mapping model provides a valuable means of elucidating metaphorical and iconic phenomena in sign languages. A single-mapping model, which characterizes signs in terms of a direct mapping between articulators and an abstract conceptual domain, risks overlooking the source-target mapping and the resemblance between the source-articulator mappings and those utilized by the sign language's productive classifier forms (Taub 2012).

In addition, it is worth noting that metaphorical-iconic words and constructions also occur in spoken languages and can be addressed using a double mapping and the analogue-building process analogous to that employed for metaphorical-iconic signs. For instance, in English, metaphorical iconicity can be observed in lengthening to signify emphasis, such as "a baaaad idea" (see Okrent 2002). Further research is necessary to explore this subject in greater depth in the future.

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Received on Nov 30, 2024
Revised version received on Dec 11, 2024
Accepted on Dec 27, 2024