



# All that glitters is not gold

Prototypical semantic change  
in shiny Literary Chinese ideophones

ICPEAL 17 – CLDC 9  
20 October 2018

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# Roadmap

- ▶ Goal:  
describe the **semantic change** of **literary Chinese ideophones** that are situated in the semantic domain of **LIGHT**  
using **prototype theory** and  
keeping in mind **different levels of schematization**.
  
- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Material & Methodology
- ▶ Literature review & Research Question
- ▶ Findings: case studies
- ▶ Conclusions

# Background: Ideophone research

- Dingemanse's (2011; 2012) cross-linguistic definition:  
"Ideophones are marked words that depict sensory imagery."

		FORM	MEANING
full reduplication	AA	► <i>wāng~wāng</i> 汪汪	'woof-woof'
partial reduplication	AB	► <i>tǎn~tè</i> 忐忑	'perturbed, disturbed' in <i>tǎntè bùān</i> 忐忑不安 'restless'
	ABB	► <i>liàng-jīng~jīng</i> 亮晶晶	'glittering, sparkling'
<p><b>MORPHOLOGY</b>            (Chang 2009;            Huang &amp; Shi 2016 etc.)</p>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► In (Mandarin) Chinese:</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► Usually the <b>MEANING</b> component is downplayed (e.g. Huang &amp; Shi's reference grammar 2016). This component, however, is essential, as ideophones are heavily grounded in context and often perform a scene in a complex verbal event (Slobin 2004; Lu 2006; Dingemanse &amp; Akita 2016; Nuckolls 2017; Haiman 2018; Li &amp; Ponsford 2018 etc.)</li> </ul>			

# Motivation of this study

- ▶ 星光熠熠
- ▶ xīngguāng yìyì
- ▶ ‘twinkling star light’
- ▶ Some people pronounced zhézhé but did know the meaning.
- ▶ There can be a dissociation between phonological form, written form and meaning.

Folk model of Chinese (漢字的「形音義」)

$$\left[ \frac{\text{writing}}{\text{sound}} \mid \text{MEANING} \right]_{\Sigma}$$



# Motivation of this study

this  
study

pre-study

- ▶ While most studies on ideophones investigate synchronic properties,
  - ▶ experiments: (like *kiki* and *bouba*)
  - ▶ anthropological studies: elicitate narratives
  - ▶ recordings
- ▶ This study is more interested in **how they evolved through time**.
- ▶ The folk model of WRITING/SOUND // MEANING is helpful, because we can investigate VARIATION on three different levels:
  1. Semasiological variation: what does a given ideophone mean?  
(What does it collocate with?)
  2. Onomasiological variation: what variants in the form are at play?
  3. Phonological variation: are there any groupings that engage in a systematic/iconic relationship with the meaning (sound-symbolism)?

# Phonological pre-study investigating sound-symbolism provided material

yì~yì	熠熠	làn~màn	爛熳	shuò~shuò	鑠鑠	yù~yì	煜煜
yuè~yuè	爚爚	wèi~wèi	煒煒	hù~hù	扈扈	yì~yù	熠熠
yào~yào	燿燿	wèi~yè	煒煡	shǎn~shǎn	閃閃	yè~yè	燁燁
yào~yào	耀耀	zhuò~zhuò	灼灼	zhēng~zhēng	錚錚	yè~yè	曄曄
yì~yào	熠燿	zhuò~shuò	灼爍	huǎng~huǎng	晃晃	càn~làn	粲爛
yì~yào	熠耀	hào~hào	皓皓	jīng~jīng	晶晶	càn~càn	粲粲
yù~yù	煜煜	jiǎo~jiǎo	皎皎	guāng~guāng	光光	làn~làn	爛爛
	...		...		...		...

Semantic domain of LIGHT

# Phonological pre-study → material

- ▶ For this study, which investigates the WRITTEN pole vs. MEANING, we ended up with **17 types** from the group that had an obstruent coda in Old Chinese (reconstruction Baxter & Sagart 2014)
- ▶ Full reduplication / AA (most frequent / prototypical form, cf. Van Hoey 2015)
- ▶ Definitions in Kroll's (2015) *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* include:
  - ▶ brightly shining; flashing; flaring; gleaming; flickering; vividly bright etc.
- ▶ Definitions in the Ministry of Education's online dictionary (found on zdic.com) include:
  - ▶ 光閃動的樣子。光明盛大的樣子。光明照耀的樣子。.....
- ▶ And in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, we get:
  - ▶ "it is light / shining" 「光也、照也、電光也」

# Literature review

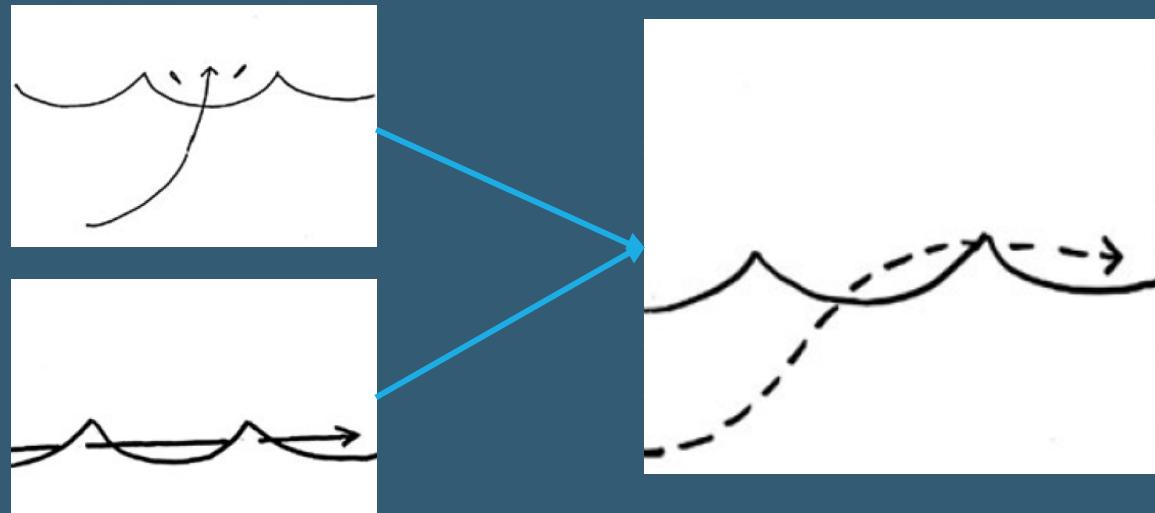
- Unifying three linguistic frameworks for Chinese ideophones: different levels of schematization

# Defining ideophones (for Chinese)

- ▶ Comparative concept (Haspelmath 2010)  
Ideophones = marked words that depict sensory imagery  
(Dingemanse 2011; 2012)
  
- ▶ Hard to define a certain lexeme (cf. Nuckolls et al. 2017):
  1. IMAGE SCHEMATIC approach (Nuckolls (1996))
  2. IDEALIZED COGNITIVE MODEL approach (Lu 2006)
  3. FRAME semantics approach (Akita 2012)

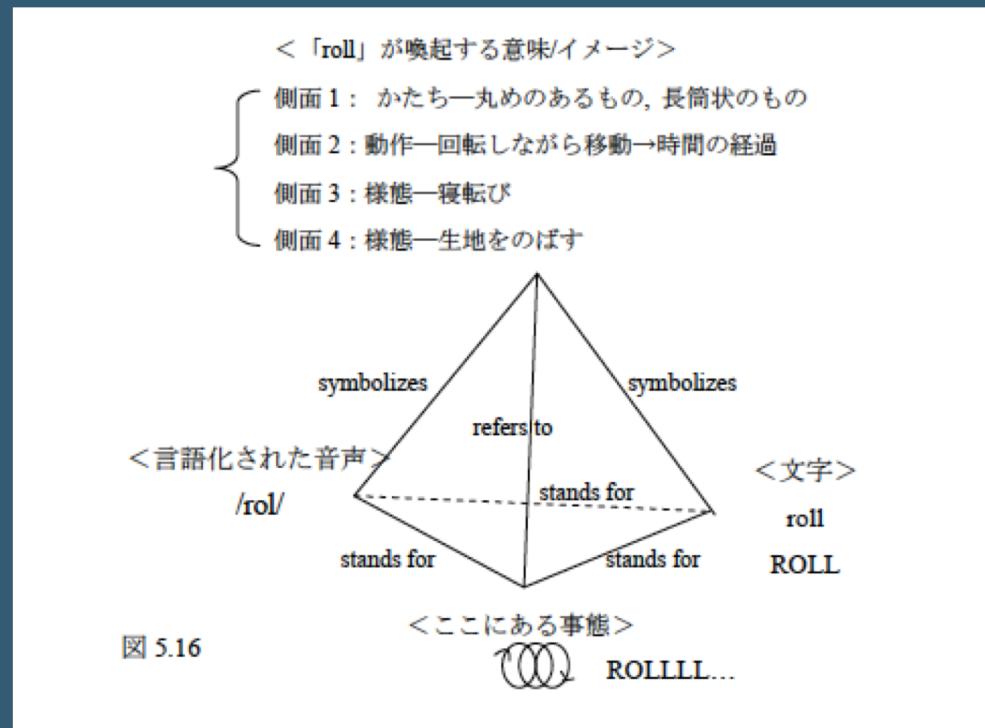
# 1. IMAGE SCHEMAS

- ▶ Finding the most fitting **image schema** underlying different meanings in the semantics of lexeme.
- ▶ For Quichua this was done and later revised (Nuckolls 1995; Nuckolls et al. 2017), e.g. *polang*
  - ▶ “glide across”
  - ▶ “glide up”



## 2. IDEALIZED COGNITIVE MODEL

- Lu (2006) uses **ICM** (Lakoff 1987) to analyze Japanese *korokoro* 可口可口 and *gorogoro* ゴロゴロ vs. Chinese *gǔngǔn* 滾滾 vs. English *roll*

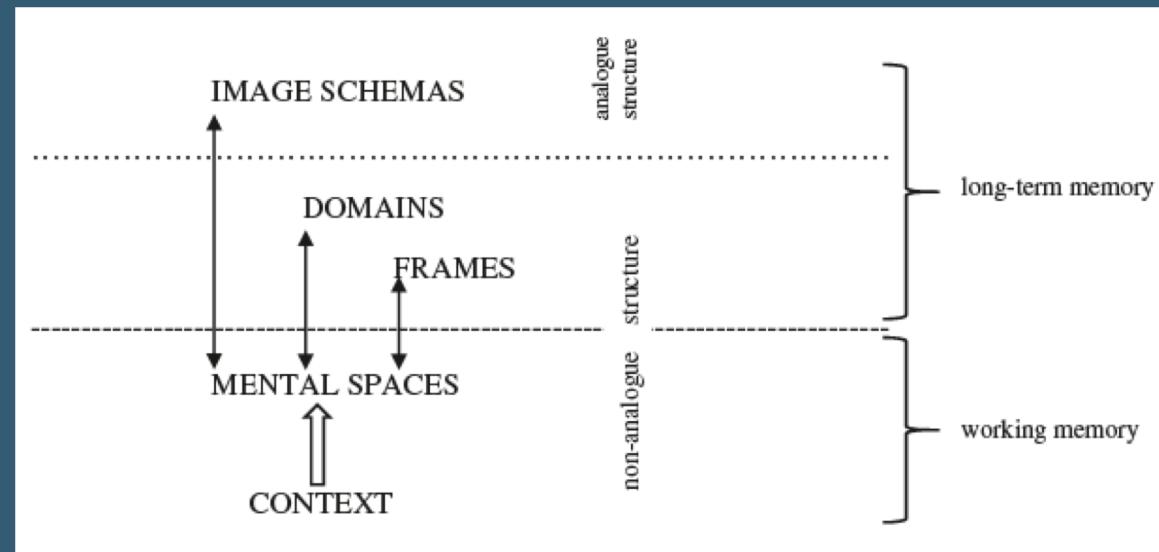


### 3. Fillmorean FRAME semantics approach

- ▶ Akita argues that SOUND ideophones in Mandarin Chinese are “generally unspecified as to sound sources and perhaps sensitive to sound qualities” (2013:29).  
In other words, they are **vague**, e.g. *jī~jī-zhā~zhā* 嘍噃喳喳
- ▶ This is opposed to Japanese ideophones, which are highly specific and almost always evoke a certain very specific frame (Akita 2012).
- ▶ However, as soon as we leave the iconicity of SOUND ideophones to more diagrammatic end of the iconicity spectrum (Dingemanse 2012), **it will become untenable to state that Chinese ideophones are only vague, and not polysemous.**

# Different levels of metaphor => different levels of ideophone?

- ▶ Kövecses (2017; 2018) proposes a **four level architecture** involved in the meaning (creation) of metaphors.



- ▶ I think this model can also be applied to ideophones, in which 'domain' is equal, or similar enough to Lu's 'ICM', i.e. a collection of frames.

# Research question Methodology

- Geeraerts's (1997) model for diachronic prototype semantics
- Corpus-based

# Research question

So far, we have tried to show that:

- ▶ There are many different ideophones related to the semantic domain of LIGHT.
- ▶ A study on different levels of abstraction might unify three different frameworks (just like in metaphor studies).
- ▶ The relationship between WRITTEN form and MEANING is not necessarily one-to-one; in other words: variation and prototypicality probably play a role.

So now we restate the research question that drives this study:

- ▶ What does a leveled approach with attention to polysemy and prototypicality reveal about the nature of ideophones?

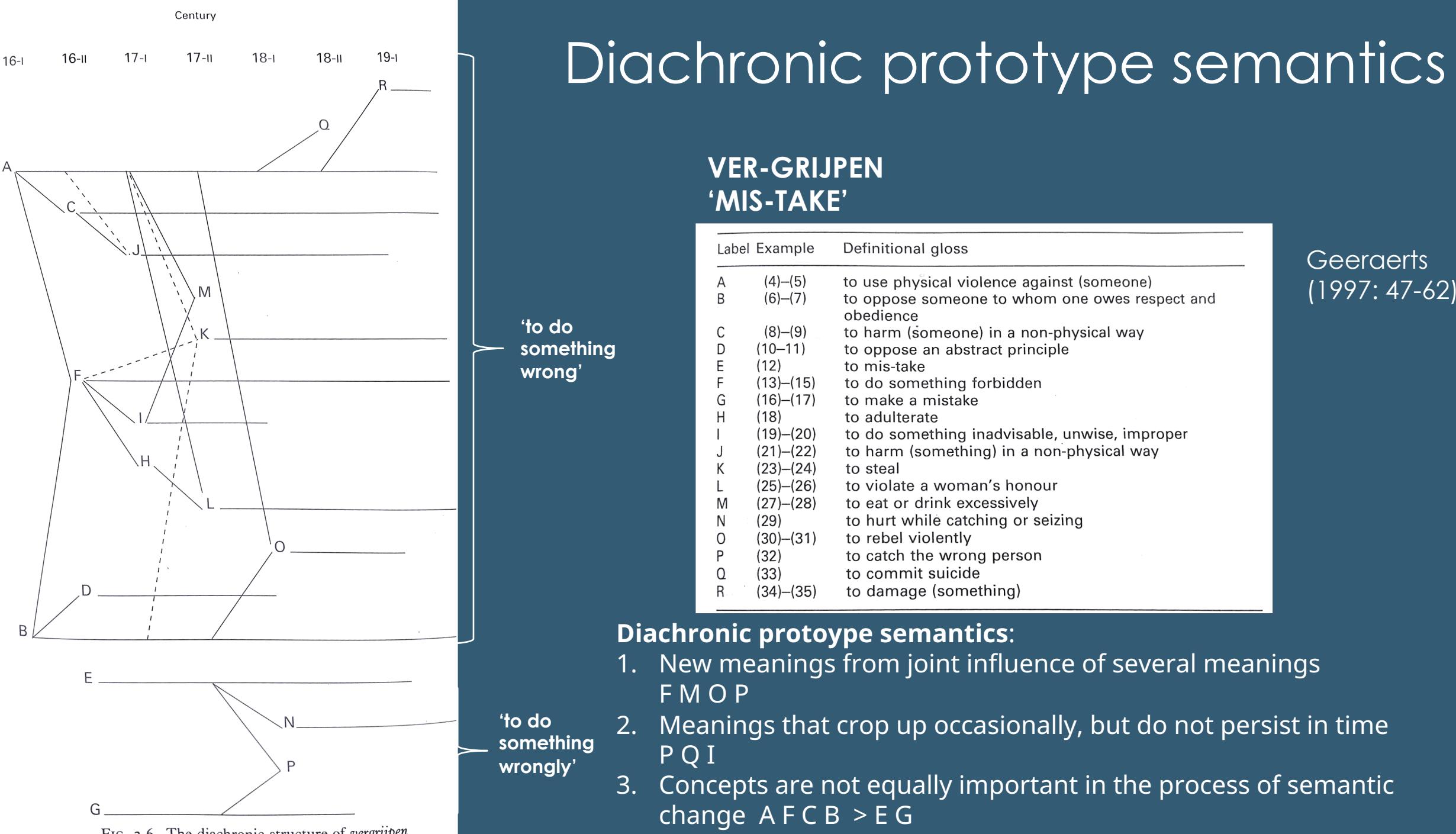


FIG. 2.6. The diachronic structure of *vergrijpen*

# Methodology

- ▶ Material (the 17 types from the pre-study)
- ▶ Corpus-based study
  - ▶ Scripta Sinica corpus 漢籍電子文獻資料庫 ('Hanchi')
  - ▶ 3500+ tokens
  - ▶ Periods in the Scripta Sinica corpus: about 300 years
    - ▶ 先秦 秦漢 魏晉南北朝 隋唐五代 宋遼金 元 明 清 民國
  - ▶ semantic preference, rather than the direct collocate (Geeraerts 2010:170-173)

pre	keyword	post	period
插葵花蘆軾 <雨中賞牡丹> 霽霏雨露作清妍	爍爍	明燈照欲然明日春陰花未老故應未忍著	xianqin
) 唐韓愈 <芍藥> 浩態狂香昔未逢紅燈	紅燈	綠盤龍覺來獨對情驚恐身在仙宮第幾重	xianqin
插葵花蘆軾 <雨中賞牡丹> 霽霏雨露作清妍	爍爍	明燈照欲然明日春陰花未老故應未忍著	qinhan
) 唐韓愈 <芍藥> 浩態狂香昔未逢紅燈	爍爍	綠盤龍覺來獨對情驚恐身在仙宮第幾重	qinhan
落瓦裂咫尺鳴、問之相去一里間、紅光	紅光	侵天明、長煙涌波月魄死、其間有物	qinhan
插葵花蘆軾 <雨中賞牡丹> 霽霏雨露作清妍	爍爍	明燈照欲然明日春陰花未老故應未忍著	three
) 唐韓愈 <芍藥> 浩態狂香昔未逢紅燈	爍爍	綠盤龍覺來獨對情驚恐身在仙宮第幾重	three
為目干性。常從容于自然。映光藻之	爍爍	。眇輕騰之翩翩。究妙音之至樂。窮有	three
落瓦裂咫尺鳴、問之相去一里間、紅光	爍爍	侵天明、長煙涌波月魄死、其間有物	three
插葵花蘆軾 <雨中賞牡丹> 霽霏雨露作清妍	爍爍	明燈照欲然明日春陰花未老故應未忍著	tang
) 唐韓愈 <芍藥> 浩態狂香昔未逢紅燈	爍爍	綠盤龍覺來獨對情驚恐身在仙宮第幾重	tang
奈仙家不肯傳。同色同名合好音，亦能	爍爍	亦沉沉。乾坤顛倒驅雷雨，龍躍安能出上	tang
三十四 / 文炬 / 偻 (P.)小月走	爍爍	，千落及萬落。處處鳳離穴，家家種	tang
曜。願言莫相忘。又贈蘇武詩曰。	爍爍	三星列。拳拳月初生。寒涼應節至。蟋蟀	tang
雪，亂紛紛柳絮因風；劍影落長虹，光	爍爍	菱花漾水。鼓振三春雷動，旗搖五色	tang



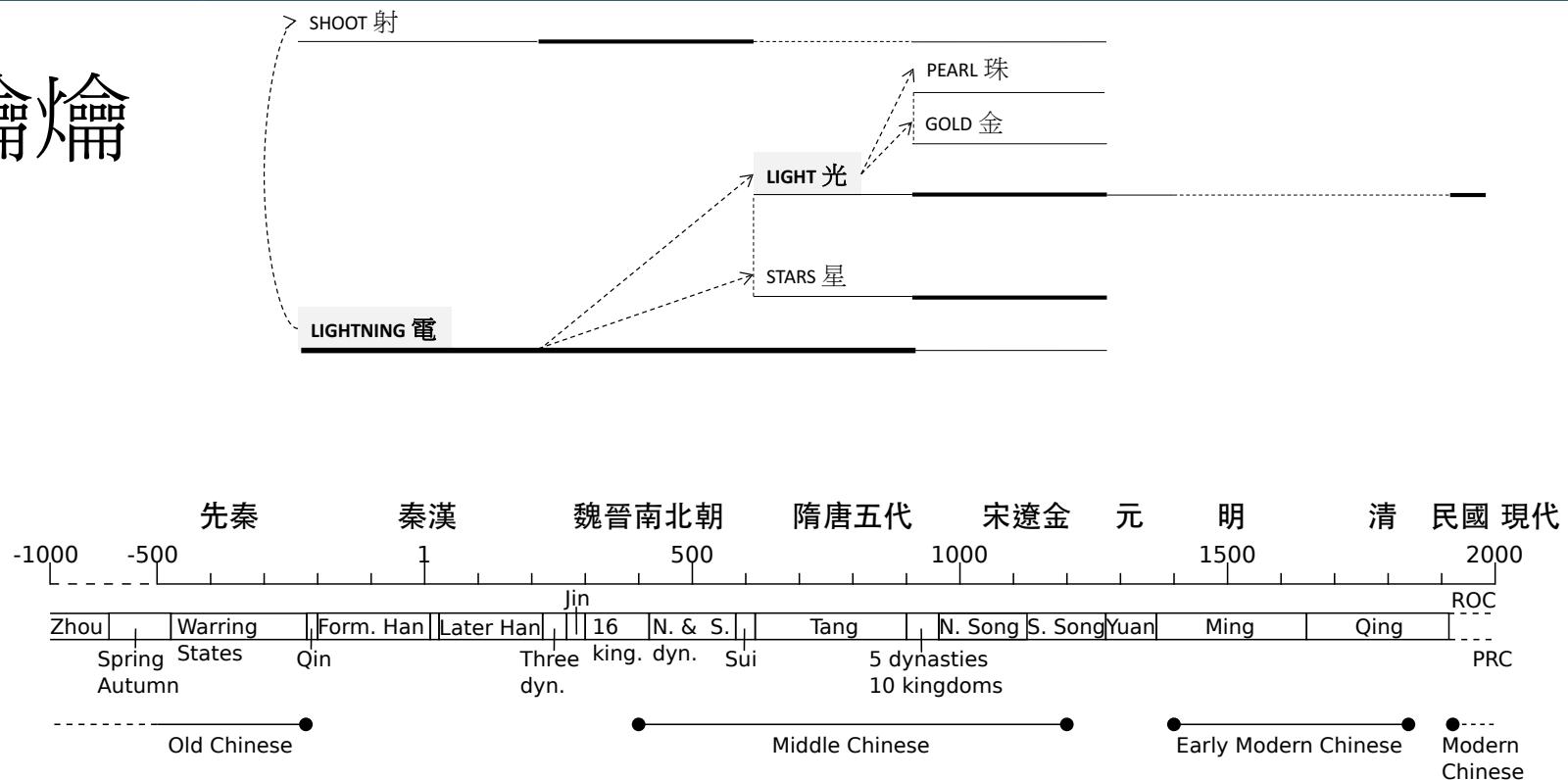
# Findings

- 3 case studies showing prototype effects

# Case study 1: yuè~yuè 燰爚 prototypical structure

- 國語辭典「光明的樣子。」
- 說文解字 | 康熙字典「光也，電光也。」

爚爚



semantic preference/  
collocations /  
mental spaces

prototype effects:  
LIGHTNING → LIGHT  
etc.

## Case study 2: *huī~huī* 輳 輳 燉 燉 晖 晖 frequency effects

- ▶ 晖 *huī* <MC *xjwīj* <OC \*q<sup>w̥</sup>ər 「晴朗的樣子。」 「光也。」
- ▶ 輳 *huī* <MC *xjwīj* <OC \*q<sup>w̥</sup>ər 「光也。」
- ▶ 燉 *huī* <MC *xjwīj* <OC \*q<sup>w̥</sup>ər 「光也。」
- ▶ Based on the definitions, one could presume that their meanings are entirely the same, i.e. synonymous.
- ▶ However, based on corpus study we can see that this is not the case:

輝  
暉  
暉  
暉

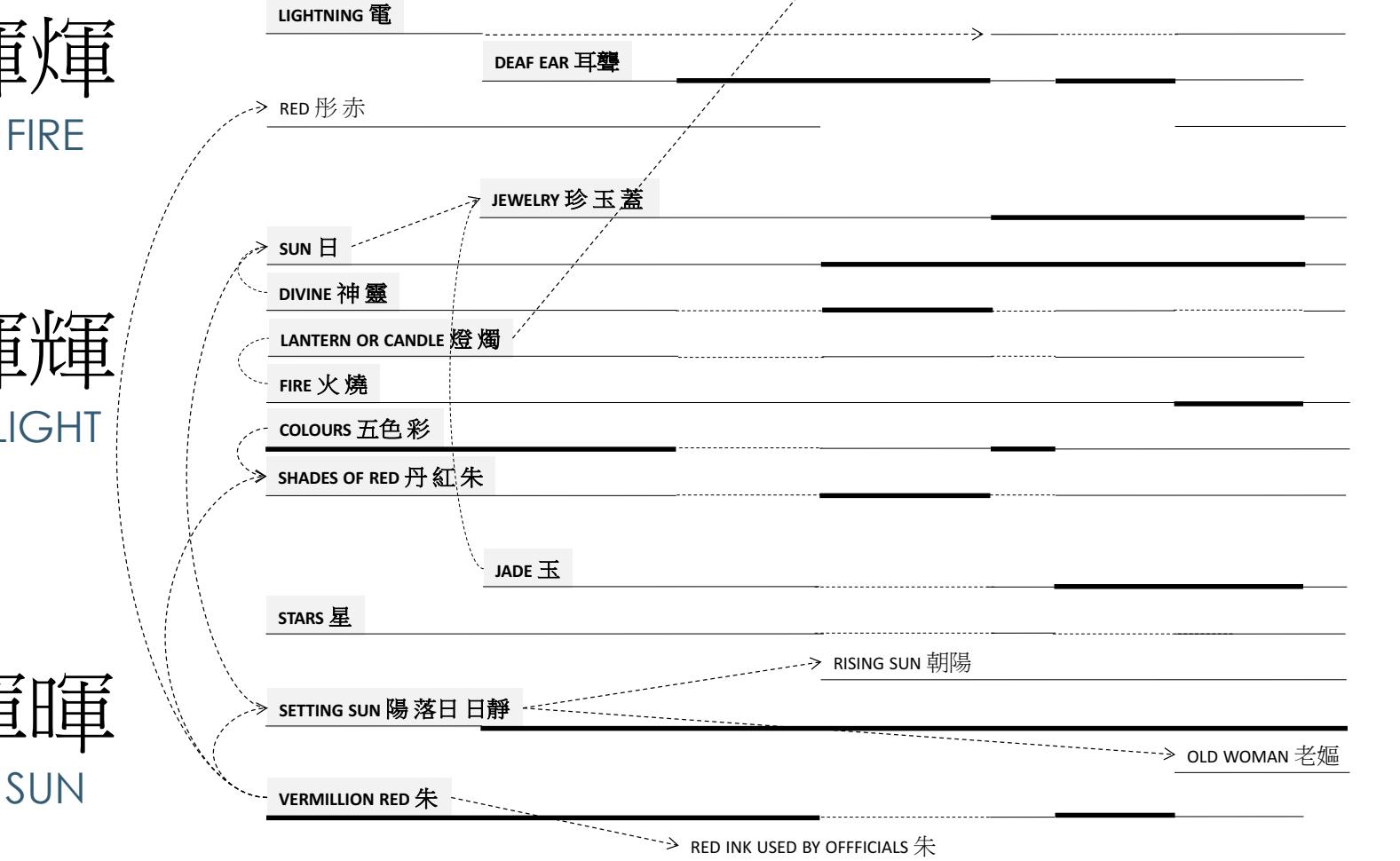
FIRE

輝  
暉  
暉  
暉

LIGHT

暉  
暉  
暉  
暉

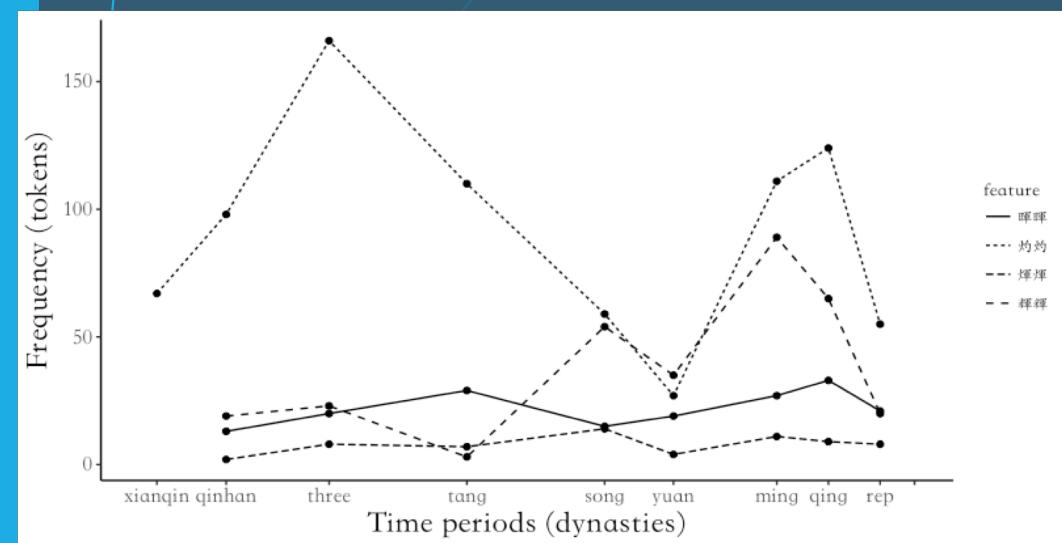
SUN



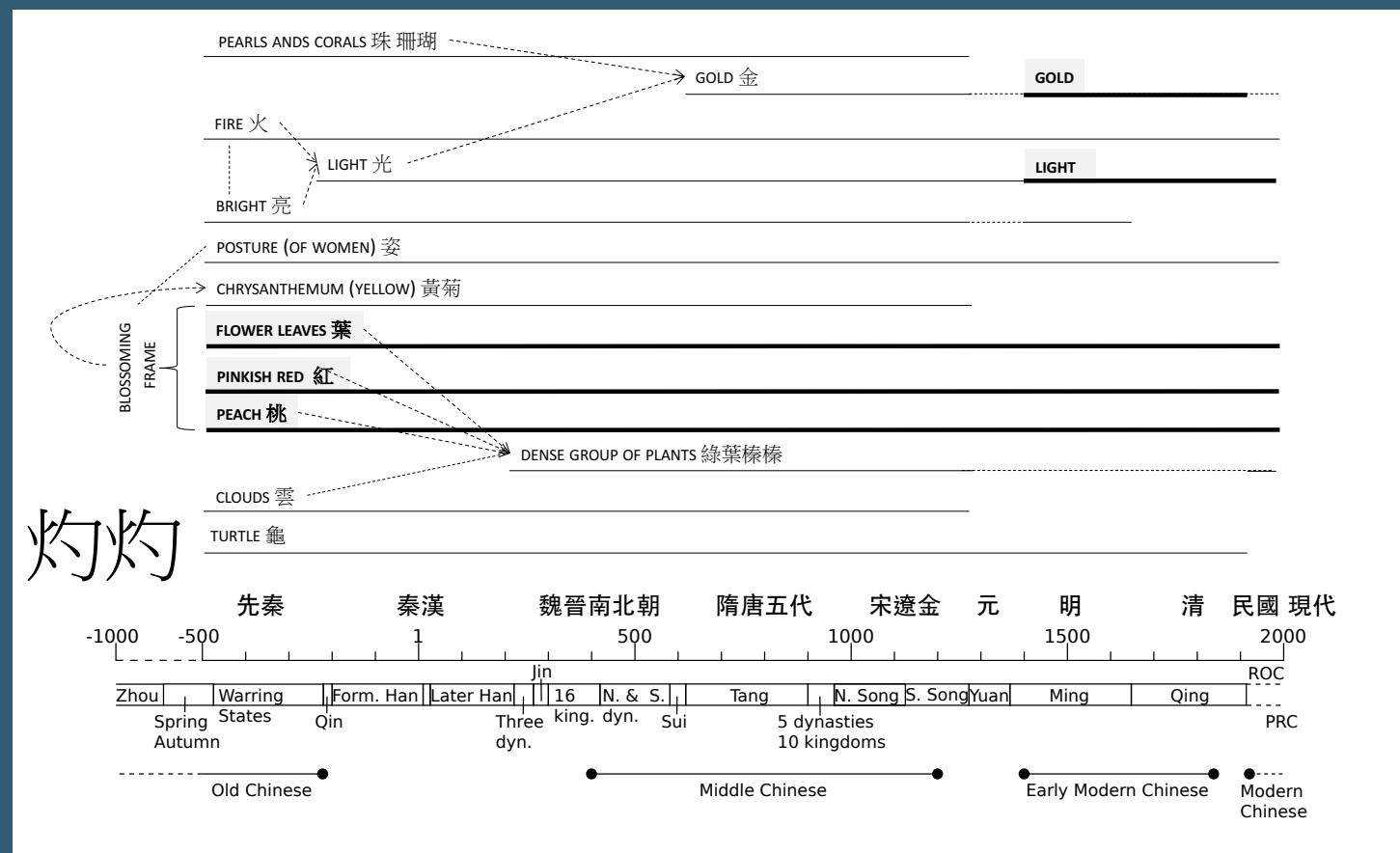
differences  
in semantics

but also in  
productivity  
per  
ideophone

# Case study 2: huī~huī 輳輝 燉暉 暉暉 vs. zhuò~zhuò 灼灼

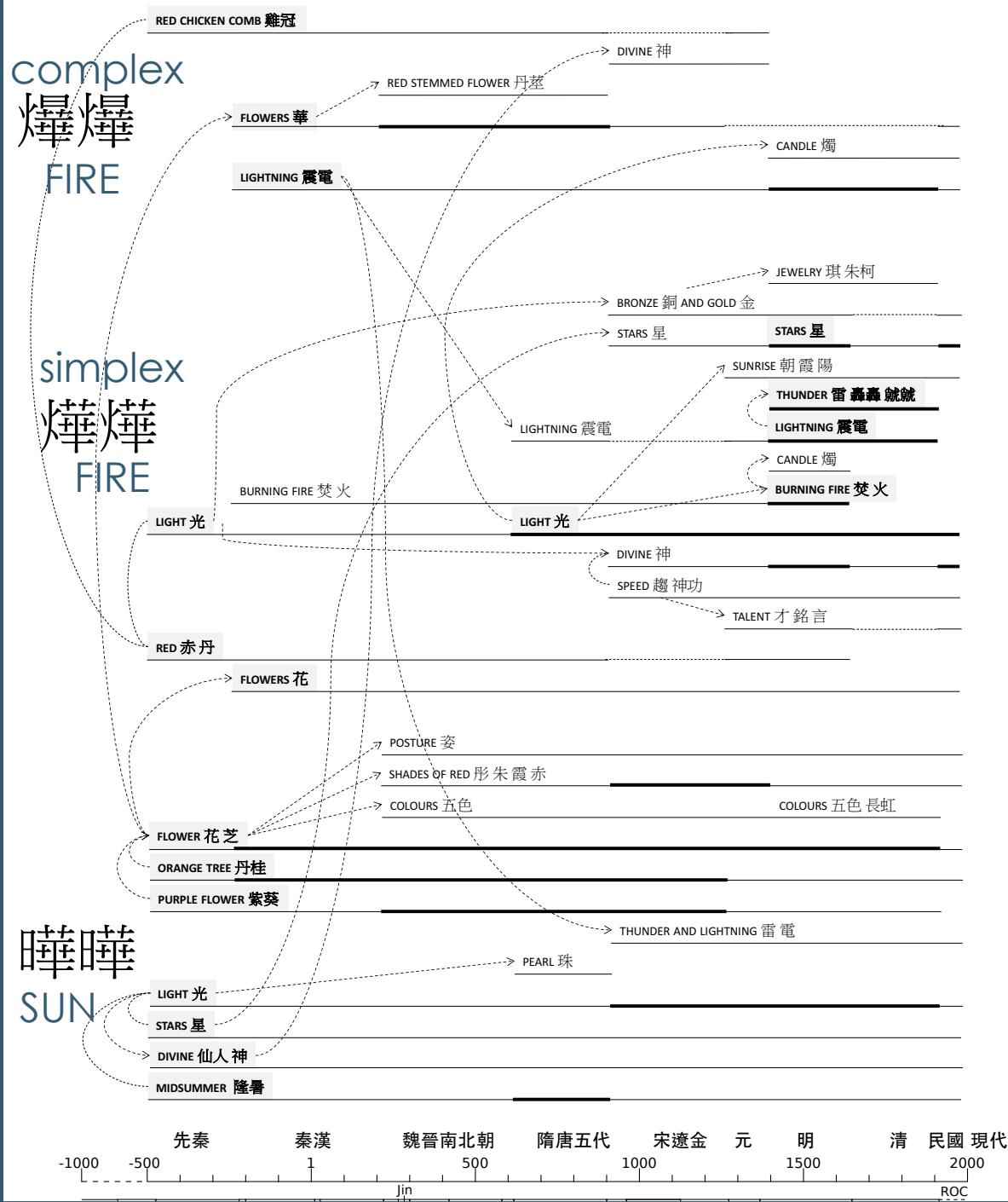


zhuò~zhuò  
has a much higher token  
frequency than any of the  
huī~huī

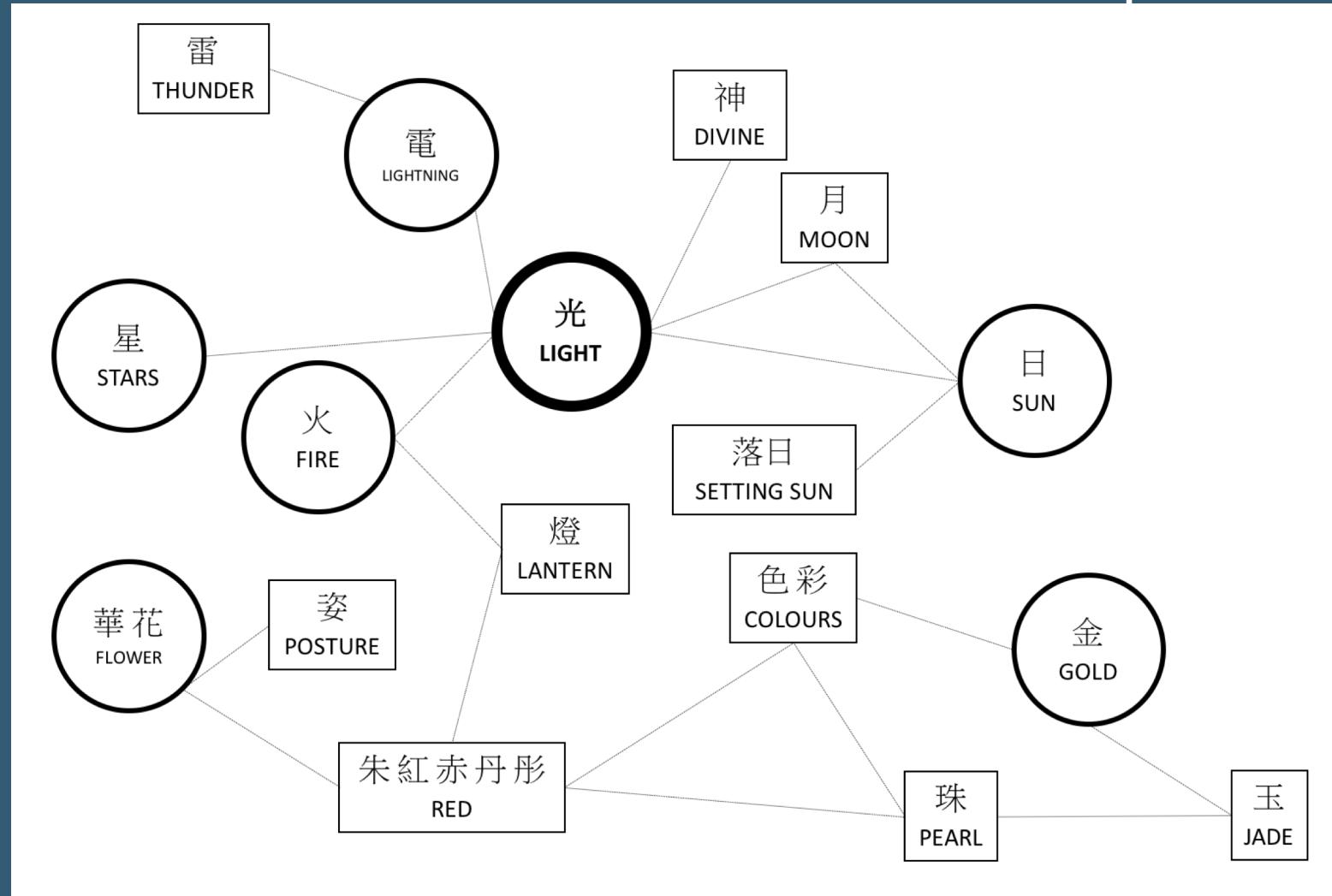


## Case study 3: yè~yè 燁燁 曜曠 燁燁 transient prototypicality

- ▶ Sometimes it is also the case that one ideophone is the most productive for a while, but that this gradually is taken over by another.
- ▶ For instance, 曜曠<sub>SUN</sub> was very productive in terms of 'shiny flowers', but also light sources  
But by the Song dynasty simplex 燁燁<sub>FIRE</sub> is taking over this role.
- ▶ The complex 燁燁<sub>FIRE</sub> was marginal and only semi productive

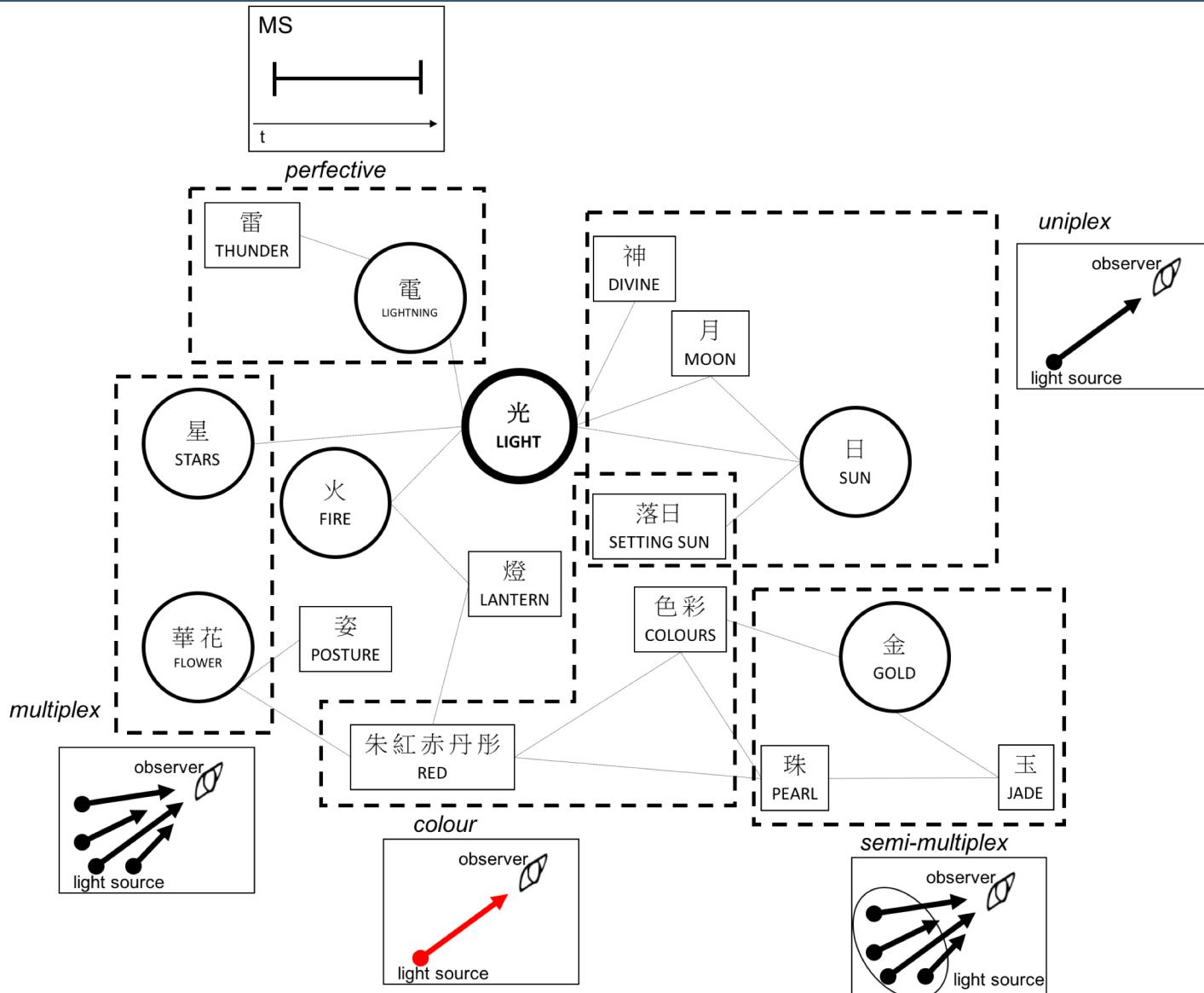


# One level of schematization higher: the main frames of LIGHT ideophones

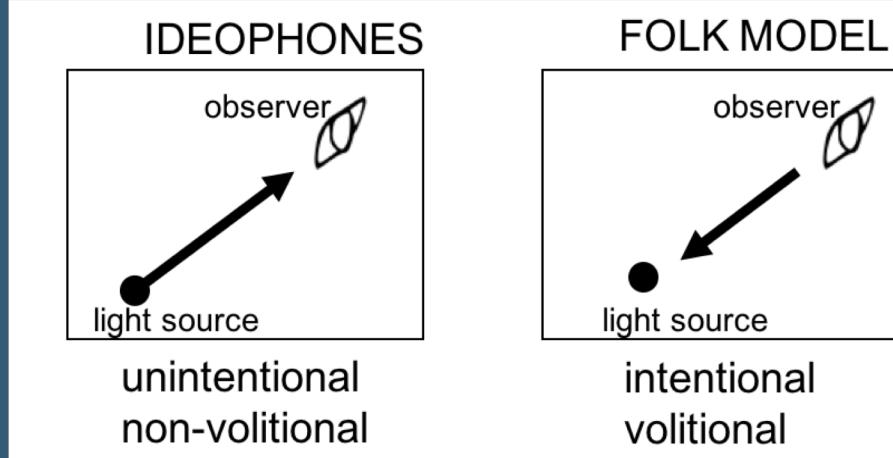


# Domains / ICMs: collections of frames

(Kövecses 2017)



# Image schemas



**Image schema  
for  
LIGHT IDEOPHONES**

SEEING IS TOUCHING (Lakoff & Johnson 1980)  
KNOWING IS SEEING (Sweetser 1990)  
CONDUIT METAPHOR (Reddy 1979)

「我明白了。」

# Conclusions

# The prototypical nature of Literary Chinese LIGHT ideophones

- ▶ Due to the **prototypical** bundles that give rise to different sets of meanings, we end up with **fuzzy extensions** of core meanings.
  - ▶ There is noticeable **polysemy** in the semantics of the investigated lexemes, e.g. *yè~yè* 瞽瞂 has a bundle that depicts LIGHT, but also FLOWERS
  - ▶ However, there is also some **vagueness**, e.g. *yè~yè*'s 瞽瞂 FLOWER bundle was presumably abstracted from certain trees (丹桂) and flowers (紫葵)
- ▶ At the same time, **frequency effects** are noticeable: once a collocation has been made, repeated usage crystallizes it
- ▶ Furthermore: **metaphorical extensions**

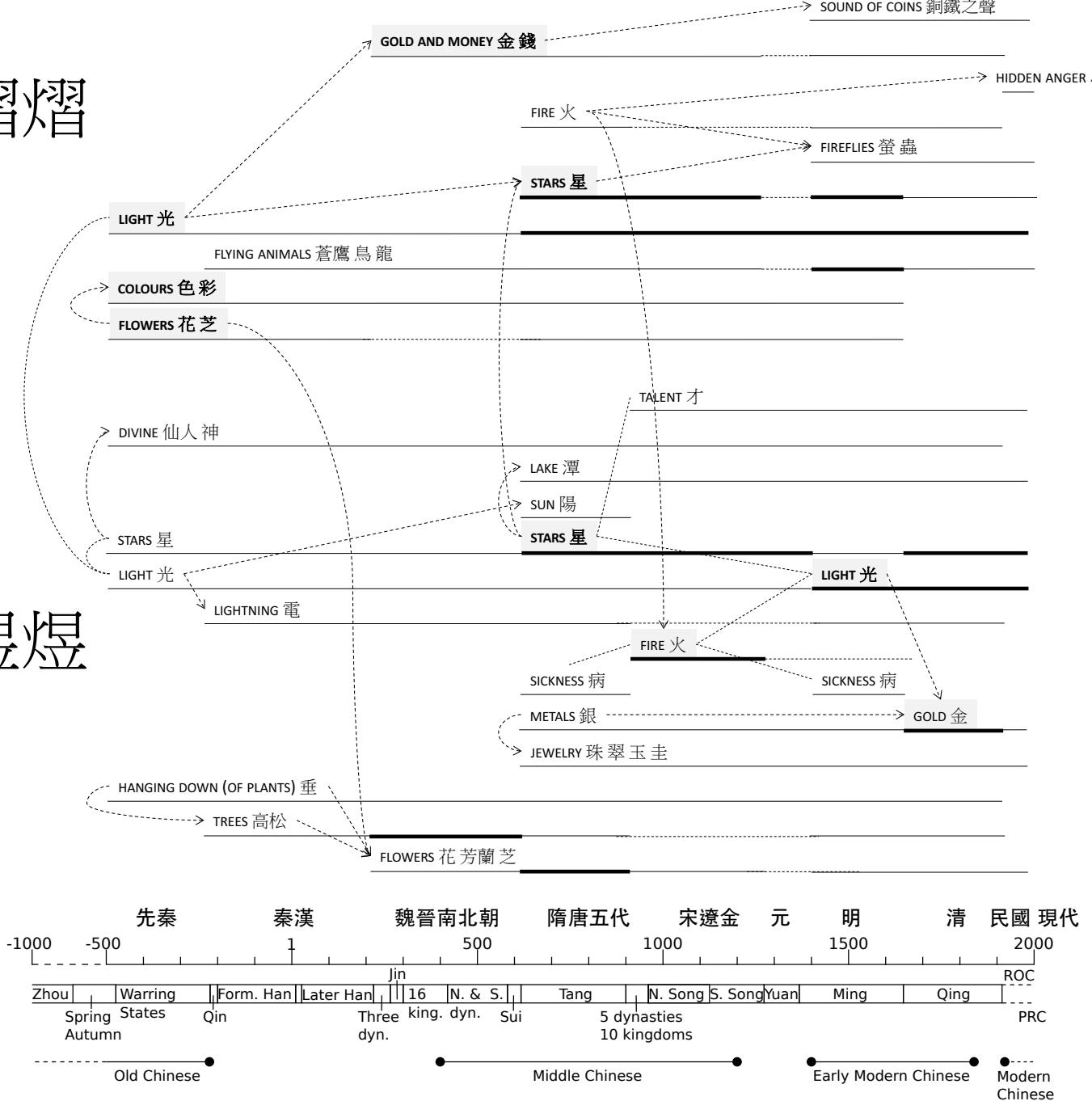
# Horizontal and vertical results

- ▶ Horizontal
  - ▶ Historical change with prototypes and frequency effects
  - ▶ Mutual influence of the written form (even with a constant phonological form)
- ▶ Vertical
  - ▶ **Mental spaces** the lower level patterns, 'real data' as we go
  - ▶ **Frames** entrenched constructions, slightly bigger
  - ▶ **Domains | ICMs** more entrenched collocations
  - ▶ **Image schemas** licensed by embodiment:  
our bodies know about physics (optics)

# Future directions

- ▶ While this study has reached important conclusions (see above), there is room for improvement:
  - ▶ **subject 'hybrid' AB ideophones** and their relation to 'pure' AA ideophones,  
e.g. *yiyi* 熙熙 and *yuyu* 煙煙 vs. *yuyi* 煙熙 and *yiyu* 熙煙
  - ▶ investigate the **token frequency** of this family and the lexemes without family
- ▶ **Other semantic domains**, e.g.
  - ▶ COLOUR
  - ▶ TEXTURE
  - ▶ Scale this approach by using **computational methods**

熠熠



Yi~yì 熠熠 only gained its connection to STARS around the Tang (589-618)

Very likely influenced by  
yù~yù 煩煩

so now we end up with

*xīngguāng yìyì*  
星光熠熠

So what is now ‘fossilized’ and often presented as a lexical item that just has to be memorized was actually more flexible and motivated than most approaches give credit for.

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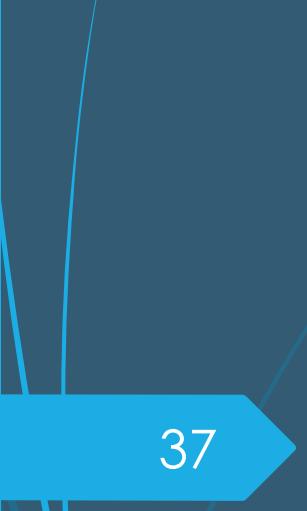
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Thank you

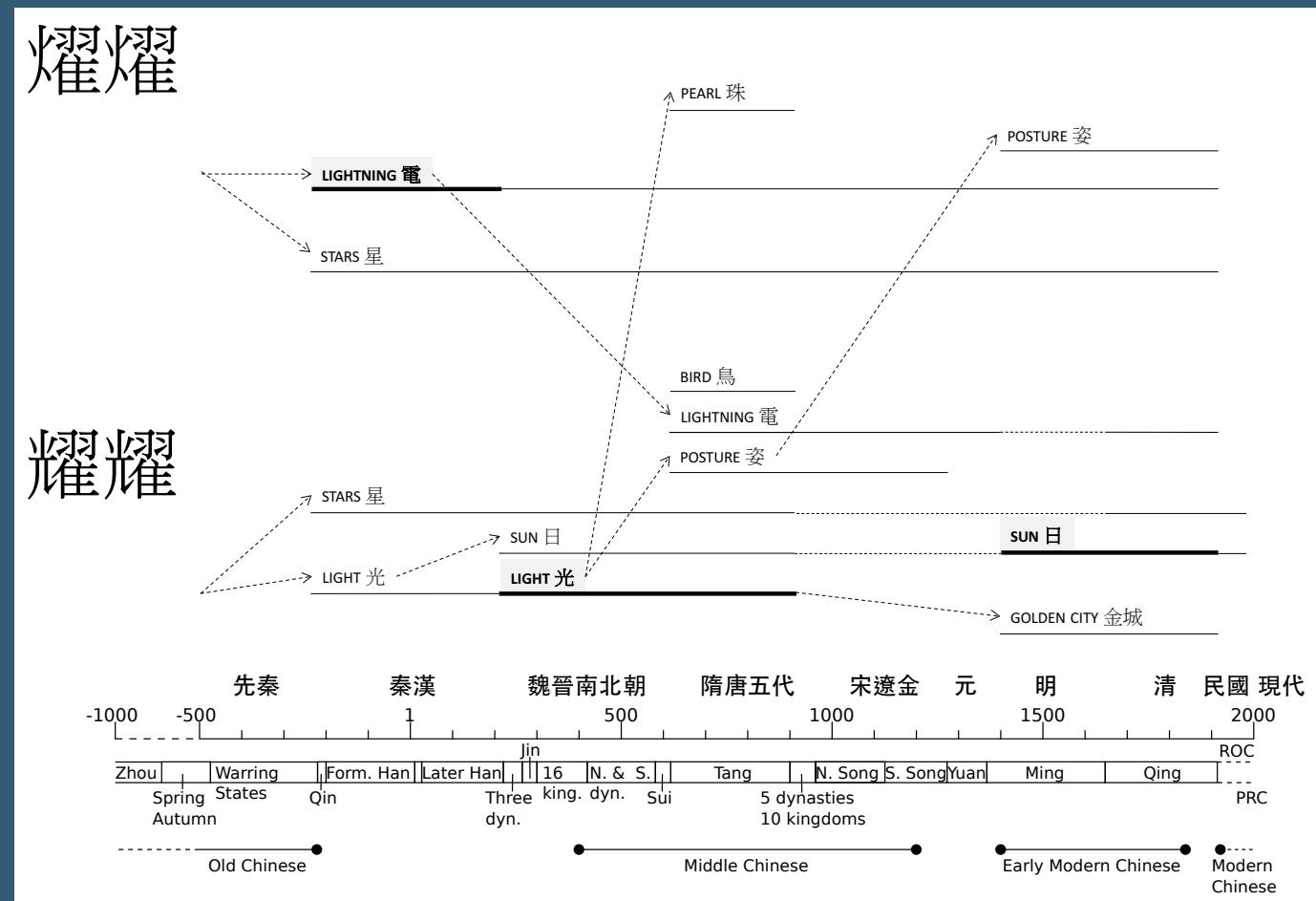


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# Case study 2: yaò~yaò 耀耀 耀燿 mutual influence

- 國語辭典：【耀燿】「光明的樣子。」 【燿燿】「NA」
- 說文解字：「照也。」

耀 yaò<sub>LIGHT</sub> 光  
燿 yaò<sub>FIRE</sub> 火



lightning → lightning

posture → posture

# Phonological pre-study → material

OC: obstruent coda	OC: nasal coda	Not analyzed
燰 yuè <MC yak <OC *lewk 燿 yào <MC yewH <OC *lewk-s 耀 yào <MC yewH <OC *lewk-s 灼 zhuò <MC tsyak <OC *tewk 烊 luò <MC lak <OC *r̥ewk 燦 shuò <MC syak <OC *r̥ewk 鑠 shuò <MC syak <OC *r̥ewk	瑩 yíng <MC hweng <OC *N-qʷŋeŋ 燔 yíng <MC hweng <OC *N-qʷŋeŋ	軒 xuān <MC xjon <OC *q̥har 疤 yǎn <MC yemX <OC *N-ram? 熊 xióng <MC hjuwng <OC *C.Gʷəm 扈 hù <MC huX <OC *m-q̥a? 閔 shǎn <MC syemX <OC *s.tem? 皓 hào <MC hawX <OC *g̥u? 皎 jiǎo <MC kaewX <OC *k̥raw?
燭 yì <MC yik <OC *Gʷəp 煬 yù <MC yuwk <OC *Gʷrəp (*əp>up>uk) 燥 yè <MC hip <OC *Gʷrəp 燥 yè <MC hip <OC *Gʷrəp 瞳 yè <MC hip <OC *Gʷrəp	錚 zhēng <MC tsreang <OC *ts̥eŋ 晶 jīng <MC tsjeng <OC *tseŋ	<b>There is no real evidence of sound-symbolism but there might be some phonesthemic networks</b>
燉 wěi <MC h̥wjX <OC *Gʷəj? 韶 wěi <MC h̥wjX <OC *Gʷəj?	燦 càن <MC tsanH <OC *ts̥an-s 燮 làn <MC lanH <OC *r̥an-s 煙 màn <MC manH <OC *m̥an-s 漫 màn <MC manH <OC *m̥an-s 煙 màn <MC manH <OC *m̥an-s	
燉 huī <MC x̥wj <OC *qʷhər 輝 huī <MC x̥wj <OC *qʷhər 燉 huī <MC x̥wj <OC *qʷhər	晁 huǎng <MC hwangX <OC *Gʷfəŋ? 光 guāng <MC kwang <OC *kʷfəŋ 煌 huáng <MC hwang <OC *Gʷfəŋ 亮 liàng <MC ljiangH <OC *raŋ-s	

# Phonological pre-study → material

## OC: obstruent coda

爚 yuè <MC yak <OC \*lewk  
 燿 yào <MC yewH <OC \*lewk-s  
 耀 yào <MC yewH <OC \*lewk-s  
 灼 zhuò <MC tsyak <OC \*tewk  
 犄 luò <MC lak <OC \*r<sup>r</sup>ewk  
 燦 shuò <MC syak <OC \*grewk  
 鑠 shuò <MC syak <OC \*grewk

熠 yì <MC yik <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>əp  
 熠 yù <MC yuwk <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>rəp (\*əp>up>uk)  
 燉 yè <MC hip <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>rəp  
 燥 yè <MC hip <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>rəp  
 瞳 yè <MC hip <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>rəp

煥 wěi <MC h<sup>w</sup>tjX <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>əj?  
 韶 wěi <MC h<sup>w</sup>tjX <OC \*G<sup>w</sup>əj?

暉 huī <MC x<sup>w</sup>tj <OC \*q<sup>wh</sup>ər  
 輯 huī <MC x<sup>w</sup>tj <OC \*q<sup>wh</sup>ər  
 晉 huī <MC x<sup>w</sup>tj <OC \*q<sup>wh</sup>ər

- ▶ For this study, which investigates the WRITTEN pole vs. MEANING, we ended up with **17 types** from the group that had an obstruent coda in Old Chinese (reconstruction Baxter & Sagart 2014)
- ▶ Full reduplication / AA (most frequent / prototypical form, cf. Van Hoey 2015)
- ▶ Definitions in Kroll's (2015) *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* include:
  - ▶ brightly shining; flashing; flaring; gleaming; flickering; vividly bright etc.
- ▶ Definitions in the Ministry of Education's online dictionary (found on zdic.com) include:
  - ▶ 光閃動的樣子。光明盛大的樣子。光明照耀的樣子。……
- ▶ And in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, we get:
  - ▶ “it is light / shining” 「光也、照也、電光也」

## Research question: operationalization

- ▶ Four levels of schematization:
  - ▶ mental spaces: what is being referred to → semantic preference
  - ▶ different frames
  - ▶ different domains
  - ▶ different image schemas
- ▶ Prototype effects throughout history
  - ▶ Model: Geeraerts's diachronic prototype semantics description of *vergrijpen*

# Polysemy vs vagueness

(Geeraerts 1997: 18-19; 2006 [1993])

- ▶ Distinctions among senses illustrate polysemy: ***fruit* is polysemous** because it has at least the meanings
  - 果 ◀ ‘something that people can eat and that grows on a tree or a bush’ and
  - 水果 ◀ ‘the result or effect of something’.
- ▶ Distinctions among the members of a single sense are cases of vagueness:
  - ▶ ***fruit* is semantically vague** with regard to the differences between oranges and watermelons, because those differences do not lie at the basis of a distinction between senses. Geeraerts (1997: 18-19).
- ▶ It's not easy to differentiate, however **statistics** help (token frequency)
- ▶ Also Tyler & Evans' (2003) criteria played a role

# Metaphorical extensions

- ▶ It is not surprising to find **metaphorical extensions** within the polysemous semantic network of the investigated items.
- ▶ using LIGHT ideophones to talk about
  - ▶ women's posture 姿
  - ▶ talented men 才
  - ▶ words 詞 言.....

# Variability in the poles of symbolic assemblies

- The current presentation once again shows that there is considerable variation and change in the poles of symbolic assemblies (Langacker 1987; 1991)

onomasiological variation  
slight diachronic change

日 金 火 光

writing  
sound

onomasiological variation  
diachronic change  
reanalysis

semasiological  
prototypicality and fuzziness  
diachronic change

MEANING] $\Sigma$

漢字的「形 音 義」