



A Study of the Buzzword “The Ancient Greek God in Charge of XX” from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor

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Abstract

The internet buzzword “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” has gone viral, with its formation and dissemination are closely linked to conceptual metaphor. This study examines “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” from a conceptual metaphor perspective, delving into its source domain characteristics, mapping process, and cognitive structure to explore its expressive effects and reasons for popularity. The study finds that “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” can convey praise, self-mockery, or irony depending on the context, and its popularity is driven by both meme propagation and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: the ancient Greek god in charge of XX; conceptual metaphor; internet buzzword.

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of internet and computer technology, online language has grown increasingly rich and mature, which has risen to successive waves of buzzwords characterized by the style of the times. Wang (2014) defines buzzword as: linguistic symbols that are most actively used by netizens within a certain period, primarily in online spaces, possessing fermenting functions and special meanings, and often exerting influence on social realities. In 2024, a large number of popular

buzzwords emerged, among which “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” was selected as one of the “Top 10 Internet Buzzwords of 2024” released by the editorial department of *Language and Writing Weekly*. It has been widely used on platforms such as Tiktok, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu, maintaining its popularity to this day. This demonstrates that the internet buzzword “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” exhibits high frequency of use, rapid dissemination, and broad reach (Hu, 2025).

"The ancient Greek god in charge of XX" originally originated from popular science posts about ancient Greek history and culture. In Greek mythology, numerous deities had their own domains of responsibility. For instance, Zeus presided over the sky, while Poseidon ruled the seas. After the phrase gained popularity online, netizens creatively adapted it to produce variations like "the ancient Greek god in charge of beauty" (describing someone with exceptionally outstanding appearance) and "the ancient Greek god in charge of slacking off" (describing someone who is careless or half-hearted in their work). These adaptations are used to highlight an individual's exceptional expertise in a specific field. The "XX" in the phrase can be filled with various parts of speech: it can be a noun, such as takeout, table tennis, atmosphere, or ratings; it can also be a verb, such as watching dramas, cooking, or taking photos; or even an adjective, such as cute, clean, or ridiculous. As a result, the internet buzzword "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX" demonstrates remarkable adaptability and flexibility.

From a cognitive linguistics perspective, analyzing "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX" can reveal its deep connection to conceptual metaphor. Therefore, this study tries to examine the buzzword "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX" from the perspective of conceptual metaphor, aiming to explore its expressive effects and reasons for popularity.

2. Literature Review

In their co-authored work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson proposed the definition of metaphor: the essence of metaphor lies in understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another. This reveals that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device or linguistic phenomenon, but a fundamental way of thinking and understanding the world. Contemporary Chinese cognitive linguistics posits that "metaphor serves as the catalyst for linguistic change, with one generation's

metaphors becoming the conventional expressions of the next" (Hu, 2004). Conceptual metaphors comprise two concepts, the source domain and the target domain, which belong to two different conceptual domains. The source domain represents the object used for comparison, while the target domain is the object being described. Metaphors emerge through psychological mapping across different conceptual domains. For example: Language is a tool. In this metaphorical sentence, many characteristics of the source domain "tool" are systematically mapped onto the target domain "language." This endows the abstract symbolic system of language with many attributes of the concrete entity "tool," such as being usable, selectable, and improvable (see Figure 1). Through metaphorical mapping, "language" is endowed with the operability, practicality, and variability of "tool," enabling people to more intuitively understand the functions and characteristics of language.

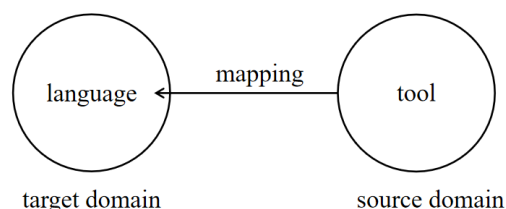


Figure 1. Language is a tool

Lakoff and Johnson proposed that conceptual metaphors can be categorized into three types: structural metaphors, orientational metaphors, and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphor refers to using the structure of one concept (the source domain) to understand and organize another concept (the target domain), thereby giving the abstract concept a clearer structure and logic—essentially explaining concepts through concepts. For example, in "time is money," concrete concepts like "spending," "saving," and 'wasting' associated with money are used to understand time, making the abstract concept of time more tangible. Orientational metaphor organizes

abstract concepts through spatial orientation (such as up-down, front-back, inside-outside), often related to human bodily experience. People frequently associate emotions and states with the spatial concept pair “up-down.” “Reaching the peak of life” metaphorically positions success or positive states at a high elevation, while “falling into a low point” metaphorically describes negative states as descending into a low place. Ontological metaphor refers to treating abstract concepts (such as emotions or thoughts) as concrete objects or entities, making them quantifiable, classifiable, or manipulable-essentially explaining concepts through physical entities. “Burning with rage” and “a mind full of ideas” respectively treat the human chest and brain as containers, with anger and ideas likened to liquids held within them. Ontological metaphors enable these concepts to be perceived and quantifiable.

After 2010, the development of the internet in China entered an explosive period, leading to a sharp increase in netizen numbers. With the emergence of internet buzzwords, linguists have increasingly turned their attention to this field, with many studies conducted from the perspective of conceptual metaphor. Bai & Wang (2014) explored the semantic evolution and cognitive mechanisms of “萌” (méng, meaning ‘cute’) from the perspectives of conceptual metaphor and conceptual integration; Wang (2020) employed conceptual metaphor analysis to examine the new meanings behind “种草” (literally ‘planting grass’, meaning to spark a desire to buy something) and “拔草” (literally ‘pulling out grass’, meaning to dissuade from a purchase or satisfy a curiosity); Cai & Zhao, Zhang, Zhang, and Chen (2022, 2024, 2025, 2025) respectively examined the metaphorical mechanisms of “社恐” (social anxiety), “X 门” (X-gate), “凡尔赛” (humblebrag), and “包 X 的” (bāo X de) respectively. Since the emergence of “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” online in April 2024, domestic scholars have also paid

attention to its formation and dissemination. Pang (2025) believes that this internet buzzword exemplifies semantic generalization, reflecting not only linguistic phenomena but also sociocultural changes. Li (2025) analyzes the phrase from a construction grammar perspective, finding that this semi-schematic construction not only demonstrates formal flexibility and innovation but also exhibits significant cultural inclusiveness and rich social significance. Yu (2025) examined the phrase from three dimensions-rhetorical metaphor, cognitive linguistics, and pragmatics-concluding that its emergence and dissemination highlight the important status of metaphor in language. Hu (2025) focuses on the semantic and syntactic functions of “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX,” dissecting how its generative mechanism stems from metaphorical and analogical processes.

3. “The Ancient Greek God in Charge of XX” Under Conceptual Metaphor

“The ancient Greek god in charge of XX,” as a structural metaphor, can be analyzed by first examining the source domain of deities in ancient Greek mythology. Ancient Greek mythology is one of the oldest and most influential mythological systems in Europe, shaping the core symbols of Western culture. Ancient Greece was characterized by nature worship and a polytheistic pantheon of personified deities. Around the 7th century BC, Greek myths and legends gradually became systematized, with enduring classics like *Homer’s Epic* and Hesiod’s *Theogony* being passed down through the ages. Through the passage of time and subsequent refinement by later generations, the ancient Greek mythology we know today took shape. Later, with the development of mass media, the dissemination of ancient Greek mythology expanded from written texts to animations and film productions. Figures like Zeus, the king of gods; Apollo, the god of the sun; Athena, the goddess of wisdom; and Poseidon, the god of the sea, became widely recognized, demonstrating the

mythology's enduring and powerful cultural vitality.

The deities in ancient Greek mythology are characterized by their human-like qualities, distinct functions, and interactive nature. They are both embodiments of natural forces and projections of social relationships. First, "human-like qualities" refers to the concept of "gods and humans sharing the same form and nature." The gods possess distinct anthropomorphic traits, resembling humans in appearance and character. Though more beautiful, powerful, and endowed with divine powers, they are not flawless supreme beings. Instead, they exhibit desires, emotions, and flaws similar to humans. For instance, Zeus, the king of the gods, is authoritative yet lustful, often taking various forms to unite with mortal women. Hera, the queen of the gods, is jealous and frequently seeks revenge on Zeus's lovers. This human-like characteristic provides the archetypal foundation for modern metaphors such as "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX."

Second, the ancient Greek gods possessed distinct functions, meaning they hold absolute authority and expertise in their respective domains. Since the Greek pantheon was structured around human society organization, the gods' diverse functions were closely tied to every aspect of human life. This provided the historical foundation for the complexity, refinement, and flexibility of the variable "XX" in the modern phrase "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX." For instance, ancient Greece was an agriculture-based civilization, which is why Demeter is the goddess of agriculture, presiding over farming, forestry, grain harvests, and teaching humans how to cultivate. Similarly, the patriarchal system of ancient Greece gave rise to Ares, the god of war, who presides over warfare, violence, and the martial spirit.

Moreover, the gods of ancient Greece were not distant or detached but frequently intervened in human affairs, even fathering

demigod heroes (such as Heracles and Perseus) with mortals. Their interventions often carried strong personal emotional motivations, for instance, Aphrodite inciting the Trojan War over the Golden Apple incident, Poseidon obstructing Odysseus' voyage out of anger. This "interactivity" between the gods and humans not only reflected ancient Greek contemplations on fate, divine will, and human free will, but also established the cultural symbolism behind the viral phenomenon of "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX."

Therefore, from a mapping perspective, the internet buzzword "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX" projects the distinct personas of various deities (source domain) onto ordinary individuals or objects in the 21st century (target domain). Their similarity stems from shared characteristics like "distinct functions," "authority and expertise," and "being admired and revered by the masses." Thus, praising someone or something as "the ancient Greek god in charge of XX" implies that they possess divine power and attributes. This metaphor builds a bridge between gods and humans or objects. The ancient Greek gods serve as the source domain, while the evaluated individuals or objects act as the target domain, with the gods' powers and traits being mapped onto them (see Figure 2). The grand narratives of Greek mythology are thus mapped onto the subtle observations of modern daily life. This shift from the divine to the human, from divinity to humanity, forms a novel metaphorical construct. Such mapping transcends literal meaning, elevating everyday actions or traits to signify that a skill or characteristic is remarkably powerful or outstanding, thereby creating new significance.

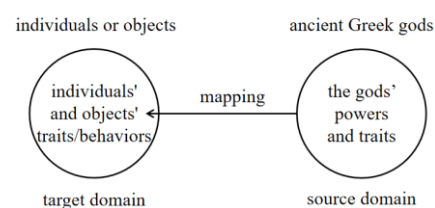


Figure 2. the ancient Greek god in charge of XX

From a cognitive structure perspective, metaphors connect familiar source domains (ancient Greek gods) with more abstract target domains (modern life contexts), utilizing the “power and traits of deities” from the source domain to reshape and deepen the understanding of the target domain. This process not only makes abstract concepts concrete and vivid but also enhances the intensity and depth of description through exaggeration and innovation, achieving a cognitive transition from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the concrete to the abstract.

Example 1: On the comment section of the song *Just Began* on NetEase Cloud Music, a highly upvoted comment reads: “Getting this song on my daily shuffle feels like being unexpectedly struck by sunlight.” A netizen replied: “You really are ‘the ancient Greek god in charge of adjectives’!”

In Example 1, the netizen uses the deities of ancient Greek mythology as the source domain and the commenter, who skillfully employs adjectives to vividly describe the listening experience, as the target domain. By mapping divine traits onto an ordinary person (see Figure 3), the reply highlights the commenter’s exceptional linguistic expression, creating an exaggerated and humorous form of praise.

Analyzing the similarity in the conceptual mapping of “the Ancient Greek god in charge of adjectives,” several points emerge. First, while the ability to use adjectives is often regarded as an insignificant trait in daily life, the phrase “the Ancient Greek god in charge of adjectives” magnifies this strength, framing it as a specialized “professional skill”-a concept that aligns with the highly segmented functions of ancient Greek deities. Second, just as gods hold supreme authority in their respective domains, the commenter’s command of adjectives is exaggerated to a “divine level,” implying that the netizen views the commenter as impeccable, professional, and authoritative in the realm of

descriptive expression. Moreover, deities are objects of worship, and the fact that this comment received numerous upvotes and replies reflects a similar “worship” mentality within the online community. Additionally, the juxtaposition of “god” with “adjectives,” which is an unconventional pairing, creates a tone that is both solemn and playful, resulting in a humorous expression rooted in “contrast-induced charm.”

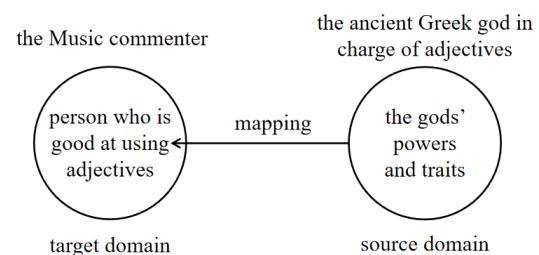


Figure 3. the ancient Greek god in charge of adjectives

Beyond praising individuals or things for possessing godlike power and qualities, when combined with pragmatic knowledge, the phrase “the the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” can also convey “self-mockery” or “irony” in specific contexts.

Example 2: A Xiaohongshu user (a BMW salesperson) posted an entry titled “A Day in the Life of a Sales Champion-The Ancient Greek God in Charge of Ridiculous”: *In the morning, the boss held a meeting that dragged on for a full half-hour—I could barely keep my eyes open. By the afternoon, I was in the zone, ready to even stop a random dog on the street to talk about the car.* The post was accompanied by a picture of themselves dozing off during the morning meeting.

In traditional metaphors, the mapping from the divine realm to the human realm is typically used to elevate the value of the target domain. Example 2, however, subverts this convention by employing “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” in an illogical manner, creating a stark contrast and a self-deprecating effect.

In this case, the source domain remains the solemn and authoritative deities of ancient Greece, while the target domain is the poster themselves (see Figure 4). By using the word “ridiculous” to describe their workday-lethargic and unresponsive in the morning, overly enthusiastic and chatty in the afternoon-the poster highlights an irrational and illogical behavioral pattern that starkly contrasts with the stable authority of a deity.

“The ancient Greek god in charge of ridiculous” wraps absurdity in divine imagery, mapping the traits of a god onto a state of unpredictability. The morning lethargy can be interpreted as the “divine dormant phase,” while the afternoon exuberance becomes the “divine manifestation phase.” This exaggerated contrast amplifies the comedic effect of the “split routine” experienced by many office workers.

By using “The ancient Greek god in charge of ridiculous,” the poster not only reflects a trend among contemporary youth to express genuine struggles through self-mockery but also serves specific communicative purposes. First, it humorously alleviates occupational stress by attributing extreme states of exhaustion and hyperactivity to a “divine role,” thereby diffusing the pressure associated with maintaining the “sales champion” persona. Second, it resonates with peers and fellow workers, who can easily relate to the experience of being “comatose in morning meetings” and “switching into hyperdrive in the afternoon.”

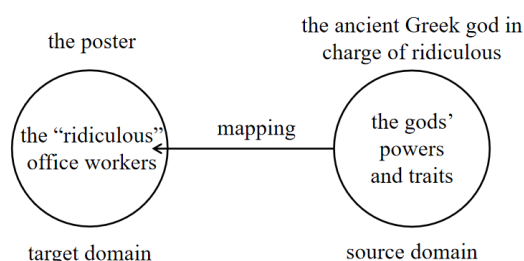


Figure 4. the ancient Greek god in charge of ridiculous

Example 3: In mid-January, Yangzhou experienced snowfall and cold weather.

However, to alleviate meteorological drought and haze, the “Yangzhou Release” Tiktok account announced that the city’s meteorological department would carry out artificial rainfall operations for two consecutive days. The harsh sleet weather prompted many residents to vent their frustrations in the comments section of the post, with one netizen commenting: “Yangzhou truly is the Ancient Greek god in charge of artificial rainfall!”

In Example 3, the phrase “the ancient Greek god in charge of artificial rainfall” appears to deify the Yangzhou meteorological department (see Figure 5), but it actually carries an undertone of irony. In ancient Greek mythology, Zeus controls thunder and lightning, while Aeolus governs winds and storms. These deities typically possess the authority to command natural phenomena, yet their actions are often unpredictable and arbitrary. This divine trait is cleverly mapped onto the artificial rainfall operations conducted by the Yangzhou meteorological department: on one hand, it acknowledges their “divine power” in wielding modern technological means; on the other, it subtly satirizes their capriciousness, reminiscent of the ancient Greek gods. When artificial rainfall causes significant inconvenience to citizens, this “divine acts” becomes a target for netizens’ jokes. The expression’s brilliance lies in its stark contrast between surface praise and underlying critique. On the surface, it maintains the laudatory structure of “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX,” while internally satirizing the capriciousness, unpredictability, and absurdity of artificial rainfall. The sarcastic use of “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” not only expresses dissatisfaction with the artificial rainfall policy but does so in a more subtle and humorous way than direct complaints.

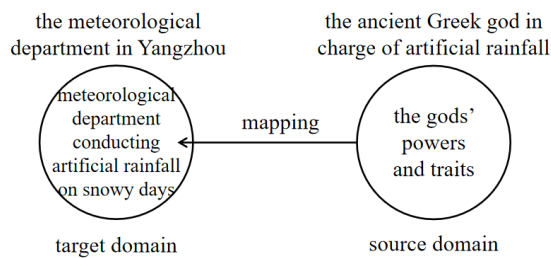


Figure 5. the ancient Greek god in charge of artificial rainfall

4. Reasons for population

(1) Meme Transmission

As an internet buzzword, the “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” relies on its adaptability, variability, and contagiousness for rapid dissemination and widespread replication (Dawkins, 1976). Ancient Greek mythology, as a cross-cultural symbol, has long established its divine division of labor as a collective cognitive “ready-made metaphor.” When netizens apply this model, recipients can instantly activate relevant schemas and even spontaneously engage in secondary creation, driving meme propagation. Simultaneously, on social media, users of this buzzword typically belong to specific subcultural groups (predominantly young people and buzzword enthusiasts). When one individual begins using “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX,” other group members rapidly experience cultural resonance, accelerating the buzzword’s spread.

(2) Cross-Cultural Transmission

The popularity of the internet buzzword “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” also reflects the charm of cross-cultural communication. As a globally shared cultural heritage, ancient Greek mythology possesses highly adaptable symbols and narratives that can be reinterpreted and applied by people across different eras and cultural backgrounds, thereby acquiring new contemporary significance. Through metaphorical framing, modern behaviors or phenomena are placed within the context of ancient Greek mythology.

This not only revitalizes the vitality of world culture but also fosters communication and understanding among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, highlighting the universality of human emotions and experiences.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the internet buzzword “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” based on conceptual metaphor theory, detailing its source domain characteristics, mapping process and cognitive structure, thereby exploring its expressive effects and reasons for popularity. Through specific case analysis, it is concluded that “the ancient Greek god in charge of XX” achieves expressive effects of praise, self-mockery, and irony in specific contexts. Its popularity is driven by both meme propagation and cross-cultural communication. However, this study focuses solely on the metaphorical mechanisms of internet buzzwords in China. Future research could further compare the similarities and differences of similar metaphorical structures across different cultural contexts.

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