

A corpus-assisted metaphor analysis in portraying businesswomen: Diachronic changes in Hong Kong English news

Yifan Li¹, Yanlin Li², Kathleen Ahrens²

Department of English and Communication

& Research Centre for Professional Communication in English

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

¹yifaan.li@connect.polyu.hk, ²{yanlin.yl.li, kathleen.ahrens}@polyu.edu.hk

Abstract

Previous studies have explored the use of metaphors in businesswoman-related news in mainstream English media. The study presents a metaphor analysis of Hong Kong English news during the two decades before the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. To compare the diachronic changes during this period, our study constructed a corpus comprising news from the South China Morning Post. The corpus comprises two sub-corpora, covering the periods from 1978 to 1987 and 1988 to 1997, respectively. Overall, the two sub-corpora demonstrate a similar pattern across source domains. The most frequent source domains include COMPETITION, JOURNEY, MACHINE, BUILDING, and PHYSICAL OBJECT. This study identifies a mix of traditional masculine and feminine traits in the metaphors used. Drawing on the actions and the social realities that businesswomen encountered, the study provides insights into the reflective value of metaphorical expressions in news discourse.

1 Introduction

Hong Kong thrived as one of the newly industrialized regions in the 20th century. In the 1970s, the Hong Kong economy experienced a 10-year growth rate of 8.9% per annum. The opening-up policy of China further boosted Hong Kong's economic growth, with a 10-year trend of 8-9% growth since 1978. In the early 1990s, the 10-year growth rate stabilized at around 6.5% (Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, 2025).

The growth in the labor force was a significant factor in the economic success, contributing approximately 2.2% of the total increase of 6.3% from 1980 to 1996. In 1996, the total labor force was 1.5 times that of 20 years ago, while the female labor participation rate increased to 1.8 times. During the 20 years, the proportion of managers and administrators in the female labor force also rose from 0.6% to 7.1%, indicating significant progress

towards gender equality in higher positions (Census and Statistics Department, as cited in Chu, 2004).

However, the limited opportunities for women in career development have been a long-standing issue in pre-handover Hong Kong. As traditional Confucian values have influenced the society, women have faced various forms of discrimination, including economic, legal, and social. In terms of political participation, due to the centralized administration style and the influence of "old-boys" networks, women remained underrepresented until the 1960s (Lim, 2015). Although the gender gap has narrowed since 1976, the persistent imbalanced gender distribution in professional and management roles still highlights the challenges faced by women (Chu, 2004).

The growing number of female business leaders and the ongoing issue of gender equality have drawn researchers' increasing attention to investigating the representation of these leaders in news media. Metaphors, as a substantial form of figurative language, are deeply rooted in humans' cognitive system and powerfully shape our way of conceptualizing the world (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). As individual and social resources jointly influenced metaphors, metaphor analysis may provide insights into the underpinning ideological motivations behind discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004).

This study aims to 1) analyze the metaphors used to depict businesswomen in Hong Kong English news, 2) identify the metaphorical patterns in the representation of businesswomen in Hong Kong English news, and 3) examine the function and semantic changes of metaphors related to the social reality faced by businesswomen before the handover to China in 1997.

2 Literature review

2.1 Corpus-assisted metaphor analysis in political discourse

Metaphor analysis in political discourse has been studied in a wide range of contexts, including public speeches and debates. Recent studies have shown that metaphors often serve as rhetorical devices to achieve specific political objectives, which may vary depending on factors such as gender and personal preferences. For instance, Charteris-Black's (2009) research on metaphors in the UK parliament debate verified the emotive or persuasive function of metaphors in political discourse. Likewise, metaphors in news discourse may simultaneously increase linguistic diversity while influencing readers' perceptions of the information.

One of the most prevalent metaphorical source domains in metaphor research is the WAR source domain. Research on WAR metaphors in politicians' speeches provided detailed analyses of the contextual usage, which reflect the association with an individual politician's positioning. For example, Charteris-Black (2005) revealed that Margaret Thatcher used more WAR metaphors and primarily did so to attack her opponents. In contrast to Thatcher, the WAR metaphors Hillary Clinton used mainly positioned her as a protector or defender rather than a fighter (Ahrens, 2019). Thus, a detailed investigation of the metaphorical language used by an individual female politician may provide valuable insight into the self-description employed in political discourse. In addition, news discourse may complement these studies and offer insight into the image of female professionals through the use of metaphorical language.

2.2 Corpus-assisted metaphor analysis in mainstream English media

Previous studies have explored the use of metaphor to describe businesswomen in mainstream English media. Koller (2004a), for instance, compared metaphors for businesswomen and businessmen in corpora of mainstream English business news (e.g., Forbes and Financial Times). Her study argued that the prevalence of the WAR metaphors in the businesswomen corpus could be a result of imposing masculine labels on women within the male-dominated business world. In contrast, the use of CAREGIVER, DOCTOR, and GARDENER metaphors highlighted the traditional femininity that is often attributed to women. This hybrid-

ity in the feminine and masculine tendencies of metaphors may reflect the evolving roles of businesswomen in the male-dominated business sector. More specifically, this implies mixed societal attitudes towards businesswomen. Although they seem to integrate into their careers in a masculine way, the societal expectation of their feminine traits remains deeply rooted.

More recently, Li et al. (2024) further illustrated that the application of WAR metaphors in one of the mainstream English business news outlets, "Bloomberg Businessweek," where metaphors were leveraged to describe businesswomen's experiences addressing different issues amidst changing societal circumstances over time. The study showed that business media used metaphors to capture the challenges faced by businesswomen, reflecting a growing awareness of the public about discussing businesswomen-related issues and shaping public perception of advocating for gender equality in the business sector.

2.3 Corpus-assisted metaphor analysis in the Sinosphere

Metaphors are not only cognitively motivated but also carry strong connotations with the cultural context.

The use of metaphor in Asian cultures has been studied across different regions and within specific areas. Targeting the English newspapers in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, Ahrens and Zeng (2021) compared the source domain variation in the discussion of democracy directly before and after the 2016 US presidential election. They found that the three regions differed in the overall frequency of metaphors and distribution across source domains. Beijing editorials showed the highest frequency of metaphorical expressions. The preferred source domain was associated with the political-cultural context: Hong Kong typically used the BUILDING source domain to conceptualize the election process.

In contrast, Taipei used more JOURNEY metaphors to discuss the future goal of democracy. This research validated the significance of metaphor research in distinguishing the English varieties. In the Hong Kong context, Ahrens et al. (2021) revealed how the use of the BUILDING source domain was tailored to different goals of political leaders in policy addresses. During the sovereignty transition period, Hong Kong Governors and Hong Kong Chief Executives employed

their metaphorical language to achieve a better understanding of the audience on critical issues relevant to Hong Kong's development.

The above research inspires further examination of the metaphorical patterns in Hong Kong English in relation to social changes over time. To track the metaphor changes in Hong Kong's economic development and increasing female labor participation, it is worthwhile to study the pre-handover period.

2.4 Research gap and research questions

Previous studies have demonstrated the dominant role of WAR metaphors in business media and explored the evolving roles of gendered metaphors, including both masculine-oriented and feminine-oriented metaphors. However, most studies have focused on mainstream English media. As an outer circle region according to the Three Circles Model of World Englishes, Hong Kong has received limited attention in metaphor analysis of English news (Kachru, 1990). Additionally, few studies have explored the nuanced differences across various metaphorical source domains and the changes in metaphorical language within Hong Kong English news over time.

To address the research gaps, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1. How were businesswomen portrayed in Hong Kong English news before the handover?

RQ2. What were the proportions and general patterns of metaphorical expressions in businesswoman-related news? Did they share similar or distinct functions?

RQ3. What were the diachronic changes in metaphor usage during the two decades in the pre-handover period?

3 Methodology

3.1 Corpus creation

In this study, South China Morning Post (SCMP), the leading English newspaper in Hong Kong, was selected as the corpus data source. The data collection consists of two sub-corpora, each containing the entirety of 20 news articles: Corpus 1, covering the period 1978-1987 (18,358 words), and Corpus 2, covering the period 1988-1997 (12,041 words). Table 1 below shows the distribution of news articles by the published year. Compared with other corpus linguistic studies (Ahrens, 2019; Ahrens and Zeng, 2021; Koller, 2004a; Li et al., 2024), the corpus size was relatively small. We have planned

to expand the data after the handover time for further comparison and diachronic analysis.

The data were collected through keyword searching in the ProQuest Historical Newspaper Database and a manual review for news related to businesswomen. The keywords input in the searching bar were: "businesswoman" OR "businesswomen" OR "female entrepreneurs" OR "female executive" OR "female CEO" OR "female business leader" OR "woman entrepreneur" OR "women entrepreneur."

By combining general terms (e.g., businesswomen) with more specific references to women (e.g., female executive), we aim to include more relevant articles in the corpus. However, some mentions about women professionals that were not specified by gender markers may be missing, which inspires future optimization of the search method.

Corpus	Year	No. of Articles	Word count
1978-1987	1980	3	3,304
	1981	2	1,254
	1982	4	3,976
	1983	1	835
	1984	4	3,199
	1985	3	3,445
	1987	3	2,345
Sub-total	1978-1987	20	18,358
1988-1997	1988	4	1,729
	1989	2	1,254
	1990	3	1,555
	1991	2	1,027
	1992	1	533
	1994	1	1,098
	1995	3	2,828
	1996	3	1,797
	1997	1	220
	Sub-total	1988-1997	20
Total	1978-1997	40	30,399

Table 1: SCMP corpus 1978-1997

3.2 Metaphor analysis

According to Charteris-Black (2004), the critical metaphor analysis (CMA) generally involves three stages: metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation. In the first stage, metaphors are identified through a careful examination of keywords and context. The second stage involves analyzing the relationship between metaphors and discourse construction. The third stage addresses the social actors and the ideological and rhetorical motivations behind the metaphor usage. Following this framework, this study adopts a corpus-assisted approach, guided by Steen et al.'s (2010b) Metaphor Iden-

tification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), to systematically identify metaphors. First, the metaphor-related words were recorded by analyzing the texts. Then, we examined the contexts to identify some potential non-literal meanings and cross-domain mappings. Words originating from other semantic domains that contributed to their contextual meaning were classified as metaphors. In this study, we only included direct metaphors that were more salient, excluding implicit metaphors in the forms of substitution and ellipsis.

To verify the source domains of the identified metaphors, we employed the method proposed by Ahrens and Jiang (2020), consulting resources such as SUMO (Suggested Upper Merged Ontology), WordNet, and online dictionaries (e.g., Longman Dictionary). Based on the identified metaphors and their source domains, we further analyzed the relationship between metaphors and discourse construction. Finally, social factors, as well as the ideological and rhetorical motivations behind metaphor usage, were analyzed to explain how metaphors shape social perceptions.

This study utilized the corpus analysis software AntConc to search for all occurrences in the corpus (Anthony, 2024). After importing the news into AntConc, we conducted a secondary search for occurrences containing the following keywords: businesswoman, businesswomen, entrepreneur(s), executive(s), she, woman (noun), and women (noun). To ensure the relevance of the unmarked terms (e.g., entrepreneur, executive), we manually reviewed the cases by clicking the keywords and using the “file view” interface to examine the context.

During the metaphor analysis process, metaphors were annotated as direct or indirect, depending on whether the subject in the sentence referred to a businesswoman or businesswomen.

4 Findings & Discussion

4.1 The general pattern across source domains

4.1.1 The overview of the use of metaphors

The occurrence of metaphors in the two corpora is similar. The log-likelihood test results indicate that the differences in metaphor usage frequency between the two corpora are not statistically significant ($LL = 0.04$), suggesting a similar pattern in the two examined decades. The normalized frequency of metaphors is 338 per 100,000 words in Corpus

1, compared to 324 per 100,000 words in Corpus 2.

During the first decade (1978-1987), the South China Morning Post used more metaphors that directly referred to businesswomen than in the second decade (1988-1997). In Corpus 1, metaphors occurred 62 times, of which 49 were direct metaphors. Similarly, in Corpus 2, metaphors occurred 39 times, of which 32 were direct metaphors. Our statistical analysis was based on these direct metaphors.

We used a threshold cumulative percentage of up to 85% to determine the frequent source domains (see Table 2). The following figure shows the normalized ratio of the most frequently used source domains in the two corpora.

Although metaphors are common in communication, they constitute only 16.4% of words in written news, 7.7% in conversations, and 18.5% in academic texts (Burgers, 2016; Steen et al., 2010a). As a result, some source domains with lower raw frequencies were included in the analysis to reflect the overall scarcity of metaphors and their important role while ensuring consistency across the top five most frequent source domains.

Source domains	Corpus 1		Corpus 2	
	Raw	Cum. %	Raw	Cum. %
JOURNEY	15	30.61	9	28.13
COMPETITION	10	51.02	7	50.01
BUILDING	9	69.39	5	65.64
PHYSICAL OBJECT	7	83.68	2	71.89
MACHINE	6	95.92	5	87.52

Table 2: The cumulative frequency of the frequently used source domains

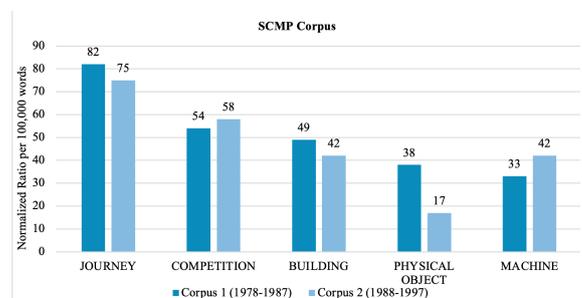


Figure 1: Frequently used metaphorical source domains in SCMP news

4.1.2 The distribution of source domains

While the frequency of metaphor occurrences in both corpora was similar, the distribution of source domains varied between the two time periods. JOURNEY and COMPETITION were the top two frequently used source domains for both decades, followed by BUILDING, PHYSICAL OBJECT, and MACHINE. Regarding the variety of metaphors, the two decades shared seven common source domains: the five most frequent source domains, along with PLANT and ANIMAL. Two unique source domains, PERSON and MONEY, were identified in the second decade.

4.1.3 The gendered orientation of source domains

The perceived gendered orientation of source domains has been discussed through a range of studies. Zeng et al. (2020) employed a qualitative approach to examine the interplay between metaphor, gender, and other political factors, using Hong Kong as a case study. They analyzed the metaphor usage of male and female politicians in relation to the gendered orientation of source domains. The results of the metaphor analysis demonstrated that the use of specific source domains was consistent with their gendered classification and aimed to construct a desirable image of political leadership. For example, the PHYSICAL OBJECT source domain was categorized as neutral in gender orientation. For instance, Female Secretaries for Justice tended to use the PHYSICAL OBJECT source domain in their speeches to enhance objectivity.

More recently, Ahrens et al. (2024) surveyed native English speakers to investigate the gender stereotypes of keywords associated with five prevalent source domains in metaphor research. Their findings showed that COMPETITION and BUILDING are perceived as more masculine, while JOURNEY and PLANT are perceived as more feminine.

The above studies have analyzed the complicated interplay between metaphor and gender. This study aims to enrich the existing research through the perspective of news discourse. Regarding the MACHINE source domain, Philip (2009) proposed that metaphors related to machinery fall into the masculine domain. We followed the classification of gender stereotypes on the most frequently occurring source domains to examine the patterns of metaphor usage in the discussion of businesswoman-related news.

4.1.4 Semantic changes of source domain usage

4.1.4.1 Similarities

In the two sub-corpora, the JOURNEY source domain demonstrates similar semantic functions and contextual usage. As discussed in section 4.2.1, the phased feature of the source domain is frequently employed to describe the actions taken by female entrepreneurs at various stages of business development. Additionally, the JOURNEY metaphors are also extended to suggest the ongoing nature of entrepreneurship and career progression.

Furthermore, the BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY metaphors often mark a significant position or change in status. Example 1 illustrates the disadvantaged status of businesswomen in terms of public social recognition. In Example 2, the phrase "took off" denotes the remarkable moment of the businesswoman in the business arena. Interconnecting with the COMPETITION and ANIMAL source domains, the media depicts the businesswoman as successful and adventurous in her business operations.

Example 1: Whenever the pollsters quiz the German public as to which woman has made the greater public impact, the names are always from the same circles - they are either in political life, or they are artists and athletes, or possibly wives of politicians. Far behind, in last place, if at all, follow businesswomen (SCMP, 1980).

Example 2: At 42, she is the hottest name in Britain's cosmetics industry, the winning filly no punter in his right mind would have backed when she took off in Brighton nine years ago (SCMP, 1985).

4.1.4.2 Differences

In this study, the COMPETITION source domain is an overarching category that includes WAR and SPORT/GAME. The former is often associated with words aligned with the WAR frame, such as "fight," "battle," and "combat." The latter typically involves less aggressive words, such as challenge. The COMPETITION source domain, with a focus on SPORT/GAME, only occurred in the first decade.

Regarding the discursive effect, the SPORT/GAME frame attenuates the aggressiveness of business activities by portraying

them as a competition between female and male entrepreneurs (see Example 3). On the contrary, the WAR frame tends to foreground the exclusivity of business competition (see Example 4) or address the welfare issue of businesswomen (see Example 5).

Example 3: Besides managing restaurants and boutiques, which can be considered a woman's natural domain, they have become tenacious in challenging their male counterparts in industrial fields such as construction, machinery, furniture manufacturing for export, soap and detergent making, and even in computer science (SCMP, 1984).

Example 4: Jennifer d'Abo made history this month when she became the first woman to launch a takeover battle on the London stock market (SCMP, 1985).

Example 5: Now, English businesswoman Diana Newhofer has come up with a way to fight back. Combatting loneliness, discomfort, and danger while travelling alone, she says, requires teamwork (SCMP, 1995).

4.2 The functions of source domains

4.2.1 Describe the efforts and achievements of businesswomen

Our study found that BUILDING and JOURNEY source domains primarily emphasize businesswomen's efforts in developing management skills and advancing to higher positions. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), a metaphorical concept could entail a coherent system of metaphorical expressions. For instance, under the TIME IS MONEY conceptual framework, some expressions correspond to money (spend, invest), some to limited resources (use, use up), and others to valuable commodities (have, give). In this case, two metaphors are under the two subcategories of BUSINESS IS BUILDING: CAREER IS A LADDER and MANAGEMENT ROLE IS THE TOP OF THE LADDER.

Example 6: Women working their way up the corporate ladder suffer far more than their male colleagues from stress, nightmares, and depression, and are four times as likely to seek psychological help, a new survey concludes (SCMP, 1981).

Example 7: At 29, she had made it to the top of the computer consultancy firm she worked for as general manager (SCMP, 1987).

Examples 6 and 7 above adopt BUILDING as the masculine-oriented source domain to display the process of striving for career advancement as businesswomen. As examined in Zeng et al.'s (2021) study, the BUILDING source domain primarily specifies a building construction or signifies a stage change. In this BUILDING source domain, career development is metaphorically conceptualized as climbing a corporate ladder, with the top representing executive roles. This metaphor illustrates the hierarchical corporate structure in the business world and the ongoing process of advancing to higher positions.

Likewise, the BUSINESS IS JOURNEY metaphor also serves to describe the continuous nature of career development. Aligned with Zeng et al.'s (2021) findings, JOURNEY metaphors often feature the ongoing process toward a goal and the progress made toward achieving it. In Example 8, the feminine-oriented JOURNEY metaphor conveyed an implicit positive attitude toward Tina Ti's career transition from actress to renowned businesswoman. By conceptualizing the career as a JOURNEY, her career advancement is conceptualized as the goal. Meanwhile, the metaphorical keyword "come a long way" highlights her unremitting efforts in her professional pursuits.

Example 8: Tina Ti, who survived as a hostage in yesterday's fatal Victoria Peak robbery, has come a long way since the 1960s when she was a screen sex bomb in Hong Kong (SCMP, 1992).

4.2.2 Discuss the challenges businesswomen faced in their careers

PHYSICAL OBJECT and COMPETITION are two source domains that often refer to the barriers that businesswomen encounter. The metaphorical expressions reinforce the hardships that businesswomen face when navigating challenges and career opportunities. In Example 9, the invisible male domination in the executive council is conceptualized as a physical bastion that hinders women from entering the executive board.

Example 9: Only two women have managed to break through the male bastion of the Executive Council, while seven of the 46 Legislative Councilors are women (SCMP, 1987).

The WAR frame is dominant in the occurrences within the COMPETITION conceptual metaphor. Corresponding to Li et al.'s (2024) research, the

business media depicted businesswomen as fighters for overcoming societal and cognitive-level challenges using WAR metaphors. As Example 10 suggests, businesswomen are expected to carefully balance their work and family responsibilities. By framing the struggle as a WAR with the metaphor keyword "conflict," the news media portrays the work-life balance as hard to reconcile. Furthermore, the gender prejudice against female business leaders indicates the disadvantaged perception they face in the business world. In Example 11, the speaker, Dr. Lber-Schade, used the BUSINESS IS WAR metaphor to highlight the urgent need for businesswomen to break those misconceptions and prejudices. By referring to businesswomen as active participants, she emphasized the significance of women's initiative in addressing the cognitive-level challenges. These two examples demonstrate the application of metaphors as persuasive and emotive devices.

Example 10: Even the most committed businesswoman, however, can feel the conflict of work and home if she has two young daughters, as Emme has (SCMP, 1980).

Example 11: "Women executives in West Germany, as in most other Western countries, still have to fight against lingering misconceptions and prejudices," she complains (SCMP, 1980).

4.2.3 Attach traditional masculine or feminine traits to businesswomen

4.2.3.1 Traditional masculine traits

Metaphor analyses of the COMPETITION source domain suggest that it tends to focus on the aggressive feature of business practice and the adventurous leadership style (Koller, 2004a,b; Li et al., 2024). This study further verifies that the depiction of businesswomen with traditional masculine traits, including being ambitious and competent in business, is often achieved through the COMPETITION source domain. The following examples feature explicit metaphor keywords in the WAR frame. The keyword "vengeance" successfully conveys Mrs. Chow's ambition in the business competition and her desire to outperform her competitors (see Example 12). The news media also used the BUSINESS IS WAR metaphor strategically regarding the economic and social environment (see Example 13). In contrast to strict social constraints, female professionals in Korea

are portrayed as self-conscious and independent in adapting to economic changes.

Example 12: As general manager of ATV, she has embarked on her job with a vengeance, hiring new staff and expanding the fare that the station has to offer (SCMP, 1989).

Example 13: Women are learning to survive in the swirling currents of Korea's rapid economic development, although the society itself is still weighed down by Confucian doctrines and imbued with the tacit sense of male supremacy (SCMP, 1984).

4.2.3.2 Traditional feminine traits

Echoing Koller (2004a), our study also finds that some unique metaphors appeared in the news about businesswomen. In the corpus, ANIMAL, PLANT, and PERSON are three source domains foregrounding prototypical femininity. The metaphor in Example 14, WOMEN ARE RESCUERS, highlights the feminine nature of the business activity while attenuating masculine traits.

Example 14: Marisa Bellisario, who became Italy's best-known woman business executive when she rescued the giant Italian telecommunications company from the brink of collapse, died on Thursday (SCMP, 1988).

Example 15: Dispensing with make-up and dressed plainly in a white shirt and black pants, the businesswoman said she reaped much more than money from her work (SCMP, 1995).

The PLANT source domain, which is perceived as more feminine, describes the traditional feminine trait less visibly. By conceptualizing WOMEN as GARDENERS, the business activity is defined as planting and sowing (see Example 15). Similarly, it is focused on the actions of businesswomen but downplays the fierce business competition.

4.3 Additional findings

Direct metaphors typically focus on reporting the achievements of an influential businesswoman or a group of businesswomen, and indirect metaphors often reflect the social realities that businesswomen face. The two indirect metaphors below use the PHYSICAL OBJECT and PLANT source domains. In Example 16, the description of Hong Kong was aligned with its essential status after the opening-up of China in 1978. As a bridge between the global

business and China, Hong Kong attracted business professionals with its unique economic system and friendly environment.

Example 16: Hong Kong is an important springboard into China for our products (SCMP, 1982).

Example 17: She added: “Hong Kong is a breeding ground for entrepreneurs because of its lack of government intervention [...] (SCMP, 1996).”

However, businesswomen’s rights were not consistent with the demand of economic growth, triggering advocacy voices for gender equality. Some indirect metaphors are juxtaposed with contrastive devices to intensify the challenges faced by businesswomen (see Examples 18, 19). Using the BUSINESS IS A JOURNEY metaphor, the speaker indicates the necessity of reforming the maternity protection system in Hong Kong (see Example 18).

Example 18: During a study comparing maternity leave rights in Asian countries 10 years ago, Ms. Thaler found that Hong Kong was the only place in Asia without maternity protection. “Even Burma was ahead of us,” she says (SCMP, 1987).

Example 19: They often do have to face a heavier burden of family responsibilities, too, and express negative emotions, compared with male colleagues (SCMP, 1989).

From the examples, indirect metaphors complement the direct metaphors in the business environment and common challenges faced by businesswomen. They form a nearly complementary relationship, supporting each other to present a more comprehensive metaphorical portrayal of female entrepreneurs.

5 Conclusion

In general, the metaphors in Hong Kong English news present a positive semantic prosody towards businesswomen. The news highlights the achievements of female business leaders while acknowledging the challenges they face in advancing their careers. The news adopts a combination of traditional masculine and feminine traits through metaphors to shape the image of businesswomen. Particularly, women were depicted as ambitious and competent in business operations, which was often associated with traditional masculinity. While also emphasizing traditional femininity, such as kindness and compassion.

The two sub-corpora demonstrated similar distribution across source domains, including COMPETITION, JOURNEY, MACHINE, BUILDING, and PHYSICAL OBJECT. In the first corpus, there were more metaphors, while in the second corpus, metaphors showed greater diversity in terms of their source domains.

To conclude, this study contributes to the analysis of metaphors in business-related news. It also extends the research on media in Hong Kong, which is an important outer circle region in the Three Circles Model of World Englishes.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Undergraduate Research and Innovation Scheme (URIS) at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Project Number: P0053583) and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Research Fund (Project Number: P0045314).

References

- Kathleen Ahrens. 2019. First Lady, Secretary of State and Presidential Candidate: A comparative study of the role-dependent use of metaphor in politics. In *Variation in political metaphor*, pages 13–34. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kathleen Ahrens and Menghan Jiang. 2020. Source domain verification using corpus-based tools. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 35(1):43–55.
- Kathleen Ahrens, Menghan Jiang, and Winnie Huiheng Zeng. 2021. BUILDING metaphors in Hong Kong policy addresses. *Metaphor in Language and Culture across World Englishes*, pages 105–128.
- Kathleen Ahrens and Winnie Huiheng Zeng. 2021. Expressing concepts metaphorically in English editorials in Sinosphere. *Exploring the ecologies of world Englishes in the twenty-first century: Language, society and culture*. Edinburgh University Press, UK, pages 170–192.
- Kathleen Ahrens, Winnie Huiheng Zeng, Christian Burgers, and Chu-Ren Huang. 2024. Metaphor and gender: Are words associated with source domains perceived in a gendered way? *Linguistics Vanguard*, 10(1):711–720.
- Laurence Anthony. 2024. [Antconc \(version 4.3.1\) \[computer software\]](#).
- Christian Burgers. 2016. Conceptualizing change in communication through metaphor. *Journal of Communication*, 66(2):250–265.
- Jonathan Charteris-Black. 2004. *Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Jonathan Charteris-Black. 2005. *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jonathan Charteris-Black. 2009. Metaphor and gender in British parliamentary debates. In *Politics, gender and conceptual metaphors*, pages 139–165. Springer.
- Priscilla Pue Ho Chu. 2004. *The making of women entrepreneurs in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau. 2025. [Executive summary](#). Government Report. Accessed: 2025-01-01.
- Braj B Kachru. 1990. World Englishes and applied linguistics. *World Englishes*, 9(1):3–20.
- Veronika Koller. 2004a. Businesswomen and war metaphors: ‘Possessive, jealous and pugnacious’? *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 8(1):3–22.
- Veronika Koller. 2004b. *Metaphor and gender in business media discourse: A critical cognitive study*. Springer.
- George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. 2003. *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press.
- Yanlin Li, Jing Chen, Kathleen Ahrens, and Chu-Ren Huang. 2024. The evolving use of WAR metaphors in businesswomen-focused media discourse. In *Proceedings of the 38th Pacific Asia Conference on Language, Information and Computation*, pages 1377–1386.
- Adelyn Lim. 2015. *Transnational feminism and women’s movements in post-1997 Hong Kong: Solidarity beyond the state*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Gill Philip. 2009. Non una donna in politica, ma una donna politica: Women’s political language in an Italian context. In *Politics, gender and conceptual metaphors*, pages 83–111. Springer.
- Gerard J Steen, Aletta G Dorst, J Berenike Herrmann, Anna A Kaal, and Tina Krennmayr. 2010a. Metaphor in usage.
- Gerard J Steen, Aletta G Dorst, Tina Krennmayr, Anna A Kaal, and J Berenike Herrmann. 2010b. A method for linguistic metaphor identification.
- Huiheng Zeng, Dennis Tay, and Kathleen Ahrens. 2020. A multifactorial analysis of metaphors in political discourse: Gendered influence in Hong Kong political speeches. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 10(1):141–168.
- Winnie Huiheng Zeng, Christian Burgers, and Kathleen Ahrens. 2021. Framing metaphor use over time: ‘Free Economy’ metaphors in Hong Kong political discourse (1997–2017). *Lingua*, 252:102955.