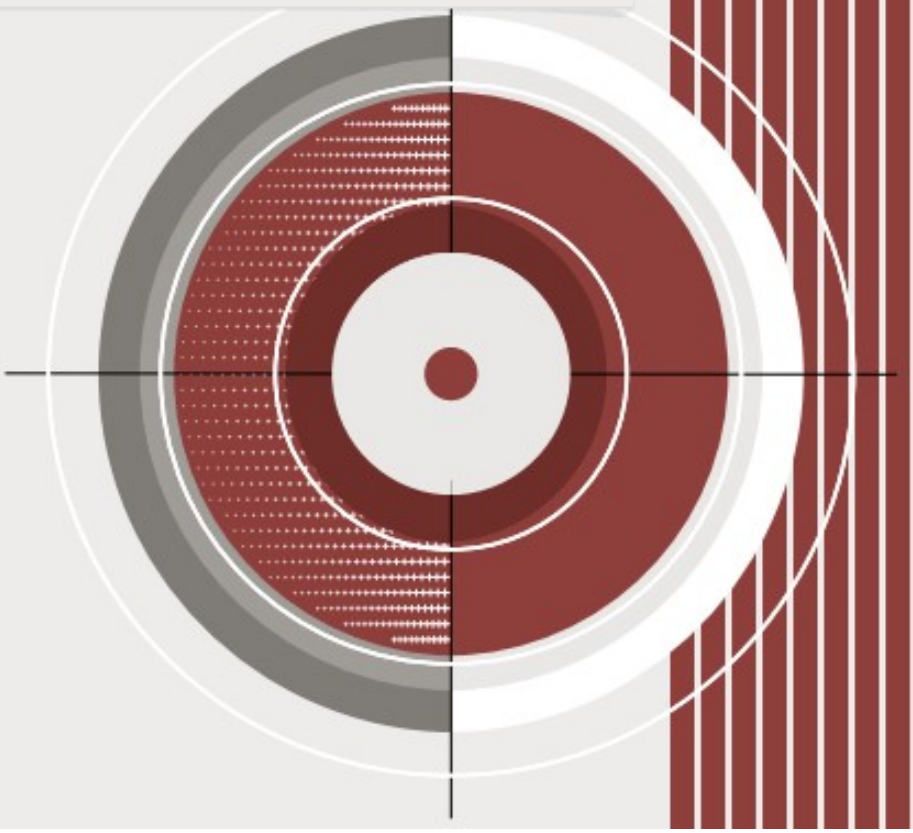
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Special Issue
Metaphorical Meaning
between Legitimation and Comprehension



The CERLIS Journal.

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Metaphorical Meaning between Legitimation and Comprehension: Political Discourse and Multilingual Education across Cultures

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ELENA MATTEI[1]

Metaphorical meaning between legitimation and comprehension: political discourse and multilingual education across cultures

Abstract

This special issue of *CERLIS Journal*, which originates from the international CERLIS 2025 conference *Metaphors in Specialized Discourses In and Across Cultures*, brings together three original studies on metaphor in specialised and institutional discourse, followed by a miscellanea contribution on tourism discourse. The three metaphor studies share a conviction that figurative language is a cognitive and discursive instrument rather than an ornament, but they observe it in two distinct conditions. Part I examines metaphor as a resource for the legitimation of political power, through the officially curated interpretation of classical quotations in Xi Jinping's discourse and through the metaphorical representation of the Russian state in the presidential inaugural addresses of El'cin, Medvedev and Putin. Part II turns from the production of metaphorical meaning to its reception, through the comprehension of textbook metaphors by multilingual students in German lower secondary education. Across both parts, the contributions converge on three points: the primacy of an expression's basic meaning as the precondition for metaphorical meaning to be recognised or inferred; the role of institutional and interactional mediation in stabilising what a metaphor is taken to mean; and the value of close, qualitative reconstruction alongside replicable identification procedures. The miscellanea article, a mixed-methods pilot study of travel influencers' Instagram captions, extends the issue's concern with discourse, persuasion and self-presentation to the tourism domain. This introduction frames the collection, presents each contribution critically, and identifies cross-cutting themes and limitations.

Keywords: metaphor; specialised discourse; political discourse; metaphor comprehension; multilingual students

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1. Framing the issue

Since Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) reframing of metaphor as a matter of thought rather than of words, and through the elaboration of that claim in cognitive linguistics (Kövecses 2010, 2017, 2020) and in discourse-oriented and critical approaches (Charteris-Black 2004, 2011; Semino 2008; Musolff 2016, 2017), the productive questions have become more specific: *where* metaphor does its work, *for whom*, and *under what conditions* its meaning holds or fails to hold. The three metaphor studies gathered in this issue, which originate from the international CERLIS 2025 conference *Metaphors in Specialized Discourses In and Across Cultures* held at the University of Bergamo, answer those questions from two vantage points that are rarely placed side by side, the first of which is the vantage point of power. In Part I, Natalia F. Riva and Francesca Volpi examine how two political systems, contemporary China and post-Soviet Russia, use metaphor to make governance intelligible and to legitimise it. Here metaphor is observed at its most stabilised: canonised in an officially published apparatus of interpretation (Riva), or reproduced with a high degree of conventionality across three decades of ritual political speech (Volpi). The second vantage point is that of reception, since in Part II Mihail Sotkov follows metaphor to the point at which it reaches readers of German textbooks for whom German is a second or a newly acquired language, and here metaphor is observed at its most fragile, because even a conventional metaphor goes unrecognised when the basic meaning of the word is unknown.

Reading the two parts together produces the issue's central argument, namely that the same property that makes metaphor an effective instrument of political framing, its capacity to make an abstract target domain feel self-evident through a familiar source domain, is precisely what is at risk when the shared ground of basic meanings, cultural associations and pragmatic conventions is not, in fact, shared. Metaphors serve legitimation because their interpretation is secured, and metaphors in reception reveal how much securing that interpretation requires.

A miscellanea contribution by Emanuela Tenca closes the issue and, although it does not address metaphor, it addresses a question that runs underneath the whole collection: how discourse constructs credibility and persuades.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical apparatus of the three metaphor studies is shared at its core and diversified at its periphery, and it is reported here as the contributors themselves present it. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT; Lakoff/Johnson 1980) provides the common foundation for Part I, in that both Riva and Volpi adopt the definition of metaphor as a systematic mapping from a concrete, experientially grounded source domain onto an abstract target domain, and both draw on Semino's (2008) account of metaphor in discourse. Riva integrates CMT with Charteris-Black's (2004, 2011) Critical Metaphor Analysis, whose "explanation" stage foregrounds the ideological motivation behind metaphor choices, and with the notions of intertextuality and recontextualisation (Kristeva 1980; Fairclough 2003) that allow classical quotations to be read as texts relocated into new discursive settings. Volpi, working within political discourse analysis (Chilton 2004; Musolff 2017), applies the Metaphor Identification Procedure in its original (Pragglejaz Group 2007) and later (Steen 2017) formulations, and organises her findings according to the macro-domains that Čudinov (2001) identified for Russian political discourse.

Part II departs from CMT in an instructive way, since Sotkov works within Functional Pragmatics (Ehlich/Rehbein 1977; Rehbein 1977), a linguistic action theory, and builds his concept of metaphor on Hoffmann's (2017) distinction between an expression's basic meaning, its actual or contextual meaning, and its meaning potential: a metaphorical use is one in which the basic meaning is suspended and replaced by an actual meaning that deviates from it.

One distinction, articulated differently in each contribution, deserves explicit marking because it organises the whole issue: the distinction between conventionalised and novel metaphor. Volpi finds "a high degree of conventionality" in the metaphors of Russian inaugural addresses, while Riva shows classical quotations being conventionalised by institutional fiat; Sotkov distinguishes two metaphor types, conventionalised or lexicalised and novel or creative, and finds that the conventional *Flüchtlingsstrom* was understood most often and the novel *Asyl-Lotterie* least often. Conventionality, in other words, is not merely a property of expressions but a relation between an expression and a community; it is what makes a metaphor invisible to insiders and opaque to outsiders.

3. The contributions: a critical overview

3.1 Part I: metaphor and the legitimation of political power

Natalia F. Riva opens the issue with a study of the series *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations* (*Xi Jinping yongdian*), published by the Commentary Department of the *People's Daily*. Her object is not Xi's spontaneous use of metaphor but the officially authorised interpretation of the classical quotations he uses, a practice (*yongdian*) which Riva situates historically (Scarpari 2015) as a centuries-old rhetorical method revived and intensified after 2012. From the second volume (2018), she selects the "Governance" section and, from its 17 quotations, three that develop the most explicit metaphorical scenarios. The passage from the *Baopuzi* culminating in the image of carving a mark on a moving boat to retrieve a lost sword frames governance as adaptation to change, and was used by Xi in the context of the 2015–2016 reform of Party mass organisations. The passage from the *Xunzi* on withholding axes and nets during seasons of growth maps ecological restraint onto prudent political intervention and is recontextualised in support of the doctrine

of ecological civilisation. Liu Yuxi's couplet on new leaves and succeeding waves naturalises cadre succession as organic renewal.

Riva's claim is that the tripartite editorial format of the series (quotation, historical context, contemporary interpretation) turns the volume into an institutional interpretive apparatus that canonises metaphorical readings and reduces interpretive openness. Classical wisdom becomes, in her formulation, a "political technology", and the study is explicit that it examines the discursive construction of interpretive frames, not their reception. Its contribution is to shift attention from metaphor *use* to the institutional processes through which metaphorical meanings are selected, interpreted and disseminated, a shift that gains resonance when read against Sotkov's account, in Part II, of what happens when no such apparatus is available to the hearer.

Francesca Volpi turns to seven inaugural addresses of the Russian Federation, from El'cin's in 1991 to Putin's in 2018. Inaugural addresses are treated as a ritual genre whose functions are to affirm national unity, to present the chosen political orientation as necessary and legitimate, and to demonstrate the will to act. Volpi first finds that the place name *Rossija*, the common noun *strana* and the pronoun *my* far outnumber the lemma *gosudarstvo* and other politico-legal terms, then applies MIP to the lexical units that attribute properties and actions to the state. Four metaphorical patterns recur across all three speakers (THE STATE IS A PERSON; THE STATE IS A BUILDING; THE STATE IS A JOB OR BUSINESS; THE ACTIVITY OF THE STATE IS A JOURNEY), while the MECHANISM and, marginally, SPORT models appear only in Putin's speeches. Personification is the most frequent process, within which the paper traces a diachronic trajectory: El'cin's Russia "rises from its knees" and is reborn through the spiritual and moral qualities of its people; Putin's Russia is strong, reliable, predictable, a 'partner' and a 'participant in international life'; Medvedev's state cares for its citizens like a father, and his *rodnoj dom* ('native home') intersects the BUILDING model with a FAMILY model.

A further observation concerns vagueness: following Semino (2008), Volpi notes that personification attributes to a single agent actions that involve many actors, and she shows how Putin's frequent *my* leaves it undecidable whether "we" includes citizens or only the

president and the political élite (Wodak/de Cillia/Reisigl/Liebhart 2009). Volpi acknowledges that a corpus of seven speeches "primarily reflects the voice of the elite"; the finding that nevertheless emerges, a gradual shift from a country in crisis sustained by traditional values to a modern, competitive state, converges with Riva's account of how conventional imagery naturalises contingent political choices.

Read together, the two Part I studies describe two regimes of stabilisation: in China, the stabilisation of metaphorical meaning is explicit and editorial: an official publication tells readers what the metaphor means, whereas in Russia it is implicit and generic, because the ritual of the inaugural address, repeated across presidencies, keeps the same conventional mappings in circulation. In both cases the effect is the same, in that adaptation, ecological stewardship, succession, strength and forward movement are presented not as decisions but as natural or necessary states of affairs.

3.2 Part II: metaphor in reception

Mihail Sotkov's study turns from the production of metaphorical meaning to its reception through an exploratory-interpretative design in which 27 students in German lower secondary education, sampled across three language-acquisition profiles (German as L1, German as L2 in mainstream classes, newly arrived migrant students in preparatory classes) and three age groups, were interviewed individually on four metaphors taken from social-science textbooks dealing with flight and migration: the conventional *Flüchtlingsstrom* and *Nussschale* and the novel *Asyl-Lotterie* and *Schmiermittel*. Sotkov's extended analysis of one interview, in which a fourteen-year-old DaZ student reads *Nussschale* ('nutshell') as a hiding place rather than as a small boat until the interviewer's gesture models the hull of a half shell, is the empirical heart of the paper, since it shows a student who knows the basic meaning and recognises that a metaphor is present, yet builds a plausible but wrong analogy and reaches the target concept only with cues, without articulating the transferred feature ('small') or the emergent meaning (a craft unfit for the crossing).

From the interviews Sotkov reconstructs five successive steps in inferential metaphor comprehension (noticing the incompatibility; inferring the target concept; establishing analogies; transferring the contextually relevant feature; grasping the emergent meaning) and distinguishes this inferential route from retrieval, in which a lexicalised metaphorical meaning is simply disambiguated. The binary results, stated with appropriate caution, are that *Flüchtlingsstrom* was understood by 13 of 27 students, *Nussschale* by 12, *Schmiermittel* by 6 and *Asyl-Lotterie* by 3; L1 students understood more often than DaZ students, and newly arrived students least often; no age pattern could be established. Three approaches to non-comprehension are identified, namely form-based construal (e.g. reading *Schale* as a form of *Schal*, 'scarf'), found only among newly arrived students, supplementation of the interpretive frame with outside knowledge, and paraphrase of propositional content with vague deixis. The didactic implications argue for language-sensitive subject teaching across the curriculum and for teacher micro-scaffolding (Gibbons 2002) that identifies the student's comprehension approach and remedies the knowledge deficit before offering cues. The study is candid that its findings are exploratory and that interview interaction differs from classroom interaction.

Read against Part I, Sotkov's study locates the point of failure at the opposite end of the communicative chain, since where Riva and Volpi document meanings secured by an interpretive apparatus or by a ritual genre, Sotkov documents what prevents a metaphor from being reconstructed on the receiving side, namely the absence of the literal layer itself, the basic meaning without which, as he puts it, an expression cannot be understood *as* a metaphor at all.

3.3 Miscellanea

Emanuela Tenca's pilot study analyses the Instagram Travel Influencers (ITI) Corpus, 300 captions (38,763 tokens) from five influencers listed by *Forbes* in 2017, collected between September 2021 and June 2022. Her framework is the tension between the discourses of travel and tourism (Dann 1996; Urry/Larsen 2011;

Azariah 2016, 2017), whereby influencers present themselves as travellers while drawing on the promotional strategies of tourism discourse and perform their authenticity under commercial pressure (Duffy/Kang 2020; van Driel/Dumitrica 2021). A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design combines corpus techniques in Sketch Engine with a deductive thematic analysis in NVivo based on a reconstrued version of Aaker's (1997) brand personality model. The corpus findings document ego-targeting with marked variation across profiles (three accounts dominated by *I*/*my*, one impersonal, one favouring *we*/*our*), with *you* shared by all and frequently embedded in interrogatives, imperatives and conditional recommendations, some of which carry paid partnerships, while keywords separate an expertise-driven profile from destination- and personal-narrative-driven ones. The thematic coding finds Excitement (38%) and Competence (35%) dominant across the corpus, with Sincerity at 20% and Sophistication and Ruggedness marginal. Tenca reports intracoder agreement (κ = 0.64) and is explicit that a corpus of this size does not license generalisation. Like the political discourse of Part I, influencer discourse is engineered to be found credible, and it must be compact, emotive and persuasive at once.

4. Cross-cutting themes

Several threads run across the three metaphor studies and give the issue a coherence beyond its two-part organisation.

The first is *the basic meaning as precondition*: Volpi's MIP analysis depends on establishing basic meanings from dictionaries before contextual meanings can be judged metaphorical. Sotkov's central finding is that knowledge of an expression's basic meaning is the prerequisite for recognising its metaphorical use. Riva's classical quotations, in turn, work only because their concrete scenarios (a boat, a forest, a river) are intelligible before they are mapped onto governance.

The second is *mediated interpretation*, since none of the metaphors studied here is interpreted in a vacuum: Riva's *People's Daily* apparatus, Volpi's ritual genre, Sotkov's interviewer (and, prospectively, teacher) are all instances of a third party stabilising what a metaphor is taken to mean. The contributions evaluate this mediation differently, as ideological closure, naturalisation or pedagogical necessity, but they agree that it is constitutive rather than incidental.

The third is *reception as the missing term*: Riva states that she examines the construction of interpretive frames, not their uptake; Volpi's corpus reflects the voice of the élite. Sotkov's is the only study in the issue that examines actual hearers, and its results, in which even a conventional metaphor is understood by fewer than half of the students, are a useful corrective to any assumption that a metaphor's institutional meaning is its received meaning.

The fourth is *linguistic geography*, in that the object languages of the three metaphor studies are Chinese, Russian and German, while English appears only as the language of analysis and of Tenca's corpus, and the pairing of Chinese and Russian political discourse in Part I is a distinctive feature of this collection.

The fifth is *scale and method*: all three studies are small in scale and say so, with three quotations, seven speeches and 27 students, and what they offer in place of breadth is depth of reconstruction.

5. Sequence and limitations

The order of the contributions is intended to be cumulative, in the sense that Riva establishes that metaphorical meaning can be institutionally fixed, Volpi shows the same fixity emerging from genre and repetition, and Sotkov shows, from the receiving end, what it takes for a hearer to reconstruct a conventionalised meaning at all.

Two limitations should be stated, namely that the collection contains no study of metaphor in English-language specialised discourse, in translation or in the tourism domain, and that reception is

examined directly in only one contribution; both are directions in which the questions raised here could be pursued.

6. Conclusion

The contributors to this issue draw on cognitive, critical and functional-pragmatic traditions, and what they share is a refusal to treat metaphor as either purely conceptual or purely textual: in each study, a metaphor's meaning is shown to depend on who fixes it, who receives it, and what knowledge the two parties hold in common. Metaphors perform their legitimating work when that common ground is secured and go unrecognised when it is not, and the studies gathered here document both conditions.

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Part I
Metaphor and the Legitimation of Political Power

NATALIA F. RIVA[1]

Classical wisdom and metaphors: representing contemporary Chinese politics through literary quotations

Abstract

This article examines how classical quotations and the metaphors they encode provide metaphorical frameworks for representing governance in contemporary Chinese political discourse. Previous studies have noted the use of classical quotations and literary references as a salient feature of the current Chinese leadership's communication practices, highlighting its strategic purpose as an instrument of identity-building, cultural and historical grounding, and ideological legitimation. Inspired by this scholarship, the article shifts attention to the institutional processes through which classical quotations are transformed into cognitive and discursive resources for framing policy orientations. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Metaphor Analysis, and theories of intertextuality and recontextualization, the study takes the officially curated collection *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations* (Volume 2), published by the Commentary Department of the *People's Daily*, as an example of an institutional interpretive apparatus that establishes and disseminates preferred metaphorical frameworks through which politics is conceptually organized and explained. Focusing on the Governance section, it adopts a qualitative close-reading approach to examine three quotations that develop particularly explicit metaphorical scenarios. The findings shed light on the discursive construction of these interpretations, showing how classical quotations, once institutionally stabilized, function as intertextual devices that activate culturally resonant source domains, thereby reaffirming, from a cognitive and discursive perspective, the role of classical tradition as a resource for political communication in contemporary China.

Keywords: Xi Jinping; classical quotations; metaphors; political discourse; recontextualization.

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1. Introduction: classical quotations as political technology in Xi Jinping's China

In recent years, the political discourse of Xi Jinping – the President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) – has been widely noted for its intensive use of quotations from China's classical tradition. Aphorisms and idioms drawn from Confucian, Legalist, Daoist, Mohist, and historical texts appear regularly in his speeches, policy statements, and diplomatic rhetoric, where they function not merely as stylistic embellishments but as meaningful resources for framing contemporary political issues. Existing scholarship on Xi's political language has shown that this appeal to the classical canon serves key rhetorical and ideological functions, interpreting his use of quotations as a multifaceted strategy of regime legitimation, cultural nationalism, and symbolic governance, against the background of a narrative of cultural confidence and national rejuvenation. In particular, scholars have argued that the long-established rhetorical practice of *yongdian* 用典, namely the systematic use of classical quotations and references to the literary tradition, has been mobilized to present the Chinese leadership as rooted in a continuous civilizational heritage, projecting an image of political coherence, cultural depth, and historical legitimacy (Scarpari 2015; Kang 2020; Brusadelli 2022). Yet, besides focussing on the cultural, historical, and ideological dimensions of Xi's use of classical quotations, attention could also be paid to the discursive and cognitive mechanisms through which these references structure political meanings. An area worth exploring is how classical texts are transformed through processes of interpretation and recontextualization into conceptual frameworks for representing and making governance intelligible, mapping concrete, historically grounded source domains onto abstract domains, oftentimes by means of metaphors. This is a phenomenon extensively documented in political discourse drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to show how metaphors are not just ornamental but powerful cognitive devices and framing tools that help guide evaluation, legitimize policy choices, and influence

ideological alignment (Lakoff/Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1996; Charteris-Black 2004, 2011; Semino 2008; Kövecses 2010, 2020; Musolff 2016; Brugman et al. 2019).

In this paper, the cognitive dimension of these quotations should not be understood primarily as an effect on audiences, but as a property of the metaphorical mappings they encode. Classical quotations and the metaphors they convey simultaneously function as markers of cultural literacy or historical authority and as intertextual discursive devices that condense complex political meanings into culturally familiar forms, activate shared cultural associations, and provide culturally resonant frames for representing political reality.

Moreover, Xi's quotations do not circulate in an interpretive vacuum; they are embedded in a broader institutional apparatus of meaning production that actively guides how these texts are to be interpreted and communicated. This study takes as its primary object the series *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations* (*Xi Jinping yongdian* 习近平用典), published by the Commentary Department of the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao* 人民日报, the official newspaper of the CPC). By collecting, categorizing, and explaining Xi's classical references, the series provides authoritative readings linking ancient moral and philosophical ideas to modern governance. In doing so, it exemplifies what can be described as intertextuality and recontextualization: the relocation of texts from one historical and discursive setting into another, where they acquire new meanings and functions (Kristeva 1980; Allen 2000; Fairclough 2003; Wodak/Meyer 2009; Martin 2011; Hodges 2015; Farrelly 2020). Through this process, classical literature is transformed into a repertoire of institutionally recontextualized metaphors. To show this, the study focuses on the Governance section (*zhili pian* 治理篇) of Volume 2 of *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations*, conducting a qualitative analysis of three quotations and the metaphorical frameworks activated through their standardized interpretations.

The argument advanced here is that Xi's classical quotations and the metaphors they encode play a significant role in the conceptualization of governance within officially curated political discourse. Rather than merely decorating political language with cultural prestige, they offer culturally resonant discursive and cognitive

affordances through which politics is represented, interpreted, and made intelligible. Additionally, this article will show how *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations*, as an officially sanctioned interpretive apparatus, institutionalizes the reading of classical metaphors by transforming them into authorized frameworks for understanding contemporary governance. Classical wisdom thus appears not simply as a source of cultural authority, but as a form of *political technology*, strategically mobilized through institutional processes of interpretation and recontextualization. Accordingly, the study examines the discursive construction and institutional stabilization of these interpretive frameworks, rather than their empirical reception or cognitive effects on audiences.

2. From quoting the classics to governing through metaphors

The practice of *yongdian* is a centuries-old rhetorical method used to validate a statement by relying on the *auctoritas* of ancient sages (Scarpari 2015; Kang 2020). As theorized in Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, a foundational treatise on Chinese literary criticism and rhetoric, embedding classical allusions or citing ancient texts in literary and scholarly writings served to create intertextual resonance, display erudition, and invoke shared cultural knowledge (Liu 2015). Although this tradition was largely abandoned following the founding of the PRC in 1949, in favour of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, it saw a gradual revival following the launch of the Reform and Opening-Up policies in 1978, with leaders such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao re-evaluating tradition to fill the spiritual vacuum associated with rapid economic growth (Scarpari 2015; Kang 2020). Nevertheless, their use of citations remained relatively moderate and often confined to diplomatic contexts, where references to tradition could support the projection of a peaceful international image for the rising power (Scarpari 2015; Kang 2020). More broadly, the trajectory

of political language in the PRC can be described as moving from the iconoclasm of the Mao era toward increasingly sophisticated narrative and rhetorical strategies, including the development of overarching metanarratives repackaging political goals through culturally resonant language, as is the case for the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) (Gallelli 2018).

Under Xi Jinping, however, the practice of *yongdian* is absorbed into a radically transformed political communication environment. Xi's discourse has been described as a "new official language" departing from the formulaic "empty talks" of earlier Party rhetoric, replacing them with a style that is vivid, image-rich, and engaging (Gallelli 2018: 599). This stylistic shift is not merely qualitative but also measurable: using textometric analysis of CPC Congress reports, Magagnin (2016) demonstrates that the 2012 Congress speech – delivered at the very moment Xi ascended to power – exhibited a significantly higher metaphorical density than its 1982 counterpart, despite being shorter. This intensification of figurative framing provides the discursive environment in which *yongdian* acquires new political force. In fact, after 2012, classical citations have become a distinctive feature of Chinese official discourse (Scarpari 2015), reconfiguring the practice of *yongdian* into a multifunctional tool: quotations are not simply authoritative references to the past, but textual units rich in metaphorical potential providing culturally sanctioned source domains for the conceptualization of governance, morality, crisis, reform, etc. In this sense, the reconfiguration of *yongdian* extends beyond its ideological dimension: allusions become a privileged reservoir of metaphorical mappings through which political reasoning is conceptually and discursively structured.

This transformation is made possible by the institutionalization of interpretation. As Zappone (2021: 83) demonstrates, in China books have historically functioned both as objects of control and as instruments of persuasion, and under Xi the circulation of standardized explanations of his political language is "capillary", disseminated through databases, apps, and pamphlets to ensure discursive cohesion. Party organs and State media have assumed an increasingly active role in producing official compilations of Xi's words, with his quotations being rarely left ambiguous or open to competing interpretations;

instead, they are strategically deployed to support specific policy orientations and normative positions (Scarpari 2015; Kang 2020). *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations* exemplifies this process: it not only records Xi's quotations but canonizes their metaphorical meanings and provides standardized interpretations of his references for the general public and Party cadres, linking ancient imagery directly to contemporary governance. Thus, the volume does not function as a mere repository of quotations; it acts instead as an institutional interpretive apparatus that authorizes particular readings of classical references and integrates them into contemporary political discourse. Similar processes of institutionalized interpretive mediation can also be observed across other officially produced media formats, such as the CCTV programme *Ping 'yu' jin ren – Xi Jinping xihuan de gudian* 平"语"近人——习近平喜欢的典故 (literally, Ping's 'words' close to the people: classical quotations favoured by Xi Jinping),[2] where classical quotations are recontextualized through standardized interpretive frameworks and multimodally adapted for wider audiences (Riva 2026).

In this way, a cultural bridge between China's historical ethos and contemporary policy narratives is established, fostering a sense of continuity that reinforces regime legitimacy by positioning the CPC as the protector of tradition. A central component of this strategy is the construction of Xi's personal image as a Confucian gentleman (*junzi* 君子) possessing virtues such as morality (*de* 德), education (*wen* 文), and righteousness (*yi* 义), thereby justifying a paternalistic style of leadership (Scarpari 2015; Kang 2020). This image is complemented by a sophisticated Confucian-Legalist synthesis: while Confucian quotes promote social harmony and people-centred governance, Legalist references are mobilized to justify re-centralization, State strength, and the use of technique (*shu* 术) for social governance (Brusadelli 2022).

[2] The main title *Ping yu jin ren* 平语近人 is a political wordplay on the traditional idiom *pingyi jinren* 平易近人, which means 'amiable and approachable'. This variation replaces *yi* 易 ('easy/plain') with *yu* 语 ('words/speech') while simultaneously leveraging the character *ping* 平 from Xi Jinping's name (习近平) to imply that his words bring him closer to the people.

Zappone (2021) expands this by describing Xi as a "master storyteller" who, through anecdotes and historical narratives, contributes to the broader strategy of 'telling China's story well' (*jiang hao Zhongguo gushi* 讲好中国故事), the Party-State's project aimed at strengthening the PRC's discursive power both domestically and internationally.

Drawing on these discussions of classical quotations as symbolic and rhetorical resources contributing to political legitimation, identity construction, and ideological messaging, this article argues that, once recontextualized and institutionally interpreted, they also possess discursive and cognitive affordances, providing metaphorical frameworks through which contemporary governance is conceptually organized and explained.

3. Metaphors, intertextuality/recontextualization, and the production of political meanings

The starting point for modern metaphor studies is shifting from the idea of metaphors as mere rhetorical ornaments to that of metaphors as a thinking mode. In fact, a large body of research in cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis has established that metaphors are not merely stylistic decorations but vital cognitive and ideological tools through which reality is conceptualized. A theoretical framework integrating the cognitive, critical, and dynamic aspects of metaphor research should identify the book *Metaphors We Live By* by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as the fundamental watershed that shifted the field from rhetoric to cognitive science. According to CMT, abstract domains (e.g., politics, governance, morality) are understood via systematic mappings from more concrete and experientially grounded source domains (e.g., body, movement, conflict) (Lakoff/Johnson 1980). These mappings do not simply describe phenomena but provide cognitive structures influencing how they are perceived, thought of, and acted upon. In other words, as highlighted in recent Chinese political metaphor research,

CMT allows researchers to see that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical (Li/Tang 2024). These approaches converge in viewing metaphors as simultaneously cognitive, evaluative, and ideological resources. Building on Semino's (2008) framework, Meng and Cheng (2025: 70) describe this phenomenon as "a kaleidoscope in discourse", where metaphors take on various forms and functions depending on the context. Cognition and reasoning facilitate the process through which less tangible target domains are understood via familiar source domains in metaphors, thereby constructing the social and political reality (Wang et al. 2024). Thus, in the political arena, metaphors function as essential interpretive frames structuring ideologies and influencing decision-making, as articulated in Lakoff's (1996) book on moral politics. Lakoff's work demonstrates how metaphorical frames are the lifeblood of political action, as they can reshape people's attitudes (Li/Tang 2024).

If, on the one hand, this cognitive mapping is due to the capacity of knowledge from non-political domains to structure and constrain how the public views the political world (Wang et al. 2024), on the other, the ideological motivations behind the choice of metaphors by the speaker or writer need to be investigated through the lens of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). Charteris-Black's CMA stresses that metaphors in political discourse are selectively chosen within specific ideological, cultural, and historical contexts, and function as rhetorical and ideological tools that persuade and motivate audiences by activating shared emotional associations (Charteris-Black 2004, 2011). Through this process, metaphors contribute to the legitimation of authority and to the naturalization of particular interpretations of the political reality, while limiting alternative ways of understanding issues. The explanation stage in metaphor analysis precisely unearths the motivations behind metaphor choices (Wang et al. 2024).

CMT and CMA have become the dominant analytical paradigms in scholarship on the use of metaphors in Chinese political discourse. Across analyses of government work reports, Party congress speeches, diplomatic discourse, and publicity materials, scholars empirically demonstrate how conceptual metaphors work as a systematic mechanism for framing political reality and transmitting core ideologies (Sun/Chen 2018; Liu/Wang 2020; Zheng 2021; Huang 2022; Fu 2024;

Li/Tang 2024; Wang et al. 2024; Meng/Cheng 2025). In foundational texts, such as government or Party reports and the *Governance of China* series,[3] source domains including 'journey', 'architecture' or 'building', and 'war' are pervasively employed to concretize abstract policy goals and project a robust national development narrative. For instance, 'journey' metaphors frame national development as a purposeful, long-term progression toward a specific destination, while 'building' metaphors emphasize the necessity of solid leadership and the role of the public as builders of a shared future (Li/Tang 2024: 36-39; Wang et al. 2024: 53). In diplomatic and cross-cultural contexts, metaphors function as vital pragmatic resources utilizing shared cognitive schemas, such as the 'Asian family' or the 'Solo River',[4] to bridge cultural barriers, enhance international identity, and bring novelty to often-formulaic political communication (Zheng 2021). In international communication, metaphors that are both culturally specific and cognitively systematic are further mobilized to project China's image as peaceful, responsible, and cooperative, thus requiring careful translation to effectively serve broader soft-power objectives (Chen 2022; Jin 2023). During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, metaphors of 'war' and 'family' were systematically employed in news pictures to foster collectivism and empathy, effectively framing the virus as a common enemy requiring urgent and unified action (Fu 2024). Similarly, an analysis of official news commentary published on *Renminwang* 人民网, the online news portal of the *People's Daily*, demonstrates how metaphorical framing transformed the pandemic into an opportunity to reinforce national identity, legitimize Party leadership, and mobilize emotional support for the CPC (Lupano 2025). In one of

[3] *The Governance of China* (*Xi Jinping tan zhiguo lizheng* 习近平谈治国理政) is a five-volume collection of speeches and writings by Xi Jinping. Published simultaneously in Chinese and English, it aims to consolidate domestic consensus, while informing foreign readers and giving China a voice in international politics (Zappone 2021: 89-90). Therefore, it can be considered a significant example of official material produced for internal and external propaganda.

[4] The 'Asian family' metaphor refers to relations among Asian countries, portraying them as kin bound by shared interests and mutual responsibility, while the 'Solo River' metaphor refers to Indonesia's Bengawan Solo River, invoked by Xi Jinping to symbolize the continuous, historical ties between China and Indonesia (Zheng 2021).

Xi's speeches on COVID-19, metaphors of 'strength', 'control', and 'movement' evolved dynamically throughout the text to convey the government's ideas and attitudes toward law-based epidemic prevention and control (Huang 2022). Furthermore, historical analyses reveal that metaphors involving 'animal' and 'person' domains have been used strategically to construct identities of Self and Other by delivering pragmatic offence against foreign adversaries, such as characterizing threats as 'paper tigers' (Liu/Wang 2020). Metaphors frame political problems and solutions in value-laden ways, as shown in a diachronic corpus-based analysis of 'law and order' metaphors within China's government work reports over 22 years (Wu/Cheng 2022). Wu and Cheng's work adds a specialized legal dimension to the study of Chinese political discourse, arguing that legal metaphors serve as a top-down instrument to justify the exercise of State power: by humanizing the threatening aspect of the law and making obscure legalese accessible through effective analogies, these metaphors – including 'building', 'physical object', 'journey', and 'living being' – help the public identify with the government's philosophy (Wu/Cheng 2022: 108).

Collectively, these findings indicate that in the context of Chinese political discourse metaphors perform multiple cognitive and discursive functions: at the basic level, they simplify and explain complex concepts and technical policies mapping them onto familiar experiential domains; more deeply, they perform important ideological and affective functions, guiding value judgment, influencing how political reality is understood, and contributing to the construction of collective identities. Ultimately, produced through recurring patterns within a highly organized and centralized discursive system, political metaphors legitimize the Party-State leadership and solicit the public's affective alignment with official goals by embedding abstract principles in cultural images that can resonate both domestically and internationally.

In the context of contemporary China, where Party-State institutions act as powerful recontextualizing agents, this theoretical framework is particularly relevant. Elements of history, classical literature, and popular language are selectively drawn on and integrated into politically authorized narratives. This institutional mediation is

especially evident in how historical figures and episodes are crafted and recrafted through the strategic endeavour of 'telling China's story well' to build a discourse that legitimizes contemporary political objectives (Riva 2025). Similarly, classical quotations are mobilized through the practice of *yongdian,* revitalized and transformed under Xi, to address political concerns (e.g., official morality, social justice, rule of law, nationalism, regime legitimacy). As texts gain meaning through a network of prior texts and discourses (Allen 2000), rather than functioning as markers of cultural literacy, quotations operate as *intertextual anchors*, linking present-day policy discourse to a reimagined tradition, the meaning of which becomes fully intelligible only within these modern contexts of use. Thus, classical quotations are not politically meaningful merely because they contain vivid imagery; they gain discursive power because their metaphorical potential is strategically selected, canonized, and disseminated through authoritative Party-State channels. It is through this process that classical quotations acquire metaphorical force in political discourse: although they do not always contain metaphors, they function as metaphorical mappings between concrete historical or narrative scenarios and abstract political domains, thereby providing interpretive frameworks.

4. Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations as a State-sanctioned system of metaphorical interpretation

This paper does not examine Xi Jinping's spontaneous use of metaphors, but the CPC's officially authorized metaphorization of political discourse, as represented in the series *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations*. By collecting, interpreting, and disseminating classical quotations used by Xi, this publication offers a particularly valuable site for examining how metaphor, intertextuality, and recontextualization operate together as a single discursive mechanism through which cultural tradition is transformed into a resource for contemporary governance. *Xi Jinping's*

Classical Quotations is a serialized collection of Xi's citations published by the Commentary Department of the *People's Daily* starting in 2015. This study is based on the second volume, published in 2018, which continued the work of interpreting classical Chinese allusions frequently appearing in Xi's speeches and writings between 2015 and 2018. 148 quotations are compiled within the book and organized into 11 thematic sections covering key political domains: Respect for the People (*jingmin pian* 敬民篇), Governance, Self-cultivation (*xiushen pian* 修身篇), Diligent Practice (*duxing pian* 笃行篇), Encouraging Learning (*quanxue pian* 劝学篇), All Under Heaven (*tianxia pian* 天下篇), Clean Government (*lianzheng pian* 廉政篇), Rule of Law (*fazhi pian* 法治篇), Dialectics (*bianzheng pian* 辩证篇), History (*lishi pian* 历史篇), and Literature (*wenxue pian* 文学篇). As noted in the volume's introduction, its purpose is not only explanatory or didactic, nor is it simply to demonstrate Xi's cultural literacy and rhetorical style; it instead reflects the CPC's broader political objective of integrating traditional culture into the contemporary discourse of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and as such, contributes to the narrative of cultural confidence (*wenhua zixin* 文化自信) and national rejuvenation (*minzu fuxing* 民族复兴), while also serving as a tool for political education and cadre training (Commentary Department of the *People's Daily* 2018). Each entry includes the classical quotation, its original historical context, and Xi's contemporary political interpretation, presented in a clear and accessible way.

This tripartite format actively guides readers in understanding how classical texts should be interpreted within the framework of present-day political discourse. The volume's accessible structure facilitates the analysis of how metaphorical language is applied across distinct policy domains, providing a good example of State-produced discourse that is both ideologically charged and methodologically analysable. This study focuses specifically on the Governance thematic section, which was chosen for its central relevance to political authority, statecraft, and ideology. The section comprises 17 quotations, but not all exhibit the same metaphorical elaboration, differing substantially in the degree to which they develop explicit metaphorical scenarios. Rather than surveying them exhaustively, the following analysis adopts

a qualitative close-reading approach, examining three quotations that offer particularly clear examples of distinct metaphorical mappings and policy domains, allowing for an in-depth analysis as opposed to a comprehensive quantitative survey. The remaining quotations, although often relying on figurative language, function primarily as normative maxims and ethical principles or as condensed analogies.

5. Metaphorical representations of governance

The three selected quotations are not the only metaphorical ones in the Governance section, but those that develop the most explicit and analytically productive metaphorical scenarios drawn from narrative and natural experiential domains, allowing their underlying conceptual mappings to be reconstructed through close qualitative analysis. For each quotation, the analysis considers the relationship between the classical source, its metaphorical structure, Xi's political reinterpretation, and the editorial explanation provided in the volume.

The first quotation offers a paradigmatic example of how a classical quotation, once recontextualized, functions as an intertextual discursive device that frames governance as adaptation:

(1) 常制不可以待变化，一途不可以应无方，刻船不可以索遗剑。
Fixed systems cannot adapt to change; one path cannot respond to all situations; carving a mark on a boat to retrieve a lost sword is futile. (Commentary Department of the *People's Daily* 2018: 37-38)

This passage originates from the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (*The Master Who Embraces Simplicity*), a Daoist work by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343 or 363, Eastern Jin dynasty), and was cited by Xi in his Address at the Central Conference on the Party's Work with Mass Organizations (6 July 2015), among other speeches. The quotation culminates with the well-known metaphor 'carving a mark on a boat to retrieve a lost sword', which describes the act of marking the side of a moving boat after dropping a sword into a river from it, failing to recognize that both the boat and the

sword have changed position. The futile attempt illustrates the consequences of not adapting policy to evolving circumstances, while static systems and single paths symbolize rigid institutional thinking. The metaphor thus frames governance as a dynamic activity requiring responsiveness to changing conditions.

This example illustrates the pattern through which classical quotations activate concrete experiential schemas for structuring abstract political reasoning. In cognitive terms, it translates the abstract challenge of governing change into a familiar physical scenario, making the necessity of adaptation appear intuitive and self-evident. Within China's contemporary political discourse, a Daoist reflection on the inevitability of change is transformed into an argument for policy responsiveness and political modernization. In this way, the metaphor does not merely describe change but prescribes a normative stance toward it: adaptation is framed as rational, effective, and politically necessary, while rigidity appears misguided and destined to fail. It is important to clarify that Xi used 'carving a mark on a boat to retrieve a lost sword' in the context of the 2015-2016 reforms of Party mass organizations, which official documents described as necessary to address organizational decay, weak discipline, and declining political loyalty (Zhou 2019; Tsai/Liao 2021; Mittelstaedt 2024). These reforms involved systematic, centrally led restructuring of core organizations (e.g., the All-China Women's Federation, the Communist Youth League, trade unions) to reinforce Party leadership and restore their role as instruments of governance rather than semi-autonomous intermediaries (Doyon 2019; Zhang/Li 2022; Snape 2024). At the same time, embedding organizational renewal within classical philosophical tradition serves an important legitimizing function: by grounding policy adaptation in culturally authoritative texts, the Party presents reform not as a rupture with tradition but as its continuation. Therefore, the metaphor operates simultaneously at discursive, cognitive, rhetorical, and ideological levels: it provides an accessible conceptual model that solicits the interpretation of policy adaptation as rational, effective, and necessary, while aligning contemporary governance with an officially sanctioned vision of Chinese civilizational heritage.

The second quotation constructs governance through a different yet equally powerful metaphorical framework:

(2) 草木荣华滋硕之时，则斧斤不入山林，不夭其生，不绝其长也；鼋鼍、鱼鳖、鳅鳝孕别之时，罔罟、毒药不入泽，不夭其生，不绝其长也。
When plants flourish and grow abundantly, axes and hatchets should not be taken into the mountains and forests, so as not to cut short their lives or interrupt their growth; when turtles, alligators, fish, and other aquatic creatures are in their breeding season, nets and poisons should not be taken into the marshes, so as not to cut short their lives or interrupt their growth. (Commentary Department of the *People's Daily* 2018: 33-34)

This passage, drawn from the chapter *Wangzhi* 王制 (*System of Kingship*) of the Confucian collection *Xunzi* 荀子, was quoted by Xi in texts such as the Speech at the Seminar for Principal Leading Cadres at the Provincial and Ministerial Level on Studying and Implementing the Spirit of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee (18 January 2016). Originally proposed by philosopher Xunzi (313-238 BCE), it describes how sage rulers regulate human interaction with nature by respecting seasonal cycles and limiting exploitation during periods of growth. The imagery establishes a systematic metaphorical mapping in which the growth cycles of plants and animals correspond to processes of social and economic development, while the restraint shown by withholding tools represents prudent political intervention: just as premature exploitation harms ecological sustainability, inappropriate or poorly timed political action threatens social stability and long-term development. In Xi's contemporary interpretation, this principle is recontextualized to support the Party's doctrine of ecological civilization and green development. Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization is a core component of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, designed to fuse environmental protection with China's modernization strategy and long-term development goals (Shi 2021; Bai 2025; Li 2025). Conceptually, this thought system rests on several interlocking ideas: a scientific view of nature, a green view of development, a people-centred understanding of livelihood, and a focus on ecosystem governance as an integrated whole of 'mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, and grasslands' (An 2021; Ren 2021; Bai 2025). Within this framework, green development is defined not as a constraint but as a prerequisite for building a 'Beautiful China' as part of the process of economic,

political, cultural, and social construction, and was codified as one of the five guiding development principles at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee held in October 2015 (Ren 2021; Wang et al. 2021; Wei/Wang 2024). Thus, environmental protection becomes a model for governance more broadly, emphasizing balance, foresight, and sustainability. Rhetorically, grounding this policy in classical philosophy contributes to its legitimation by portraying ecological governance not as a modern political innovation but as the continuation of an ancient civilizational wisdom.

A third quotation constructs governance through the metaphor of natural renewal:

(3) 芳 林 新 叶 催 陈 叶 ， 流 水 前 波 让 后 波 。
New leaves in the fragrant forest cause the old leaves to fall; the earlier waves of flowing water yield to the waves behind. (Commentary Department of the *People's Daily* 2018: 49-50)

This couplet, written by the Tang dynasty poet Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 (772-842) in response to a poem by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) mourning the death of three friends, originally expressed a philosophical reflection on the cyclical nature of existence, and was quoted by Xi in speeches such as his Address at the National Conference on Party School Work (11 December 2015). The imagery establishes a metaphorical mapping in which new leaves and succeeding waves represent younger political generations, while old leaves and earlier waves represent the preceding ones. Political succession is thus conceptualized through the familiar and inevitable processes of natural cycles. Xi cited this quotation at a time when personnel management was becoming more centralized and politically controlled. By the mid-2010s, promotions increasingly reflected top-level discretion and political loyalty, with greater concentration of authority in Party leadership and less reliance on institutionalized age-based norms established under previous leaders (Meyer et al. 2016; Wang/Vangeli 2016; Doyon 2018). In this context, the metaphor of new leaves replacing old ones grounds political succession in classical imagery of organic processes, naturalizing leadership restructuring and élite renewal as inevitable, while reinforcing ideological discipline and the continuity of the Party's

central authority (Zhao 2016; Leutert 2018). Thus, Xi recontextualized this metaphor to support the Party's system of generational change and cadre development, with the replacement of leaders being framed not as a political process but as a natural law, emphasizing continuity, stability, and revitalization.

All in all, these examples demonstrate how classical quotations, once reinterpreted in relation to contemporary political leadership, recontextualize classical metaphors to construct distinct discursive, cognitive, rhetorical, and ideological models of governance through culturally authoritative imagery. Rather than merely illustrating political ideas, classical metaphors in Xi's discourse actively frame specific governance priorities: institutional reform is conceptualized as adaptation to changing currents, environmental protection as ecological stewardship, and cadre succession as natural renewal. Through this metaphorical framing, contemporary policy agendas are presented not as contingent political decisions but as necessary responses aligned with both natural principles and the moral authority of classical Chinese tradition.

6. Concluding remarks

This study has examined how literary citations in *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations* (Volume 2), particularly in the section on governance, function as metaphorical frameworks for conceptualizing politics. Through close analysis of three selected quotations and their associated metaphors, it has shown how concrete source domains are mapped onto abstract domains of governance, institutional reform, ecological management, and cadre renewal. These quotations provide cognitive and discursive affordances by making complex political concepts intelligible through familiar experiential imagery, allowing governance issues to be framed in more accessible terms. At the same time, they perform a rhetorical function by mobilizing culturally resonant symbols with persuasive potential, inviting identification with political messages.

The metaphors analysed discursively frame political problems and their solutions, presenting adaptation, sustainability, and leadership succession as natural, necessary, and rational processes. At an ideological level, they contribute to legitimizing Party rule by embedding contemporary political authority within a continuous civilizational narrative, while simultaneously constructing Xi's persona as a sage-leader grounded in classical wisdom and moral authority.

More fundamentally, the editorial structure of *Xi Jinping's Classical Quotations* demonstrates how metaphor interpretation itself becomes institutionally organized. By systematically pairing classical quotations with authoritative explanations of their contemporary relevance, the book functions as an institutional interpretive apparatus that guides and disseminates preferred metaphorical readings of political orientations.

These findings, although preliminary and limited, suggest that classical quotations operate as devices in an institutionalized mechanism for producing and regulating interpretive frames through officially curated political discourse. Broader questions are thus raised about the relationship between quotations and political authority, particularly when metaphor interpretation itself becomes regulated: when authoritative organs provide standardized explanations of metaphorical meanings, the interpretive openness is reduced, and metaphors themselves become mechanisms for stabilizing specific ideological frames. This highlights the importance of examining not only metaphor use but also the institutional processes through which metaphorical meanings are selected, interpreted, and disseminated.

Finally, this study has certain limitations. It examines the discursive construction of metaphorical interpretations rather than their reception and therefore does not assess whether different audiences actually adopt, negotiate, or resist the interpretive frames identified. Moreover, its analysis is based on a single officially curated text and focuses on a limited number of quotations within one thematic section, which restricts its ability to assess variation across the broader corpus of Xi Jinping's discourse. Future research could expand the dataset, compare different thematic sections or genres, and investigate how metaphorical frames circulate beyond official publications. Such approaches would contribute to a deeper understanding of how classical

tradition and metaphorical reasoning interact in the discursive construction of politics in contemporary China.

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FRANCESCA VOLPI[1]

Representing the *state*: personification and other metaphorical patterns in the inaugural addresses of Boris El'cin, Dmitrij Medvedev, and Vladimir Putin

Abstract

In Russian political communication, presidential inaugural addresses – by virtue of the executive role vested in the president and the moral prestige accorded to the office in the collective mentality – play a fundamental role in representing the country, its present condition, and its future possibilities. In an inaugural address, the speaker must establish empathy with the citizenry and reinforce a sense of belonging to the community. When the concept at stake is as abstract and complex as that of the 'state', recourse to conceptual metaphor is a widely employed discursive strategy for fostering such empathy and belonging. The paper presents a qualitative study of the inaugural addresses delivered by the presidents of the Russian Federation from 1991 to 2018. It aims to sketch an overview of the metaphors used by presidents Boris El'cin, Dmitrij Medvedev, and Vladimir Putin to represent the Russian state. Drawing on the MIP and MIPVU identification procedures, the metaphors identified are classified under four macro-domains: the human being, society, nature, and artefacts. In particular, the recurrent metaphorical models appear to be: the state as a person, the state as a building, the state as a business, and state activity as a journey. Overall, the analysis highlights the widespread use of personification strategies and two dominant, competing metaphorical models: the state as a person and the state as a building. On the one hand, there is a marked tendency to represent the state as a human being who, like any individual, has lived through moments of physical suffering and recovery, and with whom citizens can identify. On the other hand, the state is represented as a container within which citizens may feel included and protected.

Keywords: inaugural addresses; Russian Federation; conceptual metaphor; personification; State

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1. Introduction

This article provides a detailed analysis of the metaphorical representations of the Russian state by the presidents of the Russian Federation between 1991 and 2018. Specifically, the analysis traces the metaphors used by Boris El'cin[2], Dmitrij Medvedev, and Vladimir Putin in their inaugural addresses to verify the existence of regularities or dynamic trends in the state's representation. The corpus of literature on the use of metaphor generally – and its use in politics in particular – is enormous. Nevertheless, this article does not focus on metaphor per se but rather reflects on the role of metaphor in the reconstruction of a nation's image. In presidential government systems such as Russia's, inaugural addresses are a key tool for shaping the political image of a country. This analysis focuses on seven inaugural addresses: El'cin's in 1991 and 1996, Putin's in 2000 and 2004, Medvedev's in 2008, and Putin's in 2012 and 2018.

Inaugural addresses are a specific textual genre in the field of political discourse. Michail Bachtin (1986: 60-102) defines *genre* as the organisational principle of an utterance. Thus, *genre* may be characterised as a set of constituent elements – formal, pragmatic, and thematic – that the speaker and the listener comply with when producing and receiving a given discourse. Regarding the features of an inaugural address, Valerija Iličeva (2015: 5) and Elena Šejgal (2000: 16) describe it as an oral, monological text, generally produced in a highly formal style, which adheres to the ritual and etiquette of the specific national cultural tradition. According to these scholars, inaugural addresses have the following functions:

- strengthening the integration of community members in an in-group and affirming national unity on a significant occasion;
- illustrating and promoting the chosen or preferred political orientation, presenting it as necessary and legitimate – this function is particularly present and relevant in presidential forms of government,

[2] I have adhered to the scientific standard used in Slavic studies when transliterating Russian names.

such as in Russia, where the president is granted strong prerogatives in the management of power;
- demonstrating the will to act.

1.1 Delimiting the field: political discourse and metaphor

The term *politics* refers to a field that is too broad and complex to define univocally. Following Semino (2008: 85), I assume that the political sphere includes a wide variety of individuals, groups, and local, national, and international institutions engaged in processes that concern the acquisition, maintenance, and exercise of power. The concept of power follows Paul Chilton's work (1996: 6), which defines it as the possession of capabilities and resources. These include linguistic capabilities and the resources necessary to promote and enforce preferred policies. However politics is conceived, be it as a struggle for power or cooperation to achieve and maintain common interests, it cannot be separated from its discursive dimension. At the centre of all political activities is the need to promote and impose the concepts underlying the chosen policies; in other words, every political activity concerns persuasion. As Chilton noted, "Political activity does not exist without the use of language" (2004: 6). Linguistic activity, whether written or oral, dialogical or monological, formal or informal, public or hidden, is the fundamental tool for achieving persuasion. One linguistic tool long recognised as relevant in political rhetoric is metaphor (Chilton 2004: 51; Semino 2008: 85; Musolff 2017: 309).

Academic interest in metaphor dates to ancient times. The concept of metaphor was already present in Aristotle's *Poetics* and *The Art of Rhetoric* (fourth century BC). Aristotle, far from considering metaphor a mere decorative element of speech, viewed it as a tool for achieving perspicuity and a central and integral part of the broader rhetorical goals of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Musolff 2017: 310).

A landmark in metaphor studies was the publication of Andrew Ortony's *Metaphor and Thought* (1979) and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), which established a new approach – conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) – as a key research area in cognitive linguistics (Croft/Cruse 2004). A vast amount of research

has been carried out subsequently by scholars from different disciplines – including linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology – affirming, expanding, and modifying the primigenial research.[3]

Cognitive linguistics has defined metaphor as correspondences between domains of knowledge and/or experience that lead to systematic implications that structure the respective target topic from a particular perspective (Musolff 2017: 311). Zoltán Kövecses puts this directly: "A conceptual metaphor is understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete)" (2017: 13).

The centrality and pervasiveness of metaphorical processes both in language and in thought – the fact that we constantly, even unconsciously, use metaphors to conceptualise and reason about the space and time that surround us – make metaphor a particularly effective persuasion tool. Politics is an abstract domain; metaphor makes these abstractions more accessible and clarifies the complex relationships characterising politics itself, linking them to the personal domain. Starting with what can be made more explicit or accessible, the speaker can highlight or understate one aspect of a complex issue rather than another, potentially influencing the listener's perception of the issue (Semino 2008: 86).

Furthermore, as Chilton (2004: 52) notes, metaphorical schemata can become part of complex clusters of meaning that involve other cognitive elements. Thus, the concept of frames is relevant. A frame is a conceptual model of reality – or of a particular aspect of it – an area of long-term knowledge and experience within a given culture. A set of different long-term mental representations constitutes an ideology shared socially by the members of a group (van Dijk 1987: 202-222; Chilton/Schäffner 2002: 29; Semino 2008: 90). Consequently, conventional metaphorical patterns can be an important element of specific frames and contribute to shaping ideologies.

[3] For a historical overview of the cognitive approaches since the development of CMT and the critical issues and related controversies, see Demjén/Semino (2017), Kövecses (2010, 2015, 2017) and Musolff (2017).

2. Method

Metaphor identification procedure (MIP) and its subsequent elaboration (MIPVU), as presented by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) and Gerard Steen (2017), were used to conduct the textual analysis. These procedures are based on identifying the basic and contextual meanings of each lexical unit. In MIP (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 3), basic meaning is defined with respect to contextual meaning as:

- more concrete and related to sensory perceptions;
- related to bodily action;
- characterised by precision rather than vagueness;
- historically older.

If the contextual meaning of a given lexical unit contrasts with its basic meaning but can be understood by comparing it to the latter, the lexical unit is metaphor-related.

I initially outlined the concept of the *state* as defined in three contemporary Russian dictionaries. Based on these definitions, I then identified the lexical units used by each of the presidents to name the state and attribute properties and actions to it. Similarly, I identified the lexical units the presidents used to attribute properties and actions to their own roles. Lastly, I analysed the lexical units identified by applying the MIP procedure.

Sergej I. Ožegov's (2013) *Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language] and Sergej A. Kuznecov's *(1998) Bol'šoj tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka* [The Great Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language] were used to verify the basic meanings of the lexical units identified for analysis.

3. Results

This section identifies examples of where Russian presidents have used metaphorical patterns to represent the state. I first referred to the definitions of the *state* found in three main contemporary Russian dictionaries; all these define the *state* as the basic form of political organisation of a community and, simultaneously, the territory over which that organisation exercises its power[4]. Beginning with this general definition, the first step in the analysis was to identify the nomination strategies the presidents used to refer to the Russian state. The results of this preliminary analysis are summarised in Table 1. As the results show, there was only a relatively small number of occurrences of the lemma *state* (*государство*) and of lemmas typical of the political-legal sphere, such as *nation* (*нация*), *authority* (*власть*), *federation* (*федерация*), and *republic* (*республика*). Even ideologically and emotionally charged lexical units such as *motherland* (*родина*), *fatherland* (*отечество*), and *power* (*держава*) were less common than the place name *Russia* (*Россия*), the common noun *country* (*страна*), and the deictic pronoun *we* (*мы*).

[4] Sergej Ožegov's (2013) *Tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka (Explanatory Dictionary of Russian Language)* defines the *state* as follows: "The political organisation of a country's ruling class, headed by the government and its organs, with the task of protecting the existing order and suppressing class opponents, as well as the country itself ruled by such political organisation". Anastasija Evgen'eva's (1988) *Slovar' russkogo jazyka (Dictionary of Russian Language)* provides a similar definition: "The political organisation of society, headed by the government and its organs, through which the ruling class exercises its power, ensures the protection of the existing order and the suppression of class opponents, as well as the country with such political organisation". Natalija Švedova's (2007) *Semantičeskij slovar' (Semantic Dictionary)* defines the *state* as "1. The basic political organisation of a society, which governs it and protects its economic and social structure. 2. A country ruled by such a power organisation".

	El'cin 1991	El'cin 1996	Putin 2000	Putin 2004	Medvedev 2008	Putin 2012	Putin 2018
STATE	4	3	6	4	6	1	3
NATION	-	-	-	1	1	2	-
RUSSIA	9	11	11	9	8	5	18
WE	6	7	21	11	3	11	25
COUNTRY	2	8	9	12	5	7	12
AUTHORITY	3	-	5	-	-	-	2
FEDERATION	2	1	-	1	-	1	-
MOTHERLAND	1	-	1	2	1	2	1
REPUBLIC	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
FATHERLAND	-	3	1	-	-	2	6
POWER	-	2	-	1	-	-	-

Table 1. Number of occurrences of a lexical unit's use when referring to the *state*.

The paper now presents the examples found in the textual analysis. These examples have been divided chronologically and grouped according to the identified metaphorical pattern. Overall, the textual analysis reveals a high degree of conventionality in the metaphors used (see Table 2). The identified metaphorical models can be traced to the macro-domains recurring in Russian political discourse identified by Anatolij Čudinov (2001): human being, society, nature, and artefacts. Specific micro-domains can be identified for each macro-domain. Four recurring patterns, common to all three speakers, were found:

- the state is a person;
- the state is a building;
- the state is a job or business;
- the activity of the state is a journey.

The state and its activity are a mechanism or instrument model was only identified in Putin's speeches, and, marginally, *the activity of the state is sport* model was attested on only two occurrences, appearing in the speeches of Medvedev and Putin respectively.

MACRO-DOMAINS	Human being			Artefacts		Nature	Society
MICRO-DOMAINS	Person	Journey	Job	Mechanism	Building	Organism	Sport
EL'CIN	8	4	4	-	2	-	-
MEDVEDEV	2	1	1	-	2	1	1
PUTIN	9	10	8	8	6	1	1
TOTAL	19	15	13	8	10	2	2

Table 2. Number of occurrences of the metaphorical patterns.

Another general consideration is that the metaphors tended to intersect, with some linguistic units referring to different domains. For example, the verb *укреплять-укрепить*, in its basic meaning of 'strengthening', could refer either to a person or, more generally, to a living being, therefore denoting the domain of nature, but it could also refer to a building, therefore denoting the domain of artefacts. Another example is the pair of nouns *прорыв* and *рывок*, which can be translated as 'breakthrough' and 'jerk', respectively, but also as 'breakthrough' and 'leap forward', respectively; thus, they could be used to refer to progress in the technological sphere as well as in the military and sporting spheres, respectively. Section 4, therefore, focuses on the more stable metaphorical patterns, that is the *state* as a person, as a building and the activity of the state as a journey and as a job or business.

3.1 Boris El'cin's speeches

The state is a person

(1) *Государство <u>сильно</u> благополучием своих граждан* [The state is <u>strong</u> in the welfare of its citizens]. (El'cin 1991)

(2) *Государственная власть <u>ответственна</u> перед народом* [State power is <u>responsible</u> to the people]. (El'cin 1991)

(3) *[…] возрождение нашего государства* [The rebirth of our state]. (El'cin 1991)

(4) *Великая Россия поднимается с колен* [Great Russia rises from its knees]! (El'cin 1991)

(5) *Россия возродится* [Russia will be reborn]! (El'cin 1991)

(6) *Определить облик новой России, страной с нормальной жизнью* [Define the image of a new Russia, a country with a normal life]. (El'cin 1996)

(7) *Наша страна была и будет сильна своим единством, дружбой ее народов. […] сильна духовностью.* [Our country was and will be strong in its unity and the friendship of its people […] strong in its spirituality]. (El'cin 1996)

(8) *Это (добро и милосердие) станет подлинным возрождение нашей страны* [This (goodness and charity) will be the true rebirth of our country]. (El'cin 1996)

The activity of the state is a journey

(9) *[…] путь, по которому предстоит идти нашей Родине. Это путь демократии, путь реформ, путь возрождения достоинства человека* [the path our Motherland has to follow. This is the path of democracy, the path of reforms, the path of rebirth of human dignity]. (El'cin 1991)

(10) *Мы возвращаемся в мировое сообщество с чистыми помыслами* [We return to the world community with pure thoughts]. (El'cin 1991)

(11) *Россия обязательно выйдет из кризиса* [Russia will definitely come out of the crisis]! (El'cin 1991)

(12) *Устремлённость вперед – вот что отличает Россию нынешнего десятилетия* [Forward projection is what distinguishes Russia in the current decade]. (El'cin 1996)

The state is a building

(13) *В радикальном обновлении нуждается и Российская Федерация. В его основе – укрепление суверенитета* [The Russian Federation also needs radical renewal. At its foundation is the strengthening of sovereignty]. (El'cin 1991)

(14) *Вы будете поддерживать меня в нашей общей созидательной работе по обновлению Отечества* [You will support me in our joint creative work to renew the Fatherland]. (El'cin 1996)

The state is a job or business

(15) *Государство служит гражданину* [The state serves the citizen]. (El'cin 1996)

(16) *Самое важное теперь – действовать профессионально* [The most important thing now is to act professionally]. (El'cin 1996)

(17) *Вы будете поддерживать меня в нашей общей созидательной работе по обновлению Отечества* [You will support me in our joint creative work to renew the Fatherland]. (El'cin 1996)

(18) *Россия будет играть ключевую роль в международных делах* [Russia will play a key role in international affairs]. (El'cin 1996)

3.2 Vladimir Putin's first two terms

The state is a person

(19) *Мы хотим, чтобы наша Россия была свободной, богатой, сильной, цивилизованной страной, страной, которую уважают в мире* [We want Russia to be a free, wealthy, strong, civilised country; a country that is respected in the world]. (Putin 2000)

(20) *Вы голосовали за процветающую и сильную Россию* [You voted for a prosperous and strong Russia]. (Putin 2000)

(21) *[…] наши потомки будут гордиться теми страницами, которые мы с вами впишем в биографию великой России* [our descendants will be proud of the pages that we will write together in the biography of great Russia]. (Putin 2004)

The state is a building

(22) *Смена власти – всегда проверка конституционного строя, проверка его на прочность* [A change of power is always a test of the constitutional system, a test of its resistance]. (Putin 2000)

(23) *Мирная преемственность власти – это важнейший элемент политической стабильности, о которой мы с вами мечтали, к которой стремились, которой добивались* [Peaceful succession of power is the most important element of political stability, which we have dreamed of, strived for, and achieved]. (Putin 2000)

(24) *Построение демократического государства еще далеко не завершено* [The building of a democratic state is far from complete]. (Putin 2000)

(25) *Всегда помнить о тех, кто создал Российское государство* [Always remember those who created the Russian state]. (Putin 2000)

The state is a job or business

(26) *[…] ваша поддержка – это только аванс власти в целом и, разумеется, мне* [your support is only an advance payment to the authorities as a whole and, of course, to me]. (Putin 2000)

(27) *[…] власть работала в его [народа] интересах, […], служила обществу* [the authorities worked in his [*the people's*] interests, protected Russian citizens, […], served society]. (Putin 2000)

(28) *Это мы вместе сделали нашу Родину открытой страной, готовой к широкому, равноправному сотрудничеству с другими государствами* [Together, we have made our homeland an open country, ready for broad, equal cooperation with other states]. (Putin 2004)

The activity of the state is a journey

(29) *Вы поддержали те первые шаги, которые были уже сделаны* [You supported those first steps that had already been taken]. (Putin 2000)

(30) *Путь к свободному обществу не был простым и легким* [The path to a free society was not simple and smooth]. (Putin 2000)

(31) *[…] этот рубеж в нашей жизни мы прошли достойно* [we have passed this milestone in our lives with dignity]. (Putin 2000)

3.3 Dmitrij Medvedev's presidency

The state is a person

(32) *[…] государства, у которого есть сегодня и необходимые ресурсы, и чёткое понимание своих национальных интересов* [state that today has both the necessary resources and a clear understanding of its national interests]. (Medvedev 2008)

(33) *[…] много ещё предстоит сделать – сделать, чтобы государство было действительно справедливым и заботливым по отношению к гражданам, чтобы обеспечить самые высокие стандарты жизни* [much remains to be done to ensure that the state is truly fair and caring towards its citizens, and to provide the highest standards of living]. (Medvedev 2008)

The state is a building

(34) *Россия – это родной дом* [Russia is our beloved native home]. (Medvedev 2008)

(35) *За последние восемь лет был создан мощный фундамент для долгосрочного развития, для просто десятилетий свободного и стабильного развития* [Over the past eight years, a strong foundation has been laid for long-term development, for decades of free and stable development]. (Medvedev 2008)

The state is an organism

(36) *За последние восемь лет был создан мощный фундамент для долгосрочного развития, для просто десятилетий свободного и стабильного развития* [Over the past eight years, a strong foundation has been laid for long-term development, for decades of free and stable development]. (Medvedev 2008)

The state is a job or business

(37) *Мы будем добиваться внедрения инновационных подходов во все сферы жизни* [We will strive to introduce innovative approaches in all spheres of life]. (Medvedev 2008)

The activity of the state is a journey

(38) *[…] в этом – наша стратегия, и в этом – ориентир на годы вперед* [this is our strategy, and this is our orientation for years to come]. (Medvedev 2008)

The activity of the state is sport

(39) *[…] в этом – наша стратегия, и в этом – ориентир на годы вперед* [this is our strategy, and this is our orientation for years to come]. (Medvedev 2008)

3.4 Vladimir Putin's third and fourth terms

The state is a person

(40) *Мы хотим и будем жить в успешной России, которую уважают в мире как надёжного, открытого, честного и предсказуемого партнёра* [We want and will live in a successful Russia respected worldwide as a reliable, open, honest, and predictable partner]. (Putin 2012)

(41) *[…] мир увидел возрождённую Россию* [the world has seen a revived Russia]. (Putin 2012)

(42) *[…] особенно остро осознаю свою колоссальную ответственность перед Россией – страной грандиозных побед и свершений* [I am particularly acutely aware of my enormous responsibility to Russia – a country of grandiose victories and achievements]. (Putin 2018)

(43) *Россия и дальше будет укреплять своё могущество* [Russia will continue to strengthen its power]. (Putin 2018)

(44) *Россия должна быть современной и динамичной, […] готова смело принимать вызовы времени и так же энергично отвечать на них, чтобы последовательно наращивать своё лидерство* [Russia must be modern and dynamic […] ready to boldly take on the challenges of the times and respond to them with equal energy in order to consistently build its leadership]. (Putin 2018)

(45) *Россия – сильный, активный, влиятельный участник международной жизни* [Russia is a strong, active, influential participant in international life]. (Putin 2018)

The state is a building

(46) *[…] укрепили страну […]* [strengthened the country]. (Putin 2012)

(47) *[…] жизнь будущих поколений, историческая перспектива государства и нашей нации зависят сегодня именно от нашей настойчивости в обустройстве огромных российских пространств от Балтики до Тихого океана* [The lives of future generations, the historical perspective of the state and our nation today depends on our persistence in building the vast Russian territories from the Baltic to the Pacific Ocean]. (Putin 2012)

The state is an organism

(48) *[…] укрепили страну […]* [strengthened the country]. (Putin 2012)

The state is a job or business

(49) *[…] нам потребуется решать задачи принципиально иного уровня, иного качества и масштаба* [We will need to solve problems of a fundamentally different level, quality, and scale]. (Putin 2012)

(50) *[…] жизнь будущих поколений, историческая перспектива государства и нашей нации зависят сегодня именно от нас, от реальных успехов в создании новой экономики и современных стандартов жизни […]* [The lives of future generations, the historical prospects of the state and our nation today depend precisely on us, on real successes in creating a new economy and modern standards of living]. (Putin 2012)

(51) *Мы выступаем за равноправное и взаимовыгодное сотрудничество* [We advocate equal and mutually beneficial co-operation]. (Putin 2018)

(52) *Но сейчас мы должны использовать все имеющиеся у нас возможности […] для повышения конкурентоспособности* [But now we must use all the opportunities available to us […] to increase competitiveness]. (Putin 2018)

(53) *Мы обязательно добьёмся успеха* [We will definitely succeed]! (Putin 2018)

The activity of the state is a journey

(54) *Мы вместе прошли большой и сложный путь* [We have travelled a long and difficult road together]. (Putin 2012)

(55) *Сегодня у нас есть всё для движения вперёд,* […] [Today, we have everything to move forward]. (Putin 2012)

(56) *Сегодня мы вступаем в новый этап национального развития,* […] [Today, we are entering a new stage of national development]. (Putin 2012)

(57) *Путь вперёд не бывает простым, это всегда сложный поиск* [The path forward is never easy; it is always a difficult search]. (Putin 2018)

(58) *Опыт показывает, что и сегодня нам нужно […] двигаться только вперёд* [Experience shows that today we need to move only forward]. (Putin 2018)

(59) *Конечно, мы должны идти в ногу с глобальными переменами […]* [Of course, we must keep pace with global changes]. (Putin 2018)

(60) *Наш ориентир – это Россия для людей, страна возможностей для самореализации каждого человека* [Our landmark is a Russia for the people, a country of opportunities for the self-realisation of every individual]. (Putin 2018)

The state and its activity are a mechanism or instrument

(61) *Сегодня у нас есть всё для созидания: дееспособное и развивающееся государство,* […] [Today, we have everything we need for creation: a capable and developing state]. (Putin 2012)

(62) *Его [Медведева] президентство придало дополнительный импульс модернизации всех сторон нашей жизни* [His [Medvedev's] presidency has given an additional impetus to modernising all aspects of our lives]. (Putin 2012)

(63) *Мы готовы к грядущим испытаниям и грядущим свершениям* [We are ready for the coming challenges and the coming achievements]. (Putin 2018)

(64) *[…] ведущая сила преобразований – это все мы, граждане России* [the driving force behind the reforms is all of us, the citizens of Russia]. (Putin 2018)

(65) *Нам нужны прорывы во всех сферах жизни* [We need innovations in all areas of life]. (Putin 2018)

(66) *Конечно, мы должны […] выстраивать свою повестку прорывного развития* [Of course, we must […] keep pace with global changes and develop our own agenda for innovative development]. (Putin 2018)

(67) *Но сейчас мы должны использовать все имеющиеся у нас возможности […] для экономического, технологического прорыва* [But now we must use all the opportunities available to

us to achieve economic and technological breakthroughs]. (Putin 2018)

(68) *[…] добьёмся прорывов в науке и технологиях* [we will achieve scientific and technological innovations]. (Putin 2018)

The activity of the state is sport

(69) *[…] и сегодня мы добьёмся прорыва, ведь мы – одна мощная команда* [and today we will achieve a breakthrough, because we are one powerful team]. (Putin 2018)

4. Discussion

4.1 Personification

Unsurprisingly, personification was the most frequent metaphorical process. It attributes human traits and actions to abstract entities, such as nation-states, and is widely used in political rhetoric. Portraying a nation as a person attributes individual actions to a single agent, although in reality, these involve many actors and long implementation phases (Semino 2008: 101-102). Personification makes political and economic processes more tangible and easier for citizens to grasp. This reduces the distance between the citizens' personal experiences and the country's political life.

El'cin's speeches describe Russia as strong and responsible. This is not surprising but must be considered in its historical context. El'cin led Russia through its transition from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation,[5] inheriting serious social and economic problems following

[5] El'cin was appointed President of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) in 1990. On 12 June 1990, the RSFSR parliament approved a Declaration of Sovereignty, which established the superiority of the Russian Republic's laws over those of the Soviet Union. On 10 July 1991, El'cin was sworn in as the president of the RSFSR. In August 1991, following an attempted coup in Moscow by

the Soviet Union's collapse. For El'cin in the 1990s, it was crucial to show Russians that their country could manage a difficult transition. He also needed to help citizens regain a sense of belonging to a strong nation. He thus uses terms like *возрождение* 'rebirth' and *возродится* (*'it will be reborn'*) to portray a country on its knees, as shown by *поднимается с колен* (*'it is rising from its knees'*), but ready to begin a new path.

Elements of personification, though less frequent, also appear in Putin's short speeches in 2000 and 2004. Russia had endured a turbulent decade during the 1990s. Putin cast himself as the leader destined to stabilise and restore international respect. He differs from El'cin in the traits he attributes to Russia. The adjective *сильный* (*strong*) still appears, conveying the idea of global respect. However, each president drew from different semantic fields. El'cin highlights spirituality, goodness, and compassion, while Putin expresses a vision of a free, prosperous, and civilised Russia. El'cin invokes stereotypes tied to the Russian national character and the elusive 'Russian soul'. Goodness, compassion, and spirituality stir emotional responses among citizens. El'cin's emphasis on the Russian people's character as the force behind rebirth is also visible in his more frequent use of citizen-related terms – *народ* (*people*), *граждане* (*citizens*), *люди* 'people', and *человек* (*person*) – rather than terms for the state. This reflects historical context: to offset a weak state, he appeals to unity and responsibility, seeking the values in citizens on which to build a new national identity.

Putin repositions Russia closer to the Western states by shifting from popular sentiment to emphasising stability, reliability, and economic success. He reinforces this focus in his early third- and fourth-

several leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Baltic republics declared their independence from the Soviet Union, which was recognised in September 1991. On 8 December 1991, the Belaveža Accords (Belarus) between the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus sanctioned the three republics' exit from the Soviet Union. On 25 December Michail Gorbačëv announced his resignation as President of the Soviet Union. The following day the parliament's upper house approved Declaration 142-N to recognise the independent republics and the dissolution of the union. The Soviet Union formally ceased to exist on 31 December (for an in-depth discussion of the last years of the Soviet Union, see Graziosi 2008).

term speeches (2012 and 2018) following Medvedev's presidency from 2008 to 2012. Medvedev, while providing fewer examples of personification than Putin, still aligns with this approach. He portrays Russia as an individual with understanding (*чёткое понимание*), care for citizens (*заботливым*), and the ability to ensure well-being (*обеспечить самые высокие стандарты жизни*). These last two phrases depict the state as a caring father looking after his family. Thus, from the metaphor *the state is a person*, we can derive the pattern *the state is a family*.

As mentioned previously, in Putin's 2012 and 2018 speeches, personification remains a widely used technique to represent the state. Russia is defined as a partner and participant in international life, and the characteristics attributed to it are typical of human beings: reliable, honest, predictable, dynamic, strong, active, and influential. Russia is also credited with actions that may fall within the sphere of human activity, such as courageously embracing the challenges of the times, responding energetically, and accelerating. Of note, some of the terms used relating to energy, dynamism, and acceleration can also fall within the semantic field of science and technology. Consequently, personification intersects with the metaphorical scheme *the state is a mechanism*. This representation contributes to building Russia's image as a modern and efficient state.

Over the past 30 years, Russian presidents have shaped an evolving image of their country. Russia begins as a suffering figure, searching for identity, and becomes a strong and confident nation, respected and assertive. As Semino (2008: 102) notes, one consequence of personification can be vagueness. Apart from declaring responsibility at the start of their speeches, the presidents are often unclear about who was responsible for strengthening Russia, accelerating its economic development, and building a strong, efficient state. This vagueness issue is particularly relevant in Putin's speeches, particularly regarding the pronoun *we*. As shown in Table 1, Putin often addresses his audience in the first-person plural. This *we* can have an inclusive intent, aiming to unite the political elite and citizens as one group. Addressing the public in this way can foster identification, emotional involvement, feelings of sameness and homogeneity, while mitigating difference and dissent. However, it is not always clear who is actually included in the *we*. As Ruth Wodak and colleagues note (Wodak/de Cillia/Reisigl/Liebhart

2009: 46), *we* can be partially or totally inclusive or exclusive depending on the other pronouns it implicitly contains. In Putin's speeches, it is not always clear whether *we* means 'I+you' (including citizens) or 'I+them' (referring to the president and the political elite, excluding citizens). Regardless of Putin's intent, this ambiguity means that the audience must interpret who 'we' includes. Consequently, Putin reduces his responsibility for statements on sensitive topics, and it becomes less likely that such statements will be questioned.

4.2 State activity as a journey and as a job or business

When we present the state as an individual who feels and acts, it also makes sense to describe its activities as travel and work. Politics as a journey is a conventional metaphor, common in many languages (see Chilton 2004; Semino 2008). Both El'cin and Putin frame Russia's political changes as a journey, reforms as steps, and difficult moments as boundaries. In this model, Russia's only direction is forward. This imagery encourages citizens to see the past – marked by trials and suffering – as behind them, and forward movement as improvement.

Equally productive is the metaphorical pattern in which political activity is a job or business. This pattern is not present in El'cin's 1991 speech but appears several times in 1996; the state's task now is to serve its citizens and behave professionally, just as a good employee would: *služit'* 'to serve' is the verb used to refer to employment in the state sector (as well as in the army). Furthermore, the expression *creative work* (*созидательной работе*) conveys the image of a political elite actively engaged in creating an artefact.

Putin also conceptualises the state's activity in terms of service to society, but adds words and expressions from the semantic sphere of business, such as *solving problems* (*решать задачи*), *achieving success* (*добиться успеха*), *mutually beneficial cooperation* (*равноправное и взаимовыгодное сотрудничество*), and *increasing competitiveness* (*повышение конкурентоспособности*). This image of Russia as a country capable of internal efficiency and a globally recognised economic partner is also consistent with one of the central images attributed to Putin, which he has sought to project since his first

term in office: Putin as a head of state who, in addition to being a strong man, is also a capable businessman.

4.3 The state as a building

Parallel to the state's representation as an animated being is its representation as an artefact – specifically, as a building, exemplified by the terms *построение* and *обустройство*, both denoting 'construction', which, in their basic meaning, refer to the construction of buildings. This metaphorical model was already present in the political discourse during Gorbačëv's *perestrojka* (literally meaning 'reconstruction') and is also notable in the analysed speeches, where a trend similar to that observed in the evolution of discourse can be identified. El'cin's speeches emphasise the need for radical restructuring; moreover, the state's construction is explained as the result of collective and creative work, in which citizens are included, and where the aspect of renewal with respect to the past is emphasised.

In Putin's speeches, the semantic field of strength and solidity is more evident. Putin is the only president who, albeit marginally and on only one occasion, uses the term *Kremlin* metonymically to refer to the Russian state as a whole.

(70) Здесь, в Кремле, – средоточие нашей национальной памяти, здесь, в стенах Кремля, веками вершилась история нашей страны […] [Here, in the Kremlin, is the heart of our national memory; here, within the Kremlin's walls, the history of our country has been made across the centuries]. (Putin 2000)

This choice suggests a desire to convey to the citizens an image of the state as a highly centralised and institutionalised entity and may be explained by the fact that during Putin's first two terms, Russia remained in a phase of economic transition and its international prestige had not yet been fully restored. In contrast, in Medvedev's speeches, the state is not depicted as a simple building but as a home, and this conceptualisation intersects with the model of the state as a family. The Russian adjective *родной*, 'native', carries a strong emotional connotation and

is generally used to describe something or someone perceived as 'dear' or 'close to one's heart'. When applied to the noun 'home', it can serve to narrow the symbolic distance between the citizenry and the governing elite, thereby fostering a sense of belonging to a shared community. The reference to a state that cares for its citizens like a father for his family (*заботливый*) also allows the state to be represented as non-oppressive in its relationship with citizens.

Medvedev's presidency was, in fact, characterised by the explicit aim of modernising the country not only at the industrial level but also in public services and administrative structures: a significant portion of his inaugural address is devoted to promoting the image of an efficient state. At the same time, Medvedev must ensure that, in the eyes of Russian citizens, this path of modernisation is clearly distinguished from memories of the USSR, whose bureaucracy was highly centralised and authoritarian, yet notoriously inefficient.

5. Conclusion

This analysis has drawn on a limited set of texts and can therefore offer only a partial perspective, one that primarily reflects the voice of the elite. Extending the investigation to other textual genres or to forms of mass cultural production could prove fruitful for identifying alternative metaphorical representations or those displaying a higher degree of innovation. Nonetheless, even a relatively small corpus yields meaningful insight into how Russia has perceived and presented itself on the international stage over the last three decades. The texts examined frequently employ highly conventional metaphors. In particular, two competing models have been identified: the state as a person – whose actions are conceptualised in terms of typically human activities such as travel and business – and the state as a construction. On the one hand, there is a tendency to construe the state as a living being with which citizens can identify and towards which they can develop empathy; on the other hand, the state is framed as a container within which

individuals may feel included and protected. Within each of these metaphorical models, it is possible to trace an evolution in the construction of the nation's image: a gradual shift from a country in crisis, sustained by the traditional values attributed to its people, to a modern, technologically advanced, and competitive state on a par with other Western countries.

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Part II
Metaphor in Reception: Comprehension in Multilingual Classrooms

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How multilingual students understand metaphors in German textbook texts

Abstract

This exploratory-interpretative study investigates how students in German lower secondary education understand metaphors in textbook texts, focusing on linguistically heterogeneous learning groups. Drawing on stimulus-based individual interviews with 27 students with different language acquisition profiles, it examines metaphor comprehension from the perspective of functional-pragmatic discourse analysis. The analysis reconstructs different paths of metaphor comprehension and, where metaphorical meaning must be inferred, five successive steps: recognising a lexical or thematic incompatibility, inferring the target concept, establishing analogies between the source and the target concept, transferring a contextually relevant conceptual feature, and grasping the emergent meaning. Knowledge of an expression's basic meaning emerges as an important prerequisite for recognising and understanding its metaphorical use. Comprehension varied across metaphors and language acquisition profiles: *Flüchtlingsstrom* ('flow of refugees'), a conventional metaphor, was understood most frequently, whereas *Asyl-Lotterie* ('asylum lottery'), a novel metaphor, was understood least frequently; students with German as their L1 generally understood the metaphors more successfully than students with German as an L2, particularly newly arrived migrant students. In cases of non-comprehension, students employ three main approaches: form-based meaning construal, supplementing the interpretive frame with additional knowledge, and paraphrasing propositional content. The findings suggest that language-sensitive subject teaching should identify students' individual comprehension approaches and provide comprehension-relevant knowledge or cues to guide them towards inferring contextual meaning.

Keywords: metaphor comprehension; multilingual students; German as a second language (*DaZ*); textbook texts; language-sensitive subject teaching

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1. Research topic and current state of research

This study investigates how students in lower secondary education in Germany (*Sekundarstufe I*) understand metaphors used in textbook texts.[2] It addresses aspects of how metaphorically used expressions are dealt with in the context of a (holistic) language education for multilingual students as well as the consideration of metaphor in the core curricula of mainstream classroom instruction. In doing so, it fills a research gap concerning the comprehension of metaphors by students for whom German is a second language (*Deutsch als Zweitsprache* (*DaZ*)). Metaphors are not a marginal linguistic phenomenon; rather, they occur frequently in both everyday and institutional discourse[3] and text types. Consequently, they should also receive greater attention within educational institutions. This raises the question of how metaphorical language should be addressed in subject-specific teaching in heterogeneous mainstream and integration classes. Based on empirical data on the metaphor comprehension processes of different groups of students, didactic and methodological implications for fostering students' linguistic abilities can be derived. Metaphors have the potential to serve as points of entry for metalinguistic reflection and language-sensitive subject teaching. They should therefore not be addressed exclusively in German language classes in the context of poetry analysis or the analysis of political speeches.

Several studies have investigated metaphor comprehension, employing sometimes very different methodological approaches. Gardner (1974), for example, uses a matching task combined with elicited justifications. His study focuses on the transfer of adjectives to other (conceptual) domains, such as describing a quiet sound as dark. The participants are preschool and school-aged children as well as university students whose first language (L1) is English. Among other findings, Gardner shows that while gender has no significant effect, age does: younger children are often able to make appropriate associations

[2] This article is a summary of Sotkov (2023) in English.

[3] *Discourse* is understood as a speech situation in which a speaker (S) and a hearer (H) are co-present in space and time (cf. Ehlich 1984), i.e. a talk.

but are less capable of justifying them than older participants. Pollio/Pollio (1979) employ a multiple-choice test to investigate metaphor comprehension in children aged between nine and fourteen with English as their L1. They find, among other results, that novel metaphors are more difficult to understand than lexicalised ones and that the ability to understand metaphors increases with age.[4] Augst (1978) examines metaphor comprehension using questionnaires and interviews. His participants are sixteen children and adolescents aged between five and eighteen and forty-eight adults with German as their L1. He finds, among other results, that preschool children can hardly understand metaphors and that children at the end of primary school understand only about half as many metaphors as adults. Zurer Pearson (1990) uses the method of stimulus repetition and investigates fifty-two preschool children with English as their L1. She finds considerable variation but no age effect. Sentences containing metaphors are repeated in the same way as sentences with literal meaning, leading her to conclude that metaphors are processed in a manner similar to non-metaphorical expressions. A more recent study in the German-speaking context is that of Lessing-Sattari (2017). She investigates the metaphor comprehension processes of thirty-three ninth-grade students in Berlin and selects three students for a contrastive case reconstruction of their individual comprehension processes. Students are instructed to verbalise their comprehension processes aloud (think-aloud protocols, introspection; cf. e.g. Heine 2014). While such protocols allow for the reconstruction of mental processes, they also entail specific methodological challenges. Lessing-Sattari works out that metaphors are generally conceptualised as stylistic devices in a school context. This neglects their didactic potential. The irritation caused by a metaphor (in the sense of a violation of the hearer's (or reader's) expectations) can initiate a (meta-)linguistic reflection process in students, potentially leading to new insights. A central prerequisite is that students possess the ability to build analogies. In this respect, metaphors have the potential to promote students' cognitive development. Holder (2019) adopts a broad concept of metaphor and

[4] For the conceptualisation of novel and lexicalised metaphors adopted in the present study see the section *Metaphor concept*.

investigates students' reception of multimodal metaphors, i.e. image-based and text-image metaphors.[5] His empirical basis consists of conversations with students in grades 4, 6, 8, and 10. He shows that multimodal metaphors are easier for younger students to understand than purely monomodal metaphors. From these findings, he derives didactic implications for literature teaching, arguing that metaphors have significant didactic potential, particularly when they are presented to younger students in multimodal forms.

As this brief overview shows, there is a wide range of studies on metaphor comprehension. Only a small selection can be presented here. These studies differ considerably in their approaches and methodological designs. This unsurprisingly leads to divergent results. In addition, they vary in their focus. What many of them have in common, however, is that they draw on a similar concept of metaphor without substantially developing it further. Moreover, most of these studies axiomatically adopt Piaget's theory of cognitive development (cf. e.g. Piaget 1988). The multilingualism of students is not systematically considered. Yet alongside monolingually socialised German-speaking students (students with German as their L1), classrooms also include students for whom German is a second language. This group comprises *DaZ* students who participate in mainstream classes and newly arrived migrant students who bring a range of heritage languages as multilingual resources and initially attend preparatory classes before transitioning to mainstream classes.[6] This linguistic reality must also be reflected upon and considered regarding methodological approaches. The present study includes students from all types of language acquisition backgrounds (German as L1, *DaZ* students, newly arrived migrant students) and reconstructs their metaphor comprehension hermeneutically within a specific discourse context (a stimulus-based interview).

[5] Holder's distinction concerns the medial form of realisation of the metaphor. For him a metaphor can be realised in different sign systems, i.e. in a (written) text, an image, or a combination of both.

[6] In some German schools, integration classes are set up for newly arrived migrant students. These students are initially taught in these integration classes before they can join mainstream classes. For this reason, they are also referred to as preparatory classes.

2. Metaphor concept

The study's metaphor concept builds on Hoffmann's functional definition of (word) meaning (Hoffmann 2017).[7] Hoffmann distinguishes between (i) a linguistic expression's basic meaning, (ii) its current or actual, i.e. contextual meaning, and (iii) its meaning potential. He defines its basic meaning as the contribution to the meaning of an utterance as it is typically understood in a society (and linguistic community) (cf. Hoffmann 2017: 45). An expression's actual or contextual meaning is defined as its contribution to the communicative sense as it is to be understood by the interlocutors in a specific constellation and utterance (cf. Hoffmann 2017: 45). The meaning potential of an expression is its contribution to the meaning of an utterance as it can be understood by interlocutors in different constellations and utterance contexts (cf. Hoffmann 2017: 45). For example, the German word *Nussschale* ('nutshell') can be understood either in the sense of 'the shell of a nut' or 'a small boat'. Both meanings are part of the expression's meaning potential. While 'shell of a nut' constitutes the basic meaning of *Nussschale*, 'small boat' is its actual meaning in a specific context of use (here: a specific German textbook text). On this basis, the concept of metaphor underlying the present study is defined as follows: when a (symbol-field) expression (Bühler ³1999) is used metaphorically, its meaning is shifted within its meaning potential. A metaphorical use is present when the basic meaning of an expression is suspended for a specific use and replaced by an actual meaning that deviates from the basic meaning in certain respects. A metaphor involves two concepts: a source concept and a target concept. If both concepts are known, the hearer (H) assumes an implicit comparison between them, making use of one or more analogies. The two concepts belong to different (conceptual) domains. An aspect of the source concept corresponds, along a particular dimension of

[7] For a systematic overview of different approaches to (or theories of) metaphor see Sotkov (2023). There, different common cognitive semantic approaches, for example Lakoff/Johnson (1980) and Fauconnier/Turner (2002), are summarised and contrasted with more pragmatic approaches.

comparison, to an aspect of the target concept; the metaphor thus operates on a similarity within difference, i.e. a similarity between different domains. Regarding their degree of conventionalisation and lexicalisation, metaphors can be located at different stages ranging from novel or creative to conventionalised and lexicalised metaphors (cf. Eggs 2006: 61). For the purposes of the present study, two types are distinguished: (i) conventionalised or lexicalised metaphors and (ii) novel or creative metaphors. As discussed in the section *Research topic and current state of research*, a comparable distinction between lexicalised and novel metaphors has also been employed in empirical research on children's metaphor comprehension (e.g. Pollio/Pollio 1979). In the case of conventionalised or lexicalised metaphors, the metaphorical meaning is conventionalised within the linguistic community and may be stored as part of speakers' lexical-semantic knowledge. It can be retrieved at any time, even independently of any context, and integrated into the mental construal of the contextual meaning of the expression, although the meaning of the whole utterance always emerges from the overall combinatorial context. In the case of novel metaphors, by contrast, the constellation and the text or discourse provide the resources necessary for understanding the metaphorically used expression. Such metaphors cannot be understood independently of context. The expression is typically not used in the given synsemantic or collocational environment (Weinrich's concept of "counter-determination" (Weinrich 1976: 320)). This lexical and thematic contradiction violates the hearer's expectations. This violation can then only be resolved by updating the meaning of the expression in the specific context of use (i.e. by interpreting its contextual meaning).

3. Methodological approach

This exploratory-interpretative, i.e. qualitative study (cf. Grotjahn 1987) employs a stimulus-based interview. From a functional-pragmatic perspective, the stimulus-based interview can be

reconstructed as a tactically modified use of the school-specific action pattern of task-setting and task-solving (*Aufgabestellen-Aufgabelösen*; cf. Ehlich/Rehbein 1977, 1986; for the pragmatic concept of tactics, see Ehlich 2007). In the present study, this action pattern serves the overarching purpose of eliciting empirical data on the students' metaphor comprehension. The students were not explicitly informed that the study focused on metaphors and metaphor comprehension. Prior to interviewing students about their individual comprehension of different metaphors in German textbook texts (the comprehension stimuli), data on their language biographies and individual language proficiency were collected. Language proficiency was assessed using Grießhaber's *Profilanalyse* ('profile analysis', e.g. Grießhaber 2013) in a slightly extended form. A questionnaire was used to collect data on the students' language biographies. For qualitative sampling, the following criteria were defined in advance (Flick [5]2012; "qualitative sampling plan" according to Kelle/Kluge 2010): (i) the students' age, (ii) the type of language acquisition ((a) students with German as their L1, (b) students with German as their L2 (*DaZ* students), and (c) newly arrived migrant students attending integration classes, with different first or heritage languages and German as the target language), and (iii) the number of students per subgroup. The resulting sample is shown in Table 1.

Language acquisition type (acquisition profile)	**Age group A (10-12 years)**	**Age group B (13-15 years)**	**Age group C (16-17 years)**
Students with German as their L1	3	3	3
Students with German as their L2 (*DaZ* students)	3	3	3
Newly arrived migrant students with different L1s	3	3	3
Total sample size: N = 27			

Table 1. Overview of the sample.

The results of the language proficiency assessment show that the largest differences occur between the age groups A and B across all language acquisition types. Overall, an increase in linguistic proficiency can be observed from age group A to age group B across all types. Differences between the age groups B and C are less pronounced. While the performance of the *DaZ* students is comparable to and in some cases even better than that of the students with German as their L1, the newly arrived migrant students generally perform below their mainstream class peers. The interview procedure (eliciting students' (individual) comprehension of metaphors) is reflected upon from a discourse-analytic perspective. Functional Pragmatics (Rehbein 1977, 2001; Ehlich ^{3}2010), as a consistent linguistic action theory, provides the appropriate theoretical framework. Students were interviewed individually and presented with comprehension stimuli containing metaphors. These stimuli were taken from textbooks used in social science subjects in German lower secondary education (*Sekundarstufe I*). To narrow the search scope for metaphors, only metaphors occurring in textbook texts dealing with the thematic complex of flight and migration were considered. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP; Pragglejaz Group 2007) was initially applied to identify metaphorically used expressions in the textbook texts. Ultimately, four metaphors were selected for the comprehension stimuli: (i) *Flüchtlingsstrom* ('flow of refugees'), (ii) *Asyl-Lotterie* ('asylum lottery'), (iii) *Nussschale* ('nutshell'), and (iv) *Schmiermittel* ('lubricant'). Where necessary, the textbook text excerpts containing these metaphors were slightly modified to compensate for the reduction of context caused by detaching them from their original didactic and interactional setting. The stimuli were then reviewed by other linguists, who were asked (a) to identify metaphors in the (text) stimuli and (b) to classify them (*conventional* vs. *novel metaphors*). This procedure ensured interrater reliability regarding both the identification and classification of metaphors.

The four selected metaphors share a structural similarity: all are determinative compound nouns. While *Nussschale* and *Schmiermittel* are used metaphorically as whole expressions, in *Flüchtlingsstrom* and *Asyl-Lotterie* it is the head noun that carries the metaphorical meaning. The four metaphors differ in terms of their degree of lexicalisation.

Asyl-Lotterie and *Schmiermittel* (as in *Respekt ist das gesellschaftliche Schmiermittel, ohne das ständig Reibung entstehen würde* ('Respect is the social lubricant without which there would be constant friction')) are identified as novel or creative metaphors, whereas *Flüchtlingsstrom* and *Nussschale* are classified as conventionalised metaphors. In the following, the metaphor *Nussschale* and a specific student's comprehension of it will be examined in more detail as an illustrative example.

The text stimulus containing the metaphorically used expression *Nussschale* is taken from the textbook *Team 10*, published by Schöningh. It appears in Chapter 8 (*Zukunft in der „Einen Welt*", 'The future in "One World"'). The textbook is designed for teaching the subject economics and politics to tenth graders. The text stimulus was not modified; only the expression *Nussschale* was highlighted by underlining. Students were instructed to focus primarily on their comprehension of the underlined expression. In the following, the text stimulus is presented and analysed. An English translation of the German original text is provided as well.

> **Der Fall: Flucht aus Afrika**
>
> **„Mir blieb nichts anderes, als es zu versuchen"**
>
> Mehr als tausend Kilometer liegen vor Henry Mafarna. In einer *Nussschale* will er von Mauretanien auf die Kanarischen Inseln fliehen. Für eine ungewisse Zukunft in der EU riskiert der Liberianer sein Leben – so wie Tausende Afrikaner auch. (Herzig/Mattes/Müller 2011: 206; boldface and quotation marks in the original; my italics)
>
> **Case Study: Flight from Africa**
>
> **"I had no other option than to try"**
>
> More than a thousand kilometres lie ahead of Henry Mafarna. In a *nutshell* he wants to flee from Mauritania to the Canary Islands. For an uncertain future in the EU, the Liberian risks his life – just like thousands of other Africans.

Regarding the identification of metaphors, there is complete agreement among all linguists acting as raters. All of them identify *Nussschale* as a metaphor in this specific context of use. With a moderate degree of agreement, the expression is classified as a conventional metaphor and thus assigned to the first metaphor type. The German determinative compound *Nussschale* is polysemous. In addition to its basic meaning 'shell of a nut' (Wahrig-Burfeind/Wahrig ⁹2011: 1082), the Wahrig dictionary entry also lists the lexicalised metaphorical meaning '(small) boat'. In the textbook text, a specific case of escape from Africa is first thematised in the heading (definite noun phrase (NP) *Der Fall* ('The case')). The NP is followed by a colon, which – according to Hoffmann (⁴2021: 631) – marks a transition point between two communicative units (units A and B). Unit B is anticipated by A. The anticipated content is made explicit by the NP *Flucht aus Afrika* ('Flight from Africa'). The subheading makes use of a direct quotation, allowing the refugee to speak for himself. The textbook authors employ the direct quote to convey a sense of inevitability from the perspective of an individual refugee. After the subheading, the internal perspective of the individual is abandoned, and the person's dire situation is described from an external perspective. Here the present tense is used, which is typical for descriptions. In the first sentence, the person is introduced with his proper name. Through thematic[8] continuation, readers learn that the person referred to as *Henry Mafarna* is male (pronoun *er* ('he')) and is from West Africa (*Liberianer* ('Liberian')). The prepositional phrase (PP) (here: a local adverbial) *In einer Nussschale* ('In a nutshell'[9]) in the sentence-initial position (pre-field) is foregrounded. The goal-oriented German modal verb *wollen* expresses a person's need to do something (cf. Hoffmann ⁴2021: 341) and, in contrast to *mögen*/*möchten* ('may/would like to'), indicates the existence of a specific (action) plan for the realisation of it.

[8] The theme or topic is understood as the subject of a text or talk.

[9] In English the phrase *in a nutshell* has a different meaning. One student of age group C with German as his L1 used his (linguistic) knowledge of the meaning of this phrase in English for his inference of *Nussschale*.

Understanding the whole text requires not only linguistic knowledge but also geographical, political, and general world knowledge. Readers must know that Mauritania is a north-western African state on the Atlantic coast, that the Canary Islands lie north-west of Africa in the Atlantic Ocean, and that they belong to Spain – and thus to the European Union (EU). With this knowledge, it becomes possible to reconstruct Henry Mafarna's escape plan. In addition, readers must know that an adult human is far too large to travel from Mauritania to the Canary Islands in the shell of a nut (the basic meaning of *Nussschale*). The preposition *in* expresses a relation of inclusion. The element of reality (i.e. the concept) referred to by the expression *Nussschale* functions as a kind of container (for the purpose of transport) for Henry Mafarna. A contradiction arises: the body size of a (prototypical) human being is incompatible with the size of a (prototypical) nutshell in terms of an inclusion relation. In this context of use, the expression *Nussschale* creates a lexical and thematic rupture. At least in its basic meaning, the expression introduces a domain that is not expected based on the lexical elements and the thematic development of the text thus far. If 'small boat' is not known as a meaning of *Nussschale*, it can be inferred from the context. If the noun position in the PP *in einer Nussschale* is not filled by a linguistic expression denoting a concept (or category member) of the WATERCRAFT category, the use of the word must be metaphorical. Linguistic and conceptual knowledge supports this reconstruction: the conceptual core of the expression *Insel* ('island') strongly suggests that what is referred to by *Nussschale* must be a watercraft. In the final sentence of the comprehension stimulus, reference is made back to the main heading and the subheading. An assessment of Henry Mafarna's situation is verbalised from an external perspective, highlighting that his escape is life-threatening. The dash marks a break before relevant parts of the utterance where the reader is expected to invest additional cognitive effort (Hoffmann [4]2021: 632). It is a turning point. The previously discussed individual case serves to concretise the situation of a specific person in the reader's imagination. After the dash, the perspective zooms out from the individual case, stating that Henry Mafarna's fate and situation are shared by many other African refugees. This is achieved through a comparison realised by the aspect-deictic

German expression *so*, the relational expression *wie* (‘like’) (in German a so-called *Adjunktor*), the NP *Tausende Afrikaner* (‘thousands of Africans’), and the (focus) particle *auch* (‘also’). In the metaphorical use of the determinative compound *Nussschale*, the meaning of the expression is shifted within its meaning potential. The basic meaning ‘shell of a nut’ is suspended for the current context of use and replaced by the meaning ‘small boat’. If the actual, i.e. contextual meaning (the metaphorical meaning) must be inferred, the basic meaning must be known to the hearer or reader. If the metaphorical meaning is not available as part of the expression’s meaning potential stored in the mental lexicon, the process of meaning construal starts with the recognition of the lexical and thematic incompatibility of the basic meaning in the specific context of use: the recognition of the incompatibility aspect. The similarity between two different concepts must then be reconstructed mentally. This requires the activation and alignment of the source concept SHELL OF A NUT and the target concept WATERCRAFT/BOAT. Analogies between the two concepts can then be established (e.g. buoyancy, similarity of shape). The metaphorical meaning aspect is the transfer of a specific conceptual element from the source to the target concept. In the case of *Nussschale* meaning ‘small boat’, the feature ‘small’ of a (prototypical) nutshell is transferred to the target concept WATERCRAFT/BOAT. The target concept is not explicitly verbalised and therefore must be inferred and activated. The metaphor *Nussschale* illustrates the hopelessness of the refugee’s situation. Due to a lack of alternatives, he attempts his escape in a watercraft that is unsuitable for his undertaking and thus risks his life.

4. Exemplary analysis

Let us consider an example. Şahin (an alias) is 14 years old at the time of data collection (age group B). His first and family language is Turkish. He began acquiring German upon entering a German educational institution. German is therefore his second language, i.e. he

is a *DaZ* student. He attends a mainstream class. In the following, his interview concerning the metaphor *Nussschale* is analysed. This metaphor is classified as a conventional metaphor (metaphor type 1). A very simplified transcription convention is used. Normal orthography and punctuation are used. At the end of utterances ↑ marks a rising intonation (interrogative mood) and ↓ a falling intonation (declarative mood). An English translation is provided directly below each numbered utterance unit.

(1)	Şahin:	Also jetzt das Unterstrichene↑
	English:	So now the underlined part↑
(2)	Interviewer:	Genau↓ […][10]
	English:	Exactly↓ […]
(3)	Şahin:	((Şahin liest den Textstimulus, der die Metapher *Nussschale* enthält)) Also hier geht's um ähm Henry Mafarna↓ Das ist ein Liberianer, der versucht, von Afrika in die EU zu fliehen↓
	English:	((Şahin reads the text stimulus containing the metaphor *Nussschale*)) So here it's about, um, Henry Mafarna. That's a Liberian who is trying to flee from Africa to the EU.
(4)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓[11]
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(5)	Şahin:	Hier ist das Wort *Nussschale* unterstrichen↓ Ähm, das war mir jetzt erstmal nicht klar, was damit gemeint wird, aber vielleicht ist damit

[10] *[...]* marks an omission.
[11] This is an instance of backchannelling ('uh-huh').

		gemeint, dass es sehr /[12] eine / ein / gefährlich ist zu kommen, dass es wieder eine Metapher ist, dass er in einer Nussschale ist oder eine Metapher dafür, dass er versteckt in / also versteckt in irgendeiner / an irgendeinem Ort, in irgendeinem Boot, keine Ahnung, ähm versucht, in die EU zu kommen und deswegen diese Nussschale↓
	English:	Here the word *nutshell* is underlined. Um, at first it wasn't clear to me what was meant by that, but maybe it means that it's very / a / a / dangerous to get there, that again it's a metaphor, that he's in a nutshell, or a metaphor for him being hidden in / hidden in some / somewhere, in some boat, no idea, um, trying to get to the EU, and that's why this nutshell.
(6)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓ Also du kanntest das Wort *Nussschale* /
	English:	Uh-huh↓ So you knew the word *nutshell* /
(7)	Şahin:	Also *Nussschale* ja, die Schale von 'ner Nuss, …
	English:	Well, *nutshell*, yes, the shell of a nut …
(8)	Interviewer:	Ja↓
	English:	Yes↓
(9)	Şahin:	… aber nicht als Metapher↓
	English:	… but not as a metaphor↓
(10)	Interviewer:	Nicht als Metapher↓ Also nicht in diesem Zusammenhang hier↑
	English:	Not as a metaphor↓ So not in this context here↑

[12] / is used to mark an interruption.

(11)	Şahin:	Nicht in diesem Zusammenhang↓
	English:	Not in this context↓
(12)	Interviewer:	Und hier steht ja, wenn ich das richtig im Kopf habe, in einer Nussschale …
	English:	And here it says, if I remember correctly, in a nutshell …
(13)	Şahin:	Ja↓
	English:	Yes↓
(14)	Interviewer:	… will er von Mauretanien oder Afrika, ich weiß nicht mehr genau, …
	English:	… he wants to flee from Mauritania or Africa, I don't remember exactly, …
(15)	Şahin:	Genau↓ Mauretanien auf die Kanarischen Inseln fliehen↓
	English:	Exactly, to flee from Mauritania to the Canary Islands↓
(16)	Interviewer:	… auf die Kanarischen Inseln fliehen, ne↓
	English:	… to flee to the Canary Islands, right↓
(17)	Şahin:	Genau↓
	English:	Exactly↓
(18)	Interviewer:	Auf die Inseln↓ Also ähm / und was war deine Idee, was könnte die Nussschale sein dann↑
	English:	To the islands↓ So, um, and what was your idea of what *nutshell* could be then↑
(19)	Şahin:	Ein versteckter Ort in 'nem / in 'nem, pfff, Frachtschiff, keine Ah / zum Beispiel …

	English:	A hidden place in a / in a, pfff, cargo ship, no id / for example …
(20)	Interviewer:	Okay↓ ((…)) Verstehe↓
	English:	Okay↓ ((…)) I see↓
(21)	Şahin:	… versteckt in irgendeinem / ja↓
	English:	… hidden in a / yes↓
(22)	Interviewer:	Und wa / wie kommst du auf *versteckt*↑
	English:	And wha / why are you thinking of *hidden*↑
(23)	Şahin:	Denn in ’ner Nussschale da ka / da ist / das ist ja eine geschlossene Schale, …
	English:	Because in a nutshell there is / that’s a closed shell, …
(24)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(25)	Şahin:	… da denkt man ja eigentlich ist ’ne Nuss drin↓
	English:	… you normally think there’s a nut inside↓
(26)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(27)	Şahin:	Aber vielleicht, dass, weil er sich darin versteckt, dann da keine Nuss drin ist, sondern die Personen, die halt fliehen↓
	English:	But maybe because he’s hiding in it, there isn’t a nut inside, but the people who are fleeing↓
(28)	Interviewer:	Und wenn du dir die Nussschale als halbe Nussschale vorstellst und nicht als ganze↑

	English:	And if you imagine the nutshell as a half and not as a whole one↑
(29)	Şahin:	Dann könnte man sich vorstellen, dass er sich dadrunter versteckt oder so↓
	English:	Then you could imagine that he's hiding under it or something↓
(30)	Interviewer:	Nimm mal die untere Hälfte↓
	English:	Take ((in the sense of 'imagine')) the lower half↓
(31)	Şahin:	Die untere Hälfte ((lacht))↑ Ähm, ((…)) /
	English:	The lower half ((laughs))↑ Um, ((…)) /
(32)	Interviewer:	Du denkst immer noch an das Verstecken von oben↓
	English:	You're still thinking of hiding from above↓
(33)	Şahin:	Ja, genau↓
	English:	Yes, exactly↓
(34)	Interviewer:	Ja↓
	English:	Yes↓
(35)	Şahin:	Dann ist / dann wäre natürlich diese Theorie vom Verstecken nicht da↓
	English:	Then / then of course this theory of hiding wouldn't be there↓
(36)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(37)	Şahin:	Dann /

English: Then /

(38) Interviewer: Was könnte es dann eher sein↑ Also so die Nussschale quasi ((zeigt entsprechend geformte Hand))↓

English: What could it be then↑ So the nutshell like this, sort of ((forms a shape with his hand))↓

(39) Şahin: Und er ist drin↑

English: And he is inside↑

(40) Interviewer: Und er ist in einer Nussschale↓

English: And he is in a nutshell↓

(41) Şahin: Dass / dass vielleicht ein Boot gemeint ist↑

English: That / that maybe a boat is meant↑

(42) Interviewer: Aha↓

English: Uh-huh↓

(43) Şahin: Dass er mit die / mit einem sehr schlechten versucht, ((…)) auf die Kanarischen Inseln zu kommen↓

English: That he tries with this / with a very bad one ((…)) to get to the Canary Islands↓

(44) Interviewer: Hm̆↓ Sehr schlecht und vor allem auch sehr klein↓

English: Uh-huh↓ Very bad and above all also very small↓

(45) Şahin: Sehr klein und sehr schlecht, ja↓

English: Very small and very bad, right↓

(46) Interviewer: Ja↓ Hm̆↓ Genau↓ Also man kann das sagen, das ist auch so im Wörterbuch, wenn man das nachschlägt, unter der Bedeutung *Nussschale*, findet man halt nicht nur ‚Nuss einer' / ‚die Schale einer Nuss', sondern …

English: Yes↓ Uh-huh↓ Exactly↓ You can also say that, it's also given in the dictionary, if you look it up under *nutshell*, you don't only find 'nut' / 'shell of a nut', but …

(47) Şahin: Ja↓

English: Yes↓

(48) Interviewer: … *Nussschale* sagt man auch so ein bisschen abwertend zu einem kleinen Boot, zu einem sehr kleinen Boot↓ Also das ist damit gemeint↓

English: … *nutshell* is also used in a rather pejorative way in reference to a small boat, a very small boat↓ That's what is meant here↓

(49) Şahin: Hm̆↓

English: Uh-huh↓

(50) Interviewer: Deswegen / aber deine Idee ist auch ganz interessant, dass man sich darin verstecken kann sozusagen↓ Dann denkst du aber die Nussschale so als Ganzes …

English: Therefore / but your idea is also quite interesting that one could hide in it, so to speak↓ But then you imagine the nutshell as a whole …

(51) Şahin: Ja, ja, genau↓

English: Yes, yes, exactly↓

(52)	Interviewer:	… und etwas, was einen so ähm auch obenrum abschützt oder abschirmt↓
	English:	… and something that also protects or shields you from above↓
(53)	Şahin:	Andersrum ist natürlich ((…)) / da ergibt das Boot Sinn↓
	English:	The other way round ((…)) / then the boat makes sense, of course↓
(54)	Interviewer:	Da ist es relativ klar, ne↑
	English:	Then it is relatively obvious, right↑
(55)	Şahin:	Ja↓
	English:	Yes↓
(56)	Interviewer:	Wenn du dir da die untere Hälfte der Nuss vorstellst und sagst, jemand ist drin, was könnte da ähm dieser Vergleichsaspekt sein oder warum kann man dann auf ‚Boot' schließen↑
	English:	If you imagine the lower half of the nutshell and say someone is inside, what could be the aspect of comparison then, or why could one conclude 'boat'↑
(57)	Şahin:	Der / weil ähm erstens diese Form von 'nem Boot ist ja auch so …
	English:	The / because, um, first of all the shape of a boat is also kind of …
(58)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓

(59) Şahin: … wie ’n / wie ’ne halbe ((…)) jetzt keine Nussschale, aber halt so hohl innen drin und …

English: … like a / like a half ((…)), not a nutshell exactly, but hollow inside and …

(60) Interviewer: Ja↓

English: Yes↓

(61) Şahin: … ’ne Hälfte und vielleicht der Vergleich *Nussschale*, weil ähm ’ne Nussschale sehr klein ist …

English: … one half and maybe the comparison *nutshell* because, um, a nutshell is very small …

(62) Interviewer: Ja↓

English: Yes↓

(63) Şahin: … und ein / und der / die Person da halt reinpassen muss, um zu fliehen↓

English: … and a / and the person has to fit into it in order to flee↓

(64) Interviewer: Sehr schön↓ Dann können wir mit dem Nächsten weitermachen↓

English: Very good↓ Then we can move on to the next one↓

(65) Şahin: Alles klar↓ ((Abschluss der Befragung zu *Nussschale*))

English: All right↓ ((end of the interview part on Şahin’s comprehension of *nutshell*))

(66)	Interviewer:	((Abschlussreflexion)) Kannst du nochmal abschließend sagen, wie du ähm eine Metapher definieren würdest↓
	English:	((final contemplation)) Can you say again, in conclusion, how you um would define a metaphor↓
(67)	Şahin:	Also 'ne Metapher würd ich so definieren, dass das 'ne Umschreibung für etwas ist, …
	English:	I would define a metaphor as a description of something …
(68)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(69)	Şahin:	… damit man ähm sich das besser vorstellen kann↓
	English:	… so that you um can imagine it a bit better↓
(70)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(71)	Şahin:	So aus Dingen, die man als äh / im alltäglichen Leben kennt, dass äh / zum Beispiel die Metapher, dass etwas über den Teller / über den Tellerrand hinausdenken, …
	English:	From things that you know from um everyday life, that um, for example, the metaphor of thinking outside the box, …
(72)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(73)	Şahin:	… weil normalerweise tut man das Essen nur in die Mitte des Tellers …

	English:	… because usually you only think inside the box[13] …
(74)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(75)	Şahin:	… und nicht bis zum Tellerrand, aber wenn man über den Tellerrand halt hinausschaut, könnte da noch mehr Wissen dahinterstecken, mehr ((unverständlich)) einfach↓
	English:	… and are limited by the scope of the box, but when you think outside of it, there could be more knowledge, just more ((unintelligible))↓
(76)	Interviewer:	Okay↓ Sehr schön↓ Und ähm du hast gesagt, das habt ihr noch nicht in der Schule gemacht, ne↑ Also nicht im Deutschunterricht oder sowas bisher besprochen↑
	English:	Okay↓ Very good↓ And um you said you haven't done that at school yet, right↑ So you haven't discussed it in German class or anything like that so far↑
(77)	Şahin:	Metaphern, nein, im Deutschunterricht nicht, vielleicht / vielleicht ganz kurz, aber halt nicht als ganzes Thema↓
	English:	Metaphors, no, not in German class, maybe / maybe very briefly, but not as a whole topic↓
(78)	Interviewer:	Okay↓ Und weißt du, woher du Metaphern sonst kennst↑
	English:	Okay↓ And do you know where else you know metaphors from↑

[13] The German idiom *über den Tellerrand (hinaus)schauen* (literally 'to look beyond the edge of the plate') corresponds to the English idiom *to think outside the box*.

(79)	Şahin:	Metaphern kenn ich, wie gesagt, aus ((…)) / in Nachrichten wird das ganz oft benutzt, …
	English:	I know metaphors from, as I said, ((…)) / they are very often used in news reports, …
(80)	Interviewer:	Hm̆↓
	English:	Uh-huh↓
(81)	Şahin:	… in äh / im Radio wird das benutzt, damit man / damit Leute sich das halt besser vorstellen können↓
	English:	… on um / on the radio they are used so that you / so that people can imagine it better↓
(82)	Interviewer:	Okay↓ Gut↓ Ähm, du bist in der neunten Klasse, …
	English:	Okay↓ Good↓ Um, you are in the ninth grade, …
(83)	Şahin:	Genau↓
	English:	Exactly↓
(84)	Interviewer:	… deine Erstsprache oder Familiensprache ist Türkisch, …
	English:	… your first or family language is Turkish, …
(85)	Şahin:	Ja↓
	English:	Yes↓
(86)	Interviewer:	… die hast du zuerst gelernt↓
	English:	… you learnt it first↓
(87)	Şahin:	Genau↓
	English:	Exactly↓

(88)	Interviewer:	Bist du gut in der Schule↑
	English:	Are you good at school↑
(89)	Şahin:	Ähm, ja↓
	English:	Um, yes↓

At the beginning of the individual interview, Şahin is first instructed by the interviewer. The task is formulated and the procedure explained. Şahin is given the text stimulus, i.e. the textbook text containing the specific metaphor. He initially makes sure that he understands the task correctly (comprehension-ensuring (linguistic) action) ((1)) and gets the confirmation that the focus is on his understanding of the underlined term *Nussschale* in the text context. Both participants engage in the school-specific interactional pattern of task-setting and task-solving (*Aufgabestellen-Aufgabelösen*, cf. Ehlich/Rehbein 1977, 1986) which has been tactically modified for the research context. After reading the written text stimulus, Şahin initially externalises a hypothesis (as an attempted solution), namely that the expression *Nussschale* refers to a hiding place ((5)). Although he also mentions the concept BOAT ("in irgendeinem Boot"), the aspect of hiding is central to his interpretation. At this point, he is unable to infer the meaning 'small boat' of the expression *Nussschale*. The interviewer notices that Şahin is familiar with the expression *Nussschale* ((6)), which Şahin confirms by verbalising its basic meaning ('the shell of a nut') ((7)). He then uses the adversative conjunction *aber* ('but') to introduce a restriction. He does not know the expression as a metaphor ((9)). Although the object of investigation (metaphors and their comprehension) had not been explicitly disclosed to the students, Şahin is able to identify *Nussschale* as a metaphor in this context. This presupposes a basic concept of metaphor and metalinguistic awareness. The interviewer attempts to guide Şahin towards the contextual meaning of the term *Nussschale* by repeating the relevant sentence from the text stimulus and drawing Şahin's attention to the surrounding linguistic co(n)text. However, this cue does not initially trigger new inferential processes. Şahin maintains his interpretation of *Nussschale* as 'hiding place'. When asked to justify

this interpretation ((22)), he explains that he imagines a whole, closed nutshell and replaces the nut inside it with a fleeing person ((23), (25), (27)). From the interviewer's professional linguistic perspective, this constitutes an inadequate solution. He therefore provides further cues, first by suggesting a different mental image (half a nutshell), and later by reinforcing this through gesture, visually modelling the shape of a lower nutshell half with his hand ((38)). This visual cue operates on a form analogy between the lower half of a nutshell and the hull of a boat. Once the interviewer confirms the inclusion relation "[…] er ist in einer Nussschale" ((40)), Şahin can infer the meaning 'boat'. He marks his uncertainty linguistically through means of modalisation (e.g. *vielleicht*, rising intonation at the end of his utterance) ((41)). The interviewer provides positive feedback. Şahin then characterises the boat as very bad ((43)). While the feature 'small' corresponds to the salient metaphorical meaning aspect that needs to be transferred from the source concept NUTSHELL to the target concept BOAT, the feature 'bad' represents an emergent evaluative aspect that is not inherent in either the source or the target concept but arises from Şahin's overall interpretation of the situation described in the text. Although Şahin can establish form analogies (shape, hollowness) ((57), (59)), he does not fully reconstruct the speaker's (action) plan (cf. Rehbein 1977) on his own. In particular, he does not articulate the crucial metaphorical transfer of the salient feature 'small' nor the emergent meaning that the boat is fundamentally inappropriate and dangerous for the transit from Mauritania to the Canary Islands. As a result, essential aspects of the metaphor remain uncomprehended. The interviewer evaluates Şahin's contribution along two dimensions: (i) its correctness relative to his own professional linguistic knowledge and comprehension and (ii) the saturation of the tactically modified linguistic action pattern (*Aufgabestellen-Aufgabelösen*) for the purpose of data collection. In both respects, the evaluation is positive and the interactional pattern is concluded ((64)). In the final contemplation after the interview about Şahin's comprehension of the four metaphors *Flüchtlingsstrom*, *Asyl-Lotterie*, *Nussschale*, and *Schmiermittel,* the interviewer asks Şahin about his metaphor concept and his knowledge of metaphor ((66) to (82)). In his response Şahin points out that metaphors are used so that people can get a better idea of a specific (abstract) concept with the help

of everyday concepts ((67), (69), (71)). He adds that he knows metaphors from news reports rather than from school, as the topic of metaphor has only been touched upon very briefly in his German classes ((77), (79), (81)). He uses an example which does not fall into the category of metaphor but is an idiom (*über den Tellerrand hinausschauen* ('to think outside the box')) ((71), (73), (75)). At the end of the interview the interviewer checks with Şahin that he is a ninth-grade student ((82), (83)) and that his L1 is Turkish ((84) to (87)). Also, he asks Şahin whether he gets good marks at school, which he confirms ((88), (89)).

5. Results

The analysis allowed five steps in the students' metaphor comprehension to be reconstructed in cases where the metaphorical meaning of an expression needed to be inferred:

1. Noticing the contradiction (incompatibility aspect): the hearer perceives a lexical and/or thematic break, i.e. a violation of his or her expectations which arise from the previously verbalised propositional content in a text or talk. For this step, the basic, non-metaphorical meaning of the expression must be known. However, in its basic meaning the expression is incompatible with the topic and/or the lexical co(n)text.
2. Inferring the target concept: this step is necessary when the target concept is not explicitly verbalised. In the case of *Nussschale*, for example, the concept BOAT is not verbalised explicitly and must be inferred if the meaning 'small boat' is not stored and readily available in the hearer's mental lexicon (linguistic knowledge) as part of the expression's meaning potential.
3. Establishing relevant analogies between the two concepts: once the source and target concepts are known, analogical correspondences between them can be mentally established.

4. Transfer (metaphorical meaning aspect): the salient and contextually relevant feature of the source concept's core must be identified by the hearer/reader and transferred to the target concept (e.g. the conceptual element or feature 'small' from *Nussschale* is transferred from the source concept SHELL OF A NUT to the target concept WATERCRAFT/BOAT).
5. Grasping the emergence (emergent meaning aspect): in the final step, the hearer/reader must grasp the surplus of meaning (oversummativity, emergent meaning) that arises from the transfer of the metaphorical meaning aspect (from a source to a target concept) and, more fundamentally, from the use of the metaphor in a specific context. This entails comprehending the utterance in terms of reconstructing the speaker's action plan (Rehbein 1977). In the case of *Nussschale*, the metaphor expresses the dramatic situation of the man fleeing from Africa: it illustrates his distress and lack of alternatives, as well as the life-threatening risk he takes by embarking on a journey in a watercraft which is unsuitable for the open sea. Through the metaphor the speaker/author (i) guides the hearer's reception of the addressed issue and (ii) prompts the hearer/reader to make specific evaluations.

These steps are relevant for inferring the contextual meaning of an expression in a linguistic context in which it is used as a metaphor. However, alternative scenarios are also possible. If the hearer/reader does not know the basic meaning of the expression, he or she may nevertheless be able to infer the current metaphorical meaning, but without understanding the expression as a metaphor. Knowing the basic meaning of a word is the fundamental requirement for metaphor comprehension. Conversely, in the case of conventional metaphors such as *Nussschale*, the metaphorical meaning may already be known and stored in the mental lexicon. In such cases, the meaning is not inferred but retrieved (disambiguation). Figure 1 illustrates the potential routes of metaphor comprehension (and non-comprehension).

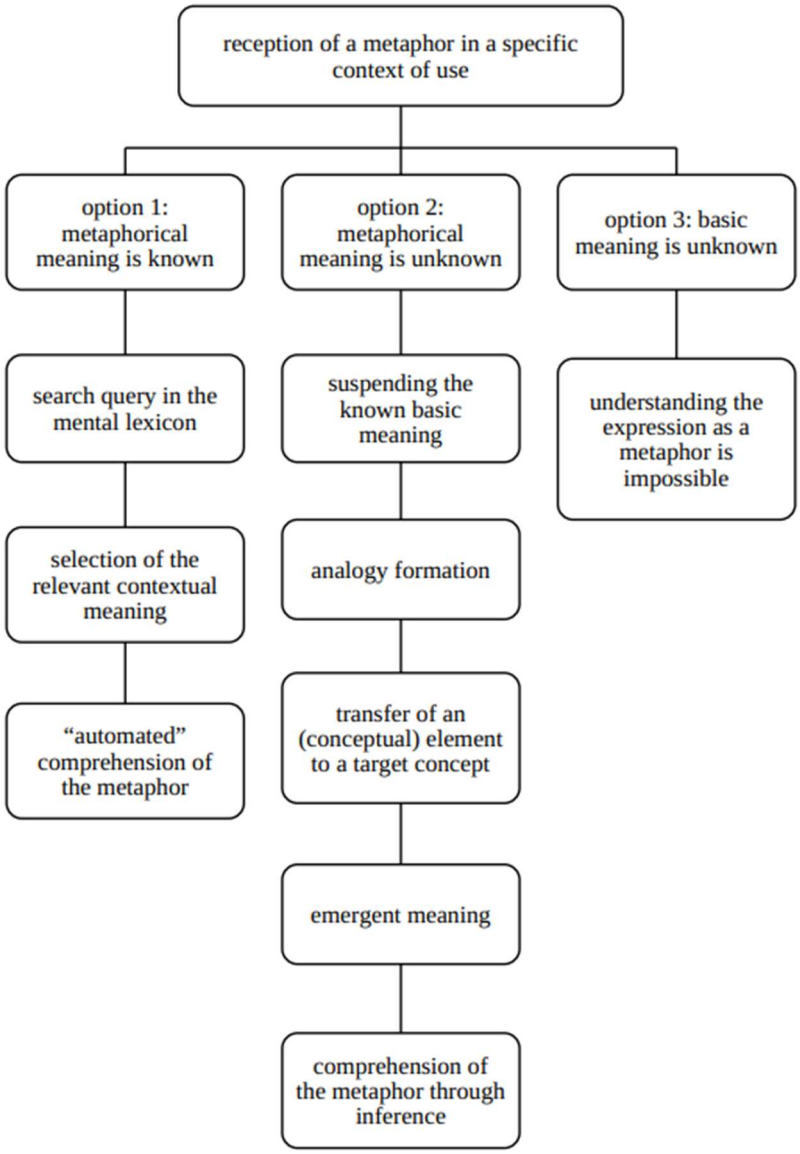


Figure 1. Paths and levels of metaphor comprehension.

When the metaphorical meaning is known as part of an expression's meaning potential and is accessible to the hearer/reader in his or her mental lexicon, a specific context of use triggers the selection of this meaning (disambiguation). In contrast to novel or creative metaphors, the heuristic potential is limited in such cases, as the hearer/reader usually does not engage in a metalinguistic reflection process. Conventional and highly lexicalised metaphors are often no longer consciously perceived as metaphors. If the basic meaning of an expression that is used metaphorically in a specific context is also unknown to the hearer/reader, the contextual meaning may still be inferred but the expression will not be recognised and comprehended as a metaphor. Thus, knowledge of an expression's basic meaning constitutes a prerequisite for metaphor comprehension.

For a better overview of the students' metaphor comprehension results, a binary coding is used (*understood* vs. *not understood*). Such a result representation necessarily constitutes a reduction, as different forms of (problematic) understanding can be distinguished (cf. Rehbein/Romaniuk 2014: 138). On the one hand, the aim of the study is to reconstruct the students' comprehension processes in depth. On the other hand, these processes are considerably more complex than a binary coding suggests. Binary coding cannot adequately reflect the depth of reconstruction or the complexity of the individual comprehension processes. Moreover, metaphor comprehension depends on a range of additional factors, such as the degree of lexicalisation of the metaphor, the co(n)text of use, the entire communication process, the students' (linguistic) knowledge resources, the cues provided by the interviewer, and what has already been discussed in relation to previously addressed metaphors. For the purposes of this binary coding, a metaphor was classified as *understood* if the student independently retrieved or inferred its contextual metaphorical meaning and established the relevant transfer from the source to the target concept. Explicit verbalisation of the emergent meaning was not required. An appropriate interpretation reached only through interviewer cues guiding the student towards the solution was not coded as independent comprehension; however, if the interviewer merely provided background knowledge necessary for comprehension

and the student subsequently inferred the metaphorical meaning independently, the metaphor was coded as *understood*. The following overview serves as a simplified presentation of the results.

	students with German as their L1				**students with German as their L2 (DaZ students)**				**newly arrived migrant students (L2 German, DaZ)**			
group:	**A**	**B**	**C**	**sum**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**sum**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**sum**
metaphor: Flüchtlings-strom	3	2	3	8/9	1	3	1	5/9	0	0	0	0/9
metaphor: Nussschale	3	3	1	7/9	1	1	1	3/9	1	0	1	2/9
metaphor: Schmiermit-tel	2	1	2	5/9	0	1	0	1/9	0	0	0	0/9
metaphor: Asyl-Lotterie	0	1	1	2/9	0	1	0	1/9	0	0	0	0/9
students' total	L1 German students: 22/36				DaZ students: 10/36				newly arrived migrant students: 2/36			

Table 2. Binary coding of the students' metaphor comprehension results.

The descriptive results indicate differences between the three language acquisition profiles. In the present sample, students with German as their L1 understood the metaphors more frequently than the *DaZ* students, while the newly arrived migrant students showed the fewest instances of metaphor comprehension. The difficulties observed among the *DaZ* students point to a need for linguistic support in the lexical-semantic domain. The particularly low number of instances of metaphor comprehension among the newly arrived migrant students raises the question of how these students can be adequately supported in their transition to mainstream classrooms and throughout their subsequent schooling.

Across the present sample, *Flüchtlingsstrom* ('flow of refugees') was understood most frequently (13/27), followed by *Nussschale* ('nutshell'; 12/27) and *Schmiermittel* ('lubricant'; 6/27). *Asyl-Lotterie* ('asylum lottery') was understood least frequently (3/27). The data do

not reveal a consistent pattern across the three age groups (A, B, C); given the qualitative sampling and the small group sizes, no conclusions about age-related differences in metaphor comprehension can be drawn from the present study. The central findings of the study can be summarised as follows:

- The co(n)text (of use) plays a crucial role in metaphor comprehension.
- An expression used metaphorically in its contextual meaning cannot be understood as a metaphor if the basic meaning of the expression is unknown.
- In the present sample, students with German as their L1 generally have access to a more complete meaning potential of expressions in their mental lexicon than their *DaZ* peers, i.e. mainstream class students whose second language (L2) is German, and especially than newly arrived migrant students in integration classes. The L1 German students generally display not only broader (vocabulary breadth) but also deeper lexical-semantic knowledge (vocabulary depth). The *DaZ* and newly arrived migrant students show more limited lexical-semantic knowledge of polysemous expressions.
- In cases of non-comprehension, the following hearer[14] strategies can be observed:
    - the use of complementary knowledge to supplement the cognitive frame for interpretation (e.g. drawing on knowledge not contained in the text or discourse, such as specific action maxims; Ehlich/Rehbein 1977),
    - meaning construction based on (a perceived) formal similarity (phonetic or graphemic) where learners assume that the unfamiliar expression is a specific inflected form of a familiar lexeme stored in their mental lexicon,
    - paraphrased reproduction of the propositional content often accompanied by vague deictic references.

[14] *Hearer* is used as a theoretical term that also encompasses readers in written communication.

- In the cases of non-comprehension examined here, insufficient lexical-semantic knowledge in the target language (in this case German) frequently constituted a central obstacle. This was especially apparent among the newly arrived migrant students in the present sample.
- Different interpretations of the contextual meaning of a metaphorically used expression may arise, among other reasons, because:
    - the conceptual core of the expression's basic meaning has not yet been acquired and the learner's knowledge has the character of a pseudo-concept (Vygotsky 1986),
    - the interpretation is not connected to the topic to which the metaphorically used expression belongs in the text or discourse,
    - irrelevant conceptual aspects are not suppressed in the formation of a mental representation (invariance), e.g. a whole, closed nutshell is imagined and not only the lower half of it in the *Nussschale* metaphor,
    - irrelevant or inappropriate analogies are formed based on a supplemented interpretive frame,
    - different characteristics of the source concept are more salient for the hearer than the intended one, leading to the transfer of a different conceptual feature or aspect and thus to a deviant interpretation.
- One strategy for inferring the contextual meaning of a metaphorically used expression is to mentally modify the concept referred to by the term in its basic meaning in such a way that the contradiction (incompatibility aspect) is resolved. This is also evident in the case of *Nussschale*: the hearer/reader perceives the incompatibility of a man being (partially) enclosed in a nutshell and enlarges the nutshell mentally to make this inclusion relation possible.
- To linguistically mark uncertainty in their hypotheses about the contextual meaning of metaphorically used expressions, students in the present sample used linguistic devices of modalisation, including the modal particle *vielleicht* ('maybe',

in the sense of 'possibly'; cf. Hoffmann [4]2021: 451-453)[15], interrogative intonation at the end of their utterances which are realised in declarative mood, and the subjunctive II (often in combination with the indefinite pronoun[16] *man* ('one')).

6. Didactic implications

The results of the study suggest that metaphors in German textbook texts should be addressed explicitly in classroom instruction, particularly in linguistically heterogeneous learning groups. Metaphors constitute a specific challenge for students whose lexical-semantic knowledge in the target language is still developing. At the same time, they offer significant didactic potential, as they can serve as entry points for metalinguistic reflection and language-sensitive subject teaching. Metaphors should not be treated exclusively as stylistic devices in German language lessons, nor should they be limited to literary texts or political speeches. Instead, they should be systematically integrated into subject teaching across the curriculum, especially in subjects such as social sciences, geography, history, and biology. In these subjects, metaphors are also frequently used (see, for example, Goschler 2019). From a didactic perspective, it is crucial to make metaphorical language visible and discussable. Teachers should guide students in identifying metaphorically used expressions, reconstructing their basic meanings, and contrasting them with their actual, i.e. contextual meanings. This process can help students expand both the breadth and depth of their vocabulary and develop greater semantic awareness. In linguistically diverse classrooms, particular attention should be paid to students with German as a second language (*DaZ* students) and newly arrived migrant students. Knowledge of the basic meanings of polysemous expressions

[15] Following Hoffmann's terminology, a distinction is made between modal particles (*Modalpartikeln*) and attenuation particles (*Abtönungspartikeln*).

[16] In German linguistics the pronoun category is severely criticised (see, for example, Graefen 2007).

is a prerequisite for metaphor comprehension. Vocabulary work should therefore not only focus on the acquisition of new lexical items but also on deepening the linguistic knowledge of already familiar words by exploring their meaning potentials.

How should teachers deal with the different approaches to metaphor comprehension employed by students? From the teacher's perspective, a distinction can first be made between (i) (linguistic) actions that enable understanding and (ii) cues in the sense of guiding learners towards understanding, i.e. towards reconstructing the contextual meaning and the speaker's action plan.[17] When students fail to understand the meaning of an expression, three approaches are used: (i) a purely form-based approach (used by newly arrived migrant students only), (ii) the approach of using additional knowledge to supplement the basis of interpretation (used by students of all language acquisition profiles), and (iii) the approach of reproducing (or paraphrasing) the propositional content of what has been heard or read (also used by students of all language acquisition profiles).

In the form-based approach, students assume that the expression in question is a specific word form of an expression already known to them with its meaning stored and readily available in their mental lexicon. They identify a perceived phonetic and/or graphic similarity between the expression whose meaning they must infer and an expression whose meaning they already know (e.g. *Schale* ('shell') as a word form of the lexeme SCHAL (*Schal* in German means 'scarf')). Newly arrived migrant students have difficulties regarding declension and conjugation. They are unable to automatically use (in production) or identify (in reception) specific inflectional forms in compliance with the rules of the target language German. Their knowledge of German morphology is still at a rather rudimentary level. A phonetic and/or graphic similarity may therefore lead them to assume, for example, that *Schale* (the head of the compound *Nussschale* ('nutshell')) is a specifically declined word form of the lexeme SCHAL (*der Schal* in the sense of 'scarf'), and that they can thus infer the meaning of the expression on this basis. At the same time, this approach shows that

[17] *Intended meaning* or *intention* is not used here. Instead, the terminology used by Rehbein (1977) is applied.

learners at a comparatively low level of language proficiency in an L2 do not tend to systematically take the linguistic co(n)text into account for their construal of meaning. Instead, they attempt to make sense of the linguistic input in a much more "local" manner – meaning that they consider expressions more in isolation from one another and assume that the meaning of an utterance emerges from assembling individually understood elements of it. In such cases, teachers must recognise that students attempt to infer the meaning of an expression in a particular context of use based on formal similarity. Such approaches to comprehension are symptomatic of the fact that other expressions in the linguistic co(n)text are likewise unfamiliar and not understood. Once the teacher has identified this comprehension approach, he or she must equip the students with the knowledge that the context of use and linguistic action as well as combinatorial relations (with other expressions) are essential for inferring the actual meaning of a word and utterance. The teacher must also determine whether students lack additional linguistic knowledge. If a knowledge deficit has been successfully identified, the teacher must act in a comprehension-enabling manner by providing the students with the missing (linguistic) knowledge relevant to comprehension.

In the case of knowledge supplementation, i.e. the supplementation of a student's basis for interpretation with additional knowledge, students draw on elements of knowledge that are not part of the linguistic unit to be understood. This supplementation occurs because students are unable to comprehend the meaning of the linguistic input as a whole or of some of its elements. Usually, this approach results in divergent interpretations. Teachers must first identify this comprehension approach and then determine which elements of knowledge the students lack. They act in a comprehension-enabling way within classroom interaction when they remedy the students' knowledge deficit by imparting knowledge which is relevant to their comprehension of the linguistic input. If students are then still unable to grasp the actual meaning, teachers may guide them towards understanding through cues.

When students produce a slightly paraphrased reproduction of the content they have received, they do not verbalise their own understanding of it but merely reproduce propositional elements. In

doing so, they make use, among other things, of anadeictic expressions (with vague references) as well as anaphoric expressions (unclear continuation of a topic) to avoid having to further specify the reference and meaning of the metaphorically used expression in its context of use. This procedure allows them to pass through specific pattern positions on the side of the hearer within the tactically modified linguistic action pattern of task-setting and task-solving (*Aufgabestellen-Aufgabelösen*, Ehlich/Rehbein 1977, 1986), even though they lack certain elements of knowledge (Sotkov forthcoming). In other words: it allows them to process a specific communicative task despite missing (relevant) knowledge elements. In such cases, teachers must identify the students' comprehension approach and act in a comprehension-securing manner (cf. Kameyama 2004) by determining whether the paraphrased reproduction of the propositional content is a symptom of a failed comprehension due to missing elements of knowledge. They can identify this comprehension approach through specific questions in classroom discourse, i.e. interaction. However, a prerequisite is that they are aware that students can potentially use this approach. Comprehension-enabling support from the teacher remedies the individual student's identified knowledge deficit by imparting knowledge relevant to comprehension. If a student cannot understand what is meant even after that, then cues can serve to guide him or her towards understanding the actual meaning.

In all cases, teachers must be sensitised to identifying the respective comprehension approach employed by a student who fails to derive the meaning of an expression in a specific linguistic co(n)text. They must first act in a comprehension-securing manner by determining which linguistic (and other) knowledge elements necessary for understanding the student lacks. Comprehension-enabling action by the teacher occurs when he or she first identifies and then successfully remedies the knowledge deficit. Cues in the sense of support actions through which teachers guide students towards understanding the actual meaning are necessary and appropriate when students are still unable to understand or infer the actual meaning despite possessing the fundamentally necessary (linguistic) knowledge for comprehension after their knowledge deficit has been remedied. This occurs primarily in connection with the school-specific linguistic action pattern of task-

setting and task-solving. The teacher's linguistic support actions must be implemented within classroom discourse. Consequently, the teachers' discourse competence must be further developed in this regard. In terms of Gibbons' concept of scaffolding, this concerns the level of micro-scaffolding, i.e. language-supportive interaction in the classroom (cf. Gibbons 2002; Hammond/Gibbons 2005).

Completely banning metaphors from textbook texts and classroom interaction cannot, in our view, be the right approach. In subject-specific instruction in mainstream classes, all students will encounter different metaphors in all school subjects. A genuine, i.e. non-lexicalised metaphor has a specific heuristic potential which can be used for the students' learning processes within the framework of language-sensitive and language-supportive instruction across all subjects. A prerequisite for this, however, is a reform of the traditional school-didactic conception of metaphor. Metaphors should not be treated exclusively in German language classes as stylistic devices in the context of poetry analysis and political speeches. This approach is too narrow and leads to a reductionist concept of metaphor in the students' minds. After all, metaphors are not only found in lyrical and persuasive texts but are also an integral part of informative factual texts, subject-specific and scientific registers, journalistic articles, and so forth.

In practice, language-sensitive teaching approaches may include the joint identification and discussion of metaphors in textbook texts, the visualisation of the source and the target concept as well as the underlying analogies, the explicit work on basic meanings, contextual meanings, and meaning potentials, the comparison of metaphorical expressions across languages, drawing on the students' multilingual resources, and the use of scaffolding strategies that support the inference of metaphorical meaning. By engaging with metaphors in this way, students can be supported not only in increasing their lexical-semantic knowledge and their metalinguistic reflection abilities but also in developing strategies for dealing with figurative language in textbook texts. This contributes to their overall development of language skills and supports equitable participation in subject learning.

7. Conclusion and research desiderata

This study investigated how students in lower secondary education in Germany (*Sekundarstufe I*) understand metaphors used in textbook texts, with particular attention to linguistically heterogeneous learning groups. The findings suggest that metaphor comprehension is a complex, multi-step process that places considerable demands on students' lexical-semantic knowledge as well as on their metalinguistic reflection and inferential abilities. Within the present sample, access to the meaning potential of metaphorically used expressions emerged as an important factor in metaphor comprehension. Students with German as their L1 generally displayed broader and deeper lexical-semantic knowledge of the expressions examined than the *DaZ* students and, in particular, the newly arrived migrant students in the sample. This appeared to facilitate their ability to resolve lexical and thematic incompatibilities and reconstruct contextual metaphorical meanings. However, difficulties in metaphor comprehension were also observed among students with German as their L1, indicating that metaphor comprehension cannot be taken for granted at this educational level. The study thus points to the need for systematic attention to metaphor in both linguistic research and educational practice.

As an exploratory-interpretative, i.e. qualitative study based on a small sample, the present investigation does not aim for statistical generalisation but rather for an in-depth hermeneutic reconstruction of students' metaphor comprehension processes. The findings should therefore be understood as exploratory insights into the comprehension processes reconstructed in the present sample. Quantitative follow-up research could test hypotheses derived from these findings and potentially allow for their generalisation. Moreover, the study is limited to four metaphors drawn from textbook texts dealing with the thematic complex of flight and migration. Future research should therefore systematically investigate a broader range of metaphors across different topics and subject areas. Further desiderata exist in the development of metaphor comprehension among multilingual children and adolescents.

In this context, longitudinal studies are necessary. The ability of multilingual students to understand metaphors in their respective first languages (L1s) should also be considered systematically. Didactically oriented follow-up research may be designed, for example, to develop procedures for assessing students' metaphor comprehension abilities. It should also be considered that metaphor comprehension was elicited in stimulus-based interviews and was therefore embedded in an interactional process. The interviewer's contributions formed part of this process, ranging from the provision of background knowledge necessary for comprehension to cues guiding students towards an appropriate interpretation. As specified in the coding procedure, interpretations reached through such solution-guiding cues were not classified as instances of independent metaphor comprehension. At the same time, the interviews in this study differ from actual classroom interaction. Future studies should therefore examine authentic classroom interactions in which metaphors occur and/or are didactically addressed. Studies focusing on production data from multilingual students are also of interest, particularly regarding their productive use of metaphors. Intervention studies could examine whether the teachers' linguistic support actions proposed here (micro-scaffolding) can be effectively implemented in classroom settings to help students infer the metaphorical meaning of an expression in a specific context when comprehension difficulties arise.

These research desiderata indicate that a wide range of further scholarly insights is needed in the field of metaphor comprehension among multilingual students. The findings of this study underscore the importance of language-sensitive subject teaching that explicitly addresses figurative language. Metaphors are not merely decorative elements of language. They play a central role in structuring knowledge and guiding interpretation. Supporting students in understanding and reflecting on metaphors therefore constitutes an essential component of equitable education in linguistically diverse classrooms.

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Miscellanea

EMANUELA TENCA[1]

The discourse of travel influencers via Instagram: insights from a small-scale pilot study

Abstract

Contents published by travel influencers online are a popular source of information for people planning their holidays. Travel influencers use their profiles as a source of income (van Nuenen 2016; Duffy/Kang 2020; Willment 2020), and to present their story as authentic, they harness travel discourse strategies; however, they also apply the promotional strategies of tourism discourse to boost their visibility (Azariah 2016, 2017). Following from these premises, this study analyses how top travel influencers emotionally connect with their audiences and enhance their social media presence by answering these questions: What type of linguistic strategies are applied for engaging followers? How is the uniqueness of the influencers' brand personality discursively expressed?

To answer these questions, a pilot study was conducted on a self-compiled small-scale specialised corpus (38,763 tokens; 32,504 words) comprising 300 posts published on Instagram by five of the most successful travel influencers according to Forbes (2017). A sequential exploratory mixed methods approach was applied (Creswell/Plano Clark 2017). Firstly, the corpus was uploaded to Sketch Engine and divided into five sub-corpora, one for each influencer. Wordlists were run for each sub-corpus to identify frequent features of the influencers' discourse. Next, keywords were extracted initially by setting the small-scale corpus as a focus corpus and EnTenTen21 as a reference corpus; subsequently, each sub-corpus was compared against the other four. Concordance lines were finally examined to understand the patterns in which frequent words and keywords are embedded. The five sub-corpora were then imported to NVivo, where the influencers' discourse was interpreted qualitatively by applying a thematic coding scheme informed by Aaker's brand personality model (1997).

The results indicate how travel influencers' discourse seeks to balance authenticity with the commodification of their narrative. However, differences emerged

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across the influencers' textual contents regarding the implementation of ego-targeting, emphatic language, and technical terminology. This variation may depend on the influencers' specific brand personality, which appears to be multifaceted and relying primarily on dimensions of excitement and competence.

Keywords: tourism discourse; travel discourse; Instagram; brand personality; mixed methods analysis

1. Background and aim of the study

The tourism industry is one of the most lucrative business sectors in the world. The sector was heavily affected by travel restrictions implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic, but it is now approaching recovery (OECD 2024) while experiencing continuous transformation in its promotion activities. Tourism discourse is crafted to prompt people to travel and visit given destinations: the specialised texts falling under this umbrella term pursue a promotional objective, as they seek to persuade their audience to purchase a service (Gotti 2006; Maci 2020; Franceschi/Hartle 2021; Gatti/Lazzeretti/Vitali 2023; Ädel/Öhqvist/Shokoohi 2024). The professionals who write these texts understand that today's tourists are better informed and more expert than in the past (Maci 2020). Social media have been playing a crucial role in this respect, as they contribute to shaping the strategies for marketing tourism destinations: today's tourism discourse goes well beyond travel guides, brochures, and advertisements, to name a few, but it accounts also for all those contents generated by individuals targeting their followers on social media. These contents are perceived as more authentic and reliable than traditional, commercial genres (D'Egidio 2014; Toubes/Araújo Vila/Fraiz Brea 2021). Social media rely on the properties of Web 2.0, a collaborative digital environment which "affords an open online participatory culture where connected individuals not only surf but can make things through editing, updating,

blogging, remixing, posting, responding, sharing, exhibiting, tagging and so on" (Urry/Larsen 2011: 59). This influences, first of all, how tourists plan their holidays. Whilst prior to Web 2.0 information based on word of mouth was usually exchanged among few, close individuals, the advent of services such as blogs, Facebook, Instagram, and X has widened the participation framework of personal travel recommendations to such an extent that these are now transmitted to anybody owning a device connected to the Internet. The way in which tourism businesses operate is impacted as well, as "tourism services are continually 'shamed' or 'recommended' on a global virtual stage with millions of daily visitors" (Urry/Larsen 2011: 59).

Contents about travel are frequently produced by bloggers and, more generally, influencers,[2] who use their social media as a source of income generated via advertising, paid partnerships, and sponsored posts (van Nuenen 2016; Duffy/Kang 2020; Willment 2020). Travel bloggers and influencers belong to the category of digital nomads (Müller 2016), which comprises all those professionals whose workplace is no longer linked to traditional office environments (Nash *et al.* 2018). Digital nomads and travel influencers may therefore be viewed as entrepreneurs competing for social media users' attention with a view to promoting their brand and increasing "the market value of their product" (van Nuenen 2016: 205). In this sense, digital nomads and travel influencers go through a process of self-professionalisation (van Driel/Dumitrica 2021) as they acquire more and more popularity.[3] This process, however, may be challenging. On the one side, influencers feel the need to develop and maintain a close relationship with their audiences, based on the authenticity and transparency of their message; on the other, they feel pressure to align their communication

[2] In this paper, "influencer" is used as an umbrella term comprising, among others, the category of travel bloggers. This is grounded on Abidin's (2017: 159) definition, following which influencers are construed as "everyday Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles".

[3] According to Nadalipour *et al.* (2023: 25), influencers' popularity "includes several criteria such as a large following, good interaction, reputation, and high impact", and factors that contribute to its growth are "being honest, proper public relations, being responsive and intimate, having real followers".

style with conventional advertising and marketing practices (van Driel/Dumitrica 2021) in order to meet the demands of their business partners, such as destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and tourism companies (Gretzel 2018; Pop *et al.* 2022; Nadalipour *et al.* 2023; Carvalho 2024). In sum, influencers strategically plan and perform their "authentic persona" (van Driel/Dumitrica 2021: 73) through "standardized and highly curated" contents (van Driel/Dumitrica 2021: 80), as they seek to match the expectations of both business partners and followers.

Starting from the assumption that influencers' travel accounts interweave the promotion of tourism services and their self-promotion, this study sets out to examine the communicative devices which infuse uniqueness and authenticity into their narrative, and which are instrumental to attracting large audiences of social media users, eager to follow in their footsteps, and perhaps become digital nomads themselves. The research questions informing the analysis are the following:

RQ1. What type of linguistic strategies do travel influencers apply for engaging social media audiences?
RQ2. How is the uniqueness of the influencers' brand personality discursively expressed?

To answer these questions, a pilot study was conducted on the Instagram Travel Influencers (ITI) Corpus, a self-compiled small-scale specialised corpus further described in Section 3, comprising 300 posts published on Instagram by five of the most successful travel influencers according to Forbes (2017). Instagram was selected for this investigation since it is the medium of choice for creating online communities (Saboia *et al.* 2018; Gholamhosseinzadeh/Chapuis/Lehu 2023). Indeed, travel bloggers and influencers communicate across different social media to secure a larger, more diverse audience, since each platform has specific affordances which help fulfil different purposes: for example, microblogging services (e.g. Twitter/X) are frequently utilised for spontaneous communication about everyday

aspects of the travel experience, while Facebook for announcements and requests for advice (Azariah 2017).

Additionally, Instagram posts were chosen for the investigation on account of the extensive research conducted in the last few years, focusing on the role played by this platform in shaping travel intentions. Many of these studies applied a quantitative approach based on surveys involving Millennials and members of Generation Z (see Anuar *et al.* 2021; Yılmazdoğan/Doğan/Altıntaş 2021; da Fonseca/Gustavo 2022; Han/Chen 2022; Mchavu/Ali/Yılmazdoğan 2022; Ghaly 2023; Goktepe/Öğretmenoğlu 2023; Verma/Dhodi/Dhodi 2023; Carvalho 2024; Firose/Chen/Tabari 2024). These are indeed the two age groups that form the majority of Instagram users worldwide (Statista 2024). The findings of these surveys indicate that influencers' credibility is key in shaping their followers' travel intentions. Broadly speaking, source credibility refers to the positive qualities of a communicator that will prompt their audiences to accept a given message (Ohanian 1990). According to Ohanian (1990), source credibility has three major components, namely expertise (the communicator's competence, experience and/or qualification), attractiveness (their physical likability), and trustworthiness (how honest and truthful they appear in front of their audiences). In the context of social media, source credibility corresponds to "the extent to which the persons generating information […] are perceived to be trustworthy, knowledgeable, and believable" (Zha *et al.* 2018: 230). A further element which is often considered in the literature when investigating influencers' credibility is similarity, that is, the degree to which followers can identify with an influencer, based on shared values and interests (Lou/Yuan 2019; Rani *et al.* 2023; Carvalho 2024). In the quantitative studies just mentioned, expertise frequently stands out as a crucial factor in determining influencers' credibility (Anuar *et al.* 2021; Yılmazdoğan/Doğan/Altıntaş 2021; Asdecker 2022; Han/Chen 2022; Ghaly 2023). A further element impacting on followers' travel intentions is the degree to which influencers engage their audiences, for example by interacting with them, responding to their feedback, and showing their authentic personality (Anuar *et al.* 2021; Han/Chen 2022).

Instagram is primarily a visual social media platform, and for this reason the quality of the photos and videos that are shared by influencers is key to their communication. However, the value of the textual component of their posts should not be underestimated, as indicated by marketers interviewed in a study carried out by Nadalipour *et al.* (2023). Indeed, a "brief, inclusive and appealing" (Nadalipour *et al.* 2023: 36) caption can enhance the meaning of a photo, as it provides insights into the influencer's experience and feelings, while sharing useful details about the destination they are presenting. Given the importance of textual information when marketing tourist destinations on Instagram, and owing to space limitations, the present investigation will focus only on the captions accompanying the posts included in the corpus.

The corpus was investigated through a sequential exploratory mixed methods approach (Creswell/Plano Clark 2017) outlined in Section 3, combining corpus linguistic techniques and deductive thematic analysis (Braun/Clarke 2006). The coding scheme implemented to conduct the latter is informed by Aaker's brand personality model (1997), which is based on the Big Five trait taxonomy of human personality and includes five dimensions and their corresponding traits:

1. Sincerity: down-to-earth, family-oriented, small-town, honest, sincere, real, wholesome, original, cheerful, sentimental, friendly.
2. Excitement: daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, imaginative, unique, up-to-date, independent, contemporary.
3. Competence: reliable, hard-working, secure, intelligent, technical, corporate, successful, leader, confident.
4. Sophistication: upper-class, glamorous, good-looking, charming, feminine, smooth.
5. Ruggedness: outdoorsy, masculine, Western, tough, rugged.

Aaker's model (1997), which is typically applied for interpreting the symbolic value of brands in consumer behaviour research, was selected for this study, as it focuses on those human characteristics of brands which make them stand out by establishing an emotional connection

with their potential and returning customers. Similarly to the way in which consumer brands are marketed to stand out from competition, travel influencers vie for followers' attention to maximise their profit.

After outlining the features of the discourses of travel and tourism with reference to travel bloggers and influencers in Section 2, the data and methodology are illustrated in Section 3. The quantitative and qualitative analyses are conducted in Section 4, while a discussion of the results and concluding remarks are provided in Section 5.

2. The discourses of travel and tourism

As highlighted in the previous section, the identity which travel bloggers and influencers create for themselves through their communicative choices is crucial, as it affects their credibility in their followers' eyes. As Azariah (2016: 941) aptly notes, "[l]anguage is […] integral to the presentation and positioning of experience as travel and the individual as a traveler not a tourist". Terms such as travel and tourism are frequently used interchangeably, yet there is tension between their underlying conceptualisations: travel is associated with positive ideas of authenticity, while tourism is associated with negative ideas of superficiality (Azariah 2017). Travellers are often viewed as solitary individuals escaping the ordinary to experience adventures "in the big outdoors", willing to adjust to the peculiarities of the host population and environment, also giving up comfort in the choice of accommodation and transportation (Dann 1996). In contrast, tourists "travel in guided groups and find pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying 'pseudo-events' and disregarding the 'real' world outside" (Urry/Larsen 2011: 7-8).

Willment (2020) observes that digital nomads apply self-presentation strategies to build their identity as travellers rather than tourists; this appears in tandem with the theme of authenticity,

frequently underpinned by influencers' narrative of personal life events. The location from which social media contents are produced is also crucial, as this offers a stage for performing authenticity (MacCannell 1999). By staging their authentic selves, digital nomads – and travel influencers – become objects of the tourist gaze (Urry/Larsen 2011), yet this is precisely where the tension between travel and tourism manifests itself: whilst the staged performance of one's self is profitable in economic, social, and cultural terms (Duffy/Kang 2020), the balance between authenticity and self-branding is hard to maintain (van Nuenen 2016; Willment 2020). Indeed, influencers commodify themselves into the economic system while attempting to "sell the extraordinary" (Duffy/Kang 2020: 183).

The tension between travel and tourism is reflected in their corresponding discourses. Following Azariah (2017), the language of travel focuses on areas of meaning such as exploration, nomadism, and the escape from routine; it relies on first-person narration, whereby the sender can be clearly identified, while the second-person reference is a marker for audience awareness. In contrast, the language of tourism is eminently commercial and promotional; it usually lacks sender identification, and it adopts an impersonal – albeit conversational – tone to address an impersonal mass of tourists (Dann 1996; Urry/Larsen 2011; Azariah 2017). In this sense, ego-targeting plays a key role (Dann 1996): on the one side, the use of the first-person singular pronoun frames the narrator as a participant in the travel experience, so as to increase the authenticity of the message; on the other, the second-person pronoun is adopted to directly address the audience – as is common in advertising – to give the impression that they have been singled out as individuals from the mass: this strategy verbalises the uniqueness of both the individuals who are targeted and of the travel services offered (Dann 1996).

Personal pronouns are important elements of tourism discourse, since they express ideas of closeness and intimacy between the message-sender and the message-receiver (Fodde/Denti 2008). Their use has been investigated in several studies which, in particular, have emphasised the meaning of linguistic patterns including *you*. The pronoun occurs frequently in different text typologies, such as tourist brochures (Francesconi 2011), travel guides (Bosnar-Valković/Jurin

2019), tourism websites (Maci 2007; Manca 2016; Ädel/Öhqvist/Shokoohi 2024), and social media (Gatti/Lazzeretti/Vitali 2023), to name a few examples. Tourism discourse is inherently persuasive (Maci 2007; Manca 2016), and patterns including *you* are particularly meaningful given its "potential for interactivity" (Ädel/Öhqvist/Shokoohi 2024: 88). The analysis of persuasive rhetorical functions in Sweden's official tourism website conducted by Ädel/Öhqvist/Shokoohi (2024) indicates that *you* helps build rapport between the writer and the reader; it is also instrumental to presenting potential visitors with a series of options to choose from when planning their holidays. An even more important function of *you* is that of creating "the writer's ethos and credibility as a guide" (Ädel/Öhqvist/Shokoohi 2024: 90), as it frequently occurs in patterns where readers/visitors are offered expert recommendations which demonstrate the writer's insider knowledge.

Instead, the findings of the study carried out by Gatti/Lazzeretti/Vitali (2023) provide interesting insights into the role of the first-person plural pronoun *we*. Their study focuses on the promotion of tourist destinations located in South Tyrol via Facebook and Instagram at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic (March-June 2020). The analysis reveals that *we* occurs more frequently than *you* in the dataset, a result which is in contrast with those of studies conducted on other text typologies (see Maci 2007; Francesconi 2011). Moreover, *we* is primarily adopted as a receiver-excluding device to present the local communities in South Tyrol "as a cohesive unit that emphasises a collective identity" (Gatti/Lazzeretti/Vitali 2023: 73). Therefore, the frequency of *we* appears to indicate the writers' preference for an emotional communicative style which conveys a sense of hope for the future, while still acknowledging the challenges posed by the health crisis.

A further important characteristic of the language of tourism is its multidimensionality (Gotti 2006) in combining elements of both specialised and general language. This is exemplified by the coexistence in the same text of monoreferential lexis and emphatic language (e.g. superlative adjectives, imperatives). Further properties of the discourse of tourism are "its extremely compact syntactic structure" (Gotti 2006: 28), which is also borrowed from specialised

language, and the use of a theme/rheme sequencing whereby a topic is foregrounded at the beginning of the text, and then expanded with new information in the following segments (Maci 2020).

Despite the tension which exists between the discourses of travel and tourism, the two "are nevertheless constantly collapsing into each other" (Azariah 2016: 941). It is therefore worthwhile exploring how this tension is resolved, and perhaps leveraged, in influencers' discourse, as they pursue their communicative agenda.

3. Data and methodology

To pursue the research objective of this pilot study, a small-scale specialised corpus, the Instagram Travel Influencers (ITI) Corpus, was compiled, collecting 300 posts published on Instagram by five of the most successful travel influencers according to Forbes (2017). The full name, nickname,[4] and country of origin of the influencers are listed in Table 1. According to the corpus size information extracted from Sketch Engine, the dataset comprises 38,763 tokens and 32,504 words; the number of unique items including non-words is 6,526. For each Instagram account sampled, a sub-corpus was compiled. An overview of the sub-corpora is also provided in Table 1.

[4] The nickname column also includes within brackets the short forms used in the remainder of the paper to refer to the influencers and their corresponding sub-corpora.

Name	*Nickname*	*Country*	*Tokens*	*%*
Brian Kelly	The Points Guy (TPG)	US	10,259	26.466
Kiersten Rich	The Blonde Abroad (TBA)	US	7,054	18.198
Eric Stoen	Travel Babbo (TB)	US	8,902	22.965
Kate McCulley	Adventurous Kate (AK)	US	8,237	21.250
Dave Bouskill and Debra Corbeil	The Planet D (TPD)	Canada	4,311	11.121

Table 1. Travel influencers selected for the pilot study and overview of the sub-corpora.

The corpus was compiled by manually collecting the textual contents (i.e. the captions) of 60 posts published by each travel influencer between September 2021 and June 2022, a time when travel restrictions were gradually being lifted around the world (WHO 2022).

The dataset was examined following a sequential exploratory mixed methods approach (Creswell/Plano Clark 2017) combining a quantitative and a qualitative strand. For each strand, different analytical techniques and tools were used, i.e. corpus linguistics via Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2004, 2014), and thematic analysis (Braun/Clarke 2006) via NVivo, as will be explained further below. Relying on a previous study conducted in learner corpus research (Hartle/Andreolli/Tenca 2024), quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques, which represent two different "interface methods" (Marres/Gerlitz 2016: 24), were here integrated positing that the adoption of data-driven techniques alone would not have allowed for a thorough interpretation of the discourse of travel influencers: while descriptive quantitative analysis can indicate the most frequent linguistic patterns in the dataset, a deeper understanding of the findings can be acquired thanks to thematic analysis applied in line with the chosen theoretical framework, in this case Aaker's brand personality model (1997).

The captions of the 300 posts sampled were saved as separate .txt files and uploaded to Sketch Engine, where the following tools were used: the wordlist to determine the most frequent words in the corpus, the keyword list to retrieve items which are unique to the discourse of

the travel influencers, and the concordance tool to explore the contexts of the items thus identified. EnTenTen21 was chosen as a reference corpus on account of its size (52,268,286,493 words), the timeframe covered (October 2021-January 2022), and the nature of its sources, which are indeed web-mediated. The unique items in the focus corpus were obtained by maintaining the default settings corresponding to value "1" in the advanced section of the keyword tool in Sketch Engine (Lexical Computing Ltd. 2015).

The .txt files were subsequently imported to the NVivo software, where they were first divided into five units of analysis, also referred to as cases, each corresponding to one Instagram profile. The cases were interpreted qualitatively by applying a thematic coding scheme informed by Aaker's brand personality model (1997). Coding was therefore theory-driven (Braun/Clarke 2006) since the dataset was investigated through the five dimensions constituting the model itself. These, however, were accommodated to the communicative context and type of message senders under scrutiny. Since Aaker's model (1997) is rooted in consumer behaviour research, it was not possible to apply it to the influencers' discourse in a straightforward manner. Instead, after close multiple readings of the dataset, the five dimensions were reconstrued as follows:

1. Competence: information which followers may find useful while travelling or visiting certain locations, and which displays the influencer's expertise and reliability in giving advice to their peers.
2. Excitement: statements marked by expressions of enthusiasm with the places and activities referred to in the posts; their goal is to influence the followers' travelling choices by showing how the influencers enjoyed themselves during their holidays.
3. Ruggedness: all those textual elements which convey a sense of adventure and challenge when travelling "off the beaten path" and spending time "in the great outdoors".
4. Sincerity: reference to those aspects of the travel experience which relate to values such as love, family, community, nature, environmental protection, respect for the host population, and which endow travelling with a deeper, more personal meaning.

5. Sophistication: description of the most exclusive and expensive aspects of the travel experience emphasising details relating to, for example, flying first class, dining in elegant restaurants, staying in luxury hotels.

The way the dimensions are construed for this study shows a nexus with travel and tourism discourses: Ruggedness and Sincerity may be linked to domains pertaining to travel, while Sophistication to tourism; instead, Competence and Excitement may encapsulate ideas of both discourses.

The adapted framework was used as a coding scheme for the thematic analysis, accomplished by manually dividing each caption into segments of variable length (i.e. each segment could encompass one or more sentences). Each segment was attributed a unique code; thus, different brand personality dimensions could coexist in the same caption, but they could not overlap at the level of individual segments. A word of caution is here needed regarding the problematics embedded in the coding stage, caused by the degree of stratification in the influencers' discourse, and by the fact that the investigation was conducted by a single coder, the author. As regards the first issue, it was observed how the dimensions of brand personality in the corpus do not always function as discrete categories, but they may enshrine similar, interrelated ideas. For instance, segments coded with the dimension of Sophistication may display elements connected with Excitement, as this is the type of emotion which may be experienced when opting for luxury accommodation and first-class transportation. This issue was solved by dividing the captions into shorter segments, which enabled the application of different codes while avoiding their overlapping. Figure 1 provides a practical example of this segmentation by showing a screenshot of the NVivo interface while coding the caption of one of the posts by TBA.[5]

[5] While conducting thematic analysis in NVivo, the software can be set so that it displays coloured bars referred to as coding stripes, showing how the content has been coded. In Figure 1, the NVivo coding stripes can be seen on the right-hand side of the screenshot. Instead, the coloured squares surrounding the relevant segments in the caption have been added by the author to further highlight the coded content.

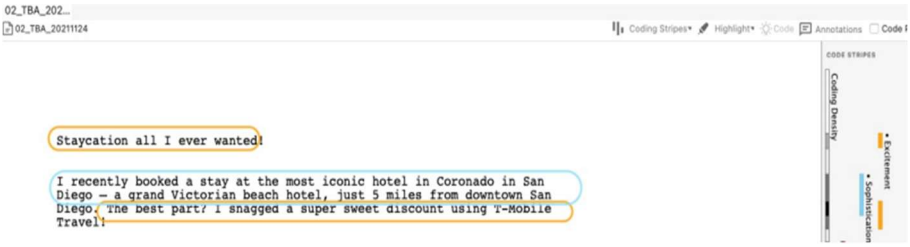


Figure 1. Segmentation of one of the captions in the TBA sub-corpus.

The second issue relates to the fact that this is a small-scale pilot study carried out with limited resources, and therefore it was not possible to hire a second coder to check the reliability of the coding scheme. Instead, intracoder reliability was measured to test the consistency over time of the author's analyses. This was done by repeating the coding after four weeks from the initial qualitative investigation. To this end, the first six posts published by each influencer in the corpus were selected, totalling 30 posts and corresponding to ten percent of the dataset. The agreement between the two analyses was calculated using the Kappa coefficient, thus obtaining a value of 0.64, which can be considered fair to good agreement (Fleiss/Levin/Paik 2013). Next, the two analyses were carefully compared to identify and solve disparities in the coding, which were primarily due to segments lending themselves to multiple interpretations. Bearing this in mind, the entire dataset was thoroughly reviewed to fine-tune the application of the framework and improve the overall consistency of the analysis. Upon completion of the coding, the crosstab query function featured in NVivo was applied to compare the distribution of the personality dimensions across the five Instagram profiles.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the small-scale study beginning with an initial quantitative analysis conducted for frequency using the Sketch Engine wordlist (4.1), and then moving to the extraction of keywords (4.2). Salient linguistic markers retrieved in these two stages were further explored focusing on their co-text using the Sketch Engine concordance tool. The findings obtained via the qualitative investigation in NVivo are reported in the last part of the section (4.3).

4.1. Frequency wordlist

A frequency wordlist was run assuming that it would have helped locate possible features of travel or tourism discourse. The top-ranking 30 words in the corpus are presented in Table 2.

	Word	*Freq.*		*Word*	*Freq.*
1	the	1608	16	on	231
2	to	1010	17	my	216
3	and	935	18	have	215
4	a	816	19	at	213
5	in	693	20	from	196
6	of	676	21	are	190
7	i	538	22	so	177
8	you	443	23	was	171
9	is	412	24	be	165
10	for	392	25	but	160
11	it	380	26	as	153
12	this	277	27	our	151
13	we	267	28	n't	144
14	with	257	29	or	142
15	that	239	30	one	139

Table 2. The 30 top-ranking words in ITI.

Unsurprisingly, the most frequent items are function words, and although their significance for the purposes of the present study is limited, it is worth concentrating on the personal pronouns *I*, *you*, and *we*, as well as on the possessive adjectives *my* and *our*, as these are elements of ego-targeting investigated in previous research on tourism discourse (see Section 2). These will be considered in detail in 4.1.1.

As regards content words, the most frequent one is *new*, which ranks 37th and occurs 108 times. This is followed by *time* (ranking 39th with 101 occurrences), *travel* (51st, 82 occurrences), *day* (53rd, 81 occurrences) and *trip* (58th, 69 occurrences). A word of caution should be added as regards *new*. Close reading of the concordance lines reveals that in 26 cases it is part of the names of destinations such as *New England*, *New Hampshire*, *New Jersey*, *New York*, and *New Zealand*, and in five cases it is part of the phrase *New Year*. If we exclude these 31 items, *new* occurs 77 times as an adjective, thus representing the fourth most frequent content word overall. These frequent content words will be analysed in 4.1.2.

4.1.1. I, you, we, my, and our

The distribution of *I*, *you*, *we*, *my*, and *our* across the five Instagram accounts is illustrated in Table 3, with information about their raw frequency (RF) and frequency normalised per 10,000 words (NF).

	TPG		*TBA*		*TB*		*AK*		*TPD*	
	RF	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*
I	6	5.85	130	184.29	216	242.64	172	208.81	14	32.48
my	1	0.97	73	103.49	76	85.37	61	74.06	5	11.6
we	21	20.47	51	72.3	87	97.73	45	54.63	63	146.14
our	33	32.17	41	58.12	25	28.08	20	24.28	32	74.23
you	99	95.50	80	113.41	68	76.39	136	165.11	60	139.18

Table 3. Distribution of *I*, *my*, *we*, *our*, and *you* in the sub-corpora.

From these preliminary results, differences across the five sub-corpora can be noticed. Firstly, the TBA, TB, and AK sub-corpora are marked by the highest number of occurrences of *I* and *my*. This type of self-reference frames the influencer's travel experience as personal and authentic, as shown in example (1).

(1) *I* had been escaping as much as *I* could, walking into town, exploring, and talking with locals at the market. *I* didn't even take many photos […] *I* just enjoyed experiencing the culture away from the resort and away from the generic cruise ship shopping districts on every Caribbean island. (TB)

In the three sub-corpora mentioned, *we* and *our* occur less frequently than *I* and *my*, and they are primarily used as receiver-excluding devices when holidays spent with partners or families are reported. Conversely, *we* and *our* are adopted inclusively in a minority of cases (*we*: TBA=4, TB=1, AK=5; *our*: TBA=5, TB=1, AK=5), and specifically in contexts where the influencers are posting about the global challenges that affect tourism today, such as the environmental crisis (2) and the war in Ukraine (3).

(2) I'm a big believer in seeing as much of the world as possible – and with all the beauty the earth has to offer, *we* are responsible for taking care of it. (TBA)
(3) As *we* follow the war in Ukraine, I can understand why people may be concerned about nearby countries. (AK)

As regards TPG, both the plural and singular forms of the first-person pronoun and possessive adjective account for a very limited portion of the dataset.[6] This denotes a preference for building the message around the travelling experience itself rather than around the influencer's personal perception of it. Hence, TPG's contents may appear to be rather impersonal, in line with tourism discourse. Instead, the more frequent occurrence of *we* and *our* compared to *I* and *my* in the TPD sub-corpus is motivated by the fact that the Instagram account is

[6] A word of caution needs to be expressed with regard to *our* in the TPG sub-corpus: its higher frequency compared to *I*, *my*, and *we* is due to its occurrence in the pattern "visit the link in our bio", which is a final call for action addressed to followers in 27 of the posts sampled.

managed by a couple of travellers. The fewer instances of *I* and *my*, however, indicate that some of their experiences are reported by either one of the two: careful reading of the entire TPD sub-corpus indicates that this is the case in 10 of the posts collected. As for the adoption of *we* and *our*, TPD apply the same communicative strategy pinned down in the TBA, TB, and AK sub-corpora, as they are describing their travelling experience through their own personal lenses, rather than taking a more neutral standpoint as in the case of TPG: *we* is used inclusively twice, while *our* only once.

A shared element across the five sub-corpora is the presence of *you* to address followers in a straightforward manner as in (4) and (5): in both cases, the influencers' individual experience is marked by the first-person singular pronoun; instead, the second-person pronoun establishes common ground with the audience, which in (4) is based on shared knowledge of popular culture references, and in (5) on the assumption that TB's followers may have become well acquainted with aspects of his personal life.

(4) Wishing I was back in Hogsmeade Village right about now! Even though it's in Hollywood, *you* feel like you're transported straight into the pages of Harry Potter. (TBA)

(5) If *you*'ve been watching my stories, *you* know that my 12-year-old and I flew to Puerto Vallarta today for her spring break. (TB)

Additionally, *you* is adopted for inviting followers into the conversation as in (6), an extract from a post reporting issues with the disruption of retailers' opening times at the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. At the sentence level, two direct questions invite followers to comment on the post and share their views.

(6) What do *you* think about this situation? Should retailers be penalized for not being open in airports? (TPG)

In other cases, *you* co-occurs with direct questions as in (7) or imperative forms as in (8) to urge followers to suggest contents for future posts.

(7) I'm getting ready to write a big post about what it's like to live in Prague. What do *you* want me to include in it? (AK)

(8) If *you* have any requests for new tour destinations, pop them in the comments! (TBA)

The excerpt in (8) exemplifies a recurring pattern in the corpus in which *you* occurs, i.e. conditional sentences where recommendations are given, as in (9): the dependent clause thematises desires or needs which fellow travellers may have, while the main clause provides a solution.

(9) So if *you*'re already a digital nomad or *you*'re dreaming up a new business venture that allows *you* to travel far and wide, download App in the Air and use the Remotely feature to find your next oasis... (TBA)

Example (9) deserves further attention because TBA is appealing to future digital nomads in order to persuade them to download an application developed by a company with which she has a paid partnership.[7] This type of message indicates tension between authenticity and the commodification of the influencers' messages, who frequently embed advertising elements into their contents: as mentioned in Section 1, social media represents for them a source of income. This communicative strategy is further exemplified in (10), where TPD are launching a contest to advertise one of their partners.

(10) Would *you* like the chance to win a 2 night stay at any @sandmanhotels in Canada as well as a food voucher for one of the Moxies, Denny's or Shark clubs connected to the hotels?
Here is how to enter:
1. Follow @theplanetd and @sandmanhotels
2. Like this post and comment tagging who you would take with you (one entry for every tag) (TPD)

While followers' attention is attracted via the interrogative at the beginning of the excerpt, the instructions for participating in the contest

[7] The paid partnership is indicated at the end of the post by means of the mention "@appintheair" and hashtag "#paidpartner". The use of these hypertextual devices is fundamental "for building relationships and communities" (Zappavigna 2015: 274) in the social media landscape.

are given through the imperative verbs *follow* and *like*. From these instructions it transpires that, in addition to promoting their partner, TPD are attempting to extend their participation framework to maximise their profits.

4.1.2. Content words: time, travel, day, new, and trip

The distribution of the five highest ranking content words in the sub-corpora is given in Table 4, with information about their raw frequency (RF) and frequency normalised per 10,000 words (NF). Some differences may be observed in their distribution, which however do not appear to be as substantial as the differences characterising the personal pronouns and possessive adjectives analysed above. This may be due to the relatively low frequency of the five content words compared to *I*, *you*, *we*, *my*, and *our*.

	TPG		*TBA*		*TB*		*AK*		*TPD*	
	RF	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*	*RF*	*NF*
time	18	17.54	11	15.59	24	26.96	30	36.42	18	41.76
travel	19	18.52	30	42.53	21	23.59	7	8.5	5	11.6
day	12	11.7	19	26.94	23	25.84	23	27.92	4	9.28
new	47	45.81	17	24.1	4	4.5	4	4.86	5	11.6
trip	3	2.92	20	28.35	17	19.1	15	18.21	14	32.48

Table 4. Distribution of the five most frequent content words in the sub-corpora.

To retrieve patterns in which the content words are used, concordance lines were examined. Firstly, it was noted that *time* occurs in the influencers' narration of their travel experiences. In this sense, it is frequently modified by adjectives such as *first*, *long*, and *much* (see example 11). Another common pattern includes *time* as an object of the verb *spend* (12).

(11) Today, for the *first time* in 37 years, I ate pizza in #Naples. (AK)
(12) They still have donuts, but the donut line was over half an hour and I opted to *spend* my *time* exploring the museum and walking around outside. (TB)

As for *travel*, the fact that it is one of the most frequently occurring content words in the corpus is a clear indicator of the primary theme running through the corpus. When *travel* is used as a verb, its most frequent subject is *you* (eight occurrences). The patterns including *you* and *travel* confirm the discussion in 4.1.1. about the role of the pronoun in the sub-corpora, which is used to build rapport, thus increasing the level of interactivity of their Instagram contents. This is particularly evident when *you* and *travel* co-occur in direct interrogatives as in (13): here TB is inviting his followers to participate in a conversation about preferred devices for taking pictures. As can be seen, TB is adopting a strategy which is similar to the one in example (6) reported in 4.1.1.

(13) Will you be *traveling* with a camera this year or have you switched to phone-only? (TB)

In addition to this pattern, the frequent prepositional phrase *travel to* may be worth mentioning (eight occurrences), shown in (14). Here, TBA announces the next destination she is visiting.

(14) I'm *traveling* back *to* Egypt! This is 'officially' the last international trip of my pregnancy! (TBA)

Overall, excitement transpires from this excerpt, conveyed by the use of exclamation marks. This excitement is connected with TBA's pregnancy, an important personal event in the influencer's life, which she enthusiastically shares with her followers, thus increasing the level of closeness and intimacy with them.

When *travel* is used as a noun, it occurs in noun phrases such as *air travel* and *international travel*. When looking at the concordance lines including these phrases, it appears that they refer to specific issues such as the pandemic (15) or rising travel costs (16). These examples seem to indicate the use of specific terminology in the corpus, which may be correlated with the self-professionalisation process of the influencer figure, as will be further explored when considering keywords in the next section.

(15) Being fully vaccinated has made *international travel* so much easier and has allowed me to travel to destinations like French Polynesia, Mexico, […] (TBA)

(16) […] the airline's new and existing services aim to capitalize upon demand from tourists and families traveling together who want to save money ahead of what is already promising to be an expensive summer travel season for both domestic and *international air travel*. (TPG)

Similarly to *time*, the noun *day* occurs in the corpus when the influencers report on their travel experiences. They may use it to describe weather conditions, and in this case the noun is pre-modified by adjectives such as *chilly*, *rainy*, *cool*, and *clear*. Most importantly, however, the noun co-occurs with positively connoted adjectives such as *gorgeous*, *magical*, *lovely* (see example 17). These adjective plus noun combinations exemplify the use of emphatic language typical of tourism discourse, which expresses the influencers' feeling of enthusiasm in telling the story of their travel experiences, with a view to appealing to their followers.

(17) It was a cool place to visit and a *gorgeous*day out on the water. (AK)

As shown in Table 4 above, the majority of instances of *new* are to be retrieved in the TPG sub-corpus. Close observation of the concordance lines indicates that this adjective occurs when TPG reports on the latest developments in the transportation industry, especially as pertains to air travel, as in excerpt (18). Indeed, as will be further discussed in 4.2 and 4.3, this is TPG's area of expertise.

(18) In economy class, the *new* seats are 17-inches wide and feature about 31 inches of pitch, which is a standard configuration across multiple carriers for 10-abreast economy class on the 777-300ER. (TPG)

Finally, the presence of the noun *trip* is motivated by the specific theme of the corpus, as indicated above in the case of *travel*. The most prominent pattern in which *trip* occurs is the one where the noun is followed by the preposition *to* and the name of a destination. The pattern may occur in the influencers' narrative of their travel experiences, as in (19), but also in posts which seek to directly engage followers and influence their behaviour, as in (20).

(19) This recent *trip to* #London (shot from #NottingHill there!) made me fall in love with Prague even more! (AK)

(20) GIVEAWAY TIME! Who wants to win a *trip to* Ottawa?
With Fall right around the corner we have partnered with @ottawatourism to give one lucky winner *a trip to* Ottawa!
Check out the link in our bio to enter! (TPD)

In example (20), TPD are referring explicitly to their partnership with Ottawa Tourism to advertise a contest launched by this organisation. The example is particularly interesting, as TPD adopt the same communicative strategies analysed in (10) in the previous section, namely a direct interrogative in the first part of the caption, and the imperative *check out* to urge followers to take action. Overall, this type of textual content seems to indicate a level of commodification in the influencers' message.

After having focused on frequent words and their co-text, the next section will account for the keywords in the ITI Corpus as a whole, and for the keywords in each of its five sub-corpora, in order to uncover relevant semantic domains in the whole dataset and pinpoint linguistic markers which are specific to each influencer.

4.2. Keywords

The keyword analysis was firstly carried out setting ITI as a focus corpus and EnTenTen21 as a reference corpus. Table 5 offers an overview of the 20 highest ranked keywords in the ITI Corpus, including frequency figures for both the focus (F) and reference (R) corpora.

		Frequency	
	Keyword	*F*	*R*
1	babymoon	10	1,904
2	tpg	12	17,150
3	epirus	8	14,206
4	vallarta	12	52,918
5	tulip	19	126,721
6	tropea	6	1,786
7	business-class	6	5,484
8	acela	5	5,655
9	inflight	6	20,893
10	calabria	6	26,694
11	nutella	6	28,394
12	turbulence	14	151,666
13	bio	39	547,271
14	airtags	4	1,491
15	aeroplan	4	6,158
16	cabo	7	60,693
17	zapata	5	27,234
18	parasailing	4	10,084
19	positano	4	10,116
20	lumberjack	5	29,569

Table 5. The 20 top-ranking keywords in ITI.

This initial keyness analysis reveals two important themes, one referring to travel locations (*epirus*, *vallarta*, *tropea*, *calabria*, *cabo*, *zapata*, and *positano*), and one referring to transportation means (*business-class*, *acela*, *inflight*, *turbulence*, and *aeroplan*). As can be noted, the latter domain focuses on travelling by plane, the only exception being *acela*, which is the name of a passenger train service operated by Amtrak, United States' national railway company.

Next, each sub-corpus was compared against the rest of ITI to locate items unique to each influencer. Table 6 displays the 15 keywords appearing with the highest ranking in each sub-corpus, along with their frequency (F). No information is supplied as regards frequency in the rest of ITI, as the keywords were not retrieved in the other sub-corpora.

TPG		*TBA*		*TB*		*AK*		*TPD*	
Keyword	*F*	*Keyword*	*F*	*Keyword*	*F*	*Keyword*	*F*	*Keyword*	*F*
seat	43	babymoon	10	dune	14	prague	16	tulip	19
economy	26	pregnant	7	colorado	9	budapest	14	ottawa	14
delta	22	cabo	7	ranch	9	scotia	10	colour	9
turbulence	14	portland	7	wife	7	hampshire	10	epirus	8
mask	14	sapphire	6	florence	7	lewis	7	bc	8
flyer	13	outfit	6	camera	7	hamburg	7	basel	6
burger	12	bailey	6	putin	6	foliage	7	favourite	6
tpg	12	nutella	6	fundraiser	6	calabria	6	australia	5
carrier	12	t-mobile	6	giraffe	6	cat	6	luck	4
mandate	12	size	5	zapata	5	anger	6	aeroplan	4
passenger	11	floral	5	memphis	5	tropea	6	grizzly	4
attendant	10	dog	5	springs	5	murray	6	rideau	4
amenity	10	print	5	duomo	4	wine	6	zermatt	4
plane	9	host	4	highly	4	beer	5	parasailing	4
federal	8	cream	4	fyi	4	québec	5	rocky	4

Table 6. The 15 top-ranking keywords in each sub-corpus of ITI.

The first element standing out from the table is that the TPG sub-corpus is primarily characterised by keywords pertaining to the domain of travelling. As shown in (21), TPG taps into specialised language to write his contents.

(21) In addition to business class, the *carrier* is updating the premium *economy* and *economy* class *seats* on these aircraft. (TPG)

The frequent keywords *carrier*, *economy*, and *seats* are monoreferential, as they are "exclusively applied to a plane – and therefore [represent] a category of transportation" (Maci 2020: 13).

A further thematic area emerging in the TPG sub-corpus is the one represented by *mask*, *mandate*, and *federal*. These are further instances of monoreferentiality, as they occur in updates about the latest guidelines for travelling during the pandemic, as in (22).

(22) BREAKING NEWS: CDC to extend *mask mandate* for two weeks. The two-week extension means the *federal mandate* will carry through at least May 2, 2022. (TPG)

The three keywords are combined to create terms which became widely used during the health crisis: *mandate* is pre-modified by *mask* and by *federal*, thus increasing the textual conciseness of the post. In general, TPG's contents, while being helpful for anyone travelling in uncertain times, are instrumental to presenting him as a reliable source of information, thus securing him a wide audience of followers. These communicative choices inform the trait of Competence, which in TPG is particularly significant, as will be seen in Section 4.3.

The domain of travel destinations, which is irrelevant in TPG, is instead accounted for in the other sub-corpora, where it is represented by the following items:

1. TBA: *cabo*, *portland*
2. TB: *dune*, *colorado*, *ranch*, *florence*, *zapata*, *memphis*, *springs*, *duomo*
3. AK: *prague*, *budapest*, *scotia*, *hampshire*, *hamburg*, *calabria*, *tropea*, *québec*
4. TPD: *ottawa*, *epirus*, *basel*, *australia*, *rideau*, *zermatt*, *rocky*

When looking at the co-text surrounding these keywords in the concordance lines, two different strategies for presenting the destinations transpire. On the one hand, the destinations (and related leisure activities) may be thematised in the post, as in (23); on the other, details of the travel experience may intersect the influencers' personal narrative, which is therefore key in the meaning-making process, as in (24).

(23) The Canadian Tulip Festival in *Ottawa* is the largest tulip festival in the world with more than 1 million tulips on display around the city. There are many places to enjoy the tulips, here are some ideas to get you started. (TPD)

(24) I flew from Santa Barbara to *Colorado Springs*, rented a car and drove southwest to *Zapata Ranch* (@ranchlands), located a few miles from the sand *dunes*. So far in two days at the *ranch* I've been over to the sand *dunes* three times […]. It's windy, because otherwise the *dunes* couldn't exist, but it's not a big deal since it's stunningly beautiful. (TB)

Both posts are informative and persuasive at the same time. However, while TPD thematise the Canadian Tulip Festival and directly address their audience by means of the pronoun *you*, TB's post carries a stronger emotive connotation, given the use of the pronoun *I* and the emphatic language exemplified by *stunningly beautiful* to describe the landscape surrounding the ranch. Thus, while practical advice is given in (23) in the form of a list of places which may be visited, in (24) the message is more indirect, although it contains a clear promotional element, i.e. the mention *@ranchlands*: thanks to this device, TB acknowledges and advertises one of his partners.

The influencers' personal narrative is supported by other keywords which are not directly related to travelling, but which may refer to crucial personal events in their life, as in TBA's case, who reports her travel experiences during her first pregnancy. This is indexed by the keywords *babymoon*, *pregnant*, and *outfit*, which can be seen in context in (25).

(25) Whether you're planning a trip to the flower fields or the beach day or are looking for some cute pieces to keep you stylin' when *pregnant*, MaternityDresses.com has so many options to choose from! (TBA)

In this post, the needs and desires of pregnant fellow travellers, who are targeted directly by means of the pronoun *you*, are thematised in the dependent clause at the beginning of the conditional sentence. The main clause, instead, fulfils a promotional purpose, as it refers to one of TBA's partners, who can satisfy those needs and desires thanks to the clothing they sell. Overall, the personal account of TBA's experience is instrumental to including pregnant followers in the conversation, while showing them how this period of their life can be enjoyed while travelling.

Further aspects of the influencers' personal lives emerge from those keywords referring to their family members, such as *wife* in TB, or their pets: these are present in TBA, where the influencer writes about travelling with her dog Bailey, and in AK, where stories of her cats Lewis and Murray are shared. AK's posts are particularly interesting because they are not travel related, but they aim at endearing her to her followers by presenting her authentic experience as a cat

owner, as in (26), where she describes how one of her cats was successfully treated for a viral disease called feline infectious peritonitis (FIP).

(26) 84 days of painful shots later, *Lewis* is fully cured. He's the most wonderful *cat* – very daring and very cuddly. (AK)

The excerpt is emotively charged given the lexical items *painful*, *most wonderful*, *very daring*, and *very cuddly*. The authentic self which AK stages is intended to lend credibility to her communication by revealing the more private aspects of her life as a digital nomad – private aspects with which followers may identify.

Along similar lines, keywords such as *putin* in TB and *anger* in AK are used in contexts where the influencers voice their opinions regarding current global events, such as the war in Ukraine (27) and the 9/11 anniversary (28).

(27) *Putin*'s attack on Ukraine is the same as Hitler's attack on Czechoslovakia before WWII. (TB)

(28) I was going to write something about 9/11 today, but when I think about it, all I feel is *anger*. (AK)

By publicly stating their position, the influencers seek to reach out to like-minded individuals. Although these contents are not related to travelling, they are leveraged by the influencers as a manner to portray themselves as world citizens who are sensitive to what occurs around them. The disclosure of their opinions endows their narrative with authenticity. Moreover, assuming that their followers hold the same views, this type of content aims to boost the influencers' credibility, as they are based on shared values (Lou/Yuan 2019; Rani *et al.* 2023; Carvalho 2024).

In sum, the findings of the quantitative analysis in Sketch Engine shed light on the techniques deployed by the influencers to reach out to their audiences, and they revealed key thematic areas in the five sub-corpora stressing elements of uniqueness and authenticity in their profiles. However, as will be seen in the next section, the application of

a qualitative approach is beneficial to gaining a better understanding of their communication strategies.

4.3. Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of brand personality applied deductively in NVivo according to the framework described in Section 3 revealed that the most prominent dimensions in the whole ITI Corpus are the ones pertaining to Competence and Excitement; Sincerity is not as significant, while Sophistication and Ruggedness play a minor role. Table 7 indicates the distribution of personality dimensions in the whole corpus by reporting the number of coded segments for each of them (N) and their percentage breakdown (%).

Personality dimension (code)	*N*	*%*
Competence	206	35%
Excitement	221	38%
Ruggedness	7	1%
Sincerity	121	20%
Sophistication	34	6%
Total	589	

Table 7. Overall distribution of personality dimensions in ITI.

By intersecting the five cases[8] with the five thematic codes using the NVivo crosstab query function, insights were gained regarding the distribution of the dimensions in each Instagram account: the number of segments and their corresponding percentages are displayed in Table 8.

[8] In this section, the NVivo terminology introduced in Section 3 is used to refer to the components of the dataset.

	Instagram profile (case)									
Personality dimension (code)	*TPG*		*TBA*		*TB*		*AK*		*TPD*	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Competence	47	51%	37	29%	52	46%	45	28%	25	26%
Excitement	23	25%	52	40%	41	36%	69	44%	36	37%
Ruggedness	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	4	2.5%	2	2%
Sincerity	1	1%	33	26%	20	17%	36	23%	31	32%
Sophistication	21	23%	6	5%	0	0%	4	2.5%	3	3%
Total	92		128		114		158		97	

Table 8. Distribution of personality dimensions across the Instagram profiles.

From the table above it can be seen that the brand personality of each influencer blends different dimensions, albeit one is usually more relevant than the others. For instance, TPG is primarily defined by Competence, as was expected while examining the data in Sketch Engine. The excerpt in (29) further exemplifies this dimension in the sub-corpus, which is reflected at the level of both lexis and information structure: the former is represented by the monoreferential compound *premium economy class,* while the latter by the thematisation of the airline *Emirates*.

(29) *Emirates* is rolling out its long-awaited *premium economy class* to flights between London and Dubai starting August 1 and will be available to book starting next month. (TPG)

Competence is preponderant in TB as well, as can be seen in (30).

(30) News: if *you*'re traveling around Italy by train this summer, *Trenitalia* has finally loaded its schedules. *I*'ve been searching for Florence-Naples in June every week for several months now and *I* was just able to book it. Trains get

> more expensive the longer *you* wait, since the discounted tickets are snapped up first, so *book now*. (TB)

Examples (29) and (30) share the same thematic area, i.e. travelling, but while *Emirates* is foregrounded in (29), in (30) the railway company *Trenitalia* is not; ego-targeting elements such as the pronouns *you* and *I* draw attention to the fellow travellers' needs, which are thematised in the if-clause at the beginning of the segment, and on TB's experience, which is accounted for in the second sentence. At the end of the segment, the followers are once again addressed directly via the pronoun *you* and the imperative form *book now*.

While Excitement is the second most important dimension in TB, it has the highest number of segments in TBA and AK. An example for each influencer is given below (31 and 32).

(31) It's *the most wonderFULL* time of the year! Reminiscing on how *truly magical* the Christmas markets in Vienna were! (TBA)

(32) Oh, the #AeolianIslands! One of *my new favorite* places in the world, seven *gorgeous* volcanic islands off the northeast coast of #Sicily. (AK)

Both examples display emotive language, based on the use of exclamations and emphatic, evaluative expressions such as *the most wonderFULL* and *truly magical* in (31), and *my new favorite* and *gorgeous* in (32).

Interestingly, the combination of personality dimensions in TPD differs from that of the other influencers: although Excitement stands out, Sincerity is almost equally salient; Competence is well represented too, but it has fewer segments and is not as significant as it is in the other four Instagram accounts. The last example discussed in this section is therefore related to Sincerity, which seems particularly relevant in TPD considering that the contents they post often describe their experiences in natural settings, as in (33).

(33) *Bavaria*, Germany is the *perfect* place to *relax*
This *gorgeous* lake is Untersee at the foot of Zugspitze – the highest mountain in Germany. It is a *great* place to go for a hike, *slow down* and to *get away from your worries*. (TPD)

The travel destination, *Bavaria*, is thematised and described emphatically with the adjective *perfect*; further instances of emphatic language are *gorgeous* and *great*, which make the text emotive and persuasive. Indeed, TPD are appealing to followers who may be interested in hiking as a leisure activity which enables them to spend time in nature and prioritise their physical and mental well-being. This message is supported by the lexical items *relax*, *slow down*, and *get away from your worries*.

A final remark about the relatively marginal role of Sincerity, Ruggedness, and Sophistication in the corpus is here appropriate. When adapting Aaker's framework (1997) for this analysis, these dimensions appeared to be closely connected with thematic domains pertaining to travel and tourism. It is therefore interesting to note that they are here rather underrepresented, which may be explained with a general tendency in the posts sampled to reduce the polarisation between travel and tourism discourses.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In order to obtain global visibility, influencers need to strike a balance between the discourses of travel and tourism (Azariah 2016, 2017). When they address their followers as peers, they are presenting themselves as travellers, yet they need to tap into the promotional strategies of tourism discourse to ultimately authenticate their identity: "travel paves the way to tourism" in the sense that "a narrative describing a destination that offers a unique travel experience by being off the beaten path can potentially prompt others to visit the same place, as a result turning it into a popular tourist site" (Azariah 2017: 8). In this context, in order to effectively impact on followers' decision-making behaviour, it is imperative for influencers to project an image of credibility (Zha *et al.* 2018; Lou/Yuan 2019; Anuar *et al.* 2021;

Yılmazdoğan/Doğan/Altıntaş 2021; Asdecker 2022; Han/Chen 2022; Ghaly 2023; Rani *et al.* 2023; Carvalho 2024). Credible contents on Instagram help increase the number of followers, and this makes influencers attractive in the eyes of potential business partners such as DMOs and tourism companies.

The findings presented above show the tension that exists between the discourses of travel and tourism, as well as the strategies mobilised to resolve it. The quantitative investigation based on the frequency wordlist pinpointed the implementation of ego-targeting techniques in the corpus – albeit with variation across the five influencers – which indicates individual preferences in addressing followers. Overall, the messages crafted by the influencers are characterised by a personal, confidential tone, as is common in travel discourse mediated by blogs and other social media platforms: the first-person reference has a clearly identifiable sender, while the second-person reference aims to include followers in the conversation and invite their feedback. These devices, which are frequently combined with imperative verbs and interrogatives, increase the level of interactivity of the influencers' message, and thus enhance their authenticity and credibility (Anuar *et al.* 2021; Han/Chen 2022). However, the same devices are implemented also in a manner which aligns with the conventions of tourism discourse, for instance, when the influencers embed advertising messages into their posts and acknowledge their business partners.

The keyness analysis revealed terms pertaining to key thematic domains in tourism discourse, since they are related to considerations taken into account by any tourist when planning their trips, namely travel locations and transportation means. The extraction of keywords for each sub-corpus uncovered the specificities of the five influencers' discourses. The domain of travelling is predominant in TPG's communication, and it goes hand in hand with the impersonal tone he adopts, and with the instances of specialised language belonging to tourism discourse, as well as to other areas which may have been of interest to holidaymakers during pandemic times. These communicative choices verbalise TPG's expertise and contribute to his credibility, while also indicating his involvement in a process of self-professionalisation (van Driel/Dumitrica 2021).

Instead, the domain of travel destinations, which is prevalent in the other sub-corpora, indicated once again how the influencers' communication blends travel and tourism discourse. The description of travel destinations offers a backdrop to the influencers' personal narrative, thus boosting the authenticity of the message via emotionally loaded vocabulary. However, this personal narrative is often coupled with promotional messages targeted to specific market niches, such as budding digital nomads, pregnant travellers, and pet owners. In this sense, the narrative of travel influencers is frequently characterised by instances of self-commodification to be read between the lines.

The findings of the quantitative analysis in Sketch Engine provided useful insights into how the tension between the discourses of travel and tourism is reconciled in the corpus. Additionally, the application of a qualitative approach through deductive thematic analysis was fundamental for making sense of the unique brand personality which the influencers craft for themselves, so that their narrative is viewed as authentic and therefore credible by their followers. In this sense, the thematic coding informed by Aaker's model (1997), which is drawn from consumer behaviour studies, was helpful to pursue the research objective, as the language of tourism is consumeristic too (Dann 1996). At the same time, by performing the thematic analysis after examining the frequency and keyword lists, it was possible to take stock of the quantitative results to lend robustness to the qualitative investigation itself. This revealed how stratified the influencers' brand personality is, as it taps into different dimensions. The prevalence of Competence and Excitement may be motivated by the influencers' need to appear credible in front of their followers, whilst imbuing their narrative with a sense of enthusiasm, designed to harness their audiences' emotions. The combination of these strategies helps influencers pursue their communicative agenda, while reducing the polarisation between travel and tourism discourses.

Since this investigation focused on a small sample of influencers, and the corpus is limited, generalisations cannot be made about the interplay of travel and tourism discourses on Instagram. A more representative dataset should be collected in the future, extending investigation to more influencers and gathering a larger number of posts. Additionally, the reliability of the thematic framework proposed

should be tested by measuring intercoder agreement. Finally, the methodology applied in this work could be triangulated with other approaches. For instance, since visuals are of prime importance on Instagram, future research could account also for the role of multimodality in supporting the influencers' narrative. Moreover, the research design could be reinforced by obtaining insights from influencers themselves through interviews and focus groups.

Despite its caveats, this pilot study has adopted a model for discourse analysis that, if scaled up, could harness the combined potential of quantitative corpus linguistics techniques and qualitative thematic analysis to help fully understand the strategies which influencers deploy to engage their audiences and stage their personal narratives in the social media landscape, as they balance authenticity with self-commodification through a layered communicative repertoire drawn from travel and tourism discourses.

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