

ROLE OF MULTIMODAL METAPHOR IN CONSTRUCTING IMAGE OF CORPORATE LEADER ON BUSINESS MAGAZINE COVERS

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Summary

This paper contributes to the relatively nascent field of multi-modal metaphor research, specifically focusing on the manifestation of the given type of metaphors on the covers of business magazines. For the purpose of this study, a sample of covers from prominent business magazines (including Bloomberg Businessweek, Time Magazine, and The Economist) was collected and analyzed. In this research paper, four types of multi-modal metaphors have been distinguished based on the means of encoding source domains and target domains in verbal and pictorial modes. The study was performed within the theoretical framework of critical metaphor analysis. After analyzing the articles, it has been determined that multi-modal metaphors on business magazine covers can be based on image-schema level metaphors such as POWER IS UP as well as more complex domain-level metaphors such as BUSINESS LEADER IS A RELIGIOUS FIGURE. Covers that rely on multi-modal metaphors help to define the personality of a certain magazine.

Key words: CMT, modality, verbal mode, pictorial mode, multimodal discourse.

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1. Introduction

The key finding of the groundbreaking conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), which was developed by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, is that metaphors are a prelinguistic cognitive phenomenon. Hence, verbal metaphors are simply a surface-level manifestation of underlying thoughts.

Over the past few years, multi-modal metaphors have emerged as a novel research area in studies of metaphors. Dutch linguist C. Forceville is considered to be the most influential name in the field. He's responsible popularizing the research area in question.

As noted by C. Forceville, in order for a metaphor to be considered "monomodal," both of its domains have to be manifested within a single mode (verbal, pictorial, and so on) (Forceville, 2016: 14). At the same time, for a metaphor to be considered "multimodal", the target and the source of a given metaphor (X is Y) have to be encoded in different sensory modes, sign systems, or both.

According to an extensive literature review study conducted by Z. Zhong et al, the U.S. has emerged as the most dominant field in metaphor research. China, Spain, the UK, and the Netherlands are also among the countries that have produced the biggest number of research papers on the topic. The number of articles on the topic soared in the previous decade, reaching a new peak in 2020 (Zhong et al., 2023).

Apart from multimodal metaphors, there has also been some research focusing on visual metaphors. According to N. Carroll, visual metaphors are "recognized simply by looking." Unlike verbal metaphors, they do not require decoding (Carroll, 1996: 189). Visual metaphors

can be manifested through such artistic medium as pictures, sculptures, photos, videos, and so on. C. Forceville has determined the following types of pictorial metaphors: 1) hybrid metaphors (an “impossible” gestalt); 2) contextual metaphors (the identity of the source domain is evoked with the visual context of the source domain); 3) pictorial similes and 4) integrated metaphors (*Forceville, 2008: 5–9*).

A. Tseronis has singled out two types of multimodal metaphors: visually conveyed metaphors and verbo-visually conveyed metaphors. The distinction is based on whether or not text is required for the identification of a metaphor (*Tseronis, 2021*).

The expectations that guide the interpretation of specific metaphors depend on the specific context, according to C. Forceville. For instance, advertisements typically have negative connotations while the opposite is true for political cartoons.

There have been relatively few research articles that specifically focus on business media discourse. For instance, V. Koller analyzed the usage age of multimodal metaphors in corporate branding messages. The researcher has found that the metaphor BRANDS ARE LIVING ORGANIZMS tends to dominate in corporate discourse. The source and the target domains of this metaphor tend to be encoded in different modes (*V. Koller, 2009*).

The corpus of covers for this particular research effort was collected from such business media outlets as Time, Bloomberg Businessweek, and The Economist. As noted by T. Spiker, the magazine cover is “most valuable piece of real estate for any magazine” due to their ability to make “a lasting impression on readers.” The cover of a certain magazine defines its “personality” (*Spiker, 2015: 377*). The scholar adds that magazine covers present scholars with “robust research possibilities” (*Spiker, 2015: 380*).

It is worth noting that some magazines like Bloomberg Businessweek frequently use multimodal metaphors for their covers in order to appear edgy and controversial while others stick with more conservative covers. C. Forceville states that metaphors tend to be intentional by default, and the construal of a metaphor depends on such factors as extra-textual knowledge, the level of alertness to certain topics, personal beliefs and so on (*Forceville, 2008: 12–13*). According to T. Spiker, controversial covers are capable of increasing brand exposure (*Spiker, 2015: 385*).

2. The main types of multimodal metaphors on business magazine covers

This research paper proposes a new classification of multimodal metaphors based on the modes in which the source and the target domains of multimodal metaphors within this corpus tend to be encoded. Overall, four types of multimodal metaphors have been distinguished. In the verbal mode, the main distinction is based on whether the visual metaphor is hybrid or non-hybrid.

The metaphors were then interpreted within the theoretical framework of critical metaphorical analysis, which was developed by J. Charteris-Black. The approach singles out such main stages of metaphor analysis as identification, interpretation, and explanation. As noted by J. Charteris-Black, metaphors are capable of affecting human beliefs and attitudes (*Charteris-Black, 2004: 13*).

Table 1

The main types of multimodal metaphors

The type of a multimodal metaphor	The manifestation of source and target domains
Type 1	The source domain in the pictorial mode + the target domain in the verbal mode
Type 2	The source domain in both verbal and pictorial modes + the target domain in both verbal and pictorial modes
Type 3	The source in both verbal and hybrid pictorial modes + the target domain in both verbal and hybrid pictorial modes
Type 4	The source domain in a hybrid pictorial and verbal modes + the target domain in a verbal mode

Type 1

In the given corpus, there is an example of the POWER IS UP/AMBITION IS UP/AMBITION IS LINEAR SPATIAL SCALE conceptual metaphors being manifested verbally and pictorially in different domains. On the “Times” cover, a business woman is seen climbing skyscrapers. This is the pictorial manifestation of the UP-DOWN image schema. At the same time, the verbal element of the metaphor is realized with the “Secrets of Ambitions” headline as well as the subhead that reads: “A secret look at what separates life go-getters from also-rans.”

Cover 1 (TIME, November 2005)



As noted by C. Forceville, multimodal manifestations of structural metaphors have attracted little interest from researchers (Forceville, 2016: 13). With that being said, there are some noteworthy studies that fall into this category. For instance, B. Winter analyzed the usage of EVIL IS DOWN metaphors in horror movies. The researcher has found that they tend to be quite prevalent within this specific movie genre (Winter, 2014). N. Silaski and T. Durovic also explored how such image schemas as VERTICALITY, CONTAINER, and PATH-MOTION served as the basis for some magazine covers focusing on the Eurozone crisis.

According to T. Krzeszowski, verticality is “directly related” to the structure of the human body and its functioning in its “canonical shape” (Krzeszowski, 1997). Such concepts as POWER and CONTROL are rooted in the prelinguistic experience because of the UP-DOWN image schema. Hence, the image schema-level metaphor POWER IS UP has plenty of manifestations in both visual and verbal modes. Various empirical studies have demonstrated that

VERTICALITY tends to be associated with positivity, power, social status, wealth and so on. As noted by L. Cian, visual positioning is capable of affecting perception, judgement, accuracy, decision making and so on (Cian, 2017: 444–459).

This cover from “The Economist” is also based on the POWER IS UP/WEALTH IS UP conceptual metaphor, and it corresponds to the first type of multimodal metaphors since the source domain of VERTICALLY is encoded visually.

Cover 2 (The Economist, January 2011)



Type 2

The two examples below show covers from the Bloomberg Businessweek magazine that utilize the same Type 2 structure. Both executives, Marissa Mayer and Satya Nadella, are portrayed as saint-like figures that could be seen as “saviours” of their respective companies (Yahoo and Microsoft). These are the pictorial components of the BUSINESS LEADER IS A RELIGIOUS FIGURE metaphor. In these examples, the source and the target of the religious metaphor are encoded in both verbal and pictorial modes.

Notably, the metaphoric association of light with the divine can be traced all the way back to Ancient Egyptian culture, and it can be found in various modern religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Stolow, Meyer, 2021). The metaphoric opposition GOOD IS LIGHT/ BAD IS DARK is also deeply entrenched in popular culture, particularly movies (Forceville, Renckens, 2013). M. J. Ortiz, who combined J. Grady's primary metaphor theory and C. Forceville's multimodal metaphor theory, claims that GOOD IS BRIGHT/BAD IS DARK is based on a widespread primary metaphor that conceptualizes darkness as evil (and vice versa) (Ortiz, 2011).

The domain-level religious metaphor, which is based on the primary metaphor, is manifested verbally in both cases with the help of such keywords as “save” and “miracle” that make it possible to activate the metaphorical mapping in question.

Similarly, this type of a multimodal metaphor is used in another Bloomberg Businessweek cover devoted to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg. In the visual mode, lines of computer code are superimposed on top of a photo of Mark Zuckerberg during a congressional testimony. The image is accompanied by the headline (“The Apology Machine”).

In the aforementioned cases, audiences already have the necessary cues for interpreting the metaphors (bright light and computer code) in pictorial mode.

Cover 3 (Bloomberg Businessweek, August 2013) /
Cover 4 (Bloomberg Businessweek, May 2019)



Cover 5 (Bloomberg Businessweek, March 2019)



Type 3

On the Economist cover, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos is pictured as Douglas Powers, commonly known as Dr. Evil, who is a popular character from Austin Powers movies. Both the source and the target domains of the metaphor BUSINESS LEADER IS AN EVIL GENIUS are manifested in the hybrid pictorial mode. It's "hybrid" (the term proposed by C. Forceville) due to the fact that the images Dr. Evil and Jeff Bezos have been merged together to highlight their similar features (like the bald head). The illustration also features the extended pinky finger gesture that Dr. Evil is known for.

The cover is supposed to show that Jeff Bezos's leadership style is similar to that of the fictional character that is known for being an evil genius craving global domination. The source and the target of the metaphorical expression is mentioned in the verbal mode ("genius" and "Amazon").

Cover 6 is taken from financial magazine Barron's. The famous business magazine cover, which shows Jeff Bezos's head and a bomb as a single gestalt, was published when the dot-com bubble of the late 90s came to an end. The "Amazon.bomb" article predicted the demise of Amazon. Interestingly enough, the cover itself was later referenced by Jeff Bezos in 2021 in a social media post, in which he reflected on the company's stunning success.

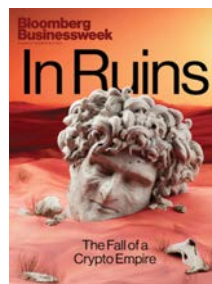
According to N. Carroll, "homospatiality" makes it possible to link different categories in visual metaphors in the same way as verbal metaphors are linked with the help of grammatical forms (Carroll, 1996: 811–812). In hybrid visual metaphors, disparate elements are fused or superimposed in order to form a unified entity. Notably, a recent neuroscientific study shows that hybrid metaphors require more intense electrophysiological processing compared to their literal counterparts that show a certain product directly (Ortiz et al., 2017: p. 328).

Cover 6 (The Economist, June 2020) / Cover 7 (Barron's, May 1999)



The same type of a multimodal metaphor is observed on the Bloomberg Businessweek cover that focuses on the downfall of FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried. In the hybrid pictorial mode, the ruins of what looks like an ancient Greek statue resemble the face and the hairdo of the disgraced entrepreneur. Even though the headline (“In Ruins”) does not explicitly mention the target domain of this metaphor (FTX), it can be recognized based on the subhead (the “crypto empire”). In the second case, the choice of the specific colors tends to dramatize Bankman-Fried's predicament.

Cover 8 (Bloomberg Businessweek, November 2022)

**Type 4**

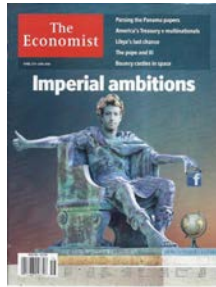
In the example below, the face of Meta (Facebook) founder Mark Zuckerberg is superimposed onto a Roman statue. The statue also shows the typical thumbs-up gesture that is typically associated with the famous social media network.

What makes this type of a multi-metaphor different from the previous case is that neither Zuckerberg nor Facebook is mentioned in the headline. Hence, only the source domain of this multimodal metaphor (a Roman emperor) actually gets mentioned in the headline (“Imperial ambitious”).

According to a recent study conducted by A. Ojha et al, pictorial metaphors tend to be perceived with a higher degree of strength when they are not verbalized (Ojha et al., 2018: p. 263). The fusion of dissimilar concepts makes it possible to focus on the most salient features for the metaphoric transfer.

The construal of the metaphor BUSINESS LEADER IS A ROMAN EMPEROR requires basic background knowledge in the realm of business, regulation, and, of course, history.

Cover 9 (The Economist, April 2016)



3. Conclusions

Many business magazines use literary devices as metaphors in order to make a lasting impression on the reader. In some cases, metaphors are employed for constructing a magazine's quirky edgy personality (case in point: Bloomberg Businessweek).

Multimodal metaphors, which combine verbal and pictorial mode, help structuring various concepts and create an image of a business executive.

Overall, five types of multimodal metaphors have been determined based on the interaction of the source domain and the target domain in verbal and pictorial modes.

Future research efforts could focus on the studies of metaphors in other modes. In addition, different types of business media content (such as business documentaries) could be explored by researchers in order to determine whether they make use of multimodal metaphors.

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