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Metaphor in Business Discourse:

A Cognitive-Critical Approach

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SYNOPSIS

Metaphor is a common language phenomenon by which people lead their lives. The thesis first makes a general survey of rhetoric and semantic study of metaphor, analyzing the theory of each school and indicating that cognitive approach to metaphor has its traditional inheritance. As part of cognitive linguistic study, cognitive approach to metaphor is philosophically grounded on experientialism. The main idea includes conceptual metaphor theory, and Fauconnier's conceptual blending theory. According to the cognitive approach, metaphor is not seen as a purely linguistic phenomenon, but the one of thought. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.

Meanwhile, it is rather abstract for most people to understand the daily operation and the development of economy. To improve the situation, the abstract notions in the business field are usually expressed via the metaphorical concept. The application of metaphorical concept suggests the universality in the metaphor cognition. Therefore, based on some important theories, this thesis tries to relate metaphor study to business discourse, in an attempt to find out the dominant and non-dominant metaphors used in this discourse and their frequencies.

The thesis is composed of six chapters, with the first and the last being the introduction and conclusion part respectively. Chapter One

presents background information on this study, purpose and hypothesis for the conduct of this research. In this chapter, a brief introduction of metaphor is made so as to reveal the complexity of this particular language phenomenon. The method adopted in the research and the organization of this thesis are also discussed.

Chapter Two is the part for literature review. Two approaches are focused on in this part. One is the cognitive one and the other the critical one. The first part of this chapter is a brief discussion of cognitive semantics, together with some other earlier theories of metaphor, like Aristotle's comparison theory. For the second critical approach, the thesis mainly lays emphasis on Halliday's approach and the Critical Linguistics. After having presented these two main theories, the thesis combines them and proposes an integrated framework to metaphor in discourse, which is discussed in the third chapter.

Chapter Four continues to put the above-mentioned framework into a research pattern. The thesis builds two text corpora, the texts in which are all collected from three authoritative business publications (Business Week, The Economist and Fortune) in the past two years. In fact, the articles are on the subject of either sales and marketing or mergers and acquisitions for better analysis. After a detailed introduction and analysis of the publications and data, the corpora are subject to quantitative analysis, which will be conducted in Chapter Five, the experimental part. Before analyzing the research findings, the lexical fields for each kind of article are defined first for better study. Then in this chapter, the

frequencies of the lexemes and metaphorical expressions are examined, which leads to a strategy for discussing the ideological impacts of metaphor on discourse and cognition.

Chapter six is the conclusion of this dissertation. The points discussed in the previous chapters are summed up in this part. At the end of this part, an evaluation is made by the author in terms of contributions and limitations of this thesis and also suggestions for further study. Indeed, this study of relating metaphor research to business discourse has a great impact on the social cognition and also contributes a lot to the understanding and using of metaphorical expressions in business discourse for English learners.

Key Words: metaphor; business discourse; cognitive-critical approach

Fauconnier

Aristotle

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Contents

Chapter One   Introduction

Metaphor is a common language phenomenon by which people lead their lives. I.A.Richards, an English rhetorician, claims that there would appear a metaphor in every three sentences in our daily speech (Richards, 1936: 98). According to the estimation of Pollio et. al. (1977), a person would use four metaphorical figures of speech every minute in free talks. (Shu Dingfang, 2000: 1) Many books, dictionaries and a number of scholars have given their different definitions to it respectively (see 1.1.).

Based on some important theories of metaphor, this thesis tries to relate metaphor research to business discourse. According to Searls (1997), "the vocabularies of business and war reporting are nearly indistinguishable". The language of the military has long been an integral part of business--- *"defending market share"* and *"going on the offensive"*. And the McDonald's VS BurgerKing "burger war" and the "cola war" between Coke and Pepsi are well-known. However, it also seems that the WAR metaphor has ignored the most important aspect of business--- satisfying the customer. Doubting whether war is the dominant metaphor or even the only dominant metaphor in business and starting from a cognitive and critical perspective, this thesis attempts to find out the dominant and non-dominant metaphors used in business discourse and their frequencies, propose a metaphor structure and, furthermore, analyze the socio-cognitive impact of this structure.

1.1 Definition of metaphor and background of the research

The term "metaphor" etymologically derives from French "metaphore" and Latin "metaphora", and can be ultimately traced back to the ancient Greek word "metapherein" which means "to transfer, change". This term now usually refers to a figure of speech in which an expression is used to denote something else, that is, something it doesn't literally denote, on the basis of the similarity between these two things. The definitions of dictionaries towards metaphor are quite similar in nature. For example, the Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Unabridged) (1988) defines metaphor as

> a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or
> action is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between
> them (as in *the ship plows the seas* or in *a volley of oaths*): an implied
> comparison (as in *a marble brow*) in contrast to the explicit comparison of the
> simile (as in *a brow white as marble*).

The Collins English Dictionary (2000) gives a similar definition:

> a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action
> that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance, for example *he*
> *is a lion in battle*.

These definitions are much indebted to Aristotle. In his *Poetics and Rhetoric*, Aristotle mentions the structure and function of rhetoric many times. He defines metaphor as the application of an alien name by

transference, either from genus to species, from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the ground of analogy. His definition of metaphor and opinion towards its major function as means of rhetoric have a deep impact on the whole western rhetoric's explanation of this specific linguistic phenomenon for more than 2000 years. Later, Richards also describes metaphor as the use of one reference to a group of things that are related in a particular way in order to discover a similar relation in another group (Lamoureux, 2005).

However, in recent years, with the vigorous development of Cognitive Linguistics, especially Lakoff & Johnson's research (1980, 1987, 1993) on the concept of metaphor from the cognitive perspective and Fauconnier's conceptual blending theory (1985, 1997), linguists began to attach great importance to the particular function of metaphor as a cognitive model. Metaphors are everywhere, which is not only embodied in language, but also in thoughts and behavior. Metaphors reflect processes of thinking and therefore serve as a good resource for the investigation of mapping in thought and language. Over the past 20 years, cognitive scientists have discovered things about the nature and importance of metaphor with significant implications for metaphor research. Such findings are startling in the sense that they require us to rethink some of our basic notions of meaning, concept and reason. Metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but more fundamentally, a conceptual and experiential process that structures our world. With such a belief we have gained deep insights since our conceptual system and all forms of symbolic interaction are grounded in our bodily experience and

yet imaginatively structured.

This new perspective on metaphor has great impact on linguistics, because studies of metaphor have now become a matter of seeking empirical generalizations to explain the phenomena based on various kinds of converging evidence concerning conceptual and inferential structure. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 156) observe that "metaphors […] highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience […] metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities", thereby hinting at metaphor's role in constituting social identities and relations.

However, one effect of the cognitive turn in metaphor studies has been the neglect of the linguistic analysis of metaphorical language. Many scholars have concentrated on presuming conceptual connections between related metaphorical expressions, but they have not really turned back to examine how and why which conceptual metaphors are expressed in the way they are in which contexts of language use. In recent years there have been some improvements of this situation, but the balance has still not quite been adjusted (Cameron and Low, 1999; Goatly, 1997).

Apart from its cognitive force, metaphor is also multi-functional. First, there is its important textual function (Goatly, 1997: 163-164). Second, metaphor also organizes the interpersonal relations between discourse participants. By using particular metaphors, discourse producers can define a topic, argue for that concept and persuade recipients to share their metaphors. In short, metaphor is ancillary in constructing a

particular view of reality. By doing so, it serves its third function---
ideational function.

1.2 Purpose and hypothesis of the research

The thesis is the study of metaphors in business discourse. The
articles chosen randomly from certain authoritative business magazines
will be used for this research since the three functions of metaphor are
also to be found. As for the textual function, it is clear to all that
newspaper and magazine language should display clarity and facilitate the
readability of its text. Metaphor is indeed instrumental in reaching that
purpose. As far as the text producers, i.e. journalists, and text recipients,
i.e. readers, are concerned, the former often use metaphor to get the
latter's attention. This is particularly true for metaphorical expressions of
war. This kind of expressions has emotive force in non-military
discourses and can appeal to the reader, which serves as its interpersonal
function. The usage of metaphorical language leads to this kind of
discourse being characterized by a highly expressive, vivid and inventive
style. Yet, inventions are not entirely accidental (Eubanks, 2000: 46). This
is where the third function of metaphor, namely the ideational function,
finds its reflection. By using particular metaphors, text producers can
reinforce their models in the readers' cognition. Although Goatly (1997: 5)
states that "most philosophical and linguistic analyses privilege the
conceptual or ideational purposes of metaphors and underplay the
interpersonal and foregrounding functions", this thesis still attempts to
focus on the ideational function of metaphor, and furthermore, show how

interpersonal function relates to the analysis of the ideational function.

The interest in the topic was also kindled by the presumed dominance of the WAR metaphor in business discourse. The particularity of this metaphor lies in the fact that its source domain is not uniform, including both physical violence and military strategy. According to Lakoff & Johnson, the sublimation of 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 & Johnson 1980: 63-64)

The above statement can easily be transferred to the BUSINESS IS WAR metaphor: the conceptual model is set in the culture and use of metaphor will not only make it more firmly but also influence the way of doing business. The author also believes that, although pervasive, the WAR model is not the only one available.

Therefore, based on the three functions of metaphor, the present research is moving on in an attempt to finding out more metaphorical models used in business discourse and putting forward the possible conceptual model underlying business discourse, especially sales and