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A Cognitive Linguistics approach to the 'less is more' paradox of communication, with specific reference to public relations messages

ABSTRACT

In this article the spotlight falls on the challenge to public relations practitioners to achieve a 'less is more' approach – not less communication, but less ambiguity. This article focuses on the way in which Cognitive Linguistics tools can facilitate clarity in public relations messages, as illustrated in the analysis of a slogan. The relationship between assumptions within this framework and issues in public relations is pointed out and illustrated. Within the Cognitive Linguistic analysis presented here, it is argued that public relations messages can be analysed in terms of specific conceptual metaphors, and that ambiguity can be limited by proposed mental mechanisms. The analysis ties in with the claim that much of our conceptualisation of experience is metaphorical, which both motivates and constrains our creativity. The advantages of an analysis within Cognitive Grammar are shown to reside in its potential to interpret linguistic expressions metaphorically and to account for stylistic phenomena.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his article on public opinion and the paradox of communication, Vorster (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:75) emphasises that public relations practitioners have to recognise the paradox of communication, namely that 'less is more'. Contemporary society, he points out, has shifted from its industrial base to an information base where 'the need to communicate' has become a catch-phrase. The information revolution has resulted in overload. According to Vorster (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:75) this requires a 'less is more' approach from practitioners – not less communication, but less ambiguity.

The real problem, writes Peters (in Vorster, 2002:82), is that perception is all there is: There is no objective reality. There is only perceived reality, the way each of us chooses to perceive communication, the value of a service, the value of a particular product feature, the quality of a product. What is real is what we perceive. Seldom if ever does a product sell itself on the basis of its 'clear technical merits'. The concept of positioning is therefore of crucial importance. In our overcommunicated society, where 'less is more', we have only one chance of creating a perception in the minds of the publics that will sell our products or services.

Ries and Trout (in Vorster, 2002:83) comment that positioning starts with a product, a piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person:

But positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. In the communication jungle out there, the only hope to score big is to be selective, to concentrate on narrow targets, to practice segmentation. In short: positioning. As a defence against the volume of today's communication messages, the mind screens and rejects much of the information it is offered. In general the mind accepts only that which relates to prior knowledge and experience.

The best approach to take in our overcommunicated society is therefore the oversimplified message. You have to sharpen your message to cut into the mind. You have to jettison the ambiguities, simplify the message, and then simplify it even more if you want to make a lasting impression.

Bernstein (in Vorster, 2002:76) states: "If we want to do business, to progress and prosper in it, then the impressions we create are important. If they get it wrong, it is not their fault, but ours. Communication is the responsibility of the communicators."

Verwey (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:70) points out that problems in communicating messages are often caused by semantics. Ensuring that a message gets through to an intended receiver public is the public relations practitioner's first goal.

The challenge in our information society, Vorster (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:76) points out, is for our thinking, our attitudes, and consequently our decision making to catch up with the reality of things. We need to reconceptualise our national and global objectives to fit the new economics of information as strategic resource. Vorster (in Lubbe & Puth,

2002:76) points out that communication practitioners should recognise the pitfalls, as well as the opportunities, of the overcommunicated society. This, he explains, requires that we integrate the communication activities of an organisation and incorporate information as a strategic resource into the strategic planning process.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

Ambiguity in itself is a common and often amusing feature of ordinary reading. It can be used as a 'deliberate poetic device' (Empson 1955) in an ambiguous text that is intended to be ambiguous. It follows from the above paragraphs, however, that it is not an asset in public relations texts.

In his plea against ambiguity in public relations messages, Vorster (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002) uses several notions that are typically encountered in analyses within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. For instance: a metaphor and quantificational expression ('less is more'), perception, the mind, information, knowledge and experience, thinking, attitudes, decision-making, reality and reconceptualisation.

The problem Vorster addresses relates to the field of communication science, but also to that of Cognitive Linguistics. The question now arises as to how this problem can be addressed within these fields. The aim of this article is to view this problem from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective.

The research question in this article can be formulated as follows: In what way(s) can Cognitive Linguistics tools facilitate clarity in public relations messages, and more specifically, in the formulation of a slogan?

Vorster (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002) poses a challenge to public relations practitioners, yet several of the expressions in his article (such as *products*, *services* and *positioning*) are typically marketing terms. He also calls for the integration of communication activities in an organisation (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:76). In the light of this, the term 'public relations' will be positioned within an integrated communications approach here.

For the purposes of this article, a message that is ambiguous will be defined as one that is not clear and can be interpreted in more than one way.

The article is organised as follows: Theoretical perspectives are set out in the next section and the research methodology in Section 4. The data is then analysed briefly from a communications perspective and thereafter within the framework of Cognitive Grammar, before the main arguments are presented in the form of a metaphorical interpretation in Section 7. Implications of the findings for public relations in general, and also for public relations messages in integrated programmes, are set out in Section 8. The article is concluded in section 9.

3. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive Linguistics is a branch of linguistics and cognitive science, which aims to provide accounts of language that relate to current knowledge of the human mind. The guiding principle behind this area of linguistics is that language use must be explained with reference to underlying mental mechanisms. The study of all aspects and manifestations of language is considered to be central to the enterprise of cognitive science (Turner, 1991, 1996).

The interaction between cognitive scientists and linguists has led to a growing body of research about metaphor in language and cognition, especially since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) pioneering book *Metaphors we live by*. This area of Cognitive Linguistics will be of particular significance for this article.

Based on research in neurology and cognitive psychology, cognitive linguists assume that there is a continuum between cognition (especially body-based cognition, but also cognition acquired on the basis of social and cultural experience) and language. As Barcelona (2000:2) points out, this view differs from other approaches that consider language to be a separate module in the mind or in the brain.

Imagination, or more technically, the ability to project concepts onto other concepts, is a major, general cognitive ability. From this it follows that cognitive scientists are increasingly interested in imaginative devices such as metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

3.1.1 *Metaphor*

Working within the cognitive paradigm, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but also in thought and action. According to them our conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we handle situations, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities.

Within the framework assumed here, metaphor is not only a stylistic tool or a figure of speech that is used to build texts, but is a conceptual phenomenon. A conceptual metaphor may conventionally be activated by or instantiated in a morpheme, a word, a phrase, a clause, a sentence, a whole text, gestures and other types of behaviour, reasoning processes, and so on (Lakoff & Turner, 1989:49-67). Metaphors are often not verbalised, but can be expressed through non-verbal communicative devices, or not be communicated at all and simply motivate our behaviour (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:156-158).

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3,5) the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. Within their view, the essence of metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another".

Metaphor is the cognitive mechanism whereby one experiential domain is 'mapped' or projected onto a different experiential domain, so that the second domain is partially understood in terms of the first one. The domain that is mapped is called the source domain and the domain onto which the source is mapped, is called the target domain. Conceptual metaphors typically employ a more abstract concept as target and a more concrete or physical concept as their source.

Within Cognitive Linguistics, conceptual metaphors are conventionally given in SMALL CAPS in the form 'CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B', while linguistic manifestations of the underlying conceptual metaphors are printed in *italics*.

Cognitive Linguistics also stresses that conventional metaphors are usually automatic, unconscious mappings, pervasive in everyday language. Literary metaphors, for instance, are considered to be creative extensions and elaborations of these conventional mappings (Lakoff & Turner, 1989:67-72).

Metaphors are to a large extent culture-specific, because domains of experience are not necessarily the same in all cultures. However, the most abstract, overarching metaphors seem to have as input or source domains universal physical notions such as 'verticality', 'container', and so on. These are known as image schemas, which are acquired on the basis of our earliest bodily experiences (Taylor, 1995:127-130).

3.1.2 Iconicity

Taylor (2002:46) explains that "an icon resembles the thing that it represents". He points out that structural iconicity is manifested when some features of the structure of a phonological form correspond to aspects of semantic structure. The length of an expression may, for instance, correlate with the complexity of conceptual content.

3.1.3 Categorisation, grammatical constructions and symbolic units

Within Cognitive Grammar, a branch of Cognitive Linguistics, grammatical constructions are complex cognitive models with two dimensions: one characterising parameters of form and one characterising parameters of meaning.

Cognitive Grammar, as set forth in Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987;1991) and Taylor (1991;1995;2002), is a theory of language and its organisation which depends crucially on the idea that human linguistic functioning shares many of the properties of other cognitive phenomena. Processes such as categorisation, among other cognitive functions, play a role in language production and perception as they also do in other ways in which human beings interact with their environment.

Within Cognitive Grammar it is assumed that all linguistic forms correlate with meaning or significance, i.e. form is motivated (cf. Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1987;1991). It is furthermore assumed that all linguistic units of whatever size are arranged in semantic sets or categories. Central to each category are the most prototypical members, that is, those which best exemplify the category in the minds of native speakers at a given time (cf. Taylor 1995:Chapter 8). Arranged around these prototypical members are those which

extend from it, in various directions, with the extensions being the result of metaphorical use or other means of relating units to each other.

Fillmore (1985) emphasises that there can be no question, in cognitive grammar, of one construction being transformed into, or derived from, another. This follows from the claim that "grammatical structure is almost entirely overt" (Langacker 1987:46). Semantic content is structured and symbolised, not at the level of an abstract, underlying representation, but at the surface level of an utterance.

The symbolic thesis is the claim that language is essentially a means for relating phonological structures (that is, language in its perceptible form) with semantic structures (that is, meanings, or conceptualisations). Accordingly, a language can exhaustively be described with reference to (i) phonological structures, (ii) semantic structures and (iii) symbolic relations between (i) and (ii).

A symbolic unit is a conventionalised association of a phonological structure with a semantic structure.

3.1.3 *The study of meaning*

Cognitive Linguistics adheres to a conceptualist approach to meaning. Within this approach, the meaning of an expression is equated with a conceptualisation in the mind of the language user (Taylor, 2002:187ff).

Two other general approaches to the study of meaning can be identified:

- (i) The language-world approach: meaning is studied as the relationship between linguistic expressions and states of affairs in the world.
- (ii) The language-internal approach: meaning is studied in terms of relations between expressions within a language.

There are three basic notions in the conceptualist approach to meaning: profile, base and domain (Taylor, 2002:192).

The profile of an expression is what the expression designates. Profiling takes place against a domain, or domain matrix, some aspects of which may be intrinsic to the conceptualisation, and which therefore constitute the base. For instance, *island* profiles a mass of land; its base is the surrounding water; general notions of the earth's geophysical structure constitute the domain (Taylor, 2002:591).

A domain may be defined as any knowledge configuration which provides the context for the conceptualisation of a semantic unit.

It is axiomatic, in Cognitive Grammar, that all linguistic expressions profile something or other, and that profiling takes place against background conceptualisations. In Cognitive Grammar terms, background is constituted by a network of unprofiled knowledge and beliefs which form the context for any conceptualisation (Taylor, 2002:198).

Taylor (1991:132) points out that in Cognitive Linguistics all meaning is, in a sense, pragmatic, as it involves the conceptualisation of human beings in a physical and social environment. The understanding of any utterance requires an act of context-sensitive interpretation by the listener. Metaphorical utterances do not form a special set.

3.1.4 *Speech acts*

A speech act is the non-linguistic accomplishment of an utterance, such as a warning or a promise, as determined by context.

Grounding is the process whereby the speaker 'locates' the designated instance from the perspective of the speech event. Differences between definite and indefinite, specific and non-specific, are aspects of grounding. Determiners (*the, a*) are quintessential grounding devices; while quantifiers (*each, every, many, three*) explicitly encode notions of quantity or amount (Taylor, 2002:344).

The term ground refers to the context of the speech event. The ground comprises the participants in the event, its time and place, the situational context, previous discourse, shared knowledge of the speech act participants, and such like (Taylor, 2002:344).

Grounding is a process that 'locates' an entity with respect to the ground. In terms of Langacker (1991:98) grounding enables the speech-act participants to "establish mental contact with" the designated entity. A grounded noun phrase (or nominal) such as the house designates an instance that is conceptualised against the appropriate domain. A grounded nominal designates the grounded instance; it does not designate any component of the ground or the grounding relation between speaker and hearer and the instance. All these aspects belong to the base of a grounded expression.

The possibility of joint identification of an instance may be due to various factors (Taylor, 2002:354):

- A unique referent in the previous discourse;
- The context of the situation;
- A relative clause; or
- The speaker invites the hearer to set up a mental space which contains a uniquely identifiable instance.

Grounding can be thought of in terms of the traditional notion of reference. Taylor (2002:346) points out that it is important to bear in mind that the referent of a grounded nominal is not some object in the external world, but an entity in a mental space. The mental space may be a model of the external world, but the referent could also be an entity in a fictional or imaginary mental space.

A mental space (as defined in Fauconnier (1994)) is a conceptual 'packet' that gets built 'on-line' in the process of understanding sentences (or other nonlinguistic messages). Mental spaces are not the same as conceptual domains, although they make use of conceptual domains in the process of understanding. They are more specific than conceptual domains. A mental space is a conceived situation, populated with elements and relations between them.

3.2 Public relations

Mulder (2004:235) describes Communication Integration as a master strategy in which every aspect of the communication mix is brought together. Integrated communication envelops integrated marketing communication (IMC). It takes relationship marketing and integrated marketing communication one step further. It still retains the focus on the customer and customer service, but now adds to the scenario the fact that the marketing function should be integrated into the core of the organisation, with all marketing and communication activities co-ordinated to deliver a “one face, one voice” message to the customer (Mulder, 2004:220-221).

Mulder (2004:227) points out that while relationship marketing was the buzzword of the 1990s, integrated marketing communication became the manner in which to make relationship marketing possible.

IMC begins with an analysis of the needs and priorities of stakeholders, and tailoring marketing and communications programmes to address these. Mulder (2004:228) points out that IMC is more than the expansion of the promotion element in the marketing mix. It is essentially the recognition of the importance of creating dialogue and long-term relationships by cultivating trust and communicating the same message to all the stakeholders. In addition, it is the recognition that all the IMC techniques communicate and that there is an overlap in the communication that these variables provide.

In integrated marketing (the context within which IMC is practiced) the marketing process is taken a step further in relation to customer satisfaction. It helps an organisation to rethink the definition of marketing and to expand it by replacing the words “satisfy customer needs” with “exceed customer expectations” (Mulder, 2004:228).

Mulder (2004:230) mentions several benefits of integrated marketing:

- By using this approach, the customer becomes the primary focus of everyone in the organisation – the bottom line of integrated marketing.
- There is no needless duplication of services. The PR messages combine with advertising, marketing and internal communication. Therefore, everything is congruent and clearer to customers.
- It can create competitive advantage, boost sales and profits, while saving time, money and stress.
- The organisation simultaneously consolidates its image, develops a dialogue and nurtures its relationship with its customers.

The premise of the exposition in Van Heerden (in Du Plessis, Bothma, Jordaan & Van Heerden, 2003) is that public relations is a separate management function in an organisation, but in order to enrich the IMC-approach, marketers can utilise certain relational tools and techniques of PR, such as MPR (marketing public relations) and publicity, to enhance the overall effectiveness of the IMC programme. PR, MPR and publicity are considered to be different theoretical notions.

Publicity and public relations are generally utilised differently from MPR, because they are not always designed to promote a specific product or service. While overall PR focuses on a full range of stakeholder relationships, MPR focuses more on customers and prospects.

Du Plessis (in Du Plessis, *et al.*, 2003:1-27) provides the following definitions that are relevant here:

The functional area of marketing communication involves communication to customers specifically about products and services. Marketing-strategy elements include the identification of the target market, positioning, product, price, distribution and marketing communication. The last four variables are traditionally known as the marketing mix elements, and marketing communication is the most visible of the marketing mix. The marketing communication strategy influences the other three elements and *vice versa*. The ultimate goal of marketing communication is to reach some audience to affect its behaviour. In order to inform, persuade and remind targeted customers effectively, marketers rely on one or more of the major elements of the communications mix.

Marketing management uses marketing communication elements to communicate with its target market and to achieve its communication objectives. This combination of marketing communication elements is referred to as the marketing communication mix or marketing communication strategy.

The marketing communications elements are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, publicity, public relations, sponsorships, marketing public relations, direct marketing, and new media marketing. In developing a marketing communication strategy, an organisation utilises the marketing communication elements - balancing the strengths and weaknesses of each - to produce an effective marketing communication campaign.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) centers on the integration of the various marketing communication elements to provide added value to the customer and increase positive relationships. It is an approach to marketing communications planning which recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines.

Public relations entails building good relations with an organisation's publics and stakeholders by creating favourable attitudes, building a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavourable rumours, stories or events.

Publicity involves influencing customers in a non-personal way by making the actual newsworthiness of the organisation's product or service known to the publicity media, thus obtaining free and favourable news coverage on the organisation and its product.

Marketing public relations (MPR) overlaps with publicity and is the management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends. MPR directly supports corporate and product image and promotion.

Corporate public relations (CPR): When public relations programmes are used to build the corporate brand through corporate positioning (by, for example, utilising issues management, corporate advertising, advocacy advertising and corporate image management).

Corporate advertising: A PR activity that is often integrated in the IMC programme to address certain objectives relating to corporate image advertising, and to bring about related and advocacy advertising (social, business and environmental issues).

3.3 The relationship between assumptions in Cognitive Linguistics and issues in Public Relations

The focus on perception in public relations ties in well with the Cognitive Linguistics approach, since cognitive models are mainly perceptually determined, which implies that meaning is not independent of perception and that meanings are (at least partly) grounded in perception. This contrasts with other versions of semantics which claim that, since meaning is a mapping between language and the external world (or several worlds), meaning does not relate to perception.

Also, public relations practitioners appear to relate almost naturally to comparisons and metaphor: "The meaning of an idea has to be clear, whether it is an event, situation or message. One of the most important jobs of public relations is to explain complex issues in simple terms. In today's sound bite environment this has become increasingly difficult." (Bivins, 1999:33)

In addition to the points above, Cognitive Grammar holds at least two advantages for the analysis of public relations messages. Firstly, it places a strong emphasis on symbolisation and the related assumption that grammar itself is symbolic and consists of symbolic units. In communicating, the public relations practitioner is constantly making decisions about semantics, symbols and stereotypes to be used. The public relations practitioner must be familiar with the various meanings of words used by all interested groups and must be able to select and transmit words that will be received as 'kinfolk' (Cutlip, et al., 1985:279).

Secondly, it assumes that all linguistic phenomena are interpreted relative to some context. In terms of Langacker (1987;1991) Cognitive Grammar is a usage-based theory. Communication is always situational, as Verwey (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:65) points out. She explains that it occurs within specific physical contexts and that its meaning is always informed by the physical and cultural setting. The physical environment includes considerations of time, space and physical properties of the environment. The cultural environment includes considerations of specific values, standards and rituals governing the communication process and assigned meanings. Cultural antecedents are those values, norms, attitudes and opinions that make up the cognitive structure of the individuals who take part in the process, and include personality variables and previous experience which will determine how people will react to the communication situation.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was to a large extent inspired by Old Mutual's new Free State headquarters that arose across from the main gate to the campus of the University of the Free State during 2004. Press releases, news clippings and advertisements relating to Old Mutual were collected over a period of a year. Several brochures were obtained from this company and representatives of their marketing department were also interviewed.

Since the emphasis is on the Cognitive Linguistic analysis and metaphorical interpretation of a communications message, the research was conducted in terms of the analytical procedures in Fauconnier (in Janssen & Redeker, 2000) and in Steen (in Gibbs & Steen, 1999).

Fauconnier (in Janssen & Redeker, 2000) points out that in Cognitive Linguistics, language is in the service of constructing and communicating meaning, and for the linguist and cognitive scientist it is a window into the mind. Seeing through that window, however, is not obvious. Deep features of our thinking, cognitive processes, and social communication need to be brought in, correlated, and associated with their linguistic manifestations.

5. THE COMMUNICATIONS MESSAGE

The focus point of the empirical data referred to in this article is Old Mutual's umbrella slogan, namely: *Every step of the way*.

Cutlip et al. (1985:283-284) provide the following guidelines for clarity: "The message must be put in simple terms. Words must mean the same to the receiver as to the sender. Complex issues must be compressed into themes, slogans or stereotypes that have simplicity and clarity. The further a message has to travel, the simpler it must be. An institution must speak with one voice, not many voices."

Old Mutual portrays a very self-confident image in choosing such a terse slogan. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse the organisational or marketing communications structure of this company. The focus here is on attributes of the slogan and its use and, briefly, on how it relates to marketing communications expressions. This message is found on all of Old Mutual's advertising, with the exclusion of text prepared by Investments (personal communication 17 November 2004). For the purposes of illustration and analysis, the focus is on the way the slogan is used in client-focused brochures.

As far as the content of the slogan is concerned, sentences that contain abstract words can be ambiguous, especially if evaluation is involved (Du Toit & Smith-Miller, 2003:30). The given slogan does require a non-literal reading and interpretation. Images can enliven a text, but this does not necessarily make the text easy to understand.

The Afrikaans version is: *Elke tree van die pad*, which is a direct translation with a somewhat more literal sense to it.

In printed form, the slogan is found on calendars and at the bottom of brochures in the characteristic Old Mutual green, with the first word often in bold, as shown above. Message elements such as words, graphics, design and colour affect attribution of meaning. According to Engel, Warshaw and Kinnear (1991:99) the colour green connotes 'security'.

The first guideline that Van der Spek (1996:196,197) provides for credible and eye-catching brochures is: Ensure that the message is unambiguous.

From the exposition in Section 3.2 above, it follows that two of the benefits of an IMC approach are that the combination of messages enhances clarity and enables "one voice" messages to the customer.

On the one hand, the Old Mutual slogan is funnelled down as a pay-off line that summarises the overall communications messages of the company, and on the other hand - as a public relations message - it paves the way and creates the right climate for the other messages in the marketing communications mix. In this way an integrated approach is ensured.

From a Cognitive Linguistics perspective, Taylor (2002:444) points out that the conceptualisations associated with an expression will tend to vary somewhat according to the contexts within which it is used. The different uses of the slogan highlight different domains against which the concepts are understood. From an IMC or MPR perspective, the slogan can be viewed as a promotional message or even as corporate advertising in certain contexts. Since the goal of this study is not to classify the slogan as such, it will simply be regarded as an IMC message for the purposes here.

Old Mutual's research and test results show positive feedback in response to this specific message (personal communication, July and November 2004).

The phrase *every step of the way* links up well with editorials and other promotional messages published. For instance, it links up with the text in the Old Mutual supplement to the Afrikaans newspaper *Volksblad*, that was published to celebrate the opening of their new building and Free State headquarters in Bloemfontein (*Volksblad*, 18 March 2004). This point will be discussed further in Section 7.3 below.

6. ATTRIBUTES OF THE GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTION

The slogan *every step of the way* is not a complete sentence consisting of a subject, verb and object, but is merely a phrase, that is, a group of words that does not include a verb.

The parameters of meaning (semantics) and of form (syntax) of the grammatical construction can be characterised as follows (cf. Taylor, 1991,1995):

Semantically this construction is used as a slogan and more specifically as a promise. The mental space involved here is that of a promotional text.

Syntactically it takes the form of a heavy noun phrase, that is, a longish noun phrase that consists of more than four words. It is printed in green (or in black) next to or below the Old Mutual logo. It is found at the bottom of the front page of the brochures mentioned. It is printed in conjunction with other shades of green and photographs depicting people and relationships. The quantifier *every* is in a focus position, since it is the first word of the phrase, but when it is printed in bold, it is made even more prominent.

In terms of speech act theory, the ways in which this nominal expression can be grounded, need to be considered, that is, ways in which the designated entity can be located with respect to the speech act situation (the ground). This involves especially the role of the determiner (*the*) and the quantifier (*every*) in this heavy noun phrase, which contains two noun phrases; namely, every step and the way.

Determiners (such as *the*) have the specific function of grounding a noun. Grounding can also be effected by the use of a quantifier. Determiners pick out the profiled instances, while quantifiers characterise the profiled instances in terms of number or amount.

To this point, the analysis does not tap the full potential of Cognitive Linguistics, as this construction can also be interpreted metaphorically within this framework.

7. A METAPHORICAL VIEW OF THE CONSTRUCTION

7.1 Linguistic expressions and containers

One of the basic metaphors proposed in Lakoff and Johnson (1980) relates to the concept of containment and the domain of containers.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:29) point out that the act of defining a territory or putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification. Furthermore, bounded objects (human beings, rocks or lands) have sizes. This allows them to be quantified in terms of the amount of substance they contain.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:126) argue that, because we conceptualise linguistic form in spatial terms, it is possible for certain spatial metaphors to apply directly to the form of a sentence, as we conceive of it spatially. This can provide automatic, direct links between form and content, based on general metaphors in our conceptual system. They point out that such links make the relationship between form and content anything but arbitrary, and some of the meanings of a sentence can be due to the precise form that the sentence takes.

The spatial relationship between form and content can be expressed using the following metaphor:

LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS.

The meanings are the 'content' of these containers. When we see actual containers that are small, we expect their contents to be small. When we see actual containers that are

large, we normally expect their contents to be large. From this it follows that
 MORE OF FORM IS MORE OF CONTENT.

From this basic metaphor the following metaphors naturally arise:

MORE CONTENT IS MORE WEIGHT

as well as the opposite

LESS CONTENT IS LESS WEIGHT

In addition to this, Taylor (1995:137) shows that through a fusion of a number of conceptual metaphors relating to verticality, quantity, evaluation, power and status, MORE is often also BETTER in many societies. Kövecses (2002:64) also refers to the phenomenon that the metaphor that underlies the social institution of grading in schools is: QUALITY IS QUANTITY.

Nouns typically refer to people, places and things. They are typical content words and carriers of information. The metaphorical interpretation of noun phrase constructions involves a complex correlation of domains. Mass and content are first of all related, as indicated above. In terms of the exposition above, linguistic constructions and content are related to each other, and then this link is metaphorically interpreted with the measuring of mass or weight. Heavy noun phrase constructions are long on paper, filled with much content in the form of linguistic constituents, and are therefore heavy. In Bouwer (1993) and Beard (forthcoming), at a further metaphorical level, this link can then be related to emotional heaviness and furthermore to emotional heavy-heartedness in the overall textual patterning of the novel.

The MORE X IS MORE Y conceptual metaphors that work well in the analysis of constructions in a novel, do not seem to apply in the same way in the case of the phrase considered here in the public relations as well as IMC contexts. As far as clarity is concerned there are no definite conclusions about whether long or short sentences are always more effective. Long sentences can contain too much information and be complex and difficult to read. Long sentences and heavy noun phrases can be iconically very demanding on the reader and so undermine clarity. Sometimes short sentences can be too concise, and consequently incomplete and ambiguous. The construction *every step of the way* is both long and short: it is short in that it is not even a full sentence, and long for the category noun phrase.

Within Cognitive Linguistics, the appropriateness of accepted metaphors in given contexts can be 'questioned' (Kövecses, 2002:48). It appears that the MORE IS MORE and MORE IS BETTER types of metaphor can be questioned for public relations messages in terms of Vorster's (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:76) advice concerning 'less is more' in public relations communication.

It is claimed here:

- That the genre of public relations messages or texts in IMC programmes can be analysed in terms of different conceptual metaphors; and
- That ambiguity is restrained in Old Mutual's use of the phrase *every step of the way* by other proposed conceptual metaphors within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics.

7.2 The JOURNEY metaphor

Kövecses (2002:3) refers to examples (in Winter, 1995:235) such as *to get a good start*, *to go far in life* and *to reach the end of the road* (which do not sound particularly literary), to make the point that a large part of the way we speak about life in English derives from the way we speak about journeys. In keeping with such examples, it appears that speakers of English make extensive use of the domain of the journey to think about the highly abstract and elusive concept of life. Cognitive Linguists suggest that these speakers draw so heavily on the domain of the journey in their effort to comprehend life, because thinking about the abstract concept of life is facilitated by the more concrete concept of the journey.

Within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics it follows that all the expressions above that have to do with life and originate in the domain of journey are linguistic metaphorical expressions, whereas the corresponding conceptual metaphor that they manifest is LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Here LIFE is the target domain that we are trying to understand via the source domain JOURNEY.

Lakoff (1989) describes a pervasive system of metaphors called the EVENT STRUCTURE METAPHOR that includes the following mappings:

STATES ARE LOCATIONS

CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS

CAUSES ARE FORCES

ACTION IS SELF-PROPELLED MOTION

PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS

MEANS ARE PATHS

DIFFICULTIES ARE IMPEDIMENTS

EXTERNAL EVENTS ARE LARGE, MOVING OBJECTS

STARTING AN ACTION IS STARTING OUT ON A PATH

EXPECTED PROGRESS IS A TRAVEL SCHEDULE

LONG-TERM, PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES ARE JOURNEYS

PROGRESS IS MOTION FORWARD

GUIDED ACTION IS GUIDED MOTION

As Kövecses (2002:9) points out, to know a metaphor means to know the systematic mappings between a source and a target. This knowledge is largely unconscious, and it is only for the purpose of analysis that the mappings are brought into awareness. However, when we know a conceptual metaphor, we use the linguistic metaphors that reflect it in such a way that we do not violate the mappings that are conventionally fixed for the linguistic community. In other words, not just any element of b can be mapped onto any element of a. The linguistic expressions used metaphorically must conform to established mappings, or correspondences, between the source and the target. Furthermore, within Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are constrained by the notion of motivation. Kövecses (2002:67-69, 76) explains this as follows:

The cognitive linguistic view maintains that – in addition to objective, pre-existing similarities – conceptual metaphors are based on a variety of human experience, including correlations in experience, various kinds of non-objective [perceptual] similarity, biological and cultural roots shared by the two concepts, and possibly others.

All of these may provide sufficient motivation for the selection of source B over C or D for the comprehension of target A. Given such motivation it makes sense to speakers of a language to use B, rather than, say C or D, to comprehend A. They consequently feel that the conceptual metaphors they use are somehow natural.

What can be predicted, however, is that no language will have source domains that contradict certain universal sensorimotor experiences in which targets are embedded.

An important aspect of metaphor is that its elaboration is typically open-ended (Lakoff & Turner, 1989:106-110) and can be creatively exploited in text and conversation. However, it is generally concluded that the metaphors used by poets and creative artists are based on everyday conventional metaphors. Gibbs (1994:7), following Lakoff and Turner, states this as follows:

My claim is that much of our conceptualization of experience is metaphorical, which both motivates and constrains the way we think creatively. The idea that metaphor constrains creativity might seem contrary to the widely held belief that metaphor somehow liberates the mind to engage in divergent thinking.

Ordinary metaphors, Kövecses (2002:46) points out, are then not things that poets and writers leave behind when they do their 'creative' work. On the contrary, there is accumulating evidence which suggests that 'creative' people use conventional, everyday metaphors substantially, and that their creativity and originality are actually derived from such metaphors. Lakoff and Turner, as well as Gibbs, have pointed out that poets regularly employ several devices to create novel, unconventional language and 'images' from the conventional materials of everyday language and thought. In addition to the device of questioning, mentioned above in connection with the more is more metaphors, other devices include extending, elaborating and combining.

In the literature, devices such as extending, elaborating and questioning all involve changes in elements in the source domain, which would be JOURNEY here. If we were to assume that the journey metaphor is adapted to LIFE INSURANCE IS A JOURNEY OR FINANCIAL PLANNING IS A JOURNEY, the innovation affects the target domain. More than one target domain can be understood in terms of one source domain; and more than one source domain can be used to understand the same target domain (Kövecses, 2002:20). For Lakoff (1989) the journey metaphor began as LOVE IS A JOURNEY.

It is claimed here that *every step of the way* is a linguistic manifestation or realisation of a combination of several metaphors, including:

LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which is a special case of the more general metaphor PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS and so shares its mappings;

EVENTS ARE ACTIONS, A PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY LIFE INSURANCE IS A JOURNEY, FINANCIAL PLANNING IS A JOURNEY.

7.3 Discussion

Part of our interpretation of the slogan *every step of the way* is guided by various metaphors with which we are familiar. Furthermore, when it is heard or read in the appropriate context (such as in a brochure surrounded by information about Old Mutual's services and placed next to its logo) the slogan will most likely be interpreted as intended. Ambiguity is limited, given this analysis, in that not just any source domain can be mapped onto a given target domain.

Most ordinary people are overwhelmed and sometimes confused by financial matters and need to understand the various aspects involved by means of a number of metaphors. The (prospective) clients are travellers on a financial journey, with their financial goals seen as destinations to be reached. The services offered constitute their vehicle, which allows them to pursue these goals. A relationship of guidance and advice is offered that will help them make progress toward their goals. The journey is not necessarily easy or straightforward. There will also be places where a decision has to be made about which direction to take. In the case of the JOURNEY metaphor expressed in the words *every step of the way*, combined with the use of the colour green, a strong, personalised sense of assurance, security, peace of mind, support and assistance is produced.

In the Old Mutual celebration supplement mentioned earlier in Sections 4 and 5, the motto *It pays to plan* (Afrikaans: *Dit betaal om te beplan*) is prominent. The interconnectedness of metaphors involved in the analysis above shows how *every step of the way* links up with other Old Mutual messages. In *Every step of the way*, the emphasis is on details of the guided journey itself, whereas in *It pays to plan*, the focus is on the planning involved in undertaking a journey and on the benefits of planning.

The Afrikaans message in the green block in the bottom right hand corner on the back cover of this supplement reads: *Ons sal daar wees as jy ons die nodigste het*. It can be translated as follows: *We will be there when you need us most*. In this linguistic expression of the JOURNEY metaphor, the elements of the source domain that are mapped onto the elements of the target domain emphasise the company and its financial advisors (*We*), as well as the client (*you*). This sentence comprises four constituent elements of journeys: the travellers, the travel or the journey as such, difficulties or questions that may be encountered on the way, and the helpers that can provide guidance and assistance. However, when this sentence is heard or seen in the appropriate context, it will most likely be interpreted as being about a relationship between a financial institution and its clients, and, furthermore, that the speaker of the sentence has in mind not real travellers but clients, and not a physical journey, but a financial process. This expression spells out the elements that are implied in *every step of the way*. In *It pays to plan*, it is not so much about the implied physical destination at the end of the journey, but about the goal(s) of financial planning.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The analysis presented above reveals the potential of Cognitive Linguistics to provide a metaphorical interpretation of the slogan *Every step of the way*.

Kövecses (2002:43,64) points out that there is a widespread belief among lay people and scholars alike that the 'real' source of metaphor is in literature and the arts. It is believed that the creative genius of the poet and the artist creates the most authentic examples of metaphor. When this notion is examined from the point of view of Cognitive Linguistics, it can be claimed that it is only partly true, and that everyday language and the everyday conceptual system contribute a great deal to the working of artistic greatness. Creative texts or messages commonly make use of unconventional (ised) metaphorical expressions that are based on conventional conceptual metaphors. In this sense, the creativity of an expression is constrained by our everyday metaphorical conceptual system. Ambiguity is limited in this way and also through the notion of motivation.

In Section 7 above, an interpretation of the metaphorical mappings in *every step of the way*, used as a slogan, was presented. The interpretation comes about as a result of a set of interrelated domains. Thus, Cognitive Linguistics enables the linguist to explicate the cognitive devices that an author of a text or message invokes and to explicate the cognitive construals and interpretations of meanings in a text or message. This ties in with proposals by Freeman (in Barcelona, 2000), who sees both (literary) texts and their interpretation as the product of cognising minds.

From the analysis above, it follows that different metaphors appear to be appropriate for different text genres and can be used to distinguish between genres. It is not claimed that the *journey* metaphor will appropriately structure all types of public relations messages, but it was shown that it works well for a slogan that needs to reassure clients within the domain of financial matters in an integrated programme. The purpose of the text, the topic, the text type and the intended readers determine the choice of words and metaphors.

Communications Consultants MD Bridget von Holt (in Goldman, 2002:119) points out that "The creative aspect [of public relations] means exploring different avenues of reaching target audiences". The tools available within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics provide the means to one of these creative avenues "as we are moving from a technology era to a knowledge era" (Carn Iverson in Goldman, 2002:62).

Cognitive Linguistics offers an essential contribution to the analysis of all forms of communication, since its approach to meaning is modelled on conceptualisation (by the language user) – in contrast to the language-world and language-internal approaches that exclude contextual, cultural and vantage-point experiences to some extent. Taylor (2002:187) formulates the Cognitive Linguistic approach as the process whereby "the meaning of an expression is equated with a conceptualisation in the mind of a language user". This the 'creator of meaning' has to keep in mind very well when slogans are formulated for the public relations sector. His or her knowledge of and suppleness in using creative as well as conceptual metaphors can be of paramount importance.

Furthermore, it is important that his or her intentions in using the utterance should be unambiguous. In this respect the integration of speech act theory and metaphor theory provides a useful analytical or formulation point of departure.

The disambiguation of the given slogan is very much related to its contextualisation. Without a very specific context it should probably have been phrased: *Old Mutual is there: every step of the way*. This is so because the phrase, as used contextually, implies the presence of Old Mutual at specific points of locality on the way. Other decontextualised conceptual metaphors would not be able to counteract the possibility of ambiguity concerning what can be found at each point of locality. This ties in with suggestions about how IMC messages should reinforce brand identity (Van Heerden in Du Plessis, et al., 2003:276).

In her book, *Managing Perceptions. Succeeding in public relations*, Gillian Goldman (2002) argues that in today's fast-moving global marketplace, corporations, trade associations and governments find themselves under increasing pressure to be heard clearly. In future, she argues, corporations will face increased challenges in maintaining a positive image, but the benefits of having such an image will also increase. Communicating clearly and efficiently with an increasingly diverse audience will be both more important and more difficult to manage than ever before (Goldman, 2002:7-8). According to Goldman (2002:8) corporate management increasingly realises that important audiences must be treated as partners in the communication process, rather than as mere targets. This positive change in objectives has significant consequences for the public relations professions, which must understand, analyse and approach key audiences with arguments that are meaningful and clearly understood.

From a communications perspective, an integrated approach enables clarity and conformity of messages, which result when a strong thematic link exists between different communications media (Watras in Mulder, 2004:230). From a Cognitive Linguistics perspective, clarity results when messages are conceptually related. The clarity achieved in an integrated programme can be enhanced when communications practitioners take aspects such as this into account.

With reference to practical applications of linguistic theories, Tabakowska (in Tirkkonen-Condit & Jääskeläinen, 2000:84) argues that the main value of Cognitive Linguistics for translation studies lies in its use in the process of linguistic "sensitization", of making translators aware of how the overall meaning of a linguistic message is shaped by the particular choices that the writer makes, using the repertoire that is offered to them by conventions established in a given language. In cognitive grammar these choices involve what Langacker (1987,1991) defines as dimensions of imagery, or alternate scene construals.

The value of Cognitive Linguistics for translators is also valid for public relations, where practitioners fulfil a similar role. Hiebert et al. (in Lubbe & Puth, 2002:77) view public relations professionals as interpreters or translators since they have to take the viewpoint of one group and restructure it or translate it so that it can be understood by another

group. As far as language as such is concerned, Sinclair (2004:39) reminds writers that most ideas will have to be rewritten, indeed preferably reconceptualised, in at least one other language in our country. In terms of the metaphorical interpretations presented above, metaphors that different subcultures and language groups live by, need therefore be taken into account.

9. CONCLUSION

The analysis above is an attempt to show how linguistic expressions function in the metaphorical mapping and speech act relations invoked by the author of a communications message.

From a communications perspective, Vorster's appeal for a 'less is more' approach, in the sense of less ambiguity in communications messages, can be addressed in an integrated approach where the emphasis is on "one voice" messages. From a Cognitive Linguistics perspective, the clarity obtained in this way can be enhanced when tools from this framework are taken into account in the formulation of messages.

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