# A Conceptual Metaphor Account of Word Composition

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## *Potentiality of "Light" in English and Chinese*

By

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Meihua Zheng
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# ABSTRACT

This study is intended to provide a description of the motivation for the emergence of new meanings in two different languages: English and Chinese. Drawing on a corpus methodology, this book adopts metaphors to be a basic instrument of thinking and cognition studies from a conceptual metaphor perspective. By probing into the compositional potentiality of LIGHT in English and Chinese, I aim to highlight the generative mechanism for word composition by metaphorization.

Metaphors are not only ornamental devices of expressing ideas by means of language, but are a language phenomenon and a basic instrument of thinking, cognition and conceptualization. Linguistic metaphor is a representation of conceptual metaphor: many concepts, especially abstract ones, are partly structured via the metaphorical mapping of information from a familiar source domain onto a less familiar target domain, and the sense transference in the process of metaphorization offers a grounding for word-sense extension. Metaphoric thought plays some role in the historical evolution of what words and expressions mean (Sweetser 1990) and metaphoric thought motivates an individual speaker's use and understanding of why various words and expressions mean what they do (Gibbs 1994).

In short, metaphor is the main motivation for the emergence of new meanings. This study takes this idea as its starting point and probes into the compositional potentiality of LIGHT in English and Chinese. The present study focuses on analyzing the cognitive motivation of *light*-word compounds, aiming at disclosing their experiential grounding and realizations. It is demonstrated that metaphorization is also a generative mechanism for word composition.

The opening chapter situates the work as a contribution to the study of metaphor and formulates a set of aims and objectives for the research. Additionally, the data and methodology for the study are stated.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature about the development of metaphor research at home and abroad as well as a brief introduction to the study of word composition.

Chapter Three establishes the theoretical foundation for the contrastive study of the metaphors in English and Chinese. It explores the conceptual nature, the internal structure, the characteristics and cultural factors of cognitive metaphor in English and Chinese. The chapter also has a section

on the primacy of conceptual metaphors and formation of word composition of *light* and 光 (*guang*) in English and Chinese respectively.

Chapter Four gives a detailed study on some major metaphors of light in English and in Chinese, outlining the research methodology and research plan. It presents the cognitive motivations for the metaphorical extensions of the LIGHT concept and the realization of cross-domain mappings by qualitative and quantitative analyses of the corpora, revealing similarities and differences in cross-cultural metaphor in this respect.

Chapter Five discusses the role of metaphor in cross-cultural context and presents evidence of variations in some concepts in different cultures from scholars who have done various kinds of studies pointing to culture specific metaphorical mappings.

Finally, Chapter Six draws conclusions from the preceding findings, presents a summary of the functions of metaphor in the process of forming the new senses and points out some problems with the case study and possible directions future research can pursue.

Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study has made the following major findings: 1) the metaphorization of the entity of *light* reflects a basic way for mankind to recognize and perceive the outside world. People take the attributes of the entity of *light* as cognitive categories, which have influence on the formation of metaphorical meanings of the concept LIGHT. 2) The metaphorical scope of *light* consists of two major parts. These are mapping the entity of *light* onto other concrete domains (include animate and inanimate domains respectively) and mapping the entity of *light* onto abstract domains (state, emotion, social relationship, time and mentality). 3) It is cross-linguistically true that meaning is equal to conceptualization. 4) Metaphorical mapping, in fact, does not always proceed from the concrete domain to the abstract domain. Rather, it can sometimes be transferred between two concrete domains. 5) Metaphorical mappings are also culturally specific. The composition conveying some metaphorical meanings in one language is absent in another language, for example, 光 in Chinese can compose with the verb.

In short, though English and Chinese are usually believed to differ tremendously from each other, the two languages are found to have many concordances in the compositional potentiality of LIGHT. Cognitively, the principles are universal, therefore, both English and Chinese do not naturally differ in the basic ways by which they form words; however, different people have different concepts. The different geographical and cultural environments that different people live in adds to the discrepancy in the detailed form of composition in different languages. Therefore, the

investigation into the formation process of compositions with LIGHT from the perspective of cognition gives insight as to the nature and discrepancy of human language.

# FOREWORD

*A Conceptual Metaphor Account of Word Composition: Potentiality of "Light" in English and Chinese* is a singular book for readers interested in the study of cognitive metaphors, which stimulate human communication through word formation. Obviously, there is a strong relationship between language and cognition, and metaphors play a significant role in the construction of new meanings in language through thoughts. In other words, cognitive metaphors can provide a breeding ground for words and meanings (lexicon and semantics) from multiple perspectives. This book contributes to a deeper understanding of the functions of cognitive metaphors by focusing on the differences and similarities in the processing of word composition and meaning in English and Chinese from a cognitive metaphor framework. It also offers a careful analysis of the cognitive motivation of *light*-word compounds by showing how metaphorization constitutes a generative mechanism for word formation.

Both the content and the structure of the volume are solid and well organized. The first chapter contextualizes the research on metaphor, as well as describing the data collection process and the chosen methodology. Chapter two contains the literature review on metaphors, while chapter three covers the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter four provides a study on metaphors of light in English and Chinese and offers cross-domain mappings and analysis of the data. Chapter five explores the intricacies of metaphors in cross-cultural context and offers evidence of variations in concepts of metaphorical mappings in different cultures found in the literature. The final chapter presents the author's conclusions, a summary of the major findings, practical implications, limitations, and further directions for research.

Definitely, this book sheds new light on the formation of metaphorical meanings, while challenging traditional views about metaphors and offering thoughts from cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspectives. Further, it provides evidence for the "possible existence of a universal ontological metaphorical system" by trying "to discover the metaphorical pathways along which *light* (*'guang'*)" is developed in relation to everyday life."

Through a careful examination of major sources such as electronic corpora and dictionaries, this mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) research demonstrates that metaphor is the main generative motivation of 光 (*guang*) compositions in Chinese and *light* in English and that their operations, models and manners are different in the two languages. The major findings consist of a recognition that metaphors for the concept *light* reflect a means of perceiving the world around us; that metaphors for light are mapped onto both concrete and abstract domains, or from concrete domains to either abstract ones or other concrete ones; that meaning is equal to conceptualization across languages; and finally, unsurprisingly, that metaphorical mappings are culturally specific. That is, a word in one language may have metaphorical meanings that do not carry over to its translation in another language.

In a nutshell, it is believed that word and metaphor formation in English and Chinese differ significantly. However, according to the findings of this study, both languages possess similarities in the "compositional potentiality of light." From the cognitive perspective, languages share universal principles, so both English and Chinese do not vary significantly in word formation processes. From the sociocultural perspective, cultures and contexts can cause some discrepancies or variations in the form of word composition across a wide range of languages.

This volume is an extraordinary addition to the thousands of bibliographical references on metaphor available in bookstores and libraries around the world.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Problems and Background

Words are considered "central to the language" (Coady & Huckin 1997: 5) and the embodiment of creativity and productivity of language (Stein 1973: 29). This means that the study of word formation is an important phenomenon in language evolution and an integral part of language study. It deals with how words find their way into a language and involves multiple understandings of the meaning of words, such as the change of lexical meaning, and polysemous phenomena in various kinds of language reality. The study of contemporary cognitive metaphor returns the study of words to the forefront of linguistic research and, to a great extent, promotes human beings' understanding and cognition of the nature of word formation.

However, researchers have long been influenced by traditional linguistics, and a view of language drawn from Saussure, which holds that the connection between word form and meaning is arbitrary, has generally been accepted**.** There is an arbitrary, rather than a natural, i.e. iconical, relationship between the signifier and the signified (Bussman 1996: 32). As regards to how meanings are related to one another, and how new meanings are formed, studies have been carried out from different perspectives, giving different interpretations and even disagreeing with each other, making this one of the most controversial topics in linguistic study. Therefore, a more scientific theory is needed to solve this classic semantic puzzle. Cognitive linguistics, initiated by the American linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, seeks to show how language is systematically grounded in human cognition, especially how thinking mechanisms function in the forming of the new meanings in language use. Namely, the analysis of cognitive metaphors can answer the above questions.

This cognitive metaphor theory holds that metaphor is not a linguistic matter but a way of thinking and cognition which is prevalent in our life; and metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms

of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). Metaphor comes out of our clearly delineated and concrete experience and allows us to construct highly abstract and elaborate concepts. Summarizing their own experiences, people tend to describe and comprehend unfamiliar things with familiar concepts so as to know about themselves and the things around them. Metaphors are not only an ornamental device for expressing ideas by means of language, but also a way of thinking, cognition and conceptualization (Ungerer and Schmid 1996: 118-122). Linguistic metaphor is a representation of conceptual metaphor and the sense-transference in the process of metaphorization offers a grounding for word-sense extension. As such, Ullmann (1962) argues that metaphor is the main motivation for the emergence of new meanings. In this sense, cognitive metaphor has opened up a new perspective on the study of words and meaning.

In brief, word composition is vocabulary in context, often driven by the power of conceptual metaphor.

## 1.2 Purpose and Significance

This study attempts to probe the phenomenon of word composition under the framework of cognitive metaphor from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective with the intention of providing evidence for the metaphorical nature of conceptualization and for the possible existence of a universal ontological metaphorical system. This research has the following objectives: to discover the metaphorical pathways along which *light* (*guang*) develops; to explain the experiential basis of the metaphorical extensions uncovered on the one hand and the realizations of those metaphorical extensions in everyday life on the other, which, according to Lakoff (1993: 244), are two sides of the same coin; and then to make clear the path and manner by which word compositions are formed, aiming to find out the rules governing word composition and to prove the flexibility and validity of metaphor as a generative mechanism of word composition. A minor purpose of the author is to see whether the construction process of word composition is of the same order in both English and Chinese and whether their meanings follow the same ways or diverge further to show that ontological metaphors play an indispensable role in our abstract thinking.

In addition, studies have shown that conceptual metaphors can be exploited to unpack the method of word composition. A most fruitful area has been the study of structural and orientation metaphorical phenomena while research investigating conceptual metaphors to analyze content words is rarely seen in the literature. For instance, Yu (1995) compares the

metaphorical expressions of *anger* in English and Chinese; and Lan (2003) examines the metaphorical extensions of *up* and *down*, *shang* (上) and *xia* (下) in English and Chinese respectively. In fact, cognitive meanings of content words play an important role in the cognitive domain. Therefore the present research probes into the possibilities of this question so as to establish the relationship between the linguistic forms of word composition and their cognitive reality. According to Stein (1973: 29), generally speaking, the study of word formation will give us a better understanding of the nature of human language; this is because creativity in word formation is more easily observed and significant than in any other aspect of language. So the study of word composition will, I believe, contribute to the understanding of the nature of human language, enhance our understanding of conceptual metaphors and their characteristics and encourage further research in the cognitive linguistic field. The methodological significance of the present study lies in that it shows that, handled properly, the traditional dictionary-based approach combined with the modern corpus-based approach to data collection and analysis can be fruitfully exploited in the field of cognitive linguistics; a field which has sometimes been criticized for relying on too narrow a range of data (Stibbe 1996; Goatly 1997). It also demonstrates how two typologically different languages can be brought together for comparative purposes within a cognitive linguistic framework (Lan 2003).

## 1.3 Methodology and Data Collection

Since qualitative analysis of the lexicographical data of the two languages does not present substantial differences in terms of the metaphorical extensions generated by *light*, we adopt both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Statistical analysis is carried out in order to examine whether a common metaphorical extension enjoys the same or different degrees of popularity in real-world Chinese and English. The qualitative approach is applied to categorize the processes of various English and Chinese word compositions of 光 (*guang*) and *light* as well as to explain their cognitive grounding (motivation). Furthermore, a quantitative approach is adopted to elucidate the frequencies and Z-scores of the formation types which are counted for each word composition both in English and Chinese based on the corpus data, so as to reveal the degree of reliability of word composition.

The development and extension of the meanings of a basic word can be found in its actual use in natural language through the prism of cognitive semantics. As such, regularities of sense in word composition should also

be found in its actual use. Therefore, the data collection for the present research uses two resources: English and Chinese dictionaries and online corpora. Dictionaries are used so that the conventional metaphorical extensions of the concept of *light* under concern, as reflected in the lexicon, can be discovered. Corpora are used in order to provide evidence from real-world language for the metaphorical extensions of *light* and so that comparison between the distributions of the metaphorical extensions in English and Chinese can be made. This study represents an attempt to apply the analysis of cognitive metaphors to a broader range of data to test its reliability and its explanatory power.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Development of Metaphor Research

Research on metaphor can be traced back to the time of ancient Greece. More than two thousand years ago, Aristotle wrote down the first definition of metaphor in his works opening formal study in this field. He believed that the primary function of metaphor was decorative and ornamental. In this traditional view, metaphor is a special form of language known as a figure of speech, especially in poetry. As a result, for hundreds of years, most studies on metaphor focused on the rhetorical perspective. However, the 20th century has witnessed a great boom in the study of metaphor: the view of metaphor has changed from seeing it purely as a figurative device to one of a matter of thought itself. Lakoff (1986) points out that metaphor is not just a way of naming, but also a way of thinking and that it is *a figure of thought*. That is the latest perspective on cognitive metaphor considers that it should be seen as thought or action rather than a characteristic of language alone. Nowadays, interest and study in metaphor has expanded to cover a broad range of areas. Conceptual metaphor participates in and reflects the cognitive processes of mankind. It is an important and a powerful cognitive instrument for expressing new concepts. Its study, including metaphor's structure, mechanism, function, effect and cognitive nature, is important to the fields of linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, education, sciences, as well as literary criticism and rhetoric. Based on this view, this book takes the conceptual metaphor theory as its principal theoretical basis. In the following we will briefly review these different approaches.

### 2.1.1 Traditional Approach to Metaphor

In science, metaphor is used to explain, test or visualize one (novel) reality in terms of another (less novel) one. A well-known example is the Bohr-Rutherford model of the atom in terms of the solar system: electrons orbit the nucleus as planets orbit the sun. The metaphor superimposes one

reality upon another and then asks a lot of questions to find out how well the superimposition actually works. If sufficient answers are negative, then a new model, a new metaphor, will be needed.

Metaphor in literature is very different. It describes one reality—a woman, say, or a landscape—in terms of something different. Underlying the difference must be a relationship of similarity, however exotic, or the metaphor will not work. The comparison must de-familiarize a known perception to some degree or it will merely appear trite. The metaphor becomes exhausted in literature, unlike science, not when it yields too many inaccuracies, but when it has become so predictable that the original de-familiarization has vanished. Scholars in the west have viewed metaphor in different ways, among which the comparison theory, the substitution theory and the interaction theory are the most influential ones. The comparison theory, also called the Aristotelian approach, holds that metaphor conveys the same meaning and that there is a comparison between the two words. Aristotle defines metaphor, at the level of the words used, such that it consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else. He thinks that the use of metaphor is close to the use of strange, ornamental or coined terms. That is, metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another by saying that one is the other, as in *he is a lion*. Or, as the Encyclopaedia Britannica puts it: "metaphor [is a] figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from *simile,* an explicit comparison signaled by the words 'like' or 'as'" [emphasis in the original]. For example, we would consider the word *lion* to be a metaphor in the sentence *Achilles was a lion in the fight*. We would probably also say that the word is used metaphorically in order to achieve some artistic and rhetorical effect, since we speak and write metaphorically to communicate eloquently, to impress others with beautiful, aesthetically pleasing words or to express some deep emotion. Perhaps we would also add that what makes the metaphorical identification of Achilles with a lion possible is that Achilles and lions have something in common, namely, their bravery and strength. His theory of metaphors as words influenced researchers for centuries. The substitution theory, as developed by the Roman rhetorician Quintillian, holds that a metaphor is where a metaphoric expression is used in place of some equivalent literal expression. So the substitution view treats the function of metaphors as a rhetorical device at the lexical level. The interaction theory has its basis in Richards' seminal work *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936). Richards argues that not only is a metaphor not a divergence from the ordinary operation of language but that it is "the omnipresent principle of all its free action" (1936: 90); the meaning of metaphor can be described as

the generation of new meaning through the interaction between the *teno*r and the *vehicle*. The thing being spoken of is sometimes called the **tenor**; the thing in terms of which it's being spoken is then called the **vehicle.** This is the first time scholars viewed metaphor as a kind of relationship between a word and its context. This theory was influential in transferring metaphor from the lexical level to the level of concepts. Later Black (1993 [1962]) developed and improved the interaction theory.

Next, I shall describe the most common conception of metaphor, both in scholarly circles and in the popular mind (which is not to say that this is the only view of metaphor). This traditional concept can be briefly characterized by pointing out its five most commonly accepted features. First, metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon and thus is centered on the use of words. The metaphorical use of *lion* is a characteristic of a linguistic expression (that of the word lion). Second, metaphor is used for artistic and rhetorical purposes, such as when Shakespeare[1] writes *all the world's a stage*. Third, metaphor is based on a resemblance between the two entities that are compared and identified. Achilles must share some features with lions in order for us to be able to use the lion as a metaphor for Achilles. Fourth, metaphor is a conscious and deliberate use of words, and you must have a special talent to be able to do it and do it well. Only great poets or eloquent speakers, such as, say, Shakespeare and Churchill, can master it. For instance, Aristotle proposes that *the greatest thing by far is to have command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius*. Fifth, it is also commonly held that metaphor is a figure of speech that we can do without; we use it for special effects, and it is not an integral part of everyday human communication, let alone everyday human thought and reasoning.

Metaphor studies in China can be dated back to as early as the Pre-Qin era (before 221 BCE). However, the study of metaphor still remained a form of comparative research into figures of speech before 1992 (Ye 2004). Not until recent times, especially before the importation and study of fresh western theories, has the study of metaphor in the Chinese context been expanded from its traditional rhetorical limitation. Some scholars began to accept the cognitive function of metaphor and study metaphor from a new perspective.

To sum up, traditional views all treat metaphor as a deviant phenomenon in language with only the interactionist approach first noticing the cognitive nature of metaphor. This eventually led to the development of the cognitive metaphor theory, to which we shall now turn.

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_the_world%27s_a_stage

## 2.1.2 Cognitive Approach to Metaphor

Along with the development of metaphor, an important idea in contemporary cognitive science is that metaphor is not just an aspect of language but constitutes a significant part of human cognition (Gibbs 1994; Sweetser 1990; Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Many concepts, especially abstract ones, are partly structured via the metaphorical mapping of information from a familiar source domain onto a less familiar target domain. For example, we often talk about *love* in terms of *journey* (LOVE IS A JOURNEY). Our metaphorical conceptualization of love partly motivates the creation and use of linguistic expressions found in everyday speech and literature that refer to love and relationships of love (e.g. *our marriage is off to a great start*; *their relationship is at a cross-roads*; *her marriage is on the rocks*; *after seven years of marriage, we're spinning our wheels*; *we're back on track again*). The traditional theory of metaphor was first properly challenged by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, which claims that "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action and our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3) and "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (5). Metaphoric thought, then, plays a role in the historical evolution of what words and expressions mean, motivates the linguistic meanings that have currency within linguistic communities or is presumed to have a role in people's understanding of language (Sweetser 1990; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987). Gibbs (1994) suggests that metaphoric thought motivates an individual speaker's use and understanding of why various words and expressions mean what they and functions in people's immediate on-line use and understanding of linguistic meaning. These writers all propose metaphor as having a natural cognitive function as a way of conceptualization; metaphor partially structures many abstract concepts through mapping them onto concrete objects, and conceptual metaphor has in everyday discourse and reasoning at least three cognitive functions: structuring the conceptual system, conceptualizing abstract concepts in terms of the apprehensible and giving a new understanding of our experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Lakoff 1993). Over the past decade and a half, this approach has been developed by George Lakoff and his colleagues through a considerable body of research (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987, 1990, 1993, 1994; Johnson 1987, 1991; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Turner 1991, 1993; Yu 1995, 1996; Kovecses 1986, 1990). Several kinds of empirical evidence from cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics support a number of these ideas.

Linguistic studies also shows that metaphoric thought plays an important role in semantic change, while other research on the systematicity of different linguistic expressions demonstrates a close link between conceptual metaphors and speakers' presumed understanding of various verbal expressions. Many psycholinguistic experiments also support the idea that metaphoric thought underpins the meaning of many words and expressions to contemporary speakers and also influences people's learning of different linguistic meanings. Consider Gibbs et al. (1997) used a priming method to examine the role of conceptual metaphors in immediate idiom comprehension. Experiments showed that people access conceptual metaphors when understanding idioms, but significantly less so when processing literal paraphrases of idioms. Additionally, people access the appropriate conceptual metaphors while processing some idioms, but not when they read idioms which have similar figurative meanings that are motivated by different conceptual metaphors. These findings provide important evidence on the constraining role that common patterns of metaphoric thought have in understanding figurative language as well as the way metaphoric thought is accessed in people's immediate production and understanding of linguistic meaning.

All the studies detailed above illustrate the main themes of research into cognitive metaphors, i.e. metaphors mediate human understanding and worldview (Sweetser 1990, 1992; Turner 1991, 1995). In terms of current Chinese research about cognitive metaphor, it seems that at the present stage, Chinese researchers spend more time introducing the cognitive approach than applying it to the investigation of the Chinese language, for example: Lu (2006, 2009); Lin (1997); Shu (1996); Shi (1995); Zhao (1995). On the basis of these introductory works and this research background, some Chinese scholars are also beginning to investigate metaphorical phenomena in Chinese. For example, Yu (1995) compares the metaphorical expressions of *anger* (*nu* /怒) English and Chinese; Lan (2003) examines the metaphorical extensions of *up* and *down*, *shang* (上) and *xia* (下) in English and Chinese; and Lu (2009) examines the metaphorical extensions of *head* (*tou*/头).

In short, all of them have made great contributions to the study of words by providing new perspectives, those of cognition and psychology, in understanding the development and extension of word meanings.

## 2.2 Word Composition and Conceptual Metaphor

As we can see from the preceding analysis, the most important studies on metaphor in lexicology and lexical semantics are mainly concentrated

on "the force of metaphor" (Zhang Yunfei 1987: 287) in semantic extension and the formation of lexical items. This view has received support from other linguists such as Lu Guoqiang (1983), Lyons (1995) and Saeed (1997) who all hold the opinion that metaphor is one of the principal factors operating in the semantic change of words. Lyons goes on to argue that metaphor is a kind of creative ability that can produce new meanings of words. In general, meanings are elements of the conceptual structure in the heads of language users and they exist only through reference to a conceptualization of the world (Lakoff 1987).

## 2.2.1 Word Composition in English and Chinese

Scholars both at home and abroad have done research on word formation types in English and Chinese (Bauer 1983; Jackson 2000; Wang 1997; Liu 1990). They generally suggest that there are seven word formation types in English and Chinese, namely, creating, onomatopoeia, borrowing, combination, clipping, conversion and blending (Zhou 2007). Of these, combination is the most significant and productive method of the seven, because it involves the process of word creation by combining two or more words or morphemes, drawing on existing elements from the native language and remodeling them into a new form. It is the most effective way to conceptualize and lexicalize our knowledge of the world, and the most productive source for new words in human languages. Compounds, or word composition, are believed to be a major type of combination, which is natural conceptual composition.

It should be noted that, owing to the unique characteristics of Chinese, it stands out as a much more challenging problem to identify a word in it than in English. The modern study of Chinese word formation originated with Ma Jianzhong (1898), who considered the basic meaningful language unit in Chinese to be the *character* or *zi* (字), and that there is no such grammatical unit of *word* in Chinese. But the linguist Fu Huaiqing (1985) has suggested a different view. He divides Chinese words into basic words and general words. Basic words are the core words inherited from ancient Chinese; general words are those words derived from basic words and widely used in daily life. Basic words were invented by the ancestors of the modern Chinese and express basic concepts and have the capacity to create new words and generate new meanings. Most basic words are single characters of one syllable, like 光 (*guang* or *light*), a basic word standing for a physical entity, and compound words (word composition) are created from these bases. For instance, some are a straightforward combination of constituent morphemes, like 光荣 (*guangrong*). Comprised of two elements,

it is a functioning linguistic unit, one whole word capable of being used independently. It stands for a widespread metaphor: HONOR IS LIGHT. Another kind is formed by compounding, namely by combining two words, like 吃光 (*chiguang*), which stands for the widespread metaphor: NOTHING IS LIGHT. In light of the theory of semantic integrity, that deals with the semantic relationship between an expression and its parts: if the meaning of an expression is not compositional from its parts, then it is usually a word; otherwise it is a phrase. Therefore, the word composition here, 光荣, is a word; it stands for a kind of honor because its meaning is not the simple sum of 光 plus 荣.

Though compounding is primarily a process of meaningful combination, most compounds are semantically obscured, though to some extent compositional (Ungerer & Schmid 1996). Generally it is not easy to guess the meaning of a compound from its parts unless you know the word in advance. How then are the meanings of word compositions constructed? That is, what is the generative motivation of word composition? What mechanism makes the form and meaning of a word composition combine? This is a problem that the present study will investigate.

## 2.2.2 Construction Motivation of Word Composition

Motivation refers to the connection between word-symbol and its sense. Some scholars propose that the meaning of word formation appears to be motivated rather than arbitrary in that there are cognitive mechanisms, such as metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge, which link literal meaning to figurative meaning. Shu (2000) claims that there are many types of meaning change, such as extension and transfer, and that metaphor is the most important origin of meaning change: metaphor is the motivation for the emerging of new meanings (Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Sweeter 1990; Yu 1998).

### 2.2.2.1 Traditional Views on Word Composition

Traditionally, word composition is regarded as a special set of the larger category of words. They are assumed to be a matter of language alone, that is, they are taken to be items of the lexicon that are independent of any conceptual system. According to this traditional view, the meanings and form of word composition are arbitrary. This originates from the referential theory that offers an elementary model of studying meaning by considering the relationship between words and the physical world.

C. K. Ogden and L. A. Richards (1923) proposed the famous Semantic Triangle (Semiotic Triangle or Triangle of Significance). Meaning in this theory is the relationship between word and referent. To establish such a relationship, a concept established by usage has to exist in the mind of the speaker and the hearer. However, they consider that there is no intrinsic relation between the sound-symbol and its sense, and the logical concept functions as the link between words and objects. Thus words are still non-motivated, conventional and arbitrary symbols. There is no way to explain why this or that sound-symbol has this or that meaning beyond the fact that the people of a given community have agreed to use one to designate the other. So there are some limitations in this theory. The modern study of Chinese word formation originates with Ma Janzhong (1898). In the first half of the 20th century the majority of linguistic scholars surveyed the structure of Chinese words from the point of view of meaning. The formation of complex words is a process of combination based on the semantic relationship between the elements (Liu 1990). In effect, some Chinese scholars have discussed the structure of Chinese word composition from the point of view of meaning, but it cannot interpret scientifically the nature of the construction of word composition. In general, the traditional view of word composition centers on simply seeking their origins and the structures are explained from their syntactic and semantic aspects, not deeply explored in terms of inner motivation.

## 2.2.2.2 Cognitive Views on Word Composition

Cognitive linguistics attempts to deal with the above dilemma of inner motivation, and has provided a new perspective on the study of language. It argues that lexical meaning is conceptual, and that the meaning of a lexeme is not referent to the entity or relation in the real world that the lexeme refers to, but to a concept in the mind based on experiences with that entity or relation (Talmy 2000; Lakoff 1980, 1987). Furthermore, the cognitive linguistic approach to semantics suggests that the objective world is not directly accessible, rather it is constructed on the basis of the constraining influences of human knowledge and language, and human language is based on the concept (Wangren 2007; Zhao 2000). Namely, reality is constructed by metaphorical thinking through language: "in the relationship between language and the physical or objective world there exists an intermediate level 'cognition' " (Svorou 1994: 4). In this model the formulation is: **reality—cognition—language**. Cognition, as the result of mental construction, is the basis of language. Knowledge of reality, whether it is occasioned by perception, language, memory or anything else,

is a result of going beyond the information given. It arises through the interaction of that information with the context in which it is presented, and with the knower's pre-existing knowledge. In effect, a very important cognitive tool—metaphor—is employed to solve this process: a new sense comes to its target domain from its source domain by metaphorical mapping. Metaphor allows attributes of basic-level sense projected onto a more abstract category by keeping their similar attributes, with a basic assumption that **semantic structure is equated with conceptual structure and meaning is equated with conceptualization** (Langacker 1987; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987). We maintain that this adheres to the nature of the theory of conceptual metaphor: metaphorization is the process of understanding one concept in terms of another. More specifically, it maps a more familiar concept domain onto an abstract one, and as a result, **a new concept is coined**. This process can be illustrated in the following figure 2.1:
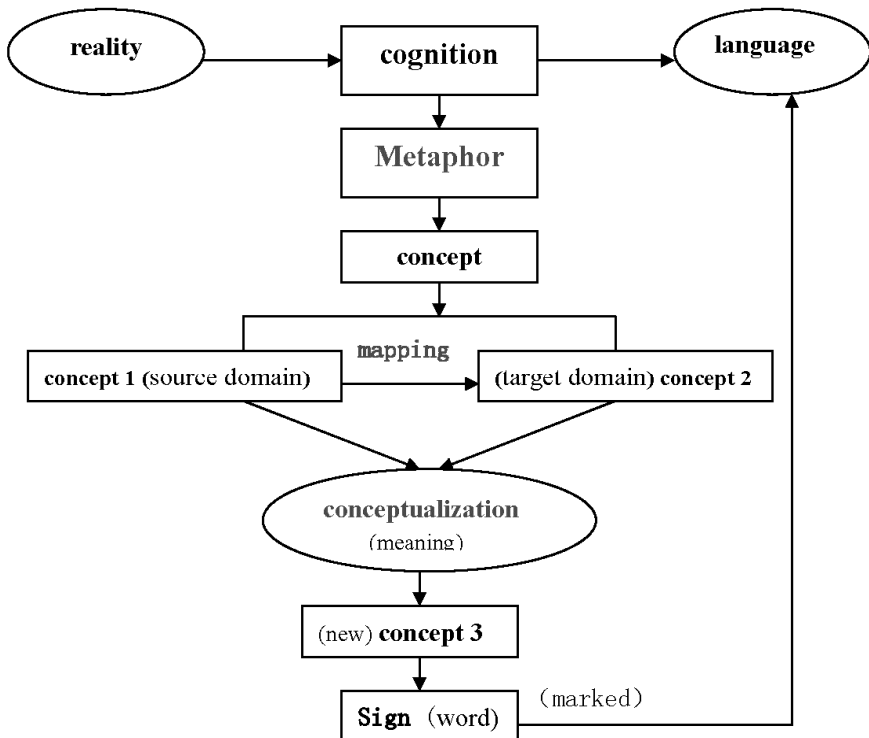


Figure 2.1 the process of conceptualization of language

The figure above shows the relationship between word meaning and its concept: the concept is the basis of word meaning, and word meaning is the expression of the concept in language. The meaning is a semantic category while the concept is a unit of thinking as well as the basis of word-meaning that depends on the generation of the concept. The order of formulation here is: **concept—meaning—word.** This helps to explain the reason why one word has a referential function in a specific context and implies that meaning alters nothing in nature from concept and meaning. The concept presents a continuum with no clear-cut dividing line so that it follows naturally that word composition should and could be examined by taking into account the generation of the concept. This provides a solid theoretical assumption for the analysis of the metaphorization of the entity of *light* in this book.

Cognitive linguists, such as Lakoff (1980, 1987), Johnson (1980, 1987), Langarker (1987), Sweetser (1990) and Chinese scholar Yu Ning (1998), have proposed that language is at least partially a metaphorical version of image-schematic reasoning based on our everyday knowledge and bodily experience of the physical world. This relies on the assumption that metaphor is the motivation for the emergence of new meaning.

The force of metaphor in the formation of lexical items is mainly described in the buildup of compounds (Jiang 2003). Some researchers emphasize that some compound words are formed in a metaphorical way and metaphorical ways of thinking play an important role in the formation of new words. It is claimed that the changing of lexical meaning is a metaphorical process, and, as Elbers (1998) argues, that the process of combining morphemes is also metaphoric in nature. As far as modern Chinese is concerned, we may even declare that new words are mostly motivated, since "characters are the basic morphological unit in the Chinese language, and it has stopped coining new characters for a long time" (Zhou 2007: 39).

## 2.3 Summary

On the whole, word composition is a common phenomenon natural to all human languages. A number of cognitive studies support the idea that word formation is partly motivated by various conceptual metaphors that exist independently as part of our conceptual system. The study of cognitive metaphor can provide new insights into how certain linguistic phenomena work, such as the development of meaning. It can also shed new light on how metaphorical meaning emerges. This challenges the traditional view that metaphorical language and thought is arbitrary and unmotivated.