

Metaphorical paradoxes: A window on the conceptual system

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Abstract

This paper reviews the inconsistencies surrounding the English metaphor of the Self and demonstrates that 1) similar metaphorical paradoxes concerning the Self exist in Chinese and Japanese, and 2) these paradoxes occur in English, Japanese, and Chinese because the Inner Self (our internal voice) is being compared either with the Social Self (how we interact with others) or the Physical Self (our body). Thus the paradoxes reflect what the psychologist William James referred to in 1892 as the 'spiritual me, material me, and social me'. In addition, these paradoxes mirror neurological phenomena found in brain damaged patients. In short, the linguistic and neurological findings point to a strikingly similar portrait of the Self, and argue for studying metaphorical paradoxes in greater detail in order to gain insight into other aspects of our conceptual framework.

1. Introduction

Understanding metaphors is a crucial part of understanding language. If one says 'Let me stew over that for a while' or 'We need to let that idea percolate' these sentences could be quite confusing if the hearer does not understand the metaphor in English that IDEAS ARE FOOD.

Understanding metaphors is also an important aspect of understanding the conceptual systems of the language speakers. When the TIME IS MONEY metaphor is found in a language (i.e. Don't waste my time; How much is my time worth to you?) it necessarily follows that these speakers have an economic system where an individual is paid for labor according to the amount of time spent on the labor.

One aspect of understanding metaphors that has not been extensively explored is the fact that both within and across languages there are many contradictory metaphors. Lakoff [1] demonstrated that inconsistencies in the metaphorical system of the Self exist for both English and Japanese. The fact that these paradoxes exist may inform us about the human conceptual system. For example, if two languages share the same metaphorical paradoxes even though they do not share the same cultural background, 'these metaphors are tapping into some sort of real human experience' [1]. What Lakoff is not able to explain, however, is what the 'real human experience' is that creates these inconsistencies that are inherent in metaphors referring to the Self.

In this paper I will review the inconsistencies surrounding the English metaphor of the Self and then I will demonstrate that 1) similar metaphorical paradoxes concerning the Self exist in Chinese and Japanese and 2) these

paradoxes occur in English, Chinese and Japanese because the Inner Self (our internal voice) is being compared either with the Social Self (how we interact with others) or the Physical Self (our body). Thus the paradoxes reflect what the psychologist William James referred to in 1892 as the ‘spiritual me, material me, and social me’ [2]. In addition, I will argue that these paradoxes mirror phenomena found in brain damaged patients. In short, the linguistic and neurological findings point to a strikingly similar portrait of the Self, and argue for studying metaphorical paradoxes in greater detail in order to gain insight into other aspects of our conceptual framework.

2. Metaphorical paradoxes concerning the Self in English

There are many different metaphors referring to the Self discussed in Lakoff [1]. I will concentrate here on the 8 metaphors that have an internal contradiction in their mappings: the Inner Self Metaphor vs. the Real Me Metaphor; the Absent Subject Metaphor vs. the Objective Subject Metaphor; the Self-as-Servant Metaphor vs. the True-to-Yourself Metaphor; and the Absent Subject Metaphor vs. the Self-Control is Up Metaphor. In the discussion that follows the ‘Subject’ refers to ‘a locus of consciousness and rationality, [which is] the center of all subjective experience’ and the ‘Self’ refers to ‘our bodies, our emotions, and that part of us that acts in the world’ [1].

Table 1 details the metaphors concerning the Self that are inconsistent with one another. (This table is a summary of the data presented in [1]). Table 2 gives metaphors in Japanese that have similar inconsistencies, and Table 3 gives metaphors in Mandarin Chinese that also have similar inconsistencies.

Table 1: Metaphorical Paradoxes concerning the Self in English

Name of Metaphor	Example	Inconsistency
The Inner Self Metaphor	Her sophistication is a facade. He won't reveal himself.	Real Self is Internal and Hidden
The Real Me Metaphor	That wasn't the real me. I am not myself.	Real Self is External and Visible
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 1: Container)	He has come to his senses. Are you out of your mind?	Moving Outside the Self is Decreased Self-Control
The Objective Subject Metaphor	You should see yourself as others see you.	Moving Outside the Self is Increased Self-Control
The Self as Servant	I have to get myself to do the laundry. I bawled myself out.	The Standard of Behavior is Located in the Subject
The True-to-Yourself Metaphor	Don't betray yourself. Be true to yourself.	The Standard of Behavior is Located in the Self
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 2: Verticality)	He has got his feet on the ground.	Control is Being on the Ground
The Self-Control is Up Metaphor	He has got control over himself.	Control is Being Up

Table 2: Metaphorical Paradoxes concerning the Self in Japanese

Name of Metaphor	Example	Inconsistency
The Inner Self Metaphor	Kare-wa mettani hontoono zibun-o dasa-na-i. he-TOP rarely real self-ACC get out-NEG-PRES. Lit.: He rarely gets out of his real self. 'He rarely shows his real self.' Kare-wa hitomaede-was itumo kamen-o kabutte-i-ru. he-TOP in public-TOP always mask-ACC put-on-STAT-PRES 'He always wears a mask in public.'	Real Self is Internal and Hidden
The Real Me Metaphor	Boku-wa kyoo-wa zibun-ga zibun de-na-I I(MALE)-TOP today-TOP self-NOM self COP-NEG-PRES yoona kigasu-ru. as if feel-PRES Lit.: I feel as if self is not self today. 'I feel as if I am not my normal self today.'	Real Self is External and Visible
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 1: Container)	Kare-wa yooyaku ware-ni kaet-ta He-TOP finally self-LOC return-PAST Lit.: He finally returned to self. 'He finally came to his senses.' Ware-ni mo naku kodomo-o sikatte-simat-ta. self-LOC even not child-ACC scold-PERF-PAST Lit. Not being even in self, (I) have scolded the child. 'I have scolded the child in spite of myself [unconsciously].'	Moving Outside the Self is Decreased Self-Control
The Objective Subject Metaphor	Zibun-no kara-kara de-te, self-GEN shell-from get out-CONJ zibun-o yoku mitume-ru koto-ga taisei da. self-ACC well stare-PRES COM-NOM important COP Lit.: To get out of self's shell and stare at self well is important. 'It is important to get out of yourself and look at yourself well.'	Moving Outside the Self is Increased Self-Control
The Self as Servant	No examples found to date for Japanese	The Standard of Behavior is Located in the Subject
The True-to-Yourself Metaphor	Zibun-o azamuite-wa ikenai. self-ACC deceive-TOP bad-PRES Lit.: To deceive self is bad. 'You must not deceive yourself.'	The Standard of Behavior is Located in the Self
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 2: Verticality)	No examples found to date for Japanese	Control is Being on the Ground
The Self-control is Up Metaphor	No examples found to date for Japanese	Control is Being Up

The two main inconsistencies relating to the metaphorical uses of the Self in Japanese are The Inner Self Metaphor vs. The Real Me Metaphor and The Absent Subject Metaphor versus The Objective Subject Metaphor.

Table3: Metaphorical Paradoxes concerning the Self in Chinese

Name of Metaphor	Example	Inconsistency
The Inner Self Metaphor	Xin li-mian hen huai. heart inside very bad Inside s/he's evil. Ta man nao-zi, huai chu-yi. S/he full brain, bad idea 'His brain is full of bad ideas.'	Real Self is Internal and Hidden
The Real Me Metaphor	Zuo-tian bu-shi jen-jen-de wo. Yesterday NEG-is real DE me. 'Yesterday I was not the real me.'	Real Self is External and Visible
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 1: Container)	Ta huei-fu li-zhi. S/he return senses She's returned to her senses.	Moving Outside the Self is Decreased Self-Control
The Objective Subject Metaphor	Zhao jing-zi kan-kan zi-ji. look mirror see self Take a look at yourself. Sa-pao niao, kan zi-ji. Piss urine look self 'Take a piss and look at yourself in it.' (i.e. realize that you 'stink' - you are a bad person)	Moving Outside the Self is Increased Self-Control
The Self as Servant	Bian-ci zi wo whip self-I To motivate and strictly supervise oneself.	The Standard of Behavior is Located in the Subject
The True-to-Yourself Metaphor	Zhong-yu zi-wo loyal self-I Be true to oneself. Ta bei-pan-le ta ziji. S/he betrayed s/he self 'S/he betrayed him/herself.'	The Standard of Behavior is Located in the Self
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 2: Verticality)	No examples found to date in Chinese	Control is Being on the Ground
The Self-control is Up Metaphor	No examples found to date in Chinese	Control is Being Up

The two main inconsistencies relating to the metaphorical uses of the Self in Mandarin Chinese are The Inner Self Metaphor vs. The Real Me Metaphor, The Absent Subject Metaphor versus The Objective Subject Metaphor, and The Self as Servant versus True to Yourself Metaphor.

The inconsistencies in the third column of the tables are the inconsistencies that Lakoff notes occur in the conceptual system of the Self. For example, he postulates that the Inner Self Metaphor entails that there is a private self, and that this private self is hidden. On the other hand, the Real Me Metaphor has to do with the values involved in social interaction, and thus there is the inconsistency between the Real Self being either internal or external. In the case of the Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 1: Container) the Self has control when it is in a normal location (on the earth, at home, at work, on the ground, in your own body or head). In this case, leaving the normal location means that one is losing conscious self-control, as in 'He is spaced out'. The Objective Subject Metaphor, however, says that one gains control when one steps outside the Subject to look objectively at oneself. Lakoff points out that since these two metaphors have contradictory entailments, they are inconsistent with one another. In the case of the Self as Servant Metaphor versus the True to Yourself Metaphor Lakoff surmises that in the former metaphor the Subject tells the Self what to do, while in the latter metaphor the Self is telling the Subject how to behave. Lastly, in the case of The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 2: verticality) the entailment involves that having control means being on the ground, while the Self-Control is Up metaphor entails that having control means that you are up above the ground as in the case of 'She has control over me.' In the next section, I will look at these metaphors that have postulated inconsistent mappings and argue that they are not in fact inconsistent.

3. Different Selves

The question that arises is: what is the reason for the inconsistencies within the metaphorical system? Is there in fact a coherent reason as to why these paradoxes exist? One plausible explanation is that these paradoxes exist because in each case the speaker is referring to a different aspect of his or her Self -- in particular a Social Self, a Physical Self and an Inner Self.

The Social Self is, following Flanagan [2], 'constituted by the patterns of thought and behavior that one deploys with different groups and on whose successful deployment one understands one image with that group to depend (p. 180).' Examples (1) and (2) demonstrate metaphors that refer to the Social Self.

(1a) Her sophistication is a facade.

(1b) He won't reveal himself.

(2) You should see yourselves as others see you.

Example (1a) is referring to how others see her sophistication. She is acting sophisticated for a certain social group. Example (1b) is a case where he won't show himself to other people. Example (2) is explicitly saying that how others see oneself is of prime importance. The Social Self is referred to in what Lakoff calls the Inner Self Metaphor and the Objective Subject Metaphor.

The Physical Self, again following Flanagan, 'consists first and foremost of one bodily being, how one experiences one body, and how one thinks one looks and moves' [3]. The metaphors that refer to the physical self are the Self Control is Up Metaphor and the Self as Servant Metaphor. Respective examples are given in (3) and (4).

(3a) She got control over herself.

(3b) He slipped into a coma.

(3c) He fell asleep.

(4) I have to get myself to do the laundry.

The examples in (3) all refer to bodily states - of keeping one's emotions from being visible on her body, or of the body being in a state of coma or sleeping. The example in (4) refers to getting the physical body to do something.

The Inner Self is, simply put, the voice we hear in our head. James writes, 'when we think of ourselves as thinkers, all other ingredients of our Me seem relatively external possessions' [2]. The Real Me Metaphor, the Absent Subject Metaphor and the True to Yourself metaphor are all instances of metaphors that refer to the Inner Self. The examples for each respective metaphor are listed in (5)-(7).

(5a) That wasn't the real me.

(5b) I am not myself.

(6a) He got his feet on the ground.

(6b) He has come to his senses.

(6c) Are you out of your mind?

(7a) Don't betray yourself.

(7b) Be true to yourself.

The examples in (5) refer implicitly to the Inner Self. The person is saying: 'I have a self that is different from what are seeing.' The examples in (6) allude to the person's internal state of mind, essentially whether he is sensible or not. Examples (7) suggests that there is an inner voice (self) to which we must listen. Table 4 gives the pairs of metaphors that Lakoff postulates to contain inconsistencies in their mappings. In each inconsistency, we can see that the metaphor is referring to a different aspect of Self: either Inner, Physical or Social.

Table 4: Metaphors refer to Different Selves

Metaphor	Examples	Inner Self	Physical Self	Social Self
Inner Self	Her sophistication is a facade.			*
Real Me	That wasn't the real me.	*		
Absent Subject	He has come to his senses. Are you out of your mind?	*		
Objective Subject	You should see yourselves as others see you.			*
The Self as Servant	I have to get myself to do the laundry.		*	
True to Yourself	Don't betray yourself. Be true to yourself.	*		
The Absent Subject Metaphor (Case 2)	He has got his feet on the ground.	*		
The Self-Control is Up Metaphor	He has got control over himself.		*	

We can see Table 4 that in each instance one metaphor is referring to the Inner Self, while the other metaphor is referring to either the Social or Physical Self. This is the reason there are inconsistencies in the mappings -- the metaphors are referring to different aspects of the Self. When we refer to something that has a different aspect, naturally the mappings that follow from it will be inconsistent with mappings that follow from another aspect.

For example, if we are talking about cars, and we are talking about the wheel on the car the conversation will not get very far if you are talking about a steering wheel and I am talking about the tires. The images and associated understanding that we have of each type of wheel will make itself apparent in the terms that we use to describe it. This is similar to the problem we have when discussing the Self -- You might be talking about the Social Self, while I might be talking about the Inner Self. The understanding that we have of each type of Self

will become apparent in the metaphors that we use. If the metaphors we use are based on different types of Self, we will soon be talking at cross purposes.

4. Discussion

The main point that I have argued for in this paper is that the usage of metaphors in English points to a three-way distinction of the Self, similar to what James postulated in 1892, and is discussed most currently in [3]. That is to say, if we take only two aspects of the Self, as Lakoff does, (Self and Subject) then the metaphorical system will involve inconsistencies. If, however, we postulate that conceptually there are three different types of Self, then our understanding of the metaphors relating to the Self changes, and moreover, what were inconsistencies under the previous analysis now become clear instances of the metaphors reflecting the tripartite distinction in our conceptual system. The question I would like to turn to now is: What other evidence is there that this tripartite distinction of the Self exists? I will answer this question by first looking at cross-linguistic evidence and second by looking at neurological evidence.

In section 2, I gave examples of metaphors in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese that had similar entailments and inconsistencies to that of English. There are two interesting things to note: first, Japanese only had metaphors that related to the Inner Self and the Social Self (and not the Physical Self), and second, although the metaphors concerning the Inner Self are quite common in the Mandarin spoken by younger speakers in Taiwan today, Jim Tai (p.c.) pointed out to me that older speakers are much less likely to use the metaphors that relate to the Inner Self. What does this mean then if the language does not have metaphors that relate to one particular type of Self?

I think, if my hypothesis is correct that there are three different types of Self in our conceptual system, that there will be metaphors that reflect this distinction in all languages. This is not to say that for a different concept such as TIME there will be unity cross-linguistically on the metaphors used. A concept such as TIME will vary according to the culture in which one lives. The emphasis here is on the fact that all humans are endowed with a physical body, have an inner voice, and must interact with other humans. Since I am postulating that all humans are minimally endowed with those three characteristics, and that these three characteristics are constant throughout history and across cultures, the metaphor system will reflect these aspects of the conceptual system of humans. Concerning the question of the lack of a metaphor relating to the physical self in Japanese, I think that it has to do with the fact that my data is limited. I postulate that there should be some type of metaphor relating to the physical self in Japanese, although not necessarily the same as the ones I have discussed for English. Concerning the question of the lack of metaphors for the Inner Self in older speakers of Mandarin Chinese on Taiwan, I think that metaphors for the Inner Self among older or previous generations involved the (minimally) the words for 'spirit' or 'I'. Jim Tai suggested (p.c.) that the

discussion of *Wang wo* 'forget-I' - 'To forget oneself' in Zhuang-zi is an example of a metaphor having to do with the Inner Self. In this case, the speaker is talking of forgetting all about oneself so that s/he can become one with the universe. Chu-Ren Huang (p.c.) suggested the example of *Chu shen* 'leave spirit' - 'To blank out' as another example of an instance where what is being referred to is the Inner Self. In this case, the spirit stands for the Inner Self. When it is no longer present, one cannot remember things, i.e. one has lost temporary use of their faculties.

At this point, I would like to concisely offer additional evidence that this tripartite distinction is valid, on the basis of dissociations that have been noted among brain-damaged patients [4]. First, Antonio Damasio's patient Elliot is a case where the Social Self is impaired. He does not react to violent images, it does not matter to him when those close to him are in pain, and he does many socially inappropriate things. His brain damage is concentrated in the frontal lobe, particularly in the right hemisphere. Second, people who have lost sense of their external body and do not feel any pain (which is called anosognosia) are, I would like to argue, cases where the Physical Self has been impaired. Patients with anosognosia have brain damage in the somatosensory region of the right hemisphere. (The somatosensory region is responsible for external senses of touch and temperature as well as the internal sense of joint position). Third, people with schizophrenia have confusion about whether the voices they hear are internal or external. They do not know when they are hearing their own inner voice.

In each of these cases, either the neurological connections to the Social, Physical or Inner Self has been cut or short-circuited in some manner. Moreover, I am postulating that one particular type of Self has been impaired - either the Social, Physical, or Inner Self. Note that I am not claiming that a particular Self is definitively located in a particular region of the brain. However, I am suggesting (along with Lakoff and others) that our metaphorical system is based on our conceptual system, and moreover, that our conceptual system has neurological underpinnings that can be investigated by means of looking at dissociations among brain damaged patients.

In sum, an analysis of metaphorical paradoxes suggest that the human conceptual system is organized in a coherent manner with respect to the notion of Self and this finding may correlate with connections that may underlie our neurological system.

Endnotes

1. These examples were constructed by Yukio Hirose while he was a postdoctoral fellow at UC Berkeley in Spring of 1993 and are cited in the appendix of [1].

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