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Powering the Narrative: Metaphors of Energy in Contemporary News Media and Their Ecological Significance

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Wang, Yu & Habil, Hadina. 2025. Powering the Narrative: Metaphors of Energy in Contemporary News Media and Their Ecological Significance. ***Sign Languages and Linguistics Convergence Research,*** *2*(2), 195-223. This study investigates the metaphorical representation of energy in contemporary news discourse. Adopting a qualitative approach grounded in Critical Metaphor Analysis and informed by an ecolinguistic perspective, the research examines how energy and energy transition are framed through conceptual metaphors. The analysis identifies six dominant metaphorical source domains and each contributes distinct cognitive, ideological, and ecological functions. The BUILDING metaphor emphasizes stability, planning, and systemic development; LIVING BEING metaphor foregrounds vitality, resilience, and interdependence; ENTITY metaphor materializes energy as a tangible and manageable object; JOURNEY and VEHICLE metaphors highlight goal-directed movement, momentum, and actionable strategies; and WAR metaphor frames energy transition as a high-stakes, competitive campaign. Collectively, these metaphors produce a multifaceted, cognitively accessible, and strategically oriented discourse, presenting energy transition as both a societal and ecological transformation. The study highlights the ecological resonance of these metaphors, demonstrating their representational and ideological implications in media discourse. These findings contribute to critical media studies, cognitive linguistics, and ecolinguistics, offering insights into the role of metaphor in shaping energy discourse and promoting environmentally responsible narratives in contemporary journalism.

Key Words: Metaphors, Energy, Energy Transition, News Media, Ecolinguistics

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1. Introduction

Energy is central to contemporary debates on economic development, environmental sustainability, and climate change (Rosen, 2021). How energy is represented in public discourse shapes public understanding and societal attitudes toward environmental responsibility. Newspapers, as a primary information source, often use metaphorical language to make abstract concepts accessible and persuasive (Zhang & Skoric, 2018). Metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices; they structure thought, highlight particular aspects of reality, and influence interpretation (Charteris-Black, 2004). In media discourse, energy is frequently framed metaphorically, shaping readers' perceptions of both its benefits and ecological costs.

Despite growing interest in environmental metaphors, research on energy metaphors in newspapers remains limited, particularly in non-Western contexts. Most studies focus on Western media, leaving a gap in understanding how energy issues are represented in Asian newspapers. This is significant given Asia's central role in global energy production and consumption (Khazaee et al., 2022). Investigating metaphors in Asian media provides insights into how energy is conceptualized, how ecological concerns are communicated, and how discourse influences public understanding of sustainability. This study addresses this gap by examining metaphors of energy in *China Daily*, a leading English-language newspaper aimed at domestic and international audiences. News discourses containing the keyword "energy" were selected to explore representations of production, consumption, policy, and environmental impact.

The study applies Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004) and Stibbe's (Stibbe, 2021) ecolinguistic view to examine the conceptual metaphors of energy and their ecological significance. CMA offers a systematic framework for identifying how metaphorical language reflects and reinforces particular worldviews and priorities. Ecolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationship between language and ecology, investigating how discourses shape human perceptions of and interactions with the natural world (Fill, 1998; Halliday, 1990). One of the most influential contributions of ecolinguistics comes from Stibbe (2015, 2021), who developed the framework of ecological discourse analysis. This approach evaluates discourses based on whether they contribute to

the well-being of ecosystems and the life systems that depend on them. Dominant metaphors reveal how language can either promote sustainable thinking or reinforce exploitative approaches to natural resources. By analyzing these metaphors, the study highlights their ecological resonance and contribution to shaping public perception.

Guided by three research questions, the study investigates: (1) the dominant metaphorical representations of energy in *China Daily*; (2) how these metaphors shape understanding of energy-related issues; and (3) the ecological significance of these metaphorical framings, particularly regarding sustainability and environmental awareness.

This research contributes to ecolinguistics and media studies by showing that metaphorical language in newspapers is not neutral: it actively powers the narrative of energy discourse, influencing ecological awareness and attitudes toward sustainability. While prior studies have examined environmental metaphors in Western media, few have focused on Asian newspapers, making this study a timely contribution. By emphasizing the ecological significance of energy metaphors, it offers insights for journalists, policymakers, and educators seeking to promote responsible, sustainability-oriented discourse.

In summary, this article examines how metaphors of energy in *China Daily* both reflect and shape public understanding of energy and environmental issues. Using CMA and an ecolinguistic lens, it identifies patterns of metaphorical representation, considers their ecological resonance, and demonstrates how media language contributes to public engagement with sustainability. The study underscores that the way energy is talked about matters, not just for communication, but for ecological awareness and responsible action.

2. Literature

2.1. Metaphors in News Discourse

Metaphors are pervasive in news discourse, shaping public understanding, framing issues, and reflecting underlying ideologies (Charteris-Black, 2004).

Research in this area draws on cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and media studies, highlighting the role of metaphor as both a cognitive and communicative tool. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), first developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), provides the theoretical foundation for much of this research by proposing that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a cognitive mechanism through which abstract target domains are systematically understood in terms of more concrete source domains via structured cross-domain mappings. Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) extends this perspective, examining the ideological and pragmatic functions of metaphors in news and public discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004). These frameworks are widely used to explore how metaphors frame news events, construct identities, and influence public opinion.

Common metaphor types observed in news discourse include war metaphors, journey metaphors, and anthropomorphic or nature-based metaphors, each carrying distinct rhetorical and cognitive effects (Anber, 2023; Flusberg et al., 2018). War metaphors, for example, often frame complex political or social issues as battles or conflicts, emphasizing struggle, urgency, and the need for decisive action. Journey metaphors can depict processes of change, progress, or development, guiding audience interpretations of events as linear or goal-oriented. Anthropomorphic and nature-based metaphors, on the other hand, humanize or naturalize abstract concepts, potentially fostering empathy or ecological awareness.

Metaphors in news discourse serve several key functions. First, they are central to framing and persuasion, helping journalists and politicians render complex issues more accessible and emotionally resonant for audiences (Zhabayeva, 2024). For instance, the use of war metaphors to describe policy challenges or crises can generate urgency and motivate action. Second, metaphors reflect ideological positioning, revealing and reinforcing particular stances while subtly shaping public attitudes and policy debates (Otieno et al., 2016). Third, metaphors contribute to narrative construction, with extended metaphorical narratives in news promoting specific worldviews, cultural values, or national identities (Zhabayeva, 2024).

2.2. Metaphors of Energy

The metaphor of energy is a central tool for conceptualizing, teaching, and

communicating about energy. Research reveals that metaphors not only shape understanding but also highlight and obscure different aspects of the energy concept.

Energy has been described in the literature through entity metaphors, in which it is construed as something that can be “accounted for,” “flow,” “be carried,” “change forms,” “be lost,” or “be stored” (Lukmanovna, 2025; Lancor, 2014). Such metaphorical patterns have been documented in various discourses, where they are associated with reasoning about energy conservation, transfer, and transformation (Harrer, 2017). However, each metaphor emphasizes certain features while potentially obscuring others. This plurality reflects both the complexity of the concept and the disciplinary commitments, which may locate energy in different entities or processes.

Research informed by metaphor theory has examined how abstract scientific concepts, such as energy, are often explained and learned through metaphorical projections grounded in everyday experience (Amin, 2009). The shift from naive, concrete understandings to abstract, scientific ones is facilitated by adopting and adapting these metaphors (Harrer, 2017). In media discourse in particular, energy-related metaphors are widely used to frame, communicate, and evaluate energy issues, shaping how such issues are publicly understood in both historical and contemporary contexts.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate how energy is metaphorically represented in contemporary news discourse. The following section outlines the research design and data collection methods.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004) to examine how energy is represented metaphorically in contemporary news discourse. CMA provides a systematic framework for identifying metaphorical expressions, analyzing their source and

target domains, and interpreting their ideological and ecological significance. The study integrates an ecolinguistic perspective (Stibbe, 2021), enabling assessment of how metaphorical framing influences environmental awareness and public understanding of sustainability.

In line with CMA (Charteris-Black, 2004), the identification and classification of source domains in this study followed an inductive, data-driven process, rather than relying on predetermined taxonomies. CMA does not assume universal or hierarchical categories of source domains; instead, metaphors are grouped based on the linguistic realizations found in the corpus and the image schemas they activate (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010; Semino, 2008).

Following this principle, metaphorical expressions were clustered into source domains according to:

Shared image schemas (e.g., OBJECT schema, CONSTRUCTION schema, JOURNEY schema).

Semantic field coherence based on recurring lexical patterns.

Distinct conceptual mappings between source and target domains.

Ideological and ecological functions, consistent with CMA's interpretive orientation.

Although corpus-based tools were employed to support the identification and frequency analysis of metaphorical expressions, the study's primary focus is qualitative interpretation. This interpretive approach examines how metaphors construct meaning, frame energy transition, and convey ecological and policy-relevant messages. By combining systematic identification with in-depth qualitative analysis, the methodology ensures both rigor and rich insights into the ways *China Daily's* discourse conceptualizes energy and its transition.

3.2. Data Collection

The corpus for this study consists of articles published in *China Daily*, one of China's leading English-language newspapers, covering both domestic and international audiences. *China Daily* was selected for its prominence, accessibility, and representation of official and semi-official discourse on energy and environmental issues.

Articles were collected using the keyword “energy” in the *China Daily* online archive, covering the period from January 2025 to June 2025, which captures recent discussions on energy policy, consumption, technological development, and ecological concerns. The initial search yielded 73 articles, which were screened according to relevance. Articles were included if they:

(1) Contained substantial discussion of energy-related topics (e.g., production, consumption, policy, sustainability).

(2) Employed descriptive or narrative language that could potentially contain metaphorical expressions.

After this screening process, 58 articles were retained for analysis. These articles formed the dataset for identifying and analyzing conceptual metaphors of energy, providing a focused and robust basis for qualitative investigation.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the main metaphorical patterns identified in the *China Daily* energy corpus, drawing on the framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis and the ecolinguistic perspective. The analysis identified six dominant metaphorical source domains: BUILDING, LIVING BEING, ENTITY, JOURNEY, VEHICLE, and WAR. These categories emerged from recurring linguistic patterns and the image schemas they invoked, as recommended in Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004). It is important to note that these domains are not intended as universal metaphor categories; rather, they reflect the conceptual patterns specific to this corpus. In particular, BUILDING and ENTITY are treated separately because they arise from different experiential schemas: BUILDING evokes construction, stability, and structure, while ENTITY evokes tangibility, objecthood, and manipulability. Their distinct cognitive and ideological functions justify separate treatment, following CMT and CMA’s emphasis on conceptual, not taxonomic, classification (Kövecses, 2010; Semino, 2008).

The analysis focuses on how metaphors conceptually frame energy and how these framings reflect underlying cognitive, ideological, and ecological orientations. Through systematic identification of metaphorical expressions and their corresponding

source and target domains, several dominant conceptual metaphors emerged, including ENERGY IS A BUILDING, ENERGY IS A LIVING BEING, ENERGY IS AN ENTITY, ENERGY TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY, ENERGY TRANSITION IS A VECHILE and ENERGY TRANSITION IS A WAR. Each metaphor reveals a distinct way of constructing meaning around energy transition, sustainability, and national development. The following subsections discuss these major metaphors in turn, illustrating their linguistic realizations, conceptual mappings, and ecological resonance within the context of Chinese news discourse. Please refer to the Appendix for full texts of the examples.

4.1. ENERGY IS A BUILDING

ENERGY IS A BUILDING is one of the most prominent conceptual metaphors identified in the corpus. In this metaphorical framing, energy is represented as a constructed and structured system, with stability, progress, and improvement as its key attributes. The discourse draws from the source domain of architecture and construction, projecting it onto the target domain of energy to conceptualize energy development as an ongoing process of designing, strengthening, and upgrading a material structure. This metaphor is linguistically realized through frequent use of expressions such as “laying a foundation,” “building a system,” “upgrading the energy structure,” and “strengthening energy security.”

These linguistic realizations highlight key source-target mappings of the BUILDING metaphor:

[Table 1] Mappings of the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A BUILDING

SOURCE DOMAIN: BUILDING / CONSTRUCTION	TARGET DOMAIN: ENERGY
Foundation, structure, upgrade	Energy systems, renewable deployment
Maintenance, renovation	Policy improvement, energy infrastructure
Strength, stability	Reliability, sustainability
Foundation, structure, upgrade	Energy systems, renewable deployment

For example, “This has laid a good foundation for large-scale deployment of

renewable energy in the world." Here, the process of advancing renewable energy is metaphorically understood as laying a foundation, a fundamental stage in the construction of a stable, enduring edifice. The foundation metaphor implies solidity, permanence, and long-term planning, evoking a sense of deliberate progress and collective effort. It constructs energy transition not as a chaotic or spontaneous change, but as a methodical process of building toward a sustainable future.

Similarly, another example reads: "But since economies still run mostly on fossil fuels, it will take a long time to switch to renewable energy and upgrade the energy structure." The phrase "upgrade the energy structure" extends the same construction metaphor, framing energy systems as architectural frameworks that can be redesigned or modernized. The idea of upgrading implies both technological progress and structural improvement, suggesting that existing energy systems are not discarded but renovated, a process reflecting incremental rather than revolutionary change.

From a cognitive perspective, this metaphor serves to make the abstract processes of energy transition more tangible and comprehensible. By invoking familiar imagery of construction, readers can conceptualize energy development as something concrete, layered, and goal-oriented. The metaphor highlights progressive temporal logic: foundations precede structures, and upgrading ensures resilience and efficiency. This temporal sequencing frames energy transition as a linear, cumulative process rather than a disruptive or uncertain shift.

At the ideological level, the BUILDING metaphor performs significant framing work. It aligns with national narratives of construction and collective advancement, echoing broader political expressions such as "building a modern socialist country" or "laying the foundation for national rejuvenation." When applied to energy, this metaphor situates technological and environmental change within a larger narrative of national progress and developmental continuity. It thus reinforces the legitimacy of state-led, long-term planning in energy governance, presenting renewable transition as both a technical and moral construction project for the future.

From an ecolinguistic perspective (Stibbe, 2015), the metaphor's ecological resonance is beneficial. The notion of laying a foundation for renewable energy promotes stability, foresight, and sustainability, which are consistent with ecological values of balance and future-oriented responsibility. The metaphor's constructive

connotation aligns with the discourse of building a green future, thus supporting environmental awareness and the ethical imperative of sustainable growth.

In summary, the metaphor ENERGY IS A BUILDING functions as a key conceptual and ideological frame in *China Daily's* reporting on energy transition. Through expressions such as "laying a foundation" and "upgrading the energy structure," the discourse depicts energy as a planned, systematic, and constructive enterprise that embodies human ingenuity and collective purpose. This metaphor emphasizes the importance of stable, resilient, and well-coordinated energy systems, highlighting how careful planning and incremental improvement can support long-term sustainability. Its ecological resonance underscores the value of building a robust renewable energy infrastructure that contributes to environmental stewardship and the transition toward a greener, more sustainable future.

4.2. ENERGY IS A LIVING BEING

The metaphor ENERGY IS A LIVING BEING frames energy and energy infrastructure as organisms that require protection, maintenance, and care. This conceptualization draws on the source domain of biology and life, projecting qualities such as vulnerability, health, and resilience onto the target domain of energy. In this metaphorical schema, energy systems are not merely inanimate structures or resources but living entities with interdependent parts, emphasizing the need for ongoing attention and systemic care.

These linguistic realizations highlight key source-target mappings of the LIVING BEING metaphor:

[Table 2] Mappings of the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A LIVING BEING

SOURCE DOMAIN: LIVING BEING / ORGANISM	TARGET DOMAIN: ENERGY / ENERGY SYSTEMS
Backbone, vital organ	Energy infrastructure, grid stability
Lifecycle, full-chain security	Energy storage systems, system integrity
Health, resilience	Safety, efficiency, reliability
Vulnerability, interdependence	Exposure to risks, systemic interconnection

An example from *China Daily* states: "To protect food systems and reduce the exposure of the energy infrastructure—the backbone of our economies—sector-specific coverage is needed." Here, the energy infrastructure is metaphorically described as the backbone of economies, implying that it functions like a central, vital component of a living organism. The metaphor evokes notions of fragility, essentiality, and interdependence, suggesting that disruptions to energy systems could have cascading effects on broader societal functions, such as food security and economic stability.

Another example reads: "Energy storage systems must achieve full-chain security to ensure the safety, efficiency, and grid-friendliness of the entire lifecycle of energy storage systems." The phrases "full-chain security" and "entire lifecycle" further anthropomorphize energy systems, highlighting the importance of holistic care and systemic integrity. By conceptualizing energy storage as a living entity with a lifecycle, the discourse encourages a perception of energy as something dynamic, sensitive, and responsive, requiring comprehensive oversight rather than isolated interventions.

Cognitively, this metaphor leverages humans' embodied experience with living beings. Concepts such as health, vulnerability, and interdependence are intuitively understood, making abstract systems like energy grids and storage technologies more relatable and comprehensible. The metaphor emphasizes the connectivity and responsiveness of energy systems, framing them as active participants in economic and ecological processes rather than passive infrastructures.

Ideologically, the LIVING BEING metaphor emphasizes responsibility, stewardship, and sustainability. It frames energy systems as entities that must be cared for through policy, technology, and regulation. By presenting energy as vulnerable yet vital, the discourse justifies proactive governance, risk mitigation, and comprehensive planning, reinforcing narratives of human oversight, technical competence, and collective accountability.

From an ecolinguistic perspective (Stibbe, 2015), the metaphor aligns closely with ecological values. By framing energy systems as living entities, it highlights interdependence, system health, and long-term sustainability, promoting awareness of the ethical and environmental dimensions of energy management. Unlike mechanistic metaphors such as VEHICLE or WAR, LIVING BEING emphasizes

responsiveness, resilience, and ecological sensitivity, encouraging a perspective in which human and technological systems must coexist harmoniously with environmental processes.

In summary, the metaphor ENERGY IS A LIVING BEING frames energy systems as vital, interdependent, and responsive entities. Expressions such as "backbone", "full-chain security", and "lifecycle" anthropomorphize energy, making complex infrastructures cognitively accessible while reinforcing ideological narratives of responsibility and sustainability. Ecologically, this metaphor promotes awareness of systemic integrity and interdependence, offering a perspective that emphasizes care, resilience, and the ethical management of energy resources.

4.3. ENERGY IS AN ENTITY

The metaphor ENERGY IS AN ENTITY conceptualizes energy and its transition as discrete, tangible units or objects, making an abstract and complex system more measurable, observable, and manageable. In this framing, energy is treated as a "thing" that can be controlled, owned, or acted upon, emphasizing its materiality and manipulability.

These linguistic realizations highlight key source-target mappings of the ENTITY metaphor:

[Table 3] Mappings of the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS AN ENTITY

SOURCE DOMAIN: ENTITY / OBJECT	TARGET DOMAIN: ENERGY / ENERGY TRANSITION
Tangible object, unit	Energy as measurable and governable units
Chain, possession, control	Renewable energy supply, energy governance
Manageable item, resource	Policy priorities, strategic interventions
Deliverable, distributable	Climate actions, energy transition outcomes

An example from *China Daily* reads: "The COP28 presidency has rightly emphasized a few priorities to deliver ambitious, yet pragmatic climate actions, such as a further push for a just energy transition." Here, energy is framed as

an entity that can be managed and distributed according to policy priorities, highlighting its governable and structured nature. Another example states: “Some international commentators complain that the country is tightening its grip on the renewable energy chain.” The phrase “grip on the renewable energy chain” treats energy as a tangible object or resource, subject to control, ownership, and strategic governance.

Cognitively, the ENTITY metaphor allows readers to conceptualize energy as a controllable unit, simplifying complex technical processes and facilitating understanding of policy measures, supply chains, and governance mechanisms. Ideologically, it reflects state authority and strategic management, emphasizing the government’s role in regulating, directing, and overseeing energy systems to achieve national and international objectives.

Ecologically, the ENTITY metaphor highlights the potential for systematic interventions, efficient management, and strategic planning in energy systems. By conceptualizing energy as a discrete and manageable unit, it underscores how targeted actions can enhance efficiency, reduce emissions, and support a just and sustainable energy transition.

In summary, the metaphor ENERGY IS AN ENTITY materializes energy as a tangible and governable object, reinforcing narratives of policy guidance and strategic oversight while promoting both technical understanding and proactive environmental action. It emphasizes the capacity for deliberate, coordinated efforts to achieve sustainability goals, supporting a measurable and actionable approach to the transition toward renewable and low-carbon energy systems.

4.4. ENERGY IS A JOURNEY

Another dominant metaphorical pattern in the *China Daily* energy corpus is ENERGY TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY. This metaphor draws upon the source domain of movement and travel to conceptualize the complex process of shifting from fossil fuels to renewable sources. In this framing, energy transition is not merely a technical adjustment, but a directed process of movement toward a desired destination, typically sustainability, modernization, or global cooperation. The JOURNEY metaphor highlights progression, purpose, and continuity,

allowing readers to understand energy transformation as a collective voyage guided by strategic planning and shared vision.

These linguistic realizations highlight key source-target mappings of the JOURNEY metaphor:

[Table 4] Mappings of the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A JOURNEY

SOURCE DOMAIN: JOURNEY / TRAVEL	TARGET DOMAIN: ENERGY TRANSITION
Roadmap, path, route	Steps and milestones in transition
Destination, arrival	Sustainability, economic diversification
Movement, progression	Gradual adoption of renewable energy
Roadmap, path, route	Steps and milestones in transition

A representative example appears in the statement: “GEIDCO has transformed global energy interconnectivity into a roadmap for global energy transition and sustainable development.” Here, the expression “roadmap” clearly evokes the journey schema. The roadmap functions as a metaphorical guide that charts direction, stages, and milestones, suggesting that the transition toward renewable energy is a structured, goal-oriented path rather than a random or uncertain process. By conceptualizing global energy interconnectivity as a roadmap, the discourse constructs an image of coordinated progress; different nations and sectors are metaphorically traveling together toward a common destination of sustainability. This metaphor not only simplifies the abstract notion of systemic change but also conveys optimism and manageability, reinforcing a belief that the journey is well-guided and achievable.

A similar metaphorical framing occurs in another example: “Through a major transformation of their energy structure, an essential path to achieve economic diversification and sustainable development.” The word “path” situates energy transformation within a spatial schema, implying movement from a current, less desirable state to a future, more sustainable one. The path metaphor reflects the conceptual logic of progression, where each step represents an incremental achievement toward the ultimate goal of ecological balance and energy security. By portraying transformation as an essential path, the discourse naturalizes the

idea that development and sustainability are destinations that can only be reached through deliberate movement and long-term effort.

From a cognitive perspective, the JOURNEY metaphor is effective because it aligns with a deeply embodied human experience—movement through space and time. Humans naturally conceptualize goals as destinations and progress as movement, so describing energy transition in these terms makes it intuitively comprehensible. Expressions such as roadmap and path evoke mental imagery of navigation, routes, and destinations, which help readers conceptualize complex systemic changes as manageable sequences of steps. This cognitive framing also reinforces temporal logic: energy transition is a process that takes time, implying patience and persistence rather than immediate transformation.

At the ideological level, the JOURNEY metaphor serves important framing functions. It positions China's energy transformation within a global trajectory of progress, emphasizing coordination, leadership, and collective movement. The roadmap imagery particularly highlights China's role as both a traveler and a guide in the global journey toward sustainable energy, reinforcing its self-representation as a responsible and forward-looking actor in global governance. This narrative aligns with diplomatic discourses that emphasize shared destiny and cooperation, suggesting that sustainable development is a common journey for humanity rather than a competition among nations.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, the JOURNEY metaphor carries strong ecological resonance: it emphasizes purposeful movement toward sustainability and highlights the importance of collective and coordinated action to achieve ecological goals. The metaphor invites engagement and hope, constructing sustainability as a destination that can be reached through shared effort, planning, and vision. It encourages readers to perceive the energy transition as a progressive, goal-oriented process, fostering commitment to renewable energy development and long-term environmental stewardship.

In summary, the metaphor ENERGY TRANSITION IS A JOURNEY constructs a compelling narrative of direction, purpose, and cooperation. Through linguistic realizations such as "roadmap" and "path," energy transformation is depicted as a guided voyage toward sustainable development. The metaphor resonates positively with ecolinguistic principles of foresight, interdependence, and

sustainability, portraying the energy transition as a collective, forward-looking endeavor that aligns human activity with ecological and societal goals.

4.5. ENERGY IS A VEHICLE

The metaphor ENERGY TRANSITION IS A VEHICLE conceptualizes the process of shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy as a moving, directed, and controllable entity. This framing draws on the source domain of transportation, projecting notions of motion, speed, and direction onto the target domain of energy transition. In this metaphorical schema, progress, acceleration, and momentum are central, emphasizing the urgency and strategic management of energy transformation.

These linguistic realizations highlight key source-target mappings of the VEHICLE metaphor:

[Table 5] Mappings of the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A VEHICLE

SOURCE DOMAIN: VEHICLE / MOTION	TARGET DOMAIN: ENERGY TRANSITION
Accelerate, inject momentum, drive, steer	Speed up renewable adoption, strengthen policies, guide transformation
Path, route, destination	Trajectory toward sustainable energy
Engine, fuel, power	Drivers of policy, innovation, and cooperation
Accelerate, inject momentum, drive, steer	Speed up renewable adoption, strengthen policies, guide transformation

One illustrative example from the *China Daily* corpus reads: “Now the international community must accelerate the energy transition away from fossil fuels and simultaneously build resilience.” The verb “accelerate” evokes imagery of a vehicle gaining speed, suggesting that energy transition is not a passive process, but one that requires deliberate effort to maintain momentum. Similarly, another example states: “The EU-China Green Partnership endeavors to redress this disparity by injecting fresh momentum in the global energy transition and climate governance agenda.” The phrase “injecting fresh momentum” reinforces the vehicle schema, portraying energy transition as a moving entity whose

progress can be boosted, guided, and steered by policy interventions and international cooperation.

Cognitively, this metaphor aligns with embodied experiences of movement and control. Humans naturally understand acceleration, steering, and propulsion through physical experience, making the complex, multi-level processes of energy transition more intuitively graspable. By invoking the imagery of a moving vehicle, the discourse conveys that energy transition is not static; it requires constant effort, strategic navigation, and coordinated action to reach its intended destination.

Ideologically, the VEHICLE metaphor communicates urgency, agency, and global collaboration. In the first example, "the international community must accelerate the energy transition" frames the transition as a collective endeavor, assigning responsibility to global actors while emphasizing proactive measures. In the second example, the EU-China Green Partnership is portrayed as injecting momentum, positioning international partnerships as engines that propel the vehicle forward. These constructions highlight leadership, cooperation, and strategic management, reinforcing the notion that energy transition is both politically and technologically guided.

From an ecolinguistic perspective (Stibbe, 2015), the VEHICLE metaphor carries strong ecological resonance. It emphasizes directionality, proactivity, and purposeful action in achieving sustainability goals, signaling that deliberate interventions can accelerate the adoption of renewable energy and strengthen climate governance. The metaphor encourages readers to perceive the energy transition as manageable, actionable, and goal-oriented, aligning with principles of foresight, responsibility, and coordinated effort.

In summary, the metaphor ENERGY TRANSITION IS A VEHICLE frames the shift from fossil fuels to renewables as a dynamic, directed, and progressive process. Linguistic expressions such as "accelerate" and "inject momentum" highlight speed, coordination, and strategic movement, making abstract systemic change cognitively accessible. The metaphor resonates positively with ecolinguistic principles of purposeful sustainability and strategic action, portraying the energy transition as a collective, forward-moving endeavor that integrates technological, societal, and ecological objectives. Together with other metaphors in *China*

Daily, it contributes to a multi-layered understanding of energy discourse, combining cognitive clarity, ideological framing, and ecological significance.

4.6. ENERGY IS A WAR

The metaphor ENERGY TRANSITION IS A WAR conceptualizes the process of shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy as a strategic conflict or campaign, drawing on the source domain of military action. In this framing, energy transition is represented as a competitive, high-stakes endeavor, with participants, leaders, and battles, emphasizing power, influence, and achievement. This metaphor underscores urgency, prioritization, and national positioning in the global energy landscape, framing energy transition as both a challenge and a contest for dominance.

These linguistic realizations highlight key source-target mappings of the WAR metaphor:

[Table 6] Mappings of the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A WAR

SOURCE DOMAIN: WAR / MILITARY CAMPAIGN	TARGET DOMAIN: ENERGY TRANSITION
Frontline, forces, campaign, battle	Leadership in renewable energy, strategic projects
Strategy, competition, victory	National positioning, technological innovation
Threats, opponents	Fossil-fuel dependency, climate challenges
Frontline, forces, campaign, battle	Leadership in renewable energy, strategic projects

The WAR metaphor emphasizes competition, strategy, and national ambition. Unlike the BUILDING metaphor, which stresses stability, or the JOURNEY and VEHICLE metaphors, which highlight progression and motion, the WAR metaphor foregrounds conflict and rivalry. It frames energy transition as a site of geopolitical significance, where technological innovation, policy leadership, and international collaboration are understood in terms of strategic advantage.

A representative example illustrates this framing: “The new energy sector represents a crucial procedure for China to be at the forefront of global energy development.” Here, the metaphorical implication of “at the forefront” evokes the

imagery of a military advance or strategic positioning on the battlefield. China's engagement in the new energy sector is framed as a deliberate campaign, with success requiring careful planning, resources, and tactical execution. Another example further reinforces this conceptualization: "China and Germany are the two major forces in the global energy transition campaign." The term "forces" directly maps the military source domain onto the target domain of energy actors, portraying nations as combatants or strategic units in an ongoing campaign toward renewable energy leadership.

Cognitively, the WAR metaphor leverages familiar experiences of competition and battle, making abstract concepts such as global energy leadership and technological advancement more tangible. Terms such as "forces" and "forefront" evoke mental imagery of structured engagement, coordinated action, and stakes, allowing readers to conceptualize energy transition as a contest with clear objectives and rivals. This metaphor effectively conveys the intensity, prioritization, and urgency inherent in national and international energy policies.

Ideologically, the WAR metaphor reflects national ambition and geopolitical positioning. In the first example, China's pursuit of the forefront in global energy development is framed as a strategic maneuver, reinforcing a narrative of technological and developmental leadership. In the second example, positioning China and Germany as the two major forces highlights the competitive dimension of the energy transition, emphasizing international dynamics and national capabilities. Through this framing, energy transition is not only an environmental or technological issue but also a matter of national prestige and influence, situating sustainability within broader strategic and political objectives.

From an ecolinguistic perspective (Stibbe, 2015), the WAR metaphor carries destructive ecological resonance. While it underscores urgency and strategic focus, it also reinforces adversarial and anthropocentric thinking, portraying energy systems and ecological challenges as opponents to be conquered. This framing may oversimplify complex socio-ecological interdependencies, emphasizing domination and victory rather than collaboration and coexistence. By presenting energy transition as a battlefield, the discourse risks prioritizing competition and national advantage over ecological sensitivity or global collective responsibility, potentially marginalizing cooperative and systemic approaches to sustainability.

In summary, the metaphor ENERGY TRANSITION IS A WAR frames the shift to renewable energy as a high-stakes, competitive campaign. Expressions such as “forefront” and “forces” provide clarity about actors and objectives but also highlight the mechanistic and adversarial assumptions underlying this perspective. Ecologically, the metaphor conveys urgency but may obscure the interconnected and cooperative dimensions of environmental sustainability. Together with BUILDING, JOURNEY, and VEHICLE, the WAR metaphor illustrates the tension between competitive framing and cooperative ecological stewardship in *China Daily's* reporting.

In discussion, energy in *China Daily* is metaphorically represented through the combined use of building, entity, living being, journey, vehicle, and war metaphors, producing a multifaceted framing of energy issues as structured, dynamic, organic, goal-oriented, and competitive phenomena. Rather than operating in isolation, these metaphors collectively construct energy transition as a coordinated and manageable process shaped by planning, governance, and strategic intervention. In *China Daily*, journey and vehicle metaphors frame energy transition as a process of movement with direction and stages, portraying the development of renewable energy systems as a collective progression along planned routes, supported by institutional momentum and technological mechanisms. This framing emphasizes continuity, coordination, and purposeful advancement, aligning with earlier observations that movement-based metaphors are frequently used to conceptualize transition processes (Muhammad & Wahyuni, 2020), while extending them to the context of Chinese English-language media discourse. The building metaphor further reinforces this narrative by presenting energy systems and governance as deliberately constructed and improvable frameworks, foregrounding stability, planning, and institutional responsibility. Similar uses of building metaphors have been documented in policy-oriented energy discourse (Ahmed, 2022), and their prominence in *China Daily* suggests a close alignment between media representations and official policy framings of energy governance. The living being metaphor in *China Daily* emphasizes the vitality, resilience, and interdependence of energy infrastructure, contributing an ecological perspective that highlights care, protection, and holistic management. This organic framing resonates with earlier analyses of environmental metaphors (Goatly, 2007) but, in

this dataset, functions specifically to naturalize the integration of energy systems within broader ecological processes. At the same time, the entity metaphor materializes energy as a tangible and governable resource, foregrounding measurability, controllability, and strategic allocation, thereby supporting policy-oriented narratives of energy management (Castree, 2020). The war metaphor, by contrast, introduces a sense of urgency and competition, framing energy transition as a high-stakes strategic endeavor that foregrounds national leadership and decisive action. Such framing mobilizes a sense of collective purpose and legitimacy for decisive intervention, echoing patterns identified in recent studies of Chinese energy discourse (Huang & Liu, 2025), while simultaneously intensifying the political and ideological dimensions of sustainability.

Furthermore, although the BUILDING, LIVING BEING, and VEHICLE metaphors originate from different experiential domains—construction, biology, and transportation—they do not function as contradictory models in the corpus. Just as Cemeron et al. (2009) and Semino (2008)'s idea, contemporary discourse often employs metaphorical multiplicity, where several co-existing metaphors highlight different facets of the same abstract concept. The metaphors identified here serve complementary roles: the BUILDING metaphor emphasizes structural planning and system design; the LIVING BEING metaphor stresses vulnerability, vitality, and ecological interdependence; and the VEHICLE metaphor foregrounds direction, momentum, and policy acceleration. Together, these metaphors create a layered representation that strengthens the ecological narrative by integrating care, stability, and progress, rather than generating conceptual conflict. Their coexistence enriches the communicative framing of energy transition and reinforces its ecological significance. Together, these metaphors communicate that ecological sustainability in energy transition is not a passive outcome but a multi-dimensional endeavor requiring structural stability, careful stewardship, strategic intervention, and long-term planning.

From an ecological perspective, the five metaphors highlight different dimensions of environmental significance in energy discourse. The building metaphor emphasizes the robustness and reliability of energy systems, suggesting that durable infrastructure is essential for long-term ecological resilience. The journey and vehicle metaphors foreground process, direction, and momentum,

framing energy transition as a gradual but managed pathway toward sustainable outcomes and signaling the importance of coordinated action to reduce environmental harm. The living being metaphor underscores the vitality, interdependence, and care required to maintain energy systems, highlighting the ecological principle that human energy infrastructure is embedded within, and dependent upon, broader environmental systems. Meanwhile, the war metaphor draws attention to the urgency and high stakes of environmental challenges, emphasizing decisive action and leadership in addressing climate risks.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how energy and energy transition are metaphorically represented in *China Daily*, focusing on five dominant conceptual metaphors: building, entity, living being, journey, vehicle, and war. The analysis reveals that these metaphors collectively frame energy as dynamic, structured, goal-oriented, organic, and strategically significant, making complex technical, social, and environmental processes cognitively accessible to readers. Each metaphor serves distinct functions: BUILDING emphasizes stability and systematic planning; JOURNEY and VEHICLE highlight movement, progress, and mechanisms of change; LIVING BEING foregrounds vitality, interdependence, and care; ENTITY materializes energy as a tangible, manageable object, emphasizing control, measurability, and strategic allocation; and WAR underscores urgency, competition, and strategic positioning.

From an ecological perspective, the metaphors convey multiple dimensions of environmental significance. They highlight the need for robust infrastructure, coordinated action, sustainable management, and decisive intervention to achieve renewable energy adoption and climate mitigation. By framing energy transition in these ways, *China Daily* not only communicates the technical and political aspects of energy but also encourages public awareness of sustainability, resilience, and environmental responsibility.

Overall, the findings illustrate the role of metaphorical framing in the discursive construction of energy in news media, revealing how abstract energy

concepts are rendered meaningful through concrete source domains and associated evaluative implications. The combined use of diverse metaphors provides a multi-dimensional conceptualization that integrates cognitive clarity, ideological narratives, and ecological implications. This study contributes to research on critical metaphor analysis and ecolinguistics by showing how media discourse can influence perceptions of energy transition, emphasizing its significance not merely as a technical or economic process but as a societal, strategic, and ecological transformation.

The metaphorical framing of energy in *China Daily* has practical implications for policymakers and communicators. By making complex energy issues more relatable, metaphors can foster public engagement and support for sustainable initiatives. Frames emphasizing urgency, progress, or systemic integrity encourage coordinated action, while metaphors highlighting interdependence and care promote ecologically responsible mindsets. Thoughtful use of metaphor can thus enhance climate communication, aligning public understanding with national energy goals and global sustainability objectives.

This study is subject to several limitations. The analysis focuses on energy discourse in a single state-owned news outlet, *China Daily*, and therefore does not capture metaphor use across other media genres or institutional contexts. In addition, the study adopts a qualitative approach and does not examine the relative frequency or dominance of specific metaphor types. Future research could extend this work by comparing science-oriented or commercial media platforms and by incorporating quantitative analyses to explore metaphor preferences and their potential ideological implications, as well as reception-focused approaches to examine how such framings are interpreted by audiences.

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Appendix

Full text of the examples for the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A BUILDING:

Example 1: Xie reiterated China's commitment to further promoting renewable energy. "China has made significant contributions to energy transition and renewable energy development," he said. Thanks to the contributions, the cost for wind power generation around the world has decreased by 80 percent, and the cost of photovoltaic solar energy has declined roughly 90 percent, Xie said. "This has laid a good foundation for large-scale deployment of renewable energy in the world,' he said. The climate envoy also said China has seen its installed capacity for renewable energy surpass that of coal-fired power, which marks a remarkable change in the country's energy structure.

Example 2: But how to mitigate climate change? At the system level, reducing the use of fossil fuels and switching to renewable energy will help mitigate climate change as well as increase people's adaptability. But since economies still run mostly on fossil fuels, it will take a long time to switch to renewable energy and upgrade the energy structure. The volatility of the energy market, where geopolitical, financial, technological, and social factors are all at play, makes it difficult to take effective collective actions and thus reduce carbon emissions any time soon in the near future.

Full text of the examples for the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A LIVING BEING:

Example 1: Early warning systems can shield people living in multi-hazard hotspots and reduce disaster losses everywhere by up to 60 percent. They provide a tenfold return on investment. To protect food systems and reduce the exposure of the energy infrastructure - the backbone of our economies-sector-specific coverage is needed. Investments at the local level to improve communities' response to early warning alerts, delivered through expanded global satellite data use and embedded in comprehensive risk management policies, must all be part of our approach.

Example 2: These benchmark projects have become models of China-Europe clean energy cooperation and green energy transformation in recent years, providing more possibilities for China-Europe cooperation in such an area, the company said. Wu said in order to promote the digitization and upgrade of the clean energy industry, energy storage systems must achieve full-chain security to ensure the safety, efficiency, and grid-friendliness of the entire lifecycle of

energy storage systems.

Full text of the examples for the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS AN ENTITY:

Example 1: The 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), which commenced on Nov 30 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, convened amid a concurrence of geopolitical and socioeconomic complexities. The COP28 presidency has rightly emphasized a few priorities to deliver ambitious, yet pragmatic climate actions, such as a further push for a just energy transition, a call for transformative climate finance, as well as the need for synergistic climate solutions that take care of people and the planet.

Example 2: China has liaised with countries and regions participating in the BRI, hoping to address the problem of climate change. Despite that, some international commentators complain that the country is tightening its grip on the renewable energy chain. Loai Sharkawi, an EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) construction manager with the PV solar project, has experience of the cross-pollination of knowledge driven by the partnership.

Full text of the examples for the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A JOURNEY:

Example 1: An analyst said the organization has been playing a key role in further facilitating the world's shift toward a green and low-carbon future. "In the past seven years, GEIDCO has transformed global energy interconnectivity into a roadmap for global energy transition and sustainable development," said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University. It has significantly improved the electrification level of the whole society, providing a fundamental solution to address the long-term contradiction between development and emission reductions faced by countries worldwide, Lin said.

Example 2: Middle East countries are going through a major transformation of their energy structure, an essential path to achieve economic diversification and sustainable development. The energy transition in the Middle East not only impacts regional political, economic and social development, but also influences the global climate change response and sustainability as major powers and Middle East countries are competing for energy dominance in the transformation

of the global energy system.

Full text of the examples for the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A VEHICLE:

Example 1: Measures to reduce emissions can produce major health benefits, including lessening air pollution, which kills 7 million people every year. The connection between health and climate change is obvious. Now the international community must accelerate the energy transition away from fossil fuels and simultaneously build resilience. What the global community must understand is that investing in climate resilience at a local level pays dividends.

Example 2: It is also vital the two sides collaborate synergistically to advance global climate governance, exerting concerted efforts to realize the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and the specific measures outlined therein. There exists a longstanding disjunction between the aspirational aims and practical implementation of the outcomes of global climate negotiations. The EU-China Green Partnership endeavors to redress this disparity by injecting fresh momentum in the global energy transition and climate governance agenda. Their partnership gives the EU and China greater autonomy and a stronger voice in global climate governance.

Full text of the examples for the conceptual metaphor ENERGY IS A WAR:

Example 1: The overall competitiveness of industry chains is a significant advantage of China's new energy sector. China's new energy technology is known for its competitive costs, higher applicability, and greater stability. The new energy sector represents a crucial procedure for China to be at the forefront of global energy development. Cooperation between China and African countries in the new energy sector will significantly help promote Chinese new energy enterprises to expand their business in the international market.

Example 2: To build a community with a shared future for mankind and achieve a sustainable future, China and Germany are the two major forces in the global energy transition campaign. Wu said that fueled by the global pursuit of carbon neutrality, high-profile enterprises in the sector should take the lead to provide safe, efficient, stable and reliable product solutions through technological innovation and boost industrial transformation toward a green development model.

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