

高 大 人 文 學 報 第 8 期  
NUK Journal of Humanities  
2 0 2 3 年 6 月 頁 0 1 - 2 2  
DOI: 10.6648/NUKJH.202306 (8).0001

## Metaphors of the Source Domain ‘Stars’ in Eulogistic Idioms

Ying-Hsuan Wu & Shelley Ching-yu Depner

Undergraduate student, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature,  
Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature,  
National Cheng Kung University

### Abstract

Death is taboo in many societies, yet shining stars are used in language to characterize death. Eulogistic idioms are written language used in funerals to mourn and praise the deceased. They appear in the form of four-character idioms and vary according to the gender, age, etc. of the deceased. This study aims to explore star-related metaphors in eulogistic idioms. We collected data on eulogistic idioms from the *Dictionary of Chinese Idioms* (2020) from the National Academy for Educational Research to answer the following research questions: (1) In what ways are the source domain *stars* mapped onto the abstract target domain *death*? (2) How does gender make a difference in star-related eulogistic idioms? (3) How is the metaphoric system of three types of metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003) presented in eulogistic idioms? The results show that the concept of death is mapped from the concepts of fading starlight, falling stars, and the human behavior of looking up at stars. That is, DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT, DEATH AS FALLING STARS, and LOOKING UP AT STARS AS SHOWING ADMIRATION FOR THE DECEASED are the conceptual metaphors in eulogistic idioms in Taiwan. The concept of DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT is used more often in eulogistic idioms for females, while the metaphor DEATH AS FALLING STARS tends to be used for males. Besides, stars representing various important social and official roles are used in eulogistic idioms for males, while only a single star representing beauty is used for females. Finally, structural metaphors are employed to present the deceased as stars; ontological metaphors express sorrowful emotions;

orientational metaphors convey distress and admiration. Star-related eulogistic idioms reflect much of Taiwanese society's cultural knowledge of death.

**Keywords: eulogistic idioms, stars, structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, orientational metaphors**

## Metaphors of the Source Domain ‘Stars’ in Eulogistic Idioms

### I. Introduction

As the last chapter of life, death is a solemn event, which is why death-related customs and etiquette have long been an essential part of human civilization, and certain language usages carry deep meanings when they are associated with death. Eulogistic idioms are one of them. These terms can be used for mourning for death or for showing admiration for the deceased. There are many metaphors in eulogistic idioms (Lu, 2020b; Tseng, 2017). Lu (2017b) examined how religion can change the way people use metaphors to conceptualize death in a multi-religious society such as Taiwan. Gibbs (1996) has pointed out that human metaphorical thinking is based on the perceptibility of the natural world. Several studies have demonstrated that nature plays an important role in idioms (Kövecses, 2010; Lee, 2019; Negro, 2019; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Pérez Hernández, 2011; Wang, 2011). Furthermore, language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch and Widdowson, 1998).

The present study examines the eulogistic idioms in Taiwanese funerals using the data retrieved from the *Chéngyǔ Diǎn* 成語典 (*Dictionary of Chinese Idioms*, DCI) published by the *Guójiā Jiàoyù Yánjiùyuàn* 國家教育研究院 (National Academy for Educational Research, NAER) at <https://dict.idioms.moe.edu.tw/>. We aim to explore the cultural meanings behind metaphors in such eulogistic idioms. Lakoff & Johnson (1980; 2003) proposed a metaphoric system with *structural*, *ontological*, and *orientational* metaphors. These three types of metaphors are adopted as the analytic framework of the study. The goal of the study is to answer the following questions: (1) In what ways are the source domain *stars* mapped onto the abstract target domain *death*? (2) How does gender make a difference in star-related eulogistic idioms? (3) How are the aforementioned three types of metaphors presented in our eulogistic idioms?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II reviews previous literature related to eulogistic idioms; Section III introduces our research framework; Section IV presents star-related metaphors and analyzes them based on gender and the three types of metaphors; Section V brings forth a discussion on the eulogistic idioms showing admiration; Section VI concludes the study.

## II. Literature Review

Previous linguistic studies on eulogistic idioms have explored them from various perspectives. For example, Lu (2017a) discussed the layout of the online request system from which eulogy givers choose the eulogistic idioms they use at funerals. Also, eulogistic idioms often incorporate cultural factors specific to certain occupations (Lu, 2020a; 2020b). Likewise, religion is also a factor that changes the way people use metaphors to conceptualize death in the multi-religious Taiwanese society (Lu, 2017b). In addition, ideologies in Chinese culture like Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, affect eulogistic idioms (Tien, 2017). Finally, metaphorical differences in eulogistic idioms in terms of different gender, and age groups are proposed (Tseng, 2017). These studies have illustrated some special features of eulogistic idioms. First, the expression is indirect (Tien, 2017). Second, the power relationship between the giver of eulogistic idioms and the receiver is asymmetric (Tseng, 2017). When a bereaved family receives eulogistic idioms from a well-known social figure, they may feel honored and comforted. In addition, although the occupation of the deceased matters (Tseng, 2017), not all the usages of eulogistic idioms are based on it. Indeed, besides the occupational categories, the DCI (2020) includes the eulogistic idioms without limiting the occupation of the deceased (see Table 1 for details). These categories are about gender and age and applicable to everyone, and gender is a factor in choosing the appropriate eulogistic idioms (Tseng, 2017). The current study focuses on eulogistic idioms in these categories with gender as one of our main concerns.

Several studies have demonstrated that nature plays an important role in idioms (Gibbs, 1996; Gibbs et al., 1997; Kövecses, 2010; Lee, 2019; Negro, 2019; Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Pérez Hernández, 2011; Wang, 2011; Wang et al., 2014). Idioms in the form of metaphors come from human observation of natural phenomena. Gibbs (1996) pointed out that human metaphorical thinking is based on the perceptibility of the natural world. In the same vein, Wang et al. (2014) pointed out that humans use observations of nature to form the basis of idioms. Likewise, Su (2002) pointed out that metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a process in which humans construct concepts and experiences of the natural world. Language users employ language to express what they have learned and observed from nature. Consequently, understanding the natural elements that make up idioms helps language users understand their figurative meanings.

There are three types of metaphors in the metaphoric system: structural, ontological, and

orientational (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003). Several studies have discussed these three metaphors. For example, according to Shih (2020), ontological metaphor is the most commonly used metaphorical system to explain the abstract concept of stress in Mandarin, followed by structural metaphors; the least used one is the orientational metaphor. The eulogistic idiom *xūn yóu gòng yǎng* 勛猷共仰 ‘victory-way-together-look up’ shows an orientational metaphor GOOD IS UP and an ontological metaphor ACHIEVEMENTS ARE OBJECTS (Lu, 2020b: 146). Similarly, emotion, as an abstract concept, is understood through structural metaphors like *food*, *organism*, and *state* (Hsiao, 2007). Moreover, Yu (2017) discussed the structural metaphor LIFE AS OPERA in Chinese and stated that the complex and diverse constructions of *Beijing operas* are used as an inference that maps onto the target domain of *life*.

The ways metaphors are expressed vary across cultures (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff, 1993). Culture is knowledge shared by a particular language community (Kövecses, 2017). In eulogistic idioms, there are many culture-specific conceptualizations. For instance, unlike in the western culture where death is usually expressed with downward metaphors, there are many metaphors of ascent among Chinese eulogistic idioms (Lu, 2017b; Lu 2020b; Tseng, 2017). It shows that the cultural specificity of metaphors is formed based on cultural patterns in a particular society (Su, 2002; Yu, 1996).

The study of Tseng (2017) is an important reference for our present study. Tseng (2017) investigated metaphors in eulogistic idioms in terms of gender. He proposed that natural resources such as rain and trees or unnatural events such as house destruction are often used as metaphors for the male deceased. For instance, *dòng zhé liáng cuī* 棟折梁摧 ‘pillar-lose-beams-break’ describes a house’s pillars and beams falling apart (Tseng, 2017). For the female deceased, Tseng found that the waning of the moon, the embroidery room, and the Yao Fountain are used as metaphors. For example, *yáo chí fù zhào* 瑤池赴召 ‘Yao-Fountain-go-call’ portrays the female deceased going back to the residence of a goddess in Chinese mythology (Tseng, 2017).

Eulogistic idioms can be influenced by beliefs, such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Tien, 2017; Lu, 2017b), by the occupation of the deceased (Lu, 2020a; 2020b), and by gender (Tseng, 2017). Though Tseng (2017) has proposed that diminishing light can be used in eulogistic idioms, he did not aim to provide a detailed analysis in this regard. The

present study aims to fill in the gap and focuses on the usage of starlight in Taiwan's eulogistic idioms.

### **III. Methodology**

We describe the data source, data set, and analytic framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003) for the present study in this section.

#### **A. Instrument**

The eulogistic idioms were collected from the DCI published by NAER. NAER is the premier institution responsible for educational research in Taiwan. One of its main objectives is planning and implementing essential educational research projects. The DCI has compiled abundant linguistic data and detailed idiom explanations. The first edition of the DCI was published in 1994 and has been revised continuously since. It is today divided into a basic version and an advanced version. We used the 2020 advanced edition for the current study. The eulogistic idioms in the DCI are categorized by the characteristics of the deceased, such as friends, businesspeople, virtuous women, soldiers, etc. The occupation, gender, and age are also labeled.

The category of gender is particularly important for this study. The available gender labels are all males, younger males, elderly males, all females, younger females, and elderly females. The category "all males" refers to male deceased regardless of age; similarly, "all females" idioms apply to deceased females of all age groups.

#### **B. Data Collection**

The retrieved data were organized in an Excel file. The analytic fields were eulogistic idioms, applicable objects, interpretation, star-related metaphor, metaphor explanation, and allusion. The purpose of the analytic item "applicable objects" was to mark the gender; "interpretation" recorded the meaning; "star-related metaphor" identified the star-related idioms; "metaphor explanation" elucidated the metaphor; "allusion" noted the cultural background of each idiom. Table 1 presents the amount of data in our database.

Table 1. The distribution of the collected and selected eulogistic idioms.

| Gender and Age  | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------|------------|
| Younger males   | 9      | 7%         |
| Elderly males   | 13     | 10%        |
| All males       | 46     | 34%        |
| Younger females | 7      | 5%         |
| Elderly females | 12     | 9%         |
| All females     | 47     | 35%        |

The categories in Table 1 are based on gender and age. The categories “all females” and “all males” have the highest and second-highest percentages in the list, respectively, as there is no age limit for these two categories. There are more eulogistic idioms used for the elderly than younger for both genders (elderly males 10% > younger males 7%; elderly females 9% > younger females 5%). In addition, in the age-restricted categories, the number of eulogistic idioms for males is larger than that of females (younger males 7% > younger females 5%; elderly males 10% > elderly females 9%). The selected idioms were then analyzed. However, before we discuss the analysis, an introduction to our analytic framework is called for.

### C. Analytic Framework: Concepts and the Metaphoric System

Metaphors have long been used to understand the concept of death. The theory of conceptual metaphors was proposed by the esteemed linguists Lakoff & Johnson in their book, *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003). The theory states that metaphors reflect people’s lives and significantly express the language speakers’ thinking process, reasoning, and imagination. That is to say, metaphors naturally stem from concrete, bodily human experiences.

Fundamentally, conceptual metaphor is composed of the mapping between the source domain and target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003). The source domain is the conceptual domain from which metaphoric expressions are extracted, and the target domain is the conceptual domain that is understood. The source domain is generally a specific person, thing, item, etc., while the target domain is usually an abstract concept, so the specific source domain is used to understand the more abstract target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003). Take ARGUMENT IS WAR as an example, the more concrete source domain *war* is

used to help understand the meaning of the target domain *argument* in the language speaker's conversation, e.g. *Your claims are indefensible* and *He attacked every weak point in my argument* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003: 4). The former employs the action of defending, a common strategy of war, to describe the structure of an argument, while the latter adopts the action of attacking.

In addition, according to Lakoff & Johnson (1980; 2003), the metaphoric system contains three types of metaphors: structural, ontological, and orientational. We adopt this system to analyze the data. Structural metaphors use a concrete object to present an abstract concept, such as TIME IS MONEY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003: 7), in which the source domain *money* is used to explain and thus mapped onto the meaning of the target domain *time*. The mapping might look something like this: Money is precious, and so is time; money can be spent, so can time. When people are wasting valuable time, it is as if they are wasting money.

Ontological metaphors are metaphors expressing vaguely defined objects (e.g. events, activities, emotions, and ideas) as physical matter (e.g. people, the human body, and containers). An example of an ontological metaphor is *Inflation makes me sick* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003: 26), where the human body acts as an entity to comprehend the idea of inflation.

Oriental metaphors are metaphors using spatial relativity to construct a conceptual system, such as UP/DOWN, FRONT/BACK, INSIDE/OUTSIDE, and ON/OFF. For example, *I'm feeling up* and *I'm feeling down* use HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN orientationally (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 2003: 15).

In the following section, we analyze the root cause of the pairing of source and target domains in eulogistic idioms. The role of the three types of metaphors as well as conceptual metaphors in eulogistic idioms will be examined based on the mappings between the source domain *stars* and the target domain *death*.

#### IV. Data Analysis

We present the analysis of the selected eulogistic idioms in this section. The first subsection exhibits the eulogistic idioms related to fading starlight and the second subsection analyzes those related to a falling star.

### A. Fading Starlight

As natural objects, stars act as a source domain in eulogistic idioms in various ways. Examples (1) and (2) are for the male deceased. These two idioms refer to different stars. The star in Example (1) refers to *nán jí xīng* 南極星 ‘Canopus’. *Nán jí xīng* 南極星 ‘Canopus’ is also known as *lǎo rén xīng* 老人星 ‘the elder star’, according to *tiān guān shū* 天官書 (*Book of Celestial*, 145 B.C.-86 B.C.),<sup>1</sup> the first book in Chinese history with a systematic description of stars as celestial officials. The name bears the meaning of longevity, it is also called *shòu xīng* 壽星 ‘the longevity star’. Both *gēng* 庚 and *shòu* 壽 possess the meaning of year and age in Mandarin Chinese, therefore, Example (1) *nán jí liàn máng* is used for an older deceased.

The star in Example (2) is *gēng xīng* 庚星 ‘the age star’. Traditional Chinese thinking holds that every person was born with a designated star (DCI, 2020), a concept similar to the twelve constellations in the West that correspond to different birthdays. The word *gēng* 庚 ‘age’ in this eulogistic idiom indicates that death is closely related to age; the older one gets, the likelihood of death increases. We see that the stars in (1) and (2) are both related to age and lifespan, that is, the source domain *stars* is used to express the target domain *death*. More importantly, the light of a star is similar to life; its brightness indicates the state of its existence. Consequently, the disappearance of starlight is similar to death, and death is the end stage of life. Second, when the starlight dims, people cannot see it with their naked eyes; similarly, when one dies, people do not see the person in the world anymore. Finally, when people see the stars dim, it usually brings a negative and lifeless feeling, just like death does.

With the source domain *stars* mapped onto the source domain *death* expressed in Taiwanese funeral customs, we see the conceptual metaphor DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT in life and language. The experiences from the physical world help to understand many concepts, especially abstract ones in a metaphorical way (Gibbs, 1996; Lakoff, 1993; Yu, 1996), and so is it in eulogistic idioms.

---

<sup>1</sup> The year of publication of this book cannot be identified. The dates of birth and death of the author *Sima Qian* 司馬遷 are recorded here instead.

- (1) 南 極 斂 芒  
nán jí liàn máng  
south pole restrain light  
Canopus has restrained its light.
- (2) 庚 星 匿 彩  
gēng xīng nì cǎi  
age star hide color  
The year star (of the person) has hidden its color.
- (3) 婺 星 光 暗  
wù xīng guāng àn  
beauteous star light dark  
The light of the Bao-Wu star has darkened.
- (4) 婺 星 光 黯  
wù xīng guāng àn  
beauteous star light gloom  
The light of the Bao-Wu star has darkened.
- (5) 婺 彩 沉 輝  
wù cǎi chén huī  
beauteous color fall brightness  
The color and brightness of the Bao-Wu star have dimmed.
- (6) 寶 婺 斂 芒  
bǎo wù liàn máng  
treasured beauteous restrain light  
The star Bao-Wu has restrained its light.

Examples (1) and (2) are usually used for males, whereas Examples (3)-(6) are for females. The stars for the female deceased in these examples refer to the same star, *bǎo wù xīng* 寶婺星 ‘the Bao-Wu star’. The word *wù* 婺 means beauteous. *Li Shangyin* 李商隱 (813 A.D.-858 A.D.), a poet in the Tang Dynasty, wrote *bǎo wù yáo zhū pèi* 寶婺搖珠珮 ‘treasured-beauteous-swing-bead-pendant’, describing the scene of beautiful women

swinging accessories to celebrate the Chinese Valentine’s Day (DCI, 2020). The word *wù 婺* has been used to describe the beauty of women for at least a thousand years. If we look into the collocations of the examples, *àn 黯* in (3) and *àn 黯* in (4) both mean darkness and without luster, while *àn 黯* also expresses depression and sentimentality. As for the collocations *chén 沉* in (5) and *liàn 斂* in (6), *chén 沉* possesses the meaning of burying, falling, and sinking, whereas *liàn 斂* means restraint, temperance, and retreat. These collocations refer to the actions and indicate the extent of fading as well as the undertone of death.

The mapping process between the source domain *fading starlight* and target domain *death* can be observed: The dimming light of a star and death are both the end of a state. Starlight can be dimmed, just like death can draw closer in everyone’s life. When the outer appearance of a star fades away and the starlight dims, it is similar to a woman’s death, when others can no longer appreciate her grace. A woman’s appearance was a valued characteristic in ancient Chinese culture, this explains why the star for females focuses on outer appearance (Examples (3)-(6)).

Turning to the metaphoric system, structural metaphors appear naturally in our data, i.e. the abstract concept of death is presented in terms of a concrete object—a star. While orientational and ontological metaphors are not presented in this subsection, we will give further discussion and elaboration of them in the second subsection of Section IV and Section V. Aside from star-related metaphors, there are also other Taiwanese eulogistic idioms that demonstrate these two types of metaphors. Eulogistic idioms such as *rén qín jù yǎo 人琴俱杳* ‘people-zither-both-disappear’ is an ontological metaphor that uses the disappearance of people and musical instruments to explain the sad mood of death. While *gāo shān yǎng zhǐ 高山仰止*<sup>2</sup> ‘high-mountain-lookup’, the orientational metaphor *looking up* describes the action of admiring the deceased (see Section V for further discussion of this idiom and elaboration of idioms showing admiration to the deceased).

Comparing the eulogistic idioms for male and female deceased, noticeably, more eulogistic idioms that use the DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT conceptual metaphor have

---

<sup>2</sup> Here, *zhǐ 止* is semantically void because it is in a morphosyntactic position like the subordinate particle *zhī 之* does and is thus used to emphasize or complement the tone.

been found for females deceased than males. Moreover, there are different stars used for males, yet there is only one star that is used for females.

## B. Falling Stars

A falling star is also a common source domain in eulogistic idioms. The action categories fading and falling contain different physical and metaphorical elements. DEATH AS FALLING STARS is instantiated by both male and female deceased. Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defines *falling* as “to suddenly go down onto the ground or towards the ground without intending to or by accident” while the definition of *fading* is “to (cause to) lose color, brightness, or strength gradually.” That is to say, fading describes the outer appearance of an object, and the movement is not as rapid as falling. The action of falling is stronger than the action of fading. The conceptual metaphor DEATH AS FALLING STARS is constructed based on the following similarities between a falling star and death. First, a star’s existence is a state similar to life; thus, the end of this state and the disappearance of such being map to the state of death. Since the action of falling is more powerful than fading, it pictures more strongly the sorrow that death brings. Second, once a star has fallen, people cannot see it hanging in the sky anymore; the same goes for death, when someone dies, people no longer see the person in their life. Finally, a falling star usually brings negative and fearful emotions; death, too, brings grief.

Examples (7) to (11) are for the male deceased, and the types of stars referred to are diverse. The stars in (7) and (8) refer to *shǎo wéi xīng* 少微星 ‘the Shao-Wei star’. This star represents the position *shì dà fū* 士大夫 ‘literati’ in feudal China as stated in *tiān guān shū* 天官書 (*Book of Celestial*, 145 B.C.-86 B.C.). The star in (9) is *nán jí xīng* 南極星 ‘Canopus’, which bears the meaning of longevity as described in the first subsection of Section IV. Example (10) portrays *wén qū xīng* 文曲星 ‘the Wen-Qu star’. In Chinese mythology, Wen-Qu is in charge of humans’ literary talent and examination luck. For example, Chinese novelist *Shi Naian* (施耐庵, 1296 A.D.-1370 A.D.) in his novel *shuǐ hǔ zhuàn* 水滸傳 (*Outlaws of the Marsh*, 1524 A.D.) mentioned that *wén qū xīng* 文曲星 ‘the Wen-Qu star’ was a star sent by the celestial Jade Emperor to assist the emperor in the human world. Therefore, those who are good at writing and serve as high-ranking officials in the imperial court are often referred to as *wén qū xīng* 文曲星 ‘the Wen-Qu star’. Furthermore, the

asterism<sup>3</sup> in (11) is *běi dòu xīng* 北斗星 ‘the Big Dipper’. The word *dòu* 斗 is used to name this asterism because the pattern of this group of stars is similar to that of a dipper. The ancients determined the seasons according to the direction pointed by the handle of the dipper since this asterism appears in different parts of the sky in different seasons and at different times of the night, as recorded in *tiān guān shū* 天官書 (Book of Celestial, 145 B.C.-86 B.C.). Thus, the significance of this asterism is evident. This asterism can only be used for male deceased, implying the lofty status of men in ancient China.

Examples (7) to (11) are used for the male deceased, whereas only Example (12) is for the female deceased. The star referred to here is *bǎo wù xīng* 寶婺星 ‘the Bao-Wu star’. As mentioned previously, *wù* 婺 describes the beauty of women, thus *bǎo wù xīng* 寶婺星 ‘the Bao-Wu star’ is frequently used as a symbol for females. We see that the stars from (7) to (11) all represent significant roles in ancient Chinese society. This phenomenon is in line with the male-dominant social values in ancient China, which proves that idioms reflect the values, morals, and history of language users in a particular ethnic group, as Chen (2009), Wang & Yu (2010), and Wang et al. (2014) have pointed out.

(7) 少 微 星 隕  
shǎo wēi xīng yǔn  
young tiny star fall  
The Shao-Wei star has fallen.

(8) 星 隕 少 微  
xīng yǔn shǎo wēi  
star fall young tiny  
The Shao-Wei star has fallen.

(9) 南 極 星 沉  
nán jí xīng chén  
south pole star fall  
Canopus has fallen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Asterism is used when referring *běi dòu xīng* 北斗星 ‘the Big Dipper’, because it is not just one star, but a group of seven stars.

- (10) 文      星      遽      落  
wén      xīng      jù      luò  
literary   star   suddenly   fall  
The Wen-Qu star has suddenly fallen.
- (11) 北      斗      星      沉  
běi      dòu      xīng      chén  
north   dipper   star   fall  
The Big Dipper has fallen.
- (12) 寶      婺      星      沉  
bǎo      wù      xīng      chén  
treasured   beautiful   star   fall  
The Bao-Wu star has fallen.

We now resume the examination of the three types of metaphors. Unlike the structural metaphors of fading starlight discussed in the first subsection of Section IV, the source domain of *falling stars* presented in this subsection shares the characteristics of structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. On the one hand, while both fading starlight and falling star use concrete objects (stars) to define death, the eulogistic idioms using falling stars further illustrate the sadness that death brings about. This is what ontological metaphors comprise, namely, it treats emotion as an entity. As we discussed, the action of falling is stronger than the action of fading. Falling is an unexpected action that happens abruptly, as in example (10), where the adverb *jù* 遽 highlights the abruptness of death. On the other hand, the verbs *yǐn* 殞, *chén* 沉, and *luò* 落 describe death as an act of going down, similar to the orientational metaphor SAD IS DOWN.

## V. Discussion: Expressing Admiration to the Deceased

As we have mentioned in the literature review, the purpose and mourning intention of eulogistic idioms are well documented (Tien, 2017; Tseng, 2017). In addition to mourning, eulogistic idioms also express admiration. Tseng (2017) said that the tone of mourning is reduced in eulogistic idioms for the elderly over the age of 80; instead, the idioms used here focus more on blessings and praises.

- (13) 斗            山            安            仰  
dǒu            shān            ān            yǎng  
Big Dipper    Mount Taishan    peacefully    lookup  
(The character of the male deceased) was as distinguished as the Big Dipper and Mount Taishan for people to look up to.
- (14) 高        風        安            仰  
gāo        fēng        ān            yǎng  
high    wind    peacefully    lookup  
(The character of the male deceased) was as glorious as the high wind for people to look up to.
- (15) 高        山            仰            止  
gāo        shān            yǎng            zhǐ  
high    mountain    lookup  
(The character of the male deceased) was as honorable as the high mountain for people to look up to.
- (16) 女        宗        共            仰  
nǚ        zōng        gòng            yǎng  
female    model    altogether    lookup  
(The female deceased) was an admired role model.
- (17) 女        宗        安            仰  
nǚ        zōng        ān            yǎng  
female    model    peacefully    lookup  
(The female deceased) was an admired role model.
- (18) 空        仰            慈            顏  
kōng    yǎng            cí            yán  
sky    lookup        kind        face  
The kind face of (the female deceased) was admired.

The eulogistic idiom (13) implies admiration instead of sorrow. This idiom is for the male deceased. The star used here is the asterism *běi dòu xīng* 北斗星 ‘the Big Dipper’, and

*shān* 山 refers to *tài shān* 泰山 ‘Mount Taishan’. *Běi dòu xīng* 北斗星 ‘the Big Dipper’ is an important asterism in ancient Chinese culture as mentioned, and so is *tài shān* 泰山 ‘Mount Taishan’<sup>4</sup>. Both *běi dòu xīng* 北斗星 ‘the Big Dipper’ and *tài shān* 泰山 ‘Mount Taishan’ are frequently used as symbols of men, which is in line with the high status of men in traditional Chinese society. Surprisingly, we did not find any female eulogistic idioms that use the metaphor LOOKING UP AT STARS AS SHOWING ADMIRATION FOR THE DECEASED, which once again shows that eulogistic idiom usage depends on gender, as Tseng (2017) has suggested.

Examples (13)-(15) are used for males, while (16)-(18) are for females. Although all of them use the orientational source domain UP, only Example (13) refers to the motion of looking up at stars. In Example (13), we see that the emotion conveyed is not the sadness from the fading starlight, nor the sadness caused by the falling stars, but the admiration of looking up at the stars hanging high in the sky in the vast universe. Although Examples (14) and (15) do not describe the motion of looking up at the stars, they are still related to natural objects, i.e., the wind and the mountain. However, from (16) to (18), the object being looked up to is no longer something in the natural world; rather, the focus is shifted to the person’s character and appearance. Being different from the orientational source domain DOWN in the second subsection of Section IV, eulogistic idioms here use the orientational source domain UP, greatly reducing the sense of sadness.

Let us go a step further to examine the conceptual metaphors analyzed in the above sections, viz., DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT, DEATH AS FALLING STARS, and LOOKING UP AT STARS AS SHOWING ADMIRATION FOR THE DECEASED. Stars act as the deceased in these idioms. At first sight, it seems that our star-related conceptual metaphors are the opposite of Lakoff’s and Johnson’s argument that DEATH IS DARKNESS and DEATH IS COLD (2003: p. 251). Nonetheless, DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT and DEATH AS FALLING STARS portray the process when the stars lose their brightness and

---

<sup>4</sup> Ren Fang 任昉 (460 A.D.-508 A.D.), a writer in the Southern Dynasty of Liang, wrote in his book *shù yì jì* 述異記 (*Strange Records*) that Mount Taishan was formed by the transformation of the head of *pán gǔ* 盤古. *Pán gǔ* 盤古 is the god of creation in Chinese mythology. At his death, his body and organs transformed into the physical world and all things in it. As influential as *pán gǔ* 盤古 is in Chinese culture, Mount Taishan was given particularly high honor in ancient China.

become dark. Without light, the stars also lose their heat. The conceptual metaphors revealed from the star eulogistic idioms coincide with the metaphors of DARKNESS and COLDNESS.

## VI. Conclusion

This study focuses on eulogistic idioms with the source domain *stars*. The similarity between the source domain *stars* and the target domain *death* explains why stars are used as metaphors in eulogistic idioms. Now we can answer our research questions: First, in what ways are the source domain *stars* mapped onto the abstract target domain *death*? As shown, eulogistic idioms use two aspects of stars, i.e. fading starlight and falling stars to map the abstract meaning of death, that is DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT and DEATH AS FALLING STARS. To be noted, Lakoff (1993) proposed the metaphor EVENTS ARE ACTIONS, which coincides with our findings. In eulogistic idioms, death, as the must-go-through event in everyone’s lifetime, is understood through the actions of starlight fading and stars falling.

Second, considering the gender difference, we can compare the conceptual metaphors DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT and DEATH AS FALLING STARS, and see that more eulogistic idioms for females use the metaphor DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT than males, and more eulogistic idioms for males use the metaphor DEATH AS FALLING STARS than females. In addition, there are more stars available for male eulogistic idioms, but only one specific star for female eulogistic idioms. Furthermore, the stars that represent males mostly represent ancient official positions or have an important role in people’s lives; but the star of the female distinctly emphasizes beauty.

Finally, the metaphoric system of three types of metaphors is present in eulogistic idioms. Structural metaphors are found in eulogistic idioms using stars as concrete objects to represent the deceased. Ontological metaphors are used to express sorrowful emotions in the conceptual metaphor DEATH AS FADING STARLIGHT. Although eulogistic idioms essentially express sadness, the emotion is stronger when using DEATH AS FALLING STARLIGHT. In terms of orientation metaphors, both UP and DOWN are found in these eulogistic idioms; DOWN conveys distress, and UP, admiration.

Death is a process that everyone must go through, and life is all the more precious because of it. The value of eulogistic idioms is to provide a way for the living to remember and part with the deceased in the last mile of life. As “language itself is a mirror and carrier of

culture” (Yu, 2017: 83), it is hoped that our study of the metaphoric conceptualization of eulogistic idioms can provide a greater understanding of the role of certain language usage in Taiwanese funeral culture, as well as an understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and cognition.

## 輓詞中來源域「星星」之隱喻

吳映璇、謝菁玉  
國立成功大學外文系  
大四生、教授

### 摘要

死亡在許多社會是禁忌，但在輓詞中卻用了閃亮的星星來形容死亡。輓詞是在葬禮上用來表示哀悼和稱頌亡者的書面語言，通常以四字成語的形式出現，常依亡者的性別、年齡等而有不同的使用。本研究旨在探究輓詞中與星星相關的隱喻。我們從國家教育研究院的《成語典》(2020)中收集了輓詞資料，擬探究以下的研究問題：(1) 來源域星星以何種方式映射到死亡的抽象目標域？(2) 與星星相關的輓詞如何呈現性別？(3) 由 Lakoff 和 Johnson (1980; 2003) 所提出的三種隱喻如何在輓詞中運用？研究結果顯示，死亡的概念是從星光黯淡、星星墜落和人類仰望星星等概念映射而來的。也就是說，死亡是黯淡的星光、是墜落的星星，而仰望星星表達對亡者的景仰，這些是台灣輓詞的概念隱喻。死亡是黯淡的星光多用於悼念女性的輓詞，而死亡是墜落的星星則常用於男性。最後，輓詞中與星星相關的三種隱喻系統分別為：結構隱喻將亡者呈現為星星、本體隱喻表達悲傷的情緒、方位隱喻傳達痛苦和景仰。與星星相關輓詞之研究結果，反映了台灣社會對死亡的文化認知。

**關鍵詞：**輓詞、星星、結構隱喻、本體隱喻、方位隱喻

## References

- Cambridge Dictionary. (2022). Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Chen, X. P. (2009). *Grammar, rhetoric and role playing of idioms*. Showwe Information. (陳湘屏 (2009)。《成語的語法、修辭及角色扮演》。秀威。)
- Dictionary of Chinese idioms. (2020). National Academy for Educational Research. Retrieved from: <https://dict.idioms.moe.edu.tw/>
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. (1996). Why many concepts are metaphorical. *Cognition*, 61, 3: 309-319.
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr., Bogdanovich, J. M., Sykes, J. R., & Barr, D. J. (1997). Metaphor in idiom comprehension. *Journal of Memory and language*, 37, 2: 141-154.
- Hsiao, C. H. (2007). *The Language of Emotion in Mandarin Discourse*. MA Thesis, Graduate Institute of Linguistics, National Taiwan University, Taipei.
- Kövecses, Z. (2010). Metaphor and culture. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Philologica*, 2, 2: 197-220.
- Kövecses, Z. (2017). Context in cultural linguistics: The case of metaphor. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *Advances in cultural linguistics* (pp. 307-323). Springer.
- Kramsch, C., & Widdowson, H. G. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford university press.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (pp. 202-251). Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by* (1 ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by* (2 ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Lu, W. L. (2017a). Socio-cultural factors in analyzing the pragmeme of accommodation: A case study of the official online eulogy request system in Taiwan. In P. Vahid & C. Alessandro (Eds.), *The Pragmeme of Accommodation: The Case of Interaction around the Event of Death* (pp. 111-127). Springer.
- Lu, W. L. (2017b). Cultural conceptualisations of DEATH in Taiwanese Buddhist and Christian eulogistic idioms. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *Advances in cultural linguistics* (pp. 49-64). Springer.
- Lu, W. L. (2020a). Viewpoint and metaphor in culture: A Cognitive Linguistic analysis on a selection of Chinese eulogistic idioms used in Taiwan. *Cognitive Linguistic*

*Studies*, 7, 1: 254-274.

- Lu, W. L. (2020b). Cultural “signs of life” in politics: A case study of eulogistic idioms for Taiwanese politicians. In V. d. S. Sinha, A. Moreno-Núñez, & Z. Tian (Eds.), *Language, Culture and Identity—Signs of Life* (pp. 141-156). John Benjamins.
- Negro, I. (2019). Metaphor and metonymy in food idioms. *Languages*, 4, 3: 47.
- Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, F. J., & Perez Hernandez, L. (2011). The contemporary theory of metaphor: Myths, developments and challenges. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 26, 3: 161-185.
- Shih, Y. C. (2020). *Conceptual metaphor of stress in Mandarin and English*. MA Thesis, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan.
- Su, L. I. W. (2002). What can metaphors tell us about culture? *Language and Linguistics*, 3,3: 589-613.
- Tien, A. (2017). To be headed for the West, riding a crane: Chinese pragmemes in the wake of someone’s passing. In P. Vahid & C. Alessandro (Eds.), *The pragmememe of accommodation: The case of interaction around the event of death* (pp. 183-202). Springer.
- Tseng, M. Y. (2017). Toward a pragmatic study of funeral discourses in Taiwan: Voice, shared situation knowledge, and metaphor. In P. Vahid & C. Alessandro (Eds.), *The pragmememe of accommodation: The case of interaction around the event of death* (pp. 259-276). Springer.
- Wang, L., & Yu, S. (2010, August). *Construction of Chinese idiom knowledge-base and its applications*. Proceedings of the 2010 Workshop on Multiword Expressions: from Theory to Applications, Beijing, China.
- Wang, L., Yu, S., Wang, Z., Qu, W., & Wang, H. (2014, June). *A Study on Metaphors in Idioms Based on Chinese Idiom Knowledge Base*. Proceedings of the 2014 Workshop on Chinese Lexical Semantics, Macao, China.
- Yu, N. (1996). *The contemporary theory of metaphor: A perspective from Chinese*. The University of Arizona.
- Yu, N. (2017). Life as opera: A cultural metaphor in Chinese. In F. Sharifian (Ed.), *Advances in cultural linguistics* (pp. 65-87). Springer.

## Chinese References

- Lee, M. H. (2019). Analysis of death-related euphemisms in modern Chinese and its pedagogical implications. *Journal of Applied Chinese*, 21: 63-103. (李美慧 (2019)。〈華語死亡委婉語分析與教學應用〉，《應華學報》，21: 63-103。)
- Wang, Y. Y. (2011). *The metaphoric art of idioms*. Showwe Information. (王韻雅 (2011)。《成語的隱喻藝術》。秀威。)

## Acknowledgment:

The authors would like to thank Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan for the financial support of this project (Project number: 111-2813-C-006-095-H).