

Melanie Anderson

#### **Expansion Project 4: Conceptual Metaphor Analysis**

In English, as in Japanese, conceptual metaphors and idiomatic usage run rampant. This project will be specifically focusing on Japanese conceptual metaphors that have English equivalents, and so comparing linguistic differences in these phrases that still achieve the same meaning. These variations reveal different linguistic patterns between Japanese and English, which interestingly seem to somewhat contradict what one would expect based on the cultural expectations of each society.

The first conceptual metaphor pair relates to a lack of understanding leading to contentedness. In Japanese, this is phrased as 知らぬが仏 (shiranu ga hotoke), which literally translates to “not knowing is Buddha,” in English. In this metaphor, the source domain is Buddha, and the target is not knowing, or ignorance. Buddha represents enlightenment or peace, and the metaphor essentially says that incomprehension leads to spiritual peace. Similarly, in English, we say “ignorance is bliss,” with the source domain being bliss, and the target being ignorance. Interestingly, in English, “bliss” carries somewhat spiritual or enlightened connotations, much like how Buddha represents a somewhat religious figure in Buddhism, which is a very common religion in Japan. However, the English version of this metaphor does not contain specific figures, whereas the Japanese version references the fixed character of Buddha as being the result. Therefore, while both refer to a lack of knowledge as being equivalent to an almost divine sense of peace, Japanese clearly references a religious figure, whereas English references only the linguistic concepts without a tangible comparison.

The second conceptual metaphor pair refers to a person's misfortune compounding in a short amount of time. In Japanese, this is expressed by the saying, 泣き面に蜂 (nakitsura ni hachi), or, "a bee to a crying face." While the metaphor itself is not clearly stated, the source domain is a bee, meaning additional suffering, and the target is a crying face, which is interpreted to mean someone already experiencing difficulty. This has a pretty clear match in English, being, "when it rains it pours." In this case, although as vague as the Japanese phrase, the metaphor's source domain is a downpour of rain, and the target is rain. A downpour in this instance is referencing a deluge of mishaps, and rain meaning a singular negative event. In other words, both of these phrases conceptually translate to, "when one things go wrong, all things go wrong," but they are expressed in differing linguistic forms. As with the previous phrase, we see that the Japanese expression uses specific objects, being a bee and a crying face, while the English expression uses more general terms, being a common form of weather, rain, and a more specialized form of the same vague thing, a downpour. Rather than using specific terminology that relates to a very explicit and detailed experience, the English equivalent uses somewhat loosely defined occurrences that, while still more tangible than conceptual as in the previous example, still feel indistinct.

The final metaphor comparison applies to the concept of craving or idealizing what someone else has or is experiencing. The Japanese phrase expressing this idea is, となりの芝生は青い (tonari no shibafu ha aoi), which literally translates to, "the neighbor's lawn is green." In this example, the source domain is green, which, although not explicitly stated, means better, and the target is the neighbor's lawn, which means another individual's current state or possessions.

Its near identical equivalent in English is, “the grass is always greener on the other side,” where, “the grass is always greener” is the source domain, also meaning better, and the target being the other side, which again means another’s belongings or current experience. While, in this case, the English version does use a slightly more specific source domain, being the other side’s grass, but again the target is the indeterminate, “other side,” rather than the Japanese’s clear reference to, “the neighbor’s lawn.”

Overall, we can see that similar conceptual metaphors exist within these two very different Western and Eastern languacultures. However, we also can note the many of the English conceptual metaphors use vague and indistinct language more related to general ideas, whereas the Japanese metaphors use specific objects or experiences. Oddly, this contradicts both of these countries generally accepted cultural expectations, where the Japanese value indirectness and generality, and English tends to be very frank and straightforward. This may result from the excuse of metaphor as being a comparison rather than a direct expression, where both cultures feel more freedom to speak in a manner contradictory to their societies’ expectations. Additionally, these shared metaphors reveal that both countries experience much of the same situations, such as envy, the issue of knowledge versus happiness, and when unfortunate events seem to converge in the same instant. While these countries are clearly very different, they do share similar ideas and concepts which are expressed through their sayings, idioms, and cultural metaphors.