

# Vertical Spatial Metaphors of Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels from the Perspective of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics: A Study of *Hometown* and *Border Town*

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## Abstract

Based on the theory of embodied cognitive linguistics, this paper examines vertical spatial metaphors in the Chinese modern classical local novels *Hometown* by Lu Xun and *Border Town* by Shen Congwen, analyzing their embodied cognitive foundations, linguistic expressions, and cultural implications. Rooted in human bodily experience and spatial cognition, vertical spatial metaphors establish conceptual mappings between concrete source domains and abstract target domains, shaping character portrayals, emotional atmospheres, and social narratives while carrying profound socio-cultural significance. *Hometown* by Lu Xun employs the opposition of “up” and “down” to depict the decline of family and societal transitions, offering a critique of rigid social hierarchies during the May Fourth Movement. In contrast, *Border Town* by Shen Congwen utilizes the dynamic interplay of vertical imagery to illustrate the flux of individual destinies in western Hunan, reflecting concerns over rural cultural crises and the impact of modernization. This study demonstrates that vertical spatial metaphors function as emotional projections and tension generators, reinforcing the narrative structure and deepening thematic expressions. In *Hometown*, they reflect disillusionment with social reality alongside aspirations for change, while in *Border Town*, they integrate human emotion with natural landscapes, crafting a poetic vision of harmony between nature and humanity. Through the process of embodied cognition, these metaphors serve as cognitive-emotional bridges, guiding readers to interpret spatial imagery, transform personal experience into critical insights on social and cultural dilemmas, and ultimately achieve aesthetic resonance and literary reinterpretation. This study highlights the significance of embodied cognitive linguistics in literary metaphor research, providing methodological insights into classical texts. Furthermore, it underscores the interdisciplinary

potential between linguistics and literary studies, offering a framework for advancing embodied conceptual metaphor research and enriching approaches to literary interpretation.

**Keywords:** Embodied Cognitive linguistics, Vertical Spatial Metaphors, *Hometown*, *Border Town*

## Introduction

### *Research Background*

Metaphor, as a crucial phenomenon in human language and cognition, has long been a central topic in both linguistic and literary studies. Since Lakoff and Johnson proposed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor research has made significant progress within the field of cognitive linguistics. This theory reveals that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device but a fundamental embodied cognitive mechanism that enables the understanding of abstract concepts through embodied conceptual mappings between a source domain and a target domain, grounded in concrete experience. In recent years, metaphor research has increasingly expanded into interdisciplinary domains, encompassing linguistics, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and literary studies, with growing scholarly attention directed toward the role of metaphor in literary texts.

The emergence of embodied-cognitive linguistics has further deepened the theoretical dimensions of metaphor research. This theory builds upon the foundational framework of embodied conceptual metaphor theory while emphasizing the bodily basis and cultural constraints of metaphor. It posits that the generation and comprehension of metaphors are not only reliant on individual bodily experience but are also deeply embedded within specific sociocultural contexts. Embodied-cognitive linguistics moves beyond a purely cognition-centered perspective by examining how metaphors emerge from the interplay between language, social structures, and cultural traditions, thus serving as a crucial entry point for understanding the interaction between cognition and culture. The introduction of this theoretical perspective allows metaphor analysis in literary works to transcend purely linguistic inquiry, extending into broader realms of cultural cognition and social critique.

Within the framework of embodied-cognitive linguistics, vertical spatial metaphor constitutes a significant area of research. The formation of vertical spatial metaphors is rooted in human bodily experience, manifesting in the mapping of "up-down" spatial relations onto abstract concepts such as moral values, social hierarchy, and power dynamics. Generally, "up" is often associated with positivity, nobility, and authority, whereas "down" is more commonly linked to negativity, inferiority, and subordination. This spatial metaphor is not only prevalent in everyday language but also plays a crucial role in literary narratives and cultural symbolism. However, existing research has primarily focused on the analysis of spatial metaphors in domains such as political discourse, news media, and advertising, while systematic studies on vertical spatial metaphors in literary works—particularly in Chinese modern classical local novels—remain relatively underexplored.

Chinese modern classical local novels vividly portrays the social landscape of rural communities through rich and dynamic language. Writers such as Lu Xun and Shen Congwen skillfully employ vertical spatial metaphors, reflecting their cultural concerns. Analyzing these metaphors provides deeper insights into their critiques and idealizations of rural society. Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town* serve as paradigmatic examples of

Chinese modern classical local novels. The former utilizes "up-down" metaphors to depict the class divisions between urban and rural communities and the decline of traditional rural society, exposing the struggles of the lower classes and the disillusionment with hope. In contrast, the latter employs "up-down" spatial metaphors to construct a poetic representation of western Hunan, conveying an aspiration for an idealized rural social order. While both works employ vertical spatial metaphors distinctively, they collectively reveal the authors' unique embodied understanding of Chinese rural culture.

Spatial metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a crucial cognitive tool through which writers perceive the world and evaluate society. However, existing research has paid insufficient attention to vertical spatial metaphors in rural novels, and systematic studies in this area remain scarce. Against this backdrop, this study adopts the embodied-cognitive linguistics framework to conduct a systematic analysis of vertical spatial metaphors in Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town*. Specifically, it examines their linguistic manifestations, narrative functions, and socio-cultural implications. Through textual analysis, this study aims to uncover the role of vertical spatial metaphors in character construction, narrative rhythm, and emotional expression, while further elucidating how these metaphors reflect the authors' value orientations and perspectives on rural culture. Ultimately, this research seeks to integrate embodied-cognitive linguistics with literary interpretation to expand the analytical framework for classic literary works, highlighting the unique academic significance of metaphor analysis in literary studies.

### **Research Significance**

This study explores vertical spatial metaphors in Chinese modern classical local novels from the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, offering multiple levels of significance:

#### *(a) Theoretical Innovation: Deepening the Application of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics in Metaphor Studies*

This research extends the application of embodied cognitive linguistics from everyday language to the realm of literature, particularly in the analysis of literary metaphors. Previous studies in embodied cognitive linguistics have largely focused on the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of language, with relatively limited exploration of the complex metaphorical phenomena in literary language. By examining the linguistic representations, embodied cognitive mechanisms, and cultural connotations of vertical spatial metaphors in Chinese modern classical local novels, this study reveals the theoretical potential of embodied cognitive linguistics in literary metaphor analysis. This interdisciplinary application not only broadens the scope of embodied cognitive linguistics research but also provides new pathways for the development and practice of metaphor theory in literature. Furthermore, it opens up a novel theoretical perspective for the integration of embodied cognitive linguistics and literary studies.

#### *(b) Cultural Interpretation: Unveiling the Deep-Seated Cultural Psyche of Rural Society*

As a bridge between human embodied cognition and cultural expression, metaphors encapsulate the core values and beliefs of specific social and cultural contexts. Through an analysis of vertical spatial metaphors in Chinese modern classical local novels, this study reveals the deeply ingrained ethical order, power structures, and cultural psyche of rural society. For instance, the metaphorical association of "up" with nobility and ideal aspirations,

and “down” with inferiority and subjugation, profoundly reflects the value systems and cultural sentiments of rural communities. This metaphor-based cultural interpretation not only unveils the socio-cultural implications of rural literature but also provides a fresh perspective for understanding the historical and cultural foundations of modern Chinese rural society.

*(c) Reader Engagement: Inspiring Readers’ Embodied Cognition and Reflection*

This study goes beyond analyzing the embodied cognitive processes of the authors and also examines the role of metaphors in guiding readers’ embodied cognition and emotional engagement. Vertical spatial metaphors, through their concrete spatial mappings and emotional resonances, lead readers from the literal meaning to the cultural context and emotional core behind the metaphors. In this process, readers’ bodily experiences and emotional interactions intertwine with the narrative strategies of the texts, achieving emotional resonance and spiritual elevation. This study not only broadens readers’ interpretive perspectives but also offers new insights into the reading experience of classic works, encouraging readers to reflect on their own lives and situations while perceiving shared human experiences.

*(d) Academic Contribution: Advancing Interdisciplinary Integration*

This study combines embodied cognitive linguistics with literary criticism, serving as a concrete example of interdisciplinary integration between linguistics and literary studies. By incorporating embodied cognitive linguistic theories, it provides a more logical and systematic analytical framework for interpreting literary metaphors. Through the practical analysis of literary texts, it also offers solid textual evidence for validating and expanding the theories of embodied cognitive linguistics. This interdisciplinary research model not only broadens the boundaries of embodied cognitive linguistics and literary studies but also sets a paradigm for future academic collaborations.

### **Research Objectives**

This study, grounded in the theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics, focuses on vertical spatial metaphors in Chinese modern classical local novels. It aims to conduct a systematic analysis from linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and literary perspectives to uncover the complex roles of metaphors in literary texts and to establish an interdisciplinary approach to metaphor research.

Firstly, the study seeks to examine the linguistic manifestations of vertical spatial metaphors in Lu Xun’s *Hometown* and Shen Congwen’s *Border Town*. It aims to summarize the main features and rhetorical functions of these metaphors in literary texts by analyzing their roles in constructing spatial imagery, shaping characters, and creating atmospheres. This analysis will reveal how vertical spatial metaphors are integrated into the linguistic framework of rural novels and contribute to the development of literary style. The goal is to deepen the understanding of the linguistic artistry in rural literature and provide a fresh linguistic perspective for interpreting classic works.

Secondly, this study aims to analyze the embodied cognitive mechanisms of vertical spatial metaphors. Within the framework of embodied cognitive linguistics, it will explore the processes of metaphor creation and comprehension, utilizing tools such as embodied

conceptual metaphor theory and image schemas. The research will explain how vertical spatial metaphors are formed through cognitive mappings based on human bodily experiences and spatial perceptions. Additionally, it will examine how these metaphors reflect the authors' life experiences and emotional embodied cognition, as well as the embodied cognitive processes readers engage in when interpreting them. By focusing on how metaphors shape readers' emotional experiences and aesthetic perceptions, the study will highlight the unique role of literary metaphors as mediators of cognition and emotion.

Thirdly, the study explores the deep connections between vertical spatial metaphors and rural culture by situating these metaphors within the cultural context of rural society. It will analyze their associations with social hierarchies, traditional ethical concepts, and value systems. The vertical spatial metaphors in Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town* not only reflect the cultural psyche and power structures of rural society but also reveal the authors' critiques of social issues and reflections on human predicaments. By comparing the cultural orientations of metaphor usage by the two novels, this study will uncover the authors' cultural attitudes and value pursuits in literary expression, thereby highlighting the profound socio-critical and humanistic implications of rural literature.

Finally, the study aims to investigate the role of vertical spatial metaphors in the thematic expression of Chinese modern classical local novels. It will analyze the intrinsic connections between metaphors and the development of plot, character destinies, and overarching themes. Metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices but also narrative tools for authors to convey ideas and emotions. This research will explore how spatial metaphors achieve the unity of form and thought within literary works, enhancing their artistic impact and helping readers gain a deeper understanding of the themes and ideas conveyed by the authors through metaphors.

### **Literature Review**

Embodied cognitive linguistics has further developed the metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics, deepening its application in literary analysis. It views metaphor not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as a mode of thought, revealing how humans interpret and understand the world by integrating bodily experiences and cultural contexts. Particularly in the analysis of literary discourse, metaphor theory demonstrates profound influence and value.

From the perspective of embodied cognitive linguistics, researchers have conducted in-depth explorations of metaphor, aiming to elucidate its role in facilitating interactive experiences and cognitive processing in literary works.

Scholars such as Sun Yi and Cui Cixing (2021), Tie Yi and Qin Xiugui (2022), Huang Xingyun and Xie Shijian (2022), Cai He (2023), and Sun Yi (2023) have investigated the embodied metaphors of specific words or concepts. Their studies reveal how language constructs metaphorical meanings through body parts or sensory verbs and highlight the unique features and variations of these metaphors across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These studies provide critical perspectives and analytical tools for understanding and interpreting the complex applications of metaphors in local novels.

Researchers such as Zuo Xiangyu (2020), Xie Shijian and Yuan Yongdan (2022), Li Ying and Yang Yunjie (2022), and Song Huicong (2023) have examined the significance of embodied cognitive linguistics in understanding and translating literary metaphors from various angles, including cross-cultural communication, dramatic texts, classical poetry translation, and English idioms. These studies expand the scope of metaphor applications in literary research, offering new perspectives for understanding the linguistic style and cultural connotations of local novels.

Although the above studies have made significant contributions to understanding the metaphorical meanings of specific words or concepts, they primarily focus on the surface structures of language, such as metaphors involving body parts or sensory verbs. They have not delved into the deeper structural aspects of metaphor, such as spatial metaphors. Spatial metaphors are particularly important in rural novels, as they are not merely linguistic embellishments but serve as critical tools for constructing complex themes and deepening emotional expression. Therefore, future research needs to further expand the analytical dimensions of metaphor and explore the multi-layered structures and functions of metaphors in local novels.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

This study, based on the theoretical framework of embodied cognitive linguistics, focuses on the phenomenon of vertical spatial metaphors in Chinese modern classical local novels. It aims to systematically analyze their linguistic representations, embodied cognitive mechanisms, cultural connotations, and narrative functions, exploring the multiple meanings and roles of metaphors in literary works.

#### *Research Questions*

What are the embodied cognitive foundations of vertical spatial metaphors? How do these metaphors, through spatial embodied cognition models, reflect the authors' bodily experiences and perceptions of life? How do readers achieve an understanding and emotional resonance with metaphors through embodied cognitive mapping during the interpretive process? What are the socio-cultural connotations of vertical spatial metaphors? How do these metaphors map onto the hierarchical structures, ethical order, and value systems of rural society? What are the similarities and differences in the use of vertical spatial metaphors in expressing cultural attitudes and critical stances in Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town*?

#### *Research Methodology*

To address the above questions, this study employs qualitative research methods, with textual analysis as the primary approach.

Firstly, this study selects Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, two classic local novels, as the primary research objects. Through a detailed interpretation of these two Chinese modern classical local novels, the study identifies typical linguistic expressions of vertical spatial metaphors, summarizes their main forms, and explores their roles in shaping linguistic style and artistic expression.

Secondly, the study applies embodied conceptual metaphor theory to analyze the cross-domain mapping mechanisms of vertical spatial terms in the novels, focusing on the

interaction between source domains and target domains. This analysis aims to reveal the embodied cognitive processes of vertical metaphors and their functions within the narrative context.

Thirdly, the study examines metaphors within the specific cultural context of rural society, investigating how these metaphors interact with the hierarchical structures, traditional ethics, and cultural value systems of rural communities. It further explores the socio-critical functions and cultural connotations of metaphors in the novels.

Finally, the study emphasizes the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives, including embodied cognitive linguistics, narratology, and cultural anthropology, throughout the research process. By combining theoretical and practical approaches, it seeks to construct a multidimensional research paradigm for metaphor analysis. Additionally, it reflects on the applicability of embodied cognitive metaphor theory in literary analysis and explores a theoretical framework and practical pathway for interdisciplinary integration between linguistics and literary studies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Core Concepts of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics*

Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), developed based on the theoretical foundations of cognitive linguistics, was proposed by Wang Yin (2014, 2020) within the context of Chinese language and culture. Its core principle, "Reality (Embodiment)--Cognition--Language," reveals that the formation and use of language are deeply rooted in human bodily experiences and cognitive processing. ECL emphasizes that experience forms the foundation of cognition, cognition elevates experience, and language serves as the organic integration of the two (Wang Yin, 2014, pp. 61, 63).

The innovative aspect of ECL lies in its dynamic and practical nature, particularly in providing new perspectives to explain the interplay between language, bodily experience, and cultural context. ECL not only focuses on how language expresses individual cognition and emotion but also examines how language constructs meaning through cultural adaptation and social practice. By establishing a dialectical relationship between "Reality--Cognition--Language," ECL builds a unique analytical framework, offering theoretical support for studies in linguistics and literature.

### *The Integration of Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Literary Analysis*

Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics provides a novel theoretical perspective and analytical tool for studying embodied conceptual metaphors in literature. As a significant pillar of ECL, Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory emphasizes the embodied cognitive essence of metaphor, offering a unique pathway for analyzing metaphorical phenomena in literary works. This section explores the integration of embodied conceptual metaphor theory with literary analysis, clarifying its specific applications in the study of spatial metaphors in Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels and establishing a solid theoretical foundation.

Firstly, Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory transcends the static definition of metaphor in traditional rhetoric, proposing that metaphor is fundamentally an embodied cognitive mechanism based on cross-domain mapping. Metaphors create embodied

conceptual mappings from a source domain to a target domain, using concrete and familiar experiences to understand abstract and unfamiliar concepts. This theory shifts the view of metaphor from merely a linguistic rhetorical device to an essential mode of thought and cognition. Applying this theory to literary analysis enables researchers to uncover authors' unique conceptualization processes, explore the embodied logic underlying literary language, and deeply understand the ideological connotations of the work through this embodied cognitive perspective. For instance, in Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels, authors often use "up" and "down" metaphors to construct characters' destinies and emotional spaces. The creation of these metaphors reflects the complex mappings between the source domain (spatial orientation) and the target domain (social hierarchy, emotional values).

Secondly, Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers new dimensions for analyzing the expressive techniques and narrative functions of literary metaphors. In traditional literary criticism, metaphors are often viewed as localized linguistic embellishments. However, Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory reveals the significance of metaphors as projections of deep conceptual systems. Through metaphors, authors creatively construct their unique conceptual worlds, with metaphors playing an irreplaceable role in character development, plot progression, and atmosphere creation. For example, in Lu Xun's *Hometown*, the metaphor of "on the ridge tiles" conveys a metaphorical narrative of familial decline, while in Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, the metaphor of "upstream" expresses the poetic dynamism of life's flow. These narrative metaphors are not mere linguistic ornaments but serve as ideological threads woven throughout the text.

Finally, Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory emphasizes the agency of readers in the process of metaphor comprehension, establishing a reader-centered interpretive principle for the study of literary metaphors. Traditional metaphor studies often focus on the creators of metaphors, overlooking the role of readers in the process of metaphor reception. Embodied Conceptual Metaphor Theory posits that the successful realization of a metaphor depends on readers' embodied cognitive mapping and emotional engagement during interpretation. In literary works, whether a metaphor evokes the intended emotional resonance or aesthetic experience largely depends on the reader's ability to utilize their embodied cognitive schemas to decode the metaphor. Incorporating this theory allows researchers to reexamine the artistic value and interactivity of literary metaphors from the perspective of readers' embodied cognitive responses and emotional experiences.

### **Vertical Spatial Metaphors of Chinese Modern Classical Local Novels from the Perspective of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics: A Study of *Hometown* and *Border Town***

#### *Linguistic Expressions and Embodied Cognitive Mechanisms of Vertical Spatial Metaphors*

Vertical spatial metaphors are grounded in human bodily experiences and spatial cognition. Through cross-domain mapping between the source and target domains, they transform concrete spatial relationships into more abstract social, emotional, and cultural imagery. This metaphorical mechanism is vividly employed in Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, where rich linguistic expressions and profound cultural connotations illustrate the tensions between individuals and society, as well as between ideals and reality.

In *Hometown*, the sentence, "On the ridge tiles, many withered stems of weeds swayed in the wind, clearly explaining why this old house was destined to change ownership," exemplifies how the spatial term "on" is metaphorically embodied through the imagery of "on



the ridge tiles." The ridge tiles, serving as the source domain, symbolize the cultural implications of "up" in traditional contexts--nobility, authority, and glory--metaphorically representing the once-prominent status of Lu Xun's family in the old society. However, the image of "withered stems of weeds" atop the ridge tiles presents a stark contrast to the positive cultural connotations associated with "up." This imagery metaphorically conveys the family's historical trajectory from prosperity to decline, highlighting the disintegration of their former grandeur.

From the perspective of embodied conceptual metaphor, the source domain of "on the ridge tiles" is mapped onto the target domain, representing the changes in the family's social status and destiny. Through this reversed metaphor, Lu Xun vividly depicts the family's decline from a high position to ruin, highlighting the erosion of familial glory under the forces of social transformation. When readers interpret the metaphor of "on the ridge tiles," they associate it with the cultural connotations of the vertical spatial concept of "up"--nobility and power--thus grasping the significance of "up" within the hierarchical framework of feudal society. When further connected with the imagery of "withered stems of weeds," readers can deeply perceive the close relationship between the family's decline and the shifts of the era. This embodied cognitive process not only enables readers to recognize the profound impact of social structures on individual fates but also evokes their resonance with Lu Xun's complex emotions--both a nostalgic reflection on the family's former glory and a critique of the inequities of the feudal system.

The brilliance of this metaphor lies in its use of the spatial relationship of "up" to draw readers into the rise and fall of the family's fortunes. As readers perceive the transformation of "on the ridge tiles" from glory to decay, they not only come to understand the historical context of the family's rise and decline but are also guided to reflect on the ruthlessness of the feudal hierarchical system and the profound impact of social change.

In *Border Town*, the phrase "At the foot of the pagoda lived a single family" uses "down" as a metaphor to represent the living conditions of the lower-class population in western Hunan. The "pagoda," as a towering structure, symbolizes the nobility and authority associated with "up," while "at the foot of the pagoda" conveys the modest life and social status of Cuicui and her grandfather through the spatial connotation of "down."

Through the mapping between the source and target domains, the spatial position in the source domain, "at the foot of the pagoda," is transformed into the target domain, representing the material scarcity and living conditions of the lower-class society in western Hunan. This metaphor of "at the foot of the pagoda" not only implies the reality of Cuicui and her grandfather's life on the margins of society, far from the hustle and bustle of the city, but also reflects their simple and peaceful lifestyle. The metaphorical use of the "up-down" relationship transforms "down" from its traditional connotation of inferiority into a symbol of serenity and tranquility, expressing Shen Congwen's unique embodied perception of local culture and harmony with nature.

For readers, the metaphor of "at the foot of the pagoda," through the mapping of "down," evokes a longing and resonance for a tranquil life. In the midst of the noise and pressure of modern society, readers, when interpreting this metaphor, naturally contrast it

with their own restless and busy lives, thus perceiving the serene beauty of life in western Hunan. This embodied cognitive process further strengthens readers' emotional connection and sense of identification with the lifestyle of Cuicui and her grandfather.

#### *The Emotional Function and Narrative Role of Vertical Metaphors*

Vertical spatial metaphors in novel narratives deepen emotional expression and drive plot development through emotional projection and narrative tension. In *Hometown* and *Border Town*, these metaphors not only externalize the authors' emotional intentions but also, through the participatory embodied cognition of readers, create an interactive dynamic between emotion and narrative.

In *Hometown*, the metaphor "under the dim yellow sky" constructs a strong emotional atmosphere through the oppressive spatial imagery. In the source domain, "under the sky" represents an enclosed and overshadowed space, metaphorically conveying a sense of oppression and hopelessness. The target domain points to the deterioration of the social environment and the confusion of individual spirits. This metaphorical expression reflects Lu Xun's profound concern and critique of the social conditions of old China.

The "dim yellow sky" is not merely a visual depiction of desolation and frailty but also a symbol of the heaviness and bleakness of social reality. In this metaphor, the village "under the sky" appears small and helpless, with the lives and sufferings of its inhabitants condensed into a seemingly static yet tension-filled image. Through this metaphor, Lu Xun projects his sense of hopelessness about society into his work, allowing readers to resonate deeply with these emotions during interpretation. For readers, this metaphor triggers an awareness of social predicaments. In their own lived experiences, the spatial imagery of "under the sky" readily evokes memories of confinement and oppression, as if the entire world is overshadowed by a powerless sky. Through this embodied cognitive process, readers can empathize with the characters' sense of insignificance and helplessness under societal pressure, drawing connections to struggles in their own lives. This emotional resonance transforms the metaphor into more than just a tool for Lu Xun's social critique—it also becomes a powerful medium for readers to reflect on societal issues.

In contrast, the metaphors of "sailing downstream" and "walking upstream along the dry road" in *Border Town* focus more on conveying the dynamic changes of emotions and the alternation of life's ups and downs. "Sailing downstream" symbolizes ease and comfort in favorable circumstances, reflecting the characters' contentment and tranquility during relatively smooth phases of life. On the other hand, "walking upstream along the dry road" represents the difficulty of going against the current, symbolizing the struggles and resistance faced in challenging situations.

Through the contrast between favorable and adverse circumstances, this metaphor conveys the tension of life and the hardships of growth. Readers, while interpreting this metaphor, can connect their own life experiences to the narrative. In times of ease, they may recall periods of comfort in their own lives; in moments of struggle, they may, through empathizing with the characters' difficulties, reflect on their own choices and perseverance when facing challenges. This emotional resonance created through metaphor not only

enhances the narrative's impact but also inspires readers to reflect on the transitions between ease and hardship in their own lives.

Beyond emotional expression, vertical metaphors also enhance the narrative's expressiveness by creating tension and dynamic transitions that drive the story forward. In *Border Town*, the metaphor "went up to the white pagoda, down to the vegetable garden, and then onto the boat" uses emotional and spatial shifts to depict Cuicui's inner emotional fluctuations and her journey of growth. The metaphor "went up to the white pagoda" reflects Cuicui's idealized pursuit of love and her lofty spiritual aspirations. The height of the white pagoda symbolizes the nobility and purity of love, embodying Cuicui's longing and anticipation for an idealized romance. However, "down to the vegetable garden" employs the metaphor of "down" to bring Cuicui back from the heights of her ideals to the grounded reality. The vegetable garden, as a physical space, represents both the mundane and the constraints of daily life. Through this metaphor, the author vividly portrays Cuicui's emotional struggle between her ideals and reality.

"Onto the boat" symbolizes Cuicui's emotional return and balance. The boat, as the shared living space for her and her grandfather, represents a simple and authentic attitude toward life. In this metaphor, "up" not only conveys Cuicui's emotional stability but also reflects her commitment to her way of life. Through the metaphorical transitions of the "white pagoda," the "vegetable garden," and the "boat," the author vividly illustrates Cuicui's emotional fluctuations and her eventual maturity.

For readers, the dynamic shifts in this metaphor, expressed through the spatial ups and downs, evoke emotional resonance. Readers can empathize with Cuicui's psychological struggle between pursuing ideal love and returning to the realities of life, thus feeling the contradictions and resilience inherent in her emotional growth. At the same time, this dynamic metaphor prompts readers to reflect on their own choices and compromises between ideals and reality. Cuicui's emotional return allows readers to realize that growth is not only about pursuing ideals but also about accepting reality and finding inner harmony.

The vertical metaphors in *Hometown* and *Border Town*, through their dual functions of emotional projection and narrative tension, deepen both the complexity of emotional expression and the richness of the narrative. These metaphors not only make the plot development more engaging but also build an emotional bridge between the text and the readers through their cognitive resonance, further enhancing the literary significance of the works.

#### *Cultural Projection and Social Significance of Vertical Metaphors*

In Lu Xun's *Hometown*, the description "In the deep blue sky hung a golden full moon; below it was a sandy beach by the sea, all planted with endless fields of green watermelons" employs vertical metaphors to vividly present social hierarchies and the life of farmers. The "sand beach" below, as the source domain, symbolizes the material space of farmers' lives and their position in the lower strata of society, while the "full moon" above, as the source domain, represents ideals and hope.

The “sand beach” below carries strong realism. Run Tu, as a typical representative of farmers, is closely connected to the sandy ground and watermelon fields, reinforcing the metaphor of “down.” This conveys the farmer’s daily toil alongside the land and their humble social status. In the target domain, this spatial metaphor transforms into the lower social position of farmers within the hierarchy, reflecting the deep-rooted issues of class division in traditional society. Through this metaphor, Lu Xun not only reveals the hardships of farmers’ daily lives and the inequalities of social hierarchy but also expresses his profound sympathy for their plight on a deeper level.

In contrast, the “full moon” above holds a symbolic significance of idealism. In Chinese cultural tradition, the “full moon” is often associated with beauty, reunion, and hope. In this context, the full moon in the “above” position symbolizes Lu Xun’s lofty social ideals—a vision of improving the fate of farmers and promoting social transformation. The contrast and tension between “above” and “below” highlight the vast gap between reality and ideals. Through this metaphor, Lu Xun conveys a reflection on the current social conditions and an anticipation of future societal reform.

For readers, this metaphor evokes strong cognitive and emotional effects. During the process of interpretation, the humble nature of the “sand beach” and the elevated status of the “full moon” create a stark contrast, drawing readers’ attention to the issue of social inequality. When readers perceive the “below” metaphor as reflecting the plight and helplessness of farmers, they are naturally reminded of the broader backwardness and oppression of society. Meanwhile, the “above” metaphor inspires a longing for a better society and a desire for change. As a result, readers not only experience the author’s profound and nuanced sympathy for the lives of farmers but also, through this cultural projection, are prompted to reflect on their own roles and significance in the pursuit of social transformation.

In Shen Congwen’s *Border Town*, the metaphor “The setting sun descended toward the upstream side where Cuicui’s home was” masterfully integrates spatial relationships with emotional expression, revealing the profound connections between nature, culture, and human life. “Upstream,” as the source domain, corresponds to abstract concepts such as purity, beauty, and ideals, while “descended” serves as a source domain symbolizing the fading of light and the impermanence of life.

“Upstream” represents the pristine and sublime qualities of the natural environment in western Hunan and symbolizes the serene and simple life shared by Cuicui and her grandfather. The purity of the upstream is not only a physical characteristic of elevation but also imbued with cultural ideals of beauty and harmony. In the target domain, “upstream” is closely tied to the lives of Cuicui and her grandfather, metaphorically representing an untainted and harmonious existence unspoiled by modernization. However, the dynamic metaphor of “descended” reveals, on an emotional level, the transience of life and the fragility of culture. “Descended” not only depicts the passage of time as the sun sets but also foreshadows the eventual disintegration of Cuicui’s family life—the death of her grandfather and the loss of her romantic aspirations.

This metaphor reflects Shen Congwen’s unique embodied perception of western Hunan culture. Through the tension between “upstream” and “descended,” Shen expresses both a

deep affection for the beauty of rural life and a recognition of the impact of modernization on traditional rural culture. Readers, in interpreting this metaphor, can feel the distinctive charm of western Hunan's natural and cultural landscape while also perceiving the vulnerability and crisis faced by rural society under the pressures of modernization.

For readers, the metaphor of "upstream" evokes a longing for unspoiled nature and culture, while the metaphor of "descended" places this longing within the inevitable flow of time, prompting deeper reflection on the impermanence of life and the impact of modernization. Through the contrast between "upstream" and "descended," readers not only perceive the poetic qualities of western Hunan culture but also grasp the unavoidable end of traditional ways of life. This dual significance of the metaphor inspires readers to contemplate the relationship between tradition and modernity while fostering a deeper emotional connection with the text.

In *Border Town*, the phrase "There was also a local tax bureau, located in a small temple beneath the riverside street outside the town" uses the metaphor of "beneath" to reveal the marginalization of power structures and their cultural significance. In the source domain, "beneath" symbolizes obscurity and secondary importance, while in the target domain, it reflects the weakened status of official authority in the social fabric of Border Town.

The local tax bureau, as an official institution, is situated in a small temple beneath the riverside street. This "beneath" positioning not only highlights the formalism and fragility of the local bureaucratic system but also metaphorically underscores the dominant role of grassroots forces in the rural community. This metaphor reveals the unique power structure of Border Town: official authority is marginalized, while the true maintenance of social order relies on grassroots autonomy and the governance of local elites.

This metaphor allows readers, while engaging with the social dynamics of western Hunan, to not only recognize the strength of grassroots order but also reflect on the relationship between power and local culture in modern society. Through cross-domain mapping, the metaphor of "beneath" reminds readers that apparent official authority may not play a decisive role in remote rural societies; instead, the true stabilizing force often lies in the spontaneous order of the community. This understanding deepens readers' comprehension of the unique operational models of rural societies and prompts reflection on the coexistence of modern administrative systems and local cultures.

The vertical spatial metaphors in *Hometown* and *Border Town* are not merely simple spatial expressions but are imbued with profound socio-cultural significance. Through the mapping of source and target domains, these metaphors reveal the authors' deep insights into social and cultural structures, while simultaneously evoking both emotional and intellectual resonance in readers. This multi-layered metaphorical expression enriches the cultural connotations and social implications of rural literature, making it more impactful and meaningful.

## Research Summary

### Research Findings

By applying the theory of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics to the systematic analysis of vertical spatial metaphors in Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, this study has yielded the following key findings:

Vertical spatial metaphors play a significant role in shaping character images, enhancing environmental atmosphere, and symbolizing social relationships. Both authors skillfully utilize the spatial imagery and cultural connotations embedded in the directional terms "up" and "down" to creatively express the inner worlds of their characters and their social circumstances. For example, the transformation of the imagery of "on the ridge tiles" in *Hometown* vividly illustrates the decline of Lu Xun's family, while the imagery of "beneath the pagoda" in *Border Town* vividly depicts the simple and tranquil lifestyle of the people of western Hunan.

The spatial schemas underpinning vertical spatial metaphors are rooted in the authors' personal experiences and cultural identities. Whether it is the binary opposition of "up" and "down" in the vertical space constructed by Lu Xun or the dynamic and complementary spatial imagery of "up" and "down" created by Shen Congwen, both are deeply grounded in the authors' perceptions of their era and rural environments. Through metaphor, the authors transform their personalized spatial experiences into universal emotional expressions and cultural metaphors, eliciting resonance among readers.

Vertical spatial metaphors serve unique functions in narrative progression and emotional expression. Comparative analysis reveals that Lu Xun often uses shifts between "up" and "down" to create tragic tension, highlighting the suffering caused by social changes, while Shen Congwen employs the dynamic flow of "up" and "down" to illustrate the vicissitudes of his characters' fates. Both authors use metaphor as a driving force for narration, guiding readers to grasp the inner journeys and the rise and fall of the characters' destinies within intricate plotlines.

Vertical spatial metaphors carry rich socio-cultural connotations. The oppositional "up" and "down" in Lu Xun's works reflect his critique of the rigid social hierarchies of feudal society during the May Fourth period. In contrast, the fluid "up" and "down" in Shen Congwen's works express his concern for the crisis of rural culture in the context of modernity. Through metaphor, the authors engage in artistic exploration of cultural traditions and contemporary issues, provoking readers to deeply reflect on personal circumstances and the fate of the nation.

The perspective of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics effectively broadens the scope of literary metaphor studies. By focusing on the embodied basis, cultural grounding, and cognitive mechanisms of metaphor, Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics transcends the traditional literary research paradigm that views metaphor as merely a rhetorical device. It provides a new theoretical lens for comprehensively interpreting the aesthetic experiences and creative intentions of authors. Furthermore, research on embodied metaphors highlights the methodological value of integrating linguistic analysis with literary interpretation.

### Research Contributions and Future Prospects

This study, grounded in the framework of embodied-cognitive linguistics, conducts a systematic investigation of vertical spatial metaphors in Lu Xun's *Hometown* and Shen Congwen's *Border Town*, contributing to the fields of theoretical expansion, metaphor analysis, literary cognition, and reader reception studies in the following ways.

#### *(a) Theoretical Contribution: Expanding the Application of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics in Literary Metaphor Research*

Traditional literary studies often regard metaphor as a rhetorical device, primarily focusing on its artistic effects and expressive techniques. In contrast, this study, adopting an embodied cognitive linguistic perspective, explores the bodily foundations, embodied cognitive mechanisms, and cultural grounding of metaphors, thereby providing a novel theoretical framework for literary metaphor research. The findings reveal that embodied cognitive linguistics offers critical insights into the intricate relationships between metaphor, authors' bodily experiences, emotional expressions, and cultural identity. This study not only deepens the embodied cognitive understanding of literary metaphors but also broadens the theoretical scope of literary studies, offering a multidimensional analytical approach for the interpretation of classic literary works.

#### *(b) Methodological Contribution: Establishing Metaphor Analysis as an Effective Approach to Interpreting Authors' Embodied Cognitive Styles and Value Orientations*

This study demonstrates that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a crucial means through which authors perceive the world, evaluate society, and construct value systems. Through an analysis of *Hometown* and *Border Town*, the findings reveal that Lu Xun employs the binary opposition of "up-down" to critique the hierarchical structure of feudal society, while Shen Congwen utilizes a complementary, fluid "up-down" spatial metaphor to express the traditional Chinese philosophy of harmony between humans and nature, along with poetic aesthetics. This discovery further confirms that metaphor is not only a projection of an author's ideological consciousness but also a vital tool for revealing their aesthetic orientation and sociocultural engagement, providing a novel analytical approach for literary embodied cognition and aesthetic studies.

#### *(c) Narrative Contribution: Unveiling the Embodied Cognitive Interaction Between Authors and Readers Through Embodied Conceptual Metaphor*

This study reveals that embodied conceptual metaphors function not only as a means of authorial embodied cognition but also as a bridge for emotional interaction between authors and readers. Through concrete linguistic expressions, authors transform individual experiences into perceptible imagery, guiding readers in metaphorical interpretation and meaning construction by drawing on their own lived experiences. The findings indicate that metaphors not only enhance emotional resonance between readers and texts but also increase the interpretability and accessibility of literary works. This discovery expands reader-response theory, emphasizing the central role of metaphor in literary embodied cognition and aesthetic experience.

Future studies can expand in the following areas.

- (a) Deepen cross-cultural comparisons of vertical metaphors across different periods and literary genres.
- (b) Combine cognitive science and experimental psychology to explore the specific emotional and cognitive effects of metaphor embodiment on readers.
- (c) Using rural literature as a foundation, further investigate how metaphors adapt and manifest in the contexts of globalization and modernization.

These directions can further enhance the depth and breadth of literary metaphor theory and provide more multidimensional perspectives for understanding the cultural value of literary works.

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