

Original Paper

The Semantic Features of Noun-verb Metaphorical Compound verbs in Mandarin Chinese

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Abstract

As a closed category, noun-verb metaphorical compound verbs are not productive but still frequently used in Mandarin Chinese. The internal relationship between the morphemes is subordinate, often with the noun morphemes suggesting the vehicles of metaphor processes and the verb morphemes indicating the tenors. Even though these compounds are already formed through metaphor, their meanings can further develop through metaphor and thereby gain new metaphorical meanings. In addition, we examine the usages and semantic features of two metaphorical compound verbs can-shi and jing-tun through a corpus-based collocation study to tease out people's internal understanding of their meanings.

Keywords

metaphorical compound, contemporary Chinese Dictionary, morpheme relationship, semantic feature, Mandarin

1. Introduction

Metaphorical compounds are one of the essential approaches to express metaphor in Chinese. Metaphorical compounds in Mandarin Chinese are words formed through metaphors (Meng, 2007). The word formation of metaphorical compounds focuses on the similarities between the tenor and the vehicle. The relationship between these two elements of a metaphorical compound is not a temporary or accidental combination cropping up in the language, but a reflection of existing concepts that correlate in people's minds.

This paper delves into noun-verb metaphorical compound verbs in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* “现代汉语词典” (Dictionary Editorial Office, 2016) to explore how the selection of traits from the vehicle is closely related to the tenor. By examining the formation of these compounds, we

can gain insight into the existing concepts that correlate in Chinese people's minds and how they shape the language we use.

2. Background

Metaphor acts as the bridge between language and cognition. It is not only a rhetorical device along with exaggeration and metonymy, but also an essential approach for us to understand the world and language change. As people ferret out the similarities between concrete things and abstract concepts, the metaphorical approach of expressing abstraction with words referring to specific referents becomes possible.

A complete metaphor requires three parts: the tenor, the vehicle, and the ground. The tenor is the subject of the metaphor being described. The vehicle refers to the figurative language used to describe the tenor. We compare the vehicle with tenor to help listeners to better understand the tenor. The ground is the relationship between the tenor and the vehicle, where the tenor and the vehicle have in common (Richards, 1936). Metaphor is a temporary stable mapping produced by social language use activities and cognitive activities, rather than a fixed combination (Cameron et al., 2009).

Metaphorical meanings refer to meanings that derive from the original meanings or basic meanings of words through metaphor (Zhou, 1993). Given that we must rely on the concepts and language expressions we already know to understand and describe unknown things, we can deduce that the thinking of human is constructed on metaphor and therefore gives rise to both metaphorical compounds and metaphorical meanings. This cognitive process is the core of metaphor and leads to the production of words. It allows familiar and unfamiliar entities to be juxtaposed, and thereby deepening our understanding of the unfamiliar.

3. Literature Review

Mandarin employs morphosyllabic characters with scripts representing syllables (McNaughton & Fan, 2013). The language contains a great ability to form disyllabic, dimorphemic compounds. According to previous surveys, compounds account for 80% of the whole Chinese words (Xing, 2006), and 95% of the neologisms (Ceccagno & Basciano, 2007). Regardless of its productive processes, their meanings are highly susceptible to semantic drift (Libben, 1998).

While noun-verb compounds are not a popular type in Modern Chinese, noun-noun, verb-noun, verb-verb, and adjective-noun are the mainstream that maintain productivity (Huang, 1998). Diachronically, as monosyllabic words predominate the Classical Chinese (Arcodia, 2007), it was a rather common syntactic process to use monosyllabic nouns as adverbial to modify monosyllabic verbs in the Classical Chinese (Yang, 2004). However, many monosyllabic free morphemes have become bound morphemes in Modern Chinese (Packard, 2000). As a result, this syntactic process no longer works in the Modern Chinese and those frequently used noun-verb phrases are lexicalized into compound verbs. Therefore, the group of noun-verb compounds can be described as a closed category.

Although morphemes are generally salient and word boundaries are obscure in Chinese text (Dronjic, 2011), a closed set with a fixed number of subsets makes it easier for us to identify and study.

From the early twentieth century to the 1940s, the study of metaphorical words in Mandarin Chinese began to enter its embryonic stage. The research on this kind of words during that period focused primarily on three perspectives, namely, word building, rhetorical devices, and word formation (He, 1982; Ren, 1981; Sun, 1956). The early research on metaphorical compounds was brief and incomplete. Xia (1983) tried to conclude the different structures of metaphorical compounds. Structural analysis also became the mainstream in the study of these words and Scholars divided them into various subcategories through different perspectives.

Zhou (1993) made a clear distinction between metaphorical compounds and metaphorical meanings. Metaphorical compounds are compound words formed in metaphorical ways and have two types. One type is that the two morphemes of a compound both reflect the objective entities that work as the vehicles, the other type is that one morpheme refers to the vehicle and another morpheme refers to the tenor. The metaphorical meaning of a word is generally the stable denotation that derives from its basic meanings or original meanings.

More recent studies on metaphorical compounds have two new interests, one is the perspective of cognitive and another is applied linguistics. Wang (1996) pointed out that metaphor is a key means to enrich and evolve the vocabulary system towards metaphorical derivatives, metaphorical compounds, and words that loses metaphor, etc. Yu (2022) conducted an in-depth investigation on the learning processes and acquisition by non-native learners of Chinese metaphorical words.

4. Morpheme Relationships

The basic structure of the compounds we discussed in this paper is disyllables that the first morphemes are noun morphemes and the second morphemes are verb morphemes. In this noun-verb structure, the noun can be both the modifier and the vehicle, while the verb is the tenor and the modified constituent simultaneously. It is prone to ferret out the basic meaning of this kind of compound verb can be “to V like N”, as shown in the following examples,

(1) a. 蔓-延

man-yan

vine-spread

“To spread around like vines”.

b. 云-集

yun-ji

cloud-gather

“To gather from everywhere like clouds in the sky”

The basic relationship between the three parts in a usual metaphor can be described as “TENOR be as GROUND as VEHICLE” (e.g., “Tony is like a donkey”, “Tony is as stupid as donkey”). As the tenor is

a verb in a noun-verb compound, the relationship can be described as “to TENOR_V GROUND_{Adjunct} like VEHICLE_N”. *Man-yuan* and *yun-ji* follow this pattern by using “around” to modify “spread” and using “from everywhere” to modify “gather” in (1a).

We can also notice that the verb morphemes are the verbs for the subjects in the sentences, as well as the verbs for the noun morpheme in the above cases. As the examples from BCC Corpus (Xun et al., 2016),

(2) a. 防止 结核病 蔓延

fangzhi jiehebing man-yan

Provent tuberculosis vine-spread

“Prevent the spread of tuberculosis”.

b. 发布会 现场 名流 云集

fabuhui xianchang mingliu yun-ji

Press_Conference on-site celebrities cloud-gather

“Celebrities gathered at the press conference”.

Yan “spread” is the verb for both “tuberculosis” and “vine”. Similarly, *ji* “gather” is the verb for both “celebrities” and “cloud”. The reason why *yan* and *ji* are not capable of occurring alone as the verbs in the sentences is that Modern Mandarin Chinese prefers disyllables to monosyllables and both two morphemes have already become bound morphemes.

However, the structure of the metaphorical compounds is not always the above case. We can divide noun-verb metaphorical compound verbs into several subcategories based on the relationship between the noun and the verb. Ceccagno and Basciano (2007) identifies three subtypes of Chinese compounds according to his research on neologisms: subordinate, attributive, and coordinate. The subcategories we discovered of metaphorical compounds are: subject-verb, object-verb, and adverbial-verb. Although subject-verb and adverbial N-verb are no longer productive compounding processes in Modern Chinese, they all belong to the larger group of subordinate.

4.1 Subject-verb Relationship

This is the largest category and it includes 34 words, such as: *man-yan*, *yun-ji*, *jing-tun*, *can-shi*, *wa-jie* and *hu-yi*, as shown for more examples,

(3) a. 瓦解

wa-jie

tile-disintegrate

“To disintegrate like tile”

b. 狐疑

hu-yi

fox-doubt

“To doubt like fox”

c. 蚕食

can-shi

silkworm-eat

“To eat something bit by bit like silkworms eating mulberry leaves, a metaphor for gradually occupying”

d. 鲸-吞

jing-tun

whale-swallow

“To swallow like a whale, using to describe occupying on a large scale”

As the noun morpheme is the subject for the verb morpheme in the above examples, it could be more detailed and explicit to interpret the meaning by saying “to spread around like vines spreading” and “to gather from everywhere like clouds gathering in the sky”. Since the content appears to be repetitive if we always follow the detailed interpretation “to V like N V”, we can simplify it into to V like N’ in most situations. Note that some of the compounds like *can-shi* and *jing-tun* have lost their original meanings and derived new metaphorical meanings by treating the whole compound as the new vehicles.

4.2 Object-verb Relationship

Compounds that represent this category are *xi-juan* (席卷) and *gua-fen* (瓜分). The nouns are the patients of the verbs, as shown in the following glossing,

(4) a. 席卷

xi-juan

mat-roll_up

“To roll up something like rolling up a mat”

b. 瓜分

gua-fen

melon-divide

“To divide something like dividing a melon”

For the object-verb structure, we must move the object from the word initial position to the position behind the verb when interpreting the meaning ‘to V like V N’. N is not the vehicle as example (3) anymore, together the phrase ‘V N’ becomes the vehicle, while the V alone remains to be the tenor.

4.3 Adverbial-verb Relationship

Compounds that represent this category are *xuexi* (血洗), *bianta* (鞭挞), *lice* (蠡测). The nouns are adverbial modifier for the head verbs, basically meaning “to V with N”, as shown in the following examples,

(5) a. 血-洗

xue-xi

blood-wash

“To wash with blood, describing brutally and massively massacring”

b. 鞭-挞

bian-ta

whip-lash

“To beat with a whip”

c. 蠡-测

li-ce

ladle-measure

“To measure something like measure the sea with a ladle”

5. Semantic Features

Among the 43 noun-verb metaphorical compound verbs we found in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (Dictionary Editorial Office, 2016), we can divide these words into two categories from the perspective of meaning traits. Words in one of the categories have derived new metaphorical meanings and words from the other category stick to their original meanings.

5.1 Compounds that Keep Their Original Meanings

According to the provided entries in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, there are two different approaches to explaining the denotations of these compounds. One way is to indicate the metaphorical processes by illustrating the tenors and the vehicles using patterns such as “V like N” style, while another is to provide meaning interpretations directly. All the meanings are collected and translated from the mentioned dictionary above.

5.1.1 Metaphorical Processes Indicated

19 words are explained in this way. As shown below, the quotation mark “...” indicates dictionary meanings and the symbol “Φ” means this is one of the entries of the word and this word has other meanings in the dictionary.

[瓦解 *wa-jie*] tile-disintegrate: Φ “To crumble or split like a pottery breaks.”

[流逝 *liu-shi*] running_water-vanish: “To vanish like running water.”

[蔓延 *man-yan*] vine-spread: “To spread around like vines.”

[星散 *xing-san*] star-scatter: “Like stars scatter in the sky, used to describe scattering in all directions.”

[棋布 *qi-bu*] chess-distribute: “To distribute like chessmen, used to describe numerous and dense.”

[蜂聚 *feng-ju*] bee-gather: “To gather together like a swarm of bees.”

[蜂拥 *feng-yong*] bee-crowd: “To crowd (walking) like a swarm of bees.”

[笼罩 *long-zhao*] cage-cover: “To cover on it like a cage.”

[兔脱 *tu-tuo*] rabbit-run_away: “To run away fast like a rabbit.”

[泉涌 *quan-yong*] spring-gush: “To keep gushing out like spring water.”

[牛饮 *niu-yin*] cow-drink: “To drink (gulp down) like a cow.”

[山积 *shan-ji*] mountain-accumulate: “To accumulate things as high as a mountain, used to describe that there are too many things.”

[雀跃 *que-yue*] sparrow-jump: “To be happy like a sparrow jumps”

[林立 *lin-li*] forest-stand: “To stand densely like a forest, used to describe many.”

[壁立 *bi-li₁*] wall-stand: “(a cliff, etc.) to stand as steeply as a wall.”

[云集 *yun-ji*] cloud-gather: “To gather from everywhere like clouds in the sky.”

[云散 *yun-san*] cloud-spread_out: “To spread out in all directions like clouds in the sky.”

[笔挺 *bi-ting*] pen-stand_upright: “To standing upright like a penholder.”

[鱼贯 *yu-guan*] fish-file_in: “To go one after another like swimming fish.”

[血洗 *xue-xi*] blood-wash: “To wash somewhere like washing with blood, used to describe slaughtering brutally and on a large scale.”

[鞭挞 *bian-ta*] whip-lash: “To lash, a metaphor for condemnation and criticism.”

[蠡测 *lice*] ladle-measure: “An abbreviation for measuring the sea with a *li* (ladle), which is a metaphor for conjecture with a shallow view.”

[瓜分 *gua-fen*] melon-divide: “To divide or distribute something like dividing a melon.”

[席卷 *xi-juan*] mat-roll_up: “To roll up something like roll up a mat.”

Besides indicating the metaphorical processes by using phrases such as “to V like N”, words like *xing-san*, *qi-bu*, *shan-ji* and *lin-li* have further explanations to interpret their explicit meanings. These further explanations follow phrases such as “using to describe” and “which is a metaphor for”. They have made denotations more straightforward for readers to understand.

We can also notice that words such as *liu-shi*, *qi-bu*, and *feng-ju* are all directly interpreted as ‘to V like N’, while words like *quan-yong*, *niu-yin*, *bi-li₁*, *lin-li* requires further adverbials adjunct to indicate the meanings, as “to V ADJUNCT(ground) like N” (e.g., the word “around” in “To spread around like vines” are the adjunct).

For those entries without adjuncts in the meaning interpretations for compound verbs, the image color of these words themselves is completely presented literally. The connection between the verb morpheme and the noun morpheme on characteristics is more intuitive and difficult to cause ambiguity, so there is no need for an adjunct to complete the meaning.

For those entries with adjuncts, the characteristics indicated by the noun morphemes are not clear enough literally. For example, *bi* “wall” itself has many characteristics, and the *bi* in the compound *bi-li₁* only indicates the trait “steep”. The word “steeply” is also the ground of this metaphor, but it is harder be found it out from *bi-li₁* alone compared to other compounds, so the dictionary needs to explain it in detail as “(a cliff, etc.) to stand as steeply as a wall”. This is not to say that readers cannot understand the meaning of *bi-li₁* in the context without interpretation. The ground is not straightforward enough during interpretation, so it is provided for readers to understand the meaning better.

What the noun morpheme indicates is a characteristic that it presents selectively. Namely, the characteristic presented by the noun morpheme and the characteristic required to be presented by the verb morpheme are mutually selected. It is the intersection and similarity between the two adjacent morphemes, as well as the ground of the metaphor. The so-called adjuncts above play these roles herein.

Those adjuncts are description and emphasis on the similarities between the noun and the verbs. For example, the ground for *quan-yong* “spring-gush” is “something keeps getting out”, and the ground for *niu-yin* “cow-drink” is “gulp down”.

More distinct cases might be the difference between *yun-ji* “cloud-gather” and *yun-san* “cloud-spread_out”. They share the same noun morpheme, while the verb morphemes *ji* “gather” and *san* “spread_out” are antonyms. The two words here use different features of the same entity “cloud”, so the grounds for each word should be manifested clearly. By virtue of this, *yun-ji* requires the ground “from everywhere” to be shown and *yun-san* requires the ground “in all directions” to be shown in the entries. As to *feng-ju* “bee-gather” and *feng-yong* “bee-crowd”, they use the same ground “a swarm of” to illustrate the denotations.

5.1.2 Direct Meaning Explanations

[笔立 *bi-li*] pen-stand: “To stand upright.”

[鹄立 *hu-li*] swan-stand: “To stand upright.”

[狐疑 *hu-yi*] fox-doubt: “To doubt”

For the three words here, the metaphorical processes are not illustrated. We believe this kind of interpretation is incomplete and requires a supplement to indicate the word formation of metaphor. We can highlight the relationship between the tenor and the vehicle to enhance the image color. Compounds like *bi-li* ‘pen-stand’ can be interpreted by saying “to stand upright like a pen”.

5.2 Verbs that Have Metaphorical Meanings

5.2.1 Metaphorical Processes Indicated

[鲸吞 *jing-tun*] whale-swallow: “To swallow like a whale, used to describe occupying on a large scale.”

[冰释 *bing-shi*] ice-melt: “To melt like ice, a metaphor that misunderstandings, suspicions, and rifts etc. are completely resolved.”

[蚕食 *can-shi*] silkworm-eat: “To eat something bit by bit like silkworms eating mulberry leaves, a metaphor for gradually occupying.”

[蜂起 *feng-qi*] bee-fly_up: “To rise up in swarms like bees flying up.”

[潮涌 *chao-yong*] tide-surge: “To surge like a tide, used to describe large numbers and strong momentums.”

[龟缩 *gui-suo*] turtle-tuck: “To hide inside and not come out like a turtle’s head tucking into its shell.”

[鼠窜 *shu-cuan*] rat-scurry: “To run away in panic like a rat.”

[鹊起 *que-qi*] magpie-fly_up: “To Fly up suddenly like a magpie, used to describe the rise and spread of fame.”

[猬集 *wei-ji*] hedgehog-gather: “To Gather together like a hedgehog’s prickles, used to describe that there are too many matters.”

[鹄望 *hu-wang*] swan-look_far_into_the_distance: “To stand upright and look far into the distance, used to describe waiting with hope.”

5.2.2 Direct Meaning Explanations

[胶着 *jiao-zhuo*] glue-bond: “A metaphor for a stalemate and cannot be solved.”

[玉碎 *yu-sui*] jade-break: “A metaphor for sacrificing to maintain integrity (often used simultaneously with 瓦全 *wa-quan* ‘tile-complete’).”

[瓦解 *wa-jie*] tile-disintegrate: ② “To make the opponents’ power collapse or split.”

[鼎立 *ding-li*] cauldron-stand: “An opposing of three forces (like the three legs of a cauldron).”

[笔挺 *bi-ting*] pen-stand_upright: ② “(clothing) to be very flat and the fold marks are very straight.”

5.3 The Metaphorical Meaning of Metaphorical Compounds

Interestingly, metaphorical compound verbs can further derive new metaphorical meanings even if the words are already formed through a way of metaphor. Words like *wa-jie* “tile-disintegrate” and *bi-ting* “pen-stand_upright” have both the denotations for original metaphorical compound and derived metaphorical meaning separately in their entries.

Other words like *can-shi* “silkworm-eat” and *jing-tun* “whale-swallow” each only have one denotation respectively in their entries. The explanation could be that the original meaning was lost as language evolved. The original meaning for the word *can-shi* is “to eat something bit by bit like silkworms eating mulberry leaves”. The meaning “gradually occupy” is the metaphorical meaning derived from the original meaning. There was a time when both meanings were acceptable. As the original meaning vanished over time, the metaphorical meaning becomes its only meaning. We can treat the noun morphemes and the verb morphemes together as the vehicles, while the tenor is their meanings being used. Namely, for the compound *can-shi*, the action “to eat something bit by bit like silkworms eating mulberry leaves” is the vehicle and the other action “gradually occupy” is the tenor.

6. Semantic Analysis through Collocations

It is too hard to determine the actual diachronic change of the compound *can-shi* and *jing-tun*. While through corpus analysis, we can tease out how the two metaphorical compounds are used by native speakers and determine whether the assumption that proposed in 5.4 is likely to fit with the reality or not.

6.1 Data Processing

The language data will be again to be collected from the BCC Corpus (Xun et al., 2016). MI value formula will be applied to find out the significant collocates of the words. The MI formula used is as follows, where $f(xy)$ is the frequency of co-occurrence of node word and collocates, and N is the total frequency of node word and collocates appearing in the corpus respectively. N stands for the corpus size, i.e., the total number of words in the corpus.

The MI formula is shown below.

$$MI = \log_2 \frac{f(xy) \times N_{corpus}}{f(x)f(y)}$$

We will examine the collocations of the two metaphorical compounds *can-shi* and *jing-tun* that $MI \geq 3$ with a minimum frequency of 4 times given that these results are more likely to be “linguistically interesting” (Stubbs, 1995).

6.2 Data Analysis

Since *can-shi* and *jing-tun* are both verbs, we can find out at least their connotations by examining what objects follow them. To simplify the situation, we will set the examined range from 0 to 1R (namely, the first word to the right of the node word). For our propose, we will only consider all the nouns that stay to the right of the node words to figure out the situation of objects that follow *can-shi* and *jing-tun*. The micro-corpus we are using has 65725 of the word tokens, 1491 node word *can-shi* and 275 for another word *jing-tun*. The results are as the following charts,

Table 1. The Significant Noun Collocates of *can-shi*

Rank	$f(y)$	$f(xy)$	MI-Value	Collocates
1	7	5	4.97666	诸侯 “lord”
2	7	4	4.65474	体育场地 “sports field”
3	9	5	4.61409	对方 “opponent”
4	11	6	4.58762	法 “method”
5	17	9	4.54455	桑叶 “mulberry leaves”
6	8	4	4.46209	鄱阳湖 “Poyang Lake”
7	9	4	4.29217	香港 “Hong Kong”
8	14	5	3.97666	天下 “the world”
9	13	4	3.87713	公有制 “public ownership”
10	34	11	3.83406	国有资产 “state-owned assets”
11	31	9	3.67782	政策 “policy”
12	19	4	3.21416	绿地 “green field”
13	22	4	3.00266	传统 “tradition”

In Table 1, almost all the nouns could not follow a verb meaning “to eat” and require a verb meaning more abstract. It manifests that the meaning of *can-shi* “silkworm-eat” should be ‘gradually occupy’ in the above cases. In fact, none of the cases uses the meaning of “to eat like silkworm” in the whole corpus we compiled since none of collocates are a kind of food except “mulberry leaves”. Mulberry leaves are what silkworms eat, and all the “mulberry leaves” are used in the metaphor part as vehicles “something/somebody do something like silkworms eat mulberry leaves”. In These sentences, the word *can* “silkworm” and *shi* “eat” are treated as separate monosyllabic words instead of two morphemes of a single compound. They are just temporary usage and do not influence the denotation of *can-shi*.

Table 2. The Significant Noun Collocates of *jing-tun*

Rank	$f(y)$	$f(xy)$	MI-Value	Collocates
1	6	6	7.90087	巨海 ‘huge sea’
2	4	4	7.90087	公共财产 ‘Public property’
3	12	7	7.12326	公款 ‘public funds’
4	9	4	6.73094	式 ‘approach’
5	75	26	6.37249	刚果 ‘Congo’
6	16	4	5.90087	策略 ‘strategy’
7	75	10	4.99398	国家 ‘state’
8	34	4	4.8134	国有资产 ‘state-owned assets’
9	138	12	4.3773	中国 ‘China’
10	63	4	3.92359	我国 ‘homeland’

In Table 2, all the nouns require abstract verbs instead of verbs referring to actual action, so the meaning of *jing-tun* is also “occupy on a large scale” rather than “to swallow like a whale”.

Interestingly, the quotation marks are used from time to time when speakers are using the two words *can-shi* and *jing-tun*. Among the 1491 cases of *can-shi*, 208 cases use the quotation marks. Among the 275 cases of *jing-tun*, 10 cases use the quotation marks. The quotation marks “” in Mandarin Chinese are used to indicate that there are some literary devices or temporary usages applied to the words in the quotation marks. In the situation of *can-shi* and *jing-tun*, it means that people tend to believe that “to eat like a silkworm” and “to swallow like a whale” are their denotations respectively, although these two meanings could not be found in the dictionary. The meanings “gradually occupy” and “occupy on a large scale” are believed to be temporary connotations by a group of native speakers, even if no one is using the meanings of “to eat” and “to swallow” in the context. This might be because the two verb morphemes *shi* “to eat” and *tun* “to swallow” are explicit so people tend to misunderstand the denotations.

7. Conclusion

This paper examines the semantic features of noun-verb metaphorical compound verbs in Mandarin Chinese. The compounds can be divided into three subcategories according to how the noun morphemes correlate with the verb morphemes: subject-verb relationship, object-verb relationship, and adverbial-verb relationship. Regardless of the complex relationships between morphemes, the permanent property for these compounds is that the noun morphemes suggest the vehicles of metaphor processes, while the verb morphemes indicate the tenors. Besides the fact that metaphorical compound verbs are already all formed through metaphor, their meanings can further evolve through metaphor on a higher level by treating the whole words as the vehicles. The more abstract novel meanings are the

new tenors.

We then focus on the two compounds *can-shi* “silkworm-eat” and *jing-tun* “whale-swallow”. Their usage patterns were explicitly illustrated by corpus analysis. It manifests that the original meanings from metaphorical word formation have already been lost, but people are still prone to believe they still exist and apply quotation marks to provide the derived metaphorical meanings of the two compounds even though it is confirmed that the original meanings are never used in the Modern Mandarin Chinese. Our study on the special type of metaphorical compounds also attests to how essential metaphor works in our mind when we try to understand and describe the world through language. The base of semantics are concepts in human mind. How we use metaphors to express abstract concepts correlates with the unique culture. It might be difficult for non-native speakers to understand metaphorical compounds in a language if the object used in the word has cultural connotations. The choice of the vehicles leads to the traits of national culture.

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