mgr Anna Krukiewicz-Gacek
Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Bankowości w Krakowie
akrukiewicz@poczta.onet.pl
mgr Dorota Skrynicka-Knapczyk
Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania i Bankowości w Krakowie
dorota.skrynicka@gmail.com

WORDS AND COGNITION: THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN MANAGING MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

Introduction

Managing people does not exist without communication. Paradoxically, in the contemporary world, often called "a global village", communication is seriously impaired due to corporate globalization. In multicultural organisations, communication occurs among people coming from different cultures. What we have in mind is not only different corporate cultures, but first of all different ethnic, religious and family cultures. Even if the company language is English, with which most employees are well familiar, communication break-downs do not vanish. It is due to the fact that linguistic performance, i.e. words, expressions and structures, is just a function of the whole human cognitive faculty with our experiences, habits and the resulting perception of the world. Consequently, a manager faces the challenge of getting a message across in such a way that it is not only comprehensible but also interpreted in the same way by everyone. Thus, the proper choice of words which trigger unambiguous images becomes a priority.

In search of effective tools that could facilitate the task we have resolved to implementing the inventory of cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics, which examines and describes the interdependence between language and mind, offers many theories which can find practical applications in managerial practice. Undoubtedly, the theory of conceptual metaphor is one of them.

The article focuses on the selected aspects of conceptual metaphor and presents its practical implications for managing multicultural teams. We will outline the potential dangers resulting from superficial understanding of metaphor. We will also recommend criteria one can adopt when creating new metaphors so that the risk of multiple interpretations and varied pictures of the world a given metaphor evokes is minimal.

1. Selected aspects of cognitive linguistics

The last decades, largely thanks to cognitive linguists, have brought about a new outlook on language which has become associated with other cognitive functions of a human brain and witnessed the search for the justification of the choice of lexical items in language usage, i.e. the knowledge about how language is used.   Therefore, cognitive linguistics questions the basic assumption of Chomskyan theory which states that language is an autonomous function of a brain, independent of other types of knowledge and cognitive functions. Many linguists, some of whom used to be Chomsky's followers, rejected the division into *I-language* and *E-language*, linguistic competence and performance, and a classic division into Saussurean *langue* and *parole*. Cognitive linguistics, whose methodology we are going to apply in this article, is based upon three core theses. So, firstly, "language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty", secondly, "grammar is conceptualization", and thirdly, "knowledge of language emerges from language use".[1] It follows that cognitive linguistics views linguistic knowledge not as separate from individual social and physical experience but as an integral part of our cognitive abilities. As a consequence, cognitive linguistics does not concentrate on a synchronic analysis of an abstract language system but attempts to examine language taking into consideration all its aspects and physical and social determinants.[2]

Cognitive linguistics is not a homogenous scientific theory but rather a set of different, complimentary proposals united by a common vision of language as an element of human cognition. One of the fundamental theories of cognitive semantics is the theory of conceptual metaphor.[3] The theory appears to be especially attractive to a manager and in the context of management. The very notion of a metaphor is not new. Much has been written about metaphors describing economic phenomena and the way organizations function. This article proposes to extend the scope of the research by a thorough analysis of the conceptual character of metaphor and its implications. As George Lakoff wrote during the Gulf War, "metaphors can kill".[4] The context of management is neither as dramatic nor as ultimate as the context of war, still a proper choice of metaphor can bring spectacular results and an improper one can prove fatal. Bearing in mind the complex nature of metaphor, we will focus

[1] W. Croft, A. Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p.1

[2] D . Geeraerts, *A Rough Guide to Cognitive Linguistics,*[in:] D.Geeraets (ed.) Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin/New York 2006, pp. 27-28

[3] G.Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980
G.Lakoff, M,Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind and its Challenge to the Western Thought*, Basic Books, New York 1999

[4] G.Lakoff , *Metaphors and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf* , http://georgelakoff.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/metaphor-and-war-the-metaphor-system-used-to-justify-war-in-the-gulf-lakoff-1991.pdf 1991 (12.04.2014)

on a detailed description of conceptual metaphor and related concepts[5] and we will propose how to implement cognitive methodology into the examination of conceptual metaphor in management.

2. Conceptual metaphor

A classic definition formulated in the Aristotle's Poetics, states that :

Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is proportion[6]

The way of understanding and approaching metaphor proposed by the philosopher has become a part of our language and culture to such an extent that many people still treat it as the only one which is correct and thus, indisputable. But it is actually one of many possible theories, not a definition. Besides, metaphor understood in this way is perceived as a purely linguistic phenomenon, characteristic of the realm of poetry; it is a stylistic figure enriching our description of the world but not indispensable per se .

The novelty of Lakoff's approach is that, " the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another".[7]The term *domain* should be explained here. According to Evans,[8] conceptual domains are „relatively complex knowledge structures which relate to coherent aspects of experience".[9] Metaphor is not, therefore, an individual, isolated phenomenon but it motivates, in a logical and systematic fashion, the way we perceive and speak about certain phenomena.

In short, metaphor is organised in terms of cross-domain mappings between different domains in our conceptual system and is a part of regular everyday thinking. It is assumed that the mapping is unidirectional and the aspects of the less abstract domain are mapped upon the aspects of the more abstract one. One has to bear in mind that not all the aspects are mapped. Cognitive linguistics puts forward several theories which explain these phenomena. **The Invariance Principle** is worth mentioning here. Its function is to preserve the cognitive topology of mappings.[10] Following the principle, we can linguistically realise the metaphor

[5] We would like to explain that the outline we suggest is not a full, chronological description of the theory but it presents different elements of the theory which, in our opinion, are important for a manager who wants to use metaphors effectively in their professional life.

[6] Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. K. H.Butcher, Macmillan, London 1902, pp. 78/79

[7] G.Lakoff, *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, [in:] *Metaphor and Thought*, A.Ortony (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge1993, p. 203

[8] V.Evans , *A Glossary of Cognitive Linguistics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2007, p.61

[9] Evans explains: „for instance, the conceptual domain JOURNEY is hypothesised to include representations for things such as traveller, mode of transport, route, destination, obstacles encountered on the route and so forth.." (Evans, 2007, pp. 61-62)

[10] G.Lakoff, *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, op.cit, pp. 215-216

ORGANISATIONS ARE PEOPLE saying that organisations *win and lose*, are *born and grow*, *sweep* or even *are out of breath* but we cannot say that they *cook dinner* or *make the bed*.

The fact that we think and speak about one thing in terms of another has significant consequences. An often quoted metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR "is not merely in the words we use [...] (but) we talk about arguments that way because we conceive of them that way – and we act according to the way we conceive of things."[11] What is more, metaphors have a feature which managers may find attractive. They **hide** and **highlight** different aspects of phenomena they describe. The aforementioned metaphor of arguing highlights the battle-like aspects of an argument[12]but at the same time the aspects connected with calm, logical discussion and compromise can get out of focus. A well-known in management metaphor ORGANISATION IS A MACHINE is an interesting example showing the potential of metaphor to hide and highlight some aspects of phenomena. When reading the analysis of the metaphor conducted by Raghu Raman and Ramachander[13], one can notice that the metaphor highlights the hierarchical and authoritarian aspect of an organization in which everything is strictly controlled and it is the manager's role to operate the machine in such a way that everything works impeccably and fulfills its functions. Since people are *cogs in the machine*, we can suspect that they can be easily replaced, or exchanged if needed. What the metaphor hides is the fact that in an organization, there should be room for the human factor and the satisfaction of employees' psychological needs.

Let us now proceed to describing the basis of metaphor. The experiential basis of metaphor can stem from **embodied cognition**, the knowledge about the world and cultural experience. Lakoff notices that metaphors are frequently rooted in physical and cultural experience and are not conceived at random. One can understand one concept in terms of another only according to its experiential basis.[14] When explaining the theory of embodied cognition, Evans states that „the human mind and conceptual organisation are a function of a way in which our species-specific bodies interact with the environment we inhabit".[15] We can therefore safely assume that metaphors grounded in embodied cognition shared by all people are understood in a similar way by people from different cultural backgrounds, ethnic

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[11] G. Lakoff, M.Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003, p.5
[12] Ibidem. p.10
[13] S.Raghu Raman, S.Ramachander, *Metaphors for Managers: New Ways of Thinking and Seeing*, [in:] *Vikalpa, July-September 2002*, pp. 3-12
[14] G. Lakoff, M.Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, op.cit, p.14
[15] V.Evans , *A Glossary of Cognitive Linguistics*, op.cit, p.66

groups, nationalities and religions. So, both **primary metaphors**[16] such as WISH IS HUNGER, and metaphors based on **image schemata** such as CONTAINMENT: IN – OUT[17], UP – DOWN[18], relatively simple metaphors such as DEVELOPMENT IS ASCEND, and complex metaphors such as ORGANISATION IS A BODY are understood the same by the majority of people. What is more, although not all conceptual metaphors are present in all languages and they can have different linguistic realisations, there are no source domains which contradict human physiology and sensorimotor cognition.[19] On the other hand, even very popular metaphors such as TIME IS MONEY, COMPANY IS A FAMILY are so deeply grounded in culture that may be incomprehensible or misunderstood in some cultural context. Let us explain it in more detail applying the methodology proposed by Lakoff.

3. Ontological and epistemic correspondences

According to Lakoff "the structural aspect of a conceptual metaphor consists of a set of correspondences between a source domain and a target domain. These correspondences can be factored into two types: ontological and epistemic. Ontological correspondences are correspondences between the entities in the source domain and the corresponding entities in the target domain [...] Epistemic correspondences are correspondences between knowledge about the source domain and corresponding knowledge about the target domain."[20] If we look closely at the metaphor ORGANISATION / COMPANY IS A LIVING BODY, we can see that the source domain is a living body and the target domain is an organisation / company. Let us look for ontological and epistemic correspondences.

Ontological correspondences:

Source domain	Target domain
head	boss, manager
brain	headquarters
blood	employees

[16] The father of primary metaphor is Joseph Grady. He proved that more complex compound metaphors are grounded in our everyday experience and are created by unification of primary metaphors. For example, the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR starts with our early childhood experience of argument (with parents) perceived in terms of (physical) fight which, in time, evolves into a more conceptually complex understanding of argument in terms of war.(G.Lakoff , *Afterword* [in:] G.Lakoff, M.Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003, pp.255, 265-66)

[17] Simple image schemata give rise to metaphorical expressions such as *"We are in trouble.", "I'm not sure we'll manage to get out of debt."*

[18] A good example is metaphor AMOUNT OF MONEY IS HEIGHT ON A VERTICAL SCALE (A.Gicala *Ekonomiści to też poeci. Metafora w języku ekonomii*, [in:] *Zeszyty Naukowe nr 4 Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej w Bochni* , Bochnia 2006, p. 9)

[19] Z. Koveces , *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002 p.76

[20] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1987, pp.386-387

cells	working groups, teams
children	branches, spin-offs
birth	set up / launch
death	closing down / bankruptcy
growing up	company transformation / expansion

Selected **epistemic correspondences** are:

<u>Source domain</u> | <u>Target domain</u>

A head governs the whole body. ⟶ A boss manages all employees .

A brain sends information / orders to all body organs. ⟶ Headquarters send information / orders to all employees.

Blood is indispensable for circulating all substances needed for life. ⟶ Employees are indispensable for doing work.

Antibodies in blood are necessary to stop an infection from spreading. ⟶ Employees are necessary to fight competition.

Individual cells constitute tissues which function together. ⟶ Employees constitute teams which work together.

All tissues of various kinds are needed so that an organism can function properly. ⟶ Various teams complement and support each other.

Organisms give birth to children who are fully dependent on them. ⟶ A company can create a new dependent company.

An organism functions in a given environment and it is subject to the environment's rules and laws. ⟶ A company functions in market conditions and is subject to its rules and regulations.

An organism is subject to the laws of evolution and has to adapt. ⟶ In order to adapt to the market conditions and to survive, a company has to evolve.

An organism undergoes vital functions such as birth, growing up, death. ⟶ A company is set up and develops but may go bankrupt and close down.

The situation becomes more complicated in case of metaphors based on concepts which are differently interpreted and perceived in different cultures. The problem does not always manifest itself on the level of ontological correspondences, yet epistemic correspondences are so deeply grounded in culture that they may be contradictory or even mutually exclusive. We will use an example of the metaphor COMPANY IS A FAMILY. Our choice is inspired by Lakoff's work on liberal and conservative models of a family realised by the metaphor

NATION IS A FAMILY.[21] Starting with the same set of ontological correspondences, i.e. the concept of a family, a father / parent, children, and so on, and looking for parallel epistemic correspondences we notice that the picture of the world created in our mind is strongly determined by the family model we grew up in.

Ontological correspondences are thus, very similar or the same:

Source domain	Target domain
family	company / organization
father / parent	boss / board
children	employees
family atmosphere	corporate culture
marriage	joining a company
divorce	handing in a notice
adultery	changing jobs / companies

Crucial differences are to be seen only when we examine epistemic correspondences in detail.

Epistemic correspondences – a conservative model

Source domain	Target domain
A family is a place to grow, mature and internalise the rules and values one must be guided by.	A company is a place where the company policy must be followed to the letter and all departures from norm will be punished.
One is a member of a family for life. You must not leave your family.	An employee expects employment for life in one company.
A family supports and helps but requires its members to put the family needs first.	A company offers stabilisation and security but requires unconditional loyalty and full availability.
A conservative family does not tolerate and will not allow for informal, multicultural or one-sex relations.	A company does not tolerate being different and aims at uniformity.
A father is a heavy-handed moral guide and expects unconditioned/absolute obedience.	A boss is infallible and an employee must not question his/her decisions.
The world viewed through father's eyes is all black and white.	A boss is authoritarian and confident of his/her arguments and does not consult

[21] G.Lakoff , *Metaphor, Morality, and Politics Or, Why Conservatives Have Left Liberals In the Dust* [w:] *Social Research*, vol 62, no. 2 , 1995
G.Lakoff , *The Political Mind*, Penguin Books, London 2008

	his/her decisions.
A father defends family values which are passed from a generation to generation although the outside world is trying to question them. →	A boss defends the company policy and does not succumb to the influence of the outsider world.
A father must be strict with children who are, by nature, prone to misbehaving and must be disciplined and punished. →	A boss must be strict with employees who, when unsupervised, are prone to neglecting their duties.

Epistemic correspondences – a liberal model

Source domain	Target domain
A family is a place to grow, mature, gain self-reliance and independence. →	A company is a place to grow professionally and show one's creativity.
Grown-up children leave the family and start the next chapter of their life. →	An employee who changes jobs does not betray their boss but realises the next chapter of their professional life.
A family supports and helps but does not require its members to put the family needs first. →	A company cares for their employees' development and well-being but respects their leisure and personal life.
A parent is an understanding and caring guide who explains and supports. →	A boss is a mentor whose patience and understanding one can count on.
A parent is aware of the fact that the world is not all black and white and lets the child present their views and allows for a difference of opinion. →	A boss admits that he/she is not infallible and encourages employees to voice their ideas, opinions, critical remarks.
A parent lets their child be independent. →	A boss encourages employees' initiative by delegating responsibility and tasks.
A parent realises that the world is changing and so is the family. →	A boss views the changing world as a challenge and opportunity for development and not as a stumbling block.

As we can see, selecting an appropriate metaphor is not an easy task to perform. When adapting a popular metaphor or, as it often happens, attempting to create a new one, a manager has to consider the implications of the metaphors applied as well as their linguistic realizations and how differently they can be interpreted. To facilitate the choice , he/she should investigate the **encyclopedic knowledge** to which the source domain provides access

and examine **semantic frames** which are activated by linguistic realizations of a chosen metaphor. In the next paragraph the terms will be explored in more detail.

4. Encyclopaedic knowledge and frames

To start with, we have to mention that cognitive linguistics rejects the classical (Aristotelian) model of categorisation. Conceptual and linguistic structures cannot, hence, be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient features. According to Rosch, the world surrounding us together with everything we experience in it are categorised by prototype, i.e. a schematic representation of the conceptual core of a category. The decision whether to include a given entity in a category is made on the basis of its resemblance to the prototype.[22] The most salient and thus most prototypical examples are found in the very centre of a category while other members – less salient and more questionable– depart from the centre and fall into periphery. This is why, most categories are fuzzy (they have fuzzy boundaries instead of clear-cut ones), and individual categories may overlap. What is more, as Wittgenstein[23] remarked, in our daily experience there are categories for which we cannot build a set of common definitional conditions / properties as there are no conditions which could be shared by all the category members. Such categories are organised by a complex network of similarities between individual members in such a way that they "resemble one another in various ways"[24]. When we categorise ideas and words, we take advantage of knowledge about the world which results from our physical experiences, education and the culture we were brought up in and/or we identify with. Consequently, calling a person who works 6 hours per day *lazy* will only partly depend on a standard (dictionary) definition of *laziness*. To a large extent, our decision will be based on the model of work and leisure which is generally accepted in our national, ethnic, family, or company culture. Just as importantly, a person whom we call l*azy* will either acknowledge or reject our criticism on the basis of their and not our understanding of this category. To put it in different words, a word or a phrase provides **access** to a vast repository of non-linguistic knowledge which, in cognitive linguistics, is called encyclopaedic knowledge. We access this knowledge through interaction with other people and physical experience, i.e. interaction with the world around us.[25] It can be assumed that metaphors, both conventionalised and novel, are motivated by knowledge about source and target domains. We must bear in mind, though, that encyclopaedic

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[22] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, op.cit, pp.39-40

[23] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M.Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, 1958, pp.31-33

[24] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, op.cit, p.16

[25] V. Evans , M. Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006, p. 206

knowledge is neither objective nor permanent. Even within one culture, the knowledge possessed by a particular language user is the resultant of the knowledge shared by a given community and the individual's personal knowledge; in the course of time, it can deepen and evolve , for example influenced by current events. We can look for explanation and interpretation of source domains in Fillmore's semantic frames. The linguist explains that by the term 'frame' he has in mind " any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits; when one of the things in such a structure is introduced into a text, or into a conversation, all of the others are automatically made available."[26] Putting forward the theory of frames, Fillmore draws attention to some aspects of language which are extremely significant in the context of this article. Firstly, he remarks that „ the word's meaning cannot be truly understood by someone who is unaware of those human concerns and problems which provide the reason for the category's existence."[27]. He explains that the word *vegetarian* can be understood properly only against the background of a community who usually eat meat and it is a conscious choice when one abstains from eating meat. Therefore, a word or metaphor which has been used makes us activate the frames it evokes. Moreover, a source domain is often structured by more than one frame. When analyzing the metaphor BOSS IS THE BRAIN OF AN ORGANIZATION, we can see that the mappings engage the concepts and expressions from the frames of PHYSICAL EXERCISE, WORK and HEALTH. So, if different 'users' of metaphor refer to different frames or/and fill them with different content, as it was in the case of the metaphor COMPANY IS A FAMILY which we discussed before, the frame conflict follows and consequently a misunderstanding may occur.

5. Practical recommendations

These reflections bring about some practical advice for mangers, especially managers working in a multicultural environment, who would like to use metaphor as an effective tool to, for example :

- communicate the company vision in a vivid, imaginative way,
- explain the importance of a task which is being performed,
- make a transition period easier.

When selecting a metaphor, managers should, above all, realise that they communicate not only words but also thousands of associations. On account of that, it must be remembered

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[26] Ch. Fillmore *Frame Semantics*, [in:] *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*, Linguistic Society of Korea (ed.), Seoul 1982 , pp.111 - 137
[27] Ibidem

that if a metaphor is to be proposed to people whose community, culture and customs we are mostly unfamiliar with, it is advisable to refer to a metaphor which is grounded in embodied cognition, image schemata, or objective knowledge about the physical world which are shared by all people. In other words, it is recommended to connote bodily and spiritual experiences shared by everybody involved in the communication process rather than the experiences characteristic of a particular national, ethnic, or class community. However, if a manager works in an environment he/she knows very well, they can attempt to take advantage of the knowledge of the local culture or cultures and implement a metaphor which, although differently understood by different employees, will not result in misunderstandings or anxiety. On the contrary, via different realisations it will enhance the development of a company, facilitate work on a collaborative project, or make understanding change easier for employees. In order to chose the metaphor wisely, a manager can attempt to apply the tools described in this paper, i.e. think about ontological and epistemic correspondences and reflect on the encyclopaedic knowledge and semantic frames it evokes. A thorough analysis should have another important effect. In a multicultural company an appropriate metaphor can facilitate communication between employees coming from different cultures, not forcing them to accept a culture which only some of them can understand or identify with. To put it differently, a well-thought-out metaphor, even if interpreted differently, does not necessarily lead to miscommunication. On the contrary, as it allows for individual interpretations it can be a practical means of uniting a common vision of a company with the individuality and cultural identity of its employees.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to demonstrate that conceptual metaphor is not only an interesting but also a very capacious and complex notion. When properly used, it may be a powerful tool in the hands of a manager. In order to ensure that, people in charge of managing multicultural teams should try to select and analyse a metaphor they are about to use by means of the methodology proposed by cognitive linguistics. We hope that the explanations we presented together with the examples reveal the potential of such an analysis and will encourage managers to make such an attempt.

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[17] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M.Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, 1958

Abstract

Managing multicultural teams involves problems with effective communication and a careful choice of lexical items because the same words may evoke different meanings. Cognitive linguistics, proposing the theory of cognitive metaphor, offers an attractive set of tools which can be applied to facilitate communication and help avoid the trap of ambiguity. The authors introduce some aspects of cognitive methodology and propose how they can be implemented in managerial practice.