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## Metaphors Business Linguistic Culture Lives By

**MIHAELA VASILOAIA**

“George Bacovia” University of Bacau

Bacău, Romania

[mihaela.vasiloaia@ugb.ro](mailto:mihaela.vasiloaia@ugb.ro)

**MICHELLE GAISOA - ISSA**

University of Navarre, San Sebastian, Spain

**NORA VERGARA - ISSA**

University of Navarre, San Sebastian, Spain

### Abstract

Metaphors in business rhetoric are dominant in practice while ignored in theory because business people are not aware of their own rhetoric, and because most of them are dead in the way that these metaphors were live when first created, then became dead through use. The most part, the bulk of the vocabulary of business, consists of metaphors taken from non-economic spheres. Non-economists, like us, find it easier to see the metaphors used than the business people. Thus, I believe that an investigation of metaphor in business texts is useful in determining the different functions metaphors play such as, a non-decorative role, more precisely, as a language necessity in communicating efficiently in business, and, at the same time, a cognitive tool.

### Key-words

business culture, metaphor, cognitive approach, business communication

## INTRODUCTION TO METAPHOR IN ECONOMICS

Formal linguistics has treated metaphor as a device of the poetic imagination found mainly in 'high' literature but hardly present in everyday language. However, there was an exception to this rule, one important theory of metaphor, known as Interaction or Tension which did not regard it as a simple use of words, but according to I. A. Richards as “two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction.” [1] Over the past two decades, linguists' view of metaphor has changed fundamentally. Modern metaphor theory refutes the idea that metaphors are merely poetic devices rather than part of everyday speech, characteristic of human thought processes, enabling us to make sense of the world and deal with our experiences on it.

In 1982, Willie Henderson opened the discussion of metaphor in economics, pointing to the scarcity of analyses of metaphor in economics, in spite of the “wide and deliberate use of metaphor in economic texts.”[2] A year later, Deidre McCloskey argues that metaphor should be investigated in the frame of an economic criticism whose objective should be finding out “how arguments sought to convince the reader.” [3]

McCloskey explains how in the eighties a few economists realized that such facts as “the character of the audience”, “the style of the customary medium”, “the practical purpose to be achieved from the communication” do influence scientific communication while not necessarily distorting it; he suggests that, in order to account for such factors, economists need rhetoric, which is not an ornament, “or what is left after logic and evidence have done their work.” [4] Rhetoric in its broad definition is the art of argument, including what is called logic, one corner of the rhetoric tetrad (which also includes, for McCloskey, metaphor, story and fact). Scientific metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments, on the contrary, they are essential to the conception, development and maintenance of scientific theories in a variety of ways: they provide the linguistic context in which the models that constitute the basis for

scientific explanation are suggested and described; they supply new terms for the theoretical vocabulary, especially when there is a gap in the lexicon; and they direct scientists towards new paths of inquiry, by suggesting new hypothetical entities and mechanism. Through metaphors scientists draw upon existing cognitive resources to provide both the model and the vocabulary in terms of which the unknown mechanisms can be conceived and so investigated. Metaphors thereby perform a cognitive role in scientific theorizing.

Since economists too tell stories, use metaphors, also twentieth-century economic literature as a whole has a style, and this style is scientific. Style in the writing of economics followed a path parallel to that of the modern novel: the suppression of the authorial “I” in the latter corresponds to the suppression of the “I” in science, yielding “represented reality.” The implied author of economic literature, once the Philosopher or the Historian, has become the Scientist. The scientific paper depends on a theory of writing – the dominant one being based on “strange commonplaces” such as that style may be separated from content, or that invention is a self-standing and all-encompassing process, supposedly independent from the metaphors and stories through which the economists’ world is created, and the style and arrangement in which their arguments are couched. [5]

The language of economics has received considerable attention in recent years. McCloskey, analyses economic texts to show, for example, how rhetorical devices may be used to suppress uncertainty and give the impression that what is presented is unassailable fact. The work which has had the most far-reaching implications for the way metaphor is considered is Lakoff and Johnson, which will be discussed more fully below. The role of metaphor specifically in economics writing has also received some attention. Henderson's article “Metaphor in Economics”, mentioned above, classifies metaphors used in economic discourse into those which are also applicable more generally, those which have become conventional tools in economic description and more original metaphorical images dealing with specific situations. Metaphor is clearly an important consideration in the economics textbooks in current use, and an understanding of metaphor thus has relevance for pedagogy in English courses for economics students. Insights into metaphor in general will hopefully be of assistance to students whose mother tongue is not English in their struggle to comprehend economics texts.

Charteris-Black thinks that metaphor is in fact an essential feature of technical discourse and plays an important role in making it easier to understand. “Meanings may be realized by word choice that differs what is in some sense typical or unmarked, and anything approaching technical language for example, tends to become noticeably more complex if one simplifies it by removing the metaphor.” [6]

Metaphors in economic rhetoric are dominant in practice while ignored in principle because economists are lacking in self-consciousness about their own rhetoric, and because most of them are dead in the way that these metaphors were live when first created, then became dead through use. The most part, the bulk of the vocabulary of economics consists of metaphors taken from non-economic spheres. Non-economists, like us, find it easier to see the metaphors used than the economists. Thus, I believe that an investigation of metaphor in economic texts is useful in determining the different functions metaphors play such as, a non-decorative role, more precisely, as a language necessity and, at the same time, a cognitive tool.

Most economists may say that they have never heard of metaphor and that it should be avoided in scientific language because it is an instrument of imprecision, though they are unconsciously using it daily. Undoubtedly, these economists are wrong as I think that metaphor plays a very important role in popularizing business concepts. To illustrate further the **large** presence of metaphor in business writing, I will take an excerpt from an article, “Fools fight for favour in the court of Mr. Market”, in *Financial Times*. The author, John Kay, views market as an “anthropomorphic and voting metaphor”. [7] Here is how he describes the two types of metaphor: “The anthropomorphic metaphor is hierarchical. ‘We might ask the *market*’ City folk will say, but only if they occupy very senior positions or are leading specialists in their field. Such individuals are privileged by direct access to *Mr. Market* himself. The most discreetly influential figures in the city and on Wall Street display the style and mannerisms of *Mr. Market*’s courtiers. The voting metaphor is democratic. Every one’s opinion counts although some opinions count for more than others. Views are weighted by the amount of money behind them ...” [8] Kay also presents *market* as “a silly old fool who occasionally makes assets available to Berkshire Hathaway beyond their fundamental value.”

As we can observe the whole text is highly metaphorical (relying mainly on personification), seasoned with sarcasm and irony. Of course, we wouldn’t expect an article on an economic issue to be subjective, to abound in figures of speech, but here we must also take into account the journalistic style.

*Market* is, indeed, one of the most used metaphors in business texts. It is actually traders and stockbrokers who exert their energy buying and selling and who use their financial expertise to take risks in the pursuit of profit. However, as Mason has pointed out, human characteristics are frequently transferred from these people to the *market* in general, or specific aspects of it. [9] In order to support this idea I shall offer the following examples from the online edition of Financial Times [10], a very rich source of material for analysis:

Brokers said *the market was having trouble* focusing on issues which could give it direction.

Stocks shrugged off weaker bond prices and a *bearish futures market* to close higher in choppy trade.

*The market is still trying* to find a level to consolidate on its way down.

*The market was very nervous*. It lacked direction. In the afternoon the index nosedived with a vengeance ...

*The market was suffering vertigo* following the dramatic 200-point leap in the futures market on Wednesday.

This personalization of inanimate or abstract nouns is a very common feature of descriptions of stock market activity. The stock markets themselves may be the object of an identity switch, where the place the stock market is located is substituted for the market itself.

Business people use metaphor both as part of the language of economics and as part of an economic metalanguage, i.e. the language used to talk about economics. The very few studies of metaphor in economics texts have come from economists themselves, such as Henderson, McCloskey.

## A Cognitive Review

Metaphor has been an important issue along centuries. It has been the focus of study, research, analysis and theory, starting from Aristotle (whose assumptions are still valid) and going on till our days, when theorists such as Lakoff and Newmark constructed whole philosophies that have metaphor at their centre.

Actually, what was called the “western metaphoromania” of the last decades resulted in a lot of research, which deals with the following processes: identification, comparison and juxtaposition, and the two dimensions of metaphor, i.e. the instrument of thinking used to shape a certain discipline and, paradoxically, the outcome of the light shed upon the metaphorical process itself. Thus, metaphor is considered both a tool of forming various sciences and a result of the way in which these sciences developed.

Aristotle is considered to have laid the basis of metaphor theory in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* and since his work, linguists have analysed either the dualistic aspect of his philosophy or the monistic one. However, the common core of all the theories is the fact that metaphor is considered the transition from the particular, the known, near, palpable and explicit to the general, unknown, distant and implicit.

As a consequence, metaphor is seen as the general phenomenon of analogical interpretation in interpreting and organising human experience. The thinking underlying the cognitive theory, according to which metaphor is appropriately characterized as the figure of speech that allows us to speak about one thing in terms which are suggestive of another, starts from the work of I.A. Richards (1936). He distinguishes between the **tenor** of a metaphor, its underlying subject, and the **vehicle**, the terms in which that subject is presented. Consider the following example: *The business organisation is a brain*. The tenor is the working of the business organisation, and the vehicle is the term *brain*. Each term in the metaphor brings with it its own system of associated commonplaces, that is, a set of (other) words and thoughts that the original term evokes in the minds of people. Viewing the business organisations as brains involves thinking about the organisation as inventive and rational, and in a manner that provides for flexibility and creative action. The challenge is to create new forms of organisation capable of intelligent change and that can disperse brainlike capacities.

For Richards, the cognitive power of metaphor derives from what he calls the “interanimation of words”, which makes metaphor not just a matter of verbal displacement or the substitution of one word for another, but “a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts.” [11]

Metaphor has been a central topic within Cognitive Linguistics since the field was born and the term coined in the 1970s. This is partly a historical consequence of George Lakoff’s dominant role and major contributions – metaphor was his focus at the time he and a number of colleagues were defining the field of Cognitive Linguistics, and continues to be today. But the importance of metaphor studies within the discipline is also a reflection of the nature of Cognitive Linguistics as it is understood by its practitioners. If Cognitive Linguistics is the study of ways in which features of language reflect other aspects of human cognition, then metaphors provide one of the clearest illustrations of this relationship. Since the 1950s, Chomskyan linguists have been devising theories of syntax which largely exclude references to the meanings of linguistic structures; it is nearly impossible, though, to conceive of metaphor without taking into account the connections between lexical semantics, usage, and our understanding and perceptions of the world.

Metaphors provide rich evidence about the ways in which some aspects of our lived experience are associated with others, for reasons that reflect basic aspects of perception, thought, and possibly neurological organisation. Within Cognitive Linguistics the term metaphor is understood to refer to a pattern of conceptual association, rather than to an individual metaphorical usage or a linguistic convention. Lakoff and Johnson describe metaphor as follows: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” [12] What Lakoff and Johnson bring new to the theory of metaphor is raising it from the level of figure of speech to that of a way of thinking defined by a systematic mapping from a source domain.

Cognitive Linguistics’ contribution has been to treat metaphorical language as data to be examined systematically and to be considered in connection with other basic aspects of mental activity. Even more importantly, scholars in the field have recognized the thorough pervasiveness of metaphor even in “ordinary” language and thought.

**Conceptual metaphors** are essential for thought process, being considered basic and universal. They are present in the major events of human life including trade, birth, death, sex, etc. They are general and abstract, and belong to dead metaphors, so that one is not aware of them, at all. The more specific and individual they are, the more likely it is for them to acquire cultural connotations, thus representing a certain community. Far from being an ornamental literary device, metaphor is seen as pervading everyday patterns of discourse and being fundamental to thought and understanding.

Many writers now make a distinction between **conceptual** and **linguistic** metaphor, whereby metaphor exists in mind, as a connection between two semantic areas [13], while the metaphorical lexis used in text is merely the conceptual metaphor’s linguistic or surface realisation. Thus, the *economy* as a whole is sometimes conceptualised as a *living organism* or as a *person* being referred to in terms of *strong/weak economy*, *economic growth/development*, *economic cycle* etc. Economic variables, which increase and decrease are often conceptualised as living organisms that *fall*, *recover*, *grow*, *rise*, *mature*, *slip back*.

Lakoff and Johnson consider that human thought is largely metaphorical and metaphorical language is only possible because of the deeper metaphors that exist in our conceptual system. [14] One of the many examples they give is *Time is Money* – and from the word *money* they infer related expressions that are used to describe time, such as: *to afford the time to* (I’m busy at work. I can’t *afford more than a week off* at a time), *to budget time* (I have *to budget my time* very well if I want to finish until the end of the week.), *to save time* (Let’s get a taxi. It’ll *save at least 20 minutes*.), *to value time* (Employees have to learn to *value their time* if they want to finish earlier.), *to waste time* (*We’re wasting time* waiting for the applicants to come.), *to run out of time* (The manager *ran out of time* so he failed in meeting the deadline for the project.), *to make time to* (The government has to *make time to* solve the environmental problem as soon as possible.), *to spend time* (He spent his life working for the poor.), *to be short of time* (I think we should hurry up. *We are short of time*.), *to borrow time* (This government is living on *borrowed time*.) etc. This metaphor came into the English language around the period of the Industrial Revolution, when people started to be paid for work by the amount of time they worked. Thus, the factory led to the institutional pairing of periods of time with amounts of money, which formed the experiential basis of this metaphor. Since then, the metaphor has been realized in many other ways. The budgeting of time has spread throughout American culture. [15]

The most fundamental notion of conceptual metaphor theory is the mapping. This term borrowed from mathematics refers to systematic metaphorical correspondences between closely related ideas. For

example, the common conceptualization of *economy* as a *machine* includes correspondences between the economy and the machine conceived as wholes, but also between the characteristics of the machine and the working of an economy; it is understood in mechanistic terms and described using lexis relating to speed, acceleration, equilibrium, engine etc. such as: *monetary transmission mechanism*, *export as engine of growth*, *inflation as a destructive machine* and the budget deficits are said to *fuel the engine of inflation*, etc.

Other conventional metaphorical patterns involving multiple correspondences between source and target domains include **Business is War**, **A Company is a Ship**, **Economics is Flying**, **Organisations are Gardens**.

The metaphor **Business is War** (as well as the other ones) works by mapping structure from one conceptual domain (source – war) to another (target – business), thereby enabling a more abstract concept (business) to be seen in terms of a more concrete source domain (war). Business is described using lexis related to fighting and war, such as: *to gain ground on* (Sales are up! That means *we are* definitely *gaining ground on* our main competitors. They'll soon be trying to take us over.), *to give up without a fight* (It looks as if we are going to be closed down. We don't want *to give up without a fight* so why don't we try to organize a management buy-out?), *to reinforce* (Our image is too old-fashioned. We need to modernize our product range in order *to reinforce* our market position. Otherwise, we'll lose it.), *to surround* (It was obvious that Smiths would close down. They were *surrounded* by big modern supermarkets with more buying power.), *to join forces* (In order to expand in the Middle East, *we've joined forces* with a company who have been working successfully in the region for over twenty years.), *to bombard* (The new advertising campaign has been a huge success. We've been *bombarded* with thousands of new enquiries.).

The image of a ship is a powerful one in business – the idea that the employees are the crew and the company is the ship. The company is seen as a ship sailing on a sea surrounded by dangers – rocks. The source domain of the metaphor **A Company is a Ship** (here, ships and navigation) supplies the language and imagery which are used to refer to the domain which is actually at issue in the discourse (the target domain in this case, companies and management). To sustain this idea we offer the following examples: *to get on board* (For Third World countries to go communist would mean fighting *to get on board* a sinking ship.), *on course* (The half-year figures are looking very good. I'd say we were *on course* for the best year in our company' history.), *to know the ropes* (Is this your first day here? Well, don't worry. If you have any questions, ask Di. Nobody *knows the ropes* like her. She's been here for over twenty years.), *to wait for the storm to pass* (We're in the middle of a world recession. Interest rates are too high and consumer confidence is at an all-time low. Let's just keep calm and *wait for the storm to pass*.), *to run a tight ship* (Miss Blake and her team of accountants make sure that not one penny is wasted. *They run a tight ship*.), *on board* (When you get new customers *on board*, keep them.), *to wreck* (*All our planning* of the past few months *has been wrecked* by the new MD, who has decided that nothing will change.), *to be all in the same boat* (It's not just you that's worried about redundancy. *We're all in the same boat*).

Planes and flying provide numerous metaphors for economists and writers on economic matters. There are a series of expressions from the field of “flying” used in the field of economics, such as: *turbulence* (There is a lot of *turbulence* in financial markets at the present.), *to take off* (We claim the Government's Back-to-Work Plan *has never taken off*.), *to plunge* (Several Asian Countries *are plunging* to their lowest levels this year.), *free-fall* (The market is in *free-fall*.), *to climb out of* (Japan has proposed an aid package to help Asian economies *climb out of* recession.), *soft landing* (Despite the present difficulties, economists think the British economy will make a *soft landing* in the autumn.), *crash* (Financial institutions around the world are panicking after yesterday's *crash* on Wall Street.), *to plummet*, *to regain control*, *spiral* (Share prices *plummeted* as banks and lending institutions struggled *to regain control* of the downward *spiral*.), *to stabilise*, *back on course* (At the close of trading, the President announced that measures were being taken to *stabilise* the situation and get the economy *back on course*.) etc.

Organisations have been often associated with living organisms, brains, machines etc. In this case the metaphorical correspondences are between the source domain (gardens) and the target domain (organisations). From the concept of *gardens* we infer related expressions that are used to describe *organisations*: *crop* (Our local business college manages to produce an excellent *crop* of keen young potential managers year after year.), *to bear fruit* (Two thousand replies this week! Our promotional campaign is beginning *to bear fruit* at last!), *to plough* (We cannot go on *ploughing* more and more money into advertising when people don't want our products. We need new products and we need them

fast.), *to flourish* (I'm pleased to say the business is starting *to flourish* again after a difficult period; profits are up, turnover is up, and morale is improving.), *deadwood* (If we want to be more efficient, we have to get rid of the *dead wood* in middle management.), *off-shoot* (Our subsidiary in Bucharest is an off-shoot of our main company in Wien.), *up-rooting* (We're planning to relocate in Scotland but the *up-rooting* process will be difficult for many of the workforce.), *cross-fertilisation* (The *cross-fertilisation* of ideas is essential in any business.), *perennial* (We keep losing staff to firms who pay more than we can afford. It's a *perennial problem* for a firm of our size.), *spadework* (I did all the *spadework* setting up the new department, but my boss got all the credit.) etc.

As Henderson pointed out, a number of what were originally metaphors have become conventionalized in the language of economics, and can now be better considered as technical terms than living metaphors. Such terms as *equilibrium*, *float*, *inflation*, *leakage*, *boom*, *liquidity* and *slump*, *cash flow* are now so familiar in the jargon of the subject that their metaphorical etymology is not immediately obvious. More obscure terms too often have metaphorical origins but become fossilized as the technical jargon of the subject, e.g. *straddle*, *strangle*, *call*, *put*, *cover*, *hedge*, *volatility*, *leverage*, etc. Since these terms are part of the specialized lexicon of the field and not generally used in a metaphorical way, they will not be considered for the purposes of this subchapter. However, it should be pointed out that the boundary between what is a fossilized or dead metaphor, and what is living, is far from clear-cut.

We have seen that some metaphorical structures (such as the ones mentioned above) are so ingrained into our habits of thought and language that they are very difficult to see as metaphors. They raise the question of whether such usages are really metaphorical in any meaningful sense. A **dead metaphor** is one that has become a conventional usage or phrase and so has (according to some theories of metaphor) lost the live mapping between its domains. An example of this is the economic term *inflation*, whose literal, non-metaphorical meaning has to do with blowing something with air. Its widespread use to refer to price rises is today hardly noticed as metaphorical; it has come to form part and parcel of the business lexicon.

There is wide diversity of opinion on the question of dead metaphors. According to Black [16], dead metaphors are not really metaphors at all, but should instead be considered as separate vocabulary items. Lakoff is dubious about the utility of the concept – he believes that most conventionalized phrases still retain traces of their origins in living metaphors. [17] Gibbs [18] points out that if a metaphor was truly dead it would lose its compositional qualities, but in fact they still remain. For example, anyone can understand the metaphor *gold avalanche*. In this case, it is possible to construct the tenor without having recourse to a dictionary. Gold avalanche is an exaggeration of the amount of gold flowing in the 1930s in the United States of America, which is what the metaphor stands for. Since the mapping between domains can be reactivated to comprehend this sort of novel phrase, the metaphor lives on after all. Metaphors used in business discourse often appear to be dead. Since the economic meanings of phrases like *buyout* (a situation in which a person or group gains control of a company or a particular part of it by buying all or most of its shares), *carry-over* (in accounting it means the amount that is moved to the next part of the accounts or the next accounting period), *collateral* (property or something valuable that you promise to give somebody if you cannot pay back money that you borrow), are perfectly clear to experts, their metaphorical origins are often dismissed and ignored. Nonetheless the viewpoint of Lakoff and Gibbs is still useful and perhaps necessary to understanding the conceptual bases of economic understanding. In this view, even when economics terms have taken on what seems like an unproblematic formal meaning, they continue to maintain a link back to their metaphor of origin, because the mechanisms for understanding are metaphorical at their roots. Metaphors can differ in the degree to which they are taken for granted and kept out of consciousness, but are rarely so dead as to completely detach themselves from their origins. Let us take as examples two extremely used metaphors in the field of business: *bull* and *bear*.

The stock markets of the world, are inhabited by two well-known metaphorical animals, *the bull* and *the bear*. These creatures have been in existence for a long time, and the Oxford English Dictionary notes that the word *bear* was in use in the early eighteenth century, and common around the time of the great speculative frenzy known as the South Sea Bubble. The origin of the term *bear* is probably connected to the proverb *to sell the bearskin before one has caught the bear*. A bear is now understood as a person who predicts a fall in the price of stocks, but originally it appears to have referred to the stocks themselves, as in the phrase *to sell the bear*. This would nowadays be referred to as *selling short*, whereby brokers sell and obtain settlement for stocks they do not actually possess in the expectation that the price will fall and they will then make a profit on the transaction. Manipulating markets by heavy short selling to bring about falls in prices is sometimes referred to as a bear trap, which is usually illegal. The bull

apparently appeared later than the bear, also during the eighteenth century, and probably as a metaphorical foil for the bear. Bulls are optimistic, predicting that stocks will rise in price.

Words derived from these basic terms include the adjectives *bullish* and *bearish*, and compounds such as *bull run*, *bear trap* and so on:

Here are some examples from business journals [19] that abound in the use of these two terms:

Speculation on new listings was dampened by the recent *bearish sentiment* towards the market.

Nomura is taking *a more bullish tone*.

When does a *bull run* take its revenge and become a *bear market*?

...fear of just about everything drove equity and derivative instruments on a major *bear run* yesterday.

The Oxford Business English Dictionary gives the following definitions for the words *bear* and *bull*: *bear* means a person who sells shares, a particular currency, etc, hoping to buy them back later at a lower price because they think prices are going to fall rather than rise; *bull* means a person who buys shares, a particular currency, etc, hoping to sell them soon afterwards at a higher price because they think prices are going to rise rather than fall. Apparently, these two economic terms have lost any connection with their original meaning. For example, in *bull market* meaning *rising prices* there seems to be no explicit likeness between the tenor (*bull market*) and the vehicle (*rising prices*). It could be argued that the ground does not lie in similarity but rather in a kind of association we make between bulls growing horns and prices as rising in the same way horns grow in bulls.

Or, as Professor Hulban notes, “In order to trigger the metaphorical thought, between the two elements there must be not a correlation in a certain context, but also a certain distance; they must belong to different poles of thought [...] being [- Inherent] to each other.” [20]

Perhaps **transparency** is a better metaphor than death to describe the condition of the metaphors underlying business terminology. They do such a good job of structuring their target domain that they seem to disappear, and the lens of metaphor becomes an invisible pane of glass. The question remains as to what makes particular metaphors achieve transparency. I speculate that metaphors become transparent when they impose a strong structure on a domain that was previously unstructured. These metaphors essentially force one to think about the target domain in their own terms, to the point where any alternative way of structuring the domain becomes forgotten and almost unthinkable. At this point, the winning metaphor is ready to be taken literally. Such metaphors have been labelled **theory-constitutive metaphors** by some philosophers of science. That is, rather than simply mapping between the concepts and vocabulary of two existing domains, as conventional metaphors do, a theory-constitutive metaphor can be said to **create** the structure of a new domain, based on the structure of an existing one.

The theory-constitutive metaphors are fundamentally used when new concepts are introduced; they allow us to see business issues in non-business lights. *Depression*, for example, which was once a state of extreme psychological strain, often with physical symptoms, has come to denote a long period of financial and industrial slump. *Velocity* that is the speed at which something moves in a particular direction – when connected with money tells us about the speed of money’s circulation; *Diffusion*, the spread of light in many directions is used to speak about the *diffusion of profits*; *Flow*, initially meaning something that moves smoothly, steadily and continuously as of a stream in a particular direction, has come to be used in talking about money, production, capital etc; *Margin*, which originally meant space between a block of text and the edge of a page, is used in the economic lexis as the difference between the cost of buying or producing something and the price that is sold for, calculated as a percentage of the selling price; *Recession*, initially period of stopping from usual work has become now a difficult period in the economy of a country or a group of countries, when there is less trade and industrial activity than usual and more people are unemployed etc.

The process whereby metaphorical representation becomes lexicalised is a natural process of linguistic change. [21] As this happens it might be thought that metaphors lose their force, but from the conceptual metaphor point of view it has been argued that “the conventional or lexicalised metaphor is all the more powerful for its automaticity and, moreover, the whole concept of deadness loses validity when metaphors are seen as cognitive instruments.”[22]

As to the sources of the theory-constitutive metaphors, traditionally, the business culture seems to have always relied upon pure sciences such as mechanics, physics, biology and even mathematics as sources of borrowing. Moreover, other domains such as electronics and zoology have been drawn upon.

Discourse domains like business are constantly developing new metaphors. Due to the preponderance of the English language in published academic work, new metaphors often appear in

English first and then they are copied or adapted in other languages. Sometimes, an initial rendering involves simply borrowing the expression in English, as for example: *broker* (someone who buys and sells shares in a company), *buy-back* (a situation where a company buys its shares back from the people who own them, in order to reduce the number of shares available, to reduce its debt), *crash* (a sudden serious fall in the price or value of something; the occasion when a business fails), *dealer* ( a person who buys and sells shares, bonds, currencies, without using a broker or an agent), *leasing* (a legal arrangement which allows you to use a car, building, a piece of equipment or some land, for a period of time, in return for rent), *lobby* (an attempt to persuade a government to change a law, make a new law etc), *management* (the act of running and controlling a business or similar organisation), *manager* (a person who is in charge of running a business, a department of an organisation, a project etc), *staff* (all the people who work for a company or an organisation), *swap* (an exchange of different types of payments, for example payments in different currencies or payments with different interest rates), etc. [23] Such borrowings became established, probably they carry a sort of prestige with them, although the misuse of such terms can render them somewhat absurd.

I consider that an investigation of metaphor in business culture will be useful in determining the different functions metaphors play, such as a non decorative role, more precisely as a language necessity and at the time a heuristic device and a cognitive tool.

The method of analysis and interpretation contains some different techniques such as: **identification**, **general analysis**, and **text analysis**. [24]

**Identification.** The business world is awash with metaphors these days, just like other domains of human experience. Important criteria for this can be impressiveness (metaphor which stand out), repetition (metaphors or metaphorical concepts which are used repeatedly or in a similar way), and elaboration (metaphors which are especially extended or explained).

**General analysis.** Considering metaphors as part of a communication process, their general meaning has to be sought, comparisons have to be made (What kind of metaphor could express the same thing?), they have to be categorised (What function has this metaphor? or What concept does it express?).

**Text analysis.** Metaphors should not be interpreted independent of their source, but in the case of economical metaphors, most of them are accepted as technical terms belonging to the language of economics, and are learnt as such.

For capturing the reasons for which a metaphor is used, in our metaphor ontology, for each concept (which can be a source of a metaphor) a set of attributes is defined (transferred to the target concept). For each attribute a set of typical values are included. For example, the organism concept is often used in metaphors for expressing a specific state (healthy – a healthy economy, illness etc), a sufferance (e.g. *pains* – The company experience *growing pains*) or a property (e.g. sensitivity).

## CONCLUSIONS

The language of business is extremely metaphorical and sometimes clusters of metaphors result in rather elaborated images. Very often this is metaphorical elaboration of an everyday word, otherwise completely familiar.

Metaphors are used for a purpose, they reflect the writer's intentions. We could say, from a speech act theory perspective, that they have strong illocutionary force. For example, saying that something is "a pillar of stability" has a strong effect due to the fact that pillars are important for buildings, and the idea of a reliable building is very important to everyone. Therefore, the reason for which a metaphor is used, the intentionality of the writer behind the metaphor may give useful insights for a true understanding of the text where the metaphor has been used.

We believe that metaphor plays an important role in popularizing business concepts and enhancing understanding in the nature of the different metaphors used in business culture; moreover it makes those interested in this field differentiate between a theory-constitutive metaphor which has no implication for the socio-economic relations within a community, and other metaphors which might have socio-economic implications.

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