

## **METAPHORS IN A HIERARCHICAL SYSTEM: A SOCIO-COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The current study aims to explore what kind of metaphors are used in a strictly hierarchical system, and how these metaphors reveal the attitudes, ideologies and identity towards the particular social circumstance. As a case study, this paper examines how young males conceptualize the obligatory military service in Taiwan. The theoretical framework of this study includes conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and blending theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998). Since conceptual metaphors reflect humans' understandings from varied embodied experiences, due to the military service as an obligation for adult men in Taiwan, the use of metaphors reveals their collected conceptualization towards the system. Based on the materials from the two online BBS forums, four salient metaphors are identified, e.g., *HUMANS IN MILITARY SERVICE SYSTEM ARE ANIMALS*, *MILITARY CAMP IS UNDERWORLD*, *MILITARY SERVICE LIFE IS A PLAY* and *MILITARY SERVICE IS SLAVERY*. We obtain three main findings. Firstly, metaphors reflect the draftees' construal of the system, illustrating their attitudes and ideologies as social cognition (van Dijk, 2001), and their identity as a member of subordinates. Secondly, metaphors in a hierarchical system such as in the military service further demonstrate the draftees' critical thinking, the euphemistic function of language, and the emotional disclosure function. Thirdly, the use of metaphors is highly correlated with the social experiences derived from the military service and is meanwhile accompanied with the disapproval and resistance to the system.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, attitude, ideology, identity, hierarchical system, military service in Taiwan

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language use as a social product is correlated with the social structure of a society, reflecting understanding of a society derived from the people's social experiences. As conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), based on the embodied experiences, metaphors reveal how speakers conceptualize a social system. In terms of the military hierarchical system, metaphors even play a crucial role in the conceptualizations of the military life. The current study aims to investigate what kind of conceptual metaphors are used in a strictly hierarchical system, and how these metaphors demonstrate the attitudes, ideologies and identity towards this particular social circumstance. As a case, this study will examine how Taiwanese young males as draftees conceptualize the dual obligatory military services in Taiwan, including military service (MS) and substitute military service (SMS), from an inferior perspective on the two hierarchical systems.

A social hierarchical system is highly relevant to its language use. The internal structure of a hierarchical system involves social stratification which indicates “any hierarchical ordering of groups within a society especially in terms of power, wealth, and status” (Trudgill, 2000). Regarding a strictly hierarchical system, Trudgill (2000) claims that the social stratification in Indian traditional society comprises different castes which are relatively rigid, and lack of social mobility within the hierarchy. For instance, according to Den Ouden (1979)'s research on language use in a caste system of a south Indian village *Irupatur*, traditionally the higher caste speakers employ the respectful verb forms to communicate with the higher caste speakers who are aged or own lands. However, while the higher caste people speak to the middle caste and the lower caste people, they use the neutral and disrespectful verb forms respectively. It is then suggested that the strict social structure is rooted in the speech styles on both of the linguistic and conceptual levels in relation to power, status, and wealth. Furthermore, the military system is also strictly hierarchical because of the rigid personnel which

revolves around power and status. Halbe (2011) declares that military personnel affect politeness and language use in the military workplace. In terms of criticism, rank plays a crucial role in the military communication. As Halbe observed, while criticism is addressed towards superiors by subordinates, it is usually in the most respectful means. For subordinates, they tend to not to perform FTAs which would challenge their superiors' face. Compare to the caste system, similarly, the strict military rank has influence on the expressions of criticism in the subordinate-superior communication, but only on the ostensible linguistic expressions. These ostensible expressions do not mean that the superiors are sincerely respected by the subordinates on the conceptual level. These expressions may instead conceptually reveal the subordinates' intended opinions on the military service systems. The use of metaphors in the current study will further show how the subordinates conceptualize the military service systems in Taiwan accompanied with their intended judgments on the hierarchical system.

## METHOD

The current study mainly adopts conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory accompanied with corpus linguistic approach as our method to deal with the uses of metaphors in the military service of Taiwan. In terms of data collecting, our language data are derived from the two BBS forums, *militarylife* and *SMSlife*, on a popular BBS named *PTT* in Taiwan. We manually retrieved 55 posts from *militarylife* and 40 posts from *SMSlife*, arranging these data as a micro corpus.

Concerning the theoretical framework, conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and blending theory (BT) provide a means to probe into human beings' understandings of a society. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose that conceptual metaphor is a key device for human beings to conceptualize the world, constructing their conceptual system based on their embodied social experiences in life. Meanwhile, through the experience, human beings employ metaphors to comprehend rather abstract concepts. Further, one of the crucial characteristics of metaphor is the function of highlighting and hiding. That is, conceptual metaphor allows people to only focus on one dimension of the concept and meanwhile hide the other dimensions which are not compatible with it. In terms of the correlation between metaphor and socio-cultural experiences, Kövecses (2005) suggests that the study of metaphor and the one of culture and society is highly relevant. In fact, the use of metaphors is influenced by the speakers' socio-cultural experiences derived from the environment, the socio-cultural context, and the communicative situations. Therefore, it is proposed that conceptual metaphors are correlated with human beings' socio-cultural experiences to comprehend the world.

Blending theory (BT) works based on the conceptual integration networks (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Coulson & Oakley, 2000). The conceptual integration network comprises two or more input spaces constructed by the elements from different mental inputs, a generic space that contains the fundamental elements which the inputs have in common, and a blend space that involves selected elements from each input and the emergent structure. Further, conceptual blending refers to "the establishment of partial mappings between cognitive models in different spaces in the network, and the conceptual structure from space to space." Moreover, one of the central mechanisms as a tool of blending in the conceptual integration is compression (Fauconnier & Turner, 2000). It is claimed that, through compression, what is represented in the blend space is interpretable, due to the metonymic mappings between elements from the blend space and the input spaces (Coulson & Oakley, 2000). In addition, it is suggested that the BT approach is mainly employed to understand the on-line and real-time process of meaning constructions (Grady, Oakley, & Coulson, 1999). The online interpretation of the conceptual blending is determined based on the personal preference and background knowledge. Hence, in order to probe into the understandings of the military service in Taiwan, the following section will investigate the metaphors we found in our data and also their emergent social meanings.

## ANALYSIS

The current section aims to examine how the draftees conceptualize the military service system, a hierarchical system in Taiwan, in terms of conceptual metaphors and conceptual blending. According

to the materials from the two forums on the BBS PTT, we identify four salient conceptual metaphors: *HUMANS IN MILITARY SERVICE SYSTEM ARE ANIMALS*, *MILITARY CAMP IS UNDERWORLD*, *MILITARY SERVICE LIFE IS A PLAY* and *MILITARY SERVICE IS SLAVERY*. Each metaphor demonstrates not only the draftees’ construal of the military service but also the relevance with the hierarchical social structure. The following examples of the metaphors are settled in *Language Data* below in the current section.

Firstly, the metaphor *HUMANS IN MILITARY SERVICE SYSTEM ARE ANIMALS* reveals that the concept *ANIMAL* is employed to construe the humans in the MS system. Owing to the draftees’ different perspectives on the system, this primary metaphor involves two metaphors—*SUPERIORS IN MILITARY SERVICE SYSTEM ARE DOGS* and *SUBORDINATES IN MILITARY SERVICE SYSTEM ARE DOGS*. Regarding the first metaphor, Example (1) describes the situation that humans have ability to help incompetent dogs wash their bowls. Based on (1), Figure 1 shows the conceptual blending of the first metaphor. It depicts that superiors are conceptualized as dogs and subordinates are identified themselves as humans under the military rank. An animal-human rank is meanwhile corresponded to the inverse military rank. The blending of these elements further displays the disparagement towards superiors with dogs’ dumbness, incompetence and inhumanity which are ubiquitous as a negative social image of dogs in Chinese culture. In terms of the second metaphor, Example (2) delineates that the draftees are ordered as dogs in the military. Following (2), the second metaphor indicates that these draftees conceptualize themselves as dogs which are unreasonably ordered by the superiors as humans under the rank. Figure 2 then presents that subordinates construe themselves as dogs and superiors as dog keepers under the military rank. The rank is further construed as an animal-keeper relationship. The conceptual blending suggests that subordinates behave as excessively obedient dogs which follow their keepers’ orders to finish various laborious tasks. In fact, the subordinates’ obedience is conceptualized with the negative aspect of power relation under the hierarchy. Both of these metaphors signify that the draftees’ conceptualizations of the MS systems have high relevance to the hierarchical social system.

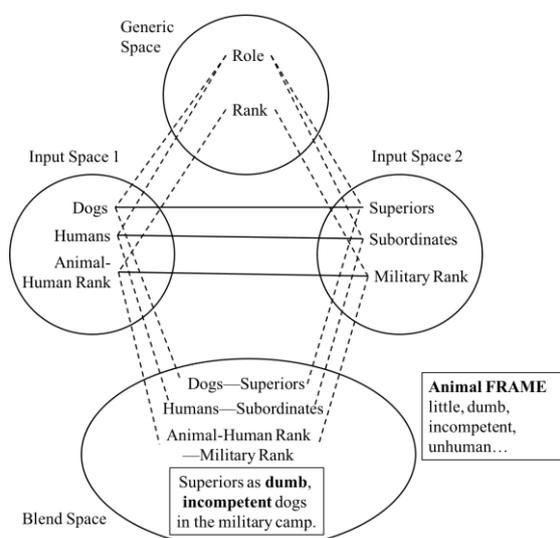


Figure 1: *SUPERIORS ARE DOGS*

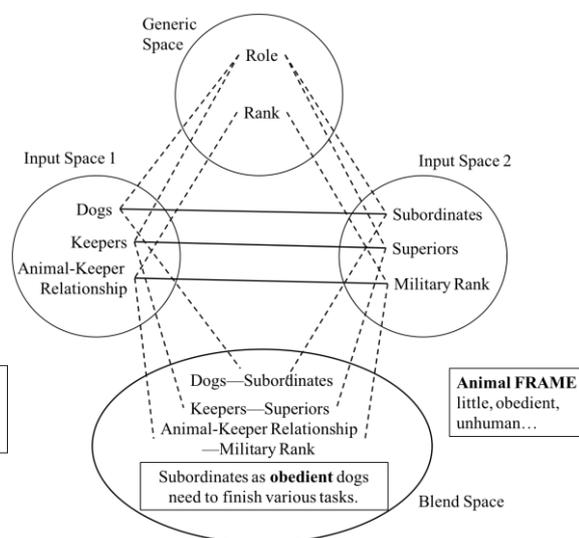


Figure 2: *SUBORDINATES ARE DOGS*

Secondly, our materials suggest the *MILITARY CAMP IS UNDERWORLD* metaphor. Example (3) implies the compliance with the rules during the days in the underworld. As Figure 3 manifests, *military camp* is conceptualized as *underworld* in Chinese culture and the underworld rules are meanwhile seen as military discipline. Besides, following (4), it is signified that the military recruitment is negatively comprehended as snatching a replacement for the return to the world of the livings in the Chinese context. Further, regarding Figure 3, the conceptual integration between the input elements and especially between *military camp* and *underworld rules* highlights the incongruity of the military discipline for the draftees. This incongruity further suggests the fact that the military discipline for the draftees is absurd like the incidents of underworld as their understanding of the MS systems. For

draftees, the conceptualization of the MS systems with the UNDERWORLD concept is accompanied with incongruity and absurdity of the military service life as underworld life against the normal life.

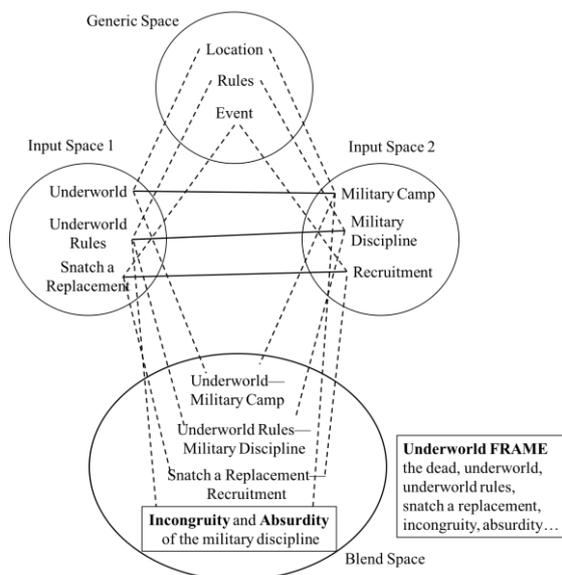


Figure 3: MILITARY CAMP IS UNDERWORLD

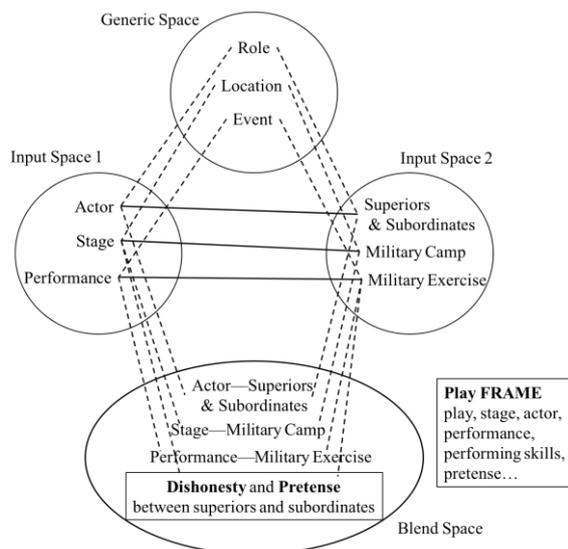


Figure 4: MILITARY SERVICE LIFE IS A PLAY

Thirdly, the *MILITARY SERVICE LIFE IS A PLAY* metaphor displays that the PLAY concept is employed to construe the draftees’ MS life. Example (5) depicts the situation that the superior commands the subordinates for a military exercise in an unreasonable way like overacting in a play. Following (5), Figure 4 demonstrates that superiors and subordinates in the MS life are both conceptualized as actors. Military exercises are construed as performances in the military camp which is meanwhile understood as a stage for actors to perform. Furthermore, in terms of Figure 4, the blending of the location *stage* and the event *military exercises* infers the dishonesty and the pretense among the interactions and the cooperation in the military exercises, because of the pressure of the rank, and the superiors’ face and request for appropriate military images. Due to the hierarchical repression in MS, dishonesty and pretense in the PLAY concept are highlighted under the power relations between subordinates and superiors under the rank, presenting the draftees’ construal of their MS life as an insincere play.

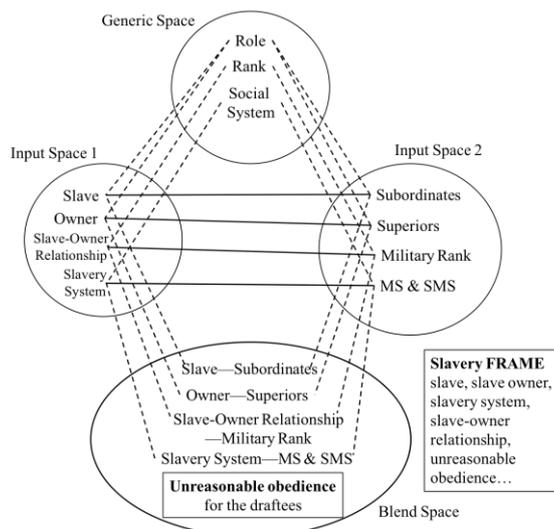


Figure 5: MILITARY SERVICE IS SLAVERY

Fourthly, the draftees tend to describe the MS systems as slavery systems, that is, the *MILITARY SERVICE IS SLAVERY* metaphor. Example (6), derived from a post discussing the cessation of the substitute military service, shows the draftees’ thought that MS is low-cost and merely without the draftees’ resistance like a slavery system. Meanwhile, they are similar to the public servants’ slaves.

The conceptual integration of this metaphor displayed in Figure 5 illustrates that the draftees as subordinates conceptualize themselves as slaves and the superiors as slave owners. The military rank is then construed as a slave-owner relationship. Further, the emergence of the blending between the location *military camp* and the social system *slavery system* implies the unreasonable obedience for the draftees in the modern MS life. It is then suggested that the draftees’ understanding on their MS life is correlated to the SLAVERY concept owing to the social experiences from the military rank.

**Language Data:**

- (1) [A discussion about the tableware-washing task.]  
**K196:** *nǐjiā gǒu huì zìjǐ xǐwǎn ma? dāngrán shì rén bāng gǒu xǐwǎn a!*  
**K196:** ‘Your **dog** at home can wash its bowl by itself? Of course it is a human who helps the **dog** to wash its bowl.’ (MS-36)
- (2) [A discussion about the treatments during the SMS life.]  
**JasonWeek:** *nǐ méiyǒu yùdào jǐshǐ zhú dòng zuò hěnduō shì háishì bǎ nǐ dāng gǒu jiào, ránhòu zìjǐ méi zuòguò shì zhǐ chū zhāng zuǐ háo wú luòjǐ de luàn fāhào mìnglíng de rén.*  
**JasonWeek:** ‘You don’t encounter the people in a situation that, even if you are initiative to do lots of tasks, you are still ordered like a **dog**. These people then don’t do anything and just employ their mouths to command you illogically and negligently.’ (SMS-19)
- (3) [A discussion about the obedience of the military discipline.]  
**RZPTT:** *wǒ tuìwǔ qián de zuìhòu yītiān háishì zhào yīnjiān guījǔ gōngshìgōngbàn guò wán tā, lǐyóu hěn jiǎndān, suīrán shì zuìhòu yītiān, dàn yīyàng háishì liú zài yīnjiān de yītiān a.*  
**PZPTT:** ‘Before the last day I complete my military service, I still obey the **underworld** rules to finish that day without personal considerations. The reason is simple. Although it is the last day, it is the same as a day staying in the **underworld**.’ (MS-42)
- (4) [A discussion about the military recruiting for receiving military honors.]  
**s52400:** *xiànzài shì zuò dào sǐ méi róngyù, lǎ tǐsǐguǐ cái yǒu róngyù, zhēn tānmāde yīncáodìfǔ.*  
**s52400:** ‘Now, we perform the tasks to death without any honors, but they receive honors due to snatching a **replacement**. What a fucking **underworld**.’ (MS-25)
- (5) *nǐ gān báimù méiyǒu rén huì yǒu yìjiàn, dàn zhìshǎo wǒ bōjiāo shí kàndào de zhuàngkuàng, gèng xiàng shì wèi xiōng ér xiōng. wǒ míngbái dàjiā dōu shì yǎnxì, dàn nǐmen yǒu biyào yǎn chéng nànyàng?*  
‘If you scolded the morons, nobody would have any opinions. But at least the situation I encountered during the transfer to other organizations was more like the one that the superiors scolded the subordinates for the reason that they wanted to do so. I understood everyone was **performing**, but was there any necessity to **perform** like that?’ (SMS-21)
- (6) [They are discussing whether cancelling the substitute military service is possible or not.]  
**frioandy:** *zhè zhǒng piányí yòu bùhuì jiào de núlì zhìdù zěnme kěnéng qǔxiāo.*  
**AxelGod:** *jiùshì yǒu āi gōngwùyuán cáinéng tōulǎn shùnbìan dang núlì yòng.*  
**frioandy:** ‘This **slavery** system which is low-cost and without draftees’ resistance is impossible to be cancelled.’  
**AxelGod:** ‘Since there are SMS draftees, the public servants are able to fool around and intentionally use them as **slaves**.’ (SMS-15)

After the examinations on these four metaphors, it is proposed that the draftees’ conceptualizations of the MS in Taiwan reveal the draftees’ attitudes and ideologies towards the military service, and their identity as subordinates. According to van Dijk (2001), social cognition primarily comprises the shared social representations of group members, including attitudes and ideologies in the society. Attitude refers to the socially shared opinions based on evaluative opinions. Ideology then indicates the fundamental social representations of social groups based on their knowledge and attitudes, etc. In terms of the MS systems, the four metaphors manifest the draftees’ negative attitudes towards the military rank and the military-related discipline, according to the highlighting of the negative elements in the ANIMAL, UNDERWORLD, PLAY, and SLAVERY concepts. Although this social hierarchical structure has its necessity to be in the military system, these metaphors raise an issue that the draftees in fact do not fully yield to the hierarchy, due to their critical thinking cultivated outside the system. Furthermore, Woodlard & Schieffelin (1994) proposed that language ideologies function as a correlation between social structures and forms of language, displaying the rooted social experiences in particular social positions. Due to the embodied social experience, the use of these metaphors combined their revealed attitudes display the draftees’ ideologies as subordinates in the MS systems. The draftees’ ideologies as social representations revolve around the issues such as the lower

positions in MS, the superiors' commanding, and the negative attitudes toward the military under the MS systems. The shared ideologies also suggest the correlation with the use of metaphors. Due to the power relation within the hierarchical system, the draftees who shared the ideologies tend to employ the euphemistic function of language to express their critical thinking on MS and SMS and even release their negative emotions from the repression of the hierarchy through conceptual metaphors.

In addition, the use of these metaphors denotes the identity as a member of the draftees in MS. Regarding the reoccurrence of these metaphors, the use of them establishes a regulation for discussing the MS systems with the speakers' social experiences. For instance, as Example (6) shows in a post which discusses cancellation of the SMS system, both of the speakers echo the same judgment on the system as slavery. After all, the use of the metaphors not only reveals the draftees' conceptualizations of the military service, but also infers the social meanings accompanied with the draftees' attitudes, ideologies and identity correlated with the structure of the military. It is eventually suggested that the use of these metaphors is highly relevant to the military hierarchical structure, because these metaphors indeed reveals the social experiences as subordinates derived from the military rank.

## CONCLUSION

The current study has found that the four salient metaphors reveal the draftees' construal of the MS systems in Taiwan. Owing to the euphemistic function of language, the draftees employ these metaphors to insinuate their critical thinking on the MS systems and as a pragmatic tool for emotional disclosure under the repression of the military rank, meanwhile covertly implying their attitudes, ideologies, and identity as subordinates in this hierarchical system. Besides, the use of metaphors is highly correlated with the social experiences derived from the power relations within the military hierarchical structure. It is concluded that metaphors in a hierarchical system, as in the MS system, do not only represent its high relevance to the inner social stratifications, but also conceptually reveal the draftees' disapproval and resistance to the system, leading into a social regulation of the system.

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