Understanding Metaphors in Adverb-Noun Patterns in Mandarin Chinese

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Abstract

This study aims to deduce how people understand the "hen N" structure or an adverb-noun pattern in Mandarin Chinese from a cognitive perspective. The four terms for the seasons appearing in the "hen N" structure were collected from online news sources between 2013 and 2014 for investigation. It is suggested the comprehension of the "hen N" structure is based on metaphorical movement. The "hen N" structure can be viewed and explained as a grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) as well as a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). For comprehending "hen N" structures, context plays the key role for people's selection of the optimal relevant information from their cognition (Kecskes, 2008; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008). The study goes on to show how additional metaphors can join and influence the understanding of the "hen N" structure.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, grammatical metaphor, context, relevance theory, profile and base

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1 Introduction

Human language is understood to be governed by grammatical rules. People know that an adjective can only be modified by an adverb and a noun should be modified by an adjective. However, the combination of adverb-noun (ADV-N) pattern can be accessed in Mandarin Chinese, meaning that a technically ungrammatical structure seems to be accepted by Mandarin speakers. For instance, examples 1 and 2 show the ADV-N pattern, 很夏天, as it is spoken in Chinese. These examples present a Mandarin expression on the first line followed by its pronunciation with tone markers on the second. Each word meaning and its parts of speech provided on the third line, and the translation of the Mandarin expression is indicated on the last line.

1. *今天 天氣 很夏天*

    jīntiān tiānqì hěnxiàtiān

    today.N weather.N very.ADV summer.N

    'The weather is very summery.'

2. *他的 穿著 很夏天*

tāde chuānzhou hěnxiàtiān
his.ADJ clothes.N very.ADV summer.N
'What he's wearing is very summery.'

For grammarians, examples 1 and 2 are considered ungrammatical because an adverb cannot modify a noun. Nevertheless, the ADV-N structure breaks the traditional syntactic rule and people seem to have no problem in understanding it. To make this structure grammatical, morphologists may simply explain that the noun in the ADV-N patterns undergoes 'conversion', a word formation rule that creates a new word by giving an existing word a new meaning or grammatical category without changing its linguistic form (Mathews, 1974). Accordingly, the noun in the ADV-N pattern is converted into an adjective so it can be modified by an adverb. Conversion is also productive in English, e.g. 'book' can be a noun indicating a collection of articles or writing printed on paper and it can also be a verb with a meaning 'to reserve something'. However, this study does not discuss the ADV-N pattern from a morphological perspective and it is supposed that there are some interactions or metaphorical movements between concepts when people interpret the ADV-N pattern. For instance, when people try to understand example 1, there should be an interaction between the concepts of noun and adjective. The meaning of the ADV-N pattern is additionally suggested from a conceptual mapping process.

With these ideas in mind, the ADV-N pattern can be seen as a construction (Croft & Cruse, 2004, pp. 266-278; Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor, 1988; Goldberg, 1995, 2009). The ADV-N pattern may automatically be understood as a schema showing an adjective phrase (AP) because Mandarin speakers know that the adverb, 'hěn', can only be followed by an adjective. Therefore, the ADV-N pattern is functionally shifted because it can stand as a grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Grammatical metaphor is described as "a substitution of one grammatical class, or one grammatical structure by another" by Briones, Fortuny, Sastre, and Pocovi (2003, p. 138). The N is employed to express the qualities and features of antecedents (Taverniers, 2004, p. 25) while people can understand the qualities and features implied by the metaphor via the context and their prior knowledge.

The ADV-N pattern refers to the "hěn N" structure in the present study. The target utterances appearing in this paper are mainly composed of the adverb "很/hěn/very" and the nouns of the four seasons, 春/chūn/spring, 夏/xià/summer, 秋/qiū/autumn and 冬/dōng/winter. Therefore, examples 3 to 6 show the target phrases examined in this research. The examples were all culled from online news reports, e.g. Yahoo!Kimo News, China Times, and Liberty Times Net, between 2013 and 2014 in Taiwan.

3. *很春天*
    hěnchūntiān
    very.ADV spring.N
    'very spring-like'

4. *很夏天*
    hěnxiàtiān

very.ADV summer.N
'very summery'

5. 很秋天

　　hěnqiūtiān
　　very.ADV autumn.N
　　'very autumnal'

6. 很冬天

　　hěndōngtiān
　　very.ADV winter.N
　　'very wintery'

Interestingly, I have found that the "hěn N" structure does not have a fixed and salient meaning when it appears alone. In other words, it is hard to specify the meaning of a "hěn N" structure if the phrase appears in isolation. However, this structure is extensively employed, not only with the seasons. For instance, in example 7, the N is 英國/yīngguó, which means Britain, but the meaning of the individual phrase 很英國 is vague. That is to say, it is hard to infer what is going to be expressed without any other assistance. This phrase should be understood in relation to the topic and context of the utterance. According to example 7, the topic is a shop, and people's experiences of Britain are being evoked. The relevant connection between a shop and Britain is being processed in people's minds. After selecting the needed features, the phrase can be interpreted as 'British style'.

7. 這間 店 很英國

　　zhèjiān diàn hěnyīngguó
　　this.DET shop.N very.ADV Britain.N
　　'This shop is very British.'

Looking at examples 1 and 2 again, we can see that both contain the phrase 很夏天 but the meaning of the phrase alters when the topics and contexts are changed. The topic in example 1 is about the weather, so the 很夏天 is associated with weather and temperature. Therefore, example 1 can be understood as 'the weather today is as hot as it is in summer'. However, the same phrase in example 2 refers to the style of clothes and can be comprehended as 'what he is wearing is very suitable for hot days' or 'what he is wearing makes people feel cooler in hot weather'. Thus, I suggest the interpretation of the "hěn N" structure relies heavily on the context, the topic, and the addressee's personal experience. Moreover, I suggest that the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) are useful and workable frameworks for explaining how Mandarin speakers comprehend the phrase and retrieve the meaning of the "hěn N" structure. When people interpret an expression featuring a "hěn N" structure, metaphorical movements unconsciously operate. In addition, the meaning of the "hěn N" structure is possibly a form of metonymy. Regardless of whether the N is a noun or an adjective, the

mapping process occurs within a single concept domain, e.g. SUMMER, under a specific context, which is known as metonymy.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theory of conceptual metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose the theory of conceptual metaphor, which suggests that metaphors are no longer figurative linguistic devices in languages, but a way for people to understand the world. People are inclined to unconsciously comprehend a concept using another concept. For example, the concept of time is understood by various concepts, such as money, a flying arrow and water, because there is no physical entity called TIME to investigate; hence, the expressions *time flies* and *how to save time* are prevalent in daily life.
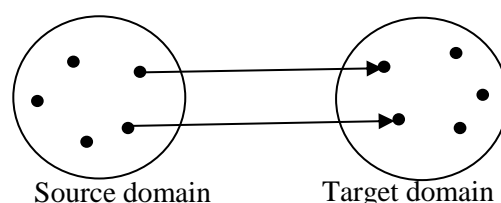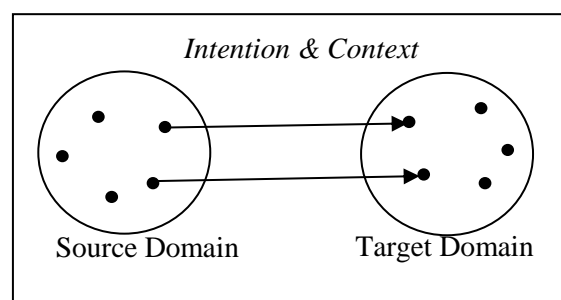

Figure 1 Conceptual mapping

For Lakoff (2006, p. 186), metaphor is defined as "a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system"; its purpose is to achieve understanding through "a relation of configuration sameness (PATH) and ontological difference" (Paradis, 2004, p. 245). Figure 1 demonstrates a conceptual mapping process. The two circles represent different concept domains; one is the source domain and the other, the target domain. The black dots inside the circles refer to the attributes affiliated to the concept domain. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) employ mnemonic strategy, e.g. TARGET-DOMAIN IS SOURCE-DOMAIN, to explain a mapping process, which means that people tend to understand the concept of the target domain through the source domain. For instance, in both English and Mandarin Chinese, the concept of TIME is usually understood through the concept of MONEY by projecting some correspondent attributes in the domain of MONEY to TIME, such as *don't waste your time*, *doing that with this machine can save you more time*, and the Chinese proverb,

8. 一寸 光陰 一寸 金

   yícùn guāngyīn yícùn jīn
   inch.QUANTIFIER time.N inch.QUANTIFIER gold.N
   'Time is gold.'

Noticeably, Paradis (2004, p. 245) points out that metaphor is a construal of comparison because understanding metaphors is based on the correspondence features between two concept domains. Through comparison, TIME can be understood via the features of valuable, quantifiable, and savable within the concept of MONEY, and people form different expressions to describe TIME during the course of their daily communication (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 7-8).

Gibbs (1996) argues that the comprehension of a metaphor depends on the context. People may have different intentions and ideas to structure their language in diverse contexts and this further influences the use of metaphors. When listeners hear a specific expression in another context, which is different from that in which it was uttered, they may misunderstand it. As a result, Wang (2014) restructures Figure 1 into Figure 2 to emphasise the element of context in the mapping process. As can be seen, the mapping is as it was presented in Figure 1, but in Figure 2, it is embedded in a large rectangle, which refers to the context. When the speaker and listener are both in the same context, the listener is able to deduce and catch the speaker's meaning from the expressions.

Figure 2 Context and conceptual mapping

Apart from the context, people also employ their personal knowledge or embodiment to comprehend metaphors (Kövecses, 2002). Their embodied experience is structured in a recurrent and similar situation by their interaction with the world (Johnson, 1987; Violi, 2000). Every aspect of people's lives becomes their background knowledge, such as their interaction with other people, their feeling about the world, and the knowledge they acquire from books. Gibbs and Colston (2006, p. 241) give an example of how people build the concept of BALANCE and extend the schema by means of metaphors. When babies are learning to walk, they may try to stand by holding something to maintain their balance. In the process of learning to walk, they may fall over and try to stand again. Finally, they will be able to maintain their balance well and walk faster and faster. The concept of BALANCE has thus been stored in their mental inventory and can be used to understand the balance of power, business, and demand and supply in the future. However, people may have different experience of the same event because they grow up in different environments. When speakers and listeners are from different places, they are likely to have a reverse, contradictory, and varied conceptualisation of the same entity, which may lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding (Johnson, 1987, p. 74).

"While metaphor is based on a construal of comparison, metonymy is a construal of salience" (Paradis, 2004, p. 245). Language users frequently employ metonymy in their everyday lives as they say one thing to refer to another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). "Metonymy is, loosely, the use of a word to denote a concept other than its 'literal' denotation" (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 48). For example, *there were a lot of new faces at the party* shows that faces are employed to refer to people. Both face and people are in a part-for-the-whole relationship within the domain-matrix, human beings (Clausner & Croft, 1999; Langacker, 1986; 1987, pp. 150-152; 2008). Moreover, Langacker (1999, p. 199) argues metonymy is a reference-point phenomenon because the uses of metonymy depend on the speakers' vantage point.

Particular associations and contexts enable people to define the metonymy's relevant features for understanding (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Paradis, 2004). The metonymy in *we need a good head in our team* shows the intrinsic association because the noun phrase (NP), a good head, and its referent, people, are inherently related. Nevertheless, *the ham sandwich is waiting for his check* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 35) indicates extrinsic associations, where the ham sandwich and its referent, a specific person, are associated contingently and non-inherently (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p. 217). They are associated because of the context (Paradis, 2004). Without the background knowledge of being situated in a restaurant, a ham sandwich and a person evoke two distinct concepts, whereas within the context of a restaurant, the ham sandwich can refer to the person who made the order.

For Langacker (1999, p. 199), metonymy is a reference-point phenomenon and it can be thought as a construal, which is defined as the alternative process of experiencing and describing something (Langacker, 2008, pp. 55-89). For example, *a half empty glass of water* can also be described as *a half full glass of water* because of the speakers' different vantage point. Paradis (2004, p. 246) argues metonymy is a case of a construal of salience, which can be classified into three types, namely, metonymization, facetization, and zone activation. The ham sandwich and its referent mentioned previously is a case of metonymization. Through a context, the two things can be associated by conceptual contiguity. Facetization can refer to the meanings conventionally expressed by a lexical item and features an absence of inter-conceptual mapping (Paradis, 2004, p. 246). For instance, the court in "the court had to assume that the statement of claim was true" refers to STAFF, which is conventionally expressed in the lexical item *court*. Zone activation can be explained via "fill it up, please! (i.e. the glass)." Only a part of the glass is relevant to the action to *fill it up* in the context. To be brief, all of these construals of salience represent the elaborated part-whole relationship in a domain-matrix (Paradis, 2004, p. 246).

Metonymies can provide additional meanings to aid people's understanding although the general meanings might come from construal of concepts. For instance, a good head in *we need a good head in our team* can be replaced by the terms *good hands* and *good body* without changing the general meaning; however, these terms make the whole expression slightly different. Although a good *head*, *hand*, and *body* can all refer to *a person*, they indicate different features. Good hands may refer to a person's skill in something, a good head indicates a smart person, and a good body can imply strength. Similarly, the understanding of a metonymy is based on personal experience and context.

2.2 Grammatical Metaphor and Schema

While Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose the theory of conceptual metaphor, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) have introduced the notion of grammatical metaphor. According to Briones et al. (2003, p. 138), grammatical metaphor is based on the notion of a metaphorical movement, but the movement is not only from words to words. For instance, one can speak "his departure" to replace "he departed". The movement is from a clause to a phrase. While the meaning of the substituted phrase does not change, the function is altered.

9. John's writing of a letter to his sister surprised me. (Taverniers, 2004, p. 21)

Similarly, the underlined part in example 9 is a grammatical metaphor. It refers to the subject, a NP, but the NP presents a process taking place in reality. According to Taverniers (2004, p. 21), "processes are normally expressed by means of a conjugated verb and a number of participants taking part in the activity, with the verb and its participants together constituting a full clause". In example 9, the process expressed by the NP can be *John wrote a letter to his sister* but the process is not understood by means of the clause. It is understood as a NP. The metaphorical movement is from a process as a clause to a process as a NP. Hence, the metaphors no longer belong to lexical meanings but grammatical forms or grammatical metaphors.

The notion of metaphorical movement is like "borrowing" some features from one concept to another concept, i.e. conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) or lexical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For instance, 'understanding' is borrowed to express the *grasp* in *he cannot grasp the meaning*. Borrowing concepts can be found in grammatical metaphors, too. In example 9, the NP is metaphorically borrowed to express a process. In addition, a NP can also be metaphorically employed to present 'qualities', which are generally encoded by adjectives (Taverniers, 2004, p. 25). This is a key point to the discussion in the present research because the nouns in example 3-6 present different qualities, as they function as adjectives.

Tomasello (2000, p. 63) indicates that an utterance is the most fundamental psycholinguistic unit and it may become a schema in people's minds. A speaker utters linguistic expression to the listener with his intonation contour and intention under a specific communicative context so that an utterance's meaning varies because of the speaker's intention in a context. Tomasello additionally argues that human infants cannot comprehend adult-language until they can understand communicative intentions, which are expressed within a specific context. Turning to the process of language acquisition, 'holophrase' is the product at a very early stage. A child is trying to understand all of an adult's language and attempting to produce an entire utterance. Nevertheless, only one linguistic unit of an adult's utterance is reproduced and this single unit presents the meaning as if it was a whole utterance. For example, a child's utterance, *Ball*, may refer to that 'I want the ball' or 'where is the ball'. After the stage of producing holophrase, children may employ some syntactic patterns to form their utterances. For example, "pivot look" (e.g. where's the X?, let's X it, open X, X here, and sit on the X), is one of the common language production features when children learn languages around the world. Children may use other words to replace the X slot and express their communicative intentions. In other words, children treat each pattern as different utterance

schemas (Tomasello, 2000, p. 66). Therefore, specific linguistic structures may be treated as different schemas so that people can grasp the meanings from their knowledge.

Importantly, people's prior knowledge functions when they try to understand conceptual metaphor (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) as well as grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor is ostensibly similar to Halliday's lexical metaphor because the mapping or movements operating between concepts is evoked by the lexicon of a language (Taverniers, 2004). However, in grammatical metaphors, only the function of the lexical item changes (Briones et al., 2003), i.e. the meaning remains the same. Moreover, grammatical metaphors are more closely related to grammatical forms or grammatical means of expressions. In addition, grammatical metaphor can be thought as a variation based on something with standard and default features (i.e. a process realised as a clause) and something extended from the variation (i.e. a process realised by some other form), e.g. the NP in example 9 is originally a clause (Taverniers, 2004, p. 21).

2.3   Comprehension and Relevance theory

Unlike pragmatics, which argues that metaphor interpretation starts when the addressee cannot register comprehension from the literal or semantic level of the utterance, relevance theory assumes that metaphor comprehension is generally achieved, as people understand nonmetaphorical speech in a specific context (Gibbs & Tendahl, 2006). Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) employs two principles to explain communication and cognition as it states a) "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance" and b) "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 260). The first claim can be thought of as a cognitive principle of relevance and the second a communicative principle of relevance. The cognitive principle of relevance relates that any input can evoke cognitive processes and that "cognitive resources tend to be allocated to the processing of the most relevant inputs available" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 261). The communicative principle of relevance denotes that ostensive input should be relevant enough for the hearers to believe it is worth the effort to process the information. The hearers are requested to pay attention to every utterance, which creates an expectation of relevance (Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008).

Gibbs and Tendahl (2006) argue the information searching process will stop when the hearers get the meaning, which is relevant to the addressee's expectation. People are inclined to search for the most relevant and meaningful information from their cognition and find the most efficient way to understand an utterance or to achieve cognitive effects in a given communicative context. That is to say, generally, "there is a trade-off between cognitive effort and cognitive effects such that listeners will attempt to maximise cognitive effects while minimising cognitive effort" (Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008, p. 1831).

Accordingly, the listeners will follow the most efficient path to access any possible interpretation with the optimal relevance. In other words, listeners do not necessarily infer all possible meanings of metaphors. In addition, context strongly influences people's interpretation of metaphor because it

helps listener's search for information when processing input. Gibbs and Tendahl (2006, pp. 397-399) assess the meaning of "Lawyers are sharks" in three different contexts and find the cognitive effects of "Lawyers are sharks" depending on each context. The interpreted meanings are related to the fundamental mapping between lawyers and sharks but the given context helps the interpreters to decide which part between them is more relevant to each specific setting (Kecskes, 2008).

2.4 <u>Active Zones and Profile & Base relationship</u>

Langacker (2008) argues semantics is conceptualization and indicates the notions of active zones, profile and base to explain people's understanding of language. Paradis (2000, p. 147) also proposes "meanings of linguistic expressions arise by the activation of conceptual patterns in the cognitive system." Some features in a concept domain become more salient than others when people are trying to interpret linguistic expressions. In other words, some features are activated in concept domains. According to relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), people try to grasp the most relevant features of concepts in their minds to understand an utterance. The optimal features can refer to the active zones of concepts and can be explained by the profile and base relationship (Langacker, 2008, pp. 66-70). Profile and base show a relationship between more salient and relatively minor features of a concept. Profile means the primary focus and base is the secondary focus. For instance, it is not possible to imagine an arc if you are not already familiar with the concept of a circle. In this case, a circle is the base for the profile, an arc. Therefore, the most relevant features mean the most active parts of concepts in comprehension.

Similarly, the profile and base may change with different contexts. For instance, the "hěn N" structure in examples 1 and 2 are both 很夏天 but when people interpret the utterances, the profiles of each differentiate according to the topics. People will search the most relevant features in SUMMER to comprehend the weather type and people's likely choice of attire in summer. The activated features about summer are the profiles and the other features of summer are the bases. People only employ what they need in order to interpret examples 1 and 2. They do not need to search out every feature related to summer to understand the utterances.

2.5 <u>Context</u>

It is evident from the above reviews that context is important in the comprehension of language. Context is broadly discussed in pragmatic terms because it influences or modifies the meaning of the language (Bates, 1976; Giora, 1999; Kecskes, 2008; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 2006). Context can provide additional clues for people to guess and interpret word meanings (Çetinavcı, 2014). In linguistics, context can refer to physical, epistemic, social, and linguistic factors, which may affect people's interpretation of language (Kecskes, 2008, p. 387; Yule, 2006). These four types of context are equally important and they function simultaneously to influence communication. Language users

can communicate, transform information and comprehend a speaker's intention through language and context.

Kecskes (2008, p. 387) describes the notion of context as a 'selector of lexical features' based on how it brings certain lexical features to the fore also speaks to the relationship between 'profiles' and 'bases' (Langacker, 2008, pp. 66-70). With this concept in mind, Kecskes (2008) points out that context not only helps people to decide which feature is more relevant in an expression but also helps people to interpret meanings more efficiently. For example, the context in example 1 shows the profile is weather and the base is summer, so the features about the weather in summer are activated, which makes them more relevant in the interpretation. People can directly retrieve the feature about the weather in summer to interpret the "hěn N" structure in example 1. Metonymic interpretation additionally shows a similar process as Croft and Cruse (2004, p. 48) specify that "a cognitive linguistic analysis of metonymy is the ability of a speaker to select a different contextually salient concept profile in a domain or domain matrix than the one usually symbolized by the word". As a result, context is strongly relevant to the interpretation of both metaphor and metonymy.

3 Methodology

Since the purpose of this study is to determine how people understand the "hěn N" structure in Mandarin Chinese, the target terms for investigation are 很春天, 很夏天, 很秋天, and 很冬天. The four phrases were initially searched for in the Academia Sinica Balance Corpus of Modern Chinese (Sinica Corpus), which was constructed by Academia Sinica, the central research institute in Taiwan in 1997. The Sinica Corpus (http://app.sinica.edu.tw/kiwi/mkiwi/) contains 4,892,342 Mandarin phrases in total, with sources ranging from literature, life, science, society, philosophy, and art. However, the four "hěn N" structures are absent from the Sinica Corpus, possibly because this structure is ungrammatical in Mandarin Chinese. Nevertheless, the structures certainly appear in people's everyday communication. As such, it is supposed that "hěn N" structure started to be spoken after 1997.

The research steps were as follows. At first, the target "hěn N" structures were collected from online news sites by searching the exacted target phrases on Google's news search engine between 2013 and 2014. The engine contains various Taiwanese news sources including Yahoo!Kimo News, China Times, United Daily News, Nownews, TVBS News, CNA News, NewsRadio, ETtoday News, Liberty News Net and PTS News. Data not included in the specified scope was subsequently filtered out manually. As a result, a total of 656 target "hěn N" structures, including 215 很春天, 332 很夏天, 69 很秋天, and 40 很冬天, were found in Google between 2013 and 2014 in Taiwan (search date: 7 Jan 2015). These phrases will be examined below in conjunction with a means to deduce how people understand "hěn N" structure from a cognitive perspective (Gibbs & Tendahl, 2006; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Langacker, 2008; Taverniers, 2004). This research does not discuss the "hěn N" structure via the frameworks of morphological analysis.

When examining the data, the priority was to define the context of utterances because context not only activates people's information processing systems but also influences people's selection of conceptual features to interpret the "hěn N" structure (Kecskes, 2008; Langacker, 2008). With the topic and context of the utterances, people's understanding of the "hěn N" structure can be accurately deduced. For instance,

10. *今年的 秋天 很夏天，連帶 延長 旅遊 旺季…* (Ciou, 18 Sept 2014)
    jīnniánde qiūtiān hěnxiàtiān liándài yáncháng lǚyóu wàngjì…
    this.DET year's.ADJ autumn.N very.ADV summer.N so.CONJUNCTION prolong.V travel.N season.N…
    'This autumn is very summery so it prolongs the peak travelling season this year...'

From the words, *autumn*, *summer*, *traveling* and *September*, the topic and context in example 10 relate to the weather and seasonal traveling. Having grasped this information, some concept domains are activated in people's minds in order to comprehend the utterance. Although it is obvious that the meaning of 很夏天 has an intimate relationship with 'summer', the aim of this study is to infer a possible mapping process when people interpret "hěn N" structures.

4 Finding and Discussion

Before discussing what a "hěn N" structure is in Mandarin Chinese, it is worth clarifying that word classes are different concept domains. For Langacker (1987, cited in Ungerer & Schmid, 2001, p. 188), "domains are 'contexts for the characterisation of a semantic unit'". Different word classes have varied contexts and functions but words belonging to a specific part of speech should behave identically (Crystal, 1997, p. 91). A noun refers to either abstract or concrete entities in the world, a verb shows an action, an adjective presents the qualities of something, etc. Different word classes can play varied roles in a sentence, e.g. a noun can be the subject in a sentence. In light of prototypical categorisation, "word classes have central members, which satisfy a maximum number of criteria of the respective class, and more peripheral, borderline members" (Taylor, 1995, p. 190). For example, trying to think of a noun, the name of an entity, such as "a book", is more salient. Compared to a nominalized action, e.g. reading, the name of an entity is relatively closer to the prototype in the concept domain. In addition, there seems to have a boundary among different concept domains of word classes, but the boundary of concepts can be vague (Taylor, 1995, p. 188; Ungerer & Schmid, 2001). That is to say, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish which category a concept should belong to. For instance, it is not easy to clearly classify a wheelchair into the CHAIR domain or the VEHICLE domain because of the vague boundaries and overlapping features between concepts (Ungerer & Schmid, 2001). Furthermore, I suggest grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) can evidence word classes hold varied concept domains because the understanding of "hěn N" structure is also based on a metaphorical movement. It indicates there should be some movements among concepts to substitute the grammatical functions of words.

4.1   The "hěn N" Structure as a Grammatical Metaphor

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and Briones et al. (2003), a word's grammatical class and grammatical structure can be substituted, changing its function, but without changing its meaning; hence, viewing a "hěn N" structure, e.g. 很春天, as a grammatical metaphor can explain why this ungrammatical structure becomes grammatical. Traditionally, an adverb cannot modify a noun, so the "hěn N" structure should not appear in people's communication. This means the function of the N changes when it combines with "hěn". The N is employed to show 'qualities' but no longer indicate its referent (Taverniers, 2004).

11.   *在 早餐店 聽到的 歌 很夏天*

       zài zǎocāndiàn tīngdàode gē hěnxiàtiān
       in.PRE breakfast shop.N hear.V song.N very.ADV summer.N
       'The song heard in the breakfast shop is very summery.'

Examining example 11, the function of the N, 夏天/summer, is changed. It does not refer to the season of summer but the qualities of summer. The "hěn N" structure in example 11 functions as the subject compliment presenting the quality of the subject. What qualities may be employed to interpret the "hěn N" structure in example 11 is based on the topic, context, and the interpreter's understanding about summer (Kecskes, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Langacker, 2008; Paradis, 2004). Some features of summer are activated or more salient than others when the topic is about songs. The salient features are profiles and SUMMER is the base when interpreting example 11 (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Langacker, 2008).

In addition, according to usage-based grammar (Tomasello, 2000), the "hěn N" structure may become a single schema because people understand it as a single unit with the speakers intention. Mandarin speakers know 很/very is a neutral and common modifier (Paradis, 2000), and when 很/very precedes an adjective (A), it intensifies the degree of the adjective. Accordingly, the "hěn A" structure is formed as an AP schema in Mandarin speakers' minds. However, when people fail to interpret a "hěn N" structure from its semantic level, they start to question whether the speaker has a different communicative intention to figuratively use the noun. They employ their prior knowledge and search any possibility to comprehend the meaning (Levinson, 1983; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Tomasello, 2000; Yule, 2006). Therefore, when they see the "hěn N" structure at first glance, Mandarin speakers may feel there is something weird but they can still employ their knowledge of "hěn A" schema to interpret the "hěn N" structure. In other words, Mandarin speakers can associate a "hěn N" structure to their understanding of the AP schema. Gradually, a "hěn N" structure may become a schema stored in people's minds (Tomasello, 2000) and people can thus understand the structure as well as comprehending "hěn A" structure.
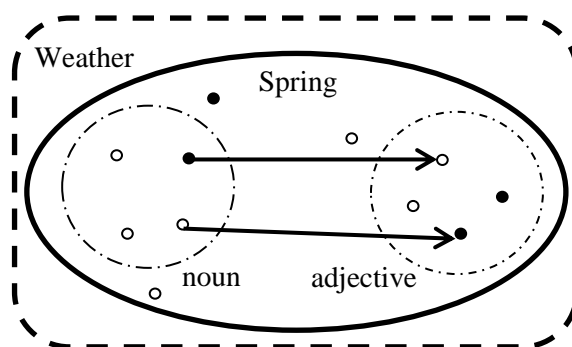
4.2   The "hěn N" Structure as a Conceptual Metaphor

In order to achieve people's understanding of "hěn N" structure in Mandarin Chinese, some concepts map onto each other. In other words, the "hěn N" structure can be seen as a conceptual metaphor, too. The conceptual mapping process is illustrated in the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The adverb 很/very is generally employed to intensify the degree of adjectives. However, this adverb does not function to intensify something in "hěn N" structure. 很/very functions to evoke mappings. In other words, when the adverb combines with a noun, people unconsciously shift the functions of noun, map concepts in their minds, and understand the meanings of "hěn N", as it has been argued by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014).

In order to understand the "hěn N" structure in Chinese, both metonymic and metaphorical mapping processes operate "simultaneously". Syntactically, the function of the N is changed (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) because the cross-domain mapping is from NOUN to ADJECTIVE. However, the meaning is definitely derived from the same concept domain. For example, the N in example 12 means 'spring' and the meaning of the "hěn N" structure is also from the SPRING concept domain. After the mapping operates, "很春天" means *very spring-like* in the expression below.

12.   *今天 天氣 很春天*
      jīntiān tiānqì hěnchūntiān
      today.N weather.N very.ADV spring.N
      'It is very spring-like today.'

Furthermore, the comprehension of this expression has to be based on the listener's knowledge and the context (Çetinavcı, 2014; Gibbs, 1996; Kecskes, 2008; Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Imagine that example 12 is said in winter. The topic in example 12 is the 'weather' and the timing of uttering this sentence is in winter. People search and link the optimal relevant features of "spring" with the topic, "weather", to interpret the whole utterance based on the context (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). For example, they may perceive different weather situations in spring and turn the meaning into an adjective to interpret this expression according to their understanding. Figure 3 presents the mapping of example 12.

Regardless of the "hěn N" structure being deemed as a grammatical metaphor or a conceptual metaphor, the understanding of this structure is ultimately context-dependent (Gibbs, 1996). Some features of a concept become active according to the inspiration of a specific context (Kecskes, 2008). They are the active zones (profiles) of the concepts (bases) (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Langacker, 2008). Trying to imagine the concept of seasons, people may have vague ideas about them because there is no scope for them to narrow down the information they need. Individuals may generally have a very broad idea about seasons because each individual learns the concept of the seasons from different experiences, such as from experiencing seasonal variations or by reading about them in books. For instance, seasonal variation can influence natures' colours, agricultural products, weather conditions, and various mental emotions. All of these are included in the concept of seasons. People can retrieve what is relevant to the target expression from the concept domain when a specific context assists them to limit the scope (Paradis, 2004). Hence, context can define what are the relevant and salient features for an expression.

13. *她的 外套 很夏天*

tāde wàitào hěnxiàtiān

her.ADJ coat.N very.ADV summer.N

'Her coat is very summery.'

14. *她的 這件 洋裝 很秋天*

tāde zhèjiàn yángzhuāng hěnqiūtiān

her.ADJ this.DET dress.N very.ADV autumn.N

'Her dress is very autumnal.'

15. *這道 菜 很夏天*

zhèdào cài hěnxiàtiān

this.DET dish.N very.ADV summer.N

'This dish is very summery.'

16. *這個 火鍋 很秋天*

zhège huǒguō hěnqiūtiān

this.DET hot pot.N very.ADV autumn.N

'This hot pot is very autumnal.'

Examples 13-16 present two "hěn N" structures, 很夏天 and 很秋天, in different contexts. The topic and context for examples 13 and 14 are about clothes and for examples 15 and 16, food and meals. For 13 and 14, the context and topic help the interpreters to select the most relevant features in summer and autumn to understand the qualities of the clothes. For instance, the colours of summer and autumn and the clothes styles in different seasons can be employed to understand the "hěn N" structures in examples 13 and 14. Turing to examples 15 and 16, the interpreters can search the most relevant features about food and meals from the concept domains of summer and autumn to

understand the meanings of the utterances. In this case, the profile can be the agricultural products produced in summer and autumn. The features about food ingredients are activated to fit the context of the utterances so people can understand the meanings expressed in the "hěn N" structure in examples 15 and 16.

Comparing the two "hěn N" structures with the topics and contexts in example 13-16, different profiles are selected from SUMMER and AUTUMN because people are inclined to search out the optimal profiles to interpret the inputs (Gibbs & Tendahl, 2006; Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008). On the basis of topics and contexts in each utterance, people do not need to search everything from the concept domains; rather, they can narrow down their searching scope (Paradis, 2004; Sperber & Wilson, 1995). For instance, people do not need to think of the features of emotions to understanding examples 13-16. Therefore, contexts and topics make people's comprehension of "hěn N" structures more efficient.

4.4   Metaphor in "hěn N" structure

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor pervades human communication. When examining the collected data, the LOVE IS SPRING metaphor was found with the phrase, 很春天. The concept of spring can be interpreted as the feeling of love in Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan. Therefore, when the context and topic of an expression is about people's relationship, the concept of LOVE may lead to a particular conception of 很春天. Also, there may be an additional concept domain influencing the understanding of the "hěn N" structure. For example, the meaning of example 17 is not purely from metonymy.

17. *近來 韓國 演藝圈 很春天…* (Wang, 07/04/2014)

jìnlái hánguó yǎnyìquān hěnchūntiān…
recently.ADV Korea.N entertainment industry.N very.ADV spring.N
'Recently, the entertainment industry in Korea is very spring-like...'

The LOVE IS SPRING metaphor influences people's understanding of example 17. This metaphor is structured from the fact that plants and animals revive in the spring. Plants grow faster after a long winter and a great deal of food is produced in the spring. The weather is warm and animals have enough grass to eat; therefore, spring is the season when most animals copulate so that people may gradually connect copulation and love with the season of 'spring' and internalise the metaphor, LOVE IS SPRING. In example 17, the topic is about the entertainment industry in Korea. The readers know that the entertainment industry here is a metonymy, which is WHOLE FOR THE PART. It refers to people, e.g. singers, actors, or stars. Therefore, the readers can interpret 很春天 via the LOVE IS SPRING metaphor because it can be employed to show a relationship between people.

As can be seen, different strands of theory have been employed to discuss the "hěn N" structure in this section because the priority is to understand the metaphorical movement in order to interpret

the structure. Grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) is employed to explain the functional movement from N to A. The structure is seen as a single unit and schema (Tomasello, 2000). Conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) can make clear to the meaning derivation because the meaning of the structure is generated from somewhere within the N domain. In addition, relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) helps the interpreter to search and decide the most relevant features from "somewhere" in the N domain based on the topic and context of the utterance. The meaning of "hěn N" schema is suggested as a form of metonymy. In the case of "hěn N" schema, the change of function can also be thought as a cross-domain mapping between the noun and adjective concept domains because the noun plays the role as an adjective in the schema.

5 Conclusion

On the basis of the discussion above, the "hěn N" structure is suggested to form a single schema in people's minds (Tomasello, 2000). People may understand it according to their understanding of AP schemas. Moreover, the "hěn N" structure can be thought of as a grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) as well as a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As a grammatical metaphor, the function of the noun is shifted to show the qualities by operating metaphorical movements. On the other hand, as a conceptual metaphor, both the metaphorical mapping between the noun and adjective concept domains and the metonymic mapping process "at the same time" when people interpret "hěn N" structure. They understand the function of N as they had known the function of A. Importantly, the meaning of "hěn N" structures mainly derive from metonymy. People can retrieve the optimal relevant concept to interpret "hěn N" structures from their cognition (Gibbs & Tendahl, 2006; Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008) according to each different context (Kecskes, 2008; Paradis, 2004). Therefore context helps people to define the scope of the active zone of concepts when comprehending utterances. Searching information to interpret the "hěn N" structure has similar features with the process of conceptual activation. The context of an utterance aids people's selection of profiles and bases in concept domains (Langacker, 2008). The derivational meaning of the "hěn N" structure is argued as the construal of salience (Paradis, 2004). Furthermore, additional metaphors may influence the interpretation of "hěn N" structure.

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