

Original Paper

Why Metametonymic Argot in the Publicity Texts of China's National College Entrance Examination Scores?

Mei Feng¹ & Guojin Hou^{2*}

¹ Associate professor of School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Medical University, China

² Professor of pragmatics and translatology, College of Foreign Languages, Putian University, China

* Corresponding author, Guojin Hou, E-mail: nationelf@126.com

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Abstract

After China's National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in recent years, some high schools tend to publicize their NCEE scores by QQ groups, WeChat groups, or posters in an implicit manner due to the inconformity of NCEE-score publicity with the present educational policy in China. NCEE-score publicity texts are now presented like a discussion of harvest events such as a harvest of a type of plant or animal. This paper studies how and why such texts occur. It has been found that: 1) each text is a metaphorical one, mapping plants, animals or other things onto NCEE testees, 2) each text is a textual configuration by metaphor chains of a harvest of plants, animals or other things, 3) the metaphors in each text are also metonymies, hence metametonymies, 4) all expressions in such a text make a metametonymic argot, and 5) each text is rich in pragma-rhetorical values. Be that as it may, in the context of maintaining NCEE fairness, NCEE-score publicity texts, however implicit, should not be encouraged despite their cleverness in evading official punishment.

Keywords

NCEE-score publicity, metaphor chains, metametonymic argot, pragma-rhetorical values

1. Introduction

China's National College Entrance Examination (NCEE, often called *Gaokao* in Chinese) has long been regarded as the fairest examination, for it provides equal opportunity for testees to enter colleges by entire self-reliance. As a critical bond between secondary and higher education as well as an important link between higher education and society, NCEE is highly valued by the government, society, education institutions at all levels, testees as well as their parents and teachers, which can be proved by the fact that before and during the exam the public security, traffic and other departments

make every effort to ensure smooth NCEE and that construction sites, restaurants, cultural and entertainment venues are given noise restrictions.

NCEE scores (achievements) come as the only criterion for college admission, high scores oriented to prestigious universities (Liu, 2012). Meanwhile, NCEE scores of a high school and its enrollment rate are of vital importance to its recruitment and development. Therefore, many high schools competitively wage extensive publicity about their NCEE scores after NCEE news. The competition of NCEE-score publicity among high schools becomes increasingly fierce and exacerbates the imbalance of educational resources between different areas (such as eastern and western areas, urban and rural areas), and even between different schools in the same area.

Considering that high schools place undue emphases on NCEE scores which deviates from the original intention of school-running, the Ministry of Education issued a notice (February 12, 2018) in which publicity of NCEE top scorers was first explicitly forbidden. CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued *The Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era* (October 13, 2020) in an attempt to reverse the unreasonable orientation of education appraisal and correct the tendency to blindly pursue a high enrollment rate. Similar requirements were made in *The Notice of the Ministry of Education on Enrollment of Regular Universities* (February 2, 2021). As *The Notice* goes, all schools should adhere to the correct view of educational achievements, further standardize the notification of NCEE scores and relevant publicity work, and change the practice of assessing students simply by NCEE scores. Except for specific items stipulated by the Ministry of Education, NCEE scores can only be offered to the testees themselves and the colleges they apply for, neither to the testees' high schools nor to any other units or individuals. *The Notice* strictly prohibits related departments and news media from publicizing NCEE scores such as "NCEE top scorers", "enrollment rate" and "high-score testees".

There thus arises the tug of war between the universal concerns about NCEE scores and the anti-publicity regulations. For example, Huai'an High School in Jiangsu Province gathered and publicized by a poster the NCEE scores of a small portion of its testees and the number of candidates for college admission on June 25, 2021, to be immediately criticized and punished by Huai'an Education Bureau. To publicize or not, that is the question. Since then, high schools began to play word games in their publicity texts. In late June 2021, for instance, there appeared *A Bulletin of Glad Tidings* in the name of parent councils about Fuyang No. 7 High School and Fuyang No. 10 High School in Anhui Province, and *A Notification* issued by Liuzhou Tieyi High School in Guangxi Province (Note 1). They tell in not telling, beating about the bush. It is noticeable that multifarious linguistic metaphors emerged in NCEE-score publicity texts of 2022, coming into the public's view via the We-Media platform in a more vivid, creative and implicit way. This paper aims to explore how and why this phenomenon occurs and what attitude should be taken towards it.

2. Literature Review

China's NCEE experienced a ten-year break-off from 1966 to 1976 since its establishment in 1952. The past decades after its resumption have witnessed the rapid development of education in China (Huang, 2020). Previous studies on China's NCEE can be summarized into four major categories: 1) studies centered on the NCEE content and its validity, primarily the content validity of the various subjects that comprise NCEE (e.g., Lin, 2021; Wang, 2021), 2) studies on the NCEE appraisal system (e.g., Li et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2019), 3) studies on NCEE policy or reform (Liu, 2007; Dai, 2011), and 4) studies on NCEE fairness (e.g., Zheng, 2010; Zhou, 2011). However, these studies are not separated from but interwoven with each other. To be specific, nearly all studies of NCEE content, NCEE appraisal system, NCEE policy, and NCEE reform serve ultimately to maintain NCEE fairness. In this sense, NCEE fairness has always been the chief common concern.

NCEE fairness presents primarily as fair exams and fair admission. Fair exams encompass fairness in content and form of the exam. In terms of content, the urban-oriented proposition is obviously unfair to the testees from rural areas due to the limited educational resources and socio-cultural conditions in rural schools (Yu, 2006; Zhang, 2008). In terms of form, a unified and standardized exam nationwide gradually transformed into a unified exam in combination with multivariant evaluation and multivariant admission. While multiple NCEE forms infused vitality for the long-term unified NCEE, they have also caused many social problems in NCEE fairness (c.f., Zheng, 2010). Fair admission is another manifestation of NCEE fairness. Yet it has been severely threatened by such policies as "slanted enrollment score", "migrant testees", "extra score policy" and "autonomous admission" (ibid.). These policies were made to pursue regional equity, but regrettably they intensified inequity or regional privilege. Therefore, it is quite urgent to modify the NCEE admission system based on fair exam (Jiang et al., 2007).

NCEE fairness aims to realize equitable distribution of educational benefits among multiple parties, such as national, social, and personal interests. According to Wang et al. (2012), NCEE fairness covers five aspects. First, the subject that determines NCEE fairness is the state or government. Second, the social members who are fit for the requirements of NCEE constitute the object of NCEE fairness. Third, the core of NCEE fairness consists in equal opportunity for higher education (resources). Fourth, influential factors of NCEE fairness include social foundation, political environment, economic level and exam technology. Last but not the least, NCEE fairness is nothing but relative fairness, a matter of actual state rather than an ideal state.

NCEE unfairness is quite a complicated problem, which comes into being due to both diachronic and synchronic factors (Wang, 2016), so it is impossible to get resolved in a short term or in a simple way. Diachronically, NCEE shows the priority of different groups in educational rights in different periods. To be specific, it was grounded in the national standpoint before 1999, giving priority to workers and peasants and those with superior abilities, while from 1999 on, it turned to the educational demand of vulnerable groups from rural and ethnic areas, who were deprived of equal educational opportunity due

to the uneven distribution of educational resources (Han, 2022). Synchronically, NCEE unfairness can be attributed to the uneven distribution of educational resources, design limitation of NCEE system, quality alienation of NCEE function and insufficient coordination of NCEE system (Li, 2012).

Fairness is not only the most important index to evaluate whether NCEE is reasonable or not, but also the yardstick of NCEE reform and policy-making. NCEE reform essentially means interpretation and practice of fairness under certain social conditions (Dai, 2006), adjusting the educational benefits among different parties. Just as Wang (2016) pointed out, fairness should be distinguished from average in NCEE, which does not require the same exam paper in the nationwide or the same enrollment score for all testees but means treating the same group or the same area equally, and treating different groups or areas differentially, including compensating the vulnerable groups from rural and ethnic areas.

All in all, previous studies are mostly concerned with NCEE fairness at the macro level, involving fairness in the content and form of the exam, fairness in NCEE admission, fairness in NCEE policy and NCEE reform. NCEE fairness at the micro level has seldom been discussed. For example, high schools with better school-running conditions, in different areas or in the same area, are more appealing to graduates of junior middle schools. Additionally, they attract excellent graduates by publicizing their NCEE top scorers and college enrollment rate, which aggravates the distributional unfairness in educational resources and student sources between different schools. In order to maintain NCEE fairness, NCEE-score publicity has been explicitly prohibited in some official educational documents issued by the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government since 2018. However, there still exist some NCEE-score publicity texts in the form of argot, which go against NCEE fairness to some degree. By analyzing such texts in detail, this paper attempts to find out the motivation for this phenomenon and propose corresponding suggestions.

3. Data Collection and Theoretical Bases

3.1 Data Collection

With the lessons drawn from Huai'an High School in Jiangsu Province in 2021, high schools dare not publicize their NCEE scores blatantly any longer. Despite the official prohibitions, NCEE-score publicity still exists nowadays in this or that covert way, such as by QQ groups, WeChat groups, or posters. Therefore, it is not easy to collect the data concerned. Besides, nearly all NCEE-score publicity texts in 2022 occur in the form of argot, primarily metaphors or metonymies.

Searching with “fancy publicity about NCEE scores” or “metaphor about NCEE scores” as keywords in Baidu, Sohu and NetEase, we gathered 30 such NCEE-score publicity texts from their We-Media platform, which unanimously take the form of screenshot of QQ, WeChat, or posters. This shows that these publicity texts, though limited in number, are original (rather than adapted or copied texts). All these texts are exceptionally publicity about the NCEE scores of 2022, involving many cities in different provinces of China.

3.2 Conceptual Metaphor and Its Systematicity

Conceptual metaphor can be seen as a linguistic, psychological and cultural behavior in which people perceive, experience, and comprehend one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 6), which involves a metaphorical mechanism and a conceptual mechanism, with the former referring to the conventional association of one thing with another and the latter meaning that “the motivation for the metaphor resides at the level of conceptual domains” (Evans & Green, 2001, p. 295).

Conceptual metaphor has the characteristics of systematicity (Lakoff, 1990, 1993; see also Feng, 2021), which can be further divided into internal systematicity and external systematicity (Wen & Yang, 2016). Internal systematicity refers to coherence within a metaphorical mapping, in which various instances across two conceptual domains systematically correspond to each other, including related senses of one linguistic expression, related linguistic expressions, new entailments and inferences. For example, the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY results from many English expressions that reflect a way of understanding and conceptualizing love in terms of a journey. The mappings across the two conceptual domains include ontological correspondences where entities in the domain of love, such as lovers, common goals and love relationship correspond systematically to entities in the domain of journeys, travelers, destinations and vehicles respectively. In short, internal systematicity of a metaphorical mapping is manifested by one-to-one correspondence across two conceptual domains. The various dimensions for the correspondence emerge directly from our experience, primarily the most important and prominent aspects.

External systematicity refers to coherence across two or more metaphors. When a concept is structured by two or more concepts, the different metaphorical mappings can be systematically linked to one another and incorporated into a more general metaphorical mapping. In other words, different metaphors with the same target or source domain are usually coherent with one another under the framework of a more general metaphor. In this sense, metaphorical mappings are organized in inheritance hierarchies in which structures in the lower mappings inherit structures in the higher ones. For example, the concept JOURNEY can be used to understand the concepts LOVE and CAREER, which can be recognized as a broader concept A PURPOSEFUL LIFE or an even broader one, namely EVENT, forming a three-level hierarchical structure (Lakoff, 1993, p. 222).

Level 1: The event-structure metaphor.

Level 2: A PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

Level 3: LOVE IS A JOURNEY; A CAREER IS A JOURNEY.

External systematicity of the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY is embodied in both its horizontal coherence with A CAREER IS A JOURNEY and its vertical coherence with A PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY as well as the event-structure metaphor.

3.3 Pragma-rhetorical Principle and Its Maxims

Pragmatics and rhetoric interrelate with each other, as they display a range of commonalities and differences (see Liu & Zhu, 2011; Ilie, 2018; Hou, 2020). Ilie (2018) argues that a pragma-rhetorical

approach provides a multi-level analysis of political discourse in terms of discursive contextualization of political power struggle and meta-discursive framing of question-answer political confrontation. Jiang and Chen (2019) develop an analysis framework by integrating theoretical perspectives like social, cognitive and performative pragmatics, based on which they discuss pragmatics-rhetoric boundary issues and the possibility of integrating pragmatics with rhetoric into pragma-rhetoric. Then Hou (2023: 151) further proposes the Pragma-rhetorical Principle with its eight maxims, shown as follows:

Maxim 1: In a pragma-rhetorical act, make your contribution one that is related to the situated context and pragmatic goal, and make the pragma-rhetorical act facilitating meaning generation and purpose achievement be the primary communicative goal.

Maxim 2: Make your contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of the pragma-rhetorical act, not more or less informative, except for a special pragma-rhetorical purpose—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

Maxim 3: Make your contribution one that is true, no less than one's own beliefs and knowledge except for a special pragma-rhetorical purpose—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

Maxim 4: Make your contribution relevant to the relevant contextemes, especially communicators' identity, relationship, status, generation, distance, needs and goals of this pragma-rhetorical act, except for a special pragma-rhetorical purpose—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

Maxim 5: Make your contribution clear, brief, and well-constructed except for a special pragma-rhetorical purpose—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

Maxim 6: Make your contribution one that is polite, generous, complimentary, humble, approving or sympathetic as required for the current pragma-rhetorical act, being appropriate in degree and manner, except for a serious threat to one's positive or/and negative face, or a special pragma-rhetorical goal—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

Maxim 7: Make your contribution civil, optimistic, humorous, vivid, demonstrating personalized attributes, being appropriate in degree and manner, except for a special pragma-rhetorical goal—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

Maxim 8: Make your contribution one that performs a sufficient number of speech acts, such as representatives, directives, expressives, interrogatives, and declarations, as required for the current pragma-rhetorical act, and in conformity with the corresponding constitutive rules and behavioral norms of a related cultural context (or cross-cultural context), meeting related felicity conditions, except for a special pragma-rhetorical goal—based on relevant expectation and understanding.

In essence, the Pragma-rhetorical Principle features being inherited, integrated, descriptive and standardized of pragmatic and rhetorical principles. "Being inherited" here refers to the fact that the Pragma-rhetorical Principle mainly inherits the three principles of pragmatics, namely Cooperative Principle, Relevance Theory and Politeness Theory, as well as the essence of rhetorical principles (see Li & Sheng, 2010, pp. 69-130) and speech act theory. Therefore, it is advisable to apply the

Pragma-rhetorical Principle with its eight maxims to the NCEE-score publicity texts, a pragma-rhetorical act of argot.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Multifarious Metaphors in NCEE-score Publicity Texts

The conceptual metaphors in NCEE-score publicity texts can be classified into three major types, namely plant metaphors, animal metaphors and other metaphors, to be analyzed one by one, followed by a discussion of systematicity of these conceptual metaphors.

4.1.1 Plant Metaphors

In the 30 collected NCEE-score publicity texts, more than half (18) use a variety of plants to allude to NCEE testees and then hinted at NCEE scores with their relevant features.

In all plant metaphors, fruit metaphors count the most in number, dominated by the conceptual metaphor: **NCEE-SCORE IS A HARVEST OF FRUITS**. Owing to the fact that Guangxi Province abounds in mangoes, six texts publicizing high schools in Guangxi Province insinuated NCEE-score via a mango harvest. Take the publicity about Qinzhou No. 2 High School (Note 2) for example.

(1) 大丰收大丰收！今年学校（二中）的芒果树收成特别好，据不完全统计，一批成熟的芒果共有 1320 个，其中重 600 克以上的芒果有 100 多个，特别惊喜的是，高三应届班的学生顾又嘉同学摘到一只重达 696 克的芒果（不带叶），是今年钦州城区水果市场的果王，目前京城两大水果商已经闻讯来钦进行抢购。

Tr.: What a harvest! This year, No. 2 High School has an exceptionally good harvest of mangoes. According to incomplete statistics, there are 1320 mangoes that are ripe, of which more than 100 weigh over 600 grams each. To our surprise, a grade-three senior high school student (relative to the students who learn at high schools for four or more years) named Youjia Gu is the king/queen of fruits in the fruit market of Qinzhou urban area this year for s/he has picked a mango as heavy as 696 grams (net weight without leaves). At present, the two largest fruit dealers in Beijing have rushed to purchase it after hearing the news.

Here NCEE-score is structured in terms of a mango harvest based on people's (especially local people's) experiential correlations. Because the ripening of mangoes inside Qinzhou No. 2 High School or in the neighborhood and the notification of NCEE scores occur roughly simultaneously each year. NCEE-score is conceptualized and understood, naturally and skillfully, by a mango harvest.

In accordance with the experiential knowledge of A MANGO HARVEST, many of its relevant entities or features map onto the NCEE-SCORE domain. Listed below are some important, prominent ontological correspondences across the two conceptual domains.

- a) Testees in the school correspond to mangoes in the school.
- b) The number of testees above the enrollment cut-off score corresponds to that of ripe mangoes.
- c) The NCEE score of a testee corresponds to the weight of a mango.
- d) The top scorer corresponds to the king/queen of fruits.

- e) Pure examination score corresponds to the net weight of mangoes per se.
- f) Colleges correspond to fruit dealers. The top two prestigious universities in China, Peking University and Tsinghua University, correspond to the two largest fruit dealers.

This metaphorical text tells about not only the large yield and good quality of mangoes but also their excellent sales prospects, forming an overall picture of the harvest of mangoes from production to marketing. The text informs about the school's NCEE scores in the disguise of a discussion of mangoes. Interesting is the fact that relevant local readers meet no problem in understanding it.

Similar are the cases of five high schools in Hunan and Anhui Provinces publicizing their NCEE scores by a harvest of peaches, plums, lychees or loquats, for the type of fruit is relevant and easily accessible. These fruits and the schools mentioned are of spatial contiguity in general, and the fruit metaphors are derived from the experiential similarity of NCEE-score and fruit-harvest from process to result. To be exact, all testees resulting from the nurturing by teachers are similar to all fruits resulting from the cultivation by gardeners, and high-score testees resemble good-quality fruits. In brief, the experiential knowledge of fruit harvests is preserved in the conceptual domain of NCEE-SCORE.

To sum up, such plants as fruits are frequently used to understand the NCEE-score. In such metaphorical mappings, plants correspond to testees, relevant features of plants correspond to the scores of testees, and the plants' next station (such as fruit dealers) corresponds to the testees' next destination (colleges or universities). In addition to plants, some animals are also employed to refer to NCEE testees implicitly, hence animal metaphors.

4.1.2 Animal Metaphors

Of the 30 publicity texts, 7 are metaphor texts of animals dominated by the conceptual metaphor: NCEE-SCORE IS A FISHERY HARVEST. Three texts report NCEE-score in terms of fish-catching. Look at the following example (Note 3).

(2) 今年学校毕业生捕鱼收成特别好。据统计，全校一批次捕获的鱼共有一千二百多条，二批次捕获的鱼有三百三十六条，总共捕获率高达百分之九十。其中，净重六百克以上的鱼有一百九十三条。更令人惊喜的是，高三应届班一同学捕获六百七十八克鲤鱼，另一同学捕获六百三十六克文鱼。三年磨练技术，收获只在今朝。

Tr. The graduates in our school have had a particularly good harvest of fish this year. According to statistics, more than 1,200 fish got caught in the first batch and 336 fish in the second batch, with a total fish catch rate of up to 90%. Among them, 193 fish have a net weight of more than 600 grams. What is more surprising is that one grade-three senior high school graduate caught a carp as heavy as 678 grams and another caught a salmon as heavy as 636 grams. After three years' skill honing in fish catch, the graduates have a good harvest now.

The ontological correspondences between NCEE-SCORE and A HARVEST OF FISH can be listed below.

- a) The fish caught correspond to high-score testees. Fish caught in the first batch correspond to the testees to be enrolled in the first batch, for key/top universities, and fish caught in the second batch correspond to testees to be enrolled in the second batch, for ordinary universities.
- b) The fish-catching rate corresponds to the testees' enrollment rate.
- c) The weight of a fish corresponds to the score of a testee.
- d) The carp weighing 678 grams corresponds to the top scorer majoring in science who got 678 scores and the salmon weighing 636 grams corresponds to the top scorer majoring in liberal arts who got 636 scores.

This source text can be understood in the same vein as the fruit metaphors of Example (1), following similar ontological correspondences.

4.1.3 Other Metaphors

In the data, we also find metaphors of cellphones, Chinese *zongzi* (traditional Chinese rice-pudding), consumers, enterprises and tour groups. They share the same working mechanism of plant and animal metaphors, as discussed above, but they are hard to be classified into a more general type. They are not as important (a small number) as the former two types of metaphors. How can the above things find their way into the NCEE-score publicity texts?

Cellphones with different qualities are used to metaphorically represent the testees with different scores in NCEE in that NCEE is conceptualized in terms of production of cellphones. Since the Chinese traditional Dragon Boat Festival fell on June 3, 2022, shortly before the notification of NCEE scores, its special food *zongzi* is used to insinuate NCEE testees, which can be roughly attributed to the temporal simultaneity of this festival and NCEE. Consumers of rice noodles in Qingshuitang Street are mapped onto the testees of the high school nearby due to the spatial contiguity of the street and the school. Different tour groups that enjoy service on high-speed trains with different train numbers (such as No. 985 and No. 211) are mapped onto testees with different scores who will be enrolled by universities of different levels (such as Project 985 Universities and Project 211 Universities, Note 4). The enterprise metaphor uses the turnover to allude to the testees' NCEE scores and the sales volume to refer to the number of testees.

Based on analyses, the above things are either the features of the surrounding areas of the high schools involved or the special things relevant to the time of NCEE-score notification. In other words, these sub-types of metaphors are formed based on spatial contiguity and temporal simultaneity. For example, the so-called enterprise in the enterprise metaphor is nothing but a store of great renown in the snack street adjacent to a specific high school. The publicity text sets it as the prototype to report NCEE result, which is not only familiar but acceptable to the readers in the neighborhood.

Altogether, the three major types of metaphors and their sub-types are summarized in the following table, with the number of each concrete example listed according to the statistics.

Table 1. Conceptual Metaphors in NCEE-score Publicity Texts

Metaphor types	Sub-types	Examples	Number	
Plant metaphors (18)	fruits (11)	mangoes	6	
		peaches and plums	3	
		lychees	1	
		loquats	1	
	flowers (5)	lotuses	3	
		sunflowers	1	
		roses	1	
	Animal metaphors (7)	vegetables (1)	corn	1
		trees (1)	saplings	1
		fishery animals (6)	fish	4
			crabs	1
Other metaphors (5)	wild animals (1)	spiral shells	1	
		wild boars	1	
	products (1)	cellphones	1	
	food (1)	Chinese <i>zongzi</i>	1	
	people (1)	consumers	1	
Total	organizations (1)	enterprises	1	
		tour groups	1	
			30	

4.1.4 Systematicity of the Conceptual Metaphors in NCEE-score Publicity Texts

As presented in section 3.2, internal systematicity refers to coherence within one conceptual metaphor while external systematicity, coherence across two or more conceptual metaphors.

It has to be admitted that all texts are not flawless. In Example (1), a student named Youjia Gu is reported as the king/queen of fruits in the fruit market of Qinzhou urban area for s/he has picked the largest/heaviest mango. In the conceptual metaphor NCEE-SCORE IS A MANGO HARVEST, the student Youjia Gu corresponds to both the largest/heaviest mango and the person who picks the mango, which fails to stick to the internal systematicity within the same metaphor. In Example (2), testees correspond to both fish and fish catchers in the same text, which also breaks the coherence of the same metaphor. However, in the collected NCEE-score publicity texts, most metaphorical mappings are manifested by one-to-one correspondence, in accordance with internal systematicity.

As the saying goes, “No pains, no gains”, diligent learning in China is often considered as “pains”, and being enrolled in a college, as “gains”. Most publicity texts (25 out of 30) tell NCEE-score by a harvest of plants or animals owing to the similarity in NCEE and a harvest event. NCEE-score is the “gain” of

educating students and a harvest of plants or animals is the “gain” of nurturing plants or breeding animals. The various metaphorical mappings are systematically linked to one another and can be incorporated into a more general metaphor: NCEE-SCORE IS A HARVEST EVENT. In this sense, these metaphors are of external systematicity.

Compared with plant metaphors, animal metaphors are less typical as harvest events in both spatial contiguity and temporal simultaneity. For instance, the wild-boar metaphor lays emphasis on the breeding process, though it reveals the result by comparing the rank of the wild boars before and after domestication. To put it another way, the wild boars rated as C+ or C before domestication are re-rated as A or B after three years of domestication. So this text narrates a harvest event despite its emphasis on the process. The most untypical metaphors are those other than plant and animal metaphors. Other things such as smartphones, tour groups and enterprises are sporadically employed to allude to testees. In some sense, these metaphors can be seen as creative usage or marginal cases of harvest events.

Although the wild-boar metaphor emphasizes the “pains” more, namely the process of cultivating the students, other metaphors highlight the “gains” unexceptionally, focusing on the scores of testees and the colleges they are to be enrolled in. Pains or gains, these conceptual metaphors can be incorporated into NCEE-SCORE IS A HARVEST EVENT. The conceptual metaphors in NCEE-score publicity texts can be briefly represented as follows:

Level 1: NCEE-SCORE IS A HARVEST EVENT.

Level 2: NCEE-SCORE IS A HARVEST OF PLANTS/ANIMALS/...

Level 3: NCEE-SCORE IS A HARVEST OF MANGOES/FISH...

It can be seen that all these metaphorical NCEE-score publicity texts derive from the conceptual metaphor of Level 1, so they are consistent by and large despite their different degrees of typicality as a harvest event. They are of external systematicity owing to both vertical and horizontal coherence.

4.2 Argot Metamonymies Rooted in Textuality

4.2.1 Metaphor Chains, Semantic Prosody and Metamonymies

In all the NCEE-score publicity data collected, it is found that the metaphors in each text constitute a metaphor chain, all serving one common conceptual metaphor. With Example (1) again, the first sentence “What a harvest!” is a general metaphor, and the second sentence “This year, No. 2 High School has an exceptionally good harvest of mangoes.” metaphorically branches off to the “harvest of mangoes”, hence a metaphor of a harvest of plant/fruit/mango, a more and more specific metaphor. The text reports NCEE-score with more details as it unfolds. The third sentence tells of the number of mangoes (1320) and the weight of each (600 grams). The fourth sentence shows the readers an example of such nice mangoes as “the king/queen of fruits”—Youjia Gu, “the top scorer” indeed. The fifth sentence highlights “the two largest fruit dealers in Beijing”, metaphorically referring to the top two prestigious universities of China—Peking University and Tsinghua University.

As such, the fruit metaphors in Example (1) chain up in the text. It is surprising, however, that none of the metaphors, in isolation, will hold semantically or logically, unless pragma-rhetorically bound in one

text, hence textuality or text-reliance of the NCEE-score publicity metaphors. Also, there appears semantic prosody of fruit harvest (and sales) in this example, represented by terms like “harvest”, “mangoes”, “ripe”, “(the number of) 100”, “600 grams each”, “the king/queen of fruits”, “fruit market”, “a mango as heavy as 696 grams”, “the two largest fruit dealers” and “purchase”. So are the cases with other examples, like Example (2) where are seen “a good harvest (of fish)” (appearing twice), the number of “1,200 fish”, “caught in the first batch”, “336 fish”, “in the second batch”, “a total fish-catching rate of up to 90%”, “193 fish”, “a net weight of more than 600 grams”, “a carp”, “678 grams”, “a salmon”, “636 grams”, which jointly engender a semantic prosody of catching big fish for the configuration of textuality. The relevant readers can reach the expected understanding usually by the end of the text by stringing up all the seemingly isolated metaphorical expressions, hence an ah-ha effect of a garden path, so to speak.

Then it can be discovered that in texts like Example (1), testees in the NCEE are not only metaphorically referred to as “mangoes”, but also, perhaps more importantly, metonymically discussed by nothing but things like “mangoes”, their weight of mangoes being the score of testees. In a certain sense, the metaphors in our data actually are metaphors in metonymies, or vice versa, so we can call them “metametonymies”. In Example (2), likewise, the NCEE testees are fish metaphorically, and in turn, metonymically resurface as or in the name of fish, hence metametonymies.

4.2.2 Argot for Wordplay

NCEE-score publicity texts circumvent the anti-publicity regulations by such metametonymies, be they plant or animal (or other) metametonymies, making a text comprehensible exclusively to the relevant readers shortly after NCEE as far as a specific area is concerned in a year. “Outsiders” may find it semantically opaque. Thus, the metametonymies in the NCEE-score publicity texts cleverly make the linguistic phenomenon, namely argot.

Argot is “(linguistics) slang or jargon peculiar to a particular group, esp (formerly) a group of thieves” (*Thesaurus*) or “[t]he jargon, slang, or peculiar phraseology of a class, orig. that of thieves and rogues” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 4th edn.). It is “the language used by a particular type or group of people: an often more or less secret vocabulary and idiom peculiar to a particular group” (*Merriam-Webster*). For example, “Bite” as an English argot (jargon/lingo/slang) may mean “a portion removed from the whole”, e.g., “the government’s weekly bite from my paycheck” (Note 5). The word “juice” as an argot means “energetic vitality”, e.g., “her creative juices were flowing” (*ibid.*). Argot in Chinese often utilizes pun, metonymy, anagram, allusion, and lexical hiding to implicate its meaning, thus intangible to average people, let alone outside readers. For instance, “使白” (*shǐbái*, make sth. white(r)) is a metonymic architecture argot for “whitewash(ing)”. Chinese names of people or places are often argot in a sense, like those in the classical novel *The Story of the Stone*, where “贾宝玉” (*Jiǎ Bǎoyù*) as hero suggests a tint of “假宝玉” (homophonic pun, lit. artificial gem/jade), “贾雨村” (*Jiǎ Yǔcūn*) suggests really “假语村” (homophonic pun, lit. a village of liars), “潇湘馆” (*Xiāoxiāng guǎn*, the Naiad’s

House/ Bamboo Lodge, Note 6) implies “消香馆” (homophonic pun, lit. an aroma-gone accommodation, (a future) disappearance of the beauties).

All the collected NCEE-score publicity texts are read *prima facie* by ordinary readers as a text of a harvest event. Encountering sayings like “No. 2 High School has an exceptionally good harvest of mangoes”, “a grade-three senior high school student (...) named Youjia Gu is the king/queen of fruits in the fruit market of Qinzhou urban area this year for s/he has picked a mango as heavy as 696 grams” (Example (1)) goes well beyond common apprehension. How can a high school have a mango harvest? Is the school campus an orchard by accident? How can the student named Youjia Gu be “the king/queen of fruits in the fruit market of Qinzhou urban area”? Or is s/he a greengrocer? If so, how can s/he pick “a mango as heavy as 696 grams”? As partly illustrated in 4.1.1, there exist correspondences between the testees and mangoes, between their scores and the weight of mangoes, between high scores and ripe mangoes, and between the top scorer and the king/queen of fruits. With example (2), by the same token, testees correspond to fish, the number of the testees reaching the level of university entrance corresponds to that of the fish big enough, testees enrolled in the first batch correspond to fish caught in the first batch, the enrollment rate corresponds to fish-catching rate, scores correspond to fish weight, the top scorer in science corresponds to the carp caught with 678 grams, and the top scorer in liberal arts corresponds to the salmon caught 636 grams.

The argot metametonymies in NCEE-score publicity texts are peculiar language of high schools in China’s specific context. They employ implicit vocabulary such as fruits, fish, cellphones and consumers to talk about testees in an attempt to evade the supervision of cyber police and official punishment. Then, what are the functions of such publicity texts?

4.3 Pragma-rhetorical Values of NCEE-score Publicity Texts

Given the markedness of the argot NCEE-score publicity texts, the unmarked, literal texts of Example (1) and Example (2) should run as follows respectively.

(1’) 好消息好消息！今年学校（二中）的毕业生高考成绩特别好，据不完全统计，上线的人数共有 1320 个，其中 600 分以上的考生有 100 多个，特别惊喜的是，高三应届班的学生顾又嘉同学取得了 696 分的好成绩（裸分），是今年钦州城区的高考状元，目前北京的两大名校已经闻讯来钦开展“抢人大战”。

Tr. Good news! No. 2 High School has got excellent achievements in NCEE. According to incomplete statistics, 1320 testees are above the enrollment cut-off score, and among them, more than 100 are over 600 scores. To our surprise, a grade-three senior high school student named Youjia Gu is the top scorer in Qinzhou urban area this year who got 696 scores (pure examination score). At present, the top two universities in Beijing have come to win him/her over after hearing the news.

(2’) 今年学校毕业生高考成绩特别好。据统计，全校一批次上线人数共有一千二百多人，二批次上线人数有三百三十六人，上线率高达百分之九十。其中，裸分六百分以上的考生有一百九十三人。更令人惊喜的是，高三应届班一同学取得六百七十八分，成为理科状元，另一同学取得六百三十六分，成为文科状元。三年磨炼技术，收获只在今朝。

Tr. In our school, more than 1,200 graduates are to be enrolled in the first batch, becoming candidates for key universities, and 336 are to be enrolled in the second batch, as candidates for ordinary universities. The overall enrollment rate is up to 90%. Among them, there are 193 graduates whose pure examination scores are over 600. What is more surprising to us is that the top scorers in both liberal arts and science are grade-three senior high school students, who got the marks as high as 636 and 678 respectively.

The two texts, compared with the source texts, sound straightforward and blank, hence unmarked in semantic expressiveness. So their pragma-rhetorical values are low. They are neither interesting nor illegal for ordinary readers, whose meanings can be easily figured out, which will definitely bring about official punishment. The rhetor thus opts for the textual argot of metametonymies for semantic opaqueness, publicity legality (actually marginal legality), and pragma-rhetorical values.

The texts in our data, all metametonymic argot texts, are charged with high pragma-rhetorical values. As regards the Pragma-rhetorical Principle:

1) They satisfy Maxim 1: they will place their “pragma-rhetorical act” of legalizing an essentially illegal text in “the situated context” to serve the pragmatic goal of implicit publicity, such as by taking advantage of spatial contiguity or temporal simultaneity.

2) They agree with Maxim 2: the semantic content of the texts piled up by coherent metaphors (metaphor chains) or metametonymies is all “informative” enough for the pragma-rhetorical act, “not more or less informative”. Each text contains brief yet informative linguistic expressions, usually encompassing four or more metaphors or metametonymies, such as in Examples (1) and (2).

3) They go in line with Maxim 3: the texts are “true”, no less than the facts of specific high schools, their NCEE scores and related information. For example, “the two largest fruit dealers in Beijing” refers to “the top two universities in Beijing” in reality, and “Trains No. 985” and “Trains No. 211 ” refer to “Project 985 universities” and “Project 211 universities” respectively.

4) They abide by Maxim 4: “being relevant to the relevant contextemes, especially the communicators’ identity, relationship, status, needs and goals as well as the events’ time and space” of the relevant pragma-rhetorical acts. In the context of official restrictions about NCEE-score publicity, the rhetors establish connections between NCEE and certain events by making full use of the spatial feature of specific high schools and the temporal feature of NCEE so as to tell NCEE-score in not telling.

5) They basically obey Maxim 5: “being clear, brief, and well-constructed” for most of them observe internal and external systematicity by coherent metaphors (metaphor chains) or metametonymies, as illustrated in sub-section 4.1.4.

6) They perfectly fit Maxim 6: “being polite, generous, complimentary, approving, and appropriate in degree and manner”. All collected texts, unexceptionally, are positive publicity of specific high schools, never mentioning the students who fail in NCEE or those whose scores are not (so) satisfying. Yet such publicity texts meet the expectation of their readers, so they are appropriate in terms of publicity manner. Moreover, the texts are appropriate in publicity degree since the information related to NCEE

is truly conveyed by metonymies.

7) They accord with Maxim 7: “being civil, optimistic, humorous, vivid, demonstrating /maintaining personalized attributes, and appropriate in degree and manner”. These metaphorical NCEE-score publicity texts are quite vivid due to the usage of metaphors about a certain plant, animal or specific thing. Being optimistic is mostly reflected by such argot expressions, which actually demonstrate the level of the potential colleges or universities some testees may be enrolled in, such as “the two largest fruit dealers in Beijing”, “Trains No. 985” and “Trains No. 211”.

8) They comply with Maxim 8: “a sufficient number of speech acts, such as representatives, expressives and declarations, in conformity with the corresponding constitutive rules and behavioral norms of a related cultural context, meeting related felicity conditions”. There are about four representatives or declarations for each text in the data, most of which observe felicity conditions, namely internal coherence. These texts function not only as summaries of some specific schools’ NCEE-score but also as powerful advertisements for attracting more excellent middle school graduates. The marked metonymic argot does demand a greater proportion of processing efforts than unmarked expressions. The relevant readers, who are well informed about the anti-publicity regulations and wish to be (better) informed about the local NCEE-score, can achieve not only relevant NCEE information in the argot but also an Ah-ha effect of deciphering the pragma-rhetorical acts and means. Thus, the pragma-rhetorical values of the metonymic argot are high, higher than the straightforward NCEE-score publicity, such as Examples (3) and (4).

5. Conclusion

China’s NCEE is the greatest public concern to average Chinese citizens, let alone to parents of NCEE testees. As NCEE-score publicity may result in cut-throat competition among high schools and among universities, it is forbidden, or in recent years it has been banned as illegal. Nonetheless, some high schools find it necessary if their students’ scores are high, so they tend to present their NCEE scores by QQ or WeChat groups or by posters. How to avoid official punishment is the point of the textual argot. Our data show that all the texts are narrated so as to sound like a discussion of a harvest of a type of thing (plant or animal). By the framework of the Pragma-rhetorical Principle (with eight maxims), we discover that each text is highly metaphorical, mapping plants or animals or other specific things onto NCEE testees. The metaphors in each text are also metonymies, or metaphors in metonymies, namely metonymies. The metonymies in each text are tightly bound in the texture of the text, depending on the semantic prosody of a harvest event. The metonymies in all texts observe internal and external systematicity by and large, and the expressions in these texts make a metonymic argot, which, opaque as they are, create rich pragma-rhetorical values to the relevant readers alongside the interpretation of NCEE-score publicity. However, NCEE-score publicity in argot disguise still does harm to NCEE fairness to some extent, so it should not be encouraged despite its cleverness in evading official punishment by using metaphor chains or metonymies and its high

pragma-rhetorical values achieved among relevant readers.

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Notes

Note 1. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1737137218178246613&wfr=spider&for=pc>

Note 2. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1736845784073066259&wfr=spider&for=pc>

Note 3. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1736832850304757374&wfr=spider&for=pc>

Note 4. “Project 985 universities” gains the name due to the concept of “Project 985” put forward in May, 1998. There are 39 such universities aiming to develop themselves as first-class universities.

“Project 211 universities” refers to 100 universities or so which the State protects. In brief, both types refer to prestigious universities in China and the former is considered to be better than the latter.

Note 5. <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/argot>

Note 6. Translation of David Hawkes, and Hsien-yi Yang & Gladys Yang, respectively.