Chinese Zodiac Culture and the Rhetorical Construction of *A Shu B, C*

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ABSTRACT

This study, based on the CCL (Center for Chinese Linguistics) corpus, the BCC (Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center) corpus, and the dictionaries of Xiehouyu (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings), finds that the rhetorical senses of the construction *A Shu B, C* depends on the categories of *A*, *B*, and *C*. When *A* is non-human, the statement is rhetorical; when *A* is human, the categories of *B* and *C* will decide its nature. When *B* is a non-traditional Zodiac sign, the statement is rhetorical, and when *B* is a traditional Zodiac sign, the categories of *A* and *C* will decide its nature. When *C* is age-related, the statement is traditional, and when *C* is attribute-related, it is rhetorical. The rhetorical construction carries evaluative connotations in the following distribution: negative: 80.8%; positive: 13.5%; and neutral: 5.7%. The possible motivations for the rhetorical senses are culturally contextualized interactions of metaphor and metonymy as well as homophonic and conceptual associations.

Keywords: zodiac culture, animals, rhetorical construction, shu, metaphor

1. Introduction

Language and culture have been important topics for centuries. Gumperz and Levinson (1996:2) held that "language, thought, and culture are deeply interlocked." Panther (2014: 2) mentioned that " the lexico-grammatical structure of a language may indeed be affected by cultural or folk models." Culture and rhetorical constructions are also related. Li (1999: 15) claimed that "culture can influence the choice of simile connectives and produce some culture-specific tropes." This study will look into the culture-specific rhetorical construction *A Shu B, C*[1)], which is derived from the traditional Chinese zodiac culture.

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1) In this structure, *A* refers to the Object to be described, *B* refers to the animal signs (traditional or non-traditional) used for the expressive statements, and *C* refers to the similarity between them. When the similarity is obvious to the audience, *C* may be absent.

Chinese zodiac culture adopts a repeating 12-year cycle (with each year linked to a particular animal: Mouse, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Loong, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig) to denote people's birth year. In Chinese, these animal signs are called *Sheng Xiao* (生肖) *or Shu Xiang* (属相). *Shu* (属) functions as a verb for the practice of using *Shu Xiang* (属相) to designate birth year in the construction: *A Shu B*.

(1) 崔慧景属马。(CCL)[2]
    Cui Huijing was born in the year of *Horse*.

According to the interpretation of Chinese characters, "*Sheng* (生) refers to birth year, and *Xiao* (肖) denotes similarity or likeness" (Ye 1998: 7). "*Shu* (属) refers to the twelve Earthly branches to designate years, while *Xiang* (相) indicates animal symbolism." (Huang 1998: 76). Both *Xiao* (肖) and *Xiang* (相) indicate similarity or symbolism. Chinese folkways held that one's personality is related to the attributes of his/her zodiac animal. Those born in the year of Dog are said to be loyal and faithful while those born in the year of Ox are hard-working but stubborn.

This special folkway produced a culture-specific simile which adopted *Shu* (属) as the connective. The observation of this construction in daily practice shows that the boundary of *B* may be extended to non-traditional animal signs while the boundary of *A* may be extended to categories (animal and plant) other than human beings.

(2) a. 这个老师是属蚊子的吧，哼哼唧唧。(BCC)[3]
        The teacher is born in the year of *Mosquito*, groaning and moaning.
    b. 中国银行业务太慢了！属蜗牛的 (BCC)
        The service of Bank of China is too slow and it is born in the year of *Snail*.

In (2a) and (2b), such new animal signs as *Mosquito* and *Snail* are adopted as

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2) CCL (Center for Chinese Linguistics) corpus is an online corpus provided by Peking University. Accessed at: http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus. With 700 million Chinese Characters (the 11th Century B.C. - present), this corpus can provide a diachronic view of the Chinese usages. This example is from ancient Chinese history book of Qi Dynasty (479-502 C.E.) 南齐书·五行志 (*South Qi History.On Five Elements*), and it is extracted from CCL Ancient Chinese corpus.

3) BCC (Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center) corpus is an online corpus accessed at: http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn/. With a total of 15 billion Chinese characters (Journals: 2billion; Literature works:3 billion; Blogs:3billion; Science and Technology: 3 billion; Comprehensive: 1 billion; Ancient Chinese:2 billion), BCC can give a comprehensive global view of modern Chinese usages.

zodiac signs to describe the attributes of the teacher and the bank service, respectively. In such examples above, *A Shu B* is used for rhetorical purposes, rather than to designate the birth year. This study attempts to find the possible motivations for the transformation from culture constructions to rhetorical constructions, which may be achieved by answering the following research questions:

(3) a. What categories can be used for *A, B and* C in the rhetorical construction?
    b. How does this rhetorical construction get its construction sense?
    c. What are the possible motivations for the rhetorical transformation?

2. Previous Studies

The examples from ancient Chinese literature works in CCL corpus show that the culture construction of Chinese zodiac signs appeared at Qi Dynasty (479-502 C.E.) (as mentioned in footnote2), while the transformed usages were found in the classical literature work of *XiYouji* (西游记) (*Pilgrimage to the West*) by Wu Chengen of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 C.E.), in which the Monkey King was described as the following:

(4) 獠牙往外生, 就象属*螃蟹*的, 肉在里面, 骨在外面。(CCL)
    With outward tusks, he was born in the year of *crab*, tender inside, tough outside.

In (4), a crab is adopted as a zodiac sign and its physical attributes are used to describe *Monkey King* as a person with tender heart and tough body.

The transformed construction has a long history but the theoretical study on it only began at the 1980s. Lin (1985:18) first defined this construction as the following:

(5) Suppose A, B and C represent the target, the source and the similarity respectively, then this special model of trope is "A (shi) Shu B (de), C", and in this model, A usually refers to human; B refers to *Shu Xiang* (属相) (Chinese Zodiac animals), mainly those temporarily-borrowed ones; C refers to the personality or characteristics of human beings. The meaning of this model is to describe the personality of human beings, so we name this kind of trope *Xing Yu* (性喻) (Metaphor for Personality).

Ma (1987: 43-44;33) regarded *Shu* (属) as a kind of simile connective, just like *Xiang* (像) (like or as). He analyzed the choice of the source and the grammatical relationship between the source, the target and the connective. However, he did not touch the issues regarding the choice of the target and the similarity.

Tang and Huang (1989: 12) highlighted the source and the connective *Shu* (属) and defined this construction as the following:

(6) In Chinese, there is a special kind of trope, which uses *Shu Xiang* (属相) (Chinese Zodiac Signs) or borrowed *Shu Xiang* (属相) as the source and the simile connective is *Shu*, so we call it *Shu Yu* (属喻) (Zodiac-based Metaphor)."

They grasped the attributes of the connective and the source, but they didn't define the boundary of the target and the ground.

Li and Li (2013) and Li (2014) analyzed the connective verb *Shu* (属) from the grammatical and semantic perspectives, which partially classified the boundary of the source and the target, but she didn't touch similarities and possible cognitive motivations of it.

Gao (2008) analyzed the boundary of the source, the target, the similarity and the motivations. The cognitive motivations for this construction involve the *Great Chain of Being* metaphor, in which the non-human objects are personified to be the target, while the non-animal notions are conceptualized metaphorically as animals of the source. Gao (2008) didn't take *A Shu B, C* as a whole from the cognitive construction perspective. He didn't touch the relationships between the sense and the form, especially the conditions for the transformation from zodiac senses to rhetorical senses. The data source of it is a combination of dictionaries and random trail searching on-line for the potential collocations (2008:13-14), rather than such systematic corpora as CCL and BCC, so the data of Gao (2008) may be not systematic and complete.

Yang (2017) adopted the criteria by Goldberg (1995; 2006) to analyze the development of the construction sense of *Shu N De* and concluded that the conditions for the construction sense are: Increased subjectivity, conventionalized implicature and contextual supplementation. She touched little on the motivations and the target.

The review above showed that the majority of the works analyzed the syntax and semantics of this construction and they focused on the source and the connective. Even though two recent studies take new perspectives of metaphor and construction grammar, but the analysis of the global construction (the target, the

source and ground) and of the possible motivations for the transformation from cultural construction to rhetorical construction was scarcely done. Therefore, this study attempts to give a global analysis of the construction and of the motivations for it.

3. Data Collection and Description

In the construction *A Shu B, C*, all the other elements are variable, except the connective verb *Shu* (属), so 属 (*Shu*) will be the most important key character for the search of this construction in CCL corpus by Zhang et al. (2003) and BCC corpus by Xun et al. (2016), which can provide this study with contexts of the construction.

In Chinese, *Shu B, C* is a kind of proverb: *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings). Heider (2011:53) summarized that "*Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings) has two parts: the first part is fairly enigmatic while the second part is usually somewhat explanatory. Often a speaker uses only the first, leaving it to knowledgeable listeners to fill in the meaning." *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings) is so widely used that many dictionaries are edited, and *Shu B (de), (C)* is cataloged as *Shu-headed Xiehouyu* (属字开头的歇后语) in the dictionaries by Wen (2002; 2004; 2005). These dictionaries can directly provide examples of this construction.

With 属 (*Shu*) as the key Chinese character, the contexts are extracted from the corpora and dictionaries. The selection criteria is the definition by Lin (1985) and the description by Heider (2011). The contexts are sorted in an Excel file, marked and classified according to the categories of *A* (Target), *B* (*Source*) and *C* (*Ground*).

4. Characteristics of the Construction and Its Components

The corpora and dictionaries produced 660 examples of *A Shu B, C* construction. Based on the observation of these examples, the possible categories for the Target (*A*), the Source (*B*) and the Ground (*C*) are generalized on the classification of the semantic categories of them respectively, such as Human, Zodiac Animal, Non-Zodiac Animal, Plant, Food, Natural Phenomena, Historical Figures, Abstract Notions etc. In the following sections, this construction and its components will be analyzed from the perspective of construction grammar and conceptual metaphors.

4.1. The rhetorical construction

A Shu B, C is a time-honored cultural-specific construction in Chinese culture and language. Goldberg (1995:1) stated that "constructions themselves carry meaning, independently of the words in the sentence." *A Shu B, C* as a whole derives from the customs of designating birth years with animal signs, but it carries rhetorical meanings, which is independent of the individual words in it and can only be understood in the Chinese zodiac culture. Goldberg's definition can testify the status of this culture pattern as a construction.

(7) C is a CONSTRUCTION iff$_{def}$, C is a form-meaning pair $< F_i,S_i>$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established construction (1995:4)

Goldberg (2006:5) revised that patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency. The rhetorical construction of *A Shu B*, *C* has inherited its form and meaning from Chinese zodiac culture, but the global meaning is not strictly predictable from the parts in it. Even with *B* as traditional zodiac animals, the meaning may not be the traditional meaning of designating birth years. For example,

(8) 老头老太太都是属<u>鸡</u>的，起的最早。(BCC)
　　The old people were born in the year of <u>Rooster</u>, rose the earliest.

In (8), the first part is the traditional zodiac expression, but the second part is not the traditional meaning. The first part can give some cultural hints but the meaning of the construction cannot be completely predicted, because the possible ground desired by the speaker is unpredictable. The second part transfers the traditional cultural construction into the non-traditional rhetorical construction. Liu (2010:13) defined rhetorical constructions as "all the unpredictable constructions", and he also argued that the rhetorical motivations can lead to occasional, temporary, specific and refreshing experiences in the constructions which are context-dependent (2010:14). Based on the definition and standard by Goldberg (1995;2006) and Liu (2010), it can be argued that *A Shu B, C* can be used as a rhetorical construction derived from the predicable grammar construction of *A Shu B* which is traditionally used for birth year designation. *A Shu B*, *C* is composed of two parts: the antecedent

(the front part) and the consequent (the second part). In the antecedent, the Target (*A*) and the Source (*B*) are connected by the connective (*Shu*) (属), which endowed the Target and the Source with potential similarity or contiguity relationships within the frame of Chinese Zodiac culture. The consequent (*C*) describes the potential similarities or intended attributes of the Target (*A*).

The observation showed that the categories of *A* and *B* and *C* are the critical factors for the transformation from the grammar construction to the rhetorical construction, which will be elaborated in the following sections.

4.2. Source (B) categories

The most striking attribute of *A Shu B* construction is the cultural practice of designating birth year with zodiac animals and relating human personality with zodiac animals. Kövecses (2002: 17) claimed that "Human beings are especially frequently understood in terms of (assumed) properties of animals". In nature, Chinese zodiac culture is "a kind of animal metaphor beneath which lies the conceptual metaphor: *HUMAN BEINGS ARE ANIMALS* " (Gao 2008: 29-30). The Source (*B*) is critical to the construction, while the connective verb *Shu* triggers the culture-specific mapping from the Source (*B*) to the Target (*A*). The categories of the Source will influence the construction senses and they should be analyzed first.

It's shown from the classification that the Source categories fall into two types: traditional zodiac signs and non-traditional zodiac signs. Among the 660 examples collected, traditional signs occupy only 87 (13.2%) while non-traditional ones take 573 (86.8%) of the total and both of them fall into sub-categories as shown below (Table 1):

The traditional zodiac signs gain non-traditional senses in the rhetorical construction while the non-traditional categories (Animal, Plant, Human Pro-fessions, Historical or Literature Figures, Artificial Objects, Natural Objects and Abstract Notions) can also enter the zodiac family to function as the Source in the rhetorical construction. Table 1 showed that non-traditional categories appear the most (86.8%) as the Source to produce rhetorical senses directly. Among the subcategories, animals (traditional:13.2% and non-traditional:43.9%) are used the most, which may reflect the animal symbolism nature of this construction. The distribution frequency of the zodiac animals may reflect the relationships between human beings and these animals. Human beings tend to use more familiar categories for their cognition, so the closer relations may be reflected in the higher frequency.

Table 1. The Distribution of Source Categories[4]

	TZS			NZS	
Mouse	10	1.52%	AP	290	43.90%
Ox	8	1.21%	PP	70	10.60%
Tiger	3	0.45%	HP	11	1.70%
Rabbit	7	1.1%	HF	39	5.90%
Loong	2	0.3%	AO	147	22.30%
Snake	2	0.3%	NO	12	1.80%
Monkey	12	1.82%	AN	4	0.60%
Rooster	12	1.82%			
Dog	19	2.87%			
Pig	12	1.82%			
Total	87	13.20%		573	86.80%

Liu (2010:13) stated that grammatical constructions and rhetorical constructions are not strictly separated. When the traditional zodiac signs are used as the Source (*B*), the construction may be grammatical or rhetorical.

(9) a. 我属<u>牛</u>的，现在二十八周岁。(BCC)

    I was born in the year of <u>*Ox*</u> and 28 this year.

  b. 九头牛也拉不回来，正好属<u>牛</u>的他被妻子嗔为"犟<u>牛</u>"。(BCC)

    Nine oxen pull him back (change his mind), just born in the year of <u>*Ox*</u>, so he was dubbed stubborn *Ox* by his annoyed wife.

  c. 这女人是不是属<u>牛</u>的，有四个胃。(CCL)

    Was this woman born in the year of <u>*Ox*</u>, having four stomach cavities.

In (9a), the construction is a traditional grammatical construction for designating birth year, while in (9b), both traditional grammatical and rhetorical senses are blended since the grammatical construction also carries some rhetorical light, and the Source refers to both the birth year and the similarities between the *Ox* and *he*. (9c) is a completely rhetorical construction whose meaning can not be predicted

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4) In this table, abbreviations are used. TZS: Traditional Zodiac Signs; NZS:Non-traditional Zodiac Signs AP: Animal and animal Parts; PP:Animal and plant Parts; HP: Human Professions; HF: Historical and Literature Figures; AO: Artificial Objects; NO:Natural Objects; AN: Abstract Notions. These abbreviations will be used in the following sections and figures.

unless in the construction frame. The stomach cavities are not the traditional concern for the personalities of those born in the year of Ox, and this new aspect consolidates the rhetorical nature of this construction, because the construction sense is not birth year designation but metaphorical mapping from Ox onto human beings. The presence of the Ground (*C*) is a decisive factor for the construction with traditional zodiac signs.

When the non-traditional zodiac signs are used as the Source (*B*), *A Shu B, C* can only be the rhetorical construction, regardless of the presence of the ground (*C*). The non-traditional signs cannot have the year designation effect in Chinese and they can only function as the Sources of the mappings onto the Targets, as shown below.

(10) a. 你属*袋鼠*的啊,回家走路用蹦的啊! (BCC)

      Were you born in the year of *Kangaroo*, homing by scampering !

    b. 属*鸡毛*的, 越吹越觉得自己高。(Wen, 2002 : 856)

      Were you born in the year of *Chicken feather*, the more self-blowing (bluffing), the higher (superior) you feels.

    c. 我是不是属*向日葵*的, 最不喜欢大白天下雨。(BCC)

      Was I born in the year of *Sunflower*, disliking daytime rain most.

    d. 蒋介石这个人是属*核桃*的, 只能砸着吃。(Wen, 2002 : 854)

      Chiang Kai Shek was born in the year of *Walnut*, only cracked by force.

    e. 亲戚们不停拷问我, 都是属*FBI*[5]的。(BCC)

      My relatives interrogate me endlessly, and they were born in the year of *FBI*

    f. 你是属*曹操*的, 这么大疑心。(Wen, 2004 : 1179)

      You were born in the year of *Cao Cao*[6], so suspicious.

    g. 我这个人是*暖水瓶*的, 别看外面冷, 里头热着。(Wen, 2002 : 861)

      I was born the year of *thermos*, seemingly cold in appearance but warm in heart.

    h. 这孩子属*水*的, 不听话, 但命大。(CCL)

      This kid was born in the year of *Water*, intractable, but lucky to be alive.

    i. 夜袭队都是属*鬼*的, 黑夜活动多。 (CCL)

      The Night Attack Troops were born in the year of *Ghost*, more night activities.

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5) FBI stands for Federal Bureau of Investigation, and here it refers to the staff of FBI as a profession.

6) Cao Cao is historical and also Literature figure who was portrayed as over-suspicious in the historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Luo Guanzhong,14th century).

4.3. The target (*A*) categories

The original target of *A Shu B* is human-exclusive, because its primary function is to designate the birth year of human, especially Chinese people. However, the analysis showed that some other categories can also appear in the Target position such as Animals, Artificial Objects, Natural Objects, Abstract Notions etc. When the non-human categories are used as the target, this construction is definitely a rhetorical construction in which the attributes of the Source (*B*) are used to understand the attributes of these non-human categories.

(11) a. 这位属*鸡*的*美国老人*已经习惯于每天四点多钟早起上班。(BCC)

   The *old American man* born in the year of *Rooster* is used to rising at about 4 AM to work.

   b. 我们家*狗*属*闹钟*的吗？还不能摁。(BCC)

   Was our *dog* born in the year of *Alarm clock*, not to be silenced by press.

   c. 小*皮鞋*，每次我穿你你就下雨，你是不是属雨的啊。(BCC)

   Pretty *leather shoes*, were you born in the year of *Rain*? It rains whenever I wear you.

   d. *手机*属*篮球*的，掉出来也就算了，几十阶的楼梯蹦着到底了。(BCC)

   My *mobile phone* was born in the year of *basketball*, it's all right to fall out off my bag, but it bounces down through several steps to the ground.

   e. 冬天的*太阳*是属骗子的，只照明不取暖。(BCC)

   The winter *sun* was born in the year of *Cheater*, sending light but not heat

   f. 夏之桃的*微博*怎么那么敏感呢？是属*雷达*的吧。(BCC)

   Summer Peach's *blog* is so sensitive, was it born in the year of *Radar*?

   g. *生活*还是要继续属*牙膏*的，不挤不出油。(BCC)

   Life was still born in the year of *Toothpaste*, no pressure, no paste (productivity).

In (11a), the target is the American old man, who has no Chinese zodiac background, so this expression tends to be rhetorical, and it is confirmed in the predicate that it's used to describe his habitual behavior rather than to designate his birth year. When the target is human being, the rhetorical construction is a kind of direct mapping from the Source attributes onto human beings.

In the examples from (11b) to (11g), the targets are respectively animal (dog), artificial objects (shoes and mobile phone), natural Object (sun), and abstract

Notions (blog and life), which definitely lead to the rhetorical feature of this construction. Since the traditional typical target of *A Shu B* is culturally human-exclusive, when non-human categories appear in the target position, this construction is doubtlessly a rhetorical construction. When these non-human targets appear, the construction involves a chain of indirect metaphorical mappings in which the non-human categories are first personified and then the Source attributes can be mapped onto them in the Zodiac-derived construction *A Shu B*.

The mappings from the Source categories (Traditional Zodiac signs and non-traditional Zodiac signs) onto the Target categories (Human beings and Non-Human notions) are summarized and illustrated in the figure below:
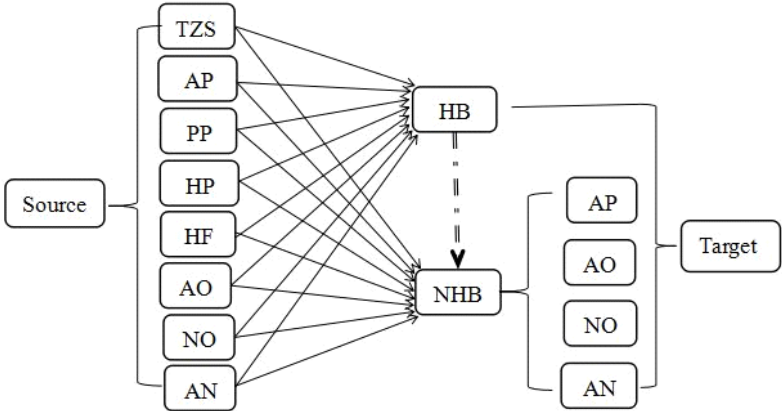
Figure 1. Source to Target Mappings[7]

4.4. The ground (*C*) categories

As mentioned above, the consequent (*C*) denotes the potential similarities or intended attributes of the Target (*A*). The presence and the categories of the consequent are critical to the rhetorical transformation of the construction.

The presence of the consequent depends on the nature and familiarity of the potential similarities or intended attributes. When the potential similarities are contextually obvious and familiar to the speakers, the consequent can be omitted.

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7) In this figure, NHB stands for Non-Human Beings. A dotted Arrow is used to refer to the intermediate mapping from human onto non-human categories which endow them virtual status as human beings, especially as Chinese with Zodiac background.

(12) a. 三八路_车_你肯定是属_乌龟_的。(BCC)

No38. *bus*, you must be born in the year of _Turtle_

　　 b. 你上辈子是属_苦瓜_的? (BCC)

You must have been born in the year of _bitter melon_ in your past-life?

In (12a) and (12b), the prominent attributes of turtle and bitter melon are obvious in the contexts. The slow moving of turtle is mapped onto the speed of the bus which is not supposed to be too slow. The bitterness of bitter melon is mapped onto the hardships in life because in Chinese, the hardship in life may be described as bitter. In these examples, the potential similarities are contextually obvious and familiar to the speakers, so they can be omitted. However, just as Zhang and Jiang (2012) and Shu (2015) mentioned, in most cases, the consequent is present, because "the upshot of using a *xiehouyu* is the second part, or the ground. The first part only serves as the trigger for bringing out the second part," as Shu (2015: 76) claimed.

Just as analyzed in 3.2.2, in *A Shu B, C*, the presence of the consequent can influence the nature of the construction. When the Target (*A*) is human and the Source (*B*) is the traditional zodiac sign, the nature of the construction depends on the presence and category of (*C*). When the consequent is present as the birth year category (age or relevant notions), the construction carries a traditional and literal sense. When the consequent is absent, it may be literal or rhetorical. When the consequent presents attributes other than age categories, the construction is rhetorical.

5. Discussion

5.1. The rhetorical senses

The analysis on the tokens of the rhetorical construction showed that *A Shu B, C*, involves a kind of culture-loaded proverb: *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings) whose main function is to create some humorous and wise evaluations and descriptions of the Target (A). Just as Lai (2008:455) commented that *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings)"contains two formulaic expressions, carries opaque figurative meanings that need to be derived through conceptual mechanisms, and is often associated with evaluative connotations".

The evaluative connotations are rated through processes combining both intra-

rating and inter-rating based on the judgement on the evaluation of A in the expressions of C. The samples were first intra-rated by the author based on basic culture valuation intuitions, and after one month, it was re-rated by the author. Along with the intra-rating, a process of inter-rating by three Chinese (one 50-year-aged male from one 40-year-aged male from central China, one 35-year-age female from Southern China) was also underway. Based on the survey on the evaluative connotations of the consequent (C), it was shown that among the 660 tokens, 533 (80.8%) tokens are negative, 89 (13.5%) tokens are positive and 38 (5.7%) tokens are neutral connotations.

(13) a. 他儿子是属*癞蛤蟆*的，不咬人，烦人。(Wen, 2002: 857)

His son was born in the year of *Toad,* not biting but annoying.

b. 爷爷，你是属*牛*的，你默默地奉献。 (CCL)

Grandpa, you were born in the year of *Ox*, silently devoting.

c. 我家丸子看来是属*兔子*的，超级爱吃胡萝卜。 (BCC)

My kid was born in the year of *rabbit*, loving carrots most.

In (13a), the annoying attribute of his son who did no harm (biting) is depicted as the ugly Toad who never bite people but was considered annoying for its appearance. The negative connotation is conveyed in a humorous way and will be neutralized. (13b) and (13c) described the behavior attributes of Grandpa and the kid in the culture-loaded construction which can create some inspiring and humorous effects. Such culture-loaded construction is frequently adopted because "the humorous nature of the *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings) will bring the speaker and hearer closer together" Shu (2015:78).

In *A Shu B, C*, the construction senses are triggered by the connective *Shu* (属), which sets this construction against the background of Chinese zodiac culture. The construction senses are inferred from the homophone association or conceptual association between the Target (A) and the Source (B), as Lai (2008) claimed. The rhetorical effect and sense depend on the consequent (C), because the antecedent *A Shu B*, as stated by Shu (2015:78), only serves as the trigger. It seems that the wit of the construction lies in the choice of the antecedent, which is often out of the expectation of the hearer which leads to some social effects.

5.2. Conditions for transformation

The traditional zodiac cultural expression *A Shu B* has been endowed with some rhetorical function and transformed into the rhetorical construction: *A Shu B, C.* Based on the analysis on the categories of the Target (*A*), the Source (*B*) and the Ground (*C*), it is found that there are some conditions for the rhetorical transformation from the traditional construction. The basic condition for this transformation is the in-congruence with the traditional categories of *A, B* and *C*.

In the traditional zodiac culture, *A Shu B, C* is used to designate the birth year and age of Chinese. *A* is human, *B* is zodiac animal, and *C* is age or age-related expressions.

Zodiac Designation: *A* (HB) + *B* (ZAS), *C* (Age)

In the rhetorical usage of *A Shu B, C*, the categories of *A*, *B* and *C* are expanded which results in the transformed rhetorical construction as the following:

Zodiac-based Rhetorical Evaluation:
(14) a. Human Target: A (HB) + B (ZAS), C (non-age)
                          A (HB) + B (NZAS), (C)
      b. Non-human Target: A (NHB) + B (ZAS), (C)
                            A (NHB) + B (NZAS), (C)

In (14a), when the Target (*A*) is human and the Source (*B*) is the traditional zodiac animal sign, the transformation depends on the categories of the Ground (*C*). When the Ground (*C*) is age or age-related expressions, it is the traditional construction. When the Ground (*C*) is specific attribute expressions, the construction is rhetorical. When the Target (*A*) is human and the Source (*B*) is the non-traditional zodiac animal sign, the construction is definitely rhetorical, regardless of the presence of the Ground (*C*), because the non-traditional zodiac animal signs are in-congruent with the traditional zodiac culture, and it cannot take the age-designation sense.

In (14b), when the Target (*A*) is non-human categories, such as animals, plant, artificial objects, etc., this construction is definitely rhetorical, regardless of the categories of the Source (*B*) and the Ground (*C*). In traditional Zodiac culture, the

Target (*A*) is human-exclusive, and only Chinese people or people with similar zodiac culture background can use this expression to talk about their age. Therefore, when non-human categories are presented as the Target (*A*), the expression is not to designate age but to evaluate or depict their attributes.

5.3. Possible motivations

The transformation from traditional cultural construction to the rhetorical construction involves several factors. No single theory can expound the complicated relationships between the Target (*A*), the Source (*B*) and the Ground (*C*). Yet, we will try to summarize the motivations for them, using the concepts discussed in the previous literature.

First of all, the possible motivations for the Zodiac culture and the rhetorical construction derived from it is the Great Chain of Being Metaphor, which, according to Lakoff and Turner (1989:167), is a scale of forms of beings. In *A Shu B*, zodiac animals do not designate birth year but also concern the personality or attributes of humans, because "the scale of beings embodies a scale of properties" (ibid), and "part of any being's nature is shared with lower beings" (ibid:167).

Gao (2008:9) stated that we may understand human beings (higher) in terms of animals (lower) or vice versa since we attribute human characteristics to animals. Thus, the Great Chain of beings "links two levels in the hierarchy of beings to the extent that one is understood in terms of the other"(ibid:9), and "it works in two directions: bottom-up and top-down"(ibid:9). Therefore, the attributes of traditional zodiac animals and non-traditional zodiac animals can be mapped onto the attributes of the Target (*A*), while non-human categories can also function as the Target (A) which is traditionally human-exclusive.

As mentioned in section 3, *A Shu B*, *C* is a type of *Shu-headed Xiehouyu* (属字开头的歇后语). In this construction, the antecedent is *A Shu B*, and the consequent is *C*. According to Lai (2008: 459), there exist two types of association between the antecedent and the consequent: Homo-phonic Association and Conceptual Association.

In Homo-phonic Association, "the target-in-source metonymy is invoked in the saying, with the first part as the source and the second part, the target, highlighting one of the biological or inherent attributes of the object" Lai (2008: 459). In *A Shu B*, *C*, the attributes of the Source (*B*) have the same or similar sound with the attributes of the Target (*A*). The sound of the Source

(*B*) attributes triggers the homophone of the Target (*A*) attributes, while the antecedent provides the context for the rhetorical construction formation.

(15) a. 他属*母鸡*的, 没鸣 (名) 。(BCC)
    He was born in the year of *Hen*, no crow (fame)

 b. 你属*蜡烛*的, 一条芯 (心) 。(BCC)
    You were born in the year of *candle*, one wick (will)

In (15a), the surface form "*born in the year of Hen, no crow*" describe one biological attribute of hen, who does not crow, and this is directly presented in the consequent. The deep form of this construction is to describe the attribute of a person, who has no fame. In Chinese, " *no crow*" and "*no fame*" are homophones which have the same sound but different forms and meanings. In this construction, " *no crow*" belongs to the surface form about hen, while "*no fame*" belongs to the deep form about human. However, they are connected in the antecedent " *He was born in the year of Hen*" and *He* and *Hen* are connected by the cultural specific connective: *Shu*. With the association of homophones, the frame of animal is shifted to the frame of human, and " *no crow*" is shifted to "*no fame*". The same process also happens in (15b), in which the attribute of having "*one wick*" of candle is shifted to the attribute of having "*one will*" of human who devoted all his heart and soul to an action.

The further analysis showed that among the 660 examples, only 45 (6.8%) tokens are related to homo-phonic sounds and the majority of the tokens are related to Conceptual Association. Lai (2008:464) stated that "a target-in-source metonymy is identified in the sayings that are used to depict typical features of a thing" and "the description serves as a source of a metaphor which maps to a target that mirrors the same metonymy pattern." (ibid:464). In *A Shu B*, *C*, the consequent (*C*) is the intended attributes of the Target(*A*). The antecedent *A Shu B* triggers the Source (*B*), which projects the consequent(*C*)(intended attributes or similarities) onto the Target(*A*) explicitly or implicitly. The physical attributes of the Source (*B*) may be mapped onto the physical attributes of the Target (*A*) explicitly or onto the abstract attributes of the Target (*A*) implicitly.

(16) a. 你呀, 属*啄木鸟*的, 嘴强身子弱！(Wen, 2002: 868)
    You were born in the year of *Woodpecker*, strong peck but weak body.

 b. 你是属*包子*的吧, 这小脸胖的。(BCC)
    You must be born in the year of stuffed buns, having a round fat face.

In (16a), the physical attributes of woodpecker: hard peck and soft feather body, is mapped onto the abstract personality of people: being eloquent but inefficient. In Chinese, mouth stands for eloquence and body stands for ability to do things. A person with strong mouth and soft body is good at talking but worse at doing thing.

In (16b), the attribute of the stuffed buns is mapped onto the physical shape of the face. The shape of the stuffed buns triggers the attribute of a round fat face. It reassembles simile and may be transformed into the following: Your face is as fat and round as the stuffed buns, but the simile may not have the humour effect of *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings).

6. Conclusion

Based on the data from corpora and dictionaries of *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings), this paper conducted a systematic analysis of the culture-specific construction of *A Shu B, C*. It is found that this construction is rhetorically transformed from the Chinese zodiac culture which evokes a kind of animal metaphor. The traditional zodiac expressions are transformed rhetorically for the evaluation and description of the desired attributes of human or non-human categories.

The analysis of the construction showed that the transformation is influenced by the categories of the Target (*A*), the Source (*B*) and the Ground (*C*). It is shown that the Target (*A*) can be human and non-human, while the Source (*B*) can be both traditional zodiac animal signs and non-traditional zodiac animal signs. The Ground (*C*) involves homophone association and conceptual association.

The rhetorical transformation is caused by the in-congruence with the traditional zodiac expression in which the Target (*A*) is human exclusive, and the Source (*B*) is the traditional collection of twelve animals, while the Ground (*C*) is year or age-related expressions. In the rhetorical construction, the categories of the three elements decided the rhetorical senses of it and they can be formulated as the following:

(17) *A* (HB) + *B* (ZAS), *C* (non-age)=Rhetorical Evaluation/Description
　　A (HB) + *B* (NZAS), (C)=Rhetorical Evaluation/Description
　　A (NHB) + B (ZAS), (C)=Rhetorical Evaluation/Description
　　A (NHB) + B (NZAS), (C)=Rhetorical Evaluation/Description

The data analysis of the evaluative connotations showed that the rhetorical construction is mostly negative, and the evaluative distribution can be shown as the following: Negative (80.8%) > Positive (13.5%) > Neutral (5.7%).

Theses evaluative connotations are conveyed through *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings) which has two-part structure: the antecedent (*A* Shu *B*) and the consequent (*C*). The antecedent describes the culture-specific mapping from the Source (*B*) to the Target (*A*), which is triggered by the culture-loaded connective *Shu.* The antecedent functions like a riddle, while the consequent is the answer to the riddle. In *Xiehouyu* (歇后语) (two-part allegorical sayings), the consequent may be omitted or delayed to leave some time for the listeners to fill in the meaning, which may reduce the negative overtone and create some humorous effect.

The possible motivation for Zodiac culture is the Great Chain of Being metaphor beneath which lies the metaphor: *HUMAN BEINGS ARE ANIMALS*. The possible motivations for the construction sense can concern the conceptual mapping between the Source (*B*) and the Target (*A*), in which the attributes of both are inter-motivated by homophone association or conceptual association to produce the construction senses. All the mapping processes are dependent on the zodiac culture contexts, the intentions of the speaker, and the familiarity of the Ground (*C*).

The systematic analysis of the zodiac-derived rhetorical construction showed that construction, culture and cognition are closely interconnected. Constructions may be derived from specific cultural contexts, which may become part of culture itself. Beneath construction and culture, there lie the various cognitive motivations for them.

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