THE
MORAL METAPHOR
SYSTEM
A Conceptual Metaphor Approach
NING YU
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Acknowledgments

The year 2020 was the 40th anniversary of the publication of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s monumental book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). This book of mine is meant to be a humble tribute that I hope to pay to Lakoff and Johnson, and to their seminal work, small-sized as is, for its massive and lasting impact on the academic world, with thousands and thousands of citations, not only in linguistics and philosophy, but also in many other disciplines proximally or distally related.

Thirty-three years ago, I had the opportunity to read *Metaphors We Live By* for the first time. Six years later, I embarked on my own journey of metaphor research, focusing on Chinese, my native language, sometimes in comparison with English. On this journey, I have had the honor, privilege, and pleasure of interacting closely with, and benefiting directly from, many great scholars in the field, including Lakoff and Johnson themselves. I would like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all of them, too many to mention individually by name here.

However, I do want to single out two of them, Ray Gibbs and Zoltán Kövecses, because they deserve my very special thanks. I was extremely fortunate to get to know them in person upfront on my journey, and have had their friendly company all along. Their guidance and assistance have helped me enormously at various junctures of the road. Their scholarship has permeated the flesh and blood of my own.

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The ideas of this book started to emerge in three of my earlier journal articles, all published in *Metaphor and Symbol* (Taylor and Francis Group):


As listed above, the third article was written with two co-authors. At the time of collaboration, Tianfang and Yingliang were still MA students, but they are now PhD candidates, at The Pennsylvania State University. I want to thank them for their contribution, and am especially happy to see their intellectual growth since then.

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1
Moral cognition and embodied metaphor

Introduction

1.1 Conceptual metaphor theory: Morality and metaphor research

Morality is an eternal subject for human inquiry into what it means to be human, concerning the fundamental human judgment on what is good or right in contrast to what is bad or wrong, in the enhancing of human wellbeing. Our moral cognition, which consists of cognitive processes and mechanisms involved in making moral judgments based on our moral values and principles, allows us to make such judgments on human character and behavior, or intention and action, distinguishing between right and wrong, or good and evil, in moral choices and decisions, and regulating interpersonal relations and interactions in social life. As a social concept, morality refers to abstract values and principles in our social life, which lack concrete referents existing in the physical world that we can experience with our perceptual senses. We, therefore, conceptualize morality using metaphor (e.g., Denham 2000; Haggerty 1997; Harley 1993; Johnson 1993; Noonan 1988; Ross 2011). As is argued, metaphor is a powerful cognitive tool for understanding abstract social concepts (e.g., Landau, Robinson, and Meier 2014; Maasen and Weingart 2000). In effect, as Gibbs (2020: 1) put it recently, “metaphor is everywhere in human life”, and it “bursts forth in most every discourse domain, is seen in virtually every language and culture that has been studied, and, quite important, is evident in many facets of human expressive action”.

Metaphor research is one of the central topics in cognitive linguistics, which is a theoretic paradigm for the study of language as an integral part of cognition and culture (e.g., Lakoff 1987a; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Langacker 1987, 1991; Talmy 2000; see also Croft and Cruse 2004; Evans 2019; Geeraerts and Cuyckens 2007; Kövecses 2006; Ungerer and Schmid 2013). The most influential cognitive linguistic approach to metaphor, metonymy,
and figurative language in general is known as conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) (e.g., Barcelona 2000a; Dirven and Pörings 2002; Fusaroli and Morgagni 2009; Gibbs 1994, 2017; Kövecses 2000, 2005, 2015a, 2020; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Littlemore 2019; Panther and Radden 1999; Panther and Thornburg 2003; Panther, Thornburg, and Barcelona 2009; Sullivan 2013; see also Dancygier and Sweetser 2014; Kövecses 2010). In fact, CMT is acclaimed as “the dominant force in the contemporary world of interdisciplinary metaphor studies” (Gibbs 2009: 14). According to CMT, metaphor is primarily conceptual in nature, and it is an essential mode of thinking, or a “figure of thought” (Lakoff 1986). In CMT, a conceptual metaphor is defined as “a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system” (Lakoff 1993: 203). As such, conceptual metaphors are manifested in metaphorical expressions, which are linguistic expressions, such as words, phrases, and sentences, as well as multimodal expressions more broadly, such as co-speech gestures, sign languages, and static and moving images (e.g., Cienki and Müller 2008; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009; Taub 2001; Wilcox 2000). Metaphorical expressions, linguistic or multimodal, are the surface realization of their underlying cross-domain mappings, or conceptual metaphors. Gibbs (2014: 19–20) summarizes the development and achievement of CMT in the following passage:

Since 1980, several hundred cognitive linguistic projects have demonstrated how systematic patterns of conventional expressions reveal the presence of underlying conceptual metaphors. These studies have explored a large range of target concepts and domains (e.g., the mind, concepts of the self, emotions, science, morality and ethics, economics, legal concepts, politics, mathematics, illness and death, education, psychoanalysis), within a vast number of languages (e.g., Spanish, Dutch, Chinese, Hungarian, Persian, Arabic, French, Japanese, Cora, Swedish), including sign languages and ancient languages (e.g., Latin, Ancient Greek), and have investigated the role of conceptual metaphors in thinking and speaking/writing within many academic disciplines (e.g., education, philosophy, mathematics, theater arts, physics, chemistry, architecture, political science, economics, geography, nursing, religion, law, business and marketing, and film).

Furthermore, Gibbs (2017: 5–7) outlines CMT’s broad scope of impact as follows: CMT has made important contributions to (i) a new way of thinking about linguistic structure and behavior as a significant part of cognitive linguistics’ program; (ii) the understanding of the pervasiveness of
metaphorical language and thought across a wide range of cognitive domains and cultural and linguistic environments; (iii) the alteration of our scholarly conception of the relationship between language and thought with its claim about abstract thinking being based partly on metaphorical mapping; and (iv) the study of embodied cognition as a leading force in the “second revolution” of cognitive science.

Though exceptionally productive ever since it began to rise in popularity 40 years ago, CMT has its own limitations as an approach to metaphor research that has received many critiques and criticisms both within and beyond cognitive linguistics (see, e.g., Cameron and Low 1999; Cienki and Müller 2008; Deignan 2005; Glucksberg and McGlone 1999; Haser 2005; McGlone 2007; Murphy 1996; Ritchie 2013; Semino 2008; Steen 2011; Vervaeke and Kennedy 1996; see also Gibbs 2009, 2011, 2014, 2017; Kövecses 2008, 2017b for evaluations or responses). In a series of publications, Gibbs (2009, 2011, 2014, 2017) has made a most comprehensive evaluation of its weaknesses as well as its strengths, and issues and controversies that have been identified and raised regarding CMT. As he points out, the most general question about CMT is whether the presence of metaphor in language necessarily indicates anything about the way people ordinarily think (Gibbs 2014). Specific criticisms of CMT include the following points (see Gibbs 2014: 20–24):

(i) **Isolated constructed examples**: Far too many of the linguistic analyses presented in favor of CMT are based on isolated examples often constructed by the research analyst.

(ii) **Limitations of the individual analyst**: Linguistic analyses of conceptual metaphors are based on an individual linguist’s own intuitions that may be theoretically motivated.

(iii) **Lack of explicit criteria for metaphor identification**: CMT analyses rarely provide explicit criteria about either how to identify linguistic metaphors in language or how to infer conceptual metaphors based on different groupings of metaphoric discourse.

(iv) **Issue of falsifiability and need for nonlinguistic evidence**: CMT is unfalsifiable if the only data in its favor are linguistic expressions, thus relying on circular logic when arguing for underlying conceptual metaphors with linguistic evidence only.

(v) **Ignorance of other factors**: CMT ignores other alternative possibilities, such as cultural, ideological, and linguistic factors, in its accounts of metaphoric thought and language.
(vi) *A reductionist approach:* CMT is far too reductionist in its account of verbal metaphor, reducing the consideration of novel poetic language to static conceptual metaphors that are grounded in recurring embodied experiences and even neural processes.

In light of these criticisms, Gibbs (2014: 31–32) calls upon CMT scholars to put CMT on firmer empirical ground. They should, among other things, (a) be more explicit about the ways they perform their linguistic analyses of language to infer conceptual metaphors; (b) seek to integrate their findings from linguistic analyses with those obtained by corpus, behavioral, and neuroscience-based research methods; (c) better articulate what empirical hypotheses and experimental predictions arise from more linguistic analyses of metaphor; (d) explore alternative explanations for the data collected in support of the theory; and (e) be more open about what it cannot accomplish simply because no single theory may be capable of explaining all aspects of the complex phenomena that are metaphorical language and thought. Looking back, we can say that CMT scholars and practitioners have made considerable progress in all these areas.

In the past decades, CMT has argued that our moral cognition is partly metaphorical, emerging in part from a complex system of conceptual metaphors for the understanding of moral principles and values (e.g., Johnson 1993, 1996, 2014; Lakoff 1996, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Lakoff and Johnson (1999), the founders of CMT, assert that this complex metaphor system for morality contain clusters of metaphorical mappings for conceptualizing, reasoning about, and communicating our moral ideas. That is the reason why morality is one of the common target domains of conceptual metaphors (Kövecses 2010).

This line of research on the metaphorical nature of moral understanding started with Johnson’s 1993 book *Moral imagination: Implications of cognitive science for ethics*, in which he argues that metaphor is pervasive in our moral reasoning, lying at the heart of our imaginative moral rationality. Different moral metaphor systems have been examined along this line of research. Their source concepts, in my view, can be characterized loosely as falling into three broad conceptual domains, or domain matrixes as combinations of domains (Croft and Cruse 2004): (i) the financial and commercial domain, (ii) the familial and social domain, and (iii) the bodily and physical domain. These are discussed briefly below.
The financial and commercial domain

The moral metaphor system grounded in the financial and commercial domain is known as the Moral Accounting Metaphor (see, e.g., Johnson 1993: chapter 2, 1996; Lakoff 1996: chapter 4; Lakoff and Johnson 1999: chapter 14). This moral metaphor system focuses on the aspects of moral interaction among people in the “moral book” and construes them as records of commercial transaction in the accounting book. This general metaphoric mapping entails numerous submappings, such as those between wellbeing and wealth, moral deeds and commercial commodities, moral debt and financial debt, moral credit and financial credit, justice and fair exchange, and so forth. Thus, for instance, our moral acts toward others increase their wellbeing, putting them in moral debt to us and giving us moral credit. As Johnson (1996: 55) puts it, this moral metaphor system “gives rise to a pattern of reasoning about our duties, rights, and obligations” and, on the basis of it, “we reason about what is fair, and our moral discourse reveals this underlying conceptual metaphor system” (e.g., In judging him, take into account all the good things he has done. I’m holding you accountable for her suffering. All her sacrifices for others surely balance out the bad things she did. I owe you a favor for that good deed. I’ll make you pay for what you did!). It is suggested that the Moral Accounting Metaphor is realized in a few basic moral schemes—Reciprocation, Retribution, Revenge, Restitution, and Altruism (see, e.g., Johnson 1993: chapter 2; Lakoff 1996: chapter 4; Lakoff and Johnson 1999: chapter 14)—which all elaborate on the notion of “balance” in the accounting book. According to the Moral Accounting Metaphor, “justice is the settling of accounts, which results in the balancing of the moral books” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 296).

The familial and social domain

Morality from the familial and social domain is known as being rooted in the Strict Father and Nurturant Parent models of the family, first proposed by Lakoff in his 1996 book Moral politics to account for ideological differences between conservatives and liberals in U.S. domestic politics. That is, the two political orientations of conservatism and liberalism were proposed as being ultimately based on different models of the family. Conservatism is grounded on the Strict Father family morality, whereas liberalism is based on
the Nurturant Parent family morality. Thus, political liberalism and conserva-
vatism hold different views of morality because they are based on different
family models that organize moral metaphors in different ways, giving prior-
ity to certain metaphors and downplaying others. For instance, the Strict
Father model gives top priority to moral authority and moral strength, whereas
the Nurturant Parent model places more emphasis on moral nurturance and
moral empathy. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), human morality
might be based on models of the family for two reasons. First, children's moral
sensibility and moral understanding are first formed within their families.
For young children, therefore, morality is just their family morality. Second,
children's moral education largely stems from their family situations. Massive
social influences on their subsequent development of moral values get filtered
through their family morality. Lakoff and Johnson's (1999: 313) hypothesis
about moral understanding is that models of the family “order our metaphors
for morality into relatively coherent ethical perspectives by which we live our
lives”. That is, morality in general is conceptualized metaphorically as some
form of family morality. This metaphorical conceptualization gives rise to the
Family of Man Metaphor, by which people ought to treat each other the way
they treat their family members (see Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 317).

The bodily and physical domain

The source concepts of moral metaphors in this domain are usually derived
from our bodily, or sensorimotor, experience in the physical environment.
Moral metaphors of this type often refer to the moral character of individ-
ual people or of society as a whole (see Johnson 1993, 1996). Johnson (1996:
57–60) discusses some basic metaphors for morality that can be categorized
as belonging to this type:

(i) **MORALITY IS HEALTH** and **IMMORALITY IS SICKNESS**
Since moral evil is a *disease*, we must *quarantine* those who are im-
moral so that we are not exposed to their influence. We must keep
ourselves *clean*, *pure*, and *protected* from moral *infection*.

(ii) **BEING MORAL IS BEING UPRIGHT**
When we are morally *healthy* and *strong*, we can stand *upright* against
evil *forces*. Morality is thus a struggle to maintain moral *strength* and
moral *balance* so that we can stay *in control* to resist immoral *forces*
and do not *fall* into evil ways.
(iii) **Being moral is being in the normal place**

Moral ends are the *places* we should strive to reach, and being moral is going *where* you ought to go. Deviance is immoral because it can take people away from the right *path* and lead them *astray*. Also, if things are out of their normal *place* or moral *order*, society will *break down* and cease to *function*.

(iv) **Morality is light and immorality is darkness**

Moral *darkness* is a threat to our basic wellbeing, with evil being a *dark force*. The *darkness* of evil makes people incapable of seeing the good and knowing what is right and wrong. The *dark side* in people threatens to overcome the *light* in them.

As illustrated above, the moral metaphors of this type are really grounded in the nature of our bodies and how they function in the physical world.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 290) argue that cognitive science, especially cognitive semantics, “gives us the means for detailed and comprehensive analysis of what our moral concepts are and how their logic works”, and that “our cognitive unconscious is populated with an extensive system of metaphoric mappings for conceptualizing, reasoning about, and communicating our moral ideas”. While asserting the metaphorical nature of moral understanding, *Lakoff and Johnson (1999)* also ask the question: Is all morality metaphoric? Their answer is no. As they suggest, there is nothing inherently metaphoric about “basic experiential morality” as aspects of human wellbeing. Nevertheless, “there is no ethical system that is not metaphorical” (p. 325). Lakoff and Johnson also raise the question of whether metaphorical concepts are universal. They indicate that the empirical research has not yet been carried out to make that determination, but the evidence available thus far suggests that they are very good candidates for universal moral concepts.

As reviewed above, the CMT research shows that our ethical values and principles are rooted metaphorically in our embodied and socioculturally situated habitation of the world (see, e.g., Johnson 1993, Lakoff 1996, Lakoff and Johnson 1999). This claim, framed within CMT, has inspired or motivated a growing body of research on the metaphorical nature of social cognition in general, and of moral cognition in particular. The disciplinary areas involved include, but are not limited to, business discourse research (e.g., Koller 2005); history (e.g., Slingerland 2011); religious studies (e.g., Howe 2006; Massengill 2008; Meier and Fetterman 2020; Nazar 2015; Slingerland 2004), public health
care and medical research (e.g., Diekema 1989; Ferentzy and Turner 2012; Hanne 2015; Wurzbach 1999), political science (e.g., Abdel-Raheem 2014; Bouger 2012; Holman 2016; McAdams et al. 2008), philosophical research (e.g., Cady 2005; Campbell 2013; Coeckelbergh 2010; Courte 1998; Fesmire 1999, 2003; Klaassen 1998), and especially social psychology (e.g., Landau 2017; Landau, Meier, and Keefer 2010; Landau, Robinson, and Meier 2014; Meier and Robinson 2004; Meier, Robinson, and Clore 2004; Meier et al. 2007; Sheikh, Botindari, and White 2013; Sherman and Clore 2009; Zhong and House 2014; Zhong and Liljenquist 2006).

Thus, for example, CMT is applied to religious studies for the analysis of religious discourse. In her book-length study, Howe (2006) applied the tools of conceptual metaphor to biblical hermeneutics, analyzing 1 Peter as an exemplar of Christian moral discourse. Her goal was to employ conceptual metaphor analysis to explain how modern readers make sense of Scripture, and her claim was that conceptual metaphor, grounded in basic embodied human experience, plays a crucial role in the creation of meaning in Christian moral discourse. Another study applying the CMT approach to moral metaphors in religious discourse is Massengill (2008), which explored the way in which moral metaphors are utilized in such religious discourses as prayers, liturgies, and other worship resources prepared for religious services. The author focused on the conceptual metaphors with such source concepts as FAMILY, JOURNEY, and PHYSICAL GROWTH, which serve as conceptual building blocks for different moral systems. These conceptual metaphors also have their horizontal and vertical variants, which may represent different moral orientations in the construction of the larger moral worldviews. For instance, God and humans are invariably framed in a vertical relationship whereas humans have a horizontal relationship among themselves (see also Meier and Fetterman 2020). The author also found that the metaphorical structures of religious language for worship may differ from those contained in political discourse as proposed by Lakoff (1996).

In contrast to religion, concerning human mental wellbeing, conceptual metaphor research has also been carried out to investigate morality and ethics in medicine and health care, which are concerned with human physical wellbeing. From a physician’s point of view, Diekema (1989: 23) studied medical professionals’ language from which he discerned various metaphors that “pervade” their conceptual systems, shaping their perceptions, their thoughts and feelings, and ultimately their behavior. For example, a prominent set of conceptual metaphors that construes medicine as a business with more
specific mappings between hospitals and marketplaces, medical services and commodities, patients and consumers, and physicians and business employees. With such a cognitive model composed of conceptual metaphors shared by medical professionals, medicine would then become a service to be purchased, the success of physicians would be defined by the gross financial profit, and the best delivery of medical care would be judged by the balance sheet and the bottom line. Diekema (1989) argued that reflection on such metaphors and willingness to be self-critical are important aspects of physicians’ ethical responsibility.

Another example is Wurzbach’s (1999) study applying CMT to the study of moral metaphors in nursing. In this article, the author traced the salient conceptual metaphors for morality that have affected nurses’ moral perceptions, values, and responsibilities through different stages of history, paralleled by the changes in social trends and contexts. For example, in the first half of the twentieth century, the dominant metaphor was a military one, when nurses were trained like soldiers, highlighting nurses’ ethical virtues as loyalty and obedience to authorities. In the 1960s and 1970s, accompanied by the women’s movement and a general questioning of authority (be it the authority of parents or husbands, doctors or hospitals), the military metaphor transitioned to a new moral metaphor that emerged with the new orientations in ethical values. The new one was the legal metaphor of advocacy, with which the fiduciary relationship between attorneys and clients is mapped onto that between nurses and patients. Nurses have the moral responsibility to defend the rights of their patients, supporting patients’ goals rather than the goals of hospitals or doctors. The author argued that different moral metaphors of nursing provided moral principles and values that guided nurses in their practice and, for that matter, nurses could not afford to follow moral metaphors without reflection. This study showed that nursing practice had been affected by the changes of dominant moral metaphors in the profession. It is exactly what Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) meant when they said that metaphor is “not just in language but in thought and action”.

All these examples illustrate how conceptual metaphors play an essential role in shaping and structuring moral cognition. In the next section, I discuss the CMT view on the emergence of conceptual metaphors and its relationship with the embodiment hypothesis in cognitive science, an interdisciplinary field where a number of disciplines such as anthropology, artificial intelligence, linguistics, philosophy, psychology converge and overlap for the study of the mind and cognition.
1.2 Metaphor, body, and culture: Embodiment

At its very inception, CMT places much stress on the “experiential bases of metaphors” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 14–21). Thus, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 14) argue that conceptual metaphors, which structure our conceptual system to a considerable extent, are not arbitrary, but grounded “in our physical and cultural experience”. While they emphasize the importance of “direct physical experience”, they also point out that:

what we call “direct physical experience” is never merely a matter of having a body of a certain sort; rather, every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions. … Cultural assumptions, values, and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay which we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our “world” in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 57)

That is, according to CMT, the experiential basis of conceptual metaphors is both bodily and cultural. On the one hand, metaphors are motivated by and grounded in the body and bodily experience, extending body-based meaning and inference into abstract thought through systematic conceptual mappings from bodily-based sensorimotor source domains onto abstract target domains (Johnson 2007; Johnson and Rohrer 2007; Lakoff 1993). On the other hand, such metaphorical mappings do not arise from within the body alone but emerge from bodily interactions that are to a large extent defined by the cultural world (see, e.g., Kövecses 2005, 2015a). This is because the bodily experiences that form the source domains for conceptual metaphors are themselves complex social and cultural constructions, which set up specific perspectives from which “aspects of embodied experience are viewed as particularly salient and meaningful in people’s lives” (Gibbs 1999: 154).

In my chapter titled “Metaphor from body and culture” in The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought (Gibbs 2008), I argue that conceptual metaphors emerge from the interaction between body and culture.

While the body is a potentially universal source for emerging metaphors, culture functions as a filter that selects aspects of sensorimotor experience and connects them with subjective experiences and judgments for metaphorical mappings. That is, metaphors are grounded in bodily experience but shaped
by cultural understanding. Put differently, metaphors are embodied in their cultural environment.

(Yu 2008: 247)

It is worth noting that the CMT claim for conceptual metaphors emerging from the interaction between body and culture should be viewed as being embedded in a larger academic context and intellectual movement in which the notion of “embodiment” attracted a growing interest in cognitive linguistics (e.g., Brenzinger and Kraska-Szlenk 2014; Frank et al. 2008; Kraska-Szlenk 2020; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Lakoff and Núñez 2000; Maalej and Yu 2011; Sharifian et al. 2008; Yu 2009a, 2009b; Ziemke, Zlatev, and Frank 2007) as well as cognitive science at large (e.g., Berdayes, Esposito, and Murphy 2004; Csordas 1994; de Vega, Glenberg, and Graesser 2008; Gallagher 2005; Gibbs 2006; Johnson 1987, 2007, 2017; Krois et al. 2007a; Rowlands 2010; Shanahan 2010; Shapiro 2011; Vallet et al. 2016; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991; Weiss and Haber 1999). As Krois et al. (2007b) point out, the concept of embodiment provides a way to link scientific and humanistic disciplines. In fact, the meaning of the term *embodiment* has also been “stretched in different directions” (Strathern 1996: 196), especially because it is now a common theoretic construct used in a wide variety of disciplines. There exist different theories of embodiment, often highly divergent from one another, and sometimes having very little in common (Rohrer 2006, 2007; Violi 2003, 2008).

The term *embodiment*, as suggested by the root of the word itself, has to do with the body as the existential ground of the mind. That is, embodiment, as the very essence of human existence, is really about how the body is related to the mind in human experience in the physical and cultural world, and how this relationship affects human cognition. Scholars in cognitive science have put forward a variety of programmatic tenets for the embodiment paradigm regarding the fundamental role of the human body in the workings of the human mind, including, for instance, the body grounding the mind, the body extending the mind, the body enacting the mind, the body informing the mind, the body schematizing the mind, the body shaping the mind. They have also proposed different embodiment tenets for the study of the relationship between body, mind, and culture: namely “the body in the mind” (Johnson 1987), “the culture in the mind” (Shore 1998), and “the culture in the body” (Maalej 2004, 2008). All of these are important theses for the exploration into the embodied nature of human cognition and socioculturally situated nature of human embodiment (Frank et al. 2008; Ziemke, Zlatev, and Frank 2007).
In Yu (2015b), I characterized the notion of embodiment as emphasizing the role of the body in grounding and framing cognition within the physical and cultural context. In contrast with the Cartesian mind-body dualism, the embodiment hypothesis claims that the body actually shapes the mind (Gallagher 2005). Such a mind is therefore embodied in that it is crucially shaped by the particular nature of the human body, including our perceptual and motor systems and our interactions with the physical and cultural world. However, the mind is not shaped universally because the body itself may take different “shapes” in different cultures in the first place. While the body is an intimate reality to us, with basic physical structures, functions, and experiences common among all of us, the notion of “body”, however, is a multifaceted concept that is culturally constructed, meaning quite different things across cultures, or even within cultures over history (see Yu 2009a: 12–28). Cultures may construe the body and bodily experiences quite differently, attributing different values and significances to various body parts and organs and their functions. Various cultural construals of the body and bodily experiences may motivate different schematizations and conceptualizations, which give rise to varied perspectives in the understanding of human inhabitations and functions in the world (Yu 2015b; see also Gibbs 1999; Kövecses 2005, 2015a; Chapter 7 of this book).

For example, different cultures in the world may vary in viewing which part of the body plays the central role in a person’s mental life. Thus, there is a need “to look for the mind inside the body” across various cultures (Sharifian et al. 2008). Sharifian et al. (2008) took it as their central aim to contribute to the knowledge of various cultures’ conceptualizations of how such mental functions as feeling, thinking, and knowing are related to particular parts of the body as is reflected in their respective languages, trying to identify synchronic variation and trace diachronic development. It was found that the major loci of the mind are the abdomen region, the heart region, and the head or brain region. The three types of conceptualizations of the mind can therefore be labeled as “abdominocentrism”, “cardiocentrism”, and “cerebrocentrism”, respectively. As the studies presented in the chapters of the book show, the “abdomen-centering” languages include Basque, Indonesian, Kuuk Thaayorre, and Malay; the “heart-centering” languages include Chinese, Japanese, and Korean; and the dualistic “heart/head-centering” languages include Dutch, English, Northeastern Neo-Aramaic, Persian, and Tunisian Arabic.

A contrastive case is found, for instance, between Western and Chinese cultures in terms of the conceptualization of “person”. The Western conceptualization of “person” is dualistic in that a person is “split” into two distinct and separate parts: the body and the mind. This mind-body dichotomy defines
Cartesian dualism, which has been the dominant philosophical view in the West for hundreds of years. The mind-body dualism is also conceptualized and expressed metonymically as a dichotomy between head (i.e., head for mind or location for activity) and heart (i.e., heart for body or part for whole), with the former being the center of thought and the latter the seat of emotions. In contrast to the Western dualistic view, Chinese culture takes on a more holistic view that sees the heart as the center of both emotions and thought. According to the traditional Chinese conceptualization, therefore, although a person also consists of two parts—the body and the heart (i.e., 身 shēn “body” and 心 xīn “heart”), these two are however not separate, the latter being an integral part of the former. In the Chinese conceptualization, the heart is traditionally regarded as the central faculty of cognition, which unifies all cognitive and affective aspects of a human person, such as mental, intellectual, rational, moral, emotional, dispositional, and so on (see Yu 2009a, 2015b). The contrast outlined here characterizes two cultural traditions that have developed different conceptualizations of person, self, and cognitive agent.

In a general sense, the term embodiment attributes a more active and constructive role to the body in human cognition. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) have argued, our mind is embodied in the profound sense that the very structure of our thoughts comes from the nature of our body. In his book titled Embodiment and cognitive science, Gibbs (2006: 1) states that in cognitive science, embodiment refers to “understanding the role of an agent’s own body in its everyday, situated cognition”, namely how our bodies influence the ways we think and speak. He outlines the following as the embodiment premise:

People’s subjective, felt experiences of their bodies in action provide part of the fundamental grounding for language and thought. Cognition is what occurs when the body engages the physical, cultural world and must be studied in terms of the dynamical interactions between people and the environment. Human language and thought emerge from recurring patterns of embodied activity that constrain ongoing intelligent behavior. We must not assume cognition to be purely internal, symbolic, computational, and disembodied, but seek out the gross and detailed ways that language and thought are inextricably shaped by embodied action.

(Gibbs 2006: 9)

Gibbs suggests that the key feature here for understanding the embodied nature of human cognition is to “look for possible mind-body and language-body connections” (p. 9) as formed in the interaction between the body and the
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physical and cultural world. He goes on to characterize the relationship between body and culture and the diversity of cultural meanings attached to the body. As he suggests, the body system offers insightful analysis for understanding cultural systems because physical environments in which people and their bodies move are imbued with culture. The body is appreciated for its symbolic properties as people instill cultural meanings into bodily processes and activities. Culture does not just inform, but it also constitutes, embodied experience. Many embodied experiences are rooted in sociocultural contexts. This does not imply that people in various cultures have different physiologies, but only that they weigh their embodied experiences differently in how they interpret their sensorimotor interactions in and with the world around them. It is therefore important to explore the linkages between embodiment and cultural meaning (Gibbs 2006: 36–39).

In sum, this section has highlighted two theses of CMT in particular and cognitive linguistics in general. First, metaphors emerge from the interaction between body and culture. Second, embodiment is socioculturally situated. My goal as a cognitive linguist is to study language as a window to cognition and culture, or cognition at the cultural level. My focus in this monograph, however, is on the area of morality. In the next section, I discuss how moral cognition, as part of cultural cognition, can manifest itself in language, and how linguistic description and analysis can lead to the revelation of cultural cognition, including moral cognition.

1.3 Moral cognition, cultural cognition, and language

Despite the growing body of conceptual metaphor studies in the field of cognitive linguistics, it seems, research into metaphorical understanding of morality in languages has been surprisingly scarce, in comparison with studies of emotion and time metaphors, for instance. Even studies that address the metaphorical nature of moral cognition in English aimed more at critical analyses leading to philosophical, ideological, or political insights, rather than at the display of the moral metaphor system as manifested in the language per se.

This book presents a cognitive linguistic study of moral metaphors in the CMT framework. I study conceptual metaphors for morality as manifested linguistically and, to a much more limited extent, multimodally in English and Chinese, attempting to contribute a comparative perspective on the research topic of moral imagination through metaphor. My focus is on the linguistic manifestation of moral metaphors in these two languages. To this end, my
primary task is to expand the investigation of the “range” (Kövecses 2010: 183–184) of fundamental moral metaphors, that is, the range of possible source concepts for morality and immorality as target concepts. These two concepts, along with their adjectival forms, moral and immoral, represent the bipolar valence of moral opposition. Of course, the English words morality and moral also have a neutral sense, relating or referring to the whole domain, semantic or conceptual.

In tackling this book project, I hope to shed some light on the metaphorical nature of moral cognition and how it is systematically manifested in language. In other words, I hope to contribute to the construction of a “language-based folk model” (Kövecses 2015b: 271) for morality, as it is composed of folk theories of morality. “Folk theories, as opposed to expert theories, are naïve nonscientific understanding of the world by lay people for their everyday purposes” (p. 271). Since the folk model is language-based, thus shared by the speakers of a linguistic community, it is also what is referred to as a cultural model of morality. Cultural models are cognitive representations and configurations of knowledge (i.e., cognitive models) about a certain field that are rooted in individual minds but collectively shared by members of a cultural group and, as such, they are taken-for-granted and often out-of-awareness, but play a central role in their holders’ understanding of the world and behavior in it (see, e.g., Bennardo and de Munck 2014; Holland and Quinn 1987; Kövecses 2005; Ungerer and Schmid 2013).

That is, cultural models pertain to cognition at the cultural level, or cultural cognition (e.g., D’Andrade 1989; DiMaggio 1997; Frank 2015; Quinn and Holland 1987; Sharifian 2008, 2009, 2017). As Sharifian (2017: 3) characterizes it, the notion of “cultural cognition” affords an integrated understanding of cognition and culture as they relate to language and offers a multidisciplinary understanding of cognition that moves beyond the level of the individual mind. While cultural cognition is inevitably rooted in the minds of individual members of a cultural group, its elements, however, are not equally shared by the members of that group; instead, they are heterogeneously distributed so that the members of the group show variation and differences in their access to and internalization of their community’s cultural cognition. In other words, individual members’ cognition can never capture the totality of their shared cultural cognition. Furthermore, “cultural cognition is dynamic in that it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated across generations and through contact between speech communities” (p. 3).

At this point, a question to ask is: What is the relationship between cultural cognition and language? I ask this question in order to highlight the relevancy
of linguistic studies to moral cognition. Sharifian (2017: 5) has the following
to say about the pivotal role of language in recording and transmitting cultural
cognition:

As a central aspect of cultural cognition, language serves (in the words of
wa Thiong’o, 1986) as a “collective memory bank” of the cultural cognition
of a speech community. Many aspects of a speech community’s language
are shaped by elements of cultural cognition that have prevailed at different
stages in the history of that community and that have left traces in subsequent
linguistic practice. In this sense, language can be viewed as a primary
mechanism for “storing” and communicating cultural cognition, acting both
as a memory bank and a fluid vehicle for the (re-)transmission of cultural
cognition.

To study the interaction between language, culture, and cognition, Shari-
fian proposes a theoretical and analytical framework of “Cultural Linguistics”,
which explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptual-
izations (Sharifian 2015, 2017). Cultural conceptualizations as more specific
instantiations and functions of cultural cognition encompass three particular
instances: namely, cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural
metaphors. According to Sharifian (2017: 7), cultural schemas are “beliefs,
norms, rules, and expectations of behavior as well as values relating to various
aspects and components of experience”; cultural categories are “those cultur-
ally constructed conceptual categories (colors, emotions, attributes, foodstuffs,
kinship terms, events, etc.) that are primarily reflected in the lexicon of hu-
man languages”; and cultural metaphors are “cross-domain conceptualizations
grounded in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, worldview, or a spiri-
tual belief system”. The necessity of studying language in the understanding of
cultural conceptualizations consists in the following observation that cultural
conceptualizations are realized in language.

Language plays a dual role in relation to cultural conceptualizations. On the
one hand, linguistic interactions are crucial to the development of cultural
conceptualizations, as they provide a space for speakers to construct and
co-construct meanings about their experiences. On the other hand, many as-
psects of both language structure and language use draw on and reflect cultural
conceptualizations.

(Sharifian 2017: 5)
As reflected in this dual role that language plays in relation to cultural conceptualizations, the mutuality here is that cultural conceptualizations underlie and motivate the use of human languages and, conversely, features of human languages encode or instantiate culturally constructed conceptualizations. Given the strong linkage between cultural conceptualizations and language, it makes good sense, therefore, to study cultural conceptualizations, and cultural cognition more generally, through close examination of language.

In essence, what I study in this monograph is moral cognition at the cultural level, or cultural cognition in its moral subcase. More specifically, I study metaphorical conceptualizations of morality as parts of cultural cognition, or cultural conceptualizations of morality through metaphor. A linguistic approach is a natural choice.

### 1.4 The moral metaphor system: Three subsystems

With respect to the experiential grounding of moral metaphors, it has been observed that the range of possible metaphors for morality is fairly restricted, and all of them appear to be grounded in our experiences of wellbeing, especially physical wellbeing (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Thus, for instance, morality and immorality are conceptualized in terms of “light” and “darkness”, or “cleanliness” and “dirtiness”; a moral or immoral person is conceptualized as being “healthy” or “sick”, or “strong” or “weak”; and the moral character of a person can be “high” or “low”, or “pure” or “polluted” (Johnson 1993, 1996; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) findings come from their study of the moral metaphor system as manifested in the English language. The question that comes along with the findings is whether or not conceptual metaphors for morality found in English are culture-specific, widespread, or universal. Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 311) note that, since the source domains of these conceptual metaphors cluster on “basic human experiences of wellbeing”, they “define a large part of the Western moral tradition” and, furthermore, “they are not unique to occidental culture” and some of them may very well be candidates for universals. Nevertheless, as they point out, the “cross-cultural research has not been done yet to determine whether any of them are truly universal” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 312).

As a metaphor researcher who is particularly interested in the interplay of language, culture, and cognition, I set out on this book project with the following central goal in mind: that is, to contribute to the discovery of
potential commonalities that define human moral cognition in general, as well as to the detection of possible differences that characterize distinct cultures concerning moral cognition. Again, what I am trying to probe into is moral cognition at the cultural level as reflected in language, in this case, English and Chinese. More specifically, my objectives for this study are fourfold:

(i) to outline the linguistic patterns in the English and Chinese moral talk via a systematic description of linguistic data;
(ii) to analyze the linguistic data so as to find out if the linguistic patterns so produced reflect the putative conceptual patterns, formulated as conceptual metaphors, hypothesized to exist in English and Chinese on the basis of preceding studies as well as personal observations;
(iii) to shed light on moral cognition at large from a comparative, cross-linguistic perspective for potential universals and variations at both linguistic and conceptual levels; and
(iv) to contribute to the CMT literature in general both theoretically and methodologically.

According to cognitive linguistics, “language is taken to be a good guide to uncovering the content and structure of our conceptual system” (Kövecses 2015b: 270). It is hoped that the findings of my linguistic study can lead to further hypotheses for future studies.

A study of this nature, ideally, should probe into as many languages as possible. In reality, however, individual researchers’ knowledge of languages is limited, especially considering the fact that there are as many as over 6,000 different languages spoken in the world. For my study, I focus on two languages that I know relatively well, English and Chinese. By “Chinese” I refer to the standard Chinese language also known as “Mandarin Chinese”, but not to the exclusion of occasional dialectal usages. Chinese is my first or native language whereas English is my second language as well as the language that I utilize chiefly for academic purposes. It so happens that these two languages have the most speakers in the world, and that they are not genetically related to each other in any way, even though isolated elements, especially in lexicon, can be found and attributed to borrowing through the history of language contact, mainly in modern times. Other than individual researchers’ limitations in the knowledge of languages, the breadths and depths of individual research projects are limited as well, constrained by the capacity and time which individual researchers have to carry out particular research projects. Fortunately, scholarship is always accumulative in nature. My study is built on preceding
studies in the field, and my hope is that this study, with its findings worthy or significant enough, can serve as a starting and reference point for similar or different studies in the future that will broaden and deepen the scope of my study on English and Chinese, and that, moreover, will extend and expand this kind of study to other languages and cultures, and to other kinds of studies in neighboring disciplinary fields. In this way, a more complete picture of moral cognition and language will unfold, with my study being one piece of the puzzle.

Moral metaphors may be analyzed as forming different systems depending on different clusters of target and source concepts involved in metaphorical mappings. For my current study, I concentrate on the target concepts MORAL and IMMORAL and those source concepts from the bodily and physical domain, or domain matrix, which is the third one of the three source domains that I discussed in section 1.1. The conceptual metaphors formulated with the source concepts from this domain are usually utilized to describe the moral character of individual people or society at large. Following the CMT tradition, the present study attempts to outline this moral metaphor system, especially its major clusters of conceptual metaphors, based on primarily linguistic evidence from both English and Chinese and, to a much more limited extent, multimodal evidence from the corresponding cultures (see Chapters 6 and 7).

While a unified and coherent one, this system, in my opinion, can be analyzed as consisting of three major subsystems as three clusters of conceptual metaphors, whose source concepts are from the domain of bodily experiences in the physical world. These conceptual metaphors are formulated in contrastive categories with bipolar values for the target concepts MORAL and IMMORAL. Thus, for instance, a person can be morally “beautiful” or “ugly”, “clean” or “dirty”, or “high” or “low”.

At the linguistic level, the source concepts are represented by semantically antonymous words. For the lack of better terms, the three subsystems are named in a shorthand fashion as “Physical” (e.g., beautiful vs. ugly), “Visual” (e.g., clean vs. dirty), and “Spatial” (e.g., high vs. low). Although termed and differentiated in a three-way distinction chiefly for the purpose of systematic analysis, the three subsystems are obviously not separate, but merging into one another and embracing a common core, as a unified whole of moral metaphor system (see section 6.5). They are unified into a whole as illustrated schematically in Figure 1.1, by the three circles overlapping one another and sharing the same center. In reality, that is, what is physical appeals to vision and exists in space, what is visual has spatial dimensions and physical substance, and what is spatial has visual consequence and physical existence.