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# 1

## Introduction: Masculinized Metaphors

War metaphors played a great part in [the seminars]: by definition, we lived in a hostile environment and it was my task to bring forth in the participants that natural aggressiveness which can make them more committed, more efficient and thus eventually more productive.

(Emmanuel, 2000, p. 10)

Even the most cursory glance at any business magazine or newspaper will leave the reader stunned by the abundance of metaphoric language to be found there. Just consider the following random sample:

From hardball pricing tactics that have knocked rivals back on their heels to a capital-spending war chest that's the largest in telecom, he's determined to transform what was once just another sleepy phone company into the pacesetter for the industry.

(Rosenbush, 2003)

In this summer of corporate love, the unwanted embrace of Pechiney, a French aluminium company, by Alcan, its Canadian rival, could become a thorny romance.

(*The Economist*, 2003, p. 58)

Ready to get swallowed: We found three takeover targets that look appetizing.

(Stires, 2003)

MGM's withdrawal is the latest twist in the long-running battle over the future of Vivendi's assets.

(Larsen, 2003)

So what exactly is going on in business media discourse? And, more specifically, what constitutes the fascination that metaphor in business media discourse holds for the critical researcher?

A great deal of that fascination is accounted for by the multi-functional nature of metaphor. First, there is its important textual function (see Goatly, 1997, pp. 163–4). As realizations of underlying conceptual metaphors, metaphoric expressions

contribute to cohesion of the text while at the same time, the tightness and consistency of the argumentation which results from the structural logic provided by the metaphor . . . contributes to such an essential textual feature as is coherence. (White, 1997, p. 242)

As we shall see in the following chapters, metaphors are organized in chains across a text, involving other cognitive models such as frames and scripts. Such ‘chains provide “connectivity” so that a simple statement . . . tells us much more than is relayed by [the] words alone’ (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995, p. 42). Moreover, metaphor also organizes the interpersonal relations between discourse participants, by virtue of being embedded in a ‘communicative complex that surrounds and supports individual metaphors’ (Eubanks, 2000, p. 8). By using particular metaphors, writers can therefore define a topic, argue for that conceptualization and persuade readers to share in their metaphor and thus relate to them. In short, metaphor is ancillary in constructing a particular view of reality. In doing so, it also serves an ideational function. This book is, in fact, based on a hypothesis focusing on that ideational function of metaphor. Yet the interpersonal function is obviously a vital issue in any analysis of the ideological work that metaphor does.

The three Hallidayan macro-functions of metaphor outlined above (Halliday, 1978) of course also feature in the print media. As for the textual function, it has been noted that ‘there is an imperious necessity for newspaper language to display clarity and facilitate . . . the readability of its text’ (White, 1997, p. 242) and metaphor is indeed instrumental in achieving that end. As far as the relationship between journalists and readers is concerned, the former draw heavily on metaphor to get the latter’s attention. In fact, this is one of the main functions of metaphor in media discourse, as the ‘media have forced . . . reporters . . . to search out fresh and dramatic ways to keep their audience or readership attentive’ (Malszecki, 1995, pp. 199–200). This is particularly true for metaphoric expressions of war, which emotionalize a subject by demarcating an ‘enemy’, and thus appeal to the reader (Küster, 1978, p. 74). Prince and Ferrari (1996, p. 230) note that, apart from serving as an attention-getter, metaphors in printed media texts also underscore the explanatory perspective of those texts, thus helping

journalists to ‘undergo a partially educationally-oriented task’ *vis-à-vis* their readers (Prince and Ferrari, 1996, pp. 226–7). Enforced use of metaphoric language makes for the highly expressive, vivid and inventive style usually found in the printed media. Yet, while ‘vividness is [undoubtedly] a virtue in newspaper writing... inventions are not entirely accidental’ (Eubanks, 2000, p. 46). This is where the third function of metaphor – the ideational construction of reality – finds its reflection in media discourse. By favouring particular metaphors in discourse, journalists can reinforce, or even create, particular mental models in their readers’ cognition.

The original rationale for writing this book was the perceived dominance of the WAR metaphor in business media discourse. The particularity of that metaphor resides in the fact that war is itself not a uniform domain, comprising as it does a blend of both physical violence and military strategy. Indeed, journalists draw on both aspects to a greater or lesser extent, yielding metaphoric expressions such as *bruising battle* (see Appendix for references: MS BW 7 and MS BW 24), *cutthroat killer* (MA FO 17) or *brutal Internet price war* (MA BW16) on the one hand, and *target group* (for example, MS FT 94), *maneuver* (for example, MA BW 19) and *strategic alliance* (for example, MA EC 33) on the other. Furthermore, the blend has a temporal sequence as, in the history of humankind, organized war originated from unsophisticated fighting. Thus Clausewitz (1952 [1832], p. 178) traces warfare back to medieval fistfights, while Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 62) go back even further in stating that ‘we have institutionalized our [animal] fighting in a number of ways, one of them being war’. Indeed, the chapter on mergers and acquisitions discourse will show how the WAR OF FIGHTING metaphor can become part of a wider metaphoric scenario of evolutionary struggle and Economic Darwinism, showing both specific [+HUMAN] and more general [+ANIMATE] features. According to Lakoff and Johnson, this sublimation of raw brutality into the ‘art’ of war accounts for the pervasiveness of the WAR metaphor in conceptualizing a number of social practices. With reference to the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, they claim that

even if you have never fought a fistfight in your life, much less a war, but have been arguing from the time you began to talk, you still conceive of arguments, and execute them, according to the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor because the metaphor is built into the conceptual system of the culture in which you live.

(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, pp. 63–4)

The above statement can easily be transferred to the BUSINESS IS WAR metaphor: the related conceptual model is entrenched in Western culture, and enforced usage of the metaphor will not only root it even more firmly but will also have an impact on the way business is being done. Nevertheless, the WAR model, although pervasive, is by no means the only one available, raising the issue of why it is used so predominantly. In Hallidayan terms, what is the ideational function it holds for its users? This function is mainly fulfilled by metaphor highlighting certain semantic components of the source domain and omitting others. For example, the expression *M&A veteran* (MA FO 15) foregrounds the component [+EXPERIENCED] while simultaneously backgrounding more problematic ones such as [+BRUTAL]. Along with this 'metaphoric filtering' (Walters-York, 1996, p. 57), control over metaphoric resources and selective metaphor usage can establish discursive power of definition and social power of exclusion – given, of course, that non-dominant groups in society grant that power to more dominant groups. To sum up the point in the words of Goatly (1997, p. 155),

metaphor... is not a mere reflection of a pre-existing objective reality but a construction of reality, through a categorization entailing the selection of some features as critical and others as non-critical... metaphors can consciously be used to construct... reality.

Another discursive aspect of metaphoric expression is the fact that, by virtue of its non-literal nature, speakers can hide behind metaphoric language, claiming that they 'cannot be held responsible for the message' (Cameron and Low, 1999, p. 86). The metaphoric expressions then seem to be the unproblematic picture of reality, 'reveal[ing] some universal structure naturally inherent in the object of discussion' (Walters-York, 1996, p. 58). The term in question is thus 'naturalized' (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 35) – that is, stripped of its ideology by being rendered uncontested 'common sense'. This hedging aspect is particularly important in the case of the potentially problematic WAR metaphor: Which conceptual links between the two social spheres of war and business are highlighted and naturalized by the WAR metaphor, and why are these links metaphorized in the first place? The purpose of any critical study of metaphor is to make explicit such socially constructed implicit meanings and test them for their ideological content.

In view of the above considerations, this book is based on the following hypothesis: business media discourse is characterized by

coherent metaphor clusters centring on the WAR metaphor, and this metaphor helps to masculinize both that discourse and related social practices. The claim that the WAR metaphor functions as a masculinization device is backed by, for example, Fleischmann (2001, p. 485), who states that 'to the extent that war is still a largely male enterprise, [the WAR] metaphor subtly reinforces [the social domain's] traditional gender bias'. Since war can be considered a 'quintessentially masculine activity and an essential test of manhood' (Wilson, 1992, p. 892),<sup>1</sup> its metaphoric usage helps to marginalize, if not eliminate, metaphoric femininity and, consequently, position actual women as an out-group in business. Accordingly, the metaphor's effect on dominant masculinity is to further activate masculine patterns of behaviour and to evoke latent desires for social formations characterized by male bonding (Küster, 1978, pp. 81–2). Enforced usage of the WAR metaphor, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, thus 'strengthens the individual's sense of maleness . . . and a predominantly male culture' (Wilson, 1992, p. 898). This strengthening is particularly significant in the male arena of corporate business, in which women still feature only very marginally.<sup>2</sup> Because of its ideological function, the WAR metaphor may very well help 'the top levels of business [to] provide a fairly convincing corporate display of masculinity' (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

The gendered ideological work metaphor does in the business media finds a reflection in readership figures: as detailed in Chapter 3, on method, a stunning 90 per cent of business magazine readers are in fact men. This fact again raises questions about the interpersonal function of metaphor: journalists do not only use particular metaphor selectively to conceptualize topics from a particular vantage point. In view of readership demographics, their interpersonal aim in doing so may be not so much to influence readers' cognition than to mirror the metaphoric models they perceive in their male readers. Apart from that, WAR metaphors are, for some corporate representatives, not only 'built into the conceptual system of the culture in which [they] live' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 64) but also have a very vivid literal counterpart in military service. Indeed, executives are quoted by journalists as literalizing, and thus intensifying, the WAR metaphor by referring to their army experience (see, for example, MA FO 4).

In order to avoid spreading the topic too thin, various questions arising in the context of metaphor and gender in business media discourse had to be neglected. Thus this study will not address the issue of genre – that is, whether metaphor usage differs across various media-related text types such as commentary, cover story or interview. For

want of reliable data, another point to be left untackled is the gendered use of metaphor – that is, whether metaphoric expressions are different according to the speaker's gender. Previous studies on this topic show different results, ranging from Eubanks' (2000) findings that 'no salient gender pattern emerged with respect to Trade Is War' (p. 162)<sup>3</sup> to Wilson's (1992) observation that 'metaphors used by women involved in the process [of implementing a new software] were quite different and not associated with war' (p. 897). Such vastly divergent results obviously call for further research. Another topic only mentioned in passing is the culture-specific differences between British and US journalists' use of metaphor. Finally, the empirical analysis will concentrate on linguistic realizations of metaphor only, leaving the vast field of multi-modal metaphor to future projects.

Yet, one issue that does play a part – and an important one at that – is that of media as secondary discourse: the particular role business media discourse plays in relation to corporate discourse is discussed in Chapter 2, on theory, and the qualitative analyses (sections 4.2 on page 78 and 5.2 on page 130) also include a discussion of the links between the two discourses. As for that last question, it should be kept in mind that

social groupings are rarely hermetically sealed, and it may well be that metaphors used by other groups influence those used by the group being studied, and vice versa. (Low, 1999, pp. 60–1)

The two spheres of corporate and business media discourse share a number of similarities, starting with the fact that both produce technical texts referring to one or several institutional–professional domain(s) (Engberg, 2003). Another resemblance is constituted by shared metaphors: media texts incorporate quotations from primary corporate discourse which corroborate the observation that 'military terminology has crept down to the level of popular managerial discourse' (Raghavan, 1990, p. 13). Finally, primary and secondary discourses are similar in the effect their metaphors have on text recipients: if 'corporate rhetoric [shapes] corporations and ultimately, the customers they serve' (Boyd, 1995, p. 4), metaphoric expressions in business media texts similarly influence readers' cognition.

This book is structured as follows: first, Chapter 2 employs the notion of social cognition to develop a framework that links the cognitive semantics approach to metaphor to a critical study of language and discourse. Chapter 3 introduces corpus-based quantitative analysis

combined with qualitative text analysis drawing on functional grammar. Applying functional grammar to the study of metaphor reacts on the observation that 'linguists of . . . the functional Hallidayan tradition have found metaphor difficult to integrate with their theories' (Goatly, 1997, p. 4), seeking to remedy that situation. These methods are then used empirically on media marketing texts on the one hand (Chapter 4) and media text on mergers and acquisitions on the other (Chapter 5). The analyses will be supplemented by a discussion of the socio-cognitive impact of the emergent metaphoric scenarios and of possible alternatives to those dominant models. Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 6) will address the question as to whether gender-neutral metaphors are a viable option in business media discourse at all.

In its mission statement, *Business Week*, one of the four publications in the corpora at hand, promises that it 'takes readers . . . inside the minds of CEOs and corporate boards' (*Business Week*, 2002c, para. 2). By unravelling the cognitive and ideological fabric of business media discourse, this book aims at taking its readers inside the minds of journalists working for business publications. As outlined above, the first step on that tour is a theory reconciling cognitive and critical studies of metaphor.

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