

PAPER

Cultural conceptualizations of Chinese zodiac animals in Chinese English

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Abstract

World Englishes as a discipline has developed more than half a century of research and practice. It is closely connected with such other disciplines as applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied cultural linguistics. In this paper, we adopt a holistic analytical framework drawing upon world Englishes and applied cultural linguistics with reference to lexical borrowing, semantic variation, and cultural conceptualizations to unpack the culturally-embedded meanings underlying the twelve Chinese zodiac animals. In particular, we explore the cultural meanings of creative expressions that use *dragon* and *horse* in Chinese English, for example, the *dragon horse spirit*, by analysing qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The English language has been going through a series of 'glocalization' processes. It has been 'globalized' and is commonly used as a lingua franca for international communication. In the meantime, it has also been localized into different varieties of English, that is, world Englishes. Alongside the linguistic 'glocalization' of English, there are also cognitive and cultural dimensions to the use of English in multicultural contexts. One of the areas in world Englishes studies is lexical semantic variation across varieties of English and lexical borrowing from other languages into world Englishes. Different worldviews, cognitive processes, and cultural conceptualizations of the speakers of world Englishes are naturally and creatively incorporated into their use and interpretation of English words. Kachru terms this process as 'acculturation of Englishes', or more specifically, 'nativized lexicalization' (Kachru, 1992a, pp. 305–310), and 'bilinguals' creativity' (Kachru, 1985, p. 20). Kachru's work has led to a growth in the research of lexical semantic variation and lexical borrowing in relation to bilingual creativity, that is, new meanings attached to existing English words and loanwords by world Englishes speakers. To unpack the increasingly dynamic and creative vocabulary of world Englishes due to semantic variation and lexical borrowing, or 'nativized lexicalization', it is necessary to adopt a cultural linguistics approach (Sharifian, 2017a), particularly the 'applied' dimension of cultural linguistics, that is applied cultural linguistics (Palmer & Sharifian, 2003; Xu, 2017a), to comprehend the worldliness of English vocabulary and the culturally constructed meanings of existing and new expressions in English.

Over the last decades, 'nativized lexicalization' research has been focusing on Kachru's (1992b) Outer Circle varieties of English, for example, institutionalized 'New Englishes' such as Indian English, Malaysian and Singaporean Englishes. However, the twenty first century so far has witnessed a new shift of focus to more global 'linguistic landscapes' (Bolton, 2012, p. 30; Gorter, 2013, p. 205), including the Expanding Circle countries. Indeed, Bolton and Davis

(2006, p. 6) point out that 'theoretically, world Englishes has consistently sought to ground its work in the "sociolinguistic realities" of all English-using societies worldwide'. Schneider (2014, p. 9) proposes that 'while the twentieth-century expansion of English predominantly transformed Outer Circle countries, in recent years attention has increasingly been directed towards the Expanding Circle, where the demand for and the spread of English have been growing dramatically'. One of the rising varieties of English in the Expanding Circle is undoubtedly Chinese English. Research on Chinese English (Bolton, 2003; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002; Xu, 2010, 2017b; Xu & Sharifian, 2017; Xu et al., 2017) has shown that creative acculturation of English in China and Chinese diasporas takes place at various levels, including lexis, syntax, discourse and pragmatics, and cultural conceptualizations, that is, schemas, categories and metaphors. The unprecedented spread of English alongside globalization both geographically and virtually has enabled culturally constructed concepts and expressions in English to gradually find their way into the daily use among speakers of world Englishes irrespective of the three 'Circles'. For example, it is increasingly common to greet people around the Chinese New Year, or the Spring Festival season with an expression containing a Chinese zodiac animal, for example, *Happy New Year of the Dragon*, and *Happy New Year of the Horse*, and this practice is not limited exclusively to Chinese communities but can be seen across cultural boundaries in a global and multicultural context. For example, Australia Post has been issuing stamps based on Chinese zodiac animals on a 12-year cycle for more than two decades, contributing to the awareness of the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS among people in Australia and across the world. Thus there is a growing awareness of cultural metaphors, such as A CLEVER MONKEY, A HARDWORKING HORSE, and A POWERFUL DRAGON. In addition, relevant cultural schemas in relation to cultural activities, for example, A DRAGON DANCE as a celebration of the Chinese New Year, has begun to take root in the minds of people not previously influenced by this aspect of Chinese culture, re-schematizing a DRAGON from the Western dinosaur-looking monstrous animal to a vibrant and celebratory creature with a benevolent disposition, symbolizing POWER, DIGNITY, FERTILITY, WISDOM, and AUSPICIOUSNESS.

In this paper, we adopt a framework that draws upon world Englishes and applied cultural linguistics to investigate semantic variations and loanwords in relation to Chinese English, and cultural conceptualizations, including schemas, categories and metaphors, to deconstruct cultural meanings of Chinese zodiac animals, and their relevant culturally constructed concepts and expressions, for example, the *dragon horse spirit*. Through qualitative interview data analysis, we explore the following research questions, including: (1) What are the cultural conceptualizations of Chinese zodiac animals among Chinese speakers of English? (2) How to decode Chinese English expressions that include zodiac animals, for example, the *dragon horse spirit*? We also explore the implications of the cultural linguistics research of Chinese zodiac animals for world Englishes studies and intercultural communication. The significance of the research underlying this paper is that it contributes to the inclusivity and worldliness of culturally constructed concepts in world Englishes for intercultural communication. It also contributes to our understanding of the nexus between the two expanding disciplines of world Englishes and cultural linguistics. In addition, it provides an insightful analytical framework for deconstructing semantic variations and loanwords across languages and varieties of English.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews relevant literature with the aim of constructing an analytical framework drawing upon the nexus between world Englishes and applied cultural linguistics. The framework comprises *lexical borrowing* and *semantic variation* across languages and varieties of English, and cultural conceptualizations, that is, *cultural schema*, *cultural conceptual metaphor* and *cultural category*, with particular reference to creative loanwords and culturally constructed concepts in Chinese English. This section also reviews literature regarding relevant research on Chinese zodiac animals from a cross-disciplinary perspective, such as social sciences, economic behavioural science, population studies, and contemporary Chinese and Asian studies. Research on lexical semantic variation across varieties of English and lexical borrowing from other languages into world Englishes can be traced back to Kachru's (1992a, p. 305) 'acculturation of Englishes', or more specifically, 'nativized lexicalization' (Kachru, 1992a, p. 310), and 'bilinguals' creativity' (Kachru, 1985, p. 20), which is defined as 'those creative linguistic processes which are the result of competence in two or more

languages' (Kachru, 1985, p. 20). The main processes of creativity, according to Kachru (1985), include: (1) 'expanded' contextual loading of the text, which involves 'an extension of the accepted literary and cultural norms'; (2) 'altered' Englishness in cohesion and cohesiveness, for example, processes of stylistic 'foregrounding'; and (3) 'transferred' discourse strategies, with a 'mixed' style, or a style-repertoire appropriate to local concepts of culture.

Bolton (2010, p. 465) has explicitly unpacked issues of creativity in relation to world Englishes, pointing out that multilingual users of English are 'typically always adaptable, always pragmatic, and always ready to adjust to new economic opportunities and lifestyles'. In addition, Jones (2010, pp. 470–471) has deconstructed 'creativity' in the light of broader social, cultural and critical dimensions of discourse, arguing that 'it is not just the text but language itself that is remade' and that 'creativity is to a large extent a matter of finding our way around constraints or limitations placed on us by the discourses within which we operate'. Issues of 'creativity' are also connected with one of the most salient properties of world Englishes, that is, 'inclusivity'. Davis (2010, p. 26) argues that 'subsequent to linguistic resistance, various cultures throughout the world have adopted and re-invented English'. Inclusivity, in the context of world Englishes, can be defined as 'a tendency to go beyond what is known, definite, and comfortable; to take into account different and even opposing values and arguments' (Davis, 2010, p. 22). Inclusivity is not simply a 'meta-theoretical term', but a dynamic principle, which may involve 'communicational risks', when 'pragmatic needs outweigh ideology sufficiently to give speakers the courage to take trans-lingual and trans-varietal communicational risks and the compassion to hear and create understanding from these attempts' (Davis, 2010, p. 26).

It can be argued that the world Englishes approaches to bilingual creativity and communicational inclusivity have enabled the English language to undertake lexical borrowing and semantic variation with reasonable ease and flexibility. Therefore, lexical borrowing and semantic variation commonly occur across varieties of English, resulting in loanwords and creative expressions that serve the needs of the world Englishes speakers, and fulfil pragmatic functions by expanding, altering, transferring and even mixing lexical repertoires of the speakers. Such loanwords and creative expressions often constitute culturally constructed concepts and cultural conceptualizations that undoubtedly need unpacking and decoding when they are adopted for intercultural communication. Even common English words such as *tree*, *food* and *people* may not be as 'common' as people generally perceive them to be when they are used by speakers of world Englishes. Sharifian (2011, p. 63) uses a list of 32 everyday words, for example, *tree*, *home*, *food*, *people*, *family*, *country*, *fun*, *story*, *mum*, *dream*, *shame*, and *life*, to investigate cultural conceptualizations in English words among two Australian groups, including Aboriginal children and Anglo-Australian children. One of his findings is that the Aboriginal cultural conceptualizations of *home* are different from those of the Anglo-Australian.'

The category of 'home' for Aboriginal people is of much broader scope in the sense that 'home' conjures up all the places where one usually stays, such as the houses in which members of one's extended family live. Thus, the houses that 'belong' to one's aunty or uncle may be considered as one's 'home'. Where Aboriginal people live next to each other, the concept of 'home', therefore, may extend to part of a suburb. (Sharifian, 2011, pp. 66–67)

Xu (2010) has classified lexis of Chinese English into Chinese loanwords such as *dimsum*, *fengshui*, *taichi*, and *dragonboat*, nativized words, such as *family planning* (referring to the 'one-child' policy), and *one country two systems* (referring to different socio-political systems in Chinese mainland and Special Administration Regions, or SARs), and common English words, for example, *water*, *tree*, and *place*. It cannot be assumed that 'common' English words share common meanings across speakers of world Englishes. Xu and Dinh (2013) have conducted research on lexical semantic variations across varieties of English, and one of their findings is that common English words, such as *noodles*, *tower*, *festival*, *wedding*, and *fate*, have different prototypical and idiosyncratic meanings across linguistic and cultural communities. For example, *noodles* can be the 'Indonesian pride', but they can be conceptualized as 'spicy, instant, cheap ... malnutritious and unhealthy food' by Korean speakers of English. Whereas Pakistani and Vietnamese speakers regard *noodles* as being secondary to rice, Japanese speakers conceptualize *noodles* as being symbolic of continuation and harmony, and food specifically served on New Year's Eve. Chinese speakers may conceptualize *noodles* as 'longevity' food for special occasions such as birthdays (Xu & Dinh, 2013, p. 377). Kirkpatrick (2015, p. 463) has elaborated on the relationship between world Englishes and local cultures, arguing that 'it is the reflection of the local culture and the pragmatic norms of its speakers that really create a distinctive variety of English'. Kirkpatrick (2015) also argues that:

[I]t is important that we all recognize how local varieties of English borrow words from local languages and adapt the meanings of other words in order for the new variety of English to be able to reflect the cultures of their speakers [...] Speakers of a new variety of English 'stretch' it so that it can accommodate and represent the local culture. The process involved includes the adoption of words from local languages which describe local items and phenomena, creativity with pragmatic norms and cultural values into their English. (Kirkpatrick, 2015, pp. 463, 468)

Another part of the literature review for this paper involves cultural linguistics and applied cultural linguistics. Cultural linguistics 'explores the features of human languages that encode culturally constructed conceptualizations of the whole range of human experience' (Sharifian, 2017b, p. 1). Applied cultural linguistics explores 'how cultural linguistics research can be applied to various other domains and disciplines', and it can be defined as 'a holistic approach that examines the cultural conceptualizations (such as schemas, metaphors and categories) in order to understand cultural meaning, raise awareness of cultural variation and enhance intercultural communication in the areas where language and cultural conceptualizations play a salient role such as language education, world Englishes, English as a lingual franca, international business and relations, health care, media, interpreting and translation, forensic linguistics, and many other "applied" studies' (Xu, 2017a, pp. 704–705). As part of the analytical framework, cultural schemas, categories and metaphors are defined as follows:

- (1) Cultural schemas capture beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behaviour as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience.*
- (2) Cultural categories are those culturally constructed conceptual categories that are primarily reflected in the lexicon of human languages.*
- (3) Cultural metaphors are cross-domain conceptualizations that have their conceptual basis grounded in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, worldview, or a spiritual belief system. (Sharifian, 2017b, pp. 3–4)*

Recent research by Polzenhagen and Xia (2015, p. 260) has explored the 'prototypicality' of cultural conceptualizations. They propose 'culturally blended concepts' in relation to *dragon* in English and 龙 (*long*) in Chinese, suggesting that the DRAGON concept is 'a blend of elements' resulting from 'cross-cultural conceptual integration'. This paper establishes its own analytical framework, which draws upon world Englishes and applied cultural linguistics, in particular, semantic variations and loanwords in relation to Chinese English, and cultural schemas, categories and metaphors, to deconstruct cultural meanings of Chinese zodiac animals, and their relevant culturally constructed concepts and expressions. The holistic nature of the analytical framework lies in that it adopts an interdisciplinary approach involving primarily world Englishes and cultural linguistics, and that it integrates trans-lingual and trans-varietal analysis into the realm of dynamic cultural conceptual schemas, metaphors and categories.

In addition, the research literature regarding Chinese zodiac animals is interdisciplinary, in that research so far has been focusing on a number of domains across disciplines, including zodiac mathematical structure (Lamb, 2000), zodiacs as birth signs (Hung, Yang, & Lee, 2016), fertility studies in China and Chinese diasporas (Wong & Yung, 2005; Yip, Lee, & Cheung, 2002), modern Chinese populations (Goodkind, 1991), economic behaviour and organization research (Johnson & Nye, 2011), as well as the political discourse of cultural heritage, national history and evolving narratives surrounding the 'zodiac saga in China' (Fotopoulos, 2015). The Chinese zodiac is commonly understood as 'a twelve-year cycle of years named after animals' (Lamb, 2000, p. 86). It is associated with various legendary origins. 'Legend has it that long ago, one Chinese New Year, the Buddha invited all the animals in his kingdom to come before him. Unfortunately, only twelve turned up. The first to arrive was the rat, followed by the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and finally the boar. In gratitude, the Buddha decided to name a year after each of the animals' (Lamb, 2000, p. 86). The Chinese have their own cultural and cognitive structures based on this zodiac 'twelve-year cycle, or duodenary' and another 'concurrent cycle of ten years, the decathedral', which involves 'what the Chinese consider to be the five elements – wood, fire, earth, metal, and water – which are further subdivided into elder and younger stems of each element', constituting a 'sexagesimal (sixty-year) cycle of elements and animals' (Lamb, 2000, pp. 86–87).

The Chinese zodiac has a long history as far as Chinese astrology is concerned. According to Yip et al. (2002, p. 1804):

[R]ecords from archaeological sites have revealed evidence for the use of astrology over 4000 years ago in China. The first reference to the relation between time (hour, day, month and year) and animals dates back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 567).

Yip et al. (2002, p. 1804) also point out that 'over centuries the astrological way of thought permeated virtually every area of Chinese culture ... The Chinese have always had strong emotion and affection for the dragon, which they know to be a benevolent creature (symbolising strength and potency)'. In terms of fertility studies and zodiac birth signs, Yip et al. (2002, pp. 1810–1811) argue that 'folklore beliefs and cultural preferences have always had an influence on fertility of the Chinese population' and they have observed that:

[A]s rooted in traditional folklore people believe that their personal traits and fortunes come under the mysterious influence of the animals of the years in which they were born. The Chinese have always had a liking for the dragon, which has been a symbol of divinity and good fortune. Prospective parents appear to be opting the Dragon Year for birth timing.

Although research on zodiac animals and birth timing shows that zodiac preferences exist among certain Chinese communities and diasporas, such as 'dragon babies' (children born in the years of the dragon) have higher birth rates than babies born in other animal years, such as the so called 'dragon effects' (Hung et al., 2016, p. 226), 'dragon year fertility spikes' (Goodkind, 1991, p. 680) or 'dragon spikes' (Johnson & Nye, 2011, pp. 85–86), Hung et al. (2016, p. 220) argue that 'media reports have exaggerated the tiger and dragon myths out of proportion,' and they conclude that 'neither the tiger nor the dragon cohort is, statistically speaking, significantly different from the others' (Hung et al., 2016, p. 226). Johnson and Nye (2011) have also critically examined whether fortune favours dragons, or the common beliefs among individuals from 'Confucian' cultures (for example, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese) that the Year of the Dragon is 'an auspicious time for business, marriage, and birth. In particular, children born in dragon years are thought to be luckier, brighter, stronger, and more likely to flourish than those born in any other year' (Johnson & Nye, 2011, p. 86). They suggest that 'the dragon superstition is self-fulfilling' (Johnson & Nye, 2011, p. 92), in the sense of 'increasing the behavioural salience of the belief' (Johnson & Nye, 2011, p. 93). They adopt the notion of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' proposed by Merton (1948) that 'in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true' (Merton, 1948, p. 195).

While acknowledging that the Chinese have a 'cultural calendar that comes with a wealth of relevant folklore' (Goodkind, 1991, p. 679), Goodkind argues that 'the Dragon Year preference is not grounded in any formal astrological principle' (1991, p. 664). He proposes 'the animal zodiac as a new consumer-choice framework' (Goodkind, 1991, p. 672), suggesting that:

[W]hile this calendar was not designed to help people decide when to bear children, under favourable technological, historical, and institutional circumstances some Chinese have taken these cultural cues in fashioning new traditions of behaviour. (Goodkind, 1991, pp. 679–680)

Prospective parents thus now appear to be using the zodiac as a kind of consumer-choice framework. As they plan for ever-smaller families, parents become more concerned with child quality, and, for some parents, the first investment in that quality concerns choosing the right zodiacal sign for the child. (Goodkind, 1991, p. 673)

In addition, the Chinese zodiac can also be applied to political discourse 'by situating the Zodiacs within a history of shifting values' (Fotopoulos, 2015, p. 603). Referring to the 'Zodiac saga' occurring in 2000, when three of the set of 12 bronze-plated zodiac animal heads, originally designed by Europeans for a Western-style section of the Qianlong emperor's private gardens, emerged for auction in Hong Kong SAR, the sale occasioned 'the development of two intersecting discourses, national humiliation and world cultural heritage' (Fotopoulos, 2015, p. 603). 'Their sale was protested by Chinese authorities as deeply humiliating to the Chinese nation. Since then, the Zodiacs have become central figures in a national campaign for repatriation and the most widely recognized objects of China's national

cultural heritage' (Fotopoulos, 2015, p. 603). The above review of the relevant research on Chinese zodiac animals shows that, although the zodiac animals have been researched in a number of domains across disciplines, there appears to be a research gap in approaching this set of Chinese zodiac animals as a culturally constructed category with associated schemas and metaphors from world Englishes and applied cultural linguistics perspectives in terms of zodiac animal related lexical borrowing and semantic variations and how their associated schemas and metaphors are heterogeneously blended and distributed among speakers of Chinese English.

3 | DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

To address the two research questions that are set out in the Introduction section, the following semi-structured interview questions were designed to collect relevant data for analysis:

1. What are the 生肖 (*shengxiao*) or Chinese zodiac animals? How are they expressed in English?
2. Do you know whether there is a sequence of the animals? How are they sequenced?
3. What zodiac animals are your favourite?
4. How do you understand or interpret your own zodiac animal?
5. Do you think one's zodiac animal may be related to one's personalities?
6. How do you think about a *dragon*, and how do you think about a *horse* in zodiac animal terms?
7. What are some of the expressions that you can think of, which contain *dragon* and/or *horse* and other zodiac animals?
8. How do you understand the expressions 龙马精神 (*longma jingshen*) or *dragon horse spirit*?

The above guiding semi-structured interview questions are explicitly related to the two major research questions in that they help the researchers find out what the cultural conceptualizations of Chinese zodiac animals are based on the experiences and perceptions of the participants, and the interview questions also help the researchers decode salient Chinese English expressions that involve Chinese zodiac animals.

The participants were recruited through social media networks, including WeChat, Facebook, and Email mailing lists. The intention was to recruit twelve participants who were born in different zodiac years. The other selection criteria included that: (1) they are adult (over 18 years of age) speakers of Chinese and English, with Chinese being their first language; (2) there is a relative gender balance among the twelve participants; (3) they are from different parts of the Chinese mainland, or overseas; (4) they agree that they can respond to the interview questions at least partially in English; and (5) they consent for the interview data to be used anonymously for this research project purpose. The semi-structured interviews were mostly conducted through e-mail exchanges, face-to-face interactions, or a combination of email and face-to-face communication in a bilingual manner. The interview data were collected directly and verbatim from the email exchanges and social media communication, or transcribed from recordings from the face-to-face interviews. For those responses that were given in Chinese, the first author of the paper has translated them into English. The following is a table of the demographic information of the twelve participants, presented in the order of when they were interviewed or returned the responses to the interview questions, a process that continued throughout February and March of 2018.

Table 1 shows that of the twelve participants, eight were female and four male. They were born in different Chinese zodiac years and their ages range from early twenties to mid-50s. Eleven were born in different places across the Chinese mainland and one was born in Hong Kong. The locations where the interviews were conducted or from whence the participants responded to the interview questions through email or social media also vary, and they include: Melbourne, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. In terms of the coding applied to the participants, the first letter for each code indicates the gender of the participant, as in, F for female, and M for male. The number in between the letters in each code indicates the position of each participant in the order of data collection. The letter(s)

TABLE 1 Demographic information of the participants

No.	Participant code	Zodiac	Gender	Age (approx.)	Hometown	Mode of interview
1	F1S	Snake	F	28	Beijing	Email/face to face
2	F2RAT	Rat	F	45	Qiqihaer/Heilongjiang	Email
3	M3RO	Rooster	M	24	Lanzhou/Gansu	Email
4	F4RAB	Rabbit	F	42	Jingdezhen/Jiangxi	Email
5	F5P	Pig	F	34	Xi'an/Shan'xi	Face to face
6	M6H	Horse	M	41	Dalian/Liaoning	Email
7	F7T	Tiger	F	31	Kunming/Yunnan	Email/face to face
8	F8G	Goat	F	50	Ya'an/Sichuan	Email
9	F9M	Monkey	F	49	Chengdu/Sichuan	Email
10	M10DO	Dog	M	23	Yibin/Sichuan	Email/WeChat
11	F11O	Ox	F	56	Hong Kong	Email
12	M12DR	Dragon	M	41	Shanghai	Email/WeChat

following the number indicate(s) the zodiac animals of the participants. For example, F1S means a female participant, the first person to have returned her responses to the interview questions, born in a Year of the Snake. M12DR means a male participant, the 12th to have returned his responses to the interview questions, born in a Year of the Dragon. The following is a list of findings based on the data analysis regarding the eight interview questions.

1. The participants are all aware of the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS, and they know that there are twelve zodiac animals. The majority of the participants know how the twelve animals are sequenced. However, in terms of how best to translate the names of the zodiac animals into English, there are variations as far as *rat*, *ox*, *dragon*, *goat*, *rooster*, and *pig* are concerned.

Although the majority of the participants know how the twelve Chinese zodiac animals are sequenced, and some even know why they are sequenced in the way they are, that is, *rat*, *ox*, *tiger*, *rabbit*, *dragon*, *snake*, *horse*, *goat*, *monkey*, *rooster*, *dog* and *pig*, one participant (F4RAB) responded that 'Yes, there is a sequence, but I could not remember the exact sequence'; another participant (M12DR) responded that:

[T]here is a hierarchy (instead of a strict sequence) of animals. Among actually existing animals, tiger and lion are usually posited at the top. (M12DR)

These responses show that although the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS is largely homogeneously distributed in terms of what and how many zodiac animals there are, there exists some apparent heterogeneous distribution regarding the sequence of the zodiac animals, and why they are sequenced the way they are. The fact that one participant (M12DR) mentioned a *lion*, which does not fall into the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS, shows that even the assumption that all speakers of Chinese English are familiar with what the zodiac animals are should not be taken for granted.

Although the participants are all bilingual speakers of Chinese and English, their translations of the names of a number of zodiac animals vary. For example, seven of the participants listed *rat* while five other participants listed *mouse*; nine of the participants listed *ox*, two of them listed *cow*, and one listed *bull*; 11 of them listed *dragon*, with the exception of M12DR, who gave the Chinese transliteration of the word 'dragon', which is *long*. In a follow-up exchange on social media interactions, he explained that 'using *long* rather than *dragon* is because the latter simply is a mistranslation'. In terms of other zodiac animals, which have different English translations, five of the participants listed *goat*, and seven other participants listed *sheep*; 11 of the participants listed *rooster* while one listed *chicken*. Ten of the participants listed *pig* while two listed *boar*. Participant F11O made the relevant point that these Chinese zodiac animals have become 'so popularly known in foreign countries, so they are getting their English names'. However, the

English names of a number of Chinese zodiac animals, as discussed above, need further codification if they are to be consistently expressed in Chinese English and across varieties of English.

Regarding the rationale for how the zodiac animals are sequenced, F1S responded that:

[T]hey are sequenced by Dizhi, i.e., the signs of time used in ancient China. For example, rat is assigned by zi which is the beginning of twelve Dizhi, so rat is the first zodiac animal. (F1S)

Dizhi (地支) is known as the 'twelve earthly branches', including zi (子), chou (丑), yin (寅), mao (卯), chen (辰), si (巳), wu (午), wei (未), shen (申), you (酉), xu (戌), hai (亥), and it is an ordering system, particularly in China, in relation to the astrological and zodiac traditions. M3RO pointed out that the sequence could be based on Chinese folklore. F5P's response was different from the others, as she said during the face-to-face interview that:

I know the sequence very clearly. In Chinese, they should be 虎牛鼠兔, 龙蛇马羊, 猴鸡狗猪, which can be literally translated as tiger, cow, rat, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and boar. (F5P)

However, her confidence appears to have been misplaced, as her list does not follow the conventional sequence of rat, ox and tiger. F7T, like F1S, also associated the zodiac animals with the Dizhi or twelve earthly branches, which she termed 'the ancient Chinese timekeeping habit', such as zi rat, chou ox, yin tiger, mao rabbit. She provided a folktale regarding the sequence of the zodiac animals that her grandmother once told her:

Once upon a time, the Jade Emperor called all the animals to attend a temple fair in which the first twelve animals would be granted to be the zodiac animals and the sequence would be related with the time of their arrival. It was said that the rat and the cat were close friends and they wanted to attend the temple fair together. It's very interesting that the cat was always sleepy, so he asked the rat to wake him up in the morning. However, the rat didn't keep the promise and he just went alone. That's the reason why the cat was absent among the zodiac animals. What's more, the rat managed to be the first to arrive. As a result, the cat turned the rat into his enemy. Each time when they meet in the following time, the cat would always chase the rat and try to take revenge. (F7T)

In terms of the sequence of the zodiac animals, F11O also speculated that the sequence could be related to the Dizhi, and she responded that:

I'm sure they can be traced back to some ancient Chinese studies such as 天干地支, 五行八卦... there must be some wisdom in it in ancient Chinese thoughts. (F11O)

In this response, the Chinese expressions 天干地支, 五行八卦 are literally translated as 'heavenly stems and earthly branches, five elements and eight trigrams', and these are primarily about ancient Chinese metaphysics and fundamental principles of cosmology.

2. In terms of the 'favourite' zodiac animals, the majority of the participants tend to list their own, and those of their close relatives, such as their parents, or children.

For example, F11O responded that 'I do have some good feelings about it [dragon] as my mother is a dragon'. F11O also made a distinction between 'rational' favourite and 'emotional' favourite by responding that: 'Rationally, none; emotionally, ox, tiger, dragon, and pig'. Among the twelve participants, nine listed their own zodiac animals as their favourite, alongside a few others. The positive characteristics of certain zodiac animals have often been given as reasons for the choice of a favourite, for example:

Dog is known as loyalty. (F2RAT)

A Rooster has an image of being lively and active, full of energy, and it gives people a vibrant impression. (M3RO)

In the North, especially my hometown, there's a saying, that is, people who were born in the Year of the Pig are very lucky. They don't have to go out and work hard in their entire lives, and they have not too bad achievements. (F5P)

[P]eople with a rat zodiac are very alert and shrewd; and they are very smart. (F5P)

Dragon (Long) in Chinese culture represents Dao (the Way), Heaven, and political legitimacy (royalty), and horse represents loyalty, manly (masculine) beauty, and might. (M12DR)

Another reason, as elaborated by F7T, is that there is a 'mental/psychological suggestion' or 'the subconscious', or a 'sort of superstition in traditional Chinese culture' that people born in the year of certain animals get along well with one another, in her case, *tiger* and *horse*. M10DO responded that 'the subconscious first choice was dragon when I read the question but actually I'm not so fond of this animal'. This 'mental/psychological suggestion' or the 'sort of superstition' can be regarded as a conscious portion of the cognitive and cultural schemas among the majority of the participants.

However, not all participants specified their favourite zodiac animals. One participant (F4RAB) responded that 'I don't have any preference among them'; and another (M10DO) responded that 'it is hard to decide which one is my favourite one'. Among the twelve zodiac animals, *horse* and *dragon* are the most favoured in this study, being favoured by five participants each. They are followed by *pig* and *tiger* (3 votes), *rat* (2 votes), *snake*, *dog*, *rooster*, *monkey*, and *ox* (1 vote). In contrast, the *goat* and *rabbit* are not favoured by any of the participants.

3. Regarding the interpretations of the participants' own zodiac animals, the responses show various cultural schemas and semantic variations.

F1S interpreted the *snake* as a 'little dragon', and it is 'flexible and sensitive, but also strong and determined', and she also interpreted that the *snake* is 'very quiet and patient', and it moves 'fast without hesitation'. F2RAT interpreted the *rat* as 'clever, tactful, tricky and fraudulent'. M3RO interpreted the *rooster* as 'active and open-hearted, full of power and grandeur'. F4RAB's response was slightly different as she said that she expressed the belief that the Western zodiac could predict more accurately the person's characters and fortune, therefore, she said that: 'I did not pay too much attention to the meaning of my Chinese zodiac'. F5P interpreted the *pig* as being 'open and extraverted, relatively optimistic' and it has 'good fortunes, or good luck'. M6H responded that 'people born in the year of the horse tend to be hard-working, faithful and having strong will-power'. F7T responded that the *tiger*:

[R]epresents power and bravery [...] Tigers are normally called King of the animals and to some degree people who are tigers in terms of zodiac animals would like to keep everything under control. Meanwhile, tigers are decisive, which means they should always make wise decisions in particular situations. (F7T)

F8G interpreted that:

[T]hose who were born in the year of the goat were born to be hard working (well, should say harder working than others) all their life in order to obtain what other people can easily get, and to have a not-easy-life; that's why many people here (in Beijing) tend to avoid having babies in such years. But in Sichuan Province where I'm from there is no such kind of an interpretation. (F8G)

F9M interpreted the *monkey* as a 'clever animal but it lacks persistence and perseverance'. M10DO interpreted the *dog* as the 'symbol of loyalty, friendliness or warm-heartedness', and he felt that 'friendliness' would fit him well. F11O shared what she thought was a general understanding that the *ox* is 'hardworking and perseverant'. M12DR shared his own view that '*long* (dragon) is a culturally created creature'. In his view, the *long* (dragon) 'marks the political wisdom of ancient Chinese thinkers – in solving the empire's lack of legitimacy', in the sense that the emperor has the legitimate power from the heaven to rule his empire.

4. In terms of the relationship between zodiac animals and people's personalities, the views of the participants are varied and divided. Some participants tend to believe that an intrinsic relationship exists to a large extent, and others, for example, F2RAT, do not. Those who do point out that the relationship between zodiac animals and human personalities could be in the form of 'self-allusion', a term used by M12DR, or a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' effect.

F1S explicitly elaborated on that point:

I don't think the year of birth has any effect on one's personality, but one's psychological suggestion can be very powerful and hence 'cast' the personality. (F1S)

This elaboration shows that at least some Chinese English speakers are aware of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' effect and use it to explain congruencies between predicted and actual personalities based on birth year. The 'self-fulfilling prophecy' effect was defined by Merton (1948) as an effect that:

[I]n the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true. (Merton, 1948, p. 195)

This effect has also been explicitly evidenced by M3RO, who pointed out that:

[O]ne's personalities should not be affected by one's zodiac animals or the time of their births. However, because of years of cultural immersion, when people are reminded of their zodiac animals alongside their corresponding characteristics, they tend to self-fulfil such beliefs, making those relevant characteristics more salient. Therefore, zodiac animals may have more or less influences on one's personalities. (M3RO)

Other participants have also implicitly commented on the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' effect, for example, F5P responded that:

[S]ince I was very young, all people surrounding me, including my friends and parents, have been telling me that people with a boar zodiac are open and extraverted, active and lucky. Therefore, slowly, I have been influenced, and I would develop similar thoughts. So, people may develop their personalities based on the information they've received about themselves. (F5P)

In a similar vein, F7T responded that:

[J]ust like people who are ox in terms of zodiac animal would be a little stubborn but hard working; people who are monkeys might be very active; people who are goats might be tame, etc. Zodiac animals are not only related to one's personalities but habits as well. (F7T)

However, the participants did not have homogenous views. Half of them (F2RAT, F4RAB, M6H, F8G, M10DO, and F11O) denied there was a logical connection between zodiac animals and people's personalities, for example, F2RAT argued that:

[T]oo many people were born in the same year and each one is different from the others. The process of growing up and the environment one is in will decide one's personalities. The personalities have nothing to do with the zodiac animal. (F2RAT)

M6H questioned the existence of such a relationship:

I am not sure about this. As a matter of fact, I doubt it. (M6H)

F8G suggested other factors might be responsible for people's personalities, and she responded:

I don't know. Probably I prefer to say that one's gene, blood type and living environment shape one's personalities. (F8G)

M10DO clearly stated that 'zodiac animals are not so related to one's characters'. F11O also challenged the connection:

I don't think like this but perhaps in ancient China, there can be some relationship when Chinese studied it—it all relates to the year you were born because of ideas like 天干地支 (heavenly stems and earthly branches). But I don't think it is that relevant in the world today. The world today is far too complicated for people's personalities to be seen simply as twelve big groups. The environment where we grew up must have affected our personalities a lot.

M12DR appears to have summarized it well:

[I]f there's a relationship of any sort, it is only in the form of self-allusion. (M12DR)

TABLE 2 Interpretations of *dragon* and *horse* by the participants

Participant	Dragon	Horse
F1S	Dragon represents 'power, authority and good luck'.	Horse is related to 'freedom, alertness and endurance'.
F2RAT	Power and superiority.	Loyalty and endurance.
M3RO	Chinese 'dragon' is different from the Western monstrous 'dragon', but a creature that represents 'mightiest power'. Chinese 'dragon' can sometimes be 'jocular, amiable, and approachable'. Many Chinese people regard 'dragon' as 'power, capability and sophistication'.	'Horse' is 'diligent, loyal, and full of spirituality'. Chinese people have good impressions on horses, and they love and respect them. 'Horse' is commonly used in metaphors for successes in career and emotion.
F4RAB	Dragon may mean having 'power'.	'Horse' may mean 'running wild without control'.
F5P	Dragon is a bit more ambitious, and powerful, and sometimes a bit aggressive.	A 'horse' is 'very hard-working, and calm, and can achieve a big goal in the long term' (F5P)
M6H	Both 'dragon and horse' represent 'energy and enterprising spirit in zodiac terms'.	Both 'dragon and horse' represent 'energy and enterprising spirit in zodiac terms'.
F7T	Dragon represents 'power and majesty'. ('In Chinese culture, the image of dragon is totally different from that in other cultures'. In some dynasties of ancient China, the emperors wore the dragon robe (龙袍) which was a symbol of the 'royal family and the position of a ruler'. 'People who are zodiac dragons are talented in leadership'.	'People who are zodiac horses are peaceful and gentle. In my mind, horses are herbivorous, so they won't put any threat to other people'.
F8G	A dragon means (good) luck, (good) appearance and power.	A horse means 'talents and energy'.
F9M	A dragon usually is a 'mysterious and somewhat vicious person'.	A horse is somehow a 'diligent and graceful person'.
M10DO	The dragon I imagined is the dignified animal which consists of many parts of other animals and will bring happiness and auspicious fortune.	'The horse is the normal horse or a horse with a pair of wings which is called 天马 (tianma) or horse bred in the sky just as the unicorn.'
F11O	Just as a legendary animal in the Chinese culture representing energy and authority.	Not much [is known] about a horse in zodiac terms as no members of my immediate family is a horse.
M12DR	A dragon person might think of him/herself as (slightly) exceptional, capable of achieving greatness.	A horse person might have more confidence in perceiving him/herself as a (handsome) beauty.

5. The *dragon* and the *horse* are the two most popular zodiac animals among the participants. Interestingly, the participants' interpretations of the *dragon* and the *horse* and their associated cultural schemas show both similarities and differences.

Table 2 collects the interpretations of *dragon* and *horse* by the participants. As far as the *dragon* is concerned, the twelve participants appear to share certain cultural schemas while making slightly different interpretations. The majority of the participants, that is, ten of them, viewed the *dragon* positively, with seven stating explicitly that the *dragon* represents 'power'. Other words associated with the *dragon* include 'authority', 'energy', 'capability (of achieving greatness)', 'good luck', 'auspicious fortune', 'superiority', 'leadership', 'majesty', and 'sophistication'. The slightly different interpretations include the *dragon* as 'jocular, amiable, and approachable' (M3RO); having an 'enterprising spirit' (M6H); representing the Chinese 'royal family and the position of a ruler' in ancient China (F7T); having a 'good appearance' (F8G); and 'happiness' (M10DO). Participant M12DR, who was born in the Year of the Dragon, pointed out that a '*dragon* person might think of him/herself as (slightly) exceptional'. In addition, participants suggested a few neutral or negative impressions of the *dragon*, for example, it can be 'ambitious and sometimes a bit aggressive' (F5P); and 'mysterious and somewhat vicious' (F9M).

As far as a *horse* is concerned, the majority of participants also share certain core cultural schemas with slight variations. The most common attributes associated with the *horse* is that it is 'diligent' or 'hard-working'; 'loyal' and it is full of 'energy' and 'endurance'. Other words that the participants used to describe the *horse* were 'freedom', 'alertness', 'spirituality', 'success', 'talent', and a *horse* can be 'calm', 'gentle and peaceful', and 'graceful', in the sense that 'horses are herbivorous, so they won't put any threat to other people' (F7T). A *horse* can also 'achieve a big goal in the long term' (F5P), and 'have more confidence in perceiving him/herself as a (handsome) beauty' (M12DR). A *horse* may share an 'enterprising spirit' with a *dragon*, according to M6H, and there may be two different types of horses, according to M10DO, including a 'normal horse' and a 'horse with a pair of wings' or 天马 (*tianma*, literally translated as a 'sky horse'). A negative interpretation of 'running wild without control', may also be associated with a *horse*, as specified by F4RAB. In addition, F11O responded by saying that 'not much [is known] about a horse in zodiac terms as no members of my immediate family is a horse'.

6. Idiomatic expressions containing *dragon* and *horse* provided by the participants show how these two zodiac animals are collocated with other Chinese characters and words, and schematized among Chinese speakers. A total of 35 idioms were used by the participants, with 15 containing *dragon*, 17 containing *horse*, and three containing both *dragon* and *horse*.

Idiomatic expressions containing *dragon* include (with the numbers in brackets indicating the number of participants listing the expression, and the literal translations in English): 龙腾虎跃 (x5, dragon soaring and tiger leaping), 生龙活虎 (x5, lively dragon and vigorous tiger), 叶公好龙 (x3, Lord Ye loved dragons, a Chinese idiom meaning that someone loves a certain thing outwardly, but not sincerely), 卧虎藏龙 (x2, crouching tiger hidden dragon), 龙飞凤舞 (x2, flying dragon and dancing phoenix), 龙腾虎啸 (roaring dragon and growling tiger), 龙争虎斗 (dragon war and tiger battle), 虎啸龙吟 (growling tiger and roaring dragon), 龙精虎猛 (doughty dragon and lively tiger), 飞龙在天 (flying dragon in the sky), 龙战于野其血玄黄 (dragons fight in the meadow, and their blood is black and yellow), 真龙天子 (real dragon and son of heaven), 画龙点睛 (fill in the eyes of a painted dragon), 神龙不见尾 (one cannot see the tail of a heavenly dragon), and 群龙无首 (dragons without a leader). One feature of these expressions is that *dragon* is commonly collocated with the *tiger* in these idiomatic expressions, with meanings such as liveliness, vigour, energy, and power. Another feature is that the *dragon* can be associated with 'sky', and the 'Son of Heaven'.

Idiomatic expressions containing *horse* include: 马到成功 (x9, a horse arrives to bring success), 马不停蹄 (x4, a horse never stops running), 马首是瞻 (x2, take the head of the general's horse as guide), 一马当先 (x2, a horse gallops at the front), 马马虎虎 (x2, neither a horse nor a tiger, meaning 'careless'), 路遥知马力 (a long road tests a horse's strength), 老马识途 (an old horse knows the way), 一马平川 (a horse galloping straight across the flat land), 万马奔腾 (ten thousand horses gallop ahead), 快马加鞭 (to spur a horse to full speed), 老骥伏枥 (an old steed in the stable is yet dreaming of heroic exploits), 千里马 (a long-distance running horse), 秣兵厉马 (feed the horses and sharpen the weapons), 汗马功劳 (to ride a labouring horse to great deeds), 马上封侯 (to win instant success or titles), 走马观花 (to view flowers on horseback), and 马失前蹄 (a horse stumbles or trips over). What most of these expressions share in common is that the *horse* is associated with running fast, good endurance, leading the race, good rewards and success.

Idiomatic expressions containing both *dragon* and *horse* include: 龙马精神 (x4, dragon horse spirit), 车水马龙 (x2, endless stream of horse, dragon and carriage, meaning 'heavy traffic'), 神龙马壮 (the strength and robustness of dragon and horse). Among these, the expression *dragon horse spirit* is the most common. The next section will explore the meanings of *dragon horse spirit* in more detail.

7. The idiomatic expression *dragon horse spirit* identifies something that is considered an 'important spirit in Chinese culture' (F1S). However, its conceptualizations are heterogeneously distributed among the participants, and among speakers of Chinese English more generally.

All the participants shared the cultural schema and interpretation of the *dragon horse spirit* as a 'positive' spirit. The *dragon horse spirit* is a symbolically uplifting spirit in Chinese culture, as both the mythical *dragon* and the *horse*, conceived as a mythical creature, have wings. Thus they represent vigour, vitality, enthusiasm, aiming high and a positive

attitude, or people's fantasies for great power, positive energy, effort and action, and leadership. People with the *dragon horse spirit* have the courage and the confidence to achieve their ambitions (F1S, M3RO, F4RAB, M6H, F7T, and F8G). M10DO made his point regarding *dragon horse spirit* explicitly:

'The dragon horse spirit means a person possesses a positive attitude which can bring prosperity. This expression comes from ancient time that describes the horse with a dragon's appearance or spirit that truly has a strong body. Therefore dragon horse spirit becomes a wish and greeting.'

As indicated by M10DO, the *dragon horse spirit* is also a common Chinese New Year greeting. This cultural schema was shared among a number of the participants, for example, *dragon horse spirit* signifies 'new-year wishes to others' in the sense of encouraging them to have the capacity for 'working even harder, not being defeated and afraid of nothing' (F2RAT).

[D]ragon horse spirit is used when people have New Year greetings. For example, Happy New Year, Dragon horse spirit. ... It means good luck and success. (F5P)

I remember every year in the Spring Festival Gala, when it comes to the New Year's greetings, people will say 龙马精神 (dragon horse spirit) which means a better year than ever before. (F7T)

Apart from these shared schemas and conceptualizations of *dragon horse spirit*, participants expressed their own more idiosyncratic understandings of the expression, for example, F5P pointed out that

[M]y personal understanding is that, dragon horse spirit means new atmosphere and new look. Doing things with the power of a thunder bolt and the speed of lightning. And it sustains and lasts for a long time. And it means being super energetic. (F5P)

F11O explained that *dragon horse spirit* means 'having a lot of energy for the day or year and I always think of it as a person's state at the beginning of the day'. M12DR regarded *dragon horse spirit* as an encouragement, that is, 'encourage people to ACT like a long (dragon) and horse, even though you were not born as one'. The use of the phrase *dragon horse spirit* is also heterogeneously distributed geographically, as pointed out by F5P:

[B]ecause I come from the North, we Northerners do not usually use the set expression 龙马精神 (dragon horse spirit). I feel like in the Southern areas, for example, Guangdong, and Fujian, people use this expression more frequently. (F5P)

F9M, whose hometown is Chengdu in Sichuan province but who has been living and working in Beijing for around twenty years, also explicitly pointed out that the expression is limited to certain parts of the country, explaining that 龙马精神 (*dragon horse spirit*) is:

[A] term I seldom use. Nor have I ever heard of it in my surroundings. I learned it first from movie stars in Hong Kong. But I never pay any attention to the meaning of it. Just guess it is a good and lucky expression related to Chinese New Year blessings. (F9M)

4 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This section discusses the findings presented in the previous section in relation to world Englishes and cultural linguistics, and addresses the two overarching research questions, namely, (1) What are the cultural conceptualizations of Chinese zodiac animals among Chinese speakers of English? (2) How to decode creative Chinese English expressions that include zodiac animals, for example, the *dragon horse spirit*? This section also explores the implications of this research for world Englishes studies and intercultural communication. The first finding of this research indicates that a majority of Chinese speakers of English are aware of the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS, and they can refer to these animals effectively in English. What is worth noticing is that since Chinese English is a 'developing variety of English, which is subject to ongoing codification and normalization processes' (Xu, 2010, p. 1), the English

equivalents of the zodiac animals are somewhat unstable, because for certain animals, there are multiple English expressions, for example, *rat* and *mouse*; *ox*, *cow* and *bull*; *dragon* and *long*; *goat* and *sheep*; *rooster* and *chicken*, as well as *pig* and *boar*. In other words, these equivalents may still need further codification.

The second finding regarding the 'favourite' zodiac animals of Chinese speakers of English indicates that both rational and emotional attitudes can be held simultaneously to the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS. How each animal is evaluated reflects individual preferences. Most people prefer or justify their own zodiac animals or those of their close family members and relatives on a pragmatic basis, for example, F11O's zodiac animal is *ox*, however, she has developed some pragmatic preference toward *dragon*, as she said 'I do have some good feelings about it [dragon] as my mother is a dragon'. This attitude is consistent with those findings from a cultural discourse and creativity perspective in that bilingual and multilingual users of English are 'typically always adaptable' and 'pragmatic' about their use of English (Bolton, 2010, p. 465), and that there are 'broader social, cultural and critical dimensions of discourse' involved in the rational and emotional dimensions of the use of English in certain cultural contexts (Jones, 2010, pp. 470–471). In addition, the rational and emotional dimensions to the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS align with Kachru's (1985, pp. 23–24) 'expanded contextual loading' of the use of English by bilingual speakers of English, and they embody 'an extension of the accepted literary and cultural norms'.

The third finding regarding the variety in the interpretations of the Chinese-speaking participants' own zodiac animals indicates various cultural schemas and cultural metaphors, as well as semantic variations in relation to the relevant zodiac animals can be drawn upon. For example, the *snake* is culturally conceptualized by one participant as a *little dragon*; the *horse* is culturally associated with diligence, strong will-power and success; and the *dragon*, which can be contrasted with its prototypical Western counterpart, is an indicator of power, leadership and great ambition. To unpack such culturally constructed concepts and expressions, it is important to adopt the analytical framework of applied cultural linguistics, which allows for the investigation of both 'language' and 'cultural conceptualizations'. It is also important to apply 'a holistic approach that examines the cultural conceptualizations in order to understand cultural meaning, raise awareness of cultural variation and enhance intercultural communication in areas such as world Englishes, English as a lingua franca, and intercultural communication' (Xu, 2017a, pp. 704–705).

The fourth finding regarding the relationship between Chinese zodiac animals and people's personalities provides more evidence of a 'distributed model' of individual and group level cultural cognitions. Sharifian (2011, p. 5) maintains that 'the cultural level of cognition, meanings and conceptualizations appear to arise from the interaction between the members of a cultural group'. Sharifian (2011, p. 4) also argues that 'the degree to which individuals can participate in a group's conceptualized sphere determines their membership of the group. This participation, or non-participation, is often mirrored in interactions between the members of a cultural group as well as those between the members of different cultural groups'. This helps explain the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' effect (Merton, 1948, p. 195) regarding Chinese zodiac animals among those Chinese speakers of English who believe such an effect exists to a certain extent, in the sense that the seemingly nonsensical or irrational connections between zodiac animals and people's personalities may evoke emerging beliefs and behaviours through interactions among Chinese cultural group members, which in turn, schematize or rationalize the non-rational conceptualizations in the minds of the members of the cultural group so that they become acceptable or even useful in that context.

The fifth and sixth findings regarding Chinese idiomatic expressions containing the words *dragon* and *horse* and the Chinese interpretations of the two zodiac animals found to be the most popular and salient for the participants indicate the role that idioms and folklore play in formulating cultural group level cognitions, for example, a *horse* is associated with 'success', and a *dragon* is associated with 'power', and that the 'cultural salience' of *dragon* and *horse* also serves to distinguish the Chinese variety of English from other world Englishes, as Thompson and Zhang (2006) state:

Cultural salience is an important but often overlooked variable in the structure of semantic domains. (Thompson & Zhang, 2006, p. 398)

Forgas (1983, p. 156) defines 'cultural salience' as the extent to which a cultural prototype is 'consensually seen as strong, normatively salient, associated with strong emotional reactions, and is highly differentiated from other, comparable prototypes within a subculture'. The fact that Chinese speakers of English share certain positive schemas of

dragon and *horse* shows that the 'aggregate salience' in relation to the Chinese variety of English regarding the two zodiac animals can be regarded as an outcome of shared cultural conceptualizations, and this 'aggregate salience', in Thompson and Zhang's (2006, p. 400) terms, becomes the equivalent of 'cultural salience'.

The seventh finding regarding the importance and cultural meanings of the idiomatic expression *dragon horse spirit* indicates that there are reasonable ways in which culturally constructed concepts can be encoded and decoded through deconstructing cultural conceptualizations among Chinese speakers of English. To unpack the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS, people need to be aware of the applied cultural linguistics framework of cultural schemas and metaphors, and world Englishes practices in relation to lexical borrowing and semantic variation. People should also take interdisciplinary perspectives to enhance the 'intelligibility of form, comprehensibility of meaning, and interpretability of sense' (Proshina, 2014, p. 4) while communicating in world Englishes.

World Englishes, as a discipline and paradigm, is 'inclusive of all varieties and variants of English, of many cultures and ethnicities, of many topics and subjects, of various approaches and perspectives' (Proshina, 2014, p. 2). In this case, different cultural categories, schemas and metaphors also contribute essentially to the 'inclusivity' of world Englishes, although they may involve 'communicational risks' (Davis, 2010, p. 26) among speakers of world Englishes. 'Communicational inclusivity' of world Englishes, according to Davis (2010, p. 26) is 'a tendency to go beyond what is known, definite, and comfortable; to take into account different and even opposing values and arguments'. It operates on a daily basis among speakers of world Englishes when 'pragmatic needs outweigh ideology sufficiently to give speakers the courage to take trans-lingual and trans-varietal communicational risks and the compassion to hear and create understanding from these attempts'. In terms of the implications of this research for world Englishes studies and intercultural communication, it is clear that the nexus between world Englishes and other relevant disciplines including cultural linguistics and English as a lingua franca is worth exploring, as it may render useful frameworks, for example, the framework of cultural conceptualizations and lexical borrowing and semantic variation, as developed and elaborated throughout this paper, for unpacking culturally constructed concepts and expressions. In this connection, people should be encouraged to develop new world Englishes proficiency in terms of acknowledging the paradigm shift from monolithic English to pluricentric world Englishes, anticipating and embracing cultural diversity and inclusivity as a result of the co-existence of various cultural conceptualizations and the ubiquity of cultural lexical borrowing and semantic variation. This would allow for the acquisition of new competence for successful intra- and intercultural communication among speakers of world Englishes.

5 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have adopted a holistic analytical framework drawing upon world Englishes and applied cultural linguistics in terms of lexical borrowing, semantic variation, and cultural conceptualizations comprising schemas, metaphors and categories to unpack the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS. In particular, we have explored the cultural meanings of some creative expressions that are related to *dragon* and *horse* in Chinese English, particularly *dragon horse spirit*. We have also explored implications for world Englishes studies and intercultural communication, pointing out that the nexus between world Englishes and other relevant disciplines may provide useful frameworks for encoding and decoding culturally constructed concepts and expressions. We have also argued that speakers of world Englishes need to develop new proficiency and competence in order to cope with the issues and challenges associated with intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability among speakers of world Englishes. It is hoped that through this exploration of the cultural category of CHINESE ZODIAC ANIMALS, we can raise the awareness of the worldliness of different varieties of English, and contribute to the inclusivity research of world Englishes.

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