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Chinese Neologisms and Metaphorical Potential in Pedagogy

Claudio Gebbia
Sapienza Università di Roma, Italia

Abstract Neologisms are a group of words that have undergone a significant transformation from top-down dissemination to a more horizontal, grassroots-driven spread, particularly fuelled by the rise of the Internet and computer-mediated communication. In this paper, I examine the intersection of linguistic and cultural phenomena, focussing on the Chinese context, guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Conceptual Blending Theory. The study seeks to unravel the cognitive and cultural mechanisms underpinning their formation and propagation. Furthermore, the exploration extends into the pedagogical potential of these linguistic phenomena, particularly their role in enhancing learners' cultural awareness, motivation, and metaphoric competence.

Keywords Chinese neologisms. Metaphor. Pedagogy. Chinese. Foreign language.

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1 Introduction

> "Metaphor is also used to fill terminological gaps"
> (Black 1962; Ortony 1975)

In recent years, Chinese neologisms have drawn increasing scholarly attention for their rich cognitive, social, and cultural implications. As Quemada (2009) and Adamo and Della Valle (2017) have highlighted, neology reflects a language's ability to adapt to historical and sociocultural shifts, ensuring its vibrancy and relevance. These lexical innovations often emerge through metaphorical and metonymic processes that not only expand the expressive potential of the Chinese language, but also reflect evolving conceptualisations within society. While several studies have examined neologisms from linguistic and sociological perspectives (Zhou 2014; Hou 2023), fewer have explored them through the combined lens of metaphor theory and pedagogical reflection.

The aim of this article is to offer a critical review of the literature on Chinese neologisms, with a particular focus on their metaphorical formation and cognitive structure, as interpreted through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2010) and Blending Theory (Fauconnier, Turner 2002). In doing so, the paper seeks to lay the foundations to inspire the following question: How can the metaphorical nature of Chinese neologisms be interpreted, and what potential, if any, do these features hold for foreign language teaching? This is not an empirical study, but a theoretically grounded synthesis of existing research, which also reflects on possible pedagogical implications – especially in terms of fostering intercultural competence and learner motivation.

By mapping key metaphorical mechanisms in neologism formation and considering how these may support educational aims, the article invites further empirical inquiry into how contemporary lexis might be integrated into teaching practices for learners of Chinese as a foreign language.

2 Why Neologisms?

Although most laypeople may be less familiar with the word 'neologism' and more used to say its actual meaning, i.e. 'new word', upon hearing it, the mind naturally looks for some examples that fit this category. That itself is a sign of how interesting neologisms are. If on the one hand, most scholars and non-scholars alike may find neologisms interesting and can intuitively make out a definition, on the other, maybe only a restricted circle of people know exactly what they really entail. In fact, definitions of this linguistic phenomenon not only have undergone some changes in the history of language

(Li, Chen 2021, 881), but also move from a more general one to more specifics and specialised others.[1] Regardless, whatever the nature of the definition describing neologisms, the substrate is a need–the need to evolve and therefore to name objects, concepts, even identities brought about by these evolutions advocated for by neologisms.

2.1 The Past of Chinese Neologisms

According to the linguist and lexicologist Quemada (2009, 23), neology attends to innovations in all areas of the social, economic, cultural, and scientific life, thus allowing each language to be, in the true sense, a living language.[2] Likewise, Adamo and Della Valle (2017, 7) define neology as the ability of the lexicon to adapt to historical, sociocultural changes, as well as to scientific and technological innovations. As for Chinese neologisms, in their inspiring essay, Jing-Schmidt and Hsieh (2019) expound how important they are to lexicon and communication (514), and how, in the past, neologisms manifested as lexical innovation produced from knowledge transmission and exchange in all fields (518). Historically, the importance and relevance of neologisms as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon has already been stated by scholars since the middle of the twentieth century, and in the history of Chinese language, their importance was also strongly established by one of the most influential Chinese linguists (Lü 1984).[3] Neologisms may have played a significant role in encouraging the gradual shift towards polysyllabism in Chinese language (Masini 1993, 122), and with the intensification of the relationships between China and abroad, Chinese neologisms have started increasingly to find their way into academic circles. In the past, diffusion of neologisms occurred only vertically top-down from the more educated members of society to divulge a controlled and selected knowledgeable vocabulary. In modern times, with the development of technology combined with the power of the Internet, neoformations are also horizontally spread and are even able to influence institutions via a bottom-up movement (Jing-Schmidt, Hsieh 2019, 518). Many studies have

1 For an overview of different definitions of neologisms given in the past, cf. Bian 2021; Li, Chen 2021; Che 2015; Guo, Kang 2008.

2 For a more comprehensive view on the different categories of neology, cf. Quemada 2009; Pruvost, Sablayrolles 2016, and for those in Chinese (at times definitions may slightly vary) cf. Gao, Liu 1958; Shi 1991; Yu 1992; Chen 1999; Yu 2001; Bulfoni 2005; Luo 2013; Jing-Schmidt, Hsieh 2019; Zhang 2020 *inter alia*.

3 Jing-Schmidt, Hsieh 2019, 514. The first systematic studies on the subject can be found in Gao, Liu 1958 and Novotná 1969; 1967, although these mainly concern loanwords and hybrids.

been undertaken on the subject of neologisms, both in China and worldwide, dealing with their definition and classification;[4] their structure and morphological composition,[5] as well as historical and etymological studies,[6] but also investigations concerning neologisms, new media and the internet.[7] One influential academic publication that consolidates the importance of neologisms is in the *Zhongguo Yuyan Shenghuo Zhuangkuang Baogao* 中国语言生活状况报告 (The Language Situation in China), issued by the State Language Commission (Guojia Yuyan Ziyuan Jiance yu Yanjiu Zhongxin 国家语言资源检测与研究中心), established in 2005 (Chen, Liu, Zhang 2022, 283; Pellin 2014, 322). Since 2006, this yearly publication provides a chapter and an appendix with the buzzwords and neologisms of the previous year. Buzzwords are also featured in one of the first periodicals in English in continental China since 1999, the *Shanghai Daily*, also limitedly available online.[8] Besides these publications, several non-academic, reference books and other websites and blogs are also available for the public.

2.2 Chinese Neologisms Today

Although neoformations' morphological processes still remain unvaried, it goes without saying that Neologisms nowadays spread greatly via the Chinese Internet Language (Li 2023; Chen, Liu, Zhang 2022; Basciano, Bareato2020; Jing-Schmidt, Hsieh 2019; cf. also Yu 2001), which pertains to the scope of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), and is currently widely addressed to as Netspeak (Crystal 2006, 33; 2018, 56).[9] The proliferation of neologisms within the netizens' speech and virally invading the media in the last three decades has definitely boosted more publications and studies within academic circles in order for researchers to further the debate as well as to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.[10] Additionally, it compelled experts to compile

4 Cf. Wang 1992; Bulfoni 2005; Guo, Kang 2008, among others.

5 Yu, Wang, Sun 2003; Liu 2010; Wang 2012; Ceccagno 2016; Glushkova, Voronina 2017, among others.

6 Masini 1993b; Huang 2012; Lackner, Amelung, Kurtz 2014; Jing-Schmidt, Hsieh 2019.

7 Chang 2007; Liu, Tao 2012; Lung Lai, Ty Ng 2014; Song 2020; Li, Chen 2021.

8 According to Basciano, Bareato 2020, the column is no longer available from 2017, even though some more recent buzzwords from 2020 on can be found. .

9 In this work for 'neologisms' it is meant those neoformations mediated via CMC, also Chinese Internet Language (cf. Bulfoni 2010; Chen, Liu, Zhang 2022) i.e. 'netspeak neologisms' rather than those coming from other sources.

10 Bian 2021; Chen, Liu, Zhang 2022, 278; Kang 2008, 1-3; Wang 2016; 2022.

specialised lexicographical works, such as dictionaries and compendia, in order to provide systematic and ready-to-use databases to aid all users. Together with many yearbooks and dictionaries published in the decade between 1988 and 1998, which even doubled in the following decade (Pellin 2014, 321), Kang (2008, 1), states that between 1980-2007 more than 60 dictionaries were published,[11] whereas according to Wang (2016, 50), 16 compendia were published on the Internet Language in the period from 2006 to 2015.[12] More recently, two important specialised dictionaries were also published: the *Xinciyu Dacidian* 新词语大词典 (The Neologisms Compendium) (1978-2018) and the *Hanyu Xinciyu Cidian* 汉语新词语词典 (The Chinese Neologisms Dictionary) (2000-18).

Related to lexicography is one last factor that played a major role in establishing the value and relevance of netspeak neologisms; that is, many have entered authoritative dictionaries such as the *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* 现代汉语词典 (Dictionary of Modern Chinese).[13] This is the final victory for many of these new words that lose their neological statute by officially becoming part of the lexicon (Adamo, Della Valle 2017, 16).

Related to the rapid advances of computer technology crossed with linguistic research is the advent of corpus linguistics and corpora research, which also have impacted upon Chinese linguistics investigation.[14] This shed a new light on the linguistic analysis of neologisms as

> corpora allow qualitative and quantitative, synchronic and diachronic investigations of the language, providing factual, frequency, and interaction evidence for linguistic analyses. (Wallis 2019 quoted in Basciano, Bareato 2020, 8)

Simply put, this means that quantitatively, corpus queries are valuable to provide statistical relevance about neologisms, providing data about their frequency, whereas qualitatively, it provides

11 Duan 2010 declares instead that until the time of his writing, neologisms dictionaries surpass 40 volumes.

12 For a more comprehensive historical view, cf. Chen et al. 2022.

13 To know more about neologisms entering the dictionary cf. Xia, Zhang 2016; "Xiandai Hanyu Cidian Di6ban Shoulu Beidaibiao Leiren Deng Xinci" 现代汉语词典第6版收录被代表雷人等新词 (The Sixth Edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary Includes New Words Such as 'Shocking'). *Sina Mobile* (2012/07/16). news.sina.cn/sa/2012-07-16/detail-ikmxzfmk1169020.d.html; "Xinban 'Xiandai Hanyu Cidian' Xinci Dahuizong" 新版《现代汉语词典》新词大汇总 (A Collection of New Words in the New Edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary). *Sohu* (2019). www.sohu.com/a/332295525_312708.

14 For a deeper understanding of the subject, cf. Basciano et al. (2020). Studies that investigate on neologisms and corpora are Gong, Hong 2019; Ma 2018.

precious evidence about its use, informing us about collocations and concordances, and telling us about their development.

Additionally, it seems to be widely concurred upon that neologisms improve comprehension of socio-cultural phenomena and written comprehension of particular written materials (blogs, reviews, websites).[15] This, in turn, contributes to developing the written production and interaction skills when faced with writing correspondence like short messages and texts, and creative writing (Masini et al. 2016).

Finally, among several studies found in mainland China, many authors also seem to agree that neologisms improve interest in the study of Chinese,[16] an important premise to consider neologisms from the perspective of motivation studies to investigate their role in impacting students' motivation in learning Chinese as a foreign language (cf. Gebbia 2025).

After stating the reasons from the existing literature for such an impactful linguistic and cultural phenomenon, the following sections shall explore the salience of neologisms within metaphor studies and in relation to pedagogy.

3 Neologisms Metaphorical Power and Potential

In the previous section, it was mentioned that many studies and investigations, largely conducted in mainland China, have been carried out on the topic of Chinese neologisms. Some of these also link them with what is one of the very acts of neology itself–metaphor. Here, Chinese neologisms will be addressed in light of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the Conceptual Blending Theory, which will be briefly expounded together with a general overview of the studies on metaphor in Chinese.

3.1 Linguistic and Conceptual Metaphor

Just the same as was stated for neologisms, metaphor can also be a powerful trope for communication. In the past, but also nowadays in the popular mind, metaphor was and is, literally, mostly judged by its cover–its linguistic appearance. As Kövecses and Benczes (2010, ix) point out, metaphor was mainly defined in three ways: "(1) metaphor is a property of words; it is a linguistic phenomenon […]. (2) [it] is

15 Cai 2005; Gao, He 2008; Gong, Hong 2019; Xing, Bai 2012; Yang 2017; Yu 2011; Zheng 2022 *inter alia*.

16 Cf. Bai 2007; Chen 2012; Wu, Song 2019; Yang 2017; Zheng 2022 *inter alia*.

used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose, […] (3) [it] is based on a resemblance between the two entities that are compared and identified". Next, they go on explaining that since metaphor was seen merely as a figure of speech, it was thought to be totally dispensable, both from communication as from thought (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, x). In 1980, with the seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), it was shown that metaphor, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, could not be dispensed of at all, yet it indeed permeates our thought as it does our conventional, everyday language. Their claim was that:

i. It's not a property of words, per se, but of concepts;
ii. Its function is to better understand certain concepts, and not just for the sake of arts or aesthetics;
iii. It is often not based on similarity;
iv. Ordinary people as well, not just artists or talents use it effortlessly in everyday life;
v. It is not a mere linguistic ornament, but it is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning (Kövecses,Benczes 2010, x).

Metaphor, albeit with some cultural variations (see § 3.3), it is entrenched in our concepts, it can shape the way with think – like in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (1939) –[17] and also relates deeply with, as it is shaped by, our bodily experiences, otherwise defined as embodiment.[18] This is called the contemporary theory of metaphor. In our mind, we create mental domains, which we then cross onto one another, outlining cross-domain mappings (from a source domain – corresponding to a concrete experience, to a target domain – a more abstract concept).[19] Therefore, conceptual metaphors are at the core of the metaphorisation process; language is their outer expression and realisation (Ortony 1993, 209).[20] While this paper will not go into details about the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, another concept related to it will be addressed–that of image schema – for the sake of the examples presented later on. Image-schema, much like some sort of archetypes, "are primitives that structure rich images. [Their] structure of the source domain is used in reasoning about

17 As also observed by Link 2013, 128.

18 The use of the term is quite idiosyncratic, as objected by Link 2013, 129, as the way it is used by Lakoff and Johnson does not correspond to what 'to embody' truly stands for. Nevertheless, the term is now fully used by the specialists of the field.

19 The source-target mappings happen in reverse order, as in LOVE IS A JOURNEY or LOVE AS JOURNEY. To know more cf. Lakoff, Johnson 1980; Kövecses, Benczes 2010a; Ortony 1993; Semino, Demjén 2017. As Link 2013, 118 pointed out, funny how the terms 'source', 'target' and 'mapping' are also conceived metaphorically.

20 For a definition of linguistic metaphor, cf. Littlemore, Low 2006; Philip 2016 *inter alia*.

the target domain" (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 212).[21] In other words, "[t]hese are abstract, preconceptual structures that emerge from our recurrent experiences of the world" (Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987 quoted in Kövecses 2016, 18).[22]

3.2 The Blending Theory of Metaphor

A further advance in the modern theory of metaphor was supplied by the Blending Theory, theorised by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Their theory is in turn grounded in the works of Grady and Johnson (1997), with their notion of primary metaphor and conflation, as well as in the Neural Theory of Metaphor of Narayanan (1997).[23] Altogether, they form the Integrated Theory of Primary Metaphor.

Primary metaphors are in a sense to be understood as produced in association with image-schema, which simply put, are essential and basic schematic concepts; they constitute cause-effect correspondences (like AFFECTION IS WARMTH) dictated by our subjective experience of the world (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 213). Each of these 'atomic' metaphorical parts "has a minimal structure and arises naturally, automatically, and unconsciously through everyday experience by means of conflation, during which cross-domain associations are formed" giving rise to more 'molecular' complex metaphors (Lakoff, Johnson 1999, 46, 49). 'Conflation' is a cognitive phenomenon happening at the very early stages of child development during learning: young children's subjective non-sensorimotor and sensorimotor experiences are involuntarily merged, undifferentiated from one another as they cannot distinguish between the two domains.[24] It is during this period that the cross-domain associations mentioned above establish; only later in life are children then able to differentiate between the two,[25] even though still preserving the established associations, which in the form of mappings, underlie conceptual (more complex) metaphors – e.g. "A *warm* smile" (Lakoff, Johnson 1999, 46, 49; emphasis added).

21 One of the examples given by the authors is that of 'physical traps' that are mapped onto 'metaphorical traps' (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 212). Other examples are container, source-path-goal, degree of closeness, direction, and amount of force (Lakoff 2008, 30).

22 For the criticism made to this view of metaphor, cf. the literature available, some of which are listed in Yu 1998, 33. Cf. also Kövecses 2016, 24-5.

23 Cf. Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 213. This also includes the neural models constructed by Regier 1996 and Bailey 1997. Cf. Lakoff 2008, 28.

24 For the experiment details documenting all the stages of conflation, cf. Johnson's dissertation (1997).

25 This is defined as 'the period of differentiation' (Lakoff, Johnson 1999, 46).

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These two notions are substantiated by the Neural Theory of Metaphor (NTM), which finds its cognitive scientific base in the Neural Theory of Language (NTL), advocated by Lakoff and Feldman (Lakoff 2008, 17), highlighting the importance of neural cluster co-activation and the principle that "neurons that fire together, wire together";[26] that means that neurons or neuronal clusters – nodes – that have been originally activated together due to a specific experiential or learning event, form a sort of mirroring link, connecting premotor/SMA (Supplementary Motor Area) cortex (responsible for performing actions) with the parietal cortex (integrating perception). This means that the mirror neurons are 'multimodal': they simulate both when acting and when 'receiving', or even imagining the action (Lakoff 2008, 19). The link will be strengthened whenever the same event occurrence startles spread activation, reinforcing the synapses.[27] Eventually, "[t]he meaning of concrete concepts is directly embodied in this manner" (Lakoff 2008, 19). That is why we would 'experience' warmth (for instance, of a smile), even though no warmth may actually be happening. In other words, we would 'feel' metaphorical warmth (that is, entailment of node C in the network characterizing another conceptual domain – affection), as it had previously been linked to feeling literal warmth (entailment of neuronal cluster B – temperature), caused by a sequence of neural activations A when being hugged or held. Therefore, NTL served to explain NTM, and how metaphors are subconsciously created in the mind, with the formation of mappings and the creation of image-schema and primary metaphors. This mechanism of metaphorical inferences can be modelled precisely (Narayanan 1997) using neural computational modelling (Lakoff 2008, 28).[28]

The Integrating/Blending Theory of Metaphor (BTM) brings cross-domain mappings created with metaphors to another level. As stated above, conceptual (more complex) metaphors are mappings created from a source to target domain, in other words, understanding a target in terms of the source (Lakoff 2008, 31). The focus of BTM is not just the superficial mapping but also the underlying networks that are really responsible for these metaphors (Fauconnier 2018). In BTM, domains are referred to as 'inputs' (and can also be more than two) and conceptual blends create further neural bindings

26 For this, cf. Hebb's neuropsychological theory (1949).

27 This process of neural strengthening is called 'neural recruitment' (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 214; 1999, 55). For a more thorough explanation of the theory, cf. Feldman, Narayanan 2004; Feldman 2008; Lakoff 2008.

28 Regier 1997 has constructed a neural computational model for how a range of spatial relations concepts could be computed by the brain. Narayanan 1997 has constructed a neural computational model of the structure of events, that is, X-schemas (Lakoff 2008, 24).

between the source input entities and the target input entities of that metaphor, resulting in the emergence of a new entity or inference (Lakoff 2008, 32). Moreover, the inputs relate to a more general domain, called 'generic space' and created independently from the inputs, containing the starting general characteristics applicable to the input spaces. Selected material from the inputs involved (unlike regular conceptual metaphor, where strictly elements from the source are mapped onto the target), which may or may not constitute a conceptual metaphor, project into another structure, called 'the blend' "where the new emergent structure is set up, allowing for further inferences or new expressions" (Dancygier 2008, 32).[29] In the words of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 218) "A blended space is a mental space that imaginatively combines elements of at least two other mental spaces that are structured by our ordinary long-term conceptual system".

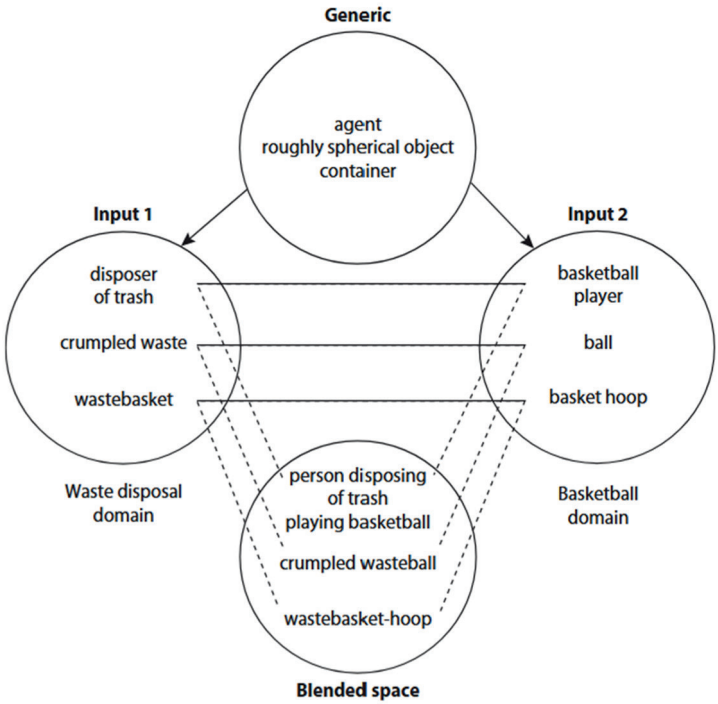

Figure 1 Playing trashcan basketball (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, 281)

29 Kövecses and Benczes (2010a, 269) mention the case of 'the grim reaper'.

An example of this process is provided in Figure 1. Several typologies of blends are distinguished in Fauconnier and Turner (2002), although these will not be addressed here due to space constraints.[30] The essential aspect of blending is that the perspective constructed is solely context-dependent of a specific blend and not as an overarching shift in meaning (Dancygier 2008, 31). In fact,

> Blending theory is centrally concerned with the use of[…] conceptual structure in particular examples. That is, […] conceptual integration: how conceptual structures are combined for use in particular cases, especially in imaginative cases. (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, 218)

Finally,

> CBT is less interested in the effect of one mapping, and centres its attention on the online spontaneous communicative effects of giving a tight and unique form to a complex set of various issues and attitudes. (Dancygier 2008, 33)

3.3 Cultural Variation

It seems now clearer how the modern theory of metaphor can help interpret linguistic neoformations, offering a fresh perspective on the functioning of specific linguistic phenomena, like polysemy and the evolution of meaning (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, xii). Before addressing the topic of metaphor and neologisms, it is worth mentioning that since subjective experiences may slightly vary among people, while many primary metaphors, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 215) pointed out, can be found to be (near)universal, as we do share common bodily and brain experiences, complex metaphor arising from those can indeed be culture-specific (Yu 2008, 259), much like painting similar or different pictures on similar canvases. Therefore, as "they [metaphors] make use of cultural information, they may differ significantly from culture to culture" (Yu 2008, 259). Cultural information entails that the embodied metaphorical inferences are not just subjected to the individual mental structure, but are influenced by different cultural models, which are "intersubjectively shared cultural schemas that function to interpret experience and guide

30 An introduction on these is provided in Kövecses, Benczes 2010, 277-8 and Kövecses 2006, § 11. Cf. also Fauconnier, Turner 2008. Another stage of the blending process can also occur, a *backwards projection* (blend → input) described in the blend example 'silver tsunami' in Dancygier 2008, 31.

action in a wide variety of domains including events, institutions, and physical and mental objects" (Gibbs Jr 1999, 153). A cultural model could also simply be defined as "any coherent organizations of human experience shared by people" (Kövecses 2005, 193). It characterises not only abstract concepts,[31] but also more concrete physical objects, which only require a literal understanding (Kövecses 2005, 193). For example, a cognitive model like 'anger', when applied to Chinese culture, it is culturally modelled and mapped also as *qi* 气 (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, 200) reflecting the "widespread model of cognition distributed across members of a speech community" (Gibbs Jr 1999, 154). When talking about cultural variation in metaphor, two kinds can be distinguished: cross-cultural (or intercultural) and intracultural (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, 215). In this paper, only the former will be addressed briefly and in relation to the Chinese culture. Among the causes of intercultural variation, Kövecses and Benczes (2010, 218) mention i) a broader sociocultural context, defined as "the governing principles and the key concepts in a given culture" influencing social but also personal concerns and interests; this point explains why the Chinese anger model is still not so far from ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER, even though, as it is related to Traditional Chinese Medicine, it can be present in different parts of the body, and most importantly, it does not need to have a specific temperature (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, 201, 219; Yu 1998, § 3.3, § 3.6). Variations can also depend on ii) natural, physical and historical environment, which goes without saying, shapes people's embodied experiences, memory, and consequently, vocabulary as well. An example that may come to mind for Chinese can be found in the saying *he xibeifeng* 喝西北风 (lit. 'Drink the northwest wind' = 'to be in dire straits'). Finally, iii) different cognitive preferences and style, impacting on what Kövecses (2006, 246) calls the 'differential experiential focus', suggesting a different attuning of people to their embodied experiences in relation to the target domain, also in the form of life choices.[32] Overall, Kövecses (2005, § 4) points out that the metaphorical variations that can occur outside of the 'congruent metaphors' – metaphors that follow congruently the generic schema – are respectively in a) range of source domains to conceptualise target domains (Kövecses 2005, 70). One example the author mentions for Chinese and also cited in Yu (1998) is the combination HAPPINESS IS FLOWERS IN THE HEART. Conversely, b) scope of the source refers to "the set of target domains

31 Even though scholarly opinions vary; some claim that cultural models for abstract concepts exist without prior metaphorical understanding, and others believe that they are inherently metaphorical Kövecses 2005, 193. To follow this discussion in relation to cultural models and metaphor, cf. Kövecses 2005, § 9.

32 For a more comprehensive explanation about the causes of variation in metaphor, cf. Kövecses (2006, § 10).

to which a particular source domain can apply" (Kövecses 2005, 72). For instance, for many western languages, the target BUILDINGS can be paired with THEORIES, RELATIONSHIPS, CAREER, COMPANY etc., while it may not be the case for other languages. In addition, c) preferential conceptualisation, a gradient of the first category, means that the conceptualisation methods of the metaphors are roughly the same, but speakers of the language may have a preference for specific ones (Kövecses 2005, 82); this is the case of the anger metaphor, which for Chinese can happen either congruently following ANGER IS HEAT (ex. *ta fahuole* 他发火了 'he emitted fire') or ANGER IS *qi* (ex. *buyao shengqi* 不要生气! 'don't produce *qi*'). Finally, some conceptual metaphors may also uniquely belong to that specific culture (Kövecses 2005, 86). I will show that this is also the case for Chinese neologisms.

According to some scholars, metaphor therefore should not be conceived only cognitively as a substrate which formed along our embodied experiences as humans and diachronically and as an inner phenomenon. It should also be considered in its outer dimension, taking into account the fact that there are synchronic factors playing a role in the continuous shape of metaphorical thinking. Gibbs Jr (1999) advocates a more 'distributed' perspective of what it is considered conceptual, to "extend the cognitive model beyond the individual" (Gibbs Jr 1999, 162), moving metaphor from our heads into the world:

> When I talk of moving metaphor 'out into the world' I am thinking of metaphor as a kind of tool, available as a 'public representation' for all to use when needed, without having to explicitly encode all conceptual metaphors as part of our internal mental representations. (Gibbs Jr 1999, 157)

In his view, metaphorical structuring of concepts is deeply influenced by situations conceptualised culturally, and by our continuous interactions with sociocultural artefacts around us.

3.4 Metaphor in Chinese

In China, the study of metaphor has always been attributed to the field of rhetorics.[33] This is sustained in Wang (2003, 102) reported in Jing-Schmidt (2016, 630) who states that metaphor "In ancient Chinese philosophy, metaphor […] is seen as a central tool of persuasion" (Jing-Schmidt 2016, 630). In the same page, the author also reminisces Mencius's good rule of speaking: "*yan jin er zhi yuan*

33 For an excursus on Chinese rhetoric, cf. Huang et al. 2019, § 45.

zhe, shan yan ye" 言近而指远者,善言也 (Those who can speak far in terms of near are good at speaking; Author's transl.). Shu (2000, 9), like Wang (2003, 103) claim that even though China lacked systematic research on metaphor, the Chinese millennial literary work were rife with metaphors, and advocated that only contrastive studies between western countries and China could bring about a further understanding of metaphor (10). Concerning the word 'metaphor' in Chinese, *yinyu* 隐喻 (lit. a hidden analogy), is reported by Wang (2003, 105) to originally fall within the scope of the many definitions of metaphor held by the word *biyu* 比喻 (metaphor).[34] The author also declares that the best Chinese notion of conceptual metaphor, which is not conceived as two separate identities – source and target–but as one, is embodied in the thought *tianrenheyi* 天人合一 ('Heaven and man as one' = 'Man is an integral part of nature'; Wang 2003, 106). According to Hao (2020, 134), this seems to support a Chinese notion of embodiment.

Since the pioneering work by Lakoff and Johnson was published in 1980, Shu (2000, 8-9) warned about the scarcity of studies in the field of metaphor in relation to Chinese, encouraging scholars to produce more work on the matter. Since then, much work has been done on the subject of conceptual metaphor. Some of the most representative studies include those carried out by Yu between 1995 and 2022[35] where Chinese ways of expressing conceptual metaphor according to various image-schema and degree of cultural variation are addressed and analysed also cross-culturally. Other mention-worthy research was carried out by Ahrens between 2002 and 2010 exploring the field of psycholinguistics and metaphorical meaning (cf. Jing-Schmidt 2016, 633; Chung, Ahrens 2019, 365). Lastly, Jing-Schmidt (2014a; 2014b; Peng, Jing-Schmidt 2014) worked on examining the social function of metaphor in Chinese discourse, highlighting that this type of investigation has received scant attention (Jing-Schmidt 2016, 633).

Based on the literature seen above, I would like to propose a little overview of some shared and non-shared image-schema between English and Chinese:

Table 1 Shared image-schema 1

	ENGLISH	CHINESE
EMBARRASSMENT/RAGE IS RED	Her faced turned all red	他的脸都红了
HAPPY IS UP*	I need something to bring my spirits up	高兴, 忐忑

34 Intended as a figure of speech and also with the meaning of 'analogy'.

35 These are only some of the works by this author. For a comprehensive view, cf. the Google Scholar page of the author. For other works, cf. also Link 2013.

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Table 2 Shared image-schema 2

	ENGLISH	CHINESE
SUSTAINABILITY IS GREEN	We're trying to be as green as possible	绿化
POPULARITY IS FIRE	That spread like wildfire	这个产品突然火了

Table 3 Non-shared image-schema 1

	JOY/POPULARITY IS RED	DANGER/CRIME/POVERTY IS RED
CHINESE	她一下子成为网红 公司开业就来了开门红	
ENGLISH		• To be in the red • To be caught red-handed • Red light/flag

Table 4 Non-shared image-schema 2

	ADULTERY IS GREEN	JEALOUSY/ENVY IS GREEN
CHINESE	戴绿帽子	
ENGLISH		Green with envy

As it can be noticed, the image-schemas chosen are mostly related to colours.[36] In Table 1 and 2, there seems to be near-universality when primary metaphors are formed. I say near- as for in English, the pair POPULARITY IS FIRE can also convey a negative sense, whereas it is not the case for Chinese.[37] Conversely, for Table 3 and 4, the image-schemas seem to be more culture-sensitive. In the case of Table 4, the colour green is culturally related to the fact that in the past in China adulterous men would be publicly shamed by walking around wearing a green hat to signal that they were cuckolds (funnily enough, in the west this would be similar to the 'scarlet letter'). The examples for Chinese for POPULARITY IS FIRE in Table 2 and POPULARITY IS RED in Table 3 can be regarded as cases of neologisms. There have been several studies in mainland China and some carried out internationally on Chinese neologisms and metaphors that have mainly analysed the cognitive characteristics and interpretation of certain formations (see below). Despite the scholarly interest in metaphor teaching and the role of metaphor in education, to the writer's knowledge, there still is a shortage of investigations regarding the importance of metaphor and neologisms applied in pedagogy. The potential pedagogical importance of metaphor and neologisms will be addressed in § 4.

36 To know more about metaphors shared by English and Chinese, cf. also Link 2013.

37 To know more about this primary metaphor, cf. Han 2012, 34, 45.

3.5 Novel Metaphors

When creating novel metaphors, we make use, mostly subconsciously, of that huge system of thousands of cross-domain mappings which characterises everyday metaphor (Lakoff 1993, 203). According to the theory of conceptual metaphor, we can also distinguish 'conventional' metaphors, that is, those which are formed subconsciously and automatically due to some precedent or preexistent internal mapping (Lakoff, Turner 1989, xi), otherwise defined as 'basic metaphors' (Lakoff, Turner 1989, 80). Conventional metaphors can be of two types: 'generic-level' and 'specific-level'.[38] The former is more 'skeletal' a category than the latter, in the sense that there are no fixed source and target domains, nor are the entities of their mappings clearly specified. True is the contrary for the latter type. In a sense, the specific-level metaphor, which is conventionalised, is also conceived as basic (Lakoff, Turner 1989, 81). Another type of metaphor are 'image metaphors': these do not map concepts, but rather superimpose images; that means, the structure of a mental image source can either be mapped metonymically onto the structure of the target domain containing an image (e.g. "Time stopped when he saw her hourglass flowing slowly") or can create an image in the target domain (e.g. "thoughts are summer lightning") (Lakoff, Turner 1989, 90-4). They are considered as one-shot, i.e. limited to specific cases. Moreover, "Image-metaphors can trigger and reinforce metaphors that map conceptual knowledge and inferential structure" (Lakoff, Turner 1989, 92). Finally, they are to be understood as separate to 'image-schema metaphors', which as we already acknowledged, are general structures – like paths, containers etc. – that provide the frame for mental images and are related to spatial reasoning (Lakoff, Turner 1989, 99). Novel metaphors can be interpreted as extensions of conventional metaphors, generic-level metaphors (as they are quite free due to lack of specificity in source, target, and mappings) and image-metaphors or as superimpositions of one onto another, which is what poetic metaphor does (Yu 1998, 29).

One of the great characteristics of human being is creativity, and poets in their creative afflatus are able to mesmerise us and, by shaping up new metaphors, provide beautiful reflections into and about life. This is what Kövecses (2005, 259) calls 'figurative creativity'. Of course, this creativity still needs to respect the conventions of our language (Philip 2016, 220)[39] and ordinarily, we

38 Events are actions would pertain to the former, while life is a journey to the latter. For more details on this, cf. Lakoff, Turner 1989.

39 Philip, contrarily to authors like Kövecses, Lakoff and Turner argues that not only conceptual level, but also lexical level and context-determined lexical creativity should

would assume the production of wondrous, powerful metaphor to be the sole prerogative of literary experts, i.e. poets. Yet, according to Lakoff and Turner (1989, xi) "Great poets […] use basically the same tools we use [and] can speak to us because they use the modes of thought we all possess". In other words, everyone can create novel metaphors, and we know we do. If we consider Lakoff's (1989) assertion valid that poetic metaphor is fundamentally a similar phenomenon to ordinary language metaphor, "an extension of our everyday, conventional system of metaphorical thought" (Lakoff 1993, 246), then neologisms, created by the online grassroot 'poets' who extend, elaborate, question, and combine on preexisting conventional metaphors, [40] composing enchanting images, are also part of that ordinary language. In addition, Kövecses (2005, 52) points out that "accumulating evidence suggests that 'creative' people make heavy use of conventional, everyday metaphors and that their creativity and originality actually derive from them". Philip (2016, 226) seems to agree with both: "The need for novelty arises when the existing expressive repertoire fails us, and this can happen equally well in spontaneous speech as in pondered literary creation, by expert users of language and by novices, including children and non-native speakers". Furthermore, the writer believes what Philip wrote below could expand the definition of neologism:

> Metaphor drives innovation in language. New meanings are not necessarily metaphorical, but metaphor provides the grounds for new referents to be identified using old words. Speakers 'stretch' the meanings of the words they know when they need to communicate something that they have no existing word for. If that stretched meaning fills a vocabulary gap in the language, making it possible for speakers to talk about an object or concept that had no previously established wording, it gets absorbed into the language system where it becomes available for further exploitation, and the process starts all over again. (Philip 2016, 219)

be considered when producing and understanding metaphors. An example that comes to mind is 'I don't want to *burst your bubble*'. Here, to understand the metaphor we need to know its contextual reference.

40 These are poetic thought modes for creating novel metaphors reported in Lakoff, Turner 1989. Respectively, extension is attributing some qualities of a target to the source (e.g. DEATH IS SLEEP). Elaboration involves the detailed development of a basic metaphor and adding layers of meaning or complexity to enhance its effect (e.g. eternal exile of the raft=death). Metaphorical questioning challenges the limits of an existing metaphor, pushing its boundaries to explore new perspectives or meanings. (e.g. 'what if love is not journey?'). Composing refers to the way in which metaphors are creatively combined to form more complex meanings or expressions (e.g. 'in the twilight of my days' combines both LIFE IS LIGHT and a LIFETIME IS A DAY).

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Even though at first novel metaphors in their gradations of novelty may sound unfamiliar, strange and cognitively daunting, they could potentially enrich the interlocutors both at the language level, and at the conceptual one, possibly providing an extra layer of culturality. Despite the lack of salience due to how infrequent and unfamiliar they can be (Philip 2016, 224),[41] we still cannot but admit that "the brain is pre-programmed to notice the unusual, so novel metaphors – once encountered – stick in our mind"; and our mind

> is poetic not only because of the possibility that thought is intrinsically metaphoric, […] but also because it is constantly in search of novelty, regardless of whether it is figurative or literal. (Giora 2003, 179)

3.6 Metaphorical Chinese Neologisms

In § 3.4 two cases of neologisms within the shared image-schemas of English and Chinese were introduced. If we want to support the stance that our thinking is subconsciously metaphorical, metaphorical thinking is also what drives the linguistic realisations of many neologisms (Wang 2012, 262). They are constantly sought after in the world of entertainment news for language play (Han 2011); moreover, the impact of the internet has made it possible for everyone nowadays to write a piece of news which "provides great potential for the emergence and stabilization of metaphors in people's linguistic and cognitive repertoires" (Han 2012, 35). Without a doubt, many neologisms are also not metaphorical, like many technical terms;[42] here, we take a look at some neoformations taking into account the conceptual and integrative theories of metaphor.

As already shown above, classification of Chinese neologisms has already been attempted in many other studies.[43] Regardless of the category of belonging, many neologisms can form as a result of a metaphorical process (He 2014, 33; Li 2021, 124), especially those that Wang (2012, 265) defines with what is originally a Christian metaphor *jiuping zhuang xinjiu* 旧瓶装新酒 'old bottles with new wine'.[44] This is easy to see as neosemanticised conventional words can become

41 On salience, cf. Giora 2003.

42 For some examples, cf. Arcodia, Basciano 2021, 197. Nevertheless, it can also not be always the case, as the many examples reported in Jiang 2004 show.

43 Cf. § 2.1 and Arcodia, Basciano 2021, 200; Bulfoni 2009; 2010b; Zong 2007; Masini 1993; Gao 2012 *inter alia*.

44 Matt 9,17, NIV. In He 2014, 33 and many others these are referred to as *jiuci xinyi* 旧词新意/义 'old words with new meaning'.

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polysemous (yet some also homonymous or near-homonymous) with another (or more) related sense(s) suggesting an underlying metaphorical relationship (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, 251). In other words, polysemies can also be explained as extended lexicalised senses of conventional lexical items in a source domain that may have been conventionalised also in the target domain, depending on whether it made use of the static mapping pattern (Lakoff 1993, 211). According to Li and Feng (2011, 14), a Metaphorical Neologism can be defined as a word of "two or three syllables, which not only illustrates the concise linguistic features, but also gives a vivid mirror of novelty chasing and jokes of social changes".

When viewed from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, it is useful to first consider Fang,Peng (2013, 81) who analysed metaphoricity of neological compounds based on four levels of semantic transparency of the constituents. Respectively, 1) completely transparent; 2) first constituent transparent, second opaque;[45] 3) first-opaque, second-transparent; 4) completely opaque. As the results of the survey they carried out revealed that the majority belonged to category no. 2, the neologisms from this category were further analysed on their metaphoric and metonymic levels and grouped into three categories:

i. First constituent created via metaphor (ex. *jijian+dian* 旗舰店 'flagship store').
ii. First constituent created via metonymy (ex. *muzhi+zu* 拇指族 [thumb+clan] 'heavy texters').
iii. Whole compound is either metaphoric or metonymic (ex. *fang+nu* 房奴 [house+slave] 'mortgage slave').

Similarly, Wang (2012, 262) states that conceptual metaphor can appear in compound neologisms in five main categories. For the sake of brevity, I have adapted some of the examples to fit the categories:

1. Former constituent is understood metaphorically (ex. *muzhi+zu* 拇指族 above).
2. Latter constituent is the metaphorical head paired with a non-metaphorical constituent (ex. *chitu* 吃土 [eat-dirt] 'to live off dirt'. Here 'dirt' is understood as 'whatever food is available' or 'almost no food' for having spent all one's money).[46]

45 Author's translation. In the original text the word is *huise* 晦涩 'obscure', 'cryptic'. I preferred 'opaque' in juxtaposition with 'transparent' (also used by the author).

46 Interesting to notice, compared with *hexibeifeng* 喝西北风 (see *infra*) which was culturally more elevated and abstract a metaphor, *chitu* 吃土 is much more 'down-to-earth' and related to our embodied experience.

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3. Both constituents of the compound are two symbolic units (ex. *boli*+*xin* 玻璃心 [glass-heart] 'oversensitive person').
4. The compound as a whole for a new metaphorical meaning (ex. *shanzhai* 山寨 'fortified mountain village' → 'counterfeit').
5. Shown on the relation between the two constituents of the compound (ex. *xiatan* 侠贪 [knight errant+corruption] → 'A corrupt Robin Hood'; Author's transl.). Here both the domains are mapping onto each other (Wang 2012, 263).

Another study that focuses on neologisms using conceptual metaphor theory can be found in Yu (2021). Resonating what stated above in Kövecses (2005, cf. § 3.3) about cross-cultural variation of metaphor, Yu analyses the culture-specific and sociological representation of leftover women (*shengnü* 剩女) as deriving from the conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE FOOD, showing from a range of news media that women are represented as dehumanised objects, therefore as commodities and food, as they are past the time decided by society for marriage and for giving birth. The very same conceptual metaphor HUMANS ARE FOOD appears to be elicited also in another (former) neologism *fensi* 粉丝 [dry noodles] 'fans' originated in 2005 from the Chinese TV show called *Super Girl*. Here the characteristics of dry noodles of tenderness, flexibility, smoothness and being interlaced with each other are mapped onto the fans swooning around their idols (Han 2011, 3484; Xu 2006).[47]

Li (2019) interprets the recent coinage of *foxi* 佛系 using both conceptual and blending theories.[48] Viewed from the conceptual metaphor theory, *foxi* 佛系 the author seems to suggest the pervasiveness of a Buddhist moral, embodied in the character *fo* (Buddha; Buddhist; Buddhism) brought about by the realisation of the primary metaphor HAPPINESS IS DETACHMENT. The character *xi*, which here refers to 'being related' but also 'linked' (or paradoxically 'attached to'). The neologism is now used to refer to people who are 'chill' about anything, and who adopt a devil-may-care attitude to life, not feeling societal pressure and "standing aloof from worldly gain and success" (Li 2019, 35; 2021, 125). Similarly, always according to Li (2019), the word could also be construed as a blended space, with

47 Standard Modern Chinese, as also confirmed in Xu, had the suffix *-mi* 迷 [confused, lost] to express 'devoted to' but only used in certain registers and only as a bound form. The less popular *fanshi* 番士 of cantonese origin is now obsolete. This may explain the adoption of a new word. Interestingly enough, *fensi* 粉丝 has then also split to develop quasi-suffixes with the meaning of 'fan of'. Finally, *fen* seems also to be a denominal verb with the meaning 'to support someone' like in *fenqi* 粉起 [rise as a noodle] (Han 2011, 3485).

48 The expression *foxi* 佛系 was coined in 2017 in a WeChat article (Li 2019, 34).

a generic space of 'characteristics of Buddha', *fo* as input 1 and *xi* as input 2.

Finally, according to Fang and Peng (2013), a neologism like *yizu* 蚁族 [ant-clan] 'college graduates with low income enduring cramped living conditions' can also be interpreted via conceptual blending **[fig. 2]**. The generic space containing the 'biological living being', 'ants' (*mayi* 蚂蚁) constitutes input 1; wherein are characteristics belonging to ants, i.e. 'fragility' and 'smartness'. 'College students' constitute input 2, always characterised by being weaker but with a good education.

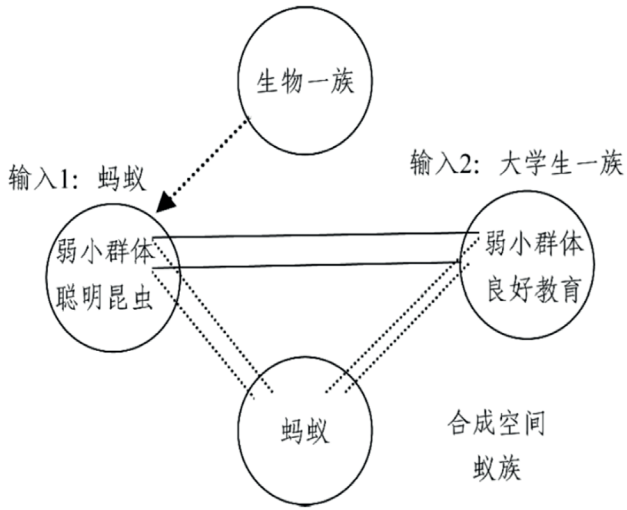

Figure 2 Conceptual blending of yizu 蚁族 (Fang, Peng 2013)

Similarly to Fang and Peng, Bai and Chen (2011, 37) interpret another neologism born out of derivation from the affixoid *-ke* 客 in terms of the blending theory **[fig. 3]**, *heike* 黑客 'hacker'. The authors believe it to be more than a mere phonetic calque, but rather a blended space. Input 1 and 2 are provided respectively by the English word 'hacker' and by one of the generic meaning of *heike*, i.e. a 'person who is involved in an illegal activity'.[49] It is not clear why the authors do not provide the generic space as well, but they seem to suggest that the word *heike*, with meaning related to the domain of technology as we know it, came into being only after being influenced by the English equivalent, and therefore acquired a new meaning. This seems in line

49 Cf. also Bai, Chen 2010.

with the fact that the affixoid *-ke* also conveys the agentive meaning of 'person' to the compound it is part of (Basciano, Bareato 2020, 253), that in Classical Chinese it was used to indicate 'person specialising in a certain activity' (Arcodia, Basciano 2021, 202), and finally that *heike* is itself a hybrid form, with both characters contributing phonetically and semantically (Arcodia, Basciano 2021, 203).[50]

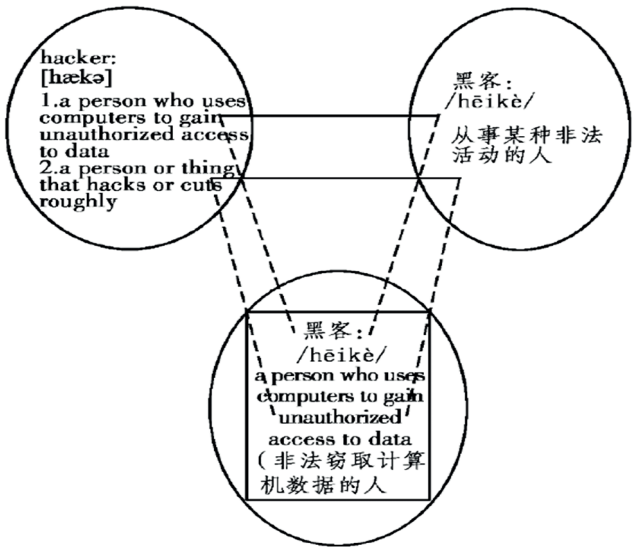

Figure 3 Conceptual blending of heike 黑客 (Bai, Chen 2011)

One final thought should go to homophonic neologisms, created exploiting the similarity or the quasi-similarity in pronunciation of other characters or symbols to replace the original language (You, Wang 2012, 136).[51] Zheng (2015, 1382) believes these kinds of words to be "also the result of metaphorical thinking of human beings" and uses two examples worth mentioning, which can be seen in Figure 4.

50 Which resonates with the case of *fensi* 粉丝 [dry noodles] 'fans' *supra*.

51 For the categories belonging to this definition, cf. You, Wang 2012 and Gao, Liu 1958.

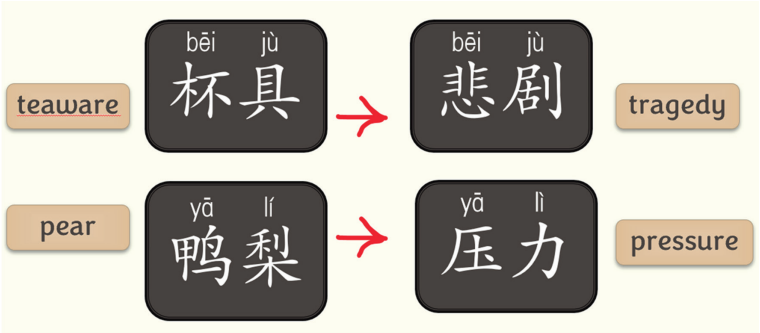

Figure 4 Metaphorical homophonic neologisms

The top pair seem to allude to the existence of the primary metaphor life is a tea table, which in turn seems to be a variation of the near-universal LIFE IS A POSSIBILITY, or even LIFE IS A BOX CHOCOLATES (Kövecses 2005, 266). As we know it, life is full of tragedy, comedy etc. just as on a tea table there could be teaware (tragedy) or washing tools, *xiju* 洗具 (*xiju* 喜剧 'comedy'). This is what seems to be a case of metaphor "'off-loaded' into the cultural world to enable people to better solve problems, make decisions and perform skilled actions" as mentioned in § 3.3 by Gibbs Jr (1997, 157). The same author reports that also for the Japanese culture these "external symbols […] serve as a kind of tool or scaffolding for culturally appropriate behaviour" (Gibbs Jr 1997, 157).

The bottom pair, associated by quasi-similar pronunciation, can be seen as a metaphorical process of mapping the abstract onto the more concrete, to make pressure more endurable and manageable, just like biting off a pear (Zheng 2015, 1382). I would also add that the fact of reifying 'pressure' as a duck-shaped pear, which can also be disposed of, calls to mind the process of dumbing down fear, aware of the fact that the symbol of the 'pear' (*li*) is generally associated with its homophonous word *-li* 离 'to depart' (therefore it is taboo to give pears as presents), then it may also be alluding to 'departing from the stress' as a means to fight it.

In the previous section, we saw how the conceptual metaphorical frameworks can show within Chinese neologisms as novel metaphors either in line with embodiment or cultural experience, or as predominantly produced by human imaginative processes, unrestrained by the embodied and sociocultural experience (Kövecses 2005, 264). Finally, Philip (2006, 65) reminds us that

> In vocabulary acquisition in particular, it seems that language items are more successfully learned when a specific focus is directed on

the relation of figurative meanings to their corresponding literal meaning. (Boers 2000; Charteris-Black 2000 quoted in Philip 2006)

4 Pedagogical Importance of Metaphor and Neologisms

As metaphors and figurative language are acknowledged as spread in and via our everyday language, especially since netspeak has made it so that the novel metaphors created are diffused more widely, giving rise to even new entailments, then language learners will be inevitably exposed to such metaphorical products and figurative language throughout different phases of their learning. Thus, this raises the question of the importance of metaphor in teaching and learning. Neologisms may be a vessel that could aid in such enterprise. As we saw, Chinese neologisms can bring to light underlying metaphorical processes specific to the culture, making it not only a means necessary for successful communication (Jing-Schmidt, Hsieh 2019, 514) but also a lens for a deeper understanding of how, sometimes different, conceptual thinking works. For reasons of space, this section will focus mostly on the importance of metaphor in pedagogy and learning and how it can be utilised in education. Many of the benefits also indirectly apply to teaching neologisms. [52]

Although metaphors in education have generally been seen as sometimes practically helpful, yet fundamentally decorative, even harmful at times, they are essential to learning in a number of ways (Petrie, Oshlag 1993, 608). In providing that passage from unknown to known (584) metaphors play a unique educational role in the acquisition of new knowledge in the most memorable way. When students employ a deeper cognitive effort (Roche 2014, 340) in understanding why 'cow' would be synonymous of 'cool', especially when the same metaphor in their own culture relates to the exact opposite, that metaphor will make it possible for them to certainly fixate the (predicative) adjective, and at the same time, learn a more culturally centred metaphor.[53] The author, echoing Littlemore (2017, 286) also mentions unwanted consequences for metaphors misused or misleading, which is something reflected in some students when a conventional word acquires a new meaning (like the very same example of 'cool' which not only means 'cow' but it is also the Chinese zodiac sign for 'ox') making it all more confusing. When metaphors are introduced in the classroom, with the due amount of direction from the teacher to encourage the student to suspend the notions

52 A more comprehensive account on the importance of Chinese Neologisms in pedagogy is given in Gebbia 2025.

53 Cf. Cortazzi, Jin 2019, 140; Cortazzi et al. 2009.

of literal truth and falsity (Petrie, Oshlag 1993, 586), in thinking and discussing the metaphors (601), they can restructure the student's cognitive apparatus and promote changes in their affective characteristics when learning something unfamiliar or abstract (600). Research in Boers (2000) shows that by systematically guiding language learners to focus on the source domains of linguistic metaphors and metaphorical vocabulary, teachers can significantly enhance learners' depth of understanding and long-term retention of the target language (Littlemore, Low 2006, 272).

Metaphorical content can function as a motivator in helping stimulate student interest when presented with more challenging content to learn (Petrie, Oshlag 1993, 602), especially in the case of more able students. In fact, the authors propose that metaphors can serve as an effective method to re-engage students who have become uninterested, as they enable learners to relate the subject matter to their personal experiences. This motivating effect is also shared by the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (cf. Ryan, Deci 2012) which pertains to both the fields of social psychology and cognitive linguistics. The claims of the motivating and efficient role of metaphor in teaching are also supported by Littlemore (2017), who in her overview of studies on metaphor applied in several educational contexts, highlights the role of metaphor not only in fostering understanding, either of abstract concepts and for memorising key concepts (Littlemore 2017, 286), but in raising critical thinking. In particular, in Littlemore (2004), a quasi-experimental study focused on metaphor in an English for Academic Purposes context and having experimental and control groups participating in 'critical thinking' session, the students of the experimental group, who also received a 'metaphoric awareness-raising' session, showed to make more explicit references to metaphor in their critical analyses. In another study on metaphor to promote critical thinking, Wan (2014 cited in Littlemore 2017, 288) administered a series of metaphor elicitation tasks to a group of Chinese students to explore their conceptualisations of academic writing, and found that it had a beneficial effect, noting how new metaphors emerged from the group discussion. Over time, participants changed their conceptualisations of the essay writing process and developed their levels of metaphoric awareness over the course of the year.

To expand on the notion of cultural variation of metaphor (Kövecses 2005), and that effective second language learning is greatly motivated by cultural awareness, which in turn plays a significant role in the learners' cognitive processes (Kövecses 2006), it is important to say that metaphor can also cultivate the acquisition of the intercultural competence (cf. Neuner 2003). In fact, "metaphors also enable teachers and students to share meaning" (Petrie, Oshlag 1993, 603); for instance, when talking in the classroom about the

meaning of *chitu* 吃土 'to live off almost nothing to eat', students also shared their slang term 'to eat dirt' in use among them. Being asked to engage on metaphorical content allowed the teaching and learning experience to be more memorable and meaningful, both for the student and the teacher.[54] In a study by Cortazzi and Jin (2019) about elicited metaphor analysis of Chinese cultures of learning, which draws attention to the cultural features of how students learn (Cortazzi, Jin 2019, 131), students have shared their ways of seeing the teachers, learning, language, dynamics and patterns of thinking, which in turn unearthed entailments underlying conceptual metaphors and provided cross-cultural insights into particular concepts learn (Cortazzi, Jin 2019, 142). From this perspective, introducing students to these metaphorical processes can be beneficial and can not only increase the size of their vocabulary but also their intercultural communicative competence, which CEFR (the Common European Framework of Reference) considers as the most important competence to develop in L2 teaching (Niemeier 2017, 268). It is worth noting that the CEFR makes no mention of the concept of metaphor and metaphorical competence, nor it contains descriptors for metaphor use (MacArthur 2017, 418; Nacey 2017, 509-10).

Table 5 Components of language competence (Littlemore, Low 2006). Source: Bachman (1990)

Table 1: The components of language competence

Organizational competence		Pragmatic competence	
Grammatical competence	Textual competence	Illocutionary competence	Sociolinguistic competence
Vocabulary or variety	Cohesion	Ideational functions	Sensitivity to dialect
Morphology	Rhetorical organization	Manipulative functions	Sensitivity to register
Syntax		Heuristic functions	Sensitivity to naturalness
Phonology/ graphology		Imaginative functions	Ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech

A final important competence promoted by metaphor teaching and learning, which also encompasses other types, is the more inherent metaphoric competence. Metaphoric competence is broadly defined by Littlemore and Low (2006, 269) "to include both knowledge of, and ability to use, metaphor, as well as Low's (1988) 'skills needed to work

54 For metaphors revolving the verb 'to eat', cf. Link 2013.

effectively with metaphor'". Repricing the model of communicative competence proposed in Bachman (1990),[55] widely used in language teaching and testing and composed of four types of competences **[tab. 5]**, Littlemore and Low (2006, 268) intend to prove the pivotal role of metaphoric competence in all areas of communicative competence.

As we can see from the model, Bachman (1990) refers to metaphor in the 'sociolinguistic competence' with the phrase 'ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech' which echoes Kövecses' view on metaphor and culture, and as we also said, culture can be the home of many original conceptual metaphors. 'Illocutionary competence' "refers to a person's ability to understand not simply the words one is using, but the message that one is trying to convey through those words". Metaphor expresses in 'ideational functions' in the sense that it is used via language to exchange information and feelings about it. Conceptual entailments show in utterances with 'manipulative functions' to affect the world around us (e.g. 'calm down' etc.) (Littlemore, Low 2006, 276). The analogies created by teachers are taken as an example of 'heuristic functions' that refer to our use of trial and error, or *ad hoc* devices, and teach the world around us. Another heuristic aspect of metaphor is "the recognition that individual metaphors (whether linguistic or conceptual) give but a partial view of any given topic and that it is therefore quite understandable and 'natural' that multiple metaphors arise" (Littlemore, Low 2006, 279). 'Imaginative functions', per se rather self-explanatory when related to metaphor, refer to the ability to create humour out of our environment for aesthetic purposes (Littlemore, Low 2006, 280). Indeed, being able to master a language in metaphorical terms and being creative can be seen as being equipped with the "tools for producing and understanding the target language in a more native-like and thus more successful way" (Niemeier 2017, 267). Littlemore and Low are also keen on reminding us that since metaphor seems to perform in all the functions of the illocutionary competence, it is probably worth for students to notice, or also to learn, when metaphors are being used in an unfamiliar way to them (Littlemore, Low 2006, 281).

For all the reasons stated above for the other functions, metaphor can therefore become a key component in 'textual competence', both written and spoken, in order to structure a cohesive, rhetorically organised text, "to use figurative language to interpret and control hedges" (Low 1988 quoted in Littlemore, Low 2006, 282). It goes without saying what 'grammatical competence' refers to, but as

55 In the Bachman's broad sense, 'competence' includes also the ability to deal with knowledge-based components of language that have been isolated as theoretical areas, such as 'syntax' or 'cohesion' (Littlemore, Low 2006, 274).

proved by the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor, our own everyday language, think of phrasal verbs for one, is imbued with conceptual metaphors, as the notion of 'grammatical metaphor' also claims (Halliday 1985; Halliday, Kirkwood 1999 cited in Littlemore, Low 2006, 283).

Littlemore and Low (2006, 286) also mention a later addition to the model where metaphoric thinking may be involved–'Strategic Competence', which deals with communication strategies analysed by two approaches. The psycholinguistic approach defines these in terms of 'compensation strategies', such as the speakers' abilities to compensate for their gaps, in order to continue the conversation (Tarone 1983, 62 cited in Littlemore, Low 2006. Cf. also Poulisse 1990). The interactive approach focuses more on the manipulation carried out by two interlocutors on the conversation to negotiate shared meaning (McNamara 1995 cited in Littlemore, Low 2006), or a change of topic with the use of figurative expressions (Drew, Holt 1998 cited in Littlemore, Low 2006). Very interestingly, among the compensation strategies, for what strictly concerns neologisms, the authors also mention word coinage:

> The strategy of word coinage involves making up new words or expressions to get one's meaning across. In order to do this, speakers often use or adapt words that are available to them in original or innovative ways in order to express the concepts they want. This process often relies on metaphorical thought, as it involves the ability to stretch the conventional boundaries of word meaning. The use of metaphorical thought to fill lexical gaps created by the emergence of new semantic fields has been central to change and development in language. (Littlemore, Low 2006, 287)

Ultimately, "language use follows the zeitgeist of society. So does metaphor." (Jing-Schmidt 2016, 635) and the fact that students are able to produce metaphors in their speech and writing is considered one of the measures of advanced proficiency in a foreign language (Philip 2006, 65).

5 Concluding Remarks

This article has reviewed key scholarship at the intersection of Chinese neologisms and metaphor theory, highlighting how figurative mechanisms – particularly conceptual metaphors and blending processes – underlie much of the creativity observed in contemporary Chinese lexis. Chung and Ahrens (2019, 367) believe metaphor "to be an important way to develop and interpret lexis in Chinese", and that "familiarising, understanding and learning neologisms can cultivate

students' 'linguistic sense' and increase their linguistic insights, leading to an improved communication". Hou (2023, 775) reports that among 271 words with a new meaning acquired, up to the year 2020, 198 are neoformations created metaphorically, as one of the most fundamental ways to neosemantise conventional meanings. Neologisms, often encapsulate cultural attitudes, generational values, and collective experiences, making them rich sources for cognitive and sociolinguistic analysis.

While the principal aim of this work has been to synthesise theoretical insights from the literature, some pedagogical implications may be inferred. The metaphorical dimension of neologisms could enhance learners' engagement, support cultural awareness, and serve as an entry point into the cognitive patterns that shape Chinese linguistic expression. Therefore, it could have valuable practical uses, such as in the teaching of foreign languages (Kövecses, Benczes 2010, xii). However, these educational suggestions remain exploratory, and future empirical research will be needed to validate their actual impact in classroom settings.

Ultimately, by offering a metaphorically informed reading of Chinese neologisms, this review contributes to broader discussions on how evolving language forms intersect with cognition and culture–and how these intersections might be harnessed, cautiously and critically, in language education (cf. Gebbia 2025).

By placing Chinese neologisms at the intersection of language, culture, and pedagogy, this study paves the way for further exploration of their potential as tools for linguistic and educational innovation. In an era of rapid global communication and cultural exchange, such inquiries hold profound implications for the teaching and learning of Chinese as a foreign language.

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