

*Conceptual Metaphors in the Uses of Prepositions in
English and Mandarin: A Comparative Study*

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to investigate the conceptual differences and similarities between English in, on, and at and Mandarin 在...裡/zai...li/in, 在...上/zai...shang/on, and 在/zai/at via a comparative analysis in order to shed light on language transfer in learning English prepositions in Taiwan.

For the comparative analysis, the data was mainly from existing literatures. Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, 2006; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008) were the foundations of this research. Moreover, an interview with English teachers from senior high schools and universities in Taiwan and a questionnaire survey with high school and university students were conducted to examine how English prepositions have been taught and learnt. In addition, thirty seven test papers were collected to inspect the errors and further to investigate the language transfers.

The findings demonstrate several conceptual differences and similarities between English and Mandarin prepositions. However, those cognitive concepts of prepositions are hardly to be found in the teaching and learning in Taiwan. In addition, students' test papers evidence that Mandarin to some extent influences English prepositions learning. The transfers might be linguistically, e.g. direct translation, as well as conceptually, e.g. different conceptualisation of space and time.

The results from the comparative analysis can provide several suggestions. Both

language teachers and learners can understand the conceptual differences between English and Mandarin prepositions to assist their teaching and learning. From the interview and questionnaire, I found Taiwanese students tend to directly accept what their teachers provide to them. They do not have the desire to obtain the reasons why the uses of prepositions have to be like that because of the influence of the teach-to-test education model in Taiwan. This might restrict students' cognitive development in language learning.

Keywords: conceptual metaphors, prepositions, language transfer, Taiwan, senior high schools and universities