

# A contrastive study of death metaphors in english and chinese

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### The Metaphorical Nature of Death\*\*

Death, a profound and universal experience, has been a subject of fascination and inquiry throughout human history. One intriguing aspect of this topic is the way we use language to grapple with its complexity and significance.

### What is the Conceptual Metaphor of Death?

In cognitive linguistics, the conceptual metaphor theory posits that we understand abstract concepts, such as death, through metaphorical mappings from more concrete ones, like physical experiences. Death is often conceptualized metaphorically as a journey, a destination, or a state of being.

### Metaphors of Life and Death

Life and death are often juxtaposed in metaphors, highlighting their intertwined nature. For instance, life may be seen as a journey, while death is the final destination. Alternatively, life can be portrayed as a flame or a light, and death as its extinguishing.

### Linguistic Metaphors of Death

Metaphors pervade our linguistic expressions about death. Some common examples include:

- "He passed away" (journey metaphor)
- "She departed this life" (destination metaphor)

- "He died" (change of state metaphor)

### **Examples of Dying Metaphors**

Metaphors can become so commonplace that their metaphorical nature is lost. These are known as "dying metaphors." Examples include:

- "Kick the bucket"
- "Meet your maker"
- "Push up daisies"

### **Metaphor vs. Dead Metaphor**

A metaphor is a figurative expression that compares two unlike things, while a dead metaphor is one that has become so ingrained in language that its metaphorical origin is no longer apparent.

### **The 4 Concepts of Death**

Philosopher Ronald De Sousa identifies four primary conceptualizations of death:

1. Annihilation: Death as the cessation of existence
2. Transformation: Death as a transition to another realm
3. Judgment: Death as an assessment of one's life
4. Absence: Death as the loss of a person from our presence

### **Metaphorical Ways of Saying Death**

To soften the harshness of death, we often use euphemisms or metaphors, such as:

- "He's gone home"
- "She's at rest"
- "He's with the angels"

### **Symbolic Metaphors for Death**

Certain symbols have become synonymous with death, such as:

- The skull and crossbones
- The grim reaper
- The hourglass

## **Orwell's Dying Metaphor**

George Orwell argued that dying metaphors, like "kick the bucket," can become meaningless and hinder our understanding of death. He believed we should strive to use fresh and evocative language to describe this profound experience.

### **Metaphor of "Dead End"**

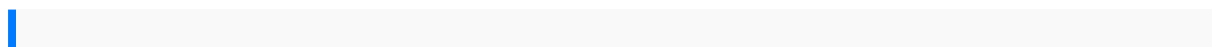
The metaphor of a "dead end" represents a situation that is hopeless or lacking in potential. This metaphor highlights the finality and futility associated with death.

### **Metaphor of "Little Death"**

The "little death" metaphor refers to a brief moment of intense pleasure or release, such as the climax of a sexual experience. This metaphor suggests that death can be a pleasurable or desirable experience.

### **Metaphor of "Dying of the Light"**

The metaphor of "dying of the light" refers to the gradual fading away of something, such as the sun or a person's life. This metaphor evokes a sense of impermanence and the inevitability of death.



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